

# MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY OPERA

PRESENTS

## A PROGRAM OF TWO ONE-ACT OPERAS

**SATURDAY, JANUARY 28** AT 8PM

**SUNDAY, JANUARY 29** AT 3PM

ALEXANDER KASSER THEATER

### GIANNI SCHICCHI

Music by Giacomo Puccini

Libretto by Giovacchino Forzano

Premiere: New York, Metropolitan Opera, December 14, 1918

*Sung in Italian with English supertitles*

### BUOSO'S GHOST

Music & Libretto by Michael Ching

Based on Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*

Premiere: Pittsburgh, 1996

*Sung in English with English supertitles*

### MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY OPERA

Anna Rebek, *Director and Staging*

### MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Kyle Ritenauer, *Conductor*

**Jonathan Koppell**

President

**Junius J. Gonzales**

Provost and Senior Vice President  
for Academic Affairs

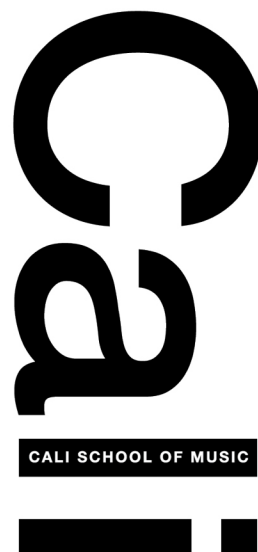
**Daniel Gurskis**

Dean, College of the Arts

**Anthony Mazzocchi**

Director

John J. Cali School of Music



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**John J. Cali School of Music**

## **MUSICAL PREPARATION**

Victoria Schwartzman, Music Director and Repetiteur

William Hobbs, Assistant Conductor and Repetiteur

## **ROLE COACHES**

William Hobbs

Mory Ortman

LeAnn Overton

Victoria Schwartzman

## **PRODUCTION TEAM**

**Production Concept and Director:** Anna Rebek

**Head of Artistic Operations/Opera:** Karen Driscoll

**Production Manager:** Phil Clifford

**Scenic Design:** Maamoun Tobbo

**Technical Director:** Jeffrey Rosolen

**Lighting Design:** Benjamin Weill

**Costume Design:** Heather Freedman

**Costume Production Assistant:** Maggie Raywood

**Props & Mask Design:** Anna Rebek and Yvonne Campos

**Production Stage Manager:** Mitchell Hildebrand

**Assistant Stage Manager:** Eponine Myles

**Surtitle Caller/Designer:** LeAnn Overton

**Title Writer (*Gianni Schicchi*):** Jeffrey Gall

**Opera Graduate Assistant:** Olivia Gasper

# PROGRAM

*Total running time: 2 hours, with one intermission*

## CHARACTER

## SATURDAY CAST

## SUNDAY CAST

Gianni Schicchi  
(cover)  
Rinuccio  
Lauretta  
(cover)  
Simone  
Zita  
Nella  
Gherardo  
Betto  
La Ciesca  
(cover)  
Marco  
Gherardino  
Maestro Spinelloccio/  
Amantio di Nicolao  
Pinellino  
Buoso's Corpo Morto

Seungchan Hong  
*Steven Condry*  
Eric Sebek  
Clara Luz Hernandez Iranzo  
*So Yeon Kim*  
Chisom Maduakor  
Weiyu Zhang  
GaDa Lambert  
Christos Harakas  
William Amory  
Helena Waterous  
*Churan Qiu*  
Jairo Santana-Figueroa  
Runyu Feng  
Gabrielle Guida  
  
Diogo Ramirez  
Rashaun Ashley

Seungchan Hong  
*Steven Condry*  
Doohyun Yoon  
Yun Xie  
*So Yeon Kim*  
Omar Abdallah  
Inhye Choi  
Taylor Amato  
Mitchell Hernandez  
Matt Delavan  
Olivia Gasper  
*Churan Qiu*  
Jairo Santana-Figueroa  
Jenna Halvorsen  
Churan Qiu  
  
