



LEONCAVALLO

Pagliacci

Jussi Björling

Victoria de los Angeles

Leonard Warren

Robert Merrill

RCA Victor Orchestra

Renato Cellini

(Recorded 1953)

Great Opera Recordings

Ruggiero LEONCAVALLO

(1858 – 1919)

Pagliacci

Canio Jussi Björling (tenor)
Nedda Victoria de los Angeles (soprano)
Tonio Leonard Warren (baritone)
Silvio Robert Merrill (baritone)
Beppe Paul Franke (tenor)
Villager George Cehanovsky (baritone)
Villager Richard Wright (tenor)

The Columbus Boychoir (Herbert Huffman, director)
The Robert Shaw Chorale (Robert Shaw, director)
RCA Victor Orchestra
Renato Cellini

Recorded 10th, 11th, 15th, 19th and 29th January, 1953 in Manhattan Center, New York
First issued on RCA Victor LM-6106

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Mark Obert-Thorn

Prologue	7:44	14 <i>E allor perché, di', tu m'hai stregato</i> (Silvio, Nedda)	3:22
1 <i>Si può? Si può?</i> (Tonio)	7:44	15 <i>Cammina adagio e li sorprenderai</i> (Tonio, Silvio, Nedda, Canio, Beppe)	4:51
Act I	38:08	16 <i>Recitar! Mentre preso dal delirio</i>	0:54
2 <i>Eh! ... Son quà! Son quà!</i> (Chorus, Canio, Beppe)	2:34	17 <i>Vesti la giubba</i> (Canio)	2:56
3 <i>Un grande spettacolo a ventitrè ore</i> (Canio, Chorus, Tonio, Villagers, Beppe)	2:32	18 Intermezzo (Orchestra)	2:59
4 <i>Un tal gioco, credetemi</i> (Canio, Nedda, Chorus)	2:55	Act II	2:55
5 <i>I zampognari! I zampognari!</i> (Boys, Men, Old People, Women, Canio)	1:26	19 <i>Ohè! Ohè! Presto</i> (Chorus, Tonio)	2:55
6 <i>Don, Din, Don, Din</i> (Chorus)	2:36	La Commedia	17:05
7 <i>Qual fiamma avea nel guardo</i>	2:17	20 <i>Pagliaccio, mio marito</i> (Nedda)	1:45
8 <i>Stridono lassù, liberamente</i> (Nedda)	2:17	21 <i>Ah! Columbina, il tenero</i> (Beppe, Nedda)	2:04
9 <i>Sei là! Credea che te ne fossi andato</i>	0:49	22 <i>È dessa! Dei, come è bella!</i> (Tonio, Chorus, Nedda, Beppe)	3:23
10 <i>So ben che difforme contorto son io</i> (Nedda, Tonio)	3:42	23 <i>Arlecchin! ... Colombina!</i> (Nedda, Beppe, Tonio, Canio)	2:18
11 <i>Nedda! ... Silvio! A quest'ora che imprudenza!</i> (Nedda, Silvio)	1:17	24 <i>Un uomo era con te</i> (Canio, Nedda, Chorus, Tonio)	1:45
12 <i>E fra quest'ansie in eterno vivrai</i> (Silvio, Nedda)	2:14	25 <i>No, Pagliaccio non son</i> (Canio, Chorus, Silvio, Nedda)	4:09
13 <i>Non mi tentar!</i> (Nedda, Silvio, Tonio)	1:21	26 <i>No, per mia madre! Indegna esser poss'io</i> (Nedda, Beppe, Tonio, Canio, Silvio, Chorus)	1:41

Ruggiero LEONCAVALLO (1857-1919) Pagliacci

The reputation of Ruggiero Leoncavallo is sadly linked to just two works: his song *Mattinata*, beloved of any aspiring tenor voice, and his two-act opera *Pagliacci* (1892). His other stage works include *La Bohème*, unfairly overlooked and neglected in preference to Puccini's almost contemporaneous setting, the wonderfully evocative sounding *Zazà* (1900), *Chatterton* (circa 1876 revised 1896) and *Der Roland von Berlin* (1904). It is possible that the very success *Pagliacci* has enjoyed since its première has made his other works seem less convincing. Be that as it may, his one great stage success has never waned in popularity. As his own librettist, the composer made highly effective use of a play within a play (he claimed the story was based on a true event from his childhood), and the tuneful and impassioned music never fails to grip an audience. The opera, first given in Milan under the young Toscanini, remains possibly the best example of the Italian *verismo* style, that realistic school of writing, largely concerned with real flesh and blood, a genuine tragedy.

