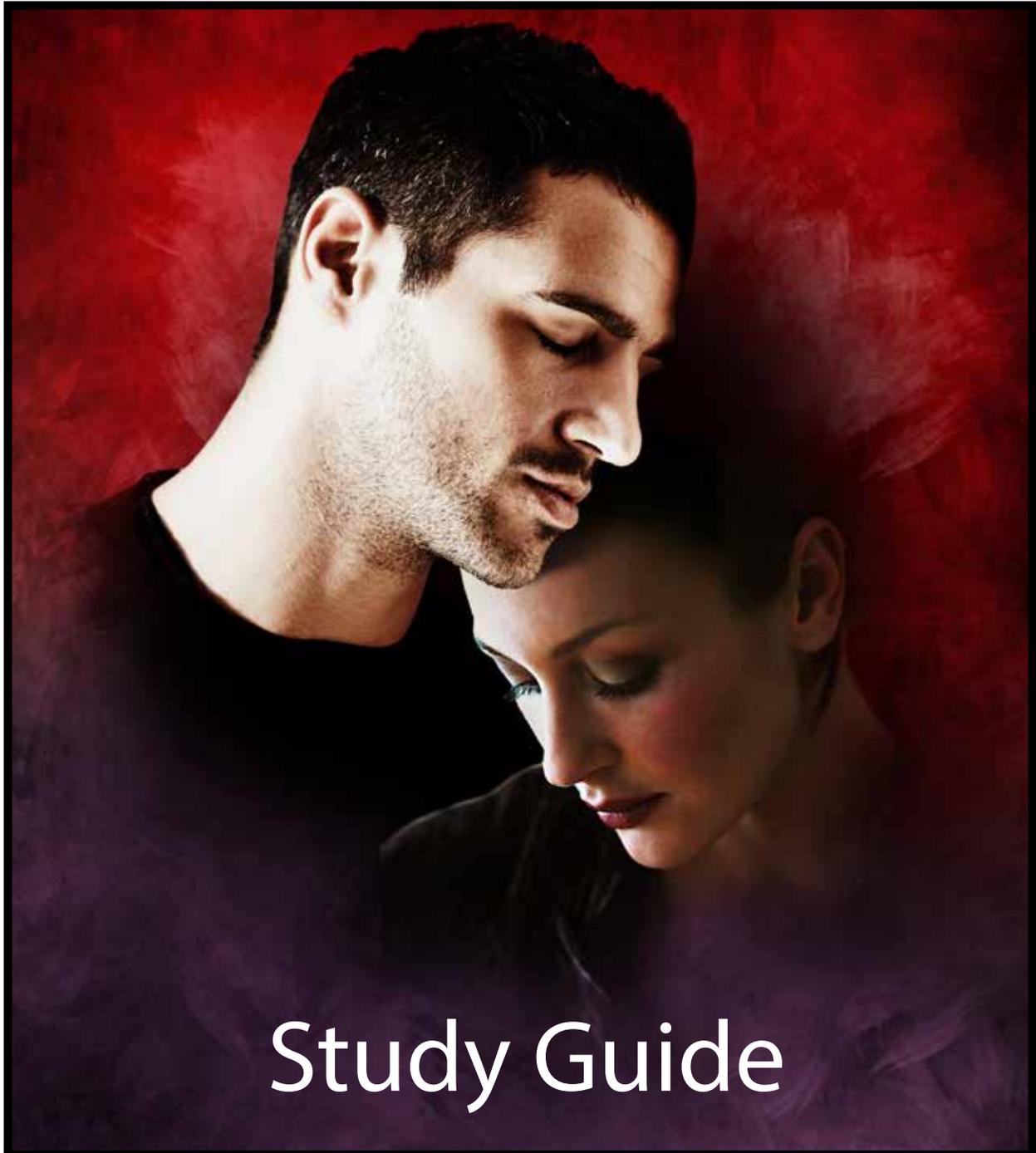




# LA BOHÈME

2013/14 Season



Study Guide

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# LA BOHÈME

# Three Great Resources for Teaching Your Students About Opera

## 1. Student Night

In order to expose student audiences to the glory of opera, Manitoba Opera created Student Night. It's an affordable opportunity for students to watch the dress rehearsal, an exciting look at the art and magic of opera before the curtain goes up on Opening Night, when tension is high and anything can happen. Please note:

