



PAYGGLEYCC

STUDY
GUIDE



23.24 Season

Opera in two acts by Ruggero Leoncavallo
Sung in Italian with projected English titles

September 21 & 23, 2023

Tennessee Performing Arts Center, Andrew Jackson Hall
Directed by John Hoomes
Conducted by Dean Williamson
Featuring the Nashville Opera Orchestra
& the Nashville Opera Chorus

CAST

Canio **JONATHAN BURTON**

Nedda **KERI ALKEMA***

Tonio **ANDREW MANEA**

Silvio **JOSEPH LIM**

Beppe **ANTHONY CIARAMITARO***

*Nashville Opera Mainstage Debut

Tickets & Information

Contact Nashville Opera at 615.832.5242
or visit nashvilleopera.org

Study Guide Contributors

Sydney Emeson, Intern
Chris Muller, Intern
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SYNOPSIS

Calabria, Italy | mid 1800s

ACT I



Jonathan Burton to play Canio

Excited townspeople mill about as a troupe of traveling actors and clowns arrive at the square of their town. Canio, head of the clown troupe, advertises the performance they will put on that night to the gathering crowd. When someone jokingly suggests that the hunchback Tonio is secretly enamored of Canio's young wife Nedda, Canio warns that is nothing to joke about.

As vesper bells call the women to church, the men go to the tavern as a small wedding takes place on the square. Nedda is left alone. Disturbed by her husband's jealousy and suspicious glances, she envies the freedom of the birds soaring overhead. Tonio appears and indeed tries to make love to her, but she rejects him. Enraged, he attempts to rape her, but she is able to fight him off, escaping his grip.

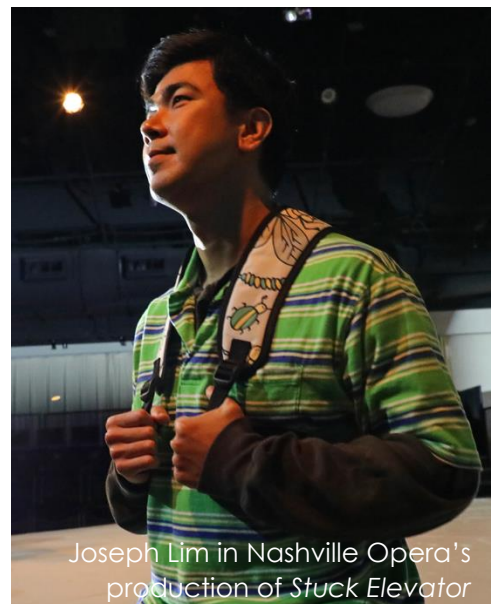
Tonio leaves, all the while swearing revenge on Nedda. Nedda in fact does have a lover — Silvio, who now arrives and does his best to convince her to run away with him after the clown show. But Tonio, who has been spying on them, and has seen everything, hurries off to tell Canio.

Before long the jealous husband bursts in on the guilty pair. Silvio escapes, and Canio never sees his face. Nedda refuses to tell her lover's identity. Canio threatens Nedda's life, but Beppe, another clown, restrains him while Nedda escapes. Tonio advises Canio to wait until evening to catch Nedda's lover. All the clowns exit to prepare for the clown show. Left alone, Canio sobs that he must go on with the clown show, even though his heart is breaking.

ACT II

The villagers, Silvio among them, take their seats to see the clown show. The events that unfold onstage are reflective of those occurring in the real lives of the actors. The curtain rises and the clown show begins.

While her husband Pagliaccio (played by Canio) is out of the house, Colombina (played by Nedda) is serenaded by her clown lover Arlecchino (played



Joseph Lim in Nashville Opera's production of *Stuck Elevator*

by Beppe). After Nedda's servant Taddeo (played by Tonio), arrives with food, he is thrown out by Beppe. The two sweethearts dine together and plot to drug Nedda's husband Pagliaccio with a sleeping potion, so they can escape together forever. When Pagliaccio arrives home, Arlecchino slips quickly out the window.

