

OPERA SAN LUIS OBISPO CELEBRATES 30 YEARS WITH THE ULTIMATE DOUBLE FEATURE!

By Virginia Bass and Kathryn Bumpass

OPERA SAN LUIS OBISPO PRESENTS

Pietro Mascagni's **CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA** and Ruggiero Leoncavallo's **PAGLIACCI**

A Citywide Arts Collaboration featuring

Central Coast Children's Choir
Civic Ballet San Luis Obispo
CORE Dance Company
Deyo Dances
Opera San Luis Obispo
Resonance Vocal Ensemble
Studio @-Ryan's American Dance

Saturday - October 10, 7pm | 2
Sunday - October 11, 2pm | 1
Performing Arts Center San Luis Obispo | 5

Stage Director - HEATHER MATHEWS
Choreographed by ANDREW SILVAGGIO
Opera San Luis Obispo
Grand Orchestra & Chorus
Conducted by
BRIAN ASHER ALHADEFF

CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE IN OPERA
30 YEARS
ON THE CENTRAL COAST

TICKETS www.pacslo.org 805.756.4849 Mon-Sat 12-6pm

TWO PERFORMANCES WILL TAKE PLACE AT THE PERFORMING ARTS CENTER, SAN LUIS OBISPO ON THE CAL POLY CAMPUS: SATURDAY, OCTOBER 10, AT 7:00PM; AND SUNDAY, OCTOBER 11, AT 2:00PM SEATS ARE STILL AVAILABLE, PRICED FROM \$10.50 TO \$80.00. ORDER ONLINE AT WWW.PACSLO.ORG OR CALL THE BOX OFFICE AT (805) 756-4849, MONDAY THROUGH SATURDAY, NOON - 6:00PM.

Every year Opera San Luis Obispo challenges itself to outdo its previous productions. This year presents the unique challenge of surpassing last season's Grand Opera production of *Aida*, making 2015 a memorable 30th anniversary year.

Rising to the occasion, Artistic Director Brian Asher Alhadeff has selected what seems to be the perfect choice—not one, but two beloved operas presented together as the traditional “double feature”: Pietro Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* and Ruggiero Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*. Both operas run only about an hour each, so the entire performance will last about 2 ½ hours, including intermission. Those who are familiar with these operas will welcome the chance to attend the magnificent pair live at the PAC, our own Grand Opera house; for audiences who have never had the sublime experience of seeing the two works performed together, this presentation will provide a special opportunity.

For this production, OperaSLO continues its *Citywide Arts Collaboration* tradition with the participation of a number of established community arts organizations: Central Coast Children's Choir, Civic Ballet San Luis Obispo, CORE Dance Company, Deyo Dances, Resonance Vocal Ensemble, and Studio @-Ryan's American Dance. For its part, OperaSLO will provide a 60-member full orchestra, a chorus of 50 singers, original sets and costumes, and an internationally acclaimed cast of opera singers in addition to several of our very own local stars.

“Why *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci*?” I asked Maestro Alhadeff. “And, how does this programming push beyond last year's tremendously successful grand production of *Aida*?”

“*Cav* and *Pag* are two operas not only perfectly partnered to each other,” he replied, “but perfect for San Luis Obispo and our *Citywide Arts Collaboration* formula. Both require a large orchestra and sizeable mixed choruses of men, women, and children. Both follow similar plots that lend themselves well to the choreographed movements of modern dance and ballet. Finally, both operas need ample performance space. Here in San Luis Obispo, we have a rich classical arts culture that can easily accommodate the two operas' orchestral, choral, and dance needs, and our Grand Opera house—the Performing Arts Center, San Luis Obispo—provides the ultimate facility for staging opera.”

