

CHANDOS

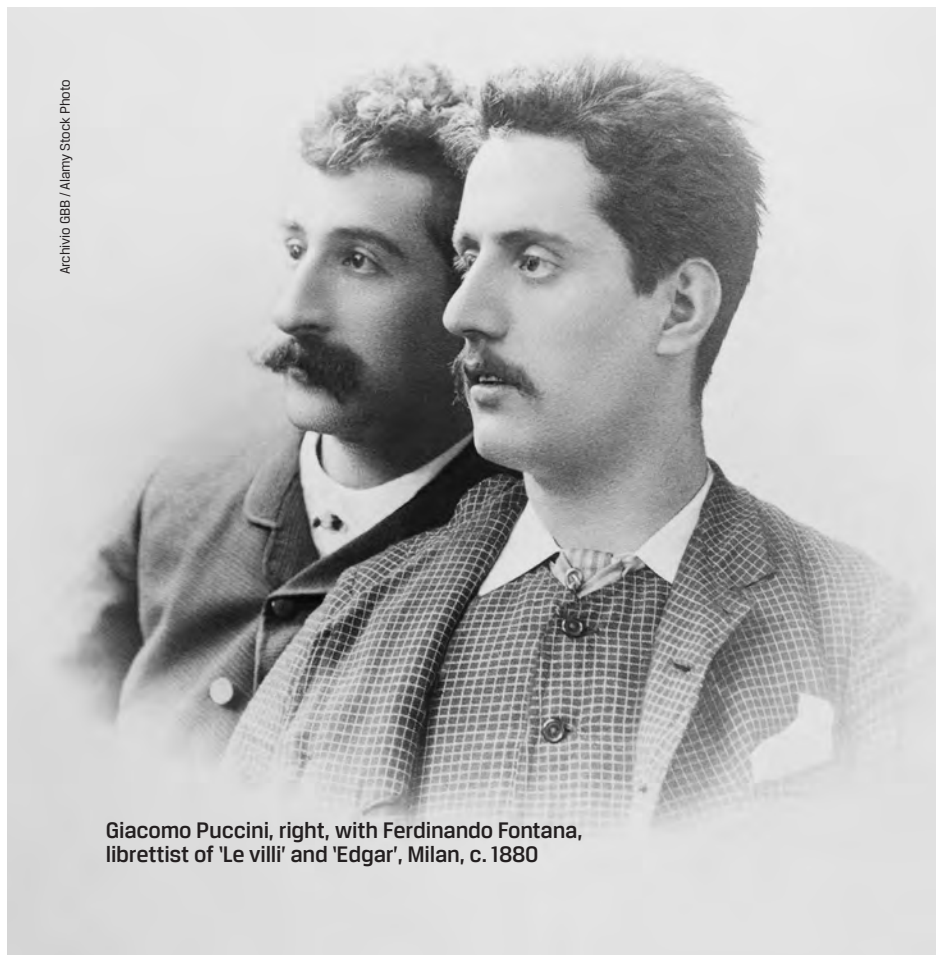
PUCCINI

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

A dramatic, low-key portrait of Giacomo Puccini. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark suit and a red cravat. His right hand is raised to his ear, and he has a serious, intense expression. The lighting is focused on his face, creating strong highlights and deep shadows. The background is dark and textured.

SINFONIA OF LONDON
JOHN WILSON

Archivio GBB / Alamy Stock Photo



Giacomo Puccini, right, with Ferdinando Fontana,
librettist of 'Le villi' and 'Edgar', Milan, c. 1880

Giacomo Puccini (1858 – 1924)

- | | | |
|---|---|-------|
| 1 | Preludio sinfonico, SC 32 (1882)
in A major • in A-Dur • en la majeur
Andante mosso – Animato – Un poco più animato –
Tempo I – Poco più lento | 7:08 |
| 2 | Capriccio sinfonico, SC 55 (1883)
in F major • in F-Dur • en fa majeur
Andante moderato sostenuto – Allegro vivace, ruvido –
Tempo I – Largamente | 10:49 |
| 3 | Preludio to 'Le villi', SC 60 (1883–84)
(The Willis)
<i>Leggenda drammatica</i> in Two Acts
(Dramatic Legend)
Andante mosso – Sostenuto – A tempo | 2:05 |
| 4 | La tregenda from Act II of 'Le villi', SC 60 (1883–84)
(The Witches' Sabbath)
<i>Leggenda drammatica</i> in Two Acts
(Dramatic Legend)
Allegro non troppo – Più vivo | 3:36 |