Rashaun Ashley  
Diogo Ramirez

## **Buoso's Ghost:** Additional cast

Magistrate  
Nun 1  
Nun 2

Gabrielle Guida  
Mackenzie McCarthy  
Mia Grizzuti

Churan Qiu  
Mackenzie McCarthy  
Mia Grizzuti

# MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Kyle Ritenauer, *conductor*

## **Violin I**

Jonathan Frelix  
Dana Ryan  
Adrianna Sewell

## **Violin II**

Daniella Renteria  
Jaiden Mahone  
Etleva Vatoci

## **Viola**

Jacob Seabrook  
Rachel O'Connor  
Noah Stevens

## **Cello**

Randy León  
Alonso J Restrepo Cardozo

## **Bass**

JP Bernabe  
Ryan Chamberlain

## **Flute**

Michelle Zarco  
Nava Payandeh

## **Oboe**

Olivia Dorschel

## **Clarinet**

Colin Merkovsky  
Matthew Rosen

## **Bassoon**

Ben Adelberg

## **Horn**

Annika Ross  
Matthew Jaimes

## **Trumpet**

Bryce Grier  
Emmanuel Reyes

## **Trombone**

Matthew Veal

## **Percussion**

Max Tripodi  
Angela Gibilisco  
Alejandro Arbelaez

## **Harp**

Esther Chung

## **Piano/Celesta**

Victoria Schwartzman

## SYNOPSSES

### GIANNI SCHICCHI

The elite Donati family of medieval Florence eagerly gather around their rich patriarch, Buoso Donati, as he takes his final breath. When a rumor is shared that Buoso might have left his fortune to the church, suddenly the tears run dry. The Donati tear the room apart looking for the will only to discover that they are indeed to inherit nothing. The young Rinuccio suggests they ask the father of his beloved Lauretta for help, since he is a man of many talents (not all of them legal), Gianni Schicchi.

The Donati family scoff at the idea of a lowly merchant being of any use, until Gianni Schicchi reveals a secret talent for impersonating the voice of the freshly dead Buoso Donati. A devious plan is set in motion. Schicchi, disguised as Buoso, will call the notary back and change the will to favor the grateful Donati. In exchange, both parties agree to the marriage between his daughter Lauretta, and their own Rinuccio. But when it comes down to the three finest possessions, Gianni Schicchi has one last trick up his borrowed sleeve. The Donati leave furious, but the young lovers happily have each other.

### BUOSO'S GHOST

Picking up moments after we left off, the young lovers Lauretta and Rinuccio exchange vows of commitment. When Schicchi urges them off to go buy a ring, he ends up alone in his new home. While making friends with a pet finch, he discovers a dark secret behind the death of Buoso. Schicchi's imagination runs wild, picturing the evil Donati enacting their ugly deed. If the Donati are capable of such deception, they will come back for revenge on Schicchi too.

As night falls an ominous storm brews, and in the dark the Donati steal into the house, ready to accuse Schicchi of their own treachery. They invite the imposing Magistrate to hold court, but when proof of their treachery is made known, the Donati change their tune. Desperate to avoid their own demise, they beg Schicchi to find a quick solution to satisfy the Magistrate. Schicchi ingeniously manages to do their bidding and also invokes the ghost of Buoso to terrify them from ever coming back.

## DIRECTOR'S PROGRAM NOTES

### Giacomo Puccini

Puccini is an icon in the opera world. Along with Mozart and Verdi, Puccini's operas are most widely performed around the world today, including *La Bohème*, *Turandot* and *Tosca*.

Born in 1858, Puccini's life wrapped over the turn of the last century and spanned major shifts in war, technology, and national identity. He lived a life of dramatic extremes: he was pressured to carry on the musical torch of his family at a young age, he was a starving artist as a music student in Milan, he was a master of practical jokes, and enjoyed extreme success from his works later in life. But one of the most relatable features of his oeuvre was his earthy sense of humanity; he loved to expose our flaws and darker impulses, and reveled in the great embarrassment of being human.

