

Pagliacci Male



The works of Italian composer Ruggero Leoncavallo are little known save for his opera *Pagliacci* (“Clowns”), which was an instant hit when it premiered in 1892. But it nearly wasn’t. Leoncavallo initially titled the opera *Pagliacci Male*, or “Evil Clowns,” after a gothic horror story of the same name by Bram Stoker, the novelist who would later pen *Dracula*. But even for late 19th century Italian opera goers who enjoyed a good on-stage beheading or two, the plot was chillingly gruesome. It traced the unspeakable acts of Moe, Larry, and Bloodbath, three clowns who triple-handedly caused a spike in incidents of coulrophobia worldwide. Faced with negative music criticism, Ruggero withdrew the opera and rewrote the libretto himself. The rest is, of course, *storia pagliaccio*.