



## The American Center for Puccini Studies

The American Center for Puccini Studies specializes in the presentation of unusual performing editions of composer, Giacomo Puccini's works and introduces many neglected or unknown Puccini pieces to the music loving public. No other opera company in the world, let alone in the United States, is exploring Puccini's lesser-known scores with such enthusiasm. The American Center for Puccini Studies approaches these works with passion and a welcome appreciation of their historical context and is heroically fighting to preserve an authentic performing tradition of the Puccini operas that may soon be irretrievably lost.

Founded in 2004 by one of the world's leading Puccini artists and scholars, Dr. Harry N. Dunstan, the company has enjoyed a varied and popular performance history, beginning with the Washington Metropolitan area premiere of the Italian edition of *Le villi* and followed by The New World Premiere of the original edition of *Suor Angelica*, adding the mystical and haunting "Aria of the Flowers". This performance was hailed by famed Puccini scholar, Dr. William Ashbrook, as "one of the greatest musical/dramatic events of my life". Several World Premieres followed in 2005, including the double bill of Didier Gold's play, *La Houppelande* with Puccini's opera, *Il tabarro*, and "The Battle of the Bohemes" — the first time in history that Ruggero Leoncavallo's *La boheme* and Puccini's *La boheme* were presented on four consecutive evenings.

Shortly following was the Washington Metropolitan area premiere of the Italian edition of the 1905 *Edgar*, which led one year later to the New World Premiere of Puccini's original four act edition of *Edgar* — a staggering accomplishment for a young performing arts group. This was only the second time in history, and the first time since the La Scala premiere of 1889, that the original, complete edition was performed. The performances featured about one hour of Puccini's music that had not been heard anywhere in the world since 1889! This edition, more than any other of his operas, reveals Puccini's strikingly original and bold genius. It is grand opera on the grandest scale! The Maryland premiere of *La rondine* completed the season.

The ACPS' third season began with performances of *Gianni Schicchi*. The company then presented the World Premiere double bill of Victorien Sardou's play *La Tosca*, presented in a new translation and performing edition prepared by Dr. Dunstan, with Puccini's opera, *Tosca*. This was the first time in history that Sardou's play and Puccini's opera were performed on consecutive evenings. The season closed on December 22 with the third annual Puccini Vigil, a special concert celebrating Puccini's birthday and featuring music from all twelve Puccini operas.

In 2007, the ACPS featured the American premiere of the tenor protagonist's *scena drammatica* in *Le villi* performances. This scene had not been heard anywhere in the world since the late nineteenth century and critics have described the dramatic truths revealed in this scene as being "stupendously expressed in this touching, sometimes almost terrifying passage" of "Wagnerian proportions." Another World Premiere was realized during this season in the form of a new conflated edition of *La fanciulla del West* coupled with David Belasco's *The Girl of the Golden West*. This was yet another rare instance where the public was able to hear the same play Puccini heard and then experience the opera based upon the play. These performances also featured the restoration of original passages not heard since 1910 and the thrilling sixteen bars added in the Act Two love duet that Puccini vehemently insisted must be kept in the opera, but which have only been performed a few times and nowhere in America! The 2007 season concluded with Puccini's ever-popular *La boheme*.

April of 2008 brought the company's orchestral debut with The Piedmont Symphony Orchestra in performances of *Le villi*, which also marked the Washington area debut of the Italian edition with orchestra. *La rondine* was revisited in October, with several restorations of original text and tempi, and the fifth annual Puccini Vigil concluded the season on December 22nd, celebrated the 150th birthday of the Maestro.

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