- 6 **Scherzo, SC 34 and Trio, SC 52** (1882–83) **2:47**
 Scherzo (Edited by Virgilio Bernardoni [b. 1958]). Allegro vivo –
 in A minor • in a-Moll • en la mineur
 Trio (Edited and orchestrated [bars 13 – 61] by Virgilio Bernardoni).
 Allegro vivo – Poco meno – A tempo – Tempo I –
 in F major • in F-Dur • en fa majeur
 [Da capo lo Scherzo]
- 6 **Adagetto, SC 51** (1883) **3:43**
 in F major • in F-Dur • en fa majeur
 (Adagietto)
 Largo
- 7 **Preludio to Act II of 'Manon Lescaut', SC 64** (1892–93) **4:08**
Dramma lirico in Four Acts
 (Lyric Drama)
 Tempo di Minuetto. Piuttosto mosso – Largo sostenuto –
 Stringendo
- 8 **Intermezzo before Act III of 'Manon Lescaut', SC 64** (1892–93) **4:29**
Dramma lirico in Four Acts
 (Lyric Drama)
 Lento espressivo – Andante calmo – Meno – Sostenuto

9	Crisantemi, SC 65 (1890) 6:29 in C sharp minor • in cis-Moll • en ut dièse mineur for String Quartet Alla memoria di Amedeo di Savoia Duca d'Aosta Adapted for String Orchestra by John Wilson Andante mesto – Sostenuto – A tempo – Sostenuto
	Tre minuetti, SC 61 (c. 1881, revised 1898) 9:02 in A major • in A-Dur • en la majeur <i>per quartetto ad archi</i> (for String Quartet) Adapted for String Orchestra by John Wilson
10	Minuetto n. 1. A S.A.R. Vittoria Augusta di Borbone Principessa di Capua. Moderato – Trio – [Minuetto da capo] 3:33
11	Minuetto n. 2. All'esimio violinista prof. Augusto Michelangeli. Allegretto – Trio – Da capo 2:45
12	Minuetto n. 3. All'amico maestro Carlo Carignani. Assai mosso – Trio – Da capo al Fine 2:43
13	Preludio to Act I of 'Edgar', SC 62 (1889, revised 1892) 3:23 <i>Dramma lirico</i> in Four Acts (Lyric Drama) Andante mosso – Presto – Andante lento ed espressivo – Tempo I

14

Preludio to Act III of 'Edgar', SC 62

(1889, revised 1892, 1905)

Dramma lirico in Four Acts

(Lyric Drama)

Lento triste – Calmissimo

4:22

TT 62:41

Sinfonia of London

Charlie Lovell-Jones leader

John Wilson

Puccini: Orchestral Music

Introduction

In autumn 1880, the twenty-one-year-old Giacomo Puccini (1858 – 1924) entered the Milan Conservatory as a student of composition. He already held a diploma from the Istituto Musicale 'Giovanni Pacini', in his hometown of Lucca, but would now study for a further three years at the centre of Italian musical life. His teachers were, briefly, Antonio Bazzini (1818 – 1897) and then, for the majority of Puccini's time at the Conservatory, Amilcare Ponchielli (1834 – 1886). The music of these two composers survives nowadays primarily as 'lollipop': Bazzini's *La Ronde des lutins* (The Dance of the Goblins), a 'scherzo fantastique' for violin and piano, and 'The Dance of the Hours', from Ponchielli's opera *La Gioconda*. But they were important figures in their time: *La Gioconda*, to a libretto by Arrigo Boito (1842 – 1918), first performed at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan, in 1876, was regularly staged internationally until the middle of the twentieth century. In due course, Puccini would enjoy a fame that came to dwarf that of his teachers. But though he was a diligent and successful

student, he was no prodigy. It was not until his third opera, *Manon Lescaut*, which had its première in Turin, in 1893, that he achieved international success. The music on this disc is a record of his approach to that breakthrough.

