

Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi* - A survey
by Ralph Moore

Having already surveyed the first two operas in Puccini's triptych *Il trittico*, I conclude with the last instalment, *Gianni Schicchi*. There are nearly fifty recordings if live recordings are counted but despite the claim on the Wikipedia that it "has been widely recorded", it enjoys no more studio recordings than its two companion pieces. I survey below eleven, consisting of all nine studio accounts plus two mono radio broadcasts all in Italian; I am not considering any live recordings or those in German, as the average listener will want to hear the original text in good sound.

The plot may be based on a cautionary tale from Dante's *Inferno* about Schicchi's damnation for testamentary falsification but its comic treatment by librettist Giovacchino Forzano, in the *commedia dell'arte* tradition, makes it a suitably cheery conclusion to a highly diverse operatic evening consisting of a sequence which begins with a gloomy, violent melodrama, moves on to a heart-rending tear-jerker and ends with this high farce. It is still genuinely funny and doubtless the advent of surtitles has enhanced its accessibility to non-Italian audiences, just as non-Italian speakers need a libretto to appreciate it fully when listening.

This was Puccini's only comic opera and satirises the timeless theme of the feigned grief and greed of potential heirs. The starring role is that of the resourceful arch-schemer and cunning impostor Gianni Schicchi but the contributions of both the soprano and tenor, although comparatively small, are important, as each has a famous, set piece aria, and for that reason neither part can be under-cast. Lauretta must be charming without being too coy and Rinuccio needs to have a heroic tenor able to cope with the fearfully high tessitura of his aria praising the virtues of Schicchi as a representative of the new bourgeoisie: "Viva la gente nova e Gianni Schicchi!" (yes, there's a social commentary angle here, too).

Schicchi must be able to deflect the audience's condemnation for feathering his own nest by deservedly punishing the rapacity of Buoso's relatives and ensuring that the young lovers can be together; only if he is sufficiently amusing and convinces us of the justice of his actions can we accede to his request and grant him what he calls in his last words, "l'attenuante" - the excuse of "extenuating circumstances". It is Schicchi's glee as he manipulates events and the relatives' impotent fury which generates the best of the comedy; he must be played by a baritone who has the gift of comic timing, verbal dexterity and wide-ranging vocal colouring. It is true that a singer whose voice is waning can successfully navigate the demands of the role but he must still be able to negotiate some sustained, high-lying phrases and a barking buffo simply will not do. Several baritones make the mistake of bringing the same broad brush-stroke portrayal you might see on stage into the recording studio; wiser exponents, such as Gobbi, know how to underplay the more overt buffo element and exploit verbal subtleties for the microphone.

Gianni Schicchi was always the most popular of the trio and it's hard to mess up, but its broad array of comic characters delivering quick-fire exchanges demands good, tight ensemble and some versions are a bit scrappy, which won't do. Certainly, Puccini's unexpected facility in comic opera makes it easy for merely competent performers to pull it off, but great comic actor-singers can both have a ball in it and also provide entertainment of superlative quality.

The Recordings

Alfredo Simonetto – 1950 (radio broadcast; mono) Cetra; Preiser, Cantus; Warner Fonit
Orchestra & Chorus - RAI Torino

Gianni Schicchi - Giuseppe Taddei
Lauretta - Grete Rappsardi
Zita - Agnese Dubbini
Rinuccio - Giuseppe Savio
Gherardo - Gino Del Signore
Nella - Renza Ferrari
Betto di Signa - Pier Luigi Latinucci
Simone - Fernando Corena
Marco - Alberto Albertini
Ciesca - Liana Avogardo
Spinelloccio - Franco Calabrese

The Italians had a saying, "Gobbi we gave to the world; Taddei we kept for ourselves" and certainly the *raison d'être* for this issue has to be the chance to hear a young Taddei exploit both his comic gifts as a singer-actor and the heft and beauty of his large lyric baritone. The only other singers whose names I recognise in what I assume to be a radio broadcast, preserved on tape, are Franco Calabrese, whose sturdy bass features in a good few EMI recordings in the 50's and of course Swiss bass Fernando Corena, who himself recorded the eponymous role for Decca in 1962. Otherwise, the cast is very good to adequate, the latter epithet applying to the rather twittery, shallow-toned "Lauretta" (sic - as per the cast list on Preiser), who must admittedly compete with some of the greatest sopranos in her one big - well, actually very short - aria "O mio babbino caro". The tenor is a bit strident but he has all the notes and rises very satisfactorily to the climactic high B in his own showpiece, "Fiorenze è come un albero fiorito"; I only wish that Simonetto had given it a bit more pace and lift, as he rather kills it with kindness. The ensemble is very good and the farcical comedy of the greedy, "grieving" relatives well brought out.