- *La Bohème* is an opera in four acts, with a running time of approximately 2.5 hours.
- The dress rehearsal is the last opportunity the singers will have on stage to work with the orchestra before Opening Night. Since vocal demands are so great on opera singers, some choose not to sing in full voice during the dress rehearsal in order to avoid unnecessary strain.
- Tickets to Student Night are \$12 per person and are available to schools and education groups only.

For more information or to book tickets, contact Livia Dymond at 204-942-7470.

## 2. The Study Guide

This study guide has been created to assist you in preparing your students for their visit to the opera at the Centennial Concert Hall. Materials in the study guide may be copied and distributed to students.

## 3. Opera in a Trunk

Bring the magic of opera right into the classroom with our Opera in a Trunk. Each trunk includes costumes, props, books, a cd and dvd of the opera, photographs, activities, and a guide for putting it all together. Rental price is \$50 per trunk for a two-week period.

Available trunks:

*La Bohème*

*Aida*

*The Daughter of the Regiment*

*The Magic Flute*

*Carmen*

For more information or to book a trunk, contact Livia Dymond at 204-942-7470.

## *La Bohème*: Good To Know

- *La Bohème* (pronounced Lah Boh-EMM) is a tragic opera in four acts, composed by Giacomo Puccini with an Italian libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica.
- One of the most romantic operas of all time, *La Bohème* is a sweetly tragic story about love and loss set in the Latin Quarter of Paris in the 1830s.
- The story of *La Bohème* is based on the French novel *Scènes de la vie de Bohème* by Henri Murger, published in 1851.
- The world premiere took place on February 1, 1896, at the Teatro Regio in Turin, Italy. Since then, *La Bohème* has become one of the most frequently performed operas worldwide.
- *La Bohème* is the most performed opera at the Metropolitan Opera with 1245 performances since the year 1900.
- Jonathan Larson's 1996 musical *Rent* is based closely on the story of *La Bohème*. The popular Broadway musical is set in New York in the 1990s, instead of Paris of the 1830s, and its heroine is dying not of tuberculosis, but of HIV/AIDS.
- Pavarotti made his operatic debut in 1961 as Rodolfo in *La Bohème* at the Teatro Municipale in Reggio Emilia.
- News of Puccini's death reached Rome during a performance of *La Bohème*. The opera was immediately stopped and the orchestra played Chopin's *Funeral March* in honour of Puccini.
- *La Bohème* has been adapted for motion pictures on several occasions, most notably a 1926 silent film which starred Hollywood legends Lillian Gish and John Gilbert, and a 2008 production which starred opera singers Anna Netrebko and Rolando Villazón.
- Manitoba Opera last staged *La Bohème* in 2005 with Derek Taylor as Rodolfo and Janinah Burnett as Mimi.



Derek Taylor (Rodolfo) and Janinah Burnett (Mimi) in *La Bohème*, Manitoba Opera, 2005

# Production Information

## *La Bohème*

April 5, 8, 11

(Dress Rehearsal / Student Night: April 3)

Centennial Concert Hall

Music by Giacomo Puccini

Libretto in Italian by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica

Premiere Performance: Teatro Regio in Turin, Italy, on February 1, 1896

Approximately 2.5 hours in four acts, with two intermissions.

Sung in Italian with projected English translations.

