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# PROGRAM NOTES FOR A GRADUATE RECITAL

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# PROGRAM NOTES FOR A GRADUATE RECITAL

by

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A Research Paper

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

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Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
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## Program Notes ‘*Gianni Schicchi*’

*Gianni Schicchi* is a one-act comic opera by the Italian composer, Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924), set to an Italian libretto by Giovacchino Forzano (1884-1970). The opera plot is derived from an episode in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. Puccini composed *Gianni Schicchi* in 1917–18. It is his last completed work. It is also the final portion of *Il Trittico*, which consists of three one-act operas: *Il Tabarro*, *Suor Angelica*, and *Gianni Schicchi*. These were written individually with contrasting themes: *Il tabarro* is a dark example of *verismo* opera; *Suor Angelica* is a religious myth; and *Gianni Schicchi* is a farce. Although each work is not associated with the others, Puccini wanted them to be performed in a single concert. However after initial premieres, most opera companies began to perform the operas separately. *Gianni Schicchi* would eventually become the most popular and frequently performed of the set.<sup>1</sup> Laretta’s aria "*O mio babbino caro*" ("Oh My Dear Papa") is a famous showpiece for sopranos.

## Background

In the late nineteenth century, the one-act opera had become popular in Italy, influenced by the success of Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*.<sup>2</sup> Puccini also had considered a set of one-act operas after *Madama Butterfly*, which premiered in 1904. However he had difficulty with a lack of new subjects. His publisher, Giulio Ricordi, strongly opposed his plan, so Puccini did not make progress on the project for a while.<sup>3</sup> In 1916, Puccini completed the one-act tragedy *Il Tabarro*. He completed *Suor Angelica*

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<sup>1</sup> Ashbrook, William. *The Operas of Puccini* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), 170

<sup>2</sup> Girardi, Michele. *Puccini: His International Art* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000). 372

<sup>3</sup> Phillips-Matz, Mary Jane. *Puccini: A Biography* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002). 148

and *Gianni Schicchi* in the following years.<sup>4</sup> Puccini initially intended a set of two operas—one tragic and one comic—but ultimately he added the religious opera as a third.<sup>5</sup> *Gianni Schicchi* is a purely comic opera, a genre which Puccini never before attempted.<sup>6</sup> The score combines elements of Puccini's modern style of harmonic dissonance with lyrical passages that effectively describes a strong parody. *Gianni Schicchi* premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in New York on 14 December 1918 as the final part of *Il Trittico* under the baton of Roberto Moranzoni. Most critics agreed that *Gianni Schicchi* was the most splendid of the three operas.<sup>7</sup>

### Characters

- Gianni Schicchi: Baritone, 50 years
- Lauretta (Schicchi's daughter): Soprano, 21 years
- La Zita (an old maid and cousin of Buoso Donati): Mezzo-soprano, 60 years
- Rinuccio (Zita's nephew): Tenor, 24 years
- Gherardo (Buoso's nephew): Tenor, 40 years
- Nella (Gherardo's wife): Soprano, 34 years
- Gherardino (Gherardo and Nella's son): Soprano or treble, 7 years
- Betto di Signa (Buoso's brother-in-law): Bass, uncertain age
- Simone (cousin of Buoso): Bass, 70 years
- Marco (Simone's son): Baritone, 45 years
- La Ciesca (Marco's wife): Mezzo-soprano, 38 years

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<sup>4</sup> Budden, Julian. *Puccini: His Life and Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). 373-375

<sup>5</sup> Budden, Julian. *Puccini: His Life and Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). 372

<sup>6</sup> Budden, Julian. *Puccini: His Life and Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). 405

<sup>7</sup> Wilson, Alexandra. *The Puccini Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). 178

- Maestro Spinelloccio (a doctor): Bass
- Ser Amantio di Nicolao (a notary): Baritone
- Pinellino (a cobbler): Bass
- Guccio (a dyer): Bass

## **Synopsis**

Place: Florence in the year 1299.

A wealthy gentleman of Florence, Buoso Donati has just died, and eight of Buoso's relatives are kneeling at his bedside. They are praying fervently for poor Buoso, but their weeping and wailing only focus on Buoso's huge inheritance. Betto starts to speak the rumor that Buoso Donati has left everything to the friars of a monastery. They turn to old Simone, Buoso's brother-in-law and the Mayor of Fucecchio, for advice. Simone tells them that if the will is in the hands of a lawyer, there is nothing that can be done, but that if the will is still in Buoso's house, they might just have some hope.

Their hysterical search for the will begins. At last young Rinuccio, Buoso's nephew triumphantly announces that he has found the will of Buoso Donati. But he refuses to release it and asks his aunt Zita to allow him to marry Schicchi's daughter, Lauretta on the first of May. Finally Zita bluntly answers that if all turns out as they hope, he can marry whomever he pleases. While they are agitated to read the will, Rinuccio sends little Gherardino to Gianni Schicchi and Lauretta to come to his assistance.

Zita seriously opens the will with false grief and Simone carefully lights three candles for Buoso. They read the will silently and soon their faces gradually look more concerned, finally giving way to cries of dismay. Simone violently blows out the candles.

"So it was true", Simone suddenly exclaims. Buoso has left everything to the monks of Santa Reparata. They painfully imagine all the luxuries the monks will enjoy, all the while laughing at the Donatis.

