

SUOR ANGELICA and GIANNI SCHICCHI, Music by Giacomo Puccini

Librettos by Giovacchino Forzano.

University Opera production directed by William Farlow

UW Symphony Orchestra conducted by James Smith



University Opera presents two gems by Puccini

A tragedy of sin and redemption and a comedy of scheming relatives take center stage in University Opera's fall production of Puccini's *Suor Angelica* and *Gianni Schicchi*, which are sung in Italian with projected English surtitles.

Suor Angelica and *Gianni Schicchi* were premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in 1918. Both operas are taken from Puccini's *Il trittico*, a collection of three one-act operas. Puccini originally intended for all three operas to be based on Dante's Divine Comedy; however, *Gianni Schicchi* is the only one based on the epic poem. Although meant to be performed consecutively as a set, the three shows are often performed separately or presented with other one-act operas by different composers. Current revivals of these operas have included modern settings, including the critically acclaimed Metropolitan Opera broadcast in 2007 on PBS.

Throughout director **William Farlow's** distinguished operatic career, these two operas have remained close to him during his professional endeavors, and his enthusiasm for them still remains strong: "How excited I am to be presenting these two miniature masterworks of Puccini!"

Farlow's cast includes undergraduate and graduate students from the University of Wisconsin-Madison School of Music, supported by the UW Symphony Orchestra under the direction of **James Smith**. The title role in *Suor Angelica* is shared by **Lindsay Sessing** (October 29 and November 2) and **Celeste Fraser** (October 31) while the role of La Principessa is performed by UW-Madison alumna **Kathleen Otterson**. The title role in *Gianni Schicchi* is performed by **John Arnold**, with **Megan Gryga** as Lauretta and **J. Adam Shelton** as Rinuccio. In addition to a sizeable ensemble in both casts, other roles are performed by **Amy Sheffer** (Abbess), **Katherine C. Peck** (Monitor) and **Leslie Lukas** (Mistress of Novices) in *Suor Angelica* and **Benjamin H Schultz** (Simone), **Michael Roemer** (Marco) and **Kathleen Otterson** as Zita in *Gianni Schicchi*.

Production staff includes costume designers **Sydney Krieger** and **Hyewon Park**, technical director **Greg Silver**, lighting designer **Steven M. Peterson**, set designer **Angelina Paoli**, vocal coach **Bill Lutes** and chorus master **Susan Goeres**. The English surtitles, by **Christine Seitz**, are underwritten by Opera Props.

Friday, October 29	7:30 PM
Sunday, October 31	3:00 PM
Tuesday, November 2	7:30 PM

All performances are at MUSIC HALL

Tickets \$20 General Public, \$18 senior, \$10 UW-Madison Student

Tickets are available through the Wisconsin Union Theater Box Office, 800 Langdon St.

Box Office Hours: M-F 11:30 – 5:30 PM, SAT 12-5:00 PM, Phone 608-265-2787

Or order online at: www.uniontheater.wisc.edu/boxoffice.html

Tickets are also available at the Vilas Hall Box Office M-F, 11:30 - 5:30 PM

A PUCCINI-FORZANO DOUBLE-BILL, TWO-THIRDS OF A TRIPTYCH

By John W. Barker

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924) had a strong feeling for specific places, and specific cities. The choices of Nagasaki as the setting for *Madama Butterfly* and of Peking for *Turandot*, much less of Gold-Rush California, were carry-overs from their literary originals, and supplied "exotic" interest. But it was a real Paris that Puccini evoked for *La bohème*, and a very, very explicit representation of Rome (through three quite individual buildings there) for *Tosca*.

The three one-act operas that make up his remarkable *Trittico* each focus our attention on very real settings. The first opera, *Il tabarro* ("The Cloak"), returns us to low-life Paris. And the third of the group, *Gianni Schicchi*, is an inescapable evocation of late-thirteenth-century Florence, Dante's city. For the middle opera, *Suor Angelica* ("Sister Angelica"), the setting seems, to be sure, a kind of generic convent, if in an age when incarceration there was punishment for disgrace to family honor. But Puccini's own sister was a nun and the mother superior of a convent: she provided her brother with much insight and information during his visits there. Indeed, he played through his score of the new opera for the nuns, reducing them to weeping. In that light, the opera's setting is effectively that specific convent.

