

*Bel Canto is:*

Director  
*Justin Guignard*

Accompanist  
*Thomas Gonder*



More Info  
and Resources!

Soprano  
*Colleen Bray*  
*Tetiana Deordica*  
*Emma Francis*  
*Rachel Savidge*

Tenor  
*Matthew Dinan*  
*Brad Horncastle*  
*Leo Macneil*  
*Roger Smith*

Alto  
*Jane Blakely*  
*Anne Hunt*  
*Sabina Horton*  
*Lisa Mitchell*  
*Carolyn Nielsen*  
*Margaret Savidge*  
*Debbie West*

Bass  
*Mike Francis*  
*Joe Horton*  
*Kit Hunt*

# Giacomo Puccini Messa di Gloria

Sacred Music from a Master of Italian Opera

*Acknowledgments*

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*Bel Canto would like to thank our many anonymous sponsors who make it possible for us to share  
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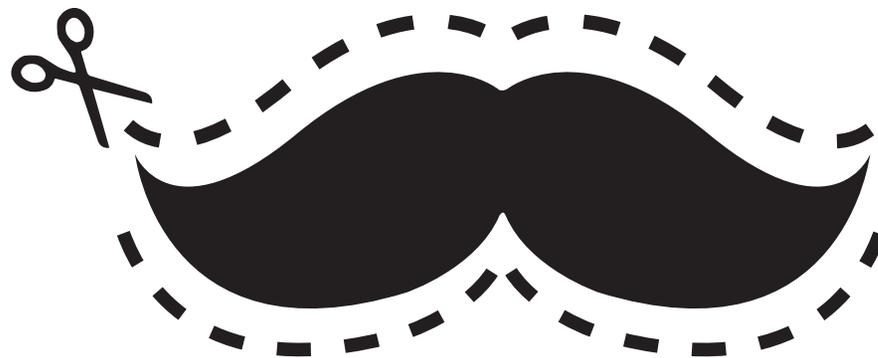
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Follow  
along with  
the Score!



Bel Canto Singers  
*Proud members of the New Brunswick  
Choral Federation*

**July 13, 1880, 6:30 am.** In a shabby, dimly-lit room, 22-year-old Giacomo Puccini is asleep at his writing desk. Papers are scattered around. His right hand still clutches a fountain pen. Suddenly, the stout wooden door to the room bursts open. Pietro Mascagni, his roommate, stands outlined in the bright morning sun. He has a loaf of crusty bread under one arm.



“Gio! *Gio!* Wake *up* you idiot! We have to be at the *Conservatorio* for eight o’clock!”

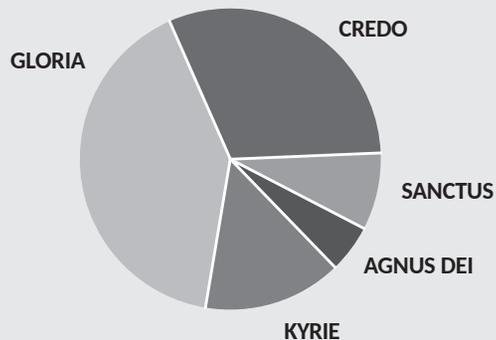
Puccini’s head jerks up. A half-finished page of score sticks to his left cheek. Peeling it carefully off, he holds it in an outstretched hand, squints, and lets it flutter to the desk.

“But I’m not finished! I’ve still the *Sanctus* and the damnable *Agnus Dei* to write! What time is it?”

Pietro pulls the bread from under his arm and points it at Puccini. “I can make excuses for about an hour, Gio. I’ll tell them you’re at confession. Haven’t you something lying around to just stick in?”

Puccini puts his face in his hands. “The whole bloody *Credo* is from four years ago already, and I’m pretty sure *someone’s* estate is gonna sue me for the fugue. I’m doomed!” He points a shaking finger at the ceiling. “This is the last time I *ever* write for the church!”

Pietro tosses the bread on the desk and sighs. “You shouldn’t have blown it all on the Gloria. That’s a real corker.” He turns to leave, and over his shoulder, winks. “It’s very, *very* good Gio. Just keep the Sanctus and Agnus short. You’ll think of something. Use male soloists. Waltz it up a bit. Good luck.”



Except for the date, Pietro Mascagni, the bit about the Credo, and the fact that Puccini never wrote another religious piece of music, none of this story is provable. It presents, however, a common theory among many choir members.

The youthful exuberance of Puccini’s *Messa a Quattro Voci* is undeniable. Born into generations of church musicians, Puccini’s desire to inject his love of a variety of musical and operatic styles into the structure and philosophy of the religious text sees the work as a whole pour out in brilliant, but often disparate vignettes. We hear 16th century polyphony, Baroque fugues, Italian folk songs, barcarolles, classical waltzes and, above all, the grand, operatic melodies for which the young Puccini was to become known. There are many moments to take note of and savour, particularly in the massive Gloria movement, which takes up almost half of the piece. The fugue, *Cum Sancto Spiritu*, particularly, was nicely described in the program notes from a Pacific Spirit Choir performance in 2018:

“Building from the bottom up, it is successively presented by the basses, tenors, altos and sopranos, changing keys, speeding up, slowing down, presented loud/soft, high/low, diminuendo-ing and crescendo-ing, running its magnificent course in the fullness of time, and leading to the joyful return of the opening Gloria melody. Remember the opening Gloria melody? Here it is presented by all the voices together in octaves, with punctuating, syncopated orchestral chords as accompaniment. What a great climax. Bravo Puccini! He even uses the word “Amen”. Except that it’s not over – remember this composer is 22 and he’s going to leave nothing on the floor. Instead, he starts a *second* fugue, and better even than that, it is a *double fugue*, containing two melodies, and more remarkable yet, the second theme is none other than the *opening Gloria tune!*”

So welcome to what we like to call, after the exhausting task of learning the thing, “Puccini’s Glorious Mess.” We invite you, if you are able, to follow along with the score, a link to which can be found on the front of this program. We have also provided some favourite recordings of the work, and some more history on our website.

This performance represents a re-awakening for Bel Canto, after the lifeless purgatory that Covid placed us all in, and the first time in many years we have tackled a single, complete work. Refreshed and invigorated by Puccini’s enthusiasm, we look forward to presenting another concert on May 27th, when we will join forces with the Sussex Choral Society to present Faure’s masterpiece *Requiem* along with some delicious selections to welcome the warmer weather.

We hope you enjoy the evening.

The Bel Canto Singers