



An A to Z of Puccini

What makes *Il trittico* so special? Puccini is a big part of its appeal, of course.

He was such a canny dramatist, a master of melody and orchestral colour, that anything he composed is irresistible. And *Il trittico* is Puccini on steroids – three operas in one breathtaking roller-coaster ride, serving up three wildly different stories.

Puccini's last completed opera (*Turandot* was unfinished at his death), *Il trittico* (*The Triptych*) shows the composer at the pinnacle of his career, yet is less often staged than, say, *Madama Butterfly* or *La bohème*, which reliably return to opera houses season after season.

Yet *Il trittico* has been called Puccini's greatest achievement ... unflinching in its dissection of suffering, deft in its comedy of avarice and snobbery ... an A-Z of Puccini (*The Independent*).

The work consists of three short operas – *Il tabarro*, a dark, moody thriller; *Suor Angelica*, a lyric tragedy; and *Gianni Schicchi*, a rambunctious black comedy. From the get-go, Puccini intended all three operas to be staged together. But that is a complicated and costly undertaking, requiring three different settings and a large cast and chorus. As a result, opera companies routinely program just one or two of the trio, and audiences miss out on the opportunity to experience the full dramatic power and thrilling emotional range of this masterpiece.

IL TABARRO has the taut psychological drama of *Tosca*, SUOR ANGELICA the emotional intensity of *Butterfly*, and SCHICCHI the lightness and sparkle of the first two acts of *Bohème*.

Critic Rupert Christiansen provides a helpful introduction to *Il trittico*:

*To those with entry-level Puccini, I'd point out that *Il tabarro* has the taut psychological drama of *Tosca*, *Suor Angelica* the emotional intensity of *Butterfly*, and *Schicchi* the lightness and sparkle of the first two acts of *Bohème*, as well as the wicked mocking energy of Verdi's *Falstaff*.*

Il Tabarro (The Cloak)

This is the first and darkest of the trio.

Michele and his wife Giorgetta live on a barge on the river Seine near Paris. As the life of the river goes on around them and the dockworkers and shopgirls ply their trade, the couple are mired in despondency: their child died a year ago and the tender nights when Michele would shelter his little family in his cloak are long over. Michele suspects that Giorgetta is unfaithful ... and over the course of a single night their marriage comes to a brutal end.

The music is amazing. Hypnotic rhythms suggest the inexorable flow of the river and the undercurrents of the couple's tragedy. The score evokes the hardscrabble lives of those who work on the river – you'll hear the sounds of a tugboat whistle, car horns, and a hurdy-gurdy. Puccini conjures a Hitchcockian atmosphere against unexpectedly delicate, Debussy-like open harmonies that create an oddly tender portrait of a couple lost in despair and longing.

For Puccini, the river lay at the heart of the opera: *The Lady Seine should be the true protagonist of the drama ... the boatmen*

and stevedores dragging out their wretched existence in the traffic of the river ... in complete contrast to the longing that throbs in Giorgetta's heart ... Love snatched at for the odd quarter of an hour is not enough for her. Her dream is to escape ... to leave the cabin on the water where her child died... These are gleams and shadows that just give the crime a sharp and delicate flavour, like an etching.

Suor Angelica

Puccini's favourite of the trio, *Suor Angelica* tells the heart-rending story of a young woman who has been immured in a convent for seven years for having a baby out of wedlock and bringing shame on her aristocratic family. One day, her aunt turns up unexpectedly, and Angelica's heart is filled with wild, doomed hope.

Puccini's eye for detail is striking, as he lovingly sketches a bleak world coloured with dreams of small pleasures, as the nuns confess their desires to see a lamb or to taste something delicious, and celebrate when a fountain glows gold in the evening sunlight.

The soundscape is gorgeous. Written for female voices alone, the opera juxtaposes ethereal choruses, delicate notes of church bells and birdsong, along with the kind of intense, over-the-top emotion only opera can convey. In this work, serenity and anguish are never far apart.

As critic Robert Hofler has remarked, *In recent years the maudlin, tune-filled story has emerged as a major guilty pleasure. In essence, it's the MGM score Puccini never lived to write.*

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The subject matter of *Suor Angelica* may not be fashionable (we rarely pack young women off to convents these days), but it can still reduce grown operaphiles to tears. As Rupert Christiansen wrote, *If its climactic 15 minutes don't mash you to pulp, opera just isn't for you.*

Gianni Schicchi

***Il trittico* culminates in the raucous swan song of Gianni Schicchi** – the very last opera Puccini completed and, sadly, his only comedy.