On record, *Pagliacci* has always been popular, as witnessed by complete recordings sung in English, French, German, Italian, Romanian and Russian. The first 'complete' recording, made in 1907, was supervised by the composer himself. Furthermore, it has always proved a success commercially but sadly, all too often, it is an excuse to deliver the score 'can bello' and blatantly to ignore what Leoncavallo took trouble to mark in his score. It is exactly the former approach that invariably earns *verismo* operas a bad reputation. Observe the markings and the work comes over as far from crude, indeed one can appreciate that it is a genuine masterpiece of the genre.

At the time this present recording was made in 1953, the Spanish soprano Victoria de los Angeles had not sung the rôle of Nedda on stage, and her interpretation may seem possibly a little on the cool side and lacking in south Italian warmth. Nevertheless, she

really sings the rôle. The choice of Jussi Björling as the tenor Canio is interesting in that it was not a rôle he sang much in the opera house. His interpretation is far removed from the ranting voice and over-dramatic portrayal all too common with more Italian tenors. The Swede is superbly musical and by observing Leoncavallo's markings, most moving, noble and believable, so in Björling's hands the character of Canio is no bully but one of dignity. The stellar casting of two of the Metropolitan Opera's finest baritones of the day in the rôles of the deformed clown Tonio and Nedda's lover Silvio, was indeed greatly to the benefit of the recording. Leonard Warren's vocal prowess is amply illustrated with those magnificent top A flats in the *Prologue*, for the like of which one would give so much today. From a dramatic point of view Warren may not make enough of the jealous nature of Tonio's character. Robert Merrill gives a warm and seductively sung Silvio in his own characteristic manner, being especially good in the love duet with Nedda, whilst Paul Franke offers an attractively sung Beppe. The choral contribution, as directed by Robert Shaw, is first-rate. Possibly the less than totally convincing conducting of Renato Cellini may fail to make the overall performance tingle with the last ounce of dramatic excitement but there is nothing vulgar or crude in his reading of the score. Unusually for the time, the final words - "*La commedia è finita!*" - are spoken correctly by Tonio, not by Canio as so often the case.

Critical opinion of this performance has generally been positive. The 1955 edition of *The Record Guide* said, "it is the most enjoyable performance we have ever heard". The authors felt the cast, primarily taken from the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, "displayed the generally higher standards of taste in Italian opera, which still prevail at that institution". The reviewer in the April 1954 issue of *The Gramophone* (Philip Hope-Wallace) commented that "Victoria de los Angeles is in many ways a most beautiful Nedda - quite

an oddity these days”, and felt Björling conveyed the necessary irony for the part of Canio. Overall he much liked the performance, even though he felt the delivery of the Italian text was not always dramatically conveyed. Whilst the balance between voice and orchestra may favour the former, that was the prevailing fashion in the days of mono recording.

The Spanish soprano **Victoria de los Angeles** was born in Barcelona in November 1923, later studying in that city. Her formal début was in 1945 as the Countess in *Le nozze di Figaro*. After winning the Geneva singing competition in 1947 she was invited by the BBC in London the following year to take part in radio performances of Falla’s *La vida breve*, an event which aroused great interest and critical acclaim. She then appeared at the Paris Opéra, Covent Garden in London, La Scala in Milan and the Metropolitan, New York in three successive years from 1949 onwards. She later sang at Bayreuth in 1961 but thereafter began to confine her appearances to the concert hall. Her voice was one of great lyrical beauty and conveyed infinite tonal contrasts with an unusually warm lower register. She recorded extensively in both opera and song, particularly in the latter area, Spanish music of many centuries. She continued to appear in concert until her mid-sixties.

