

Riccitelli, Primo [Pancrazio]

(b Campli, Teramo, 9 Aug 1875; d Giulianova, Teramo, 27 March 1941). Italian composer.

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He spent his early years in a seminary, which he later abandoned in order to devote himself fully to composition. From 1896 until 1903 he studied with Mascagni at the *Liceo Musicale* of Pesaro, even though it is unclear whether he formally enrolled in this institution. Mascagni later introduced him to Casa Sonzogno; for this publisher he wrote *Madonnetta* on a libretto by Luigi Illica (1910) and *Maria sul monte* on a libretto by Carlo Zangarini (1911, but premiered five years later). After World War I the impresario Augusto Laganà commissioned a new opera on a libretto by Giovacchino Forzano; the result of this collaborative project, *I Compagnacci*, won the 1922 national opera competition launched by the Italian government. *I Compagnacci* became Riccitelli's most successful work; after its world première at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome in 1923, the opera was staged at La Scala, at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, and at the Teatro Massimo of Palermo, among others. Thanks to this opera, set in late 15th-century Florence, Riccitelli became one of the most performed living composers in Italy during the 1920s. Several music critics both in Italy and in the United States found significant parallels between *I Compagnacci* and Mascagni's works, especially in their melodic lines, as well as with Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*. Moreover, *I Compagnacci*'s humorous undertone led a number of critics (Raffaello De Rensis, Alberto Gasco, and Matteo Incagliati) to argue that this opera constituted a significant link with the Italian comic opera tradition from the previous century. The worldwide success of *I Compagnacci* prompted impresario Walter Mocchi to commission a new opera, *Madonna Oretta*, once again on a libretto by Forzano. Riccitelli completed this work in 1927 but it was only premiered five years later at the Teatro Reale dell'Opera – the former Teatro Costanzi. *Madonna Oretta* was the last successful opera by the composer, who died in poverty less than ten years later. Autograph letters by Carlo Zangarini and Tito Ricordi to Riccitelli are held at the Biblioteca provinciale Melchiorre Delfico in Teramo (*Carte Riccitelli*).

Works

(selective list)

Stage

Francesca da Rimini (op, S. Pellico), between 1896 and 1903, lost
Lory (op, P. Riccitelli), between 1896 and 1903, lost
Nena (scena siciliana), between 1896 and 1903, lost
Giuliano (op)
Madonnetta (op, L. Illica), 1910, commissioned by Sonzogno
Maria sul Monte (op, C. Zangarini), Milan, Teatro Carcano, 8 July 1916, commissioned by Sonzogno
I Compagnacci (op, G. Forzano), Rome, Teatro Costanzi, 10 April 1923, Sonzogno
Madonna Oretta (op, G. Forzano), Rome, Teatro Reale dell'Opera, 3 Feb 1932, Sonzogno
Capitan Fracassa (op., G. M. Viti), unfinished

Instrumental

Heremos, symphonic poem after C. Zangarini, solo, choir, and orchestra, between 1896 and 1903, lost

Bibliography

SchmidlD ; Thompson1; DEUMM

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R. De Rensis: 'I Compagnacci di Riccitelli', *Il messaggero* (11 April 1923)

D. Alaleona: 'I Compagnacci di Primo Riccitelli', *Il mondo* (12 April 1923)

A. Belli: 'Un grande successo al Costanzi: I Compagnacci di Riccitelli', *Corriere d'Italia* (12 April 1923)

M. Incagliati: 'I Compagnacci di Forzano e del maestro Riccitelli al Teatro Costanzi', *Il giornale d'Italia* (12 April 1923)

- M. Muzii: *A Primo Riccitelli* (Teramo, 1923)
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