Buoso Donati has just died. His body lies cooling in his bed, and his relatives are devastated – for they have found his will, which leaves all Buoso's money – and his prize mule – to a monastery. Things look hopeless until the family ask for help from a clever rogue named Gianni Schicchi, who impersonates Donati long enough to fabricate a new will and win a dowry for his daughter Lauretta.

There are big questions in this opera.

Will Buoso's greedy relatives get their hands on his fortune? Will Lauretta be allowed to marry the man she loves? And who will inherit Buoso's mule?

A zany tribute to the pleasures of avarice and skullduggery, *Gianni Schicchi* lets us root for the most cunning of villains – one that Dante condemned to the Eighth Circle of Hell.

Gianni Schicchi (yes, he was a real person) is mentioned briefly in *Inferno*, the first part of Dante's epic *Divine Comedy*. Schicchi appears as a rabid demon *who mangles others in his frenzied rage*. His punishment for impersonating Buoso Donati and forging his will is to spend eternity attacking and biting other denizens of Hell.

Schicchi is among some 70 of Dante's contemporaries who turn up in *Inferno*, where they are subjected to gruesome torments by the poet's spiteful pen. Buoso Donati is also a historical character, one of several members of the powerful Donati clan who litter the *Divine Comedy*. (Dante's wife Gemma was a Donati, which may explain his desire to punish Schicchi for ripping off the family.)

Puccini is much kinder to Schicchi than Dante and gives the last word to his hero, who speaks directly to the audience at the end of the opera, telling us that he really ought to be forgiven for his crime.

A Landmark Canadian Production

Stagings of *Il trittico* in its entirety are rare. But the opera represents Puccini at his finest, and it is surprising that it has been staged only once before in Canada. That was in 1971 at the short-lived Opéra du Québec (not the present day Opéra de Québec).

The artistic director at the time was Léopold Simoneau, who would later move to Victoria and found Canada Opera Piccola. The role of Michele in *Il tabarro* was performed by Bernard Turgeon, an operatic legend, admired pedagogue, and, in his later years, an Elk Lake asparagus farmer. Bernard performed internationally over a stellar 57-year career, created the role of Louis Riel for the Canadian Opera Company, and performed in multiple Pacific Opera productions during the 1980s and 1990s.

Also in the 1971 production was the fine pianist Louise-Andrée Baril, who is the répétiteur for Pacific Opera's new production! After a hiatus of nearly 50 years, we are thrilled to bring *Il trittico* to a Canadian stage, reuniting its three brilliant operas, as the composer would have wanted.

The music of Gianni Schicchi is a riot.

Critic Anna Picard has said, *The suavity, sexiness and wit of the score is irresistible.* The big hit is *O mio babbino caro*, a gorgeous tune that is not, as one might expect, a love song, but a teenage tantrum – Lauretta essentially tells Schicchi, *Daddy if you don't let me marry the man I love, I'll just die* (literally – for she threatens to throw herself off a bridge if she can't have her way.)

The Creation of Il trittico

As early as 1900 (just after *Tosca* had hit the stage) Puccini floated the idea of a trilogy of one-act operas. But it was over a decade before the first of the trio emerged. In 1912 Puccini saw the one-act play *Le Houppelande (The Cloak)* by Didier Gold in Paris and was struck by its atmosphere and its *Grand Guignol* character – referring to the Paris theatre whose name was a catchphrase for lurid melodramas that were often presented in a triple bill with a sappy play and a black comedy.

Things gelled in 1917, when librettist Giovacchino Forzano showed Puccini a sketch for a one-act play set in a convent. The composer, whose sister was a nun, loved the concept and happily set to work on *Suor Angelica*. Forzano also broached the notion of an opera based on a few throwaway lines in Dante's *Inferno*. That became *Gianni Schicchi*.

***Il trittico* premiered at the Metropolitan Opera** in December 1918, just a month after the end of WWI, with Puccini still stuck back in Europe.

From the beginning, *Gianni Schicchi* was the most warmly received of the three operas. It still turns up frequently, usually torn from its siblings, forced into a marriage with some other work such as

Pagliacci, Hänsel und Gretel, Bluebeard's Castle – even *Buoso's Ghost*, Michael Ching's sequel to *Schicchi*. In 1934 a reviewer decried the Metropolitan Opera's "grotesque" pairing of *Schicchi* with Strauss' *Salome*. The Met continued to program this odd couple over a half dozen seasons and in 1938 even used *Schicchi* (in English) as a warmup act for Strauss' blood-soaked psychodrama *Elektra*.