Preludio sinfonico

The fact that all this music is instrumental, while Puccini is known almost exclusively as a composer of opera, highlights the way in which, from the 1870s onwards, Italian composers increasingly conceived their work in 'symphonic' terms. In Lucca, Puccini had composed a Mass for vocal soloists and chorus with orchestral accompaniment as his graduation piece, but in Milan, his principal compositional exercises were purely orchestral. The earliest of them, the *Preludio sinfonico*, in A major, was first performed at an end-of-year concert at the Conservatory in July 1882. Evidently bowled over by Wagner (the model is the Prelude to *Lohengrin*, an opera widely seen and also discussed in Italy following its national première, in Bologna, in 1871), Puccini nevertheless moulds the structure of his *Preludio* with care, achieving

a seamless transition from the opening hymn-like melody, via an intermediate climax, to a more flowing middle section. Fanfares build to a triumphant return of the hymn; in the quiet coda, Puccini explores remote harmonies.

Scherzo; Trio; Adagetto

From the same period come a pair of compositions that seem not to have been entirely finished. The Scherzo in A minor and Trio in F major have recently been grafted together and their orchestration completed; previously they were thought to be two unrelated pieces. The *Adagetto* (the standard Italian would be 'Adagietto') feels like the draft of the opening section of a longer work. Attractive in their own right, these compositions by Puccini introduce us to a characteristic of his working methods that would be retained in his greatest successes: the re-use, in an operatic setting, of music first conceived as purely instrumental. Thus, the perky theme of the Scherzo in A minor crops up near the start of his first opera, *Le villi*, as Black Forest villagers dance a waltz to celebrate the betrothal of Anna and Roberto (more on this couple below), while the *Adagetto* found its way into his second opera, *Edgar*: it forms the basis of the first part of Fidelia's Act III solo, 'Addio, mio dolce amor'

(Farewell, my sweet love). As to the Trio in F, its melody reappears, some twenty years later, when Sharpless recalls the heroine's visit to the American consulate in Act I of *Madama Butterfly*.

Capriccio sinfonico

The most celebrated example of such re-use of instrumental material relates to the largest of the compositions written under Ponchielli's guidance: the *Capriccio sinfonico*, which was Puccini's graduation piece at the Milan Conservatory, where it was first performed in July 1883. Anyone who has seen (or heard) *La bohème* can hardly fail to recognise the music that opens the fast middle section of the *Capriccio*: Puccini re-used this material to open the opera, returning to it numerous times in Act I. As if he were setting out to achieve the opposite effect from that of the *Preludio sinfonico*, of the previous year, in the *Capriccio* Puccini heightens contrasts: not just between the slow outer sections of the piece and its central waltz themes, but also within the slow music, which veers between expressions of anguish (again somewhat Wagnerian) and consolation. The slow music, too, was re-used, in the funeral cortège of *Edgar*, Act III, which immediately precedes Fidelia's 'Addio, mio dolce amor'. The coda of the *Capriccio* appears self-reflexively to refer to the idea of contrast,

transforming the first of the waltz themes (on its initial presentation, it immediately follows the *La bohème* music) into a hymn.

Le villi

Buoyed up by the success of the *Capriccio sinfonico*, Puccini determined to enter a competition for a one-act opera that had been launched earlier in 1883 by the publishing house Sonzogno. The deadline was 31 December, so he had to work fast. *Le villi* (The Willis) sets a libretto by Ferdinando Fontana (1850–1919), centring on the punishment carried out by the eponymous vengeful female spirits, the ghosts of wronged lovers: they dance their faithless men to death. Tales of the Germanic supernatural were much in vogue in Milanese literary circles. Puccini did not win, yet a group of Fontana's friends (including Boito) clubbed together to fund a production, and *Le villi* went on to enjoy a successful first night at the Teatro Dal Verme, in Milan, in May 1884. Subsequent productions in Turin and at La Scala saw the opera expanded to two acts.

We hear two orchestral extracts. The serene 'Preludio' mingles themes from the happy first act: from the duet between Anna and Roberto, and from the concluding 'Preghiera' (Prayer), which is led by Anna's father, Guglielmo. Early in 1883, Puccini

had pooled resources with his fellow Conservatory student Pietro Mascagni (1863–1945) to buy a score of Wagner's brand-new *Parsifal*; in the first of the themes taken from the 'Preghiera', at the entry of the bass instruments, there is once again a Wagnerian tinge. Very different in character is 'La tregenda' (The Witches' Sabbath), the second movement of the 'Parte sinfonica' that opens Act II: the audiences' first sight of the dancing *villi*. In a pair of stanzas printed in the libretto to accompany the ballet which he envisaged at this point, Fontana explains how Roberto, having himself been abandoned by the 'siren' for whom he deserted Anna, now nears his doom. Puccini provides a suitably diabolical tarantella in G minor, music that will return at the end of the opera as the undead Anna and her companions finish Roberto off to blasphemous cries of 'Osanna!'

