Giacomo Puccini - Il Trittico (Maazel) [1990]

1. Il Tabarro (The Cloak) Performer: Ingvar Wixell, Renata Scotto, Plácido Domingo, Michel Sénéchal, Dennis Wicks, Gillian Knight *2. Suor Angelica – Beginning 3. Suor Angelica – Senza Mamma*
Performer: Renata Scotto, Marilyn Horne, Patricia Payne, Gillian Knight, Ann Howard, Ileana Cotrubas, Doreen Cryer, Margaret Cable, Elizabeth Bainbridge, Shirley Minty, Gloria Jennings, Ursula Connors, Ameral Gunson, Della Jones
4. Gianni Schicchi – Povero Buoso! 5. Gianni Schicchi – O Mio Babbino Caro
Performer: Tito Gobbi, Ileana Cotrubas, Plácido Domingo, Anna di Stasio, Florindo Andreolli, Scilly Fortunato, Alvaro Domingo, Alfredo Mariotti, Giancarlo Luccardi, Carlo del Bosco, Stefania Malagù Ambrosian Opera Chorus London Symphony Orchestra Lorin Maazel – director

Il Trittico consists of 3 short one-act operas, each lasting slightly less than one hour. According to the explanatory essays accompanying this very worthwhile recording, Puccini's original concept was to have all three performed back to back in one evening (just think of the demands on the stage crews!). Given 3 separate and distinct librettos, it thus becomes a bit more understandable why Il Trittico as a whole has not fared particularly well in terms of public enthusiasm over the years. However, in this late 1970's recording, Lorin Maazel leads 2 London orchestras and an accomplished cast of singers in a largely successful effort to show that Puccini really knew what he was doing after all. If there is a single thematic idea expressed in Il Tabarro, Suor Angelica, and Gianni Schicchi, it is the idea of death and how it can be considered musically. Each opera uses the theme in a distinctly different way, which establishes a legitimate rationale for hearing the entire trilogy. Il Tabarro is a straightforward, gritty story of revenge murder resulting from presumed marital infidelity, while Suor Angelica is the poignant story of a morally disgraced nun who commits suicide, yet achieves salvation in the end. Finally, Gianni Schicchi clearly is the most innovative of the 3 operas. With no overture and no choral component, the libretto tells the story of an early Renaissance blue collar trickster, whose ingenuity and sleight-of-hand maneuvers cheat a grieving Italian family out of its entire inheritance after its wealthy, aristocratic patriarch dies. Perhaps Puccini's only real attempt at comic opera, Gianni Schicchi is a very interesting tale full of sarcasm and trickery, and this is

probably the reason why it historically has been the most popular of the three. Schicchi truly breaks the Puccini mold, because one clearly noticeable characteristic is the lack of the glorious, soaring arias and duets/ensembles which are such a trademark of the larger Puccini works. Overall, these 3 operas present an intriguing side of Puccini, and Lorin Maazel's forces do a very nice job. All things considered, I do not think Il Trittico quite measures up to the standards Puccini set in his great full-length operas. There are few bravura, soaring melodies made to order for soprano and tenors in any of the operas, and the melodic content is noticeably more subdued compared to.... La Boheme, for instance. Still, Il Trittico should satisfy the average opera fan, and this nice recording definitely will do that. --- Henry S., arkivmusic.com

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