



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**FEBRUARY 19, 2007**

**Contact: Stephen J. Baker** – *Public Relations Manager*

**Phone:** 757-627-9545 ext. 3323  
**Fax:** 757-622-0058

**E-Mail:** [press@vaopera.org](mailto:press@vaopera.org)  
**Web:** [www.vaopera.org](http://www.vaopera.org)

VIRGINIA OPERA PRESENTS A DOUBLE-BILL PRODUCTION OF  
**CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA / I PAGLIACCI**

**Debuts of Teatro Colón leading tenor Gustavo López Manzitti as Turiddu and Canio,  
and Metropolitan Opera veteran mezzo-soprano Jane Dutton as Santuzza**

**Return of Virginia Opera veterans, including Cristina Nassif in the soprano role of Nedda**

**Detailed staging by celebrated MARRIAGE OF FIGARO director Lorna Haywood**

**NORFOLK, Va.** – For the final performances of its 2006-2007 season in March and April, Virginia Opera brings audiences to Old World Sicily with the double-bill production commonly known as “CAV-PAG,” featuring two of Italian opera’s most beloved one-act tragedies – Pietro Mascagni’s **CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA** and Ruggiero Leoncavallo’s **I PAGLIACCI**.

Mascagni’s **CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA**, the title of which translates to “rustic chivalry,” reveals with its heart-rending music the tragic events that occur after the soldier Turiddu returns home from a military tour, only to discover that his fiancée has married another. Familiar to many is Leoncavallo’s **I PAGLIACCI**, in which betrayal leads to bloody revenge as Canio, playing the role of the clown Pagliacci in a story-within-a-story, is faced with the task of bringing his audience to laughter, even though the fresh discovery of his wife’s callous infidelity tears at his soul.

**Gustavo López Manzitti**, leading tenor at Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires, makes his Virginia Opera debut in the leading roles of Turiddu in **CAVALLERIA** and Canio in **PAGLIACCI**. Another world-class talent making her company debut is mezzo-soprano **Jane Dutton**, a veteran of the Metropolitan Opera who will sing the leading role of Santuzza in **CAVALLERIA**.

Returning for **PAGLIACCI** is nationally-acclaimed former Virginia Opera young artist **Cristina Nassif** (**CARMEN**, 2006; **LA TRAVIATA**, 2005) in the soprano role of Nedda. Also making returns are French-Canadian mezzo-soprano **Geneviève Després** (**THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO**, 2006; **LA TRAVIATA**, 2005) as Mamma Lucia in **CAVALLERIA** and handsome baritone **Michael Todd Simpson** (**THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO**, 2006) as Silvio in **PAGLIACCI**. Mr. Simpson is also scheduled to appear next season in the title role of Virginia Opera’s first Russian opera, **EUGENE ONEGIN**.

Returning British stage director **Lorna Haywood** (**THE MARRIAGE OF FIGARO**, 2006) will unite the two stories by having them take place in the same village, just one year apart, with a large chorus helping to paint the vivid background of Sicilian life in the 1940s.

CAV-PAG 2/2/2/2

“The pairing of these operas is apt,” says Ms. Haywood. “The action of both takes place in Southern Italy on important Feast Days: CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA occurs on Easter Sunday, while I PAGLIACCI is set in August, on the Feast of the Assumption of Mary. Infidelity, passion and murder are common to both plots.

“I decided to set both operas in the same small Sicilian village during the 1940s – an uncertain and dangerous time during Mussolini’s tenure as dictator of Italy. By then the country’s economy was destroyed, the people impoverished, downtrodden and war-weary. They tried desperately to cling to the old ways; their ancient codes of honor and their religious traditions in which the Feast Days were an important and stabilizing influence in their lives.”

Virginia Opera Artistic Director **Peter Mark**, who will conduct all performances, says, “Opera’s most famous twins – ‘Cav’ and ‘Pag’ – are not only thrilling dramas based on the raw passions of ordinary people, but soaring and searing musical icons of realistic human situations and struggles, immediately recognizable to anyone who hears and sees them for the first time. Having been annually on the operatic ‘Hit Parade’ for over 100 years since their creation, we are proud to present them together again here in Virginia.” The double-bill was staged just once before at Virginia Opera, in 1988.