The relatives start a quarrel and Zita comments bitterly "Who would ever have thought when our cousin Buoso departed from the living..." Suddenly, they have an idea that perhaps there is a way to get around the will. They ask again Simone's advice, but Rinuccio suggests that Gianni Schicchi can help them. Zita, however, refuses to accept it. Gherardino returns with the news that Schicchi is on his way. Simone and Zita strongly oppose a marriage between a Donati and the daughter of a peasant, Gianni Schicchi. But Rinuccio points out that Schicchi is clever and cunning that he can help them.

Schicchi arrives with his daughter, Lauretta. He makes a call of condolence for the family's loss, and Lauretta and Rinuccio begin to whisper to each other lovingly. But Zita wants to turn them out and tell Schicchi that she will not give her nephew to someone without a dowry. Lauretta and Rinuccio plaintively plead that they love each other, but Schicchi and Zita continue to argue. Rinuccio begs Schicchi to help them out with the will, but he firmly refuses. At that moment, Lauretta pleads with her father, singing the famous aria, "O mio babbini caro." If their love is a hopeless, she will throw herself off the Ponte Vecchio into the Arno. Finally Schicchi accepts his daughter's plea.

Schicchi sends Lauretta out of the room and then asks whether there is anyone else who knows about Buoso's death. They answer that no one does, not even the servants. Schicchi then tells Gherardo and Marco to remove Buoso's body to another room, and orders the women to remake the bed. Suddenly, Doctor Spinelloccio arrives and Schicchi tells the relatives to stop him from coming in. The relatives hastily inform

him that Buoso is better. Schicchi then pretends to be Buoso in a nasal voice, asking the doctor to come back later since he is feeling better and wishes to rest. The doctor goes away.

Schicchi asks the relatives if he sounded just like Buoso, and they jubilantly agree that he does. Then Schicchi explains his plan to call a notary, telling him Buoso is dying and wants to re-make his will. When the notary comes, the room is dark and the figure of Buoso Donati will be dimly seen in the bed, complete with cap and chin strap. Schicchi will lie in bed and dictate a new will in the fake voice of Buoso.

The relatives admire Schicchi's plan and rush to kiss and embrace him. Zita sends Rinuccio for the notary and they start arguing about the division of the estate. The relatives shout that the money has to be in equal portions. In addition, Simone wants the farms at Fucecchio; Zita, those at Figline; Betto, those at Prato. Gherardo and his wife, Nella, want the lands at Empoli; Marco and his wife, La Ciesca, those at Quintole. But Zita points out that there still remain the choicest properties, the most valuable things: the mule, Buoso's house, and the mills of Signa. Simone suggests that they should be given to him, because he is the oldest and was Mayor of Fucecchio. But the others do not agree with him and have a quarrel. Schicchi mocks their hypocritical family love.

The quarrel is suddenly interrupted by the tolling of a funeral bell. The relatives are shocked that the news of Buoso's death has become known outside. Gherardo rushes out to see, and soon returns with the happy news that there is no cause for alarm. He tells them that the captain's servant has had an accident. They cheerfully pray that he rests in peace. Simone suggests that the matter of the house, the mule, and the mills be left to the justice and honesty of Schicchi and the relatives agree without hesitation. Zita, Nella, and

La Ciesca begin to dress him in Buoso's nightclothes. The women flatter and admire Schicchi in a beautiful trio.

Schicchi now gives them warning that whoever falsifies a will is to be punished by having their hand chopped off, and then exiled by the law in Florence. Just then the notary, Amantio di Nicolao, arrives with the witnesses and Schicchi jumps into the bed and pretends to be Buoso. Gianni Schicchi greets them in an affected voice and they are much moved. Schicchi is sorry for being unable to write the will himself due to paralysis, then he raises his trembling hands and the relatives make a show of pity.

The notary begins to read the Latin preamble, and then Schicchi continues telling that he revokes any previous testament, and the relatives praise his prudence. The notary asks about luxurious funeral arrangements, but Schicchi says that he wants them to spend no more than two florins, and the relatives praise him again for his modesty. Then he endows only five lire as a legacy to the little friars of Santa Reparata, and the relatives are beside themselves with joy. The notary skeptically asks him whether that might be too little. Schicchi shrewdly answers that if he left a great deal to the church, people would say that it was stolen money.

He then keeps his promise to divide Buoso's money equally among the relatives, and also bequeathes the specific lands requested by each relative. However in regard to the mule, the house, and the mills, he proclaims they fall to his dear friend, Gianni Schicchi. The relatives are extremely horrified but they cannot contain their fury because of Schicchi's warning about the penalty for forging a will. Schicchi asks Zita to pay the fees for the notary and the witnesses, who depart in sorrow.

After they leave, the relatives turn on Gianni Schicchi with unrepressed fury. Schicchi chases the relatives out of what is now his house and they make their way toward the door, looting as much as they can carry and screaming that he is a thief and a scoundrel. Meanwhile, Laretta and Rinuccio sing of their first kiss at Florence, with Florence seeming like a paradise in the distance. Schicchi returns and, moved at the sight of the happy lovers, he turns to the audience and asks, "Tell me, ladies and gentlemen, if Buoso's money could end up better than this? For this bit of fun, I have been condemned to the Inferno, and so be it. But with the permission of the great father Dante, if you have been amused, grant me extenuating circumstances!" He bows to the audiences as the curtain comes down.

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