Another familiar Puccini theme woven into all three of the *Trittico* operas is that of death. *Il tabarro* is climaxed by a jealous husband's brutal murder of his wife's lover. In *Suor Angelica*, we confront the reported death of a child and the actual suicide of its mother. In *Gianni Schicchi* the death has occurred before the action and becomes the ironic trigger for superb comedy. Thus, the serious theme of death addressed in the first two operas sets us up the better for comic relief in the final one.

Puccini normally based his operas on successful plays, many of which he witnessed in performance. On a visit to Paris in 1912 he was quite taken by a one-act play, *Le huppelande* ("The Cloak"), by one Didier Gold. He was de-

termined to put it to music, securing the rights and setting Giuseppe Adami to prepare an Italian libretto. As a one-act piece, of course, it required accompanying material. As early as 1904, noting the new vogue for one-act operas (think *Cavalleria* and *Pagliacci*), Puccini tempted to make his own mark in that genre, despite initial discouragement from his publishers. Further, Puccini had decided to become the first composer to put together a full bill of one-acters all of his own.

For a while he cast about vainly for two other stories to set, until he was rescued by the accomplished man of the theater and libretto writer Giovacchino Forzano. Having planned his tale of the unhappy nun as a spoken play, Forzano offered it to Puccini as an operatic subject, and also broached the idea of treatment of the Schicchi tale. Puccini was delighted with both suggestions, which allowed him to fulfill his dream of creating a clutch of three one-act operas. Accordingly, the omission of *Il tabarro* in our UW Opera production might be said to give us the straight Forzano double-bill, the pair of operas that made possible the totality of *Il trittico*.

After much negotiation, rights to stage the premiere production went to the Metropolitan Opera in New York, which had premiered *La fanciulla del West* in 1910. Puccini was unable to attend the premiere of *Il trittico* on December 14, 1918. It was very well received at the time, but for many decades thereafter was ignored as an entity. Only in recent years its unity has won new respect.

There have been commentators who have found the religiosity of *Suor Angelica* excessive, especially in its redemptive conclusion. Some have suggested that Puccini might have elevated Angelica among his tormented heroines by leaving her to die in the cruel irony that her suicide had cost her her salvation. Nevertheless, a convincing portrayal of this character can realize Puccini's ending to moving effect.

The ultimate in ensemble opera, *Gianni Schicchi* is a testimony to Puccini's capacity for masterful comedy, so rarely shown elsewhere in his output. Forzano's libretto is an ingenious expansion of the tiny allusion to the title character in the *Inferno* of Dante's *Divine Comedy* (another triptych, by the way!). In Canto 30, Dante encounters Schicchi among the Deceivers in Hell, specifically one of two who sinned through criminal disguises. One is an incestuous daughter who disguised herself so she could enter the bed of her father, after whom she lusted. The other is "that goblin Gianni Schicchi," who "undertook, that he might gain the Lady of the Troop, to disguise himself as Buoso Donati, making a testament and giving to it a legal form."

The received back-story to this reference relates that Schicchi was an accomplished mimic and was persuaded by the dead Buoso's son, Cimone, to impersonate Buoso, so as to add advantageous clauses to his will. In the process, Gianni also inserted one that gave him the superb mare, Lady of the Troop, which he desired. Dante's brief characterization of Schicchi, a member of the Cavalcanti family, is not at all a positive one, but perhaps reflected the poet's bias, since he himself had been married to a member of the Donati family. Forzano transformed these scraps into the witty picture of a loveable rogue who turns the tables on an appallingly greedy family.

Even without *Il tabarro*, Puccini's setting of the two Forzano librettos provides an evening of richly contrasted lyric drama.

