

The Pescadero Opera Society presents

Il Tabarro

(“The Cloak”)



Music by
Giacomo Puccini

Libretto by
Giuseppe Adami

After the 1910 play, *La Houppelande*,
by Didier Gold

Opera in One Act

Setting: A barge on the river Seine in Paris
in the early 20th century

Characters

Michele, a barge owner (baritone).....Lucio Gallo
Giorgetta, Michele’s wife, (soprano)..... Eva-Marie Westbroek
Luigi, a stevedore (tenor)..... Aleksandrs Antonenko
Tinca (“tench”), a stevedore (tenor) Alan Oke
Talpa (“mole”), a stevedore (bass)..... Jeremy White
La Frugola, Talpa’s wife (mezzo-soprano)..... Irina Mishura
Song peddler Ji-Min Park
Two Lovers Anna Devin, Robert Anthony Gardiner

Conducted by Antonio Pappano
The Royal Opera House in London, England

Première Performance at the Metropolitan Opera House, New York on December 14, 1918

Il Tabarro: Synopsis



Michele, the barge owner, stares moodily into the sunset smoking his pipe; his unhappy, much younger wife Giorgetta busies herself with the laundry and other household tasks, and his stevedores Tinca, Talpa and Luigi are unloading sacks of cement from the hold, groaning under the weight. Giorgetta makes them take a break and offers them a glass of wine while Michele goes below deck, worried because Giorgetta is rejecting all his advances to her. An organ grinder comes along the quayside and Tinca starts to waltz rather clumsily with Giorgetta. When Luigi takes over from him there is an immediate and urgent sense of physical attraction between them and they dance together oblivious of the world around them until Michele appears again. They rush apart. Upon Giorgetta's casually phrased question about his plans for the crew Michele replies that, yes, Talpa and Tinca will stay — and Luigi, too.

La Frugola appears to pick up her husband, Talpa. She goes about all day picking up bits and pieces that other people throw away and she gives Giorgetta a beautiful jewel-studded comb that she found that day. Their talk about the back-breakingly hard life of the stevedores leads Luigi to an impassioned outcry against their lot that would not be out of place in a socialist manifesto. Giorgetta falls into a wistful reminiscence about her youth in the Paris quarter of Belleville, and Luigi, also born and bred there, blends his voice with hers in happy duet. For a moment all their troubles are forgotten.

When Tinca, Talpa and Frugola leave, Luigi stays behind, ostensibly to discuss with Michele whether or not to stay on the crew, but this is just an excuse for him to be close to Giorgetta. Michele goes off to put up the position lamps; ecstatically they recall their hour of love the night before and make plans to meet again later that evening after Michele has gone to sleep. They have a certain signal to give the all-clear — Giorgetta is to light a match to show Luigi that he can come aboard safely.

After Luigi has left, Michele tries to rekindle some of the old warmth in the couple's relationship as he talks to Giorgetta about the happy times they had in the past with their small child, long since dead. He talks about how he used to shield them all from the cold winds under his cloak. But Giorgetta's mind is on other things and her heart remains closed to him. She pretends to be tired and goes below deck. Michele watches her through the window. She is not getting ready for bed, but she seems to be waiting for something. A sudden flash of jealousy and despair makes Michele rant against the fate that has turned their relationship sour. Does his wife have a lover? Who could it be? He prepares to light his pipe.

Luigi, hiding on the quayside, waits for Giorgetta's signal. He sees the match being lit and, assuming that it is Giorgetta that has lit it, sneaks aboard the barge. It is so dark that he cannot see Michele until it is too late: Michele grabs him and forces him to confess that he loves Giorgetta. Enraged by what he hears, Michele strangles Luigi and places his body at his feet. Michele then covers him with his cloak and waits for Giorgetta, who is stirring below. She approaches in a softened mood but, when she expresses a desire to be sheltered by Michele's cloak, he pulls the cloak away to reveal Luigi's lifeless form. In triumph, he pushes her savagely onto the dead body.

Il Tabarro: Background



Puccini had first been fascinated by a one-act drama called *The Cloak*, by Didier Gold, in Paris, where it was successful enough to have enjoyed a run of several years. Full of the ambience of the lives of the barges on the River Seine at the beginning of the 1900s, Puccini originally engaged his friend, Ferdinando Martini to write the libretto based on Gold's play, to be called *Il Tabarro*. However, Martini proved to be a very slow producer, and eventually, Puccini changed his mind and engaged Giuseppe Adami, with whom he had written *La Rondine*, and who had probably been waiting in the wings for this opportunity. He delivered a completed libretto to the composer in just two weeks. Puccini completed the orchestration in 1916.