Taddei's performance is broad, burly and buffo; he hardly attempts the almost sly, intimate subtleties of Gobbi's two famous recordings made almost twenty years apart in 1958 and 1976 respectively but he is certainly an amusing vocal actor with a whole range of funny voices from falsetto to booming, full-voiced baritone and an "old man" whine. The difference, if you like, is that his impersonation seems geared to the stage while Gobbi's is more a product of the recording studio.

The mono recording was presumably made on tape; there is a bit of hiss and some fuzzy blare and distortion in loud, concerted passages but it is very listenable. Preiser's issue, licensed from Cetra, is all in German with no synopsis, only a biographical appreciation of Taddei and a track and cast listing - that's it.

Francesco Molinari-Pradelli – 1956 (studio; mono) Philips
Orchestra & Chorus - Teatro di San Carlo di Napoli

Gianni Schicchi - Renato Capecchi
Lauretta - Bruna Rizzoli
Zita - Vittoria Palombini
Rinuccio - Agostino Lazzari
Gherardo - Piero De Palma
Nella - Ornella Rovero
Gherardino - Nino Tarallo
Betto di Signa - Plinio Clabassi

Simone - Giuseppe Modesti
Marco - Arturo La Porta
Ciesca - Maria Minetto
Spinelloccio - Ferruccio Mazzoli
Pinellino - Giorgio Onesti
Guccio - Gerardo Gaudio

(A download of this is also available, one of *10 Complete Operas* on The Art of Singing label)

The mono sound here is considerably better than both the Cetra studio recording of six years earlier and the live broadcast from 1963 but it's not easy to find on CD. You can, however, hear it on YouTube. The cast might not consist of household names but they are rather good: there are a couple of bass stalwarts well-known to collectors in Clabassi and Modesti, arch-comprimario Piero De Palma, rich-voiced veteran contralto Vittoria Palombini and tenor Agostino Lazzari in much ampler, more secure voice than he was to be for Gardelli in the Decca studio account six years later – he makes a good job of his praise-aria even if his top notes are bit strained. At the centre of the action is that neglected and highly versatile baritone Renato Capecchi, who sang a celebrated *Rigoletto*, *Iago* and *Scarpia*, so was no slouch – but that's the problem: his *Schicchi* sounds as if a heroic Verdi baritone is slumming it in a comic role – which, in fact, is what is happening. His tone and vocal production are intrinsically ill-suited to *Schicchi* so variety is lacking. His "Niente! Niente! Niente!" sounds like Renato in *Ballo* or Carlo in *Forza* vowing vengeance - then he overdoes the compensation for that by excessively hamming up the nasal "Buoso whine" and it becomes wearing. Bruna Rizzoli is a pleasant *Lauretta* without being especially touching or memorable.

Molinari-Pradelli's conducting is flexible and energised and the Neapolitan orchestra actually very disciplined, if rather recessed. This is by no means unenjoyable but other performances offer a more apt and characterful performance.

Gabriele Santini – 1958 (studio; stereo) EMI
Orchestra & Chorus - Teatro dell'Opera di Roma

Gianni Schicchi - Tito Gobbi
Lauretta - Victoria de los Ángeles
Zita - Anna Maria Canali
Rinuccio - Carlo Del Monte
Gherardo - Adelio Zagonora
Nella - Lydia Marimpietri
Gherardino - Claudio Cornoldi
Betto di Signa - Saturno Meletti
Simone - Paolo Montarsolo
Marco - Fernando Valentini
Ciesca - Giuliana Raymond
Spinelloccio - Alfredo Mariotti
Pinellino - Virgilio Stocco
Guccio - Paolo Caroli
Amantio di Nicolao - Alfredo Mariotti

Over sixty years on, this vivid recording in spacious early stereo has not been surpassed, mainly because of Gobbi's comic timing and variety of vocal inflection and the sense of teamwork amongst the supporting cast. No matter how many times I hear it, I laugh at Gobbi's impersonation of "povero Buoso"; the transformation from streetwise, razor-sharp *Schicchi* to doddering dotard is masterly and no-one can deliver a simple line like, "Sta bene" in so many ways. As ever, his top notes are a bit dry

but the voice is a kaleidoscope of shifting moods and emotions and this is an ideal role for such an accomplished singer-actor.