Tre minuetti

As well as the première of *Le villi*, 1884 saw the publication, with small Milanese firms, of a version for piano duet of the *Capriccio sinfonico* and of three minuets – *Tre minuetti* – that Puccini had composed for string quartet. The latter are elegant examples of pastiche, showing us how a late-nineteenth-century composer understood the music of a hundred years earlier. Puccini used the theme of the

second minuet to open *Manon Lescaut*, and materials from all three pieces in the dance scene of Act II: the music suits the opera's eighteenth-century setting.

Edgar

A more significant publishing event of 1884 was the contract which Puccini signed with Ricordi (Verdi's publisher), who bought the rights for *Le villi* and commissioned a new opera from the same team of composer and librettist. Unhappily, this would be *Edgar*, the only major work of Puccini's that can legitimately be classed a failure. The fault belongs squarely with Fontana, who concocted a grotesque mediaevalising farrago, closely related to Wagner's *Tannhäuser*: it would be kindest not to go into the details. The absurd libretto is a pity, for it inspired Puccini to music that is often fully mature in style, able to stand without apology beside his more celebrated scores.

Of the two Preludes recorded here, that to Act I does not feature in Puccini's final, 1905 revision of *Edgar*. In the original, four-act version, which had its première at La Scala in April 1889, this music was placed before Act IV; for a revision, in three acts, of 1892, Puccini placed the previous Act IV Prelude, now shortened, at the very start of the work. The version we hear was made for a

performance in Madrid, also in 1892. There are two types of material, expressing the virgin / whore dichotomy embodied by the opera's female characters. Puccini begins and ends with the delicate dawn music that opens Act I proper: this is associated with the pure, loyal Fidelia. Tigrana, her evil, sexy (and darker skinned) opposite number, is portrayed in the dramatic middle section, beginning with this character's leitmotif, and proceeding, after a climax, to music used (in the three-act version) for the Act II duet between Tigrana and Edgar. The Prelude to Act III had a less troubled genesis, simply remaining in place when *Edgar* was cut down to three acts. Sorrowful melodic lines over a *pizzicato* bass alternate with anticipations of the exceptionally lyrical second part of Fidelia's 'Addio, mio dolce amor'.

Crisantemi

On 26 January 1890, an audience in the Milan Conservatory heard (and encored) the first performance of Puccini's *Crisantemi* (Chrysanthemums) for string quartet. This is an elegy in ternary form for Amedeo, Duke of Aosta (1845 – 1890), who has gone down in history as a rather unsuccessful King of Spain between 1871 and 1873. In the Italian language of flowers, chrysanthemums stand for mourning; Puccini would re-use this music

John Wilson and Sinfonia of London, at
Symphony Hall, Birmingham, 26 November 2022

Chris Christodoulou



in *Manon Lescaut* – briefly in Act III and then extensively in Act IV as the dying Manon and obsessed Des Grieux drag themselves through a desert landscape improbably placed on the outskirts of New Orleans.

Manon Lescaut

Manon may have been Puccini's first international success, but its creation was anything but smooth. The Prelude to Act II recorded here was discarded from the score when a whole act was removed during the process of composition. Listeners familiar with the opera will recognise the opening of the Prelude as deriving from the dance scene of Act II. Here is more elegant eighteenth-century pastiche, though just before the final *tutti* we also have a glimpse of the leitmotif introduced as the heroine gives her name in Act I. Finally on this disc we hear the Intermezzo placed between Acts II and III. Arrested at the end of Act II, Manon is now in prison, awaiting deportation to America. The Intermezzo gives us Des Grieux's response: he will follow her to the ends of the earth. A doleful, chromatic introduction leads to a long *cantilena*, which rises to heights of passion as it recalls the love duet of the preceding act.

