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Vancouver Opera Presents a Rare Double Bill

CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA & I PAGLIACCI

Desire. Despair. Avenge!

Vancouver, B.C. ~ Intense melodic music; beautiful dramatic singing; vivid and emotional plots: these are the elements of Vancouver Opera's season-opening production of *Cavalleria Rusticana* by Pietro Mascagni and *I Pagliacci* by Ruggero Leoncavallo, **November 10–17, 2007** at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. Not seen in Vancouver for nearly 30 years, this classic operatic pairing features the powerful drama and turbulent emotions that mark the *verismo* genre of gritty realism. Scandal and murder are brought to life by an exceptional cast of Canadian and international singers.

Cavalleria Rusticana features soprano **Lori Phillips** as Santuzza and tenor **Steven Harrison** as Turiddu, joined by rising Canadian mezzo-soprano **Majorie Poirier** as Lola, baritone **Gregory Dahl** as Alfio, and mezzo-soprano **Marcia Swanson** as Mama Lucia. In *I Pagliacci* Canadian tenor **John Mac Master** performs Canio/Pagliaccio, reprising a role he sang to thunderous applause in 2005 at New York's Metropolitan Opera. He's joined by Canadians **Sally Dibblee**, soprano, as Nedda; **John Fanning**, baritone, as Tonio; **Etienne Dupuis**, baritone, as Silvio; and **Phillippe Castagner**, tenor, as Beppe.

Opening night is Saturday, November 10, 2007 with subsequent performances **Tuesday, November 13, Thursday, November 15, and Saturday, November 17**. All performances take place at the **Queen Elizabeth Theatre**, Georgia and Hamilton Streets, Vancouver, B.C. and begin at **7:30 pm**. Tickets ranging in price from **\$29 to \$135** are available exclusively at the **Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre**, online at www.vancouveropera.ca or by telephone (**604-683-0222**). See complete ticket information below.

VO Music Director **Jonathan Darlington** conducts the Vancouver Opera Orchestra and the Vancouver Opera Chorus (**Leslie Dala**, Chorus Director). Stage direction is by **Joseph McClain**, former General Director of Austin Lyric Opera. The rustic setting is evoked by **Peter J. Hall's** set design and lighting design by Vancouver-based **Gerald King**. *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *I Pagliacci* are performed in Italian with English translations projected above the stage.

THE SINGERS

Soprano **Lori Phillips** (Santuzza) was seen by Vancouver audiences last season in the title role of *Ariadne auf Naxos*, and in 2005's *Masked Ball*, as Amelia. She has sung the title role of *Turandot* in New York, Memphis and Nashville and participated in Seattle Opera's *Ring Cycle* as Gerhilde, among many other credits. Upcoming, she'll sing *Turandot* in Atlanta and North Carolina, and the title role of *Tosca* with Opera Birmingham.

Tenor **Steven Harrison** (Turiddu) is recognized by the European press as a musician and singing actor of the highest calibre. He has sung with New York City Opera and Washington Opera in the US, but is primarily affiliated with European houses such as Deutsche-Oper-am-Rhein and Prague's National Theatre. His interpretation of *Werther's* title role has won him considerable acclaim. This is his VO début.

Recent mezzo-soprano discovery **Majorie Poirier** (Lola) made her Vancouver Opera début in the role of Dryad in 2007's *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Ms. Poirier is a native of Quebec City.

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Hailed by *Opera Canada* as "an expressive singer blessed with a rich, bold voice," baritone **Gregory Dahl** (Alfio) sings regularly with VO, most recently as Ping in *Turandot* (2005). His recent credits include Figaro in *The Barber of Seville* with Edmonton Opera and the title role of *Don Giovanni* for Pacific Opera Victoria.

Marcia Swanston's (Mamma Lucia) last VO appearance was as Marthe in *Faust* (2006). The Canadian mezzo-soprano's recent roles include Azucena in *Il Trovatore* and Mrs. Noye in *Noye's Fludde*. She is a faculty member at Dalhousie University's Department of Music.

Vancouver audiences will remember dramatic tenor **John Mac Master's** vivid appearances in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, *The Flying Dutchman* and *Elektra*. He made his Metropolitan Opera debut as Canio in an international radio broadcast performance of *I Pagliacci* during the 04/05 season, to enormous critical acclaim. In fall 2006 he made his role début at the Welsh National Opera, starring as Tristan in *Tristan und Isolde*.

Soprano **Sally Dibblee** (Nedda) will be familiar to audiences in Vancouver from her appearances in *Turandot*, *Susannah* and 2003's *La Bohème*. The Fredericton, N.B.-based singer is a frequent guest of opera companies and symphony orchestras throughout Canada.

Baritone **John Fanning** (Tonio) is a veteran of eight seasons at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. He appeared with VO as the Marquis de la Force in *Dialogues of the Carmelites* in 2005, as Faninal in *Der Rosenkavalier* in 2004, and as Rance in 2003's *The Girl of the Golden West*.

Baritone **Étienne Dupuis** (Silvio), who appeared as Papageno in last season's acclaimed *The Magic Flute*, recently appeared in the roles of Lescaut in Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* at the New Israeli Opera, Bob in *The Old Maid and the Thief* with I Musici of Montreal, and Marcello in *La Bohème* with L'Opéra de Québec.