There are other good recordings, but once heard this recording has a way of imprinting itself on your mind in such a way as to render all subsequent versions redundant. It really is remarkably vivid and it was only when I played it again having listened to other versions that I realised how Santini's conducting and the singers' commitment and invention really makes the action leap out at the listener. They are a real ensemble, introducing all sorts of little refinements and nuances into their exchanges to render them more immediate. Accompanying sound effects, such as when they are scrabbling through cupboards and papers for the will, are appropriate – and their reactions to the contents are amusing. Carlo Del Monte does not have the meatiest tenor – it's a bit constricted and throaty - but he is vibrant and audible. De los Ángeles is tad over-winsome and plaintive - or adorable, depending on your taste – and her top notes are a little thin, but she is in many ways ideal. Alfredo Mariotti is ridiculous as Maestro Spinelloccio the doctor and very funny, especially when paired with Gobbi in full whiny Buoso mode.

This is the recording whereby many older opera buffs will have come to know the piece and it stands the test of time – and it comes with a quadrilingual libretto.

(The bonuses of excerpts from two of Gobbi's most impressive tragic roles are a taster for the indispensable complete recordings under Santini.)

Lamberto Gardelli – 1962 (studio; stereo) Decca
Orchestra & Chorus - Maggio Musicale Fiorentino

Gianni Schicchi - Fernando Corena
Lauretta - Renata Tebaldi
Zita - Lucia Danieli
Rinuccio - Agostino Lazzari
Gherardo - Renato Ercolani
Nella - Dora Carral
Gherardino - Antoine de Ninno
Betto di Signa - Giovanni Foiani
Simone - Paolo Washington
Marco - Silvio Maionica
Ciesca - Miti Truccato Pace
Spinelloccio - Giuseppe Morresi

In good, stereo sound with a lively production and some very nice voices among the supporting cast, this has the look of a typically successful Decca recording from the early 60's; unfortunately, the whining, weedy and underpowered tenor of Agostino Lazzari is not among its assets. He is routinely overpowered by the other singers and the orchestra; clearly the role was beneath or unsuitable for Del Monaco, the tenor in the other components of Gardelli's triptych. The presence of Tebaldi is promising and she manages to school her big, by then occasionally scratchy, soprano to produce a more restrained and almost girlish sound in order to depict Lauretta as a naive innocent, but her account of her big aria is detached and she's no-one's ideal in that role. Corena's coarse, hammy Schicchi is another distinct blot - especially in comparison with Gobbi's superlative tour de force in the 1959 stereo set under Santini or the subtly amusing Schicchi of van Dam under Pappano.

Gardelli conducts expansively but there's not much sheen on the sound of the Florentine orchestra. Edward Greenfield in a generally sour assessment in "Opera on Record 2" complains of poor ensemble; I don't notice that but have to agree that overall this recording is a bit of a lemon.

Massimo Pradella – 1963 (radio broadcast; mono) Opera d'Oro
Orchestra & Chorus - RAI Milano

Gianni Schicchi - Tito Gobbi
Lauretta - Cecilia Fusco
Zita - Jolanda Gardino
Rinuccio - Renzo Casellato
Gherardo - Mario Carlin
Nella - Liliana Rossi (Perino)
Gherardino - Carlo Ambrosoni
Betto di Signa - Angelo Nosotti
Simone - Paolo Montarsolo
Marco - Mario Basiola jnr.
Ciesca - Luisella Ciaffi Ricagno
Spinelloccio - Giorgio Onesti
Pinellino - Christiano Dalamangas
Guccio - Enzo Viaro
Amantio di Nicolao - Carlo Badioli

This hissy, strident mono radio broadcast has been available cheaply on the bargain Opera d'Oro label but copies are currently hard to obtain – and in truth, that doesn't much matter as a glance at the cast will tell you that its *raison d'être* is Gobbi's presence – but why bother with this if you can have him in excellent stereo on EMI? That cast is actually quite good; Montarsolo – careful how you say that – repeats the rotund-voiced Simone he gave us in the EMI studio recording five years earlier and there are a few decent, second-rank or comprimario singers present like Mario Carlin. He is a light, pleasant tenor with a certain degree of penetration but was certainly never going to set the house on fire and there are no more stars other than Gobbi. Cecilia Fusco is an ordinary Lauretta with a rather lachrymose timbre and an edge in her tone. Nor is the conducting very exciting - in fact it veers between being rushed and leaden-footed. Don't bother unless you are very tolerant of ropey sound and/or a Gobbi completist. He is once more terrific here but hear him in much better sound and better accompanied in the Santini recording.