Director's Notes, by William Farlow

Gianni Schicchi first came my way in 1968 when, at the age of twenty, I alternated the roles of Marco and Schicchi. The opera has followed me throughout my career and I can not count the number of productions I have directed. *Suor Angelica*, too, has been with me a long time, though with fewer productions. My only regret is that we are not able to offer the first part of *Il trittico – Il tabarro*. Perhaps next time.

Prepare yourself for our Puccini twin-bill by checking our website uwoperaprops.org where you'll find links to synopses for both of our operas, as well as sound-clips of the music.

Candid Concert Opera Brings *The Bat* to Madison for the Holidays

Madison is fortunate to have a growing cadre of young singers living in town and available for local performances in between the "main stage" events downtown and on campus. They're eager to show their stuff in at least two new organizations: Soprano Melanie Cain's **Fresco Opera Theatre** has presented two shows to date, "Dueling Divas" last March and "Ding Dong the Diva's Dead" earlier this month, at the Overture Center's Playhouse Theater. The latter show will travel to Appleton for Halloween; for more information see the website www.frescooperatheatre.com. We recommend their spirited and innovative productions!

Another new group helping to make opera more accessible and appealing to new audiences is Codrut Birsan's **Candid Concert Opera**. A year ago this company presented two concert performances of Mozart's *Così fan tutte*, and in spring they offered Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore* in the same condensed concert style featuring Birsan's flamboyant pianism and charming commentary. Now we will be offered Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*, in English and in their concert style, with an all-star cast headed by Saira Frank and Emily Birsan. For the full cast and information on the venues for the performances slated for December 11, 18, 19 see the website www.codrutbirsan.net/opera/

A preview of the *Fledermaus* performances will be offered on October 23 at Capitol Lakes retirement community; for more information call Codrut at (920) 257-7491.

Rising Stars at Chicago Lyric Opera's Apprentice Program

Emily Birsan, soprano, who sang the title roles in the University Opera 2009-2010 productions of *Thaïs* and *Maria Stuarda*, has been accepted into the Lyric Opera of Chicago's prestigious apprentice program, The Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center. That appointment is effective in January 2011 and in the meantime Emily will be studying in Madison and has accepted the role of Barbarina in Madison Opera's production of *The Marriage of Figaro*, November 5 and 7.

Already in the Lyric Opera's apprentice program are tenor **James Kryshak**, who appeared in University Opera productions as Ernesto in *Don Pasquale*, Pelléas in *Pelléas et Mélisande*, and Camille in *The Merry Widow*; and **Sam Handley**, bass-baritone, who appeared as Sam in University Opera's production of *Trouble in Tahiti*. Both Mr. Kryshak and Mr. Handley have appeared in Lyric Opera's stage productions as well as in the "Rising Stars" gala concerts for young singers.

The talent in our UW-Madison opera program is broad and deep, and many kinds of recognition reward our singers for their dedicated work. In recent correspondence with Kathy Pyeatt, Wisconsin District Director for the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, Ms. Pyeatt expressed her congratulations for Emily Birsan's appointment to the Ryan Center, observing that "the UW-Madison voice department has made really great strides in the last few years. You all have a lot to be proud of in Madison!"

Another kind of recognition occurs later in a career, as we can see in the following example of success by one of our graduates.

Alumni News

UW School of Music alumna **Abbie Furmansky**, soprano, who has performed with orchestras and opera companies on both sides of the Atlantic, including New York City Opera, Deutsches Symphonieorchester Berlin and the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, will give a Master Class on Thursday, March 31, and a Recital with pianist-composer **Daniel Sutton** on Sunday, April. 3. [For details, see Upcoming Madison Events on page 5.]

We plan to offer much more space to alumni news in our Spring 2011 newsletter. For current news, see music.wisc.edu/media/VoiceSelected2010.pdf

Madison Opera Trips provides tickets and bus transportation to Lyric Opera for five operas during the 2010-2011 season: Verdi's *Macbeth* (Oct. 21, 2:00 matinee) and *A Masked Ball* (Nov. 18, 7:30), Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Mikado* (January 11, 7:30), Puccini's *The Girl of the Golden West* (Feb. 9, 7:30), Wagner's *Lohengrin* (March 1, 7:30).