Sinfonia of London brings together outstanding musicians for special projects, live and recorded, under its Artistic Director and conductor, John Wilson. Described in the press as 'one of the best ensembles anywhere' (*The Guardian*), it includes a significant number of principals and leaders from orchestras based both in the UK and abroad, alongside notable soloists and members of distinguished chamber ensembles. The orchestra made its acclaimed live début in 2021 at the BBC Proms and its international début in 2025 at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam. Alongside annual Prom appearances, it gives regular concert tours around the UK, cementing its reputation for world-class excellence with 'typically exhilarating performances' (*The Arts Desk*) and five-star reviews. Its much celebrated recording profile on Chandos Records covers a wide range of repertoire, including works by Korngold, Respighi, Ravel, Strauss, Rachmaninoff, Britten, Walton, Bliss, and Rodgers & Hammerstein. The magazine *BBC Music* declared that 'Wilson and his hand-picked band of musicians continue to strike gold with almost anything they turn their hands to', while *The Mail on Sunday* found the album of English Music for Strings 'dazzling... some of the finest string playing ever put on disc by a British orchestra'. Their most recent recording is the second in the orchestra's

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series devoted to orchestral works by Sir William Walton, the first, centred round the Violin Concerto, having earned universal acclaim. Alongside outstanding reviews ('leaves music critics ready to die for joy', in the words of *iNews*), the orchestra has received five *BBC Music Magazine Awards* in five years and, in 2022, a *Gramophone Award*. In 2023, *The Sunday Times* stated that 'Sinfonia of London sets the gold standard – an orchestra of generals that takes the unfashionable, the obscure, the overlooked, and makes it unmissable'. www.sinfoniaoflondon.com

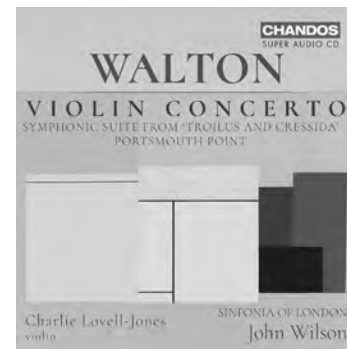
Born in Gateshead and since 2011 a Fellow of the Royal College of Music where he studied composition and conducting, **John Wilson** is now in demand at the highest level across the globe and has over the past thirty years conducted many of the world's finest orchestras. In 2018 he relaunched Sinfonia of London, which *The Arts Desk* described as 'the most exciting thing currently happening on the British orchestral scene'. His much-anticipated BBC Proms debut with this orchestra, in 2021, was praised by *The Guardian* as 'truly outstanding' and admired by *The Times* for its 'revelatory music-making'. They are now highly sought-after across the UK, the

2024/25 season notable for performances at major UK venues including the Barbican Centre, Bridgewater Hall, and Glasshouse International Centre for Music, as well as a return to the BBC Proms. Their large and varied discography having received near universal critical acclaim, in the autumn of 2024 they released their twenty-fourth album since 2019. Their CDs have earned several awards, including numerous *BBC Music Magazine Awards*: for recordings of Korngold's Symphony in F sharp (2020), Respighi's Roman Trilogy (2021), Dutilleux's *Le Loup* (2022), Rodgers & Hammerstein's *Oklahoma!* (2023), and works by Vaughan Williams, Howells, Delius, and Elgar, a disc which won the Orchestral Award and was chosen Recording of the Year. *The Observer* described the Respighi recording as 'Massive, audacious and vividly played' and *The Times* declared it one of the three 'truly outstanding accounts of this trilogy' of all time, alongside those by Toscanini (1949) and Muti (1984). In March 2019, John Wilson was awarded the prestigious Distinguished Musician Award of the Incorporated Society of Musicians for his services to music and in 2021 was appointed Henry Wood Chair of Conducting at the Royal Academy of Music.

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www.amicidipuccini.co.uk / www.teatrodelgigliogiacomopuccini.it / www.albastini.co.uk

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GIACOMO PUCCINI

(1858 – 1924)

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| 7 | PRELUDIO TO ACT II OF 'MANON LESCAUT', SC 64 (1892–93)* | 4:08 |
| 8 | INTERMEZZO BEFORE ACT III OF 'MANON LESCAUT', SC 64 (1892–93)* | 4:29 |
| 9 | CRISANTEMI, SC 65 (1890)† | 6:29 |
| 10-12 | TRE MINUETTI, SC 61 (c. 1881, revised 1898)† | 9:02 |
| 13 | PRELUDIO TO ACT I OF 'EDGAR', SC 62 (1889, revised 1892)* | 3:23 |
| 14 | PRELUDIO TO ACT III OF 'EDGAR', SC 62 (1889, revised 1892, 1905)* | 4:22 |

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