Lorin Maazel - 1976 (studio; stereo) CBS
Orchestra - London Symphony Orchestra

Gianni Schicchi - Tito Gobbi
Lauretta - Ileana Cotrubas
Zita - Anna Di Stasio
Rinuccio - Plácido Domingo
Gherardo - Florindo Andreolli
Nella - Scilly Fortunato
Gherardino - Alvaro Domingo
Betto di Signa - Alfredo Mariotti
Simone - Giancarlo Luccardi
Marco - Carlo Del Bosco
Ciesca - Stefania Malagù
Spinelloccio - Leo Pudis

Veteran Tito Gobbi here reprised one of his most acclaimed and character roles and despite the passing of the years delivered another master-class of vocal acting, mostly covering the dry top skilfully.

Casting Domingo avoids the mistake of skimping on the casting of Rinuccio; he delivers a typically smooth, rich-toned performance, coping well with the high-flying line of the role. Cotrubas is predictably delectable as Lauretta, my favourite in the role.

Maazel's conducting is decidedly relaxed throughout, hence he gives his singers plenty of space to make their points but there is sometimes a lack of tension and excitement which slightly compromises the atmosphere of these most specifically and uniquely atmospheric of Puccini's works and a certain slackness prevails. Nor is the supporting cast, while adequate, as characterful or distinguished as in some other recordings - there are a few wobblers - and some key comic events, such as the reading of the will, fall rather flat. The sound is good but the voice of Maestro Spinelloccio, the doctor, is oddly distanced when he visits.

Some will also lament the lack of a proper libretto – a standard omission in more recent bargain boxes – and providing only two tracking cues is absurd - but the synopses are quite detailed. Despite the welcome presence of Domingo and Cotrubas, given that we can hear Gobbi in sappier voice - albeit not in such modern sound – in his first recording in a livelier account, on balance I still prefer that to this, even if I want to return to Cotrubas's winning Lauretta.

János Ferencsik – 1982 (studio; digital) Hungaroton
Orchestra - Hungarian State Opera

Gianni Schicchi - György Melis
Lauretta - Magda Kalmár
Zita - Zsuzsa Barlay
Rinuccio - Denés Gulyás
Gherardo - Péter Korcsmáros
Nella - Zsuzsa Misura
Gherardino - János Német
Betto di Signa - Sándor Széki
Simone - József Gregor
Marco - Miklós Mersei
Ciesca - Klári Jász
Spinelloccio - Sándor Palcsó
Pinellino - András Rajna
Guccio - János Tóth
Amantio di Nicolao - István Gáti

Recorded in beautiful, full, spacious sound, the conducting and manner in general is quite deliberate to match; the opening ten minutes up until the discovery of the will have a kind of hypnotic intensity then the music blooms very satisfyingly. Indeed, this is one of the more leisurely accounts but it doesn't sound slack. The voices, too, are generally very pleasing, even if one or two female voices, such as Zsuzsa Barlay, are a bit shrill and wobbly; Denés Gulyás has a big, beefy, grainy tenor preferable to the under-sized tenorino too often wheeled out and he makes quite a showpiece of his aria. All the singers in general make an ample, generous sound, really singing out. Several of them will be familiar to Western European ears from the series of excellent opera recordings Hungaroton made in the 70's and 80's; I am thinking in particular of György Melis, Magda Kalmár and József Gregor who were stalwarts for that label along with Sylvia Sass. Kalmár doesn't have the sweetest sound but sings expressively and the top of her voice floats nicely. Gregor sings an authoritative Simone – the elder voice of the family. Melis has a pleasant baritone which sometimes assumes an intrusive beat on loud notes and lacks the colorific range of the greatest exponents of Schicchi and his vocal make-up is a bit too clumsy and inflexible to encompass soft subtleties but he makes a nice job of assuming a Buoso-voice and sing *con gusto*, creating a credible comic persona.

This isn't a first choice but there are many things about it which I like and enjoy and it certainly exceeded my expectations.

