

## Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra March 10 and 12 programme complementary content

Over the course of a decade, the partnership between the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, European Opera Centre and Sir Bryn Terfel has become a rewarding musical collaboration.

Now, following Puccini's *Tosca* in 2013 and Verdi's *Falstaff* in 2017, the superlative Welsh bass-baritone returns to Liverpool Philharmonic Hall for a third, unmissable, operatic outing – this time in Puccini's only opera buffa, the brilliant *Gianni Schicchi*.

Watch Stephen Johnson talking about the concert programme [here](#).

In addition, this companion page draws together a range of complementary content that we hope will help shine further light on the pieces, the people who composed them and the performers bringing them to life here in Hope Street.

### Sir Bryn Terfel interview

At a statuesque 6ft 3ins and with a voice as deep and resonant as an underground cavern, it's not unusual for [Sir Bryn Terfel](#) to draw attention.

But recently, on journeys between his London bolthole and the Royal Opera House – where he's spent the first 10 weeks of the year in *The Barber of Seville*, that attention has increased – not necessarily because of his brilliant performance as Don Basilio in Rossini's comic masterpiece but because of Terfel's recent appearance on Saturday night television.

"I catch the Tube to work, and so many people are saying 'we loved you on Michael McIntyre'," he laughs.

At the start of January, the 57-year-old from Gwynedd appeared on the comedian's Big Show, singing [All I Ask of You](#) from *Phantom of the Opera* with lockdown heroine [Anne Wilkins](#), a blind singing teacher from Bridgend.

"Obviously when you're asked to do something like that, it's a challenge to say no because Anne had asked for me," he explains. "So, I double checked with them and made sure it wasn't John Owen Jones that they wanted, the best Phantom that ever lit up a stage in the West End!"

"Anne's an incredible musician, and she had what it takes to sing that duet; she had the range and beautiful high notes and beautiful chest voice and great confidence."

It was, Terfel admits, a moving experience – he battled a lump in his throat – and it's clear from the reaction he's had, both in person and on social media, that many others were moved too.

Meanwhile Anne, he says, would no doubt love to be present at his latest collaboration with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra as it involves one of her favourite arias.

The aria in question is the transcendent and lyrical '[O Mio Babbino Caro](#)', which has become one of the most widely-known and loved in the classical canon, embedding itself in popular culture not least through Dame Kiri te Kanawa's soaring interpretation used in the 1985 Merchant Ivory film, [A Room With a View](#).

The work it emerged from is Giacomo Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, the comic one-act opera which concluded the Italian composer's *Il Trittico* (The Triptych), premiered at the Met in New York in December 1918.

Terfel says: "Puccini had studied composers like Debussy, Strauss, Schoenberg, Stravinsky. And out of that emerged a study of three operas, *Il Trittico*: the very dark and dramatic *Il Tabarro*,

the very, very sentimental *Suor Angelica*, and then the denouement, if you will, is this brilliant comedy *Gianni Schicchi*, which at that time was the most acclaimed of the three.”

He describes it as “a tale of greed and trickery, but also it’s a very humane comedy”, with an engaging “quicksilver” score.

In the opera, based on a scene from Dante’s *Divine Comedy* and with a libretto by Giovaccino Forzano, Florentine merchant Buoso Donati dies, leaving all his wealth to a monastery – much to the dismay of his family, who subsequently appeal to the peasant Gianni Schicchi for help.

Schicchi, whose daughter Lauretta is in love with Donati’s relative Rinuccio, contrives to create a new will, but outwits the grasping relations to leave most of the dead man’s property to himself instead.

It’s Lauretta who sings ‘O Mio Babbino Caro’ to Schicchi, being played by the bass-baritone.

This concert version involves young singers from the Liverpool-based European Opera Centre.

It’s the third collaboration between Terfel, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and the Haigh Street operatic training organisation, following Puccini’s *Tosca* in 2013 and Verdi’s *Falstaff* in 2017.

Terfel says: “What’s lovely is that from those two operas, I’m meeting these young singers and they’re doing really well. I even sang with a couple of them in Vienna on the stage, and in Graz.”

He continues: “When you’re a part of something like that there are some specific roles that you love to think you’ll repeat.

“So it’s not only that you’re working with somebody, but hopefully that you’re learning something about the profession as well, and that hard work and dedication does prevail and that’s something that is very important within a singer’s life.”

Terfel reveals he “learned that the hard way” when he was at the very start of his career and singing Antonio in *The Marriage of Figaro*, rehearsing at legendary conductor Sir Georg Solti’s home in Swiss Cottage.

“I forgot to learn a recitative,” he recalls, “and Sir Georg was absolutely aghast that I was fumbling, trying to sight read. I had to come clean and say sorry I missed that.

“He came up to me and silently said ‘learn that tonight and come back knowing it tomorrow or I’ll get somebody else’.

“I think that’s an important point. I will be very collegial but if I’ve got something to say I won’t hold back on giving them some pearls of wisdom that I’ve received from some of the most amazing conductors and directors in our profession.”