The Pescadero Opera Society presents

Suor Angelica



**Music by
Giacomo Puccini**

**Libretto by
Giovacchino Forzano**

Opera in One Act

**Setting: A convent near Siena
in the late 17th century**

Characters

Suor Angelica, a nun (soprano) Ermonela Jaho
 The Princess, her aunt (contralto) Anna Larsson
 The Abbess (mezzo-soprano) Irina Mishura
 Suor Zelatrice, the monitress (mezzo-soprano) Elena Zilio
 Mistress of the Novices Elizabeth Sikora
 Suor Genovieffa (soprano) Anna Evin
 Suor Osmina (soprano) Eryl Royle
 Suor Dolcina (soprano) Elizabeth Key

Conducted by Antonio Pappano
 The Royal Opera House in London, England

Première performance: Metropolitan Opera House, New York on December 14, 1918

Suor Angelica: Synopsis



Angelica lives the convent life of a pious nun, banished there seven years before by her noble family for the disgrace she brought upon them with the birth of her illegitimate son. Since then, she has lived a completely closeted life, without contact with the outside world.

Unexpectedly one day the visitor's bell rings and the Abbess announces the arrival of Sister Angelica's aunt, the Princess. The cruel and haughty Princess produces a document and insists that Angelica sign over her inheritance to her younger sister's future husband, who is willing to forgive Angelica's stain on the family honor. Angelica begs for news of the son she has only seen once. The Princess eventually reveals that the boy died two years previously. Distraught, Angelica signs the document and sobs for the child who died motherless.

In her grief, Angelica believes that she sees her child beckoning her in the twinkling stars and prepares herself a fatal potion. As she drinks it, she realizes that suicide is a mortal sin, and calls to the Virgin Mary to deliver her into salvation. As the other sisters look on, the Madonna appears with a small child, bathed in radiant light. Together they lead Angelica to Paradise.



Suor Angelica: Background



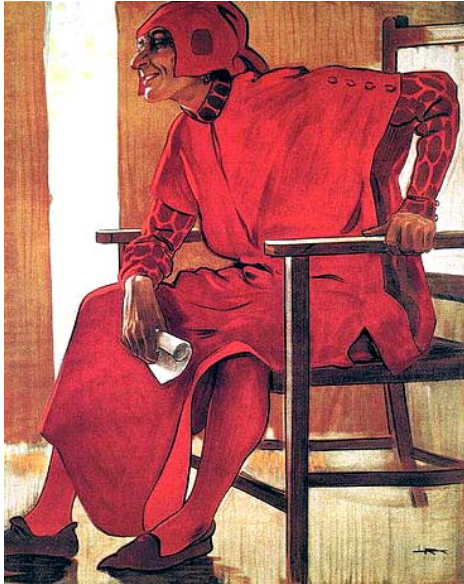
Suor Angelica was Puccini's personal favorite and contains three distinct sections. The curtain opens on a series of delightful vignettes of convent life, during which Angelica's character gradually emerges. The reason for her presence in the convent is hinted at but not revealed until the second section in which she is visited by her aunt, the Princess. As this point we begin to understand that beneath her serene exterior lies unresolved turmoil.

In the late 17th century, nuns lived almost as prisoners with little or no contact with the outside world. What little news did penetrate the sanctity of their domain was brought in by the few trusted nuns who gathered alms. Not all the sisters would have chosen their vocation. At the time banishment to a convent was a common punishment for social misdemeanors, such as having a child out of wedlock.

For the libretto of *Suor Angelica*, Puccini turned to Giovacchino Forzano, a colorful character who had already been successful in a variety of careers before he turned playwright. In Forzano, Puccini found a quick and intelligent librettist, who was not hampered by having to adapt libretti from previously written works, as Puccini's other librettists had been. In fact, *Suor Angelica* was written after an idea of Forzano's own. Work on *Suor Angelica* progressed at a rapid pace, and Puccini composed the music with remarkable speed, in part because of the high quality of Forzano's libretti.