Giuseppe Patanè - 1987 (studio; digital) Eurodisc; BMG-RCA

Orchestra - Münchner Rundfunkorchester

Chorus - Chor des Bayerischen Rundfunks

Gianni Schicchi - Rolando Panerai

Lauretta - Helen Donath

Zita - Vera Baniewicz

Rinuccio - Peter Seiffert

Gherardo - Tullio Panè

Nella - Valerie Errante

Gherardino - Claudio Kunz

Betto di Signa - Gerhard Auer

Simone - Franco Federici

Marco - Robert Riener

Ciesca - Mechthild Georg

Spinelloccio - Walter Zeh

Pinellino - Marcel Rosca

Guccio - Axel Wagner

Amantio di Nicolao - Raimund Grumbach

This series from Eurodisc/RCA includes a lot of recordings - such as the *Il tabarro* and *Suor Angelica* conducted by Patanè which I previously reviewed - which were often pleasing without ever being first rank – but this last instalment exceeds those, having more zip and a superior cast, especially of the of principal singers. I love the recently deceased Panerai's neat, distinctive baritone and he deploys it here vividly without resorting to undue mugging; he must surely either consciously or otherwise have had Gobbi in mind for his characterisation of Schicchi imitating Buoso as he employs some of the same tricks very successfully and has sufficient bite in his tone to suggest Schicchi's sharp wit and steely resolve. The lovers are a fine pair: Helen Donath isn't especially distinctive but sings prettily and Peter Seiffert has sufficient vocal heft and stamina to make Rinuccio interesting; his aria is rousing and he cuts through the orchestra and ensemble impressively. That ensemble is engaging: Vera Baniewicz makes a better Zia than she did a Frugola, Valerie Errante is a shimmering Nella and Franco Federici is a solid, sonorous Simone. The co-ordination and interaction among the supporting singers in general are slick.

Patanè's conducting is more animated here than was sometimes the case and concerted passages bowl along zestfully. The digital sound is excellent.

I always encounter a surprise candidate for recommendation when I do these surveys; this is it – and it serves as a suitable memorial tribute to a great baritone.

Bruno Bartoletti – 1991 (studio; digital) Decca

Orchestra - Maggio Musicale Fiorentino

Gianni Schicchi - Leo Nucci

Lauretta - Mirella Freni

Zita - Ewa Podles

Rinuccio - Roberto Alagna

Gherardo - Ricardo Cassinelli

Nella - Barbara Frittoli

Gherardino - Barbara Guerrini
Betto di Signa - Giorgio Giorgetti
Simone - Enrico Fissore
Marco - Orazio Mori
Ciesca - Nicoletta Curiel
Spinelloccio - Colin Cue

The presence of the young, ardent Alagna is instantly promising, especially if you already know his excellent Rinuccio in the Pappano recording, although occasionally his tone turns nasal. Yes, Freni is rather too mature for the ingenue Lairetta – would it be unkind to suggest that she sounds more like Rinuccio's auntie? – and her vibrato has loosened and spreads but she retains much ample beauty of tone. Bartoletti knows how the opera goes and the supporting cast are good; Decca's digital sound is first class. The proverbial fly in the ointment here is Leo Nucci, already exhibiting signs of the vocal decline which set in so quickly after his promising international debuts in the late 70's and through the 80's. The bleat, blare and scooping up to higher notes soon vitiated his singing – and he is not especially dominant or characterful so a lot of nuances found by Gobbi and Panerai are missed. He does the obligatory "old geezer" voice well enough but that's easier caricature and the portrayal of Schicchi himself is bland. You have only to compare his coarse vocalisation with the elegant singing of his considerably older compatriot baritone Rolando Panerai to hear how crude and flawed his technique is – and that, for me, puts this dull recording out of the running. No Prince, no *Hamlet*.

Alexander Rahbari – 1993 (studio; digital) Discovery
Orchestra - Orchestre Symphonique de la RTBF

Gianni Schicchi - Eduard Tumagian
Lairetta - Miriam Gauci
Zita - Mabel Perelstein
Rinuccio - Yordy Ramiro
Gherardo - Franco Careccia
Nella - Diane Verdoodt
Gherardino - Oliver Van de Voorde
Betto di Signa - Frans Van Eetveldt
Simone - Marcel Rosca
Marco - Mark Meersman
Ciesca - Rachel Fabry
Spinelloccio - Jan Joris

In excellent digital sound, this is the third instalment in the Discovery trilogy recorded in Brussels with a good cast. Eduard Tumagian has an attractive, well-schooled baritone, reminiscent of van Dam's smooth voice. He is not especially distinctive but does everything right without exactly focusing our attention upon Schicchi the way the more dominant exponents can, as he sounds like an all-purpose Italianate baritone – not a bad thing but unmemorable.