The Richmond Symphony will provide the orchestra for the production, which opens at the Harrison Opera House in Norfolk on March 9, with additional performances March 11, 14, 16 and 18. Performances continue at the Landmark Theater in Richmond, Va. on March 23 and 25, followed by final performances March 30 and April 1 at George Mason University’s Center for the Arts in Fairfax, Va.

Both operas will be sung in Italian with Digitext SuperTitles projected above the stage. Single tickets are available for all performances on Virginia Opera’s website at [www.vaopera.org](http://www.vaopera.org), and via phone for Norfolk performances at 757-623-1223 (Southside) or 757-877-2550 (Peninsula); Fairfax performances at 703-218-6500; and Richmond performances at 804-262-8003. Virginia Opera can also be found online at [www.myspace.com/vaopera](http://www.myspace.com/vaopera).

Contact Public Relations Manager Stephen J. Baker at 757-627-9545 ext. 3323, or via e-mail at [press@vaopera.org](mailto:press@vaopera.org) for more information.

**CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA – AN OPERA IN ONE ACT BY PIETRO MASCAGNI**

Libretto by Giovanni Targioni-Tozzetti and Guido Menasci after the play by Giovanni Verga  
Performed in Italian with Digitext Supertitles

**I PAGLIACCI – AN OPERA IN ONE ACT BY RUGGIERO LEONCAVALLO**

Libretto by the composer  
Performed in Italian with Digitext Supertitles

**CAST LIST**

Artistic Director and Conductor..... **Peter Mark**  
Stage Director..... **Lorna Haywood**

**CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA**

Santuzza..... **Jane Dutton\***  
Turiddu..... **Gustavo López Manzitti\***  
Alfio..... **Andrew Oakden\***  
Lola..... **Kristin Rothfuss\***  
Mamma Lucia..... **Geneviève Després**

**I PAGLIACCI**

Canio..... **Gustavo López Manzitti\***  
Nedda..... **Cristina Nassif**  
Tonio..... **Andrew Oakden\***  
Silvio..... **Michael Todd Simpson**  
Beppe..... **Zachary Stains**

\* *Virginia Opera mainstage debut*

**PERFORMANCE DATES**

**Harrison Opera House, *Norfolk***

Friday, March 9 at 8 p.m.  
Sunday, March 11 at 2:30 p.m.  
Wednesday, March 14 at 7:30 p.m.  
Friday, March 16 at 8 p.m.  
Sunday, March 18 at 2:30 p.m.  
Tickets \$25-90 – 757-623-1223 (Southside), 757-877-2550 (Peninsula) or [www.vaopera.org](http://www.vaopera.org)

**The Landmark Theater, *Richmond***

Friday, March 23 at 8 p.m.  
Sunday, March 25 at 2:30 p.m.  
Tickets: \$20-\$85 – 804-262-8003 (Ticketmaster) or [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com)

**George Mason University's Center for the Arts, *Fairfax***

Friday, March 30 at 8 p.m.  
Sunday, April 1 at 2 p.m.  
Tickets: \$44-\$90 – 703-218-6500 or [www.tickets.com](http://www.tickets.com)

*Audiences are invited to join Virginia Opera 45 minutes prior to the start of performances (except opening night in Norfolk) for free "Opera Up-Close" presentations that provide helpful insights about the production.*

## STAGE DIRECTOR'S NOTES, LORNA HAYWOOD

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century a trend towards realism in opera pervaded Italian opera. In search of “verismo”, composers drew their subject matter from everyday life and ordinary people whose actions were down-to-earth, emotionally raw and often violent. This was a far cry from the traditional themes of idealized romance taken from history, myth or legend.