### PRINCIPAL CAST

*In order of vocal appearance*

MARCELLO	<b>Keith Phares</b>	<i>Baritone</i>
RODOLFO	<b>Eric Fennell</b>	<i>Tenor</i>
COLLINE	<b>Giles Tomkins</b>	<i>Mezzo-soprano</i>
SCHAUNARD	<b>Peter McGillvray</b>	<i>Baritone</i>
BENOIT	<b>David Watson</b>	<i>Bass</i>
MIMI	<b>Danielle Pastin</b>	<i>Soprano</i>
ALCINDORO	<b>David Watson</b>	<i>Bass</i>
MUSETTA	<b>Lara Ciekiewicz</b>	<i>Soprano</i>

Manitoba Opera Chorus

Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra

Conductor	Daniel Lipton
Director	Brian Deedrick
Scenery and props	Edmonton Opera
Costumes	Malabar Limited
Lighting designer	Bill Williams
Stage manager	Robert Pel
Assistant stage managers	Candace Maxwell, Kathryn Ball
Projected titles	Sheldon Johnson

# Synopsis

## ACT I.

Paris, Christmas Eve, c. 1830. In their Latin Quarter garret, the painter Marcello and poet Rodolfo try to keep warm by burning pages from Rodolfo's latest drama. They are joined by their comrades — Colline, a young philosopher, and Schaunard, a musician who has landed a job and brings food, fuel and funds. But while they celebrate their unexpected fortune, the landlord, Benoit, arrives to collect the rent. Plying the older man with wine, they urge him to tell of his flirtations, then throw him out in mock indignation. As the friends depart for a celebration at the nearby Café Momus, Rodolfo promises to join them soon, staying behind to finish writing an article. There is another knock: a neighbour, Mimi, says her candle has gone out on the drafty stairs. Offering her wine when she feels faint, Rodolfo relights her candle and helps her to the door. Mimi realizes she has dropped her key, and as the two search for it, both candles are blown out. In the moonlight the poet takes the girl's shivering hand, telling her his dreams. She then recounts her solitary life, embroidering flowers and waiting for spring. Drawn to each other, Mimi and Rodolfo leave for the café.

## ACT II.

Amid shouts of street hawkers, Rodolfo buys Mimi a bonnet near the Café Momus before introducing her to his friends. They all sit down and order supper. A toy vendor, Parpignol, passes by, besieged by children. Marcello's former lover, Musetta, enters ostentatiously on the arm of the elderly, wealthy Alcindoro. Trying to regain the painter's attention, she sings a waltz about her popularity. Complaining that her shoe pinches, Musetta sends Alcindoro to fetch a new pair, then falls into Marcello's arms. Joining a group of marching soldiers, the Bohemians leave Alcindoro to face the bill when he returns.

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*La Bohème, Manitoba Opera, 2005*

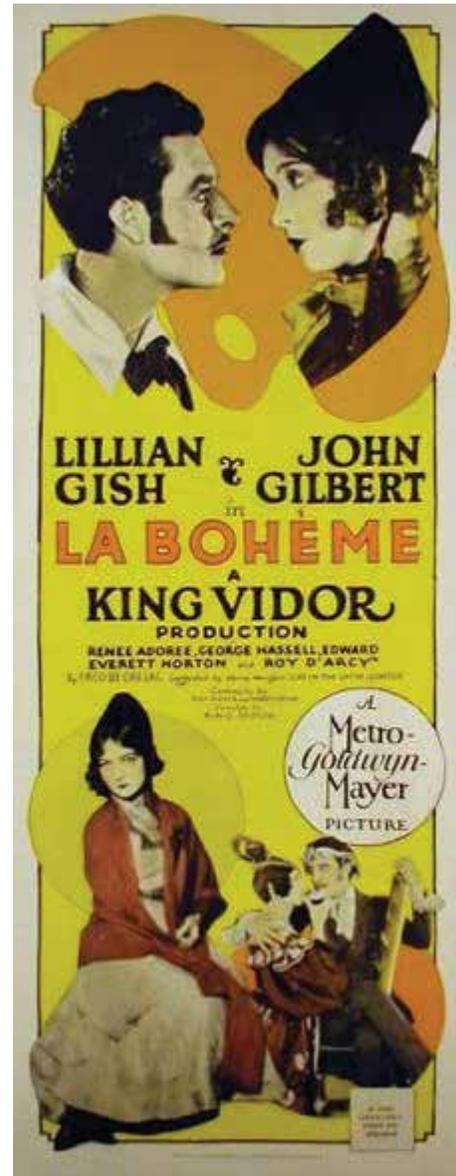
### ACT III.