Miriam Gauci's full, creamy voice gives considerable pleasure, despite a tendency to flap; Mabel Perelstein's Zita is similarly big but with a tendency to wobble. Yordy Ramiro is of the lighter, smaller-voiced type of Rinuccio who can struggle to make himself heard in ensemble so he bleats when he is straining to generate volume and his aria is thus an anti-climax. Marcel Rosca as Simone has a suitably cavernous bass and vocal acting of the cast in general is entertaining.

Rahbari's conducting is lively, flexible and alert; the swift mood-changes are deftly navigated by his excellent orchestra and apt sound effects add atmosphere. Given that this can be picked up at bargain prices, it's worth the investment perhaps as a taster or supplement but it is compromised by a weak Rinuccio and a lack of the individuality encountered in the best.

Antonio Pappano – 1998 (studio; digital) EMI
Orchestra - London Symphony Orchestra

Gianni Schicchi - José van Dam
Lauretta - Angela Gheorghiu
Zita - Felicity Palmer
Rinuccio - Roberto Alagna
Gherardo - Paolo Barbacini
Nella - Patrizia Ciofi
Gherardino - James Savage-Hanford
Betto di Signa - Carlos Chausson
Simone - Luigi Roni
Marco - Roberto Scaltriti
Ciesca - Elena Zilio
Spinelloccio - Enrico Fissore
Pinellino - Simon Preece
Guccio - Noel Mann

The surprise here is José van Dam who, given his usual demeanour as a dignified, serious and noble-voiced artist, reveals far more talent for comedy than I would have suspected - and even if his top notes are a bit dry, the same is true of Gobbi. He displays considerable acumen at mimicry and his forays into full voice fall gratefully on the ear, even if he defaults too obviously into his normal “Schicchi voice” during his croaking dictation of the will as Buoso, whereas Gobbi emphasises the name without breaking character. Gheorghiu is enchanting as Lauretta, pure and appealing - and to my ears preferable to Victoria de los Ángeles although I am aware that many will disagree. Likewise, many will prefer a virile and young-sounding and Roberto Alagna to the perfectly adequate Carlo del Monte as Rinuccio; Alagna is among the most boyishly appealing and convincing tenors in that role, even better than Domingo.

The cast features a good number of native speakers which helps in delivering the dialogue idiomatically and features singers spotted and recruited early by Pappano who are now quite famous names such as Patrizia Ciofi, who sings the top line in the “Goodnight, baby boy” trio very sweetly. Veteran Felicity Palmer makes a telling contribution with her tangy mezzo and fellow-veteran Luigi Roni makes a fruity Simone. I am impressed by Elena Zio as Ciesca and Enrico Fissore hams it up amusingly as both the visiting doctor with a speech impediment and the lawyer.

The sound is ideal: rich, full and beautifully balanced, the playing of the LSO very refined and Pappano's direction wonderfully detailed; the beauty and invention of Puccini's orchestration often take centre stage but Pappano is so delicate that I miss the thrust of more visceral versions which embrace the comedy with more abandon. Pappano does not quite achieve the fizz and spring of some earlier versions but anyone acquiring this as part of the 3 CD set will not be disappointed.

Recommendations:

Stereo sound at least, if not digital, is surely desirable, so goodbye to the three mono versions above, which, in any case, do not field the best casts or offer the best interpretations.

Ultimately, one has to concede the overall supremacy of Gobbi's 1959 stereo set under Santini as a nonpareil of vocal acting. The Pappano and Patanè recordings come a close joint-second but the former is available only as part of the complete 3 CD set or a download, whereas the RCA and EMI issues are each on a single CD. Outright failures are few, but I would avoid the Bartoletti and the Gardelli - and in any case the latter, too, is available only as part of the Decca set (or on two bargain

CDs on the Alto label, too); several others afford considerable pleasure but those three prevail as chief recommendations.

First choice:

Gabriele Santini – 1958

Second choices:

Patanè - 1987

Antonio Pappano – 1998

This concludes my survey of all three components of *Il trittico*, and given that the trio of recordings featuring Gobbi and de los Ángeles all came high in my recommendations, all the indications are that anyone wanting the complete triptych should go for the earlier, vintage EMI set, the second choice being the Pappano as a supplementary or more modern version. The Documents label has also issued a bargain set with the first two, earlier EMI recordings and Taddei's *Gianni Schicchi*, reviewed above – all mono, of course.

Ralph Moore