**Ruggero Leoncavallo**

**Pagliacci**

Libretto by the composer

World premiere: Milan, Teatro dal Verme, May 21, 1892

*Live in HD* transmission and radio broadcast

April 25, 2015

**Prologue**

Tonio the clown announces that what the audience is about to see is a true story and that actors have the same joys and sorrows as other people.

**Act I**

A village in southern Italy. A small theatrical company has just arrived and Canio, the head of the troupe, advertises the night’s performance to the gathered crowd. One of the villagers suggests that Tonio is secretly courting Canio’s young wife, Nedda. Canio warns them all that he will not tolerate any flirting offstage—life and theater are not the same. As the crowd disperses, Nedda is left alone, disturbed by her husband’s jealousy. She looks up to the sky, envying the birds their freedom. Tonio appears and tries to force himself on her but she beats him back and he retreats, swearing revenge. In fact, Nedda does have a lover—Silvio, a young peasant, who suddenly appears. The two reaffirm their love and Silvio persuades Nedda to run away with him that night. Tonio, who has returned and overheard the end of their conversation, hurries off to alert Canio, but Silvio manages to slip away unrecognized. Canio violently threatens Nedda but she refuses to reveal her lover’s name. Beppe, another member of the troupe, restrains Canio, and Tonio advises him to wait until the evening’s performance to catch the culprit. Alone, Canio gives in to his despair—he must play the clown even though his heart is breaking.

**Act II**

That evening, the villagers assemble to watch the performance, Silvio among them. Beppe plays Harlequin, who serenades Columbine, played by Nedda. He dismisses her buffoonish servant Taddeo, played by Tonio, and over dinner the two lovers plot to poison Columbine’s husband Pagliaccio, played by Canio. When Pagliaccio unexpectedly appears, Harlequin slips away. Taddeo maliciously assures Pagliaccio of his wife’s innocence, which ignites Canio’s jealousy. Forgetting his role and the play, he demands that Nedda tell him the name of her lover. She tries to continue with the performance, the audience enthralled by its realism, until Canio snaps. In a fit of rage he stabs Nedda and then Silvio, who rushes to her aid. Turning to the horrified crowd, Canio announces that the comedy is over.

*Pagliacci* is performed as a double bill with Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana*. For a synopsis of that opera, turn to page TK.