At dawn on the snowy outskirts of Paris, a Customs Officer admits farm women to the city. Musetta and revelers are heard inside a tavern. Soon Mimi walks by, searching for the place where the reunited Marcello and Musetta now live. When the painter emerges, she pours out her distress over Rodolfo's incessant jealousy. It is best they part, she says. Rodolfo, who has been asleep in the tavern, is heard, and Mimi hides; Marcello thinks she has left. The poet tells Marcello he wants to separate from his fickle sweetheart. Pressed further, he breaks down, saying Mimi is dying; her ill health can only worsen in the poverty they share. Overcome, Mimi stumbles forward to bid her lover farewell as Marcello runs back into the tavern to investigate Musetta's raucous laughter. While Mimi and Rodolfo recall their happiness, Musetta quarrels with Marcello. The painter and his mistress part in fury, but Mimi and Rodolfo decide to stay together until spring.

### ACT IV.

Some months later, Rodolfo and Marcello lament their loneliness in the garret. Colline and Schaunard bring a meager meal. The four stage a dance, which turns into a mock fight. The merrymaking is ended when Musetta bursts in, saying Mimi is downstairs, too weak to climb up. As Rodolfo runs to her, Musetta tells how Mimi has begged to be taken to her lover to die. While Mimi is made comfortable, Marcello goes with Musetta to sell her earrings for medicine, and Colline leaves to pawn his cherished overcoat. Alone, Mimi and Rodolfo recall their first days together, but she is seized with coughing. When the others return, Musetta gives Mimi a muff to warm her hands and prays for her life. Mimi dies quietly, and when Schaunard discovers she is dead, Rodolfo runs to her side, calling her name.

- synopsis courtesy of Opera News



Movie poster of 1926 *La Bohème*  
Metro-Goldwyn Mayer film

# Principal Characters

In order of vocal appearance

Name	Description	Pronunciation
Marcello	a painter	Mahr-CHELL-loh
Rodolfo	a poet	Roh-DOHL-foh
Colline	a philosopher	Kohl-LEE-neh
Schaunard	a musician	Shoh-NAHR
Benoit	a landlord	Behn-NWAH
Mimi	a seamstress	Mee-MEE
Alcindoro	an elderly admirer of Musetta	Ahl-cheen-DAW-aw
Musetta	a flirtatious singer	Moo-ZET-tah



Mimi and Rodolfo costume designs by Adolfo Hohenstein for the premiere at Teatro Regio, 1896

## The Principal Artists

### **Eric Fennell** *Rodolfo*

American lyric tenor Eric Fennell has firmly established himself as a young professional in the world of opera and classical music. He has performed leading roles with some of North America's top companies including New York City Opera, San Francisco Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, and Seattle Opera. *La Bohème* will be Mr. Fennell's Manitoba Opera debut.



### **Danielle Pastin** *Mimi*

Quoted as having "...a lovely demeanor and irresistible creamy timbre" by *Opera News Magazine*, fast-rising young soprano Danielle Pastin is quickly gaining attention from opera houses around North America including the Metropolitan Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Arizona Opera, and Pittsburgh Opera. *La Bohème* will be Ms. Pastin's Manitoba Opera debut.



### **Keith Phares** *Marcello*

A noted interpreter of Mozart and bel canto repertoire, Keith Phares is regarded as one of his generation's most versatile artists. A graduate of the Julliard Opera Center, he has since sung with such companies as the Metropolitan Opera, Houston Grand Opera, San Francisco Opera, Washington National Opera, and Santa Fe Opera. *La Bohème* will be Mr. Phares's Manitoba Opera debut.



### **Lara Ciekiewicz** *Musetta*

Winnipeg soprano Lara Ciekiewicz has sung with companies such as l'Opéra de Montréal, Opera Lyra Ottawa, Toronto Operetta Theatre, and Pacific Opera Victoria. A graduate of l'Atelier lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal, Ms. Ciekiewicz also holds a Masters in Music (Opera) from McGill University and a Bachelor of Arts (Honours, Voice) from the University of Winnipeg. She last appeared with Manitoba Opera as The High Priestess in *Aida* in April 2013.