A buffet of our inanity is on display in his works: we order expensively even with a dry wallet (*La Bohème*), we rage against our lovers when we're scared we don't deserve them (*Tosca*), we lie and cheat for money (*Gianni Schicchi*), we look down on others (*Turandot*), we're ridiculous when in love (most), and we're messy and driven by base desires (*La Fanciulla del West*). Puccini was unreserved about setting to music the unfiltered emotional excesses we experience, and his music draws broad, bold strokes to match.

While many of his contemporary composers insisted on writing their own libretti, Puccini always employed a librettist and demanded many drafts of them, seeking a perfect marriage between the rhythms of spoken words and the flow of music. Many composers secluded themselves to write their masterpieces, but Puccini famously worked late at night and held card games in the same room with his piano. The merry company, the rhythm of speech and tones of friends gathering – this was the kind of musical truth he was after. His stories and music were influenced by the “verismo” style at the time, which aimed to show people, and life, as they really are.

*Gianni Schicchi* is Puccini's only comic opera, and was originally written as the third opera in a series of 3 one

acts called “Il Trittico”. Both Gianni Schicchi and Buoso Donati were historical figures, and this opera is based on some verses in Dante’s *Inferno*. Dante himself was married to a descendant of the Donati family, and in his exploration of hell he sees Schicchi wrestling on a level reserved for those who commit illegal impersonation.

## Things to listen for in Gianni Schicchi

*Gianni Schicchi* has carved its place in opera repertoire as a comedic jewel. Puccini borrowed from many sources—and used a more “through-composed” style that was influenced by French and German opera. You’ll notice that there’s only 3 arias in the entire hour of music; each of the young lovers have their own aria, and Schicchi himself also has one. The rest is a bouncy feast of ensemble-driven themes woven together like a medieval tapestry.

### Lament Theme

Moments after the death of their patriarch, Buoso Donati, the rest of the Donati gather around his bed. Puccini writes an exaggerated theme of moaning lament, but the short, stilted chords indicate a superficial performance of grief, instead of a genuine one. This theme will twist, curve and transform over the course of the evening, and its development continually adds new layers of meaning.

### Rinuccio’s Aria - “Firenze è come un albero fiorito”

Rinuccio tries to convince the prejudiced Donati family that it is the immigrant country folk like Schicchi that have enriched Florence into a culturally “blossoming tree”. He hails this group for establishing a merchant class, having street smarts, and building the impressive skyline. Puccini borrows a swinging rhythm of a peasant song to give Rinuccio’s aria a sweetness and optimism that match his inclusive spirit.

### Lauretta’s Aria - “O mio babbino caro”

Arguably one of the most recognizable arias of all time, this melody has made its way into our collective consciousness. The young Lauretta, Gianni Schicchi’s daughter, has been thwarted in her wish to marry Rinuccio, and in desperation begs her father to try anything to save her dream. Arias are born of an emotional outpouring, and in this one, the sweet

musical theme that begins the piece in her voice ends up restated in a thunderous orchestral version. Puccini used this theatrical aria form throughout his career with great success.

### Ladies Trio- “Spogliati bambolino”

As quick as they were to spurn Schicchi at the beginning, the three Donati ladies, Zita, Nella and La Cieca transform into a dulcet trio of sirens when Schicchi has their inheritance in his hands. While helping Schicchi change into the dead Buoso’s nightclothes, this lady trio lulls him into bed with seductive and beguiling harmonies.

### Michael Ching

Michael Ching is an American composer, librettist, songwriter, conductor, and former arts administrator. From 1992 through 2010, he served as Artistic Director of Opera Memphis, and frequently as General Director. Ching began his career as a National Opera Institute apprentice 1980–1981 at the Houston Grand Opera Studio, where he was involved in the company’s productions and continued his composition studies with composer Carlisle Floyd, and Robert Ward at Duke University. From 1981–1985 he held increasingly responsible positions at the Greater Miami Opera/Florida Grand Opera. He subsequently held conductor and executive director positions at venues including Texas Opera Theatre, Chautauqua Opera, and Triangle Music Theater. He has served as guest conductor with a variety of companies including the Hawaii Opera Theater, Nashville Opera, was the Music Director of Amarillo Opera, and Nickel City Opera in greater Buffalo, New York from 2012–2017. In 2019 he was elected to the board of directors of the National Opera association, and is an Opera consultant at EC Schirmer.

