



College of Music  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Worthington Family Foundation Opera Theatre Season  
**MSU OPERA THEATRE**



Music by Giacomo Puccini - Libretto by Giovacchino Forzano  
Music by Gioachino Rossini - Libretto by Gaetano Rossi

Melanie Helton, stage director  
Katherine Kilburn, conductor  
Daniel Jaggars, assistant conductor

*Generously sponsored by  
The Eleanor H. and Harold E. Leichenko Opera Endowment  
established by Lauren Julius Harris,  
Richard and Joan Witter Endowment for MSU Opera Theatre,  
and Susan Davis*

Wednesday, March 25, 7:00 p.m.  
Friday, March 27, 7:00 p.m.  
Saturday, March 28, 7:00 p.m.  
Sunday, March 29, 2026, 3:00 p.m.  
Fairchild Theatre, MSU Auditorium

## A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

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The two Italian operas we are presenting tonight were premiered 108 years apart. *La cambiale di matrimonio* was Rossini's first opera and premiered in 1810 in Venice. Rossini was only 18 and had no idea that he would become the linchpin composer of the *bel canto* era. Puccini's *Suor Angelica* was premiered at the Metropolitan Opera in 1918 as part of a trilogy of one act operas, the other two being *Il tabarro* and *Gianni Schicchi*. Puccini would only live until 1924, leaving *Turandot* unfinished.

*Cambiale* has all the musical precursors of what would become Rossini's trademark – the long crescendos, sparkling ensembles and virtuosic arias. Later on, Rossini would famously steal from himself, reusing music from opera to opera. The last part of Fanny's aria, "Vorrei spiegarvi il giubilo", was later used in a duet in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. Rossini actually used the overture from the dramatic *Elisabetta regina d'Inghilterra* for the comic *Barbiere*.

The former head of MSU Press, Gabriel Dotto, was also an editor for Puccini's music publisher Ricordi. He had prepared a reconstructed edition of two arias from *Suor Angelica* for Bologna Opera under Maestro Riccardo Chailly. Both of those arias were part of the premiere performance in New York in 1918, but were later cut in Rome for brevity. In subsequent years, Puccini very much regretted the cut and wanted to have them restored in the scores but never got around to insisting that Ricordi do so since he was, by that time, elbow deep in preparing *Turandot*. We thank Gabe for bringing this to our attention. We believe MSU to be the first university to restore this original version.

The "Aria dei fiori" is also dramaturgically important because it explains that she is not only ingesting poison but also hallucinogens, and hence it becomes clear that she is not witnessing a "miracle" but instead is hallucinating, and we, the audience, are participants in her hallucination.

Please join us next season for Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Gondoliers* in the fall and Mozart's *Così fan tutte* in the spring. Enjoy!

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

### *Suor Angelica*

In order of appearance\*

	<u>March 25, 28</u>	<u>March 27, 29</u>
Suor Angelica	Shuhan Zhang	Tiffany Williams
La Principessa, Angelica's aunt	Fengzhen Liu	Meagan Wozny
La Badessa, Abbess	Abigail Solomon*	
La Suora Zelatrice, Monitor	Wanyi Cui*	
La Maestra della Novizie, Mistress of Novices	Huizhong Jiang*	
Suor Genovieffa	Yingxi Lei	Amira Coleman
Suor Osmina	Hannah Bancroft*	
Suor Dolcina	Rachael Farquharson*	
La Suora Infermiera Nursing Sister	Hannah Tatay*	
Le Cercatrice, Food Gatherers	Ruby Ricker* and Grace Gits*	
Le Novizie, Novices	Amaya Morren* and Janae Washington*	
Le Converse, Lay Sisters	Maliah Cook* and Avery Beeman*	
Chorus: Jayden Randall, Char Van Arragon, Avery Beeman, Micah Brezenski, Reagan Lewis, Miranda Allen		
Covers for Suor Angelica: Abigail Solomon, Elia Meekhoff		
Angelica's Child, Garrick Schmidt		