# The Composer

## Giacomo Puccini

Born: 1858

Died: 1924

Born in 1858 in Lucca, Italy, Giacomo Puccini came from a long line of professional musicians. Giacomo was only five years old when his father, organist and choirmaster of the San Martino church, died. The post as organist and choirmaster was held, through an uncle, to ensure Puccini could assume the post when he was old enough in order to maintain the line of Puccini musicians presiding there, dating back 124 years. Young Puccini began his career as organist there when he was 14.

Puccini was encouraged in his career as a composer by the positive reception for some of his church pieces and a cantata. *Aida*, the Verdi opera which he saw at age 18, also inspired him. Scholarships from a great uncle and Queen Margherita of Savoy enabled him to study at the Milan Conservatory from 1880-1883.

Puccini did not care for city life, but it did influence his work. His bohemian existence as a poor student, sharing an apartment with two other artists, later found expression in *La Bohème* (just as the writer, Henri Murger's early years as a poor author inspired his stories on which the opera was based). Though loosely associated with the verismo movement, which strove to create more natural and believable opera theatre, Puccini did not hesitate to write period pieces or to exploit exotic locales. In *Tosca* he wrote an intense melodrama set in Rome during Napoleonic times. For *Madama Butterfly* he chose an American story set in Japan. These three operas earned Puccini an international reputation.

Puccini experienced some initial failure with *Madama Butterfly* (1904) but his faith in the work led him to revise it until operagoers accepted it. This initial failure temporarily prevented him from new compositions, but a visit to New York ultimately resulted in his writing his first 'modern' work in *La Fanciulla del West*.

World War I caused the next major break in Puccini's creative life. Hostilities complicated his negotiations to write an operetta for Vienna, now in enemy territory. The operetta became instead a light opera, *La Rondine*, produced at Monte Carlo and welcomed coolly at the Met as "the afternoon of a genius." Puccini never regained his youthful eminence and romantic spontaneity, but he continued to work seriously, broadening his horizons.

A chain-smoker, Puccini developed throat cancer and was taken to Brussels in 1924 for treatment by a specialist. Though the surgery was successful, Puccini's heart failed, and he died shortly afterward. At the time of his death, he had been working on the most ambitious of his operas, *Turandot*, based on Schiller's romantic adaptation of a fantasy by Carlo Gozzi, the 18th-century Venetian satirist. In *Turandot* for the first time Puccini wrote extensively for the chorus, and he provided an enlarged, enriched orchestral tapestry that showed an awareness of Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* and other contemporary scores. Puccini died at age 65. Throughout his life, he wrote a total of 12 operas.



## The Librettists

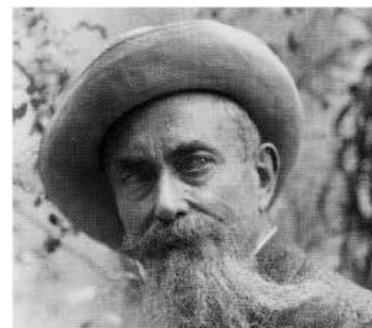
The partnership between Puccini and librettists Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa was organized by the publisher Giulio Ricordi in 1893. The head of the most powerful publishing firm in Italy during the 19th century, Ricordi had the ability to make or break any young composer who came along, much in the same way that a CEO of a major record label can do today.

Having taken Puccini under his wing, Ricordi was intent on hiring the best writers to work with the young composer on *La Bohème*. He found them in Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa. This collaboration was such a success that the three worked together on two other operas: *Tosca* (1900) and *Madama Butterfly* (1904).

### Luigi Illica (1857-1919)

Luigi Illica ran away to sea at an early age, and in 1876, he found himself fighting the Turks. Three years later, he moved to the relatively peaceful enclave of Milan, Italy, and there began his literary career, including a collection of prose sketches and plays.

He began writing librettos in 1889. His most famous librettos are three of Puccini's operas (*La Bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*) as well as Giordano's *Andrea Chenier*.



