

France, Paris, Cafe Momus, set design for Act III in opera *La bohème* by Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924),  
performance at Paris Opera, November 23, 1973



FEBRUARY 14, 17, 19, 22 (M), 25, 28 (M), MARCH 3, 6, 11, 20 (M) 26, 28



# *La bohème*

Opera in Four Scenes

Music by Giacomo Puccini

Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica

Based on the book *Scènes de la vie de bohème* by Henry Murger

Sung in Italian

First performed by Sarasota Opera on February 11, 1960

2006 production created by Sarasota Opera

Conductor

Stage Director

Scenic Designer

Costume Designer

Lighting Designer

Hair & Makeup Designer

Chorus Master

Youth Opera Chorus Master

Assistant Conductors

Surtitle Supplier

Surtitle Translator

Victor DeRenzi

Stephanie Sundine

David P. Gordon

Howard Tsvi Kaplan

Ken Yunker

Sue Schaefer

Artyom Pak

Jessé Martins

Stefano Teani, Connor Buckley, Jordan Brooks

Words For Music

Victor DeRenzi

## CAST

Rodolfo, *a poet*

Marcello, *a painter*

Schaunard, *a musician*

Colline, *a philosopher*

Benoit, *the landlord*

Alcindoro, *a state councilor*

Mimi

Musetta

Parpignol, *a street vendor*

A Customs Sergeant

A Customs Officer

WooYoung Yoon ++

Filippo Fontana

Riley Findley \*

Young Bok Kim

Brian Kontes

Hans Tashjian

Ashley Milanese +

Virginia Mims

Konstantin Jan \*\*

Alejandro Cuellar \*\*

Gabriel Lockheimer Toso \*\*

Sarasota Opera Orchestra

Chorus: Sarasota Opera Apprentice and Studio Artists

Sarasota Youth Opera

*\*Studio Artist*

*\*\*Apprentice Artist*

*+The David and Edith Chaifetz Endowed Artist*

*++The Jan Schmidt Endowed Artist*

Production sponsored by Paul and Sharon Steinwachs

# LA BOHÈME SYNOPSIS

## SCENE I

### *In the garret*

Marcello, a painter, works on his canvas while Rodolfo, a poet, looks out the window. Rodolfo decides to burn the manuscript of his play to heat the room. The philosopher Colline arrives, soon followed by Schaunard, a musician and the fourth inhabitant of the garret. He has food, money, and wood, but he tells his friends to save the food for another time. Tonight is Christmas Eve, and he insists they dine out. The apartment erupts into turmoil when Benoit, the landlord, demands the rent. He is coaxed by Marcello into talking about his amorous adventures. With mock indignation, the bohemians condemn Benoit's marital infidelity and usher the landlord away without paying him. As his friends are leaving, Rodolfo decides to finish writing an article before joining them. Unable to write, Rodolfo answers a knock at the door. A young woman asks to have her candle relit but faints once inside the garret. After Rodolfo revives her, they are forced to search in the dark for her lost key after both their candles go out. The poet finds the key but convinces the woman he has not and gently touches her hand in the dark. Rodolfo tells her that he is a poet and the woman in turn explains that her name is Mimì, and she makes her living by embroidering. Mimì and Rodolfo profess their love.

INTERMISSION

## SCENE II

### *In the Latin Quarter*

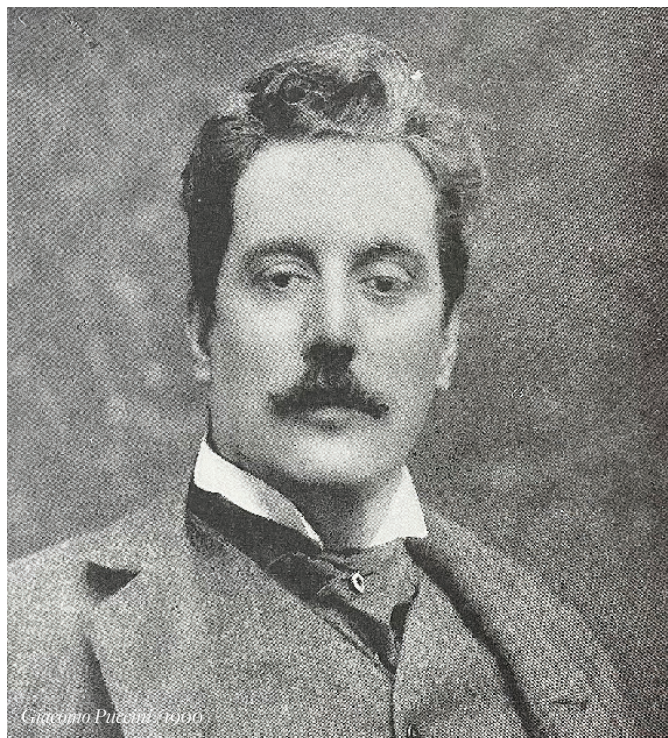
Outside the Café Momus, peddlers sell their merchandise to the revelers. The bohemians converge at the café, and Rodolfo introduces Mimì to his friends. She is readily accepted and tells them about a bonnet Rodolfo has bought her. Marcello is surprised when Musetta, his former lover, arrives with her current paramour, the state councilor, Alcindoro. Musetta's behavior embarrasses Alcindoro as she sings a song to rekindle Marcello's love. Sensing her attempt is successful, Musetta pretends to have a pain in her foot so as to get rid of Alcindoro. Alcindoro runs off to have Musetta's shoe repaired while Marcello and Musetta fall into each other's arms. The waiter presents a bill to the bohemians who cannot pay it. Musetta solves the problem by having the amount added to Alcindoro's bill.