Born in Canada but raised in New Jersey, fast-rising tenor **Philippe Castagner** (Beppe) studied at the University of British Columbia. He launched his professional career by winning the Metropolitan Opera Auditions in 2002 and joining the Met's Lindemann Young Artists Program. He has appeared with that company as well as with New York City Opera, San Francisco Opera, Portland Opera and the Aspen Opera Festival. He recently sang the role of Tamino in VO's *The Magic Flute*.

THE STORIES

Cavalleria Rusticana

Turiddu, a young villager, has seduced Santuzza, who is pregnant by him and has been excommunicated because of her condition. Turiddu has abandoned Santuzza to resume an earlier affair with Lola, who has in the meantime married Alfio, the local carter.

Easter dawns on the square of a quiet Sicilian village. In the distance, Turiddu serenades Lola. Santuzza approaches Mamma Lucia outside her tavern to ask for her son Turiddu. Alfio swaggers in with some friends, bragging about his job and his new wife. Before he leaves, he reports that he spotted Turiddu near his house that morning. Santuzza pours her heart out to Mamma Lucia and asks her to pray for her while she pleads with Turiddu. The old woman leaves for mass and Santuzza confronts an obstinate Turiddu who refuses to listen to her pleas to return her love. When Alfio arrives, Santuzza tells him of Lola's betrayal. Swearing revenge, Alfio rushes off, followed by Santuzza, who regrets revealing the truth. Alfio confronts Turiddu, insulting him and challenging him to a knife fight. When Mama Lucia enters, Turiddu tells her he is going to walk off the effects of the wine and enigmatically asks her to take care of Santuzza if he should not return. Mamma Lucia starts after him, but Santuzza intercepts her and throws her arms around her neck, sobbing, as a woman runs in, screaming that Turiddu has been killed.

I Pagliacci

Act I: Villagers greet a popular company of itinerant players, and are invited to the evening performance by Canio, the head of the troupe. One of the villagers jokingly cautions Canio about Tonio's designs on his wife, Nedda. Alone, Nedda fears that Canio has discovered her secret desire for another man. When Tonio approaches and clumsily tries to kiss her, she lashes him with a whip, leaving him furious. Moments later, she is in the arms of her lover, a local man named Silvio, who begs her to leave her loveless marriage. Alerted by the bitter Tonio, Canio watches in shock from a distance as the lovers plan a midnight escape. Silvio slips away and Canio confronts Nedda. When she refuses to divulge Silvio's name, Canio rushes at her with a knife and has to be restrained. Canio prepares for the show as he bitterly reflects that he must play the clown while his heart is breaking.

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Act 2: The villagers, including Silvio, assemble to see the performance. With her husband Pagliaccio (played by Canio), not due home for hours, Columbine (Nedda) nervously listens for her lover's signal. Outside her window, Harlequin (Beppe) serenades her. Columbine's servant Taddeo (Tonio) enters and sighs his infatuation for his mistress. Harlequin leaps through the window to rescue Columbine from Taddeo's advances. The two lovers dine together and plot to poison Pagliaccio, who soon arrives. Harlequin slips out through the window. With obvious hatred, Taddeo assures Pagliaccio of his wife's innocence, which ignites Canio's jealousy. As the line between comedy and reality blurs, Canio demands that Nedda disclose her lover's name. As Nedda desperately tries to keep Canio within the script, the audience is electrified by the play's realism. Convulsed with rage, Canio stabs Nedda and then Silvio, who rushes the stage. Tonio announces to the shocked villagers that the comedy is ended.

BACKGROUND

Often performed together, *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *I Pagliacci* are the very definition of *verismo*, a style of opera that first came to prominence with Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1890), and reached an apex with Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* (1892). Influenced by the literary realism of such authors as Dumas, Zola, and the Sicilian writer Giovanni Verga, *verismo* was an intense, gritty, and rough-hewn form that pushed Italian opera in new directions in the 1890s. *Verismo* operas are characterized by vivid depictions of the everyday lives of the everyday people, whose very human dramas hold great potential to touch us deeply.

Mascagni wrote *Cavalleria* in 1889 as an entry in a one-act opera competition promoted by an Italian music publisher. He had doubts about the work's quality, so his wife, unbeknownst to him, sent in the score in his name. Needless to say, he won, and the opera premiered to wildly enthusiastic acclaim. The 70-minute masterpiece was to be the height of Mascagni's success, but as he once wisely said, it is "better to have conquered once, than never to have conquered at all."

Leoncavallo took up Mascagni's mantle two years later, with the *début* of *I Pagliacci*. The raw material for the story was a case that the composer's father, a judge, had once tried. The opera was composed in a short, five-month burst, and its premiere was conducted by Toscanini. Leoncavallo's fame and fortune were secured overnight. Unfortunately, his follow-up opera was savaged in the press, and he spent the rest of his career in a public relations battle with Puccini, composing his own version of *La Bohème* and disparaging his initial success.

The two operas were first paired in New York in 1903. The double bill, known to aficionados as "Cav and Pag," has been a classic pairing ever since. The operas have obvious similarities, but of the two, *Cavalleria* has the more refined music and *Pagliacci* the more exciting drama. At just over an hour each, it makes sense to savour the contrasts and similarities between the two in a single evening.

FULL TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets from \$29 to \$135 (plus handling fee) are available from the **Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre**, online at www.vancouveropera.ca, or by phone at 604-683-0222. Visa, MasterCard and American Express are accepted. **GROUPS:** For special pricing for groups of ten or more, call 604-683-0222. A limited number of half-price tickets may be available at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre box office from 12 to 4 pm on the day of each performance. Subject to availability. For information, call 604-683-0222. There will be no rush seats available on performance nights.

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