*Tosca* and *Falstaff* were both part of formal Artist in Residence stints for the farmer’s son from Pantglas, but his association with Liverpool goes back much further.

He made his Royal Liverpool Philharmonic debut in 1991, singing Beethoven’s *Ninth Symphony* under the baton of Sir Charles MacKerras.

Two years prior to that, aged 24, he had his first taste of performing at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall when he sang in Haydn’s *Creation* with the Liverpool Welsh Choral Union and Liverpool Sinfonia.

“Wow, that was Cardiff Singer of the World time,” he says, recalling the moment in 1989 when he won the [lieder prize](#) at the prestigious competition, catapulting the young singer into the national and international spotlight.

“I adore it [the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra] and I love that Hall and I just wish I’d done more, even at the beginning of my career. The Hall is stunning to sing in, and the orchestra, people that we know....”

He mentions a particular fondness for working with former Orchestra Leader Jim Clark, adding: “Again it’s all about guiding and learning and teaching.

“One of the loveliest concerts I remember was the Bach afternoon concert we had when we did the *Ich habe genug*. It was part of my *Tosca* year.”

Now he’s looking forward to his return, and his first time working with Chief Conductor Domingo Hindoyan.

“I think people prefer sometimes to just sit and have the orchestra on the stage and listen to this music,” he says of the concert staging. “Some operas lend themselves to that and I think we’ve done all of them.

“*Tosca* is great in concert, *Falstaff* is great, and I think *Schicchi* will be amazing, especially with the very interesting programme Domingo has devised in the first half as well.”

Watch Sir Bryn Terfel as Scarpia in Puccini’s *Tosca*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OeuYKIMfV4I>

## **Domingo Hindoyan**

**Domingo Hindoyan** was born in Caracas in 1980 to a violinist father and a lawyer mother. He started his musical career as a violinist in the ground-breaking Venezuelan music education programme, El Sistema.

He studied conducting at **Haute Ecole de Musique in Geneva**, where he gained his masters, and in 2012 was invited to join the Allianz International Conductor’s Academy, through which he worked with the London Philharmonic and the Philharmonia Orchestra, and with conductors like Esa-Pekka Salonen and Sir Andrew Davis.

He was appointed first assistant conductor to **Daniel Barenboim** at the Deutsche Staatsoper Berlin in 2013 and in 2019, he took up a position as principal guest conductor of the Polish National Radio Symphony Orchestra.

In the same year, he made his debut with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra and was appointed as successor to Vasily Petrenko in 2020, taking up this position in September 2021.

## **European Opera Centre**

The **European Opera Centre** was launched in 1997 by major opera companies in Denmark, France, Italy, Spain and the UK with the support of the European Parliament and Commission, to help young Europeans into opera education and employment, in roles including singers, conductors, directors, designers and administrators.

The centre started in Manchester and moved to Liverpool in 2004, opening Capital of Culture year with a performance of Donizetti’s ***Emilia di Liverpool***.

It is based on the creative campus at Liverpool Hope University, and singers from more than 30 countries come to benefit from training in a series of performance and recording projects, including full productions, productions in concert, orchestral concerts and masterclasses.

Productions are staged at international locations and the centre also champions uncommon repertoire, as well as developing audiences for opera.

The Centre has been a regular collaborator with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic. In 2017, young singers from the Centre joined Sir Bryn Terfel in a concert version of Verdi's *Falstaff* at Liverpool Philharmonic Hall.

## **Giacomo Puccini**

**Giacomo Puccini** composed **12 operas** over the course of 40 years – works which took audiences from bohemian Paris to imperial Japan to the American wild west.

The social satire *Gianni Schicchi* was one of a trio of one-act operas – known as *il Trittico* - which were premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in **New York** on December 14, 1918, and is the only comic opera the Italian composer wrote.

The story, in a libretto by playwright and later film director Giovacchino Forzano, comes from a passage from Dante's *Divine Comedy* which mentions a real-life Gianni Schicchi consigned to hell for trying to steal the money of a dead Florentine aristocrat.

The opera is best known however for its soprano aria *O Mio Babbino Caro* which is a favourite with filmmakers, not least Merchant Ivory who used it in their film *A Room With a View*.

Meanwhile *Le Villi*, dating from 1884, is a two-act opera-ballet based on a short story called Les Willis, which itself was based on the European legend of the Vila which also inspired Giselle.

And Puccini composed *Manon Lescaut* between 1889 and 1892. The opera, set in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, concerns the ill-fated love story of the titular Manon and the student Des Grieux.

Listen to Dame Kiri Te Kanawa sing *O Mio Babbino Caro* from *Gianni Schicchi*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cyQ4vkTwc4E>

## **Pietro Mascagni**

The son of a baker, **Pietro Mascagni** was born in Livorno in 1863. Like Schubert, Schumann, Stravinsky and Handel, Mascagni initially **studied law** before the siren song of music became too strong.

Initially a conductor and piano teacher, it was while he was working as a conductor in Cerignola, Puglia, in 1890 that the 27-year-old shot to fame with his award-winning one-act opera *Cavalleria rusticana*.