*\*All performances*

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

### *La cambiale di matrimonio*

Norton, Sir Tobia Mill's Butler	Chauncey Burghart	Calvin Aupperlee
Clarina, maid to Fanny	Huizhong Jiang	Riley Piazzon
Sir Tobia Mill, A wealthy merchant	Nicholas Perkins	Joseph Baunoch
Fanny, daughter to Sir Tobia	Zimo Chen	Makinsey Rosser
Edoardo, her sweetheart	Jackson Guthrie	Michael Seare
Edward Slook, A rich Canadian	Jordan Washington	Ting Yi Chen
Servants: Elia Meekhoff*, Robin Bernard*, Gavin Cagney*		

# STAFF FOR MSU OPERA THEATRE

Music Director	Katherine Kilburn
Producer	Melanie Helton
Set Design	Matthew Peterson
Set Construction/Technical Director	D.J. Selmayer
Lighting Design	Brent Wrobel*
Costume Designer	Wardrobe Wizardry, Glenn Breed*
Wig and Makeup Design	Martha Ruskai*
Guest Coaches	Rachelle Jonck*, Tessa Hartle*
Production Stage Manager	Eric Bach
Assistant Stage Manager	Alekzander Lipar
Assistant to Melanie Helton	Makinsey Rosser
Musical Preparation Assistance	Elden Little
Assistant Conductor	Daniel Jaggars
Costume Assistant	BreAnne Turner
Rehearsal Accompanist	Jiayin Zhang, Luming Zhao
Fairchild Theatre Operations Manager	Nick Raffaele
Fairchild Theatre Stage Manager	James Peters
Recording Services	Jennifer Shangraw
Publicity, MSU College of Music	Michael Sundermann, Rick Seguin
Budget Officer	Andrea Worful
Financial Officer for MSU Opera Theatre	Renee Graff
Video Artist	Andrew Acciaoli
Aur Angelica supertitles	Cori Ellison
Chorus Master	Shelby Laird

\*Guest Artist

*The Friday evening performance will be conducted by  
Daniel Jaggars, assistant conductor*

## Grateful Acknowledgments

James Forger, Dean, College of Music

**MSU Vocal Arts Area Faculty:** Jane Bunnell, Marc Embree, Derrick Fox, Richard Fracker (chair), Melanie Helton, Harlan Jennings, Elden Little, Anne Nispel, Mark Rucker, Sadie Rucker, Sandra Snow

Deborah Moriarty, Chair, Piano Area; Zhihua Tang, Collaborative Piano

MSU Department of Theatre

Ann-Marie Lindley, Director of Development, College of Music

**College of Music Staff:** Lynne Funk, Katie Bethel, Shawn Mahorney, Amy Rivard, Tom March, Renee Graff, Justin Baker,

MSU Opera Theatre is proud that our 2024 production of Sondheim's *A Little Night Music* won the American Prize for University Musical Theatre Production. *Don Giovanni* won 2nd prize in the American Prize for University Opera Production.

## SYNOPSIS – Suor Angelica

In a convent in 17<sup>th</sup> century Italy, nuns are singing in chapel. Sister Angelica is rushing to chapel but stops to do penance for being late. Two lay sisters rush in, already late. The nuns enter the courtyard after chapel and the Monitor of Sisters chides the lay sisters for their lateness. She forgives Angelica, who indeed made the proper penance. The Monitor chides another nun for her behavior, telling her to work in silence. The Mistress of Novices explains to the young sister that the punished sister made them laugh in chapel. Sister Osmina is then chided for hiding rose blossoms in her sleeve. She huffs off, denying her “sin”. The Monitor then releases the other sisters for rest and recreation.

Sister Genovieffa, a young, cheerful nun, asks her sisters to look at the golden light which is gathering. She tells them to expect that the golden light will gather on the fountain. A young novice asks the Mistress if they will be blessed today by the miracle of the golden light. The Mistress replies that perhaps it will be too early or too late, since the miracle only happens three evenings a year and at different times. The nuns recall that it has been a year since it last happened and since then they lost a sister to death. Genovieffa suggests that when the light occurs, they gather the blessed water and sprinkle it on the tomb of their departed sister.

Sister Angelica, who has been tending her herb garden, sings of flowers which never bloom in death, but only guided by the Virgin Mary does death become life. The Monitor reminds them that desires must not be worldly and vain. Genovieffa replies that she thinks it should be all right to desire little things: she was a shepherdess and she dearly misses holding the soft little lambs. She then offers a penance for her small desire. Sister Dolcina steps forward to share her desires, but the other nuns already know. They teasingly call her a glutton!

