

# **PAGLIACCI**

**words & music by Ruggiero Leoncavallo**

**premiere conducted by Arturo Toscanini in Milan in May 1892**

## **PROLOGUE**

***Si puo?* Tonio (member of the troupe)**

Tonio, one of a traveling theatrical group, introduces the opera by calling the audience's attention to the humanity of the author and the performers, not just the experiences of the characters (which are meant to reflect real life). This is the crux of the upcoming drama - the characters in the opera will be putting on a show in the commedia dell'arte tradition and we the audience will be privy to what goes on behind their masks.

## **ACT I, Scene i a village in Calabria, Italy, in the 1860s**

***Eh! Son qua!* Chorus of Villagers**

A theatrical group arrives in town - the villagers greet the players with glee.

The players enter in or alongside their wagon. The wagon contains sets, costumes, props, etc., and will be transformed into a stage.

***Un grande spettacolo* Canio (head of the troupe), Tonio, Peppe (member of the troupe), Two Villagers**

Canio announces the show of the evening. A villager invites the guys for a drink.

Canio and Peppe accept, Tonio will stay behind.

Another villager jokingly suggests that Tonia stays behind to get some one on one time with Nedda, the sole female member of the troupe and the wife of Canio.

***Un tal gioco* Canio, Nedda (member of the troupe, married to Canio)**

Canio responds quite threateningly. Infidelity onstage is hilarious but in real life it is no joking matter.

Nedda wonders what he's getting at.

***I zampognari!* Villagers, Canio**

The bells call the villagers to church. Canio reminds them that the show begins at 11pm.

The villagers make their way to church. All exit the stage except Nedda.

## **ACT I, scene ii**

***Qual fiamma avea nel guardo!* Nedda**

Nedda recalls the fury she saw in her husband's eyes when he was discussing infidelity.

She refers to a secret, and her fear of his violent anger, then urges herself to give in to the beauty of the day and her stirrings of delight. She sings longingly of the freedom of the birds around her, who follow their chosen path regardless of the dangers they face.

***Sei la?* Nedda, Tonio**

Tonio appears and confesses his love to Nedda. Nedda mocks him and tells him he can have her when they're onstage in the play. Tonio wants her now, in real life, and is determined to have her. He tries to kiss her but she fights him off with a whip. Before leaving, Tonio swears to have revenge on her.

***Silvio! A quest'ora?* Nedda, Silvio (a local man), Tonio**

Silvio appears. Silvio and Nedda have been having an affair. Tomorrow the troupe will be leaving the region, separating Silvio and Nedda. Silvio implores Nedda to leave her husband for him.

Nedda resists at first but is finally persuaded. During the exchange, Tonio returns, spots the lovers and runs off to fetch Canio. Nedda and Silvio kiss and communicate their love for each other.

**Cammino adagio**    **Tonio, Silvio, Nedda, Canio, Peppe**

Tonio leads Canio to the scene and they overhear Silvio arranging with Nedda to meet as they have previously. Nedda sighs “*A sta notte e per sempre tua sarò*” - “Til tonight and forever I will be yours.” These words elicit a shout from Canio, which alerts Silvio and Nedda to his presence. These words are a direct quote from the show that the troupe will perform in the evening. Tonio is delighted with the havoc he’s wreaked. If he can’t have Nedda, he wants to cause her the maximum amount of pain. Canio attacks Nedda and demands the name of her lover. Peppe intercedes - the villagers are getting out of church, the play must begin soon, they must all prepare.

**Vesti la giubba**    **Canio**

Canio is left alone on stage.

Canio must put on his costume and make-up and, once again, prepare to be the butt of jokes, to be laughed at and ridiculed on stage for being a foolish cuckold, to play his part in the performance.

In reality, inside, he is in absolute anguish.

**INTERMEZZO**    **Orchestra**

**ACT II, scene i**    **The stage has been built and set for the performance.**

**Ohe! Presto affrettiamo**    **Villagers, Tonio, Peppe, Nedda, Silvio**

The villagers gather and take their seats with great excitement, anticipation and a bit of roughhousing.

Tonio and Peppe corral them.

In the confusion, Nedda and Silvio are able to exchange a few words.

**THE PLAY**

**Pagliaccio mio marito**    **Nedda, as Columbine**

Columbine sets the stage.

**O, Colombina**    **Peppe, as Harlequin, Columbine**

Harlequin sings to his love Columbine from outside the window.

**E dessa! Dei, come e bella!**    **Tonio, as Taddeo, Columbine**

Taddeo, finding Columbine alone, professes his love to her. Columbine treats him roughly. There is some business with a chicken.

**Arlecchin! Colombina!**    **Columbine, Harlequin, Taddeo, Canio, as Pagliaccio**

Columbine and Harlequin dine and drink together. Harlequin has brought a sleeping potion.

When the potion has knocked Pagliaccio unconscious the lovers will run away together.

Taddeo warns the lovers of Pagliaccio’s approach.

Columbine sighs the words, “*A sta notte.....E per sempre io sarò tua!*”

Harlequin exits and Pagliaccio enters. Now the infidelity rigmarole begins.

As Pagliaccio insists that Columbine name her lover he goes off script a bit.

Columbine reminds him of his character/role.

**No! Pagliaccio non son**    **Canio, Villagers, Columbine**

Canio expresses his true feelings, reminding Nedda that he took her in and has provided for her and loved her. The audience is truly moved. Columbine tries to draw him back into the play but when Canio again demands her lover’s name Nedda drops all pretense.

**No, per mia madre!**    **Nedda, Villagers, Silvio, Peppe, Canio**

Nedda defies Canio and he stabs her in a jealous rage. With her dying breath Nedda calls out to Silvio.

Canio stabs Silvio and announces: “*La commedia e finita!*” - “The comedy is finished!”