Canio is drunk, and erratically attempts to carry on with the clown show. With an intentional undercurrent of malice, Taddeo sarcastically assures Pagliaccio of his wife's innocence, intentionally fueling Canio's real-life jealousy. Straying from the script, Canio demands that Nedda reveal her lover's name. Nedda tries to continue with the play and get Canio back on script. The audience applauds the realism of Pagliaccio's jealous "acting." Enraged by her defiance, Canio chases Nedda from the stage and into the audience. Canio viciously stabs Nedda screaming at her to say her lover's name before she dies. With her dying breath, Nedda cries out to Silvio for help. Silvio rushes forward out of the crowd to save Nedda. He is immediately stabbed and killed by Canio. The audience is horrified, announcing "La commedia è finita! (The comedy is finished!)"



Keri Alkema to play Nedda



Nashville Opera's 2011 production of *Pagliacci*

MOMENTS TO LISTEN FOR

STRIDONO LASSU

Fearful of Canio's jealousy, Nedda longs to escape and be free like the birds in the sky.

VESTI LA GIUBBA ("PUT ON THE COSTUME")

Canio sings this aria after he learns of his wife Nedda's affair with Silvio. He prepares to play the role of the clown despite his heartbreak, hiding away his pain with a fake smile.

SUVVIA COSI' TERRIBILE

Canio's final confrontation of Nedda, which leads to both her and Silvio's deaths.

FUN FACT!

Enrico Caruso's 1907 recording of "Vesti la giubba" was the first-ever record to sell more than a million copies!

COMEDIA DELL'ARTE

The play put on by the company of actors in *Pagliacci*, at least before it goes horribly awry, can be classified as *commedia dell'arte*. This is a form of Italian theatre that was highly popular throughout Europe from the 16th to the 18th century. Performances were comprised of stock character types such as Arlecchino, the clown, and Colombina,

the maidservant and frequent love interest. These character types inspired other operas such as *The Barber of Seville* and *Don Giovanni*.

Their defining charms lay in improvisation, physical comedy, use of vernacular dialects, and witty commentary that reflected real-life conditions. Although its popularity eventually declined over time, the influence of *commedia dell'arte* remained to shape the works of Shakespeare and even Charlie Chaplin's slapstick comedy.



FUN FACT!

A number of pop songs contain references to *Pagliacci*, notably Smokey Robinson's "Tears of a Clown"

RUGGERO LEONCAVALLO 1857-1919 | COMPOSER AND LIBRETTIST



Ruggero Leoncavallo was born on April 23, 1857, in Naples, Italy. He was the son of a magistrate and studied literature at the University of Bologna under Giosuè Carducci. Due to his uncle's position as director of the press department at Egypt's Foreign Ministry, he worked in Egypt as a piano teacher and the personal pianist for the brother of the Khedive from 1879 to 1882, when he left for Paris due to political revolts. There he met Berthe Rambaud, a student of his whom he later married in 1895.

While working as an accompanist and teacher for artists performing in cafes, Leoncavallo wrote a symphonic poem titled *La nuit de mai*, inspired by the French romantics. It received critical acclaim, which finally gave Leoncavallo the success and funds he needed to return to Milan with Rambaud to begin composing opera.

After several years of teaching and attempting to secure the production of his operas, most notably *Chatterton*, he created *Pagliacci* in the verismo (realistic) style. He claimed that it was based on a murder trial over which his father had presided. It was first performed in Milan in 1892, where it was an immediate success. Today, *Pagliacci* is the only work by Leoncavallo in the standard operatic repertory.

His 1897 *La Bohème* was far overshadowed by Puccini's opera of the same name which had premiered the previous year, although some of its arias are still performed today. The operas he wrote afterwards, such as *Zazà* (1900), *Der Roland von Berlin* (1904), and *Zingari* (1912), were met with varying but ultimately limited success.