The Swedish tenor **Jussi Björling** (1911-1960) was an exact contemporary of his baritone colleague Leonard Warren. Born in Stora Tuna in the district of Dalarna, as a boy he toured and recorded with the family quartet, in addition to visiting the United States. His adult teachers were his father David, John Forsell and the Scottish tenor Joseph Hislop. He was a member of the Royal Opera in Stockholm from 1930 onwards but two years later began his international career in Germany, followed by Vienna (1936), the Metropolitan Opera in New York (1938) and Covent Garden the following year. Widely regarded as the foremost ‘Italian’ tenor of his day in the *spinto* rôles of Puccini and Verdi, Björling also excelled in French opera. His work was highly respected for its artistic qualities, even if his acting ability was somewhat stilted. He recorded

extensively from the mid-1930s until his early death in 1960. His poor health in later years was caused by heart problems. His ten complete operatic recordings include *Il trovatore* (Naxos 8.110240-41).

Leonard Warren (1911-1960), born in New York of Russian immigrant parents, began his career in the chorus of Radio City Music Hall. After winning the Metropolitan Auditions of the Air in 1938, he then studied briefly in Italy, before his formal début as Paolo in *Simon Boccanegra* in January 1939. During 22 seasons at the Met, Warren sang over six hundred performances with the company, with whom he became the principal baritone in Italian repertoire. His overseas appearances included Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires (between 1942-46), Mexico City (1948-49): when he was conducted by Renato Cellini in four Verdi operas), Milan (1953-54) and a concert tour of Russia in 1958 in addition to three opera performances. He collapsed on stage during a performance of *La forza del destino* in March 1960 and died in the wings almost immediately. His huge, resonant voice with its easy upper register was ideally suited to Verdi, a number of whose operas he recorded, including *Rigoletto* (Naxos 8.110148-49) and *Il Trovatore* (Naxos 8.110240-41)

Brooklyn-born **Robert Merrill** (b. 1917) first studied with his mother. Following his stage début in 1943, he won the Met Auditions of the Air, which brought about his first appearance in that house in December 1945. It was here that the larger part of Merrill’s career was spent over a period of thirty years, appearing in nearly 750 performances of 21 rôles. He flirted briefly with Hollywood before returning to the opera house. Generally considered to have possessed one of the finest lyric baritone voices of his time, he also sang in opera in San Francisco, London and Venice. He recorded extensively, including many of the principal Verdi baritone rôles.

Paul Franke (b. 1920) was born in Boston and studied at the New England Conservatory. Following his début at the Metropolitan in December 1948, he would become a valued member of this house and give nearly 1500 performances of some sixty or more rôles,

virtually all in *comprimario* rôles.

Conductor **Renato Cellini** (1912-1967) was born in Turin into a theatrical family. He became a child prodigy as a cellist, giving his first recital aged just ten. Later he would learn the piano and organ. At his native city's Conservatorium he studied composition with Alfano and Ghedini, later working in Italian opera houses as a répétiteur and conductor. He worked with Glyndebourne Festival Opera after the war but then moved to New York where he worked with the musical staff at the Metropolitan from 1948 until 1954. He also conducted a handful of opera performances with the company, including four with Leonard Warren with

whom Cellini became a close friend (Warren was godfather to Cellini's daughter). He suffered a heart attack in September 1950 and his health was never robust after that date. Between 1954 and 1964 Cellini served as Music Director of the New Orleans Opera Association. He also conducted opera in Mexico City (1948-49), Cincinnati and Caracas, Venezuela. He conducted three further operas for RCA/BMG – *Cavalleria rusticana*, *Rigoletto* (Naxos 8.110148-49) and *Il trovatore* (Naxos 8.110240-41) – in addition to accompanying singers in operatic arias.