Looking for Missing Links

Critics have long indulged in the game of dissecting Puccini's intentions and looking for themes that link the three operas. Are they a journey from hell to heaven à la Dante? (Early on, Puccini had thought of writing three operas, each representing one of the books of the *Divine Comedy*, but in the end only *Schicchi* holds up a funhouse mirror to Dante's vision of hell.)

Other themes have been teased out: death, presented with brutality, then grace, then cynicism (never mind that death tends to pop up in a lot of operas). Parental love is another thread, evident in the grieving parents in the first two works and Schicchi's affection for his daughter in the third. And all three operas end with a character asking pardon – for adultery (Giorgetta), suicide (Angelica), and fraud (the cheerfully unrepentant Schicchi).

Musicologist Fedele d'Amico suggests that Puccini's purpose is simply *to show that he can write three operas having nothing in common but this: to be completely different from each other.*

Perhaps it's enough, in the words of critic Peter Davis, *to revel in the sheer creative virtuosity, theatrical craft, economy of means and superior quality of invention that characterize these perfectly polished scores ... the crowning masterpiece of Puccini's maturity.*

Maureen Woodall

Creative Team & Cast

L **Leading the charge** to bring *Il tritico* to the stage is the marvellous trio of Artistic Director **Timothy Vernon**, director **Glynis Leyshon**, and designer **Pam Johnson** – the team behind 2018's glorious *Rinaldo*. The production will be brightened by the work of lighting designer **Michael Walton** and enlivened by the skill of choreographer **Jacques Lemay**. Timothy Vernon conducts the **Victoria Symphony** and **Giuseppe Pietrarroia** directs the **Pacific Opera Chorus**.

Il tritico is an intriguing opportunity for audiences to observe opera artists as they take on multiple roles, playing both tragic and comic characters in a single production.



Aviva Fortunata, who was sensational last season as Leonore in *Fidelio*, is a triple threat this time round, with three major role debuts: the adulterous Giorgetta in *Il tabarro*; the guilt-ridden nun in *Suor Angelica*; and the scheming Nella in *Gianni Schicchi*.



Simon Boccanegra.

American baritone **Todd Thomas** returns for debuts as Michele, the brooding, jealous husband in *Il tabarro*, and the crafty Schicchi. Todd's Pacific Opera roles have included Alberich in *Das Rheingold*, Iago in *Otello*, and the title role in



Adam Luther, most recently seen as Tassilo in *Countess Maritza*, will play Luigi, Giorgetta's lover in *Il tabarro*, then Gherardo, the greedy nephew of Buoso Donati in *Gianni Schicchi*.



Boccanegra, and the devastating title role in *Jenůfa*.

Lara Ciekiewicz will portray Suor Genevieve, the sweet nun who longs to see a lamb. Then, as Laretta in *Schicchi*, she gets the hit tune *O mio babbino caro*. This versatile singer has performed Nellie in *South Pacific*, Amelia in *Simon*



Megan Latham has three roles – La Frugola, a ragpicker who longs to retire to the country, in *Il tabarro*; the rigid, unloving aunt in *Suor Angelica*; and the scheming Zita in *Schicchi*.

Frugola's husband Talpa is played by **Thomas Goerz**, who is also the elderly, self-important Simone in *Schicchi*.

Marion Newman appears as the Abbess in *Suor Angelica*. Then in November she will reprise the role of Dr. Wilson in the remount of *Missing*.

Owen McCausland, Jaquino in last year's *Fidelio*, is the hard-drinking Tinca in *Il tabarro* and Laretta's lover Rinuccio in *Gianni Schicchi*. **Maria Soulis** portrays the monitress in *Suor Angelica* and Ciesca in *Schicchi*.

Also in the cast are **Caitlin Wood**, **Peter Monaghan**, **Jason Cook**, **Jan van der Hoof**, and **Geoffrey Schellenberg**, as well as several **Pacific Opera Choristers** in *compromario* roles.

Canadian Operas on Tour

Two new operas co-commissioned by Pacific Opera go on the road.



Missing is an acclaimed work by Métis/Dene playwright Marie Clements, and Juno-winning composer Brian Current. Set in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and along BC's Highway of Tears, *Missing*

gives voice, in English and Gitksan, to the story of Canada's missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

Missing was co-commissioned by Pacific Opera and City Opera Vancouver, its creation and production led by Indigenous theatre and opera artists. When it premièred in 2017, it was called a *milestone for the opera world* (*The Whole Note*).

We are thrilled that *Missing* will return for two performances in Victoria before it tours to Regina and Prince George. Those who were unable to see it during its sold-out Victoria run in 2017 now have a chance to experience the power of this poetic and haunting work of art.