When Genovieffa asks Angelica if she has desires, she replies that she does not. The other nuns immediately gather to gossip: Angelica has been in the convent for seven years and has never had a letter or visitor. They believe that she must be wanting contact with the outside world. They know she is from a noble family and has been banished as some sort of punishment, but they do not know why.

A nursing sister enters in a panic, telling Angelica that a sister has been stung by a vicious wasp and is in terrible pain. Angelica makes up a poultice for her, saying that it will relieve her pain. She teasingly reminds the nurse that a little pain is a small cross to bear.

Two sisters have been begging for food from the surrounding villages. They bring in a wheelbarrow filled with treats: nuts, olive oil, pasta, and even some raspberries. Sister Dolcina is rapturous with the things to eat, and shares with the other sisters. The begging sisters tell the others that they have seen a fine carriage approaching the convent. Angelica is stunned to hear this and describes her family carriage perfectly. They tell her it is indeed that carriage. The Abbess enters, telling the others to leave. She tells Angelica that it is indeed her aunt, the Princess, and that she must be brave and stoic in her acceptance of whatever she has to say.

The Princess enters, barely looking at Angelica. The Princess states that twenty years ago when Angelica's parents died, they left her in charge of the family's affairs. She presents a parchment to Angelica. Her sister is to be married and Angelica must renounce her share of the inheritance due to her shame and disgrace. Angelica asks her how she, as her aunt, can be so cruel and callous to her. The Princess can only reply that the only thing Angelica can do is repent. Angelica says that she will not repent the birth of a son seven years ago, although illegitimate. She begs news of the boy whom she has not seen since birth. The Princess coldly tells her that the boy died of an illness two years ago. Angelica collapses in agony, wailing. The Princess presents the contract and Angelica sobs, sobbing. The Princess leaves with only a backward look.

Angelica sings that her baby died without a mother. He died with his hands crossed on his chest, dead without knowing how much his mother loved him. She begs the dead child's spirit to talk to her.

The sisters reenter and Genovieffa tries to comfort Angelica. They leave her alone as she prays to the Virgin. She then begins to collect herbs and flowers for a potion, listing them and their qualities as poison. She begs the Virgin as she drinks the poison, collapsing in agony. As the sky goes golden, the sisters praise Mary as Angelica begins to hallucinate. She sees the Virgin bring the angel of her son to her as she sinks into death.

## **SYNOPSIS - La cambiale di matrimonio**

A room in Tobia Mill's house. Norton and Clarina, servants of Mill, a rich English merchant, are eagerly discussing the latest news about the future of their master's daughter, the lovely Fanny. The two gossipers stop when old Mill comes into the room, intent upon studying – without being much enlightened – the map of the world, although not very scientifically. Norton and Clarina come back with an important letter that has arrived from the New World. Mill is overjoyed to recognize the handwriting of Slook, his wealthy colonial correspondent in Canada. In his letter, Slook announces his impending arrival to pick up the “merchandise” quoted in the agreement that he has signed with Mill: an agreement in which Slook has commissioned Mill to find him a wife with all the necessary qualities. It is a “deal” of the greatest importance and Mill, without consulting her, has decided that Fanny shall be the “merchandise”. Norton tries in vain to dissuade him from combining business and pleasure from the contract. When the two men have left, Fanny comes in with her beloved, Edoardo Milfort. As Edoardo lacks means, Fanny has never confessed her love to her father. The two young people are awaiting the arrival of Edoardo's rich uncle before confessing their love.

