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## Clown teared up by tragedy

# 'Pagliacci' tells the story of jealousy and passionate love.

by Nathan Ancheta - Scene Editor

## Opera Omaha is leading its 2009-10 season with the well-known drama,

Leoncavallo's "Pagliacci."

"Pagliacci" [Italian for 'clowns'] is an opera about a Commedia dell'Arte troupe that comes to the town of Calabria, Italy, to perform a show.

The main character, Canio, is the mean-spirited boss of the company. He plays the character Pagliaccio in the troupe's 'Commedia.' His wife, Nedda, has been cheating on him with a man named Silvio, while fending off the advances of Tonio, a member of the cast. Beppe, the harlequin of the improv group, is Canio's sidekick. He is also Nedda's lover in their comedy play. What ensues is a dramatic play-within-a-play.

"One reason why it's a masterpiece is you can't tell when it's art and when it's real life," said tenor Mark Calvert, who sings the role of Beppe.

The production is considered short for standard opera repertory, lasting 1 hour and 30 minutes. But even with its brief time frame, it is packed with drama.

"Pagliacci has it all: love, betrayal and murder," said Kelly Blice, Opera Omaha director of marketing.

"Pagliacci was ground breaking when it premiered in 1892 — completely changing the way operas were presented. It's a very fast-paced and intense opera," Blice said.

The opera is probably most famous for its depiction of a sad clown in the tenor aria "Vesti la Giubba" [put on the costume]. The moving aria performed by Canio is one of the most recognized pieces of music. A version recorded by Italian tenor Enrico Caruso in 1904 was the first million-selling record in history. More recently, it has been featured in a Coca-Cola commercial, the ending credits of a "Seinfeld" episode and briefly during an episode of "Hey Arnold!"

Calvert, a native of Wichita, Kan., received his operatic training at the Yale University School of Music. Although originally from the Midwest, "Pagliacci" will be his first American performance since 2004. He has been in European productions for the past five years.

A difference, according to Calvert, is the practice schedule. Typically European productions have six weeks of rehearsal. For "Pagliacci," the ensemble is practicing for two.

"That means when you come to rehearsal here, you've got to have your game on."

On Calvert's, and most of the cast's, first day in Omaha, they sang through the complete opera with a maestro.

"It's very quick, but it's very concentrated. It's not add water and stir; it's everyone bringing a lot of preparation and a lot of experience to these roles."

Calvert said his preparation included looking more into the context of his character by getting in Beppe's frame of mind.

"It's more than knowing what you're singing because, as you know, it's all in Italian."

Although opera is bigger in Europe, Calvert said Opera Omaha is an esteemed institution right here in town.

"I can't say from the viewpoint from people in Omaha, but in the opera world, it's a very well-respected company," Calvert said.

"I'm working with some professionals who are having really nice careers and some of them who have done these roles many times in big houses. From what I've seen, we have a really high standard. It's not to be underestimated."

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