November 1 & 2, 7 pm
at the Baumann Centre
250.385.0222 | pacificopera.ca

The Flight of the Hummingbird is a new opera for young audiences, co-commissioned by Pacific Opera and Vancouver Opera. In this enchanting opera, the animals of the forest are inspired to come together by Dukdukdiya, the Hummingbird, to save their home from a raging fire.

The Flight of the Hummingbird is based on an indigenous parable from the Quechuan people of South America, a story that travelled through pre-contact trade routes to become well known within Haida culture. The opera's libretto and design are by Haida artist Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas and Barry Gilson. Quebec composer Maxime Goulet is creating the music, and Glynis Leyshon is the dramaturg and director.

The opera will tour to schools and community venues in southern BC, Vancouver Island, and the Gulf Islands. There will also be four public performances at the Baumann Centre.

Public Performances
March 19 & 20, 2 pm
March 21 & 22, 7 pm
250.385.0222 | pacificopera.ca

BC school tour
January 20 to May 6.
boxoffice@pacificopera.ca
250.385.0222
Bookings still available



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Everyone welcome.

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Inside Opera at the Union Club Friday, October 4, 11:45 am.
The Union Club, 805 Gordon. With Robert Holliston and guests. \$35 includes lunch. *Reserve with payment by October 1: 250.382.1641*

Opera Goes to the Movies Tuesday, October 8, 7 & 9:15 pm.
Cincenta, Student Union Building, UVic. *A Room with a View*.
Admission at the door only. \$7.75 / \$5.75

Opera Motifs Tuesday, October 15, 12:30 pm. Royal Theatre, West Lobby. Robert Holliston explores aspects of *Il trittico*.

Opera Today Wednesday, October 16, 7 pm. Royal Theatre, West Lobby. Panel discussion: Traditional opera through today's lens.

Lunchbox Opera Tuesday, October 22, 12:30 pm. Royal Theatre, West Lobby. Maria Soulis, mezzo soprano, and Robert Holliston, piano.

Opera Today with Iestyn Davies Wednesday, October 30, noon.
Christ Church Cathedral, Chapel of the New Jerusalem, 930 Burdett.
Countertenor Iestyn Davies in conversation with Robert Holliston.

Fretwork & Iestyn Davies Wednesday, October 30, 7:30 pm.
Christ Church Cathedral. British countertenor Iestyn Davies in concert with the British viol consort Fretwork. Pre-concert talk at 6:45.
Tickets: \$40 from Cathedral Office, Munro's Books, Ivy's Books.

Grand Tour of Beer Friday, November 15, 7:30 pm. Baumann Centre. Back by popular demand! A beer tasting paired with Early Music and classical drinking songs with Joe Wiebe, the Thirsty Writer, and the Luchkow-Stadlen-Jarvis Trio.
Tickets \$45.50 from pacificopera.ca | 250.385.0222

Christmas Concert with Casa Diva Saturday, November 30, 2 pm.
The Baumann Centre. Sopranos Joni Henson and Virginia Hatfield and mezzo-soprano Megan Latham celebrate the Christmas spirit.
Tickets \$35 from pacificopera.ca | 250.385.0222

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Monday, December 2, 5 pm, Baumann Centre, 925 Balmoral Rd.
All Members welcome. RSVP to 250-382-1641.
Information: pacificopera.ca

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Il Trittico

Pre-performance lobby lecture
1 hour before curtain
October 17, 19, 25, at 8 pm
Wednesday, October 23, 7 pm
Sunday, October 27, 2:30 pm

Student & Family Preview

Tuesday, October 15, 7 pm, Royal Theatre

School Groups & Students: book through the Pacific Opera Box Office: 250.385.0222

Families: Tickets are \$25 adults / \$15 students, from pacificopera.ca | 250.385.0222

Sense of Occasion

Thursday, October 17, 6:30 pm.

East Lobby, Royal Theatre

Pre-performance reception to celebrate the opening night of *Il trittico*. Gourmet finger foods and wine. Space is limited. Dress is festive. \$35 per person. *Reserve with payment by October 8: 250.382.1641.*

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Saturday, October 12, 6 pm. Royal Theatre

6 pm: Coffee and cookies

6:15 pm: Discussion with creative team members

7:00 pm: Piano Technical Rehearsal

By invitation to members of the President's Circle and Impresario Circle.

President's Circle Season Launch Party

Sunday, October 20, 7 pm. Oak Bay Beach Hotel

Reception and performance by members of the principal cast of *Il trittico*

By invitation to members of the President's Circle and Impresario Circle.

MISSING At the Baumann Centre November 1 & 2, 7 pm

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