Norton joins the young couple and warns them of Fanny's father's intentions. Mill himself unexpectedly enters and Norton explains away the suspicious presence of a young man by introducing Edoardo as the new bookkeeper. Mill entrusts his daughter with a letter that she is to present to the foreigner who is about to arrive. This is none other than Slook, who enters clumsily trying to show off his newly acquired “European” good manners without forgetting that he is basically a man accustomed to “practical American simplicity”. When at last he is left alone with Fanny, Slook learns from the letter that she is the girl whom Mill has selected to be his future wife. Fanny tries to persuade Slook to give up any idea of getting his hands on his “merchandise” and Edoardo comes in and intimates that the American had better abandon the business entirely and not say anything about it to old Mill: Slook, afraid of having his eyes torn out, goes off with the young people without being able to understand why they are so threatening. Clarina is worried about Fanny, whom she would like to see happy, and Norton comforts her, secure in his belief that the marriage to Slook will never take place. As soon as he has the chance, Norton insinuates to Slook that the goods in which he is about to invest (his future wife) are already mortgaged. His head spinning with all this, poor Slook goes to look for Mill and tells him that the deal is

off, but the outraged Mill at once challenges him to a duel, feeling himself to have been tricked and insulted. When Mill has gone away, Slook soon discovers that Edoardo and Fanny are in love and, moved by their words, proposes to sign the promissory note over to Edoardo whom, at the same time, he designates as his heir: the American cannot believe that in Europe a father would force a daughter into marrying against her will. Fanny, thanking him, expresses all her unbounded happiness. Meanwhile Mill, preparing for the duel, realizes that he might get the worst of it and becomes terrified. When Slook joins him and observes his lack of courage he teases him until the others come in to break off the warlike preparations. Edoardo shows Mill the promissory note and demands the goods specified, but the astonished Mill demurs. Only Slook can persuade him to allow Fanny to marry Edoardo, promising him that since Edoardo is his heir, all will be well and bring him a grandson. (Synopsis courtesy of Rossini Opera Festival.)

# MSU SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Katherine Kilburn, conductor

Zongheng Zhang, assistant conductor

## Violin I

Yu-Chieh Lin  
Arianna  
Argentieri\*  
Daniella Greene  
Thomas  
Shahbaghyan  
Min-Han Tsai  
Wenjin Zhang  
Lin Heng Ping

## Violin II

Alirna Korieva  
Chen Han Hsu  
Sarah Munson  
Fanhong Jiang  
Yueyu Liu  
Chenghong Yin

## Viola

Jian Xiong  
Jiajing Fang  
Mengyuan Song

## Cello

Tung-An Chien  
Aaron Longuski  
Shaniah Cooper

## Bass

Grant Phillips  
Ariel LeBlanc

## Flute

Adam Josef

## Oboe

Brett Boyer  
Caitlyn Falbe

## Clarinet

Hourun Qu  
Max Okagaki

## Bassoon

Megan Frederick

## Horn

Evelyn Irrer  
Keith Pepper

## Trumpet

Evelyn Szilagyi

## Trombone

John Danziger

## Harp

Serenity Flores

## Piano/Celesta

Yingyi Xu

## Harpsichord

Elden Little

## Organ

Marie Blair

## Percussion

Peter Nonaka  
Glenn  
vanValkenburgh

## Rehearsal

### Pianists

Jiayin Zhang  
Luming Yang

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Daniel Jaggars

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MSU Opera Society is the community support organization of the MSU Opera Theatre. With grateful appreciation, we acknowledge the following members of the MSU Opera Society at Michigan State University beginning July 1, 2024-June 30, 2025. We are grateful to our members for their generous contributions.

*The 2025-26 MSU Opera Theatre season is generously funded by the Worthington Family Foundation.*

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For information about the MSU Opera Society, please contact the College of Music Advancement Office at (517) 353-9872 or e-mail Ann-Marie Lindley at [alindley@msu.edu](mailto:alindley@msu.edu).

**STUDENT NEWS:** **Jiahao Fu** sang roles in Opera Grand Rapids *Stuck Elevator* and will sing a role and cover the role of Yamadori in their upcoming *Madama Butterfly*. **Madeline Jeleniewski** and **Alekzander Lipar** (both BM2027, students of Melanie Helton) are semifinalists in the Harold Haugh Competition. **Makinsey Rosser** (MM2027, student of Melanie Helton) will perform the role of Sister Rose in *Dead Man Walking* with Seagle Festival in the Adirondacks this summer. She also won the Harold Haugh Competition. **Michael Seare** (MM2026, student of Mark Rucker) will sing the lead tenor role in *La Scala di Seta* with Bel Canto in Tuscany. **Abigail Solomon** (BM2027, student of Mark Rucker) sang in *The Handmaid's Tale* with Detroit Opera and will sing the title role in *Suor Angelica* with Bel Canto in Tuscany. **Xiao Xiao** (DMA2026, student of Richard Fracker) sang in *The Big Swim* commissioned by Houston Grand Opera as the mezzo-soprano lead (with alumnus **Zaikuan Song** in the bass role). She will be an apprentice with Glimmerglass Opera this summer.