The Pescadero Opera Society presents

Gianni Schicchi



**Music by
Giacomo Puccini**

**Libretto by Giovacchino Forzano,
after an episode in *Dante's Inferno***

Opera in One Act

**Setting: The bedroom of Buoso Donati,
Florence, Italy on September 1, 1299**

Characters

Buoso Donati, a wealthy Italian aristocrat	Peter Curtis
Gianni Schicchi (baritone).....	Lucio Gallo
Lauretta, his daughter (soprano).....	Ekaterina Siurina
Zita, called the "Old Woman," Buoso's cousin (alto)	Elena Zilio
Rinuccio, Zita's nephew, in love with Lauretta (tenor)	Francesco Demuro
Gherardo, Buoso's nephew (tenor).....	Alan Oke
Nella, his wife (soprano)	Lisa Anne Robinson
Gherardino, their son (soprano).....	Filippe Turkheimer
Betto di Signa, Buoso's brother-in-law (bass)	Jeremy White
Simone, Buoso's cousin (bass).....	Gwynne Howell
Marco, his son (baritone).....	Robert Poulton
La Ciesca, Marco's wife (mezzo-soprano).....	Marie McLaughlin
Maestro Spinelloccio, physician (bass)	Henry Waddington
Ser Amantio di Nicolao, notary (baritone).....	Enrico Fissore
Pinellino, shoemaker (bass).....	Daniel Grice
Guccio, dyer (bass).....	John Malloy

Conducted by Antonion Pappano
The Royale Opera House in London, England

Première performance: Metropolitan Opera House, New York, December 14, 1918
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Gianni Schicchi: Synopsis

Buoso Donati, a rich aristocrat of Florence, has just died. Hearing of Buoso Donati's death, his relatives rush to his bedside, ostensibly to mourn his passing, but actually with only one thought in mind — to find his will and claim their inheritance. When Betto announces that there is a rumor abroad that Buoso has left his estate to the monks, a frenzied search ensues throughout the house, looking for the precious document.

Young Rinuccio is the one to find the will and, before he hands it over to his Aunt Zita, he begs her permission to marry his sweetheart, Lauretta, daughter of *Gianni Schicchi*. His aunt replies that if they all receive their inheritance, he can marry whomever he likes. The will is opened and their fears are confirmed — apart from some bequests to each of them, the monks are to receive the most sought-after items: the mills at Signa, the house and the finest mule in Tuscanny!

Rinuccio suggests calling for the clever and resourceful Gianni Schicchi to help them out of their predicament. His inventive ideas can always be counted upon to avert a crisis. Initially, this suggestion is forcefully rejected and, upon Schicchi's arrival he is abused by Zita; however Lauretta intervenes on Rinuccio's behalf and persuades her father to help the family claim the inheritance so that she and Rinuccio can marry ("Oh! mio babbino caro"). Schicchi sends Lauretta away so that she is not complicit in the plot.

Unexpectedly, the doctor arrives, but Schicchi successfully dupes him by imitating Buoso's voice. Inspired by the success of the encounter, Schicchi evolves a plan to write a new will, posthumously! Secretly each of the relatives promises Schicchi a substantial reward if he leaves the bulk of the estate to them, and to each he agrees. The women dress him in Buoso's nightgown, and he reminds them all that the punishment for falsifying a will is amputation of the right arm and exile.

The Notary and two witnesses arrive. Schicchi, disguised as Donati, proceeds to dictate the new will. To the relative's horror he leaves the three most valuable items — the mills at Signa, the house and the finest mule in Tuscanny — to himself! The mortified family is forced to remain silent, as they are now implicated in a grave crime. As soon as the Notary and witnesses depart, an outrage ensues. The enraged relatives turn on Schicchi, but he chases them out of what is now his own house. As they leave they take with them whatever they can carry.

Left alone, Rinuccio and Lauretta embrace, dreaming of their future happiness together. Schicchi turns to the audience to justify his actions and beg their indulgence to grant him extenuating circumstances for his actions — namely to provide Lauretta with the dowry she requires to enable her to marry Rinuccio.



The relations hear the new will

Gianni Schicchi: Background



Gianni Schicchi has always been the most popular of the three operas, and is Puccini's only comedy. At this time in his life, Puccini particularly wanted to write a comic opera, and in this opera he revealed an unexpectedly well-developed genius for comedy. It is brilliantly written, both musically and dramatically, painting the greedy relatives with an acidic tone that is ageless. Work on *Gianni Schicchi* progressed at a rapid pace, and Puccini composed the music with remarkable speed, in part because of the high quality of its libretto.