The best-known examples of Italian verismo happen to be two short operas that are now virtually inseparable, though their premieres were two years apart. Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana*, based on Giovanni Verga's drama, was the winner of a competition for a one-act opera; its first performance in 1890 was so wildly successful that none of his subsequent scores could come close. *I Pagliacci* was supposedly based on a real-life murder case tried by Leoncavallo's father. Another great success at its premiere in 1892, none of the composer's later operas grabbed the audience's attention.

The pairing of these operas is apt. The action of both takes place in Southern Italy and that action takes place on important Feast Days: *Cavalleria Rusticana* occurs on Easter Sunday, while *I Pagliacci* is set in August, on the Feast of the Assumption of Mary. Infidelity, passion and murder are common to both plots.

With this in mind I decided to set both operas in the same small Sicilian village during the 1940s – an uncertain and dangerous time during Mussolini's tenure as dictator of Italy. By then the country's economy was destroyed, the people impoverished, downtrodden and war-weary. They tried desperately to cling to the old ways; their ancient codes of honor and their religious traditions in which the Feast Days were an important and stabilizing influence in their lives.

Methods of warfare may have become more “sophisticated”, and the killing of innocent people may be called “collateral damage”, but the essential problems of small-town-life do not change. There will always be a “Turiddu” called up for active duty who returns to find his ‘Lola’ married to someone else; who hooks up with a ‘Santuzza’, but, having got her pregnant, resumes his relationship with his former girlfriend. And there will always be an ‘Alfio’ wheeling and dealing to procure the supplies the villagers need for survival. And there will always be the rigid code of behavior that insists on the betrayed husband exacting revenge for his wife's infidelity.

In the second opera, a year has passed and Turridu's mother, Santuzza and her child, with the rest of the villagers, welcome a second-rate traveling acting company. The play is a traditional “commedia dell'arte” story of a wife betraying her husband with a younger lover. Reality intrudes. Nedda is having an affair. In the “play” Canio/Pagliaccio cannot distinguish between his wife and the character she plays. In a jealous rage he stabs her and her lover and the horrified villagers are told – “The play is over.”

Not exactly the way a celebratory Feast Day should end, but “verismo”, like life, does not pretend to make everything tidy. Life, especially in wartime, is unpredictable and cruel. Mascagni and Leoncavallo composed operas that vividly illustrated that life.

## **CAST INFORMATION**

### **Peter Mark – Artistic Director**

Since his Virginia Opera debut in 1975 – conducting the pilot production of *La Traviata* with rising star Diana Soviero as Violetta – Maestro Peter Mark has presided over Virginia Opera's growth into one of the finest and largest opera companies in the nation. Under his guidance, Virginia Opera has identified and presented some of the nation's most promising young singers – from Jeannine Altmeyer, Ashley Putnam, Frederick Burchinal, John Aler, Rockwell Blake, Randy Locke, and Jake Gardner to Renée Fleming, Barbara Dever, Sujung Kim, Frank Porretta, Grant Youngblood, Fabiana Bravo, Randall Scarlata, Tracie Luck, and Thomas Truhitte. He has brought directors from the theatre and opera world to Virginia including Gian Carlo Menotti, Gordon Davidson, Arvin Brown, Dorothy Danner, Bernard Uzan and Lillian Groag in new productions designed by some of the nation's top opera and theater designers. As conductor, Maestro Mark has led more than 95 highly successful Virginia Opera productions and has brought the artistic achievements of Virginia Opera to the international stage, conducting the company's productions and presenting the company's singers in South America, London, New York, and most recently Shanghai, where he conducted the city's first Italian-language *Tosca* – on newly built, Virginia Opera-designed scenery – to open the brand new Opera House of the Oriental Arts Center, China's first. In celebration of the impact of those performances, and the importance of the occasion, he was featured on the cover of the national Opera News of China. Among Virginia Opera's most recognized productions are four operas by Maestro Mark's wife, distinguished Scottish-American composer Thea Musgrave, and the Virginia Premieres of Strauss' *Elektra* and *Salome*, Wagner's *Die Walküre* and *Tristan & Isolde*, Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*, and Handel's *Agrippina*. Maestro Mark has conducted the British premiere of Musgrave's *A Christmas Carol* for the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden (telecast throughout the United Kingdom by Granada Television); 10 sold-out performances of *Porgy and Bess* at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires (which opened that famed house's 1992 season) and *La Bohème* for its centennial production at the Torre del Lago Puccini Festival in Italy. He has also conducted for New York City Opera, Pacific Opera Victoria in Canada, and the National Opera of Mexico at the Bellas Artes. He is featured as conductor on three commercial recordings of Virginia Opera productions: *Mary, Queen of Scots*, *A Christmas Carol* and, most recently, Handel's *Julius Caesar*. Prior to his career as conductor and impresario, Maestro Mark, who began his musical career as a boy soprano at the Metropolitan Opera and the New York City Opera, enjoyed a successful career as an orchestral, chamber music, and solo violist. He held leadership positions with the Juilliard Orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Lyric Opera of Chicago Orchestra, and toured extensively throughout the former Soviet Union, South America, and Great Britain as a soloist.