**ALUMNI NEWS:** **Ruoxi Bian** (DMA2024, student of Jane Bunnell) is an apprentice artist at Opera Orlando and a district winner in the MET Laffont Competition. **Christine Boddicker** (BM2020, student of Jane Bunnell) is an apprentice artist at Pensacola Opera and a district winner in the MET Laffont Competition. **Leah Bryzski** (BM2015, student of Anne Nispel) sang the role of Adele in *Die Fledermaus* and will be in a new opera, *Barbaverde en Mineralis*, in Guadalajara Mexico. **Yilin Chen** (DMA2025, student of Richard Fracker) just finished his apprenticeship with Cedar Rapids Opera. **Shannon Crowley** (BM2020, student of Mark Rucker) is a winner in the MET Laffont Competition. She has been an apprentice artist at Pittsburgh Opera. **Jamie Eagle** (MM2024, student of Richard Fracker) will be a studio apprentice at Central City Opera this summer. **Paige Heidrich** (DMA2025, student of Melanie Helton) sang in *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Cunning Little Vixen* with Detroit Opera and has accepted a tenure stream faculty position at Saginaw Valley State College. **Sean Holland** (BM2019, student of Richard Fracker) is on the National Tour of *Hell's Kitchen* as Riq and covering the tenor lead Knuck. **Lindsey Kesselman** (BM2006, student of Melanie Helton) continues as one of the premiere proponents of contemporary vocal music in the country, with multiple appearances at the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble and with the Haven Trio. **Michaela Larsen** (BM2020, student of Marc Embree) sang in *Fidelio* at the Metropolitan Opera and multiple roles at the Chautauqua Opera Conservatory and Opera Kansas. **Xiaoji Ji** (DMA2025, student of Richard Fracker) is just finishing an apprentice artist position with Pensacola Opera. **Brian Major** (DMA 2018, student of Mark Rucker) sang the title role of *Nabucco* with Opera SaoPaolo and roles in *La Traviata*, *Moby Dick*, and *Die Frau ohne Schatten* at the MET. **Jose-Luis Maldonado** (DMA2024, student of Mark Rucker) sang Title Role of Rigoletto for Indianapolis Opera and will perform Tonio in *I Pagliacci* for Opera Birmingham. **Jenny Ribeiro** (DMA2022, student of Marc Embree) covered Lady Macbeth as a resident artist at Teatro Nuovo 2025 and performed "Wagner's Women" with the Berlin Wagner Group, Concord, NH. She was a Visiting Assistant Professor of Voice at Albion College in 2025-26. **John Riesen** (MM2015, student of Richard Fracker) continues to sing all over the country, recently hitting 10,000,000 plays on Spotify. He is currently touring the country with another top 10 Billboard artist soprano Laura Auer as Aria Nouveau and earned a grammy nomination as an associate producer for the "Impossible Dream". **Ben Reisinger** (MM2022, student of Mark Rucker) is a Lindemann Young Artist at the Metropolitan Opera and has won multiple competitions. He is currently appearing in *Tristan and Isolde* at the MET. He has sung Alfredo in *La Traviata* for Opera Colorado and Romeo in *Roméo et Juliette* for Opera Chile. **Zaikuan Song** (DMA2021, student of Richard Fracker) recently performed the Verdi Requiem with the National Philharmonic. **Gabriel Lockheimer Toso** (MM2024, student of Mark Rucker) is a young artist with the Sarasota Opera and won an Encouragement Award in the Minnesota District of the MET Laffont Competition. **Kyle White** (BM2018, student of Marc Embree) won 2nd place, Met Midwest Region, Laffont Comp and sang Marcello in *La Boheme* with Madison Opera. He was also an apprentice with the Santa Fe Opera.