INTERMISSION

## SCENE III

### *Barrière d'Enfer*

At the tollgate, guards admit workers and peasants into the city. Mimì, in ill health, finds Marcello at the tavern where Musetta and he are working and Rodolfo has recently arrived. Mimì explains that although she and Rodolfo have been living together, their relationship is not going well. Marcello urges her to leave when he sees that the poet is looking for him. Instead,



Mimì hides so she can observe the two. Rodolfo tells Marcello that he wants to separate from Mimì. What frightens him is Mimì's bad health: she is sure to die. Mimì overhears the conversation, and the men discover her as she coughs and weeps. Rodolfo tries to comfort her while Marcello jealously goes to find out why Musetta is laughing loudly in the tavern. Mimì tells Rodolfo that she can no longer live with him. They begin to reminisce as Marcello and Musetta argue. Mimì and Rodolfo decide to remain together until spring as Musetta and Marcello break up.

INTERMISSION

## SCENE IV

### *In the garret*

Several months later, both Rodolfo and Marcello desperately miss their former loves. Schaunard and Colline arrive with a meager meal. While much clowning ensues, Musetta bursts through the door and says that Mimì is at the top of the stairs, too weak to enter. Rodolfo brings Mimì in and makes her comfortable. When left alone, Rodolfo and Mimì relive moments from their first meeting. The others return and as they busy themselves, Schaunard notices that Mimì has died. Rodolfo sees his friends' reactions and, rushing to the bedside, discovers Mimì.

*World Premiere - Teatro Regio, Turin, February 1, 1896*



## LA BOHÈME BACKGROUND

*La bohème*, the fourth opera written by the Italian composer Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924), is one of the most performed and best-loved operas in the world today. Its place as a masterpiece in the operatic canon is anchored by the work's many, almost contradictory, elements. These include realistic characters displaying simple emotions, theatrical situations, narrative brevity, and poetic expansiveness. However, the path to creating this fresh and original opera was a tortuous one for Puccini and his librettists. It was only after numerous changes of structure and detail that the work which audiences recognize as Puccini's *La bohème* came into existence.

Following the huge critical and popular success in early 1893 of his third opera, *Manon Lescaut*, Puccini divided his attention by working on two new operas simultaneously. They were *La lupa* (*The She Wolf*), based on Giovanni Verga's short story of a peasant life in Sicily, and *La bohème*. Puccini first gave preference to *La lupa* but finally decided to abandon its composition in July of 1894. The composer incorporated some of the music he had already written for his Sicilian opera into his Parisian one. Even with all of Puccini's attention focused on *La bohème* its creation did not occur swiftly. The composer demanded many changes from the opera's two librettists: Luigi Illica, who was responsible for the scenario, and Giuseppe Giacosa, whose job was to versify the prose text Illica brought into the project. Because of Puccini's unhappiness with Illica's work, Illica complained to the publisher, Giulio Ricordi, that he had rewritten the complete libretto three times and certain sections four times in order to appease Puccini. Both librettists felt abused by the composer and each in turn wanted to resign from his assignment. Ricordi managed to keep Puccini, Illica, and Giacosa (whom he referred to as the 'Holy Trinity') working together.

The librettists' job adapting Henry Murger's book *Scenes de la vie de bohème* was not easy. French author Murger (1822-1861) wrote a work filled with many unrelated episodes and populated with numerous characters based on authentic Parisian figures. Illica and Giacosa had to create a coherent dramatic plot from the unconnected stories. Because of this challenge, the overall shape of the new libretto was much in flux. For example, the famous Act I meeting of Rodolfo and Mimì in the garret was not part of the opera's early stages. Ricordi himself, by suggesting that Musetta should reprise part of her waltz offstage, helped ease some of the problems in creating the current Act III. In the last act, Puccini was completely stymied in writing the music for four Bohemians in which they were to sing a toast to each other. Less than three months before the first performance, the composer simply deleted the section from the opera.

The world premiere of *La bohème* took place at Turin's Teatro Regio on February 1, 1896. It was at this same theater and on this date exactly three years before that *Manon Lescaut* had opened. *La bohème* on the whole was greeted in a friendly fashion by the audience but the majority of the critics were hostile. Expecting to hear an opera in



the romantically tragic vein of *Manon Lescaut*, the critics instead were offered a mixture of lighthearted and sentimental scenes in often conversational style. They condemned the new opera as a step backward and especially castigated Puccini for some of his harmonic touches. In spite of the critics' objections, by the end of its first month *La bohème* was given 24 performances before sold-out houses.

After the first production of the opera, Puccini again demanded new alterations from his librettists. These included the addition of a section in Act II between Parpignol's exit and Musetta's entrance and changes in the end of the same act in order to conclude it more effectively. Puccini even made changes to the melody of Musetta's waltz. Further performances followed in Rome, but the reception at first was lukewarm. However, with a production in Palermo, Sicily in April 1897, the opera achieved an unparalleled success, and its fame spread throughout the Italian peninsula. Performances of *La bohème* are today the backbone of operatic seasons around the globe.

Sarasota Opera has presented many productions of Puccini's works at the Opera House. These include *Madama Butterfly* in 1986, 1994, 2007, 2011, 2017, and 2023; *Il tabarro* in 1987; *Tosca* in 1988, 2004, 2009, 2015, 2022; *La fanciulla del West* in 1993; *La rondine* in 1999 and 2008; *Turandot* in 2013 and 2019; and a production of the composer's complete *Il trittico* (consisting of the three one-act operas *Il tabarro*, *Suor Angelica*, and *Gianni Schicchi*) in 1996. Sarasota Opera last produced *La bohème* in 2020.

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**Greg Trupiano (1955-2020)** joined Sarasota Opera in 1987 and was with the company until his death. He was also the Artistic Director of the Brooklyn-based *The Walt Whitman Project*, founded in 2000.