### **Lorna Haywood – Stage Director**

Lorna Haywood returns to Virginia Opera following her successful directing debut last season with the company's hit production of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. After an operatic career that took her to the Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Glyndebourne Festival Opera, English National Opera, San Francisco Opera, Chicago Lyric Opera and numerous other American opera companies, Lorna Haywood is now in demand as an opera director. Acclaimed as a superb singing actress throughout her career, Ms. Haywood now receives similar accolades for her innovative and imaginative direction. Ms. Haywood's productions include *La Traviata* for Norway's Opera Nordfjord; *The Marriage of Figaro*, *La Traviata*, *La Bohème*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Il Trovatore*, *Romeo et Juliette*, and *Tosca* for Madison Opera; *La Traviata*, *La Bohème*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Il Trovatore*, *Die Fledermaus* and new productions of *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Tosca* and *Don Giovanni* for Opera San Jose's new California Fox Theater; *The Magic Flute* and *Fidelio* for Atlanta Opera; *Amahl and the Night Visitors* for Toledo Opera; and *Rigoletto* and *Madame Butterfly* for Opera Birmingham. Upcoming productions for the 2007-2008 season include *Tosca* for Toledo Opera and *Rigoletto* for Opera San Jose.

**Jane Dutton (mezzo-soprano) – Santuzza (CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA)**

Jane Dutton is acclaimed for her "rich and sonorous" sound and her "moving and memorable performance, full of expression," (Pravo newspaper, Czech Republic), and has been engaged and re-engaged in many of the top opera houses in the world. At the famed Metropolitan Opera, Miss Dutton was praised for her performance as Jordan Baker in John Harbison's *The Great Gatsby*, which was conducted by James Levine. Her performances in past seasons have ranged from her debut as Stephano in *Roméo et Juliette* to Mrs. Gleaton in the Metropolitan Opera premiere of Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*. Jane Dutton made her European opera debut at the Gran Teatre Del Liceu in Barcelona as Anne Boleyn in Saint-Saëns' *Henry VIII*. Miss Dutton will return to the Liceu to sing Waltraute in *Die Walküre* in a cast that includes Plácido Domingo and Waltraud Meier. She made her debut at the Tokyo Opera Nomori in *Elektra* with Seiji Ozawa and was invited to participate in the 2006 Saito Kinen Festival with Maestro Ozawa. During the 2007/2008 season, she will sing her first Amneris in *Aida* in a new production with English National Opera in London. Among her many awards, Ms. Dutton was a finalist in Plácido Domingo's Operalia '97 World Opera Competition in Tokyo and the Metropolitan Opera National Council Eastern Regionals.