For his librettist Puccini turned to Giovacchino Forzano, a colorful character who had already been successful in a variety of careers before he turned playwright. In Forzano, Puccini found a quick wit and intelligence. The music is witty in itself, ably complementing Forzano's clever plot and libretto.

Puccini himself developed the idea for *Gianni Schicchi* from a plot that he derived from *Dante's Inferno*. Derived from a few lines, it concerns the impersonation of Buoso Donati and the falsification of a will, for which, according to Dante, Schicchi is damned. Forzano, however, provides "extenuating circumstances" for Schicchi, developing the idea into an engaging tale of two young lovers dependent on the bequest as a dowry to ensure their match.

Unlike Dante, Forzano does not ignore the complicity of the greedy relatives and metes out his own justice. The relatives are self-motivated, false, unpleasant and always bickering with one another. Of them, only Rinuccio seems innocent of real greed; all he wants is to marry his beloved Lauretta. Puccini contrasts the spiky dissonant music of the relatives with extended, expansive melodic lines for the lovers, which seem almost a parody of his own style. Lauretta's moving pleas "O mio babbino caro" (oh, my beloved father) serves as the turning point in the opera, as from that time Schicchi conceives of the plot to save the lovers and rid them of the relatives.

The music and the plot rattle along breathlessly from start to finish, every character clamoring for attention, and only brief moments of respite. Slapstick is interspersed with human interest and despite the use of stock commedia dell'arte characters, both Forzano and Puccini invest them with personality, liveliness and realism blended ingeniously with the comedy. One is left wishing that Puccini had had the opportunity to write more comic operas. Alex North, adapts the music from *Gianni Schicchi* into the movie, *Prizzi's Honor*.

Dante, Florence and Gianni Schicchi

Gianni Schicchi, the eponymous protagonist of Puccini's opera, was an historical personage who lived in Florence in the last part of the 13th century (the opera takes place September 1, 1299). The events described in the opera, Gianni Schicchi's posing as the dead Buoso Donati in order to forge a new will, seem also to be historical, since Dante referred to the incident in the *Inferno*, XXX 41-45:

...a false shape assuming, so performed
The deed of sin; e'en as the other there,
That onward passes, dar'd to counterfeit
Donati's features, to feign'd testament
The seal affixing, that himself might gain.

The "other there" to whom Dante refers is, of course, Gianni Schicchi. He could not have enjoyed his ill-gotten gains very long since Dante's trip through the *Inferno* took place only seven months later, on the night between March 24 and 25, 1300. At the end of the opera, Schicchi refers to his fate:

"For this prank [bizzarria] I was sent to Hell. So be it. But with the permission of the great Dante, if you enjoyed yourself tonight, perhaps you'll say: "Not guilty!"

Giacomo Puccini

Born: Lucca, December 22, 1858 — Died: Brussels, November 29, 1924



Giacomo Puccini was the fifth generation of a family of professional musicians and composers, living and working in and around Lucca, Tuscany, Italy. When he was just five years old his father died.

Puccini eventually took over his father's position of choirmaster and organist at San Martino Church. It was expected that Giacomo follow in the path of his ancestors, who were church composers and organists, thus continuing the long family tradition. All that changed for him one night in 1876, when he and a friend walked thirteen miles to the city of Pisa to see a production of Verdi's *Aida*. From that moment on Giacomo knew that his true passion would be opera.

In 1880, Puccini completed his studies at the Pacini Institute in Lucca. Having just finished composing a mass, *Messa di Gloria*, his great-uncle was encouraged to help support his musical education. A scholarship was also granted from Queen Margherita at Milan's Conservatorio. Milan, with its famous Teatro alla Scala, was the place to be for all young up-and-coming composers.

For three years (1880-1883) Puccini continued his studies at the Conservatorio. For a graduating exercise he composed an orchestral piece, *Capriccio sinfonico*, which was performed by the student orchestra. It achieved great success at its performance and foretold the gifts that were to be — of operas blending intense emotion and theatricality with tender lyricism, colorful orchestration and a rich vocal line.