Cavalleria Rusticana and *Pagliacci* are representative of a very special style of opera called *verismo*, from the Italian *vero*, meaning “true.” While *verismo* operas flourished for only a short while (between about 1875 through the early 20th century), the genre is responsible for some of the most famous operas of all time: *Carmen*, *La Boheme*, *Tosca*, *Porgy and Bess*, and *Madama Butterfly*, to name just a few. Plots are often gritty and passionate, presenting themes that deal with the everyday problems of working people, the urban bourgeoisie, or provincial society. Their extravagant realism can include sordid or violent depictions of contemporary life. Both operas are set in rural southern Italy in the 1880s. *Cavalleria* opens during a simple Easter celebration,

while *Pagliacci* spotlights a stop on the performance route of a touring troupe of gypsy clowns.

"*Verismo* is my personal favorite genre of opera," says Alhadeff. "Everything happens quickly, almost in real time. Here we have a genre where the orchestra is also a character, which makes my job as conductor especially challenging. The singing style is quite different as well. Whereas most operas demand a constant focus on vocal purity, *verismo* calls for a more emotionally flexible, down-to-earth singing style, at times incorporating even such features of natural speech as sighs, grunts, huffs, and cries. But most exciting are the glorious, swelling, passionate melodies that pull us deep into the plots and intimate struggles of the characters."

As you enjoy these performances, bear in mind that singing *verismo* opera makes heavy demands on vocalists. Experienced large voices are required to negotiate the powerful singing and emotionally charged sentiments of the characters.

"Moreover," Alhadeff continues, "three of the roles are the sort of dream opportunities that opera singers may be offered only once in a lifetime. It is a common tradition to double-cast the three leading singers in both *Pagliacci* and *Cavalleria Rusticana*, and Opera San Luis Obispo is excited to carry on that tradition. Bay Area tenor David Gustafson will perform the role of Canio in *Pagliacci*, and also the role of Turiddu in *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Similarly, Los Angeles-based bass-baritone Gabriel Manro will perform the roles of Tonio in *Pag*, and Alfio in *Cav*."

"Perhaps the greatest point of interest for both the audience and me will be to experience dramatic soprano Katharine Gunnink, who took first prize in the 2013 Irene Dalis International Voice Competition, performing the roles of Nedda in *Pag* and Santuzza in *Cav*. This is particularly special because the role of Santuzza is generally sung by a mezzo-soprano, while the role of Nedda is sung by a dramatic soprano. Sonoma County-based Gunnink is an exceptional soprano with a unique range similar to that of Maria Callas, Beverly Sills, and Kathleen Battle.

Another special treat will be to experience John Viscardi, an extremely gifted young baritone from Philadelphia, in the role of Silvio in *Pagliacci*."

Opera San Luis Obispo is also excited to offer roles to four talented local singers as well. Hailing from Arroyo Grande, mezzo-soprano Judith Dunlore will perform the role of Mamma Lucia in *Cav*. Atascadero-based tenor Paul Osborne will perform the role of Beppe in *Pag*. Morro Bay-based soprano Karen Dunn and San Luis Obispo-based Jumi Kim will share the role of Lola in *Cav*.

Hailing from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, Heather Mathews makes her OperaSLO stage-directing debut in the production. Drew Silvaggio will lead a troupe of choreographers including Suzy Miller, Lisa Deyo, and Ryan Beck. Maestro Alhadeff will conduct the Opera San Luis Obispo Grand Orchestra and Chorus.

Two performances will take place at the Performing Arts Center, San Luis Obispo on the Cal Poly campus: Saturday, October 10, at 7:00pm; and Sunday, October 11, at 2:00pm. Seats are still available, priced from \$10.50 to \$80.00. Order online at www.pacslo.org or call the box office at (805) 756-4849, Monday through Saturday, noon - 6:00pm.



The City of SLO presents OperaSLO with an official proclamation acknowledging 30 years of service to the central coast. From left to right, Mayor Jan Marx, Brian Asher Alhadeff, Sharon Dobson, Carol Nelson-Selby, Lanyce Mills



Brian Asher Alhadeff conducts *Carmen* at the PAC – OperaSLO 2013



OperaSLO's 2014 production of *Aida* at the PAC



OperaSLO's 2014 production of *Show Boat* at the PAC