**Gustavo López Manzitti (tenor) – Turiddu (CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA), Canio (I PAGLIACCI)**

Gustavo López Manzitti studied vocal technique with Carlos Guichandut, Nino Falzetti and María Rosa Farré. He is a graduate in Piano at National Conservatory "Carlos López Buchardo", completing his studies of Harmony and Composition with Irma Urteaga and Orchestral Conducting with José Martí Llorca. Some of his recent performances include Carlo VII in *Giovanna D'Arco* (Carnegie Hall, New York), Don José in *Carmen* (Grand Théâtre de Québec, Canada and Opera Delaware), Andrea Chénier (Teatro Argentino), the Duke in *Rigoletto* (Opera Delaware), Tito in *La Clemenza di Tito* (Palma de Mallorca, Spain), Turiddu and Canio in *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *I Pagliacci* (Atlantic Coast Opera Festival), Manrico in *Il Trovatore* (Teatro Argentino), Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* (Luna Park Stadium, Buenos Aires), Ernani (Teatro Avenida, Buenos Aires), Mozart's *Requiem* (Basilique de Notre Dame, Montreal, Canada). In previous seasons he has sang Cavaradossi in *Tosca* with the New York Grand Opera, and in Teatro Colón of Buenos Aires the main roles of the operas *Rigoletto*, *Simon Boccanegra*, *Carmen*, *I Lombardi*, *Doña Francisquita*, *Armide*, *La Bohème*, *Alceste*, *La Traviata*, *Werther*, *La Clemenza di Tito*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *Il Pirata*, *Le Villi*, *Die Fledermaus*, *Beggar's Opera*, *Mahagonny* and *Maldoror*.

**Andrew Oakden (baritone) – Alfio (CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA), Tonio (I PAGLIACCI)**

Andrew Oakden continues to garner critical acclaim in opera houses across the United States and will make his New York City Opera mainstage debut performing the roles of Alfio *Cavalleria Rusticana* and Tonio *I Pagliacci* in the fall of 2007. He recently made his Ft. Worth Symphony debut in the role of Papageno *The Magic Flute*. In 2005, he performed the Mandarin *Turandot* and Pietro *Simon Boccanegra* at Santa Fe Opera, and Alfio *Cavalleria Rusticana* and Tonio *I Pagliacci* at Sarasota Opera where he additionally covered Stankar in Verdi's *Stiffelio*. Following his success as Tonio at Sarasota Opera, The Sunday Telegraph (London) wrote: "...the unexpected thrill of a young baritone, Andrew Oakden, stepping in at a moment's notice into the role of Tonio and bringing the house down with his superb singing of the prologue...Oakden is a name to note." Mr. Oakden was the 1<sup>st</sup> Prize Winner in the Palm Beach Opera Vocal Competition as well as being a recent finalist in both the regional Metropolitan Opera Competition and the 2005 MacAllister Awards. Upcoming engagements include covering Fiorello *The Barber of Seville* and his New York City Opera Debut.

**Kristin Rothfuss (mezzo-soprano) – *Lola (CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA)***

Kristin Rothfuss thrills audiences with her rich voice, her stunning beauty and charismatic personality. This September she will be making her Sacramento Opera debut singing Dorabella in a new production of *Così fan tutte* directed by John de Lancie. In March she will be returning to Carnegie Hall with Mid America Productions and to the South Coast Symphony Orchestra in a gala concert. She recently sang the world premier of McGurty's *The New Colossus* the Westfield Symphony Orchestra and sang Zulma in *L'Italiana in Algeri* with Opera Pacific, Ino in *Semele* with Long Beach Opera, Mercedes in *Carmen* with the Westfield Symphony Orchestra. Kristin was an apprentice artist with Santa Fe Opera where she sang Oreste opposite Susan Graham as *La Belle Helene* and sang Kate in *Pirates of Penzance*. With Opera San Jose she sang Olga in *Eugene Onegin* and Maddalena in *Rigoletto*. She also performed Cherubino in *The Marriage of Figaro* at Opera Idaho and debuted with the Los Angeles Opera as the Page in *Lobengrin*. Equally at home with contemporary music, Ms. Rothfuss created leading roles in world premieres of two exciting operas: Madame Matilde in Nathan Wang's *On Gold Mountain* with the Los Angeles Opera and Patsy Jefferson in Glenn Paxton's *Monticello* with Grand Performances of Los Angeles.

