



## ***Sister Angelica***

Libretto to *Sister Angelica* originated as Giovacchino Forzano's free fantasy. Forzano used to be a singer and also an opera director before becoming a librettist.

Puccini knew conventual environment very well thanks to his sister Ramelda, who was a nun. As nuns were not allowed to visit a theatre, Puccini played the opera to his sister and to the whole convent on a piano in the cloister. *Sister Angelica* is a continuation of Puccini's veristic style with a typical tragic female heroin. The first half of the opera shows typical aspects of life in the convent, the other half focuses on the main character from the plot to the final disaster.

The contrast of both parts is raised by dramatic atmosphere; the situations are built up in a masterfully dramatic and musical way, thus having a huge emotional impact on the audience.

### **The opera contents**

Sister Angelica comes from a noble family. She gave birth to an illegitimate child seven years ago and thus sullied the family. Her aunt, taking over Angelica and her younger sister's upbringing after their parents died, sent Angelica to a convent straight after the baby was born; she was to suffer for the sin she had committed. In the convent, Angelica grows herbs. She has not heard of her family for seven years at all.

After the sisters sang hymns, they gather in the courtyard. The strict Monitor scolds the sisters and creates an apprehensive, prison-like atmosphere. Before she leaves the scene she invites the sisters to rest.

The sisters rejoice at the sunshine and remember a sister who has died. Sister Genovieffa cannot forget her childhood when she used to pasture sheep and confesses that she wishes to cuddle the fluffy lambs again and listen to their bleating instead of some people's stupid talks. The Monitor stresses that any desire at all is wrong in the convent. Genovieffa asks Angelica what desires she has but Angelica claims to have none. The other nuns begin gossiping about her true secret desire - to hear from her family.

The conversation is interrupted by the Infirmary Sister, who begs Angelica to make a herbal remedy for another sister stung by a wasp. Angelica, apart from the herbs, adds also a message for the afflicted sister: being stung by a wasp is but a small ache in a man's life.

Two touriers then arrive, bringing supplies to the convent, as well as news that a grand coach is waiting outside the convent. Sister Angelica immediately becomes nervous and upset, thinking rightly, according to the description of the coat of arms, that someone in her family has come to visit her. The Abbess immediately announces Sister Angelica's aunt.

The Princess clearly shows contempt for Angelica. She has only come for Angelica to sign a document renouncing her claim to her inheritance as Angelica's sister is to get married.

Angelica asks her aunt to treat her more kindly after all the years she has been repenting for her sin. The Princess remains adamant and points out that Angelica will suffer for her sin until the end of her life. Angelica at least wishes to know how her baby is. Her aunt stand-offishly and briefly informs her niece that the boy fell ill and died two years ago. Sister Angelica, devastated, signs the document and collapses in tears. Then, seized by a heavenly vision, asks the Virgin Mary to take her to the heaven so that she can meet her little child. She makes herself a poison using her herbs and drinks it, but immediately realises that in committing suicide she has damned herself. She begs the Virgin Mary for mercy and she sees a miracle: her son is coming in the heavenly light. Angelica dies.

Giacomo Puccini  
**GIANNI SCHICCHI**

*Silesian Theatre in Opava*  
Opera chorus

**Giacomo Puccini**  
**GIANNI SCHICCHI**  
in Italian original

**Conductor: Damiano Binetti**  
**Director: Jana Andělová-Pletichová**  
**Libretto: Giovacchino Forzano**  
**Translation: Karel Kügler**  
**Costumes: Roman Šolc**  
**Stages: Jaroslav Milfajt**  
**Répétiteurs: Libuše Vondráčková, Oldřich Heřmanský, Jan Snítíl**

Characters and Casting:

Gianni Schicchi - Andrij Škurhan  
*or* Ladislav Neshyba  
Lauretta - Tereza Kavecká  
*or* Katarína Vovková  
Zita - Šárka Maršálová  
Rinuccio - Alexandr Vovk  
*or* Jaroslav Wewióra  
Gherardo - Petr Murcek  
Nella - Ilona Kaplová  
Gherardino - Vít Hofmann  
*or* Matěj Graca  
*or* Martin Bárky  
Betto - Dalibor Hrdá  
Simone - Peter Soós  
Marco - Martin Šujan  
Ciesca - Olga Procházková  
Buoso Donati - Vlastimil Smolík  
Maestro Spinelloccio - Václav Marek  
Ser Amanti di Nicolao - Roman Cimbál  
Pinellino - Jaroslav Marek  
Guccio - Stanislav Beneš

Co-performing the Orchestra of Silesian Theatre in Opava  
Concert Master: Jiří Crha  
Deputy Concert Master: Mitko Nanov  
Cello Concert Master: Petr Meca

Performance directed by: Brigita Prokešová  
Text monitored by: Marta Vaňková

**OPENING NIGHT: 2 March 2008**

## ***Gianni Schicchi***

is the only G. Puccini's comic opera to a libretto by Giovacchino Forzano, based on Canto XXX of *Inferno* (Hell) from Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. This buffo belongs to the cream of the cream of what has been composed in the comic opera genre.

Puccini leads the ensemble opera, reminding us of his previous music style only in arias, in a wonderful, completely novel compositional way. As ever, he remains a brilliant dramatic and theatre adviser in creating both the story and the plot. Satire, good description of characters and situations, sharp rhythm and melody switching (drawn also from Italian folk songs and nursery rhymes) guarantee an excellent opera comedy.

### **The opera contents**

In the house of wealthy Buoso Donati's, who has just died, all his relatives have gathered to mourn melodramatically, but all that they really long for is the inheritance left by him. Betto has heard the rumour that Buoso has left all his money to the local monastery. For that reason, they all search for the will. Rinuccio finds it, but refuses to release it to his aunt until she agrees to his terms: she must allow him to marry Lauretta, the daughter of Gianni Schicchi's, who comes from the country, is not of noble origin and does not possess money for a rich dowry.

Reading the will confirms the disinheritance: everything belongs to the monks. Rinuccio suggests that the crushed relatives ask Gianni Schicchi for advice. He knows the letter of law and will certainly be able to help them. At first the conceited Florentines do not want to hear a word about Gianni Schicchi, however, when he arrives, having been invited by Rinuccio, accompanied by his daughter Lauretta, they beg him for help. Gianni has a plan: he disguises himself as Buoso and dictates a new will in the presence of the notary. He reminds all of the penalty for forgery - loss of a right hand and permanent exile from Florence.

Gianni, now dressed in Buoso's night gown, dictates a new will to the notary and the witnesses granting the best property, i.e. the house, the mills in Signa, and the best mule in the region to himself. The relatives are outraged but of course cannot say anything from the obvious reason. Only when the notary has left they all swoop on Schicchi, who throws everyone out; the house is now his anyway.

Rinuccio and Lauretta are happy now. It was at last them who profited most from the inheritance.

Gianni Schicchi turns to the audience: "Well, my dears, was this not a fine use of Buoso's money? And for this, I have been assigned a place in the Hell by great Dante. Though, if you have enjoyed this evening, I request *your* indulgence at least."

## **Giacomo Puccini**

**(22nd or 23rd December 1858 in Lucca - 29th November in Brussels)**

Puccini was born a fifth child in an established family with rich musical history behind them. His great-grandfather started the family tradition of church music, in which young Giacomo took part as a choir singer when he was ten, and as an organist at fourteen. He was taught and educated by his uncle Fortunato Magi, who married Puccini's mother, a musician Albina Magi, after Giacomo's father died.

Puccini's music education at school was taken over by Carlo Angeloni. Puccini composed his first works in the years 1875-1880. These were pieces for organ, choir, *Mass A Flat Major*, *Preludio sinfonico*.