Meanwhile, the music-publishing firm of Edoardo Sonzogno announced the first of several competitions for a one-act opera. (Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* was discovered in this way in 1889.) Puccini, then still a student of the Conservatorio, decided to take part in it. A young librettist and journalist, Ferdinando Fontana, suggested that he compose an opera around the story, *Le Villi* (The Witches). Though Puccini didn't win, the opera was produced successfully in 1884 in Milan. As a result, the great Milanese music publisher, Giulio Ricordi, acquired the rights to *Le Villi*, and commissioned Puccini to write a new opera, again with the young Fontana as his librettist. This was the beginning a life-long association of Puccini and Ricordi, in whom he found a fatherly friend and wise guide.

Puccini was a perfectionist, writing just eight full-length operas, compared to Verdi's 28. He set high standards for himself and everyone else involved in his operas. His early works show German influence. Later works show the influence of Debussy, and even a touch of the atonality of Schoenberg. But he never strayed too far from his melodic Italian roots or lost his attachment to his native Tuscany.

He worked tirelessly with the sopranos who played his heroines. Maria Jeritza, Puccini's favorite Tosca, recalled, "Sometimes he would make me so angry I wanted to cry." He would say, "If ever I wake you at three in the morning and ask you to sing a high C, you will sing a high C."

When he was financially able, he bought a villa at Torre del Lago, living there much of his life. He was eventually driven away by the smell of a peat factory that was built during World War I. Puccini took no interest in politics and thought the war a mistake from the start. His lack of enthusiasm for the war was one reason for his falling out with his fiercely patriotic friend, conductor Arturo Toscanini.

Puccini was fond of hunting and smoking, and was fascinated with the mechanical marvels of his day. He owned a wireless and a phonograph and corresponded with Thomas Edison. He also owned several automobiles and motor yachts, and barely survived one of the first car crashes in Italy. Puccini once described himself as a "mighty hunter of wild fowl, operatic librettos and attractive women."

Puccini was a notorious lady's man, but he was innocent of the scandal that most shook his marriage. Convinced he was having an affair with a maidservant, his wife, Elvira, drove the young girl from the house and publicly denounced her. The girl was so shaken that she committed suicide, whereupon it was determined that she was in fact a virgin.

Near the end of his life, Puccini was still striving for greatness with his last opera, *Turandot*. Marek wrote, "He became a frightening taskmaster, not only with his librettists but, above all, with himself. He was bent on doing something new, determined to write music of much larger scope, of legendary stature and philosophic implication." Some critics felt that he nearly succeeded. Only death from throat cancer in 1924 prevented him from finishing and polishing the opera. (*Turandot* was eventually completed by his close friend, Franco Alfano, using Puccini's notes.) At the première performance of *Turandot* at La Scala in 1926, the conductor, Arturo Toscanini, ended the performance in the middle of Act III (after Liù's death), turned to the audience and said, "At this point the Maestro laid down his pen.

Il Trittico: Background (***"The Triptych"***)¹

Puccini is one of the most well-loved of opera composers, mainly due to the popularity of *La Bohème*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Tosca* and *Turandot*. Less well-known are his mature works that he considered to be his greatest achievements, among which are the three one act operas which form *Il Trittico*. Composed for the 1918 New York Metropolitan Opera season, each opera is a finely crafted dramatic and musical work of less than an hour's duration.

Puccini's early ideas for three one-act operas to be performed together had been rejected by Ricordi since 1904 as being a bad idea. But, after Ricordi died in 1912, Puccini took up the idea again, and worked on the three pieces during the war, about the time he was also writing *La Rondine*.

Il Trittico is composed of three one-act operas in the style of the Parisian Grand Guignol — a horrific episode (*Il Tabarro*), a sentimental tragedy (*Suor Angelica*) and a comedy or farce (*Gianni Schicchi*). The idea of joining various works into one evening constitutes an expression of originality. The beginnings belong to a slow process to abandon little by little the conservative world from which Puccini had arisen. *Il Tabarro*, *Suor Angelica* and *Gianni Schicchi* remain, with all their harsh realism, sentiment and calmness, a fascinating theatrical idea.