The reason Illica was always photographed with his head slightly turned is because he lost his right ear in a duel over a woman.



### Giuseppe Giacosa (1847-1906)

Giuseppe Giacosa began his professional life as a lawyer. He graduated in law from Turin University and immediately joined his father's firm in Milan. He moved permanently into the literary world when his one-act verse comedy, *Una partita a scacchi*, became a popular success. From 1888-1894 Giacosa held the chair of literature and dramatic art at the Milan Conservatory.

### What is a Libretto?

Libretto means "little book" in Italian. It refers to the written text of an opera set to music by the composer. Today, we commonly refer to an opera as being 'by' the composer of the music, but the text is a vital component and is normally written first. In earlier times it was often regarded as more important than the music, and it was common for audience members to purchase the libretto to read.

Early composers were usually contracted to set music to a pre-existing text. Only later did composers (such as Mozart and Verdi) work in close collaboration with their librettists. A few composers – notably Wagner – wrote their own texts.



# The Music of *La Bohème*

The music of *La Bohème* shifts between *parlando* (words sung in the manner of spoken speech), *arioso* (singing that is similar to but more melodic than *parlando*) and full-scale *aria* (a song for one singer which allows a character to express emotions and reflect on the drama).

## Music Excerpts:



*Rodolfo and Mimi* by Luigi Morgari (1857 - 1935)

### ACT I

The first meeting of the young lovers takes place when Mimi knocks on Rodolfo's door to ask for a match to light her candle. In Rodolfo's aria, *Che gelida manina* ("Your tiny hand is frozen"), he takes Mimi's hand and tells her about himself. She responds with her aria, *Si, mi chiamano Mimi* ("They Call me Mimi"), telling him her real name is Lucia but she's always called Mimi and that she is a seamstress and his neighbour.

In the beautiful love duet, *O soave fanciulla*, Rodolfo and Mimi passionately declare their new love for one another, Mimi singing how "Love, only you alone guide us!"

### ACT II

While the four roommates celebrate at the Café Momus, Marcello's former girlfriend, Musetta, arrives with a new admirer. Her aria, *Quando me'n vo*, also known as *Musetta's Waltz*, grabs the attention of everyone as she tries to make Marcello jealous.

### ACT III

Mimi, realizing she is dying, tells Rodolfo they should go their separate ways as she sings her aria, *Donde lieta uscì*. The contrasting moods of Mimi and Rodolfo compared to Marcello and Musetta is highlighted in the quartet *Addio, dolce svegliare*. The first couple sings of their past happiness while the other pair argue about Musetta's flirtatiousness. While they leave one another in anger, Rodolfo and Mimi decide to stay together through the cold winter months.

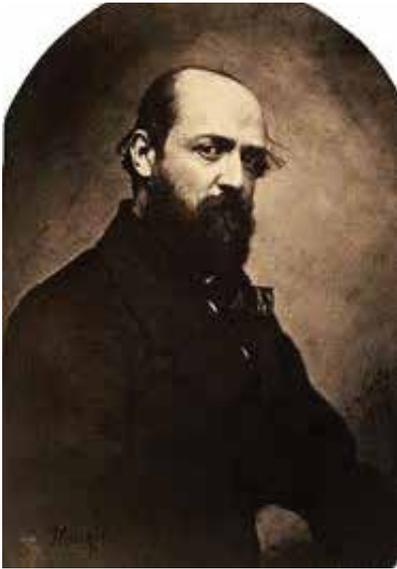
### Act IV

When spring returns, Rodolfo and Marcello cannot work because of their heartbreak over the girlfriends they loved, expressing this in their duet *O Mimì, tu più non torni*. Colline, their philosopher friend, sings his aria, *Vecchia zimarra*, telling how the coat he is selling to pay for a doctor for Mimi has been his friend and prized possession.

In Mimi's final moments, Puccini composed a feeling of breathlessness with the use of the eighth note rests in between each thought. This final scene has mostly *parlando* singing (singing in the manner of spoken speech). Underscoring is a slower, quieter orchestra—a pause before the end.