Malcolm Walker

Synopsis

Prologue

① After the orchestral introduction, with its themes of the clown's tragedy, of love and of jealousy, Tonio comes forward, seeking the indulgence of the audience. He explains that the coming play is true, not fiction, and written from the memory of events that still affect the writer. It is a story of love, hatred and sorrow. The audience should understand that actors are human, with feelings like those of the audience. He calls on the actors to begin.

Act I

② As the curtain rises, a trumpet call is heard and the sound of a drum. The people of the village, in their best clothes for the Feast of the Assumption, gather to see the players arrive.

③ Canio, standing on his cart, announces the coming entertainment, promising the sight of Pagliaccio's revenge and of the intrigues and discomfiture of the

clown Tonio. Tonio makes to help Nedda down from the cart and is cuffed by Canio, who takes her by the arm. Beppe drags the cart away, while Tonio threatens revenge. A group of villagers invite the players to drink with them, but Tonio alone refuses. The villagers suggest that Tonio wants to stay behind to pay court to Nedda, which forces a reluctant smile from Canio.

④ Canio tells them that it is better not to joke like that, because acting and real life are not the same. On the stage Pagliaccio catches his wife with her lover, a subject for comedy, but if Nedda seriously were to be caught out like that it would be quite another matter. The villagers ask him if he is serious, but Canio tells them he adores his wife, whom he now kisses.

⑤ Excitedly the villagers welcome the sound of the bagpipes, but it is time for Vespers. Canio tells those who have invited him to wait for a moment, while he goes behind the stage erected in the village square.

⑥ To the sound of the bells, the villagers prepare to go to the church for Vespers.

7 Nedda is left alone and thinks that Canio may discover her secret love. She welcomes the mid-August sunshine and the birds, that her mother understood so well.

8 She delights in the birds, singing and flying through the sky, towards the realisation of their desires, whatever may come, as her thoughts do.

9 She is interrupted by Tonio, who has been listening. She laughs at him.

10 Tonio tells her that, although he may be ugly and deformed, he has his own dream and is in love with her. She finds the idea ridiculous and tells him to keep his desires for the play and his simpering for the stage. He tells her not to laugh and insists that she hear him. He tries to kiss her and she strikes him with a whip. He goes, vowing revenge, while she declares that she is not afraid of him, ugly as he is in mind as in body.

11 Silvio appears, rebuked by Nedda for his imprudence. He tells her that Canio and Beppe are in the tavern, but she explains what has just happened with Tonio.

12 Silvio begs her to stay with him, when the players move on the next day. He tries to persuade her, if it is true that she never loved Canio, to escape with him that night.

13 She pleads with him not to disturb her life by such temptation, as he continues to urge her. They are observed by Tonio, who slips away to the tavern.

14 Silvio continues, declaring that Nedda has bewitched him and recalling the times they have spent together. Nedda gives way, ready to yield completely to his pleas.

15 Tonio has found Canio, whom he now leads to the scene. They hear the lovers plan to elope that night, but

Silvio, unrecognised by Canio, makes his escape. Canio chases after him, while Tonio expresses his satisfaction. Returning, Canio presses Nedda to reveal the name of her lover, but she refuses to divulge it. He threatens her with a dagger, but is restrained by Beppe, who urges Canio to make ready for the play, as the people are leaving the church. Tonio tells Canio that it is better to pretend and that he will watch out for Nedda's lover, who will be in the audience. Beppe urges Canio to make ready and tells Tonio to bang the drum.

16 Canio is distraught and finds his task hard, to play the clown in these circumstances.

17 He must don his costume and make-up to amuse the public, whatever his own feelings.

Intermezzo

18 In the orchestral interlude themes from the *Prologue* are heard.

Act II

19 Beppe comes forward sounding the trumpet, while Tonio bangs the drum. Beppe then arranges the benches for the audience, who now come excitedly in, urged on by Tonio as they take their places. Silvio is among them, taking a seat in the front row and then moving to exchange a word with Nedda, who is collecting ticket money. She tells him to be careful but that Canio has not recognised him. The audience is impatient, while Beppe tries to deal with them. Eventually he and Nedda go behind the stage. A bell sounds and the curtain is drawn back.