**Geneviève Després (mezzo-soprano) – *Mamma Lucia (CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA)***

French-Canadian Geneviève Després made her U.S. debut last season in two critically acclaimed roles with the Virginia Opera as Flora in *La Traviata* and Marcellina in *The Marriage of Figaro*. Also last season, she appeared as Miss Todd in *The Old Maid and the Thief* for I Musici in Montreal, Mother Jeanne in *Les Dialogues des Carmélites* with Vancouver Opera, and Frugola in *Il Tabarro* at the IVAI in Tel Aviv, where she previously performed Giulietta in *The Tales of Hoffmann*. This season, she performs La Maestra in *Suor Angelica* with Opéra de Montréal, Dame Marthe in *Faust* with the Jeunesses Musicales du Canada, and The Mother/The Dragonfly/The Squirrel in *L'Enfant et les Sortilèges* at the Nashville Opera, which will be released on the Naxos Label. As a noted concert artist, Ms. Després has performed with the Quebec Symphony Orchestra at the Lanaudière International Music Festival in Berlioz's *Les Nuits d'Été*, as well as *Das Lied von der Erde* with the Nouvel Ensemble Moderne, and excerpts of Mahler's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* with the International Vysocina Music Festival in the Czech Republic.

**Cristina Nassif (soprano) – *Nedda (I PAGLIACCI)***

Universally acclaimed for her powerful and expressive voice and for her electric stage presence, former Virginia Opera Spectrum Resident Artist Cristina Nassif is quickly establishing herself as one of the finest singing actresses on the American operatic stage. She made her Washington National Opera debut last May, bringing her bold soprano and fiery temperament to the role of Vitellia in Mozart's *La Clemenza di Tito*. Audiences and critics alike have praised her recent performances as Bizet's *Carmen* and Verdi's *Violetta* – roles she debuted in at Virginia Opera. Her varied repertoire also includes *Nedda*, *Tatiana*, *Zemfira*, *Musetta*, *Rosina*, *Alice Ford*, *Donna Elvira*, *Pamina* and *Despina*. This February, Ms. Nassif made her Carnegie Hall debut in an evening of Operatic Highlights at Weill Recital Hall sponsored by the Italian Academy Foundation and in cooperation with the International Opera Alliance (IOA). In addition to Virginia Opera, she has performed with the Virginia Symphony, the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra, the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, the Chamber Soloists of Philadelphia, Wichita Grand Opera, Central City Opera, and the Opera Theater of Pittsburgh, among others. Equally at home on the concert stage, Ms. Nassif has been hailed for the distinct quality of her voice, for her charismatic stage presence and for her innate ability to sincerely communicate both music and text.

**Michael Todd Simpson (baritone) – *Silvio (I PAGLIACCI)***

Michael Todd Simpson, who appeared as Count Almaviva in Virginia Opera's *The Marriage of Figaro* in 2006, made his professional debut as Paris in the Cincinnati Opera's 2002 production of Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*. A graduate of the Seattle Opera's Young Artists Program, Mr. Simpson most made his mainstage debut there as Hermann in Offenbach's *The Tales of Hoffmann* and sang the roles of Guglielmo in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and Count Almaviva in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. Also a member of the Young American Artists Program at Glimmerglass Opera, his roles there included Happy in Puccini's *La fanciulla del West* and Tooley in the American premiere of Sir Richard Rodney Bennett's *The Mines of Sulphur*. This season, Mr. Simpson makes his debuts at Opera Omaha in their production of Britten's *Paul Bunyan* and at the Dallas Opera as Silvio in Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*. A native of Gastonia, N.C., Mr. Simpson holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in vocal performance from Erskine College in Due West, S.C. He earned his Masters of Music degree at the College Conservatory of Music of the University of Cincinnati where he studied with renowned opera singer and teacher Barbara Honn, and was a regional winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions.

