

Pagliacci

dramma in a prologue and two acts

libretto and composer **Ruggero Leoncavallo**

premiere Milano, Teatro Dal Verme, 21 maggio 1892

In the prologue Tonio, who is wearing the costume he will wear in the second act, presents himself to the audience while the curtain is down; he announces that the use of disguises in the performance that is about to begin was requested by the author to honour the traditions of theatre. The story the audience are about to witness is true, and the actors are men and women who are full of true suffering and passion, just like everyone else.

Act 1

The plot takes place in Calabria, in a place called Montalto on the day of Ferragosto, somewhere between 1865 and 1870

It is three o' clock in the afternoon. An itinerant theatre company has come to the village to perform. The troupe consists of the head comedian, Canio, his wife Nedda, Tonio and Peppe. Physically deformed, Tonio is in love with Nedda but when he tries to tell her of his feelings, she makes fun of him and hits him with a whip. Enraged and wanting revenge, Tonio discovers that Nedda is having an affair with Silvio, who lives in the village. Tonio tells her husband Canio, who is madly in love with his wife, he is being betrayed and makes sure he witnesses a meeting between the two lovers with his own eyes. Before taking her leave, just as Nedda is promising Silvio she will run away with him after the performance, Canio throws himself between the two lovers. Silvio, however, who knows the surrounding paths like the back of his hand, manages to escape incognito and Nedda resolutely refuses to reveal the name of the man she was with. Peppe then arrives and takes Canio's weapon away, reminding them all that the performance is about to begin

Act 2

The play begins amidst the lively, curious reactions of the village inhabitants. Colombina (Nedda) is in love with Arlecchino (Peppe) but he is surprised by her husband, Pagliaccio (Canio). The latter was informed by Taddeo, a simple-minded servant played by Tonio. Arlecchino manages to escape and only husband and wife remain on the stage,



Pagliaccio and Colombina. This stage fiction is now a perfect mirror of reality – mad with jealousy, Canio keeps asking Nedda what her lover's name is. Disturbed, the audience suddenly realizes that something serious and unforeseen is about to happen. When Nedda refuses to reveal her lover's name once again, her husband stabs her. Dying, she begs Silvio for help, who is watching the show. In the general confusion Silvio runs to her side but he also falls victim to Canio, who then announces the performance is over.