Leoncavallo died on August 9, 1919, and hundreds came to attend his funeral. He wrote the librettos for most of his own operas, as well as some for other composers, and he is remembered as one of the greatest Italian librettists of his time.

FUN FACT!

Leoncavallo completed writing the entirety of *Pagliacci* in just 5 months!

ON OPERATIC VOICES

Every voice is unique, and no singer gets to choose the category in which they sing but must work with the vocal attributes with which they were born. Composers usually assign a voice type to a character based on his/her personality or age. Read these descriptions for examples.



SOPRANO

This is the highest female voice and has a range similar to a violin. In opera, the soprano most often plays the young girl or the heroine (sometimes called the prima donna), since a high bright voice traditionally suggests femininity, virtue, and innocence. The normal range of a soprano is from middle C through two octaves above middle C, sometimes with extra top notes. Most women are sopranos. In *Pagliacci*, the role of Nedda is played by a soprano.

MEZZO-SOPRANO

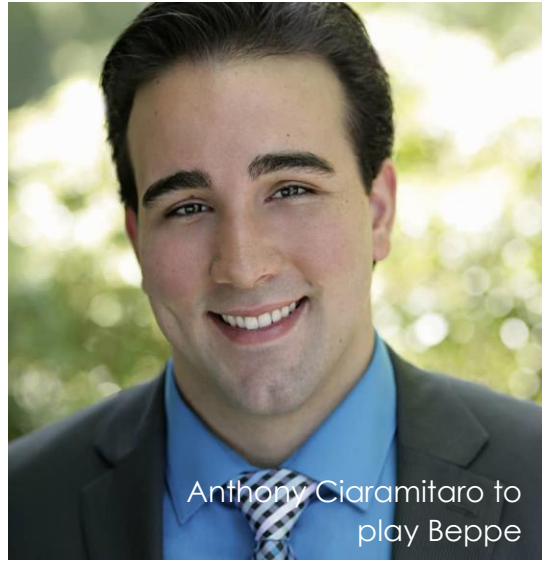
Also called a mezzo, this is the middle female voice with a range similar to an oboe. A mezzo's sound is often darker and warmer than a soprano's. In opera, composers generally use a mezzo to portray older women, villainesses, seductive heroines, and sometimes even young boys. Mezzo-sopranos also often serve as the friend or sidekick to the soprano. The mezzo-soprano's normal range is from the A below middle C to the A two octaves above it.

CONTRALTO

This is the lowest female voice and has a voice similar in range to a clarinet. Contraltos usually sing the roles of older females or special character parts such as witches and old gypsies. The range is two octaves from F below middle C to the top line of the treble clef. A true contralto is very rare—some believe they don't exist at all!

COUNTER-TENOR

This is the highest male voice, which was mainly used in very early opera and oratorio. The voice of a countertenor sounds very much like a mezzo-soprano's voice, and they often sing the same repertoire. Like the contralto, true countertenors are very rare.



Anthony Ciaramitaro to play Beppe

TENOR

This is usually the highest male voice in an opera. It is similar to a trumpet in range, tone, color, and acoustical ring. The tenor typically plays the hero or the love interest. His voice ranges from the C below middle C to the above. In *Pagliacci*, the roles of Canio and Beppe are played by tenors.

BARITONE

This is the middle male voice and is close to a French horn in range and tone color. The baritone usually plays villainous roles or father-figures. The range is from the G an octave and a half below middle C to the G above. In *Pagliacci*, baritones play the roles of Tonio and Silvio.

BASS-BARITONE/BASS

This is the lowest male voice and is similar to a trombone or bassoon in range and color. Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom in serious opera. The range spans from roughly the F above middle C to the F an octave and a fifth below.

FUN FACT!

In 1907, *Pagliacci* became the first opera to be recorded in its entirety!