Antonio Bazzini and composer Amilcare Ponchielli, who both taught also Pietro Mascagni, were his professors at the Conservatory. Puccini finished his studies in 1883, introducing his *Symphonic Capriccio*.

In the same year, he wrote his first one-act opera, *Le Villi*, with which he entered editor Edvard Sonzogno's competition. Although he did not win, *Le Villi*, this time as a new two-act version, was successfully staged and caught the attention of Giulio Ricordi, which started the whole-life cooperation of the two.

After having seen Verdi's *Aida* in 1886, Puccini decided to devote his life completely to the opera. In 1889, his second opera, *Edgar*, based on Alfred Musset's drama, was staged in Milano's La Scala. Another opening night, *Manon Lescaut*, an opera based on Prévost, took place in Turin in 1893. This was his first foray into verismo, which Puccini followed in the other operas of his. The *La Bohème* opening night in Turin in 1896 was a triumph and the opera has been the most popular opus of his up to now. It is based on Henry Murger's novel. Based on Sardou's impressive drama, Puccini composed *Tosca*, which premiered at the Teatro Costanzi in Milano in 1900 and made a huge success again.

On the contrary, his next opera *Madam Butterfly*, premiered in La Scala in 1904, was completely unsuccessful and stopped to be staged immediately. To compose this work, Puccini had been inspired by the American playwright David Belasco's play about a Japanese girl's tragic fate, performed in a London theatre. Puccini was extremely proud of *Butterfly* and that was the reason why he rewrote and shortened it. And the result? Triumph, and *Butterfly* is still to be seen on every opera stage.

After a longer period of absence, the composer started working on *La Fanciulla del West (The Girl of the Golden West)*. He was inspired by popular novels about American prospectors. The opening night with Enrico Caruso and Emmy Destinn took place in New York City at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1908; Toscanini conducted the premiere.

Premiered in Monte Carlo in 1917 (and staged 18 years ago in our theatre), lyrical epic opera *The Swallow* was not very successful. At the same time Puccini worked on *The Triptych*, a collection of three one-act operas, *Il tabarro (The Cloak)*, *Suor Angelica (Sister Angelica)*, and *Gianni Schicchi*, premiered at the Metropolitan Opera House in 1918. Gianni Schicchi was the most successful of the three.

*Turandot* premiered in Milano's La Scala in 1926, more than a year after Puccini died. He was inspired by Shiller's dramatization of the homonymous Carlo Gozzi's Persian fairy tale. Puccini did not finish the opera; he was defeated by throat cancer, probably a result of his habitual chain smoking. *Turandot* was completed by Franco Alfano. Puccini died after an operation in Brussels on November 29, 1924.

He pursued three passions in life: apart from cigar smoking, it was water birds hunting and women. He spent a lot of his time hunting animals at Torre del Lago near Viareggio in his residence; he spent all of his life following his passion for women. His first wife, Elvira Bonturi, had been married to a merchant but while attending piano lessons, she fell in love and got pregnant with her teacher, Puccini. They both had to leave Lucca, their hometown, and lived unmarried with their son Antonio until Elvira's husband died; and only then did they get married.

Puccini was unfaithful not only to his wife but also to his lovers. He is said to have suffered from satyriasis, i.e. an abnormal sexual desire in men, similar to nymphomania in women. There was a huge scandal when their maid, with whom Puccini was supposed to be having an affair, committed suicide. Elvira had thrown her out of the house and made the whole event public, after which Puccini left home for seven months and his son ran away to Munich and threatened to emigrate to Africa.

Puccini's life could produce enough material for an extensive novel; however, he is more renowned as an excellent opera dramatist and he is applauded in opera houses all over the world.

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Head of Artistic Technical Operations: Pavel Uherka

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Head of Wig Makers: Alena Hrubá

Decorations: GERA Hřibek

Theatre Director: Jindřich Pasker

Opera Director: Damiano Binetti

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