# The Bohemians

In 19th century France, bohemians referred to those who lived outside the norms of society. The name came from the term 'Bohemia' - the area now known as the Czech Republic. Since the Romani people, who were believed to have come from Bohemia, did not conform to traditional French society, the word 'Bohemian' was applied to people who were outsiders apart from conventional society and untroubled by its disapproval. The term was later used to describe a person who practices an unconventional lifestyle, especially an artist or writer.



Henri Murger in 1857

The characters in *La Bohème* are based on characters in *Scènes de la vie de Bohème*, a French novel written by Henri Murger and published in 1851. Murger wrote about the lives of struggling young artists and writers in Paris, living and loving in conditions of abject poverty. He was a Bohemian himself and historians speculate that many of his characters resembled people he had known throughout his life. Puccini was a bohemian as well during his young adult years, and he worked closely with the librettists in developing *La Bohème*, drawing on Murger's work as well as experiences in his own life as a young music student in Milan.

Although Paris of the 1830s was home to enormous wealth as well as abject poverty, restaurants and cafés were often frequented by all types of citizens, no matter their social status. Café Momus, the setting for Act II of *La Bohème*, was a real café in Paris, where young artists and writers would go to wine, dine, and socialize. The Latin Quarter, where the story of *La Bohème* is set, was a thriving artistic community at the time. Many significant young artists lived in this area including the playwrights/novelists Alexandre Dumas, Victor Hugo, Emile Deschamps, and George Sand, composers Hector Berlioz and Frédéric Chopin, actress Marie Dorval, and painter Eugène Delacroix.



*The Bohemian (or Lise the Bohemian)*  
by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, 1868, oil on canvas.

## The History of *La Bohème*

By the time Puccini took on the project of *La Bohème*, his fourth opera, he was in his thirties and no longer living the life of a struggling artist. With his previous opera, *Manon Lescaut*, which premiered in 1893, he had made his name in the world of Italian opera and was now an up-and-coming composer embraced by the artistic establishment.



Illustration by Joseph Hémard from *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*, Paris, 1921.

The subject of *La Bohème* is said to have come to Puccini's attention in 1891 as he was finishing up *Manon Lescaut*, although he didn't commit to writing an opera with a bohemian theme until 1893. In a chance meeting with composer Ruggero Leoncavallo, the two rivals learnt that they were both working on an opera based on Murger's *Scènes de la vie de bohème*. As the stories in Murger's novel were in public domain, they both continued working on their own versions of the work.

Though Leoncavallo's opera was very successful when it opened 15 months after Puccini's *La Bohème*, it never achieved the fame that Puccini's work did. Leoncavallo's *Bohème* is hardly ever staged anymore, despite the fact that it was well received when it first premiered and was also the first really successful role for the brilliant young tenor Enrico Caruso.

The premiere of Puccini's *La Bohème* took place on February 1, 1896, at the Teatro Regio in Turin, Italy. Although there were mixed reactions to the novelty of the subject matter, the opera soon became a success and within a few years, it was being performed in many of the leading opera houses of Europe, as well as the United States. *La Bohème* remains one of the most frequently performed operas ever written.



Original 1896 *La Bohème* poster by Adolfo Hohenstein

## Mimi's Last Breath

During the 1830's, when *La Bohème* is set, tuberculosis was a common contagious disease. It was often called consumption. Consumption was so common its symptoms were often romanticized. The phrase "femme fatale" means, literally, fatal women or women destined to die. The term was coined during this time and came to also mean dangerous women. These fragile flowers with delicate health brought out the protector in men of the time. Women had few choices in life and often if they were unmarried, those choices were rife with illness, poverty, and death. Often they needed a male protector. Mimi appeals to Rodolfo because of her illness and her vulnerability. Mimi is a composite character based on the characters Mimi and Francine from Murger's novel. In the novel, Mimi is a flirt and courtesan who falls in love with Rodolfo and leaves him for a wealthier man. Francine is a demure young woman dying from tuberculosis. She lives upstairs from the Bohemians. In the opera, the librettists Giacosa and Illica take the best of both characters and create Mimi, the consumptive seamstress. Mimi is described as beautiful with "pale cheeks red with their flush, pale skin, her consumptive cough, and her wasted frame." All of these characteristics were evidence of her condition. The first time Rodolfo and Mimi meet he knows she is ill and he fears her illness, both because of the risk of his poverty to her health and of contracting the disease from her. His fears, of course, were not unfounded, but what is tuberculosis?