A SOUND ANATOMY OF OPERA

There are many different kinds of songs in opera. Performers may sing alone, in couples (duets), trios, or larger groups, and there are also moments when no one sings at all—and each composer develops his or her own preferred combinations of these options.

THE OVERTURE

An opera usually begins with an orchestral piece of music called the overture, which functions as an introduction to the opera. Lasting anywhere from five to twenty-five minutes, these opera overtures usually contain important themes from the rest of the

production. Before 1800, houselights were not dimmed while the overture played, and audience members continued to talk, drink, and even play cards! This ceased in the 1900's as the overture became a more integral part of an operatic performance. At the end of the overture, the curtain rises, and the story of the opera unfolds through a series of scenes.



ARIAS

An aria is a solo moment for an opera singer and is usually accompanied by the orchestra. Italian for “air” or song, an aria stops the plot momentarily, giving each character the opportunity to express their innermost thoughts and feelings. These pieces also provide an opportunity for the singer to demonstrate their vocal and artistic skill. Mozart, Verdi and Puccini were able to achieve a remarkable balance between memorable melodies that perfectly suit the human voice while still reflecting the drama of the text.

RECITATIVES

Recitatives, a type of singing unique to opera, help propel the action forward. They can be accompanied either by a full orchestra, or, as is often the case with opera written before 1800, by harpsichord or keyboard instrument. Often introducing an aria, the text is delivered quickly and encompasses a very limited melodic range. It has no recognizable melody, and the rhythms follow those of the spoken word.

ENSEMBLE (“TOGETHER”)

Ensemble singing deals with two or more voices of different ranges performing together. These include duets, trios, quartets, quintets, and sometimes sextets. The composer blends the voices depending on the dramatic requirements of the plot. For instance, a love duet may begin with each performer singing different music at different times, then gradually unifying into harmony. Conversely, the music of a duet may depict conflict.



CHORUS

Most operas include music sung by a large group of singers (sometimes more than 40) called a chorus. The chorus often appears in a crowd scene and can provide a stunning contrast to solo or ensemble singing. In one opera by Benjamin Britten, the chorus is played by a single male and a single female, as in the tradition of ancient Greek theatre.

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

The orchestra accompanies the singing and introduces the opera with the overture. Musical and emotional themes often appear in orchestral introductions and conclusions to arias, recitatives, and choruses.

OPERA ETIQUETTE

ALWAYS BE EARLY!

Please arrive early to ensure you can find your seat before the performance begins and before the orchestra tunes. If you are late, you may miss the overture or even the first act!

OPERA IS FOR ALL AGES TO ENJOY!

Opera is full of emotion, passion, human conflict, and discovery. Nashville Opera usually presents operas in their original language and projects supertitles above the stage so the audience can understand every word.

WHAT TO WEAR

Many people think of a night at the opera as a glamorous event and an excuse to bring out the fancy attire. But, it is also acceptable to dress comfortably. A light sweater, jacket, or wrap is suggested because the theater is air-conditioned.

USE THE RESTROOM

Once in the theater it is courteous to remain seated and involved in the production until intermission. Please do not leave the theater unless there is an emergency.

PLEASE BE COURTEOUS...

to everyone in the audience and on stage. Opera is a live performance, so any talking, cell-phone use (including texting) or other noise/light disruption takes away from everyone's experience at the opera. Wait until intermission to talk to your neighbor or use electronic devices that may distract others.

APPLAUSE WELCOME!

There are several opportunities for applause during a performance. Applause should take place when the conductor takes the podium at the very beginning of the performance and following intermission. It is also acceptable to applaud after an overture or aria during the performance. You may show your appreciation to the performers by shouting "Bravo!" for a male performer, "Brava!" for a female performer, or "Bravi!" for an ensemble. At the conclusion of the performance, the singers will take their "curtain call." It is appropriate to continue applauding until all singers have stepped forward to accept their applause.

NO PHOTOS OR RECORDINGS PERMITTED