**Zachary Stains (tenor) – *Beppe (I PAGLIACCI)***

Zachary Stains returns to Virginia Opera having appeared last season in the role of Flavio in *Norma*. Following his success in the title role of Vivaldi's *Ercole sul Termidonte* in Spoleto, Italy with conductor Alan Curtis and director/designer John Pascoe (released on DVD in early 2007 on the Dynamic label) tenor Zachary Stains will return to Spoleto, Italy this July for the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the festival to sing the role of Oronte in Handel's *Alcina* in a new production by the same creative team. Of his role as Tiridate, opposite Joyce DiDonato's Radamisto on the Virgin Classics/Alan Curtis CD of Handel's *Radamisto* released last year, the London Times wrote: "Superb". "Zachary Stains' Count Almaviva (*The Barber of Seville*) sang beautifully with his light, lyric tenor" – Opera Canada, 2006 – Green Mountain Opera Festival, Vermont. "Standout singing and acting...tonal warmth and superb diction" wrote Tim Smith in the Baltimore Sun of his Peter Quint in Opera Vivente's 2005 *The Turn of the Screw*. Upcoming engagements include the title role in Handel's *Giove in Argo* with Alan Curtis in Halle, Göttingen, and Hannover, Germany and the role of Oronte in *Alcina* with Opera Vivente in Baltimore, Maryland.

## FULL SYNOPSES

### **CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA**

A small village in Sicily in the 1940s. Early on Easter morning. As the village awakens, Santuzza comes looking for her lover, Turiddu, at the tavern of his mother Mamma Lucia. The old woman tells her that Turiddu is away and invites her in. The girl reveals that she has been excommunicated, but before she can explain, Alfio, the local carter, returns to the village bringing supplies and mail – and boasting about his pretty wife Lola. Mamma Lucia is surprised to learn from him that Turiddu is still in town. The villagers assemble to go to mass. Santuzza explains to Mamma Lucia that before Turiddu went into the army he was engaged to Lola. Tired of waiting, Lola married Alfio, but now Turiddu has taken up with Lola again. The old woman goes to mass, leaving Santuzza to confront Turiddu, who denies the affair. Lola brazenly passes by on her way to church. Turiddu argues violently with Santuzza, then follows Lola into church. Santuzza curses him, then maliciously tells Alfio of Lola's infidelity. She immediately feels remorse.

After mass, Turiddu and his friends go to the tavern. Alfio arrives but refuses the wine offered by Turiddu, Turiddu accepts Alfio's challenge to a duel, in token of which he bites Alfio's ear. Turiddu asks for his mother's blessing and commits Santuzza to her care. Screams are heard and a woman brings the news that Turiddu has been killed.

### **I PAGLIACCI**

The same village – one year later. Before the opera begins, Tonio steps before the curtain to tell the audience that the author has written a story about real life – and that the actors, like them, are flesh and blood.

**PART I.** Excited villagers gather as a traveling road show arrives. Canio, head of the troupe, describes the show and invites them all to attend that evening. When someone jokingly suggests that the hunchback Tonio is secretly enamored of his young wife, Canio is not amused – infidelity in a comic play is quite different from real life. Canio and Beppe depart for the local tavern, leaving Nedda alone. Tonio appears and hesitatingly confesses his love. Enraged by her scornful laughter, he seizes her, and she lashes out at him. Swearing vengeance he leaves. Silvio, Nedda's lover, arrives and begs her to run away with him after the show that night. Tonio overhears them and hurries to fetch Canio, who arrives in time to hear Nedda's promise to leave. Silvio escapes and Nedda refuses to identify him, even when threatened with a knife. Beppe restrains Canio and Tonio advises him to wait until later when the elusive lover must give himself away.

**PART II.** The villagers assemble to see the play "Pagliaccio e Colombina." Colombina (Nedda), in the absence of her husband Pagliaccio (played by Canio), is serenaded by Arlecchino (Beppe), who dismisses her buffoonish servant, Taddeo (Tonio). The sweethearts dine together and plot to give Pagliaccio a sleeping draught. Warned by Taddeo of Pagliaccio's unexpected return Arlecchino escapes. With pointed malice, Taddeo assures Pagliaccio of his wife's innocence, further provoking Canio's jealous anger. Abandoning the script, Canio tries to force Nedda to reveal her lover's name. She attempts to continue with the play, the audience applauding the realism of the "acting." Enraged, Canio snatches a knife from the table and stabs Nedda. Dying, Nedda calls out to Silvio. As he rushes to her, he too is stabbed.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND – by Stephen A. Willier