For ticket availability and other information, call Fern Lawrence at (608) 238-1529.

Opera for the Young presents *Pirates of Penzance* during Fall 2010

This season, Opera for the Young celebrates its 40th anniversary of bringing opera to children. Founded in 1970 by artists associated with UW's School of Music, the relationship between the University and OFY remains strong. Often OFY provides some of the first professional experiences for UW-trained artists. For OFY's *Pirates of Penzance* tour, seven UW alums are taking part in the production. The public is invited to observe any of the OFY performances, for example on Sunday, October 24 (2 pm at the Capitol Lakes retirement community, 333 W. Main St.), October 25 (9:30 am at Elvehjem Elementary School in Madison), or October 29 (2 pm at the Madison Children's Museum).

For a complete tour schedule, check www.operafortheyoung.org

A FEW UPCOMING MADISON EVENTS FEATURING VOCAL MUSIC

Friday, Oct. 29 (7:30 pm) and Sunday, Oct. 31 (3:00 pm) and Tuesday, Nov. 2 (7:30 pm): University Opera, Puccini – *Suor Angelica* and *Gianni Schicchi*. Music Hall.

Friday, Nov. 5 (8:00 pm) and Sunday, Nov. 7 (2:30 pm): Madison Opera, Mozart – *The Marriage of Figaro* (the cast includes James Doing and Emily Birsan). Overture Hall.

Saturday, Nov. 6 (8:00 pm): Concert Choir. Beverly Taylor, conductor. Mills Hall.

Sunday, Nov. 7 (7:30 pm): Madrigal Singers, Bruce Gladstone, conductor. Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610*. Mills Hall.

Saturday, Nov. 13 (8:00 pm): Chorale. Bruce Gladstone, conductor. Mills Hall.

Friday, Nov. 19 (4:00 pm): "The Mise-en-scène of Mediation: Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*," David Levin, Germanic Studies, Univ. of Chicago. This talk examines Peter Konwitschny's unconventional Stuttgart production of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*. Room 1641, Mosse Humanities Building.

Friday, Nov. 19 (8:00 pm): University Chorus and Women's Chorus. Michael Pfitzer and Sarah Riskind, Brian Gurley, conductors. Mills Hall.

Saturday, Nov. 20 (8:00 pm) and Sunday, Nov. 21 (4:00): Choral Union with Chamber Orchestra, Beverly Taylor, conductor. Handel's *Israel in Egypt*. Mills Hall.

Saturday, Nov. 20 (8:00 pm) and Sunday, Nov. 21 (3:30 pm): Madison Bach Musicians, *Cantatas: BWV 4, Christ lag in Todes Banden; BWV 106, Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit; BWV 196, Der Herr denket an uns*. Grace Episcopal Church, 116 W. Washington Ave.

Tuesday, Nov. 23 (7:30 pm): University Opera, Opera Workshop. Selections from Weber's *Der Freischütz*, Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, Britten's *Billy Budd*, Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea*, Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, and Strauss's *Arabella*. Music Hall.

Sunday, Dec. 5 (2:00 pm and 4:00 pm): Winter Choral Concerts. Bruce Gladstone, Beverly Taylor, Michael Pfitzer, Sarah Riskind, Brian Gurley, conductors. Luther Memorial Church.

Some events to watch for in 2011:

Saturday, Feb. 5 (8:00 pm): Paul Rowe, baritone, and Martha Fischer, piano. Mills Hall.

Tuesday, Mar. 8 (7:30 pm): University Opera, Opera Workshop. Music Hall.

Thursday, Mar. 31 (4:30 pm): Abbie Furmansky, soprano. Master Class. Morphy Hall.

Sunday, Apr. 3 (4:00 pm): Abbie Furmansky, soprano, with Daniel Sutton, pianist-composer. Recital: A program of 19th and 20th century songs, plus a new work by Mr. Sutton. Mills Hall.