Tuberculosis is an infectious disease caused by the bacteria *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. The disease is highly contagious and is contracted by breathing in infected sputum or drinking infected milk (this is very uncommon).

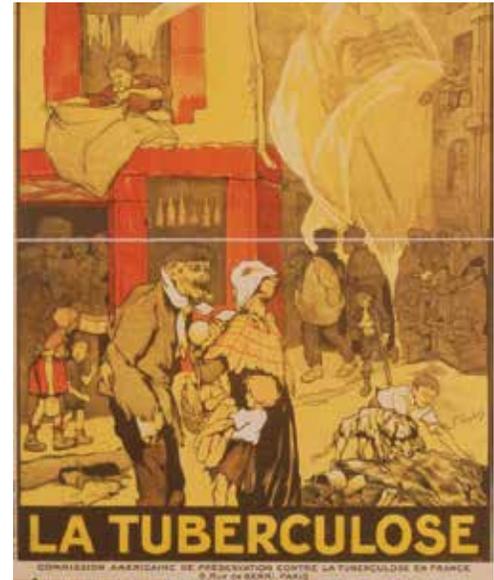
Tuberculosis primarily affects the lungs, although as the condition advances, it can affect other organs, the brain and the spine being most common. An infected person may not have evident symptoms because the immune system encases the bacteria in scar tissue and prevents them from spreading. Should old age or other factors (like illness, hunger or exposure) weaken the immune system, symptoms of the disease present themselves. Symptoms include night sweats, fever, fatigue, and weight loss. Eventually, the infected individual will cough up blood-flecked sputum caused by the eroding blood vessels of the lung. At the final stages of the disease, these blood vessels rupture and the patient dies in extreme pain.

Tuberculosis is credited with killing a billion people in the last 200 years and is responsible for the largest number of deaths in history. In 1945, streptomycin, a new antibiotic, was discovered and TB all but disappeared in the West. Incidences are on the rise again throughout the world, however, and more frighteningly, new strains which are resistant to regular course antibiotics are becoming more common.

*-Article written by Alexis Hamilton and re-published with the permission of Portland Opera.*

# TB in Opera and Literature

When one considers some of the greatest romantic operas ever written, it is interesting to note that three of them (*La Traviata*, *La Bohème*, and *Les Contes d'Hoffman*) focus on women dying of tuberculosis, the true symptoms of which are anything but romantic. Frightening coughing spasms, blood-stained sputum, burning fever, and an agonizing death all characterize the final stages of tuberculosis. Within the context of these operas and much Romantic literature, however, the symptoms emphasized are the “positive” ones: pale skin with high color of the cheeks and lips, slender, ethereal beauty, feverishly shining eyes and bursts of preternatural energy and creativity. In addition, the consumptive beauty was thought to possess unusual sexual appetites and powers of seduction. Her appearance became fashionable because of this sexualization.



Tuberculosis was a dreaded problem, as this French WWI poster indicates.

At the time *Traviata*, *Hoffman* and Murger’s novel were written, the causes of TB were unknown. Forty percent of the population carried the contagion and more people died of consumption than from any other cause. The only thing that we can compare it to in our own time is AIDS. Because so many suffered from the disease, and so little could be done to either cure or alleviate its symptoms, society romanticized it, applied positive attributes to it and shrouded it in gothic mystery. Susan Sontag, in her study *Illness as Metaphor* pointed out that TB was “both a way of describing sensuality and promoting claims of passion, and a way of describing repression...

and a suffusion of higher feeling.” TB became a double-edged sword, granting a heightened state of spirituality, but caused either by (on a positive note) a. excess sensitivity of feeling or b. immoral behavior, debauchery, sexuality, etc