Today, Ching is a freelance composer and conductor and Chairman of the Douglas Moore Fund (which supports emerging opera creators). He is the composer/librettist of the opera *Speed Dating Tonight!* which premiered in 2013 and is one of the most popular operas of the 21st century. Other works include *Slaying The Dragon* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (an opera a cappella). Next month

*Buoso's Ghost* will get its first showing at Florida Grand Opera under his baton.

Michael has described himself as having “a lifelong devotion to operatic composition learned through the success and failure of over a dozen operas, through composition study, and through years of conducting the standard operatic repertoire.” His strong interest in folk and country music infuse a sense of Americana to the contemporary operatic landscape.

If Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* can be described as a Medieval tapestry, Ching's *Buoso's Ghost* resembles an American quilt. Drawing from influences as wide ranging as gospel, western, and Sondheim, while also paying homage to the musical threads in Puccini's score, Ching's eclectic approach makes the score fun and unpredictable. Opera devotees will recognize allusions to Mozart, Shostakovich, and even an Italian line from Ponchielli's *La Gioconda*. Michael Ching hosted an exciting Master Class in Opera Workshop this fall, gave great feedback to our singers, and shared with us some of his inspirations for this charming sequel.

### **Things to Listen for in Buoso's Ghost**

Born of a conversation over brunch between Ching and his friends about what could happen after the final scenes of great operas, the idea of a sequel to *Gianni Schicchi* was conceived. Having outsmarted the Donati family, surely there would be consequences for Schicchi... How would they extract their revenge? What would happen when the church is left empty-handed? What has he really won in the end, and was it worth it? These are the questions driving *Buoso's Ghost*. Set in the same room only minutes from the end of *Gianni Schicchi*, we see Schicchi alone for the first time, having blessed the marriage of his daughter Lauretta to Rinuccio.

### **Lover's Duet “We are free to be married”**

Michael Ching explained to us that he wanted to assure audiences from the beginning of *Buoso's Ghost* that his musical language is inclusive. He kept taking out more and more atonality with each draft to put ears at ease, crafting a whirling lover's duet. This warm

opening stitches together the two operas nicely, and helps contrast the idealism of young love with the dark revelations to come.

### **Nuns Scene**

When a duo of Nuns from Santa Reparata come to collect on Buoso's promised wealth, the saccharine harmonies reveal their greedy motivation. Alternating between legato arcs and sharp stinging phrases, Ching creates a tight, edgy duet. Originally conceived as an homage to the song “The Lollipop Guild” from *The Wizard of Oz*, (composed by Harold Arlen) you'll hear the familiar opening “we represent...” as the nuns launch. Although the original score indicates “friars” instead of nuns, Ching gave his blessing for us to showcase lady voices.

### **“Picture the Poisoners”**

What begins as Schicchi imagining how the Donati must have served Buoso their special recipes, becomes a full blown nightmare. His fantasies come to life as he watches the Donati gift a lavish spread to a once very alive Buoso. Michael Ching explained that this piece of music was inspired by “A Little Priest” from *Sweeney Todd* (by Stephen Sondheim), when Mrs. Lovett suggests serving up Sweeney's unfortunate clients as pies on the menu. In both stories the lightness of a waltz gives a fun conspiratorial charm to contrast with very dark imaginings.

### **Western “Addio Firenze”**

In the second half of *Buoso's Ghost*, the Magistrate warns the Donati of the consequences for being found guilty of murder - banishment from Florence and having a leg cut off. With such a dire prediction looming, Ching shows a strong sense of humor in the music, using 4 bars of a Western-style ambling theme. The Donati use this horse step rhythm to imagine what walking away from Florence would be like on one wooden leg.



BIOGRAPHIES BY QR CODE

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