For more information about UW-Madison School of Music events, visit the website at www.music.wisc.edu/calendar. From the drop-down menu 'Show Events In,' select 'student recitals' to find the latest scheduling information on student recitals.

Also see the Opera Props website at: uwoperaprops.org, especially for information on the Puccini twin bill to be presented on October 29, 31 and November 2.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT OF OPERA PROPS

Dear opera-friend,

We began our fall season with a marvelous concert on September 26 at Holy Wisdom Monastery:

Bill Farlow introduced seven soloists, each of whom took on a classic aria – the repertory ranged from Cherubini and Mozart to Dvořák and Puccini. The performances were vivid and powerful, and the audience responded appreciatively to these fresh, well-trained voices.

Since the concert had been organized to benefit the University Opera program, Bill explained the current needs of the program and discussed the shrinking resources being provided by the University administration. After the concert, audience members sought out the singers for further discussion, and several offered interesting ways to provide help for this impressive program.

We are working to follow up these offers, and will continue to try to improve the funding of our singers. We hope that you will consider joining us with your own ideas and resources.

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Judging from the audience's response last month to our singers' obvious talent, our fall season's offering of a Puccini twin bill of *Suor Angelica* and *Gianni Schicchi* is not to be missed. As opening night approaches, the students are hard at work rehearsing the music and searching for clever ways to project the story lines. You'll want to be in Music Hall to see the results!

For our opera-goers who will attend the October 29 premieres, we can offer a somewhat different style of before-opera dining at the University Club. Many of our patrons had expressed their wish for a lighter menu, and we have done just that! See the following page for the specific details.

Do consider joining us at the University Club for some pleasant discussion of the operas, especially with our guest speaker Celeste Fraser who'll join us for dinner and give us a soprano's view of Puccini's operas!

-Dan Shea

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**A dining idea for Friday, October 29,
opening night for *Suor Angelica* and *Gianni Schicchi*:**

Come to the University Club for a social hour: cash bar and fellowship 5:00 - 5:45.
Then, from 5:45 - 7:10, we'll share a buffet meal in the Wayside Dining Room.

Salad Caprice, Field greens tossed with balsamic vinaigrette topped with fresh mozzarella and sliced roma tomatoes,

Entrées of

Sicilian Stuffed Chicken, pepperoni and provolone stuffed chicken breast finished with creamy alfredo sauce,

Tuscan Eggplant Roulade, grilled eggplant roulade stuffed with marinated portabella mushrooms, roma tomatoes, and zucchini finished with hearty marinara sauce,

Bruschetta Baked Pollack, Italian herb butter baked Pollack fillets topped with garlic and basil, marinated roma tomatoes finished with balsamic reduction,

Baked Penne Marinara,

accompanied by

a Medley of summer squash and zucchini,

followed by dessert

Cannoli filled with cream cheese, ricotta, pecans, and chocolate mocha sauce.

Our Program: Joining us to discuss *Suor Angelica* and *Gianni Schicchi* will be soprano **Celeste Fraser**, who will appear as Sister Angelica at the Sunday matinee performance of *Suor Angelica*.

Following dinner and program, it's just a short walk to Music Hall for the 7:30 curtain.
Early parking at 5:00 should be relatively easy, on a busy weekend.

PLEASE SEND US YOUR LIST OF NAMES OF THOSE ATTENDING, AND A CHECK FOR YOUR GROUP (\$24 PER PERSON, gratuities included).

Note: Tables will seat a maximum of 8. Parties of 4 to 8 can have a table reserved for them.

Checks are payable to "UW Opera Props (Dinner)" and **mail by October 23** to:

Dan Shea

3337 Conservancy Lane

Middleton, WI 53562

Questions? Call Dan at (608) 836-6911 or email: dshea@chorus.net

The University Club is located at 803 State Street mall, corner of Murray Street.

Note: If you have tickets for another performance of *Suor Angelica* and *Gianni Schicchi* and prefer to change them to Friday night, October 29, in order to join our social-buffet program, call or visit the Wisconsin Union Theater Box Office, 800 Langdon St. (608-265-2787).