Commedia

20 The scene is a little room with two side-doors and a window in the background. There is a table and two chairs. Nedda, as Columбина, is seated at the table, from time to time looking round impatiently to the door. She

stands and looks through the window, walking up and down impatiently. Her husband Pagliaccio is late coming back, and why is that idiot Taddeo not there.

21 She hears the plucked strings of a guitar from outside and with a cry of joy runs to the window, serenaded by Beppe as Arlecchino.

22 She signals to him that the coast is clear, but Tonio, as Taddeo, comes in and declares his love for her; her husband is away and now they are alone. Ironically he praises her purity, as white as snow. Meanwhile Arlecchino has made his way into the room, carrying a bottle, which he puts on the table. He takes Taddeo by the ear and gives him a kick, turning him out.

23 Columbina and Arlecchino embrace. He sits down at the table, while Columbina sets two places and puts a chicken on the table. They are interrupted by the return of Taddeo, announcing the arrival of Pagliaccio. Columbina tells Arlecchino to go and he leaps out of the window, telling her to pour a draught from the bottle into Pagliaccio's drink, before he goes to sleep. She promises to join him that night, overheard by Pagliaccio.

24 Pagliaccio reproaches Columbina, who declares that he is mad or drunk. He sees two places set at the table, but she tells him the other place was for Taddeo. Called in, Taddeo pretends to be afraid, assuring Pagliaccio that his wife is pure and chaste, to the

amusement of the audience. Pagliaccio insists on knowing the man's name.

25 Unable to restrain himself any longer, Canio declares that he is no longer Pagliaccio, now demanding retribution, blood to wipe out disgrace. He reminds Nedda how he found her, an orphan, almost dead from hunger, and gave her a name and his love. The audience comments on the realism of the scene, while Canio continues his reproaches. Nedda coldly tells him to let her go, if she is unworthy of him. He will have none of it, but must know the name of her lover, as he seeks, seemingly, to return to the play again. Nedda tries to continue her part and assures him that it was the timid, harmless Arlecchino who was with her. Canio, though, accuses her of infidelity and demands the name of her lover or her life, but she refuses to tell him, as the audience begins to realise that the scene is real, not acting.

26 She refuses to name her lover. Beppe tries to intervene, but is held back by Tonio. Canio seizes a knife from the table, as Nedda tries to escape among the audience. Canio seizes her and strikes her with the knife. As she falls, she calls on Silvio for help. He cries out and is stabbed to the heart by Canio, who is disarmed by the audience, Tonio declares that the play is over – *La commedia è finita*.

Keith Anderson

Producer's Note

The source for the present transfer was a set of mid-1950s plum "shaded dog" label RCA Victor pressings, an edition that featured a combination of quiet surfaces and wide frequency range. (The range may have been a little too wide for some playback units at the time, as a later remastering on red "shaded dog" pressings sounds muffled in comparison, particularly in Act II.) There are a couple instances of distortion in the original tapes caused by volume overload and limiting, but on the whole the original sound has a wonderful presence and immediacy which I tried to convey in this restoration.

Mark Obert-Thorn

ADD

Playing
Time
68:54

Ruggiero
LEONCAVALLO
(1857-1919)

Pagliacci

Canio Jussi Björling
Nedda Victoria de los Angeles
Tonio Leonard Warren
Silvio Robert Merrill
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The Columbus Boychoir (Herbert Huffman, director)
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1	Prologue	7:44	19	Act II	2:55
2-17	Act I	38:03	20-26	Commedia	17:05
18	Intermezzo	2:59			

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A complete track list can be found in the booklet
Cover Image: Costume design for Canio from *Pagliacci*, 1892 (anonymous)
Credit: [The Art Archive / Museo Teatrale alla Scala Milan / Dagli Orti]



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LEONCAVALLO: Pagliacci

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CANADA