For Puccini started work on *Il Tabarro* in his 50s and completed the project with *Gianni Schicchi* in his 60s. For Puccini, *Il Trittico* represented an important expression of his art. His well-known gifts for lush melody, rapturous lyricism, and a strong sense of theater are in ample evidence in these three operas:

- ***Il Tabarro*** is a somber, near-melodramatic tragedy. The opera is very dark and brooding, full of the violence and grit associated with verismo opera.
- ***Suor Angelica*** (Puccini's personal favorite) is a sentimental tragedy with strong melodies and a mystic theme. It is an uplifting tale of religious redemption.
- ***Gianni Schicchi***, the most popular of the three, is a farce full of greed and conniving. It is a delightful comedy, full of wit and vivacity, whose libretto was derived, surprisingly enough, from a few lines in *Dante's Inferno*. It has a developed plot line with an exposition, a conflict, and a delightful ironic resolution.

Some critics feel that *Il Trittico* is a rather catch-as-catch-can collection of three one-acts, having virtually no direct connection to one another. It's as if Puccini had a handful of unused ideas that he wanted to express, ideas suitable to a short form that he simply threw together, like a patchwork of scraps. They argue that three one-acts

¹**triptych:** (trīp" tīk) A work consisting of three painted or carved panels that are hinged together, usually depicting a religious scene, sometimes used as an altar piece.

on a program might prove to be a more deeply satisfying evening if the works were thematically related and commented upon one another so that the whole would be more than the sum of its parts. But that is not the situation with *Il Trittico*. Despite the limitations of the form, they explain, *Il Trittico* is still Puccini, and has moments of his gloriously soaring melody, emotional verity, and melodramatic theatricality that make it worth the occasional production.

Premier Performance

The first performance of *Il Trittico* took place at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, December 14, 1918, because the majority of the artists in Italy were in military service due to the war raging in Europe. Unfortunately, Puccini was unable to be at the performance, since travel in Europe was dangerous because of mines, and it was also difficult to get a visa. How Puccini wished that his opera could have been premiered “at home!” In spite of the absence of the composer, the premiere of *Il Trittico* was a triumphant success, especially *Gianni Schicchi*.

Il Trittico: The Video (2011)

Starring Eva-Maria Westbroek, Ermonela Jaho and Lucio Gallo; conducted by Antonio Pappano



This is The Royal Opera’s first complete presentation of Puccini’s *Il Trittico* since 1965. Leading director Richard Jones staged his witty, darkly comic realization of *Gianni Schicchi* for The Royal Opera in 2007, and here he completes the trilogy. This production of *Il Trittico* was first broadcast on BBC Radio 3 and went to cinemas world-wide in February 2012.

When *Il Trittico* was first shown in 2011 it received rave reviews right across the whole of the British press. The staging of all three was updated. *Suor Angelica* was relocated from a convent to a hospital ward for children run by a religious order. *Gianni Schicchi* was relocated to modern-day Florence. The orchestral playing under the inspired direction of Pappano is outstanding and the pacing of each drama was as near to ideal as possible.

Puccini’s trilogy has three very contrasting one-act operas, each lasting for about one hour and intended to be performed in the course of a single evening. They were composed in the order in which they were written with *Il Tabarro* (The Cloak) opening the set, *Suor Angelica*, in the middle, and the most popular of the three has always been amusing comedy *Gianni Schicchi*.

Il Tabarro is a tale of inevitable tragedy and eventual revenge killing. The brooding atmosphere builds steadily and remorselessly in this production with excellent singing and acting by all three of the main cast — Lucio Gallo as Michele, Eva-Maria Westbroek as Giorgetta and Aleksandra Antonenko as Luigi. The supporting cast is equally excellent. This is a fine and very convincing performance.

Suor Angelica is an upsetting tale of extreme punishment, where religion is used as an evil tool by a cruel relative to achieve victimization and eventual disinheritance of a young woman in her “care.” This is a very hard-hitting tale indeed, and in a performance such as this reaches almost unbearable levels of pain for the viewer. This is in no small part the result of a quite exceptional performance by Ermonela Jaho as Sister Angelico, who delivers a performance of incredible intensity.

Gianni Schicchi is a dark comedy centered on the efforts of the family to change the will of a recently deceased wealthy relative. Lucio Gallo somehow manages to change from the murderous husband of *Il Tabarro* into the humorous Gianni Schicchi with complete aplomb, and is well supported by the rest of the cast. This last opera is very much an ensemble piece, and in this performance the ensemble works very well together towards a satisfying conclusion.