*Cavalleria Rusticana* by Pietro Mascagni (1862-1945) and *I Pagliacci* by Ruggiero Leoncavallo (1858-1919) have so frequently been paired in performance that they have come to seem inseparable, often being referred to affectionately as “Cav ‘n’ Pag”. In 1890 the publisher Eduardo Sonzogno announced a contest for a one-act opera and even though Mascagni submitted his score after the deadline, the judges unanimously awarded him the prize. *Cavalleria* was an instant hit at its Rome premiere in 1890 and within a year had traveled the world to great acclaim. Sadly, Mascagni was never again able to come close to this early success achieved when he was twenty-six years of age. It was the great acclaim accorded to *Cavalleria* that prompted Leoncavallo, stoked with jealousy and ambition, to compose *I Pagliacci*, premiered in May of 1892 in Milan. As with Mascagni, he too is remembered today as the composer of a single work.

*Cavalleria* and *Pagliacci* are considered the cornerstones of operatic *verismo*, the outgrowth of a literary trend meant to portray “truth,” “reality,” a “slice of life”. Important models for Italian *verismo* were French in origin, notably the novels of Emile Zola and Bizet’s opera *Carmen*. Mascagni based his opera on the Sicilian writer Giovanni Verga’s play and novella, keeping the same name for his opera. Verga’s drama was innovative in that nothing is explained in advance: the audience follows the story, discovering the action as it happens. The Sicilian locale is important for *verismo*, as is the direct, overly-passionate way of speaking, covering the spectrum from prayers to curses. Ritual often dictates behavior. The action begins on a tranquil Easter morning and ends in violent bloodshed. The speed of events is very quick and the actors used an emphatic style of gestures. In addition, the opera setting has the power of superb melodies put into the human voice plus vivid orchestral colors and effects to portray the characters and the drama. The chorus acts in the manner of Classical Greek tragedy, which had a long tradition in Sicily. They are aware of events but powerless to act upon them.

Whereas *Cavalleria* is in one act, *Pagliacci* is in two acts and a prologue, but to be played continuously, making it in effect a one-act work. This concept was key to the power and shock value of *verismo*: the drama was to be moved inevitably towards its powerful catharsis with no let-up of mounting tension. Tonio, in the Prologue to *Pagliacci*, deliberately claims the work as veristic: “truth is the author’s inspiration.” Even though *Pagliacci* may not be quite as melodically enticing as *Cavalleria* (although all the major characters have effective, memorable arias), it is especially fascinating for its confrontation between the mask and the face beneath the mask and for the related familiar device of a play-within-a-play and the drama enacted on the stage suddenly becoming the real-life drama of the actors. One significant difference between the final moments of *Cavalleria* and *Pagliacci*, both of which end in violence, is that the killing of Turiddu takes place offstage and the name of the perpetrator is withheld due to the dictates of “rustic chivalry”, really a euphemism for the godfather’s code. In contrast, the double murder at the end of *Pagliacci* takes place on stage – demanded by the action and structure of the work – and is therefore more shocking and more truly in the veristic tradition than *Cavalleria*. The resulting *frisson* is also that much more powerful in *Pagliacci* because the murderer is a white-faced clown, whose credo is to laugh. On the other hand, Easter Sunday is hardly a day for vendetta. It is certain, however, that the double-bill of “Cav ‘n’ Pag” invariably produces an exciting few hours in the theater.

*Stephen A. Willier is an accomplished music historian and opera scholar whose writings have appeared in the Journal of the American Musicological Society, Opera Quarterly, Opera News, Grove Dictionary of Opera, MLA Notes, Studi musicali, and The Journal of the American Liszt Society, among others. He has been a member of the music history department at Temple University since 1989 and currently serves as department chair. His book, Vincenzo Bellini: A Guide to Research, was published in 2002.*