Altogether, Mascagni composed 16 operas over half-a-century, including *Iris* and *Nerone*, but he never again managed to reach the heights of success that he did with his youthful composition.

*L'amico Fritz* dates from 1891 and is a feelgood pastoral romance in three acts and in which the story unfolds amid the cherry trees and vineyards of a small village in Alsace. It was based on the French comic novel *L'ami Fritz* and intended to complement the melodrama of *Cavalleria rusticana*.

**Did you know? At its premiere at the Teatro Constanzi in Rome on May 17, 1890, *Cavalleria rusticana* received a record-breaking 60 curtain calls.**

Watch footage from Raging Bull which used the *Intermezzo* from *Cavalleria rusticana*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYBGQuSG94>

## **Amilcare Ponchielli**

[Amilcare Ponchielli](#) was born near Cremona in 1834, and studied at the Milan Conservatory from the age of nine before becoming a church organist and conductor of a community band.

He later became musical director at Piacenza Cathedral and a professor of music at Milan, where his pupils included both Puccini and Mascagni.

Ponchielli composed his first opera in 1856, but his stage work found little success until the early 1870s.

[La Gioconda](#) (translated as ‘the joyful girl’) was written in 1876 and had a libretto based on Victor Hugo’s story *Angelo, Tyrant of Padua*.

It became Ponchielli’s most successful and widely performed work and is particularly popular for its *Dance of the Hours*, which was used in Disney’s 1940 animation [Fantasia](#).

Along with operas, Ponchielli also composed ballets, although for the last five years of his life, he was musical director at Bergamo Cathedral where he wrote a number of sacred works.

Watch the *Dance of the Hours* from Disney’s *Fantasia*.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJ7IGnQPZPQ>

## **About the Music**

### **Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924): Gianni Schicchi**

(Plus orchestral intermezzi from operas by Puccini, Mascagni and Ponchielli)

Composed: 1917-18

First Performed: 14 December 1918, Metropolitan Opera, New York

Orchestral interludes from some of the most famous Italian operas make a lively, colourful and full-blooded first half of this concert. *Le villi* (1883) was Puccini’s first opera. Its mixture of doomed love and supernatural machinations (‘Willies’ are the avenging spirits of young women forsaken by their lovers) was quite a hit at its premiere, but then it rapidly faded from the repertoire. However, *La tregenda* (‘Witches Sabbath Dance’) steadily became a concert favourite. It enacts the magical spell by which the vengeful spirits magnetise the perfidious male heartbreaker and force him to dance to death.

Then heartbreak itself is portrayed in the poignantly lyrical Intermezzo from Act III of Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut* (1892), in which Manon and her lover Des Grieux realise that their love, and both their lives, are tragically ill-fated. The love story in Piero Mascagni’s *L’amico Fritz* (‘Friend Fritz’, 1891) is a much happier one, despite early complications. But the lovers’ fate still hangs in the balance when the darkly impassioned Act III Intermezzo sinfonico is heard. Tenderness and hope can be felt in the much-loved Intermezzo from Mascagni’s one-act melodrama *Cavalleria rusticana* (‘Rustic Chivalry’, 1889), in which a simple hymn tune embodies the peace of country living, but alas, this time the story isn’t going to end well. Finally, we have Amilcare Ponchielli’s Dance of the Hours, a miniature ballet-suite from his opera *La Gioconda* (‘The Smiling Lady’, 1875). Ponchielli’s operas haven’t done spectacularly well in the opera house, but Dance of the Hours has become a concert favourite, especially after its inclusion in the Disney animation *Fantasia*, where the dancers were ostriches, hippopotamuses, elephants and alligators!

Puccini’s one-act *Gianni Schicchi* (pronounced ‘Jiáni Skíki’) is his only comic opera, and most opera lovers would agree that it’s a shame he didn’t write more. It was intended as the third part

of an operatic trilogy (*Il trittico*), as a kind of upbeat counterbalance to the decidedly sinister *Il tabarro* ('The Cloak') and the unashamedly sentimental *Suor Angelica* ('Sister Angelica'), but it soon took on a life of its own. Unpromisingly for a comedy, *Gianni Schicchi* is based on a story from Dante's depiction of a guided tour of Hell (*Inferno*), but what Puccini makes of it is deliciously subversive fun. Gianni Schicchi definitely isn't 'noble' in either sense of the word: he manipulates the family of a recently deceased rich gentleman into helping him forge the will, then – to their horror – he changes it so that almost all the money comes to him. But Gianni isn't purely self-motivated. He also wants to help his daughter Lauretta marry the old gentleman's son, Rinuccio, despite the family's qualms about Gianni's humble origins, and his delight as they sing of their love in their new home is genuinely touching. The much-loved aria 'O mio babbino caro' ('Oh dearest father') is actually pivotal to the story – it's here that Lauretta manages to charm Gianni into helping her and Rinuccio. But it's by no means the only winning moment in this vibrant and melodious score. Yes, it is a pity Puccini never followed up on the triumph of *Gianni Schicchi*, but we can at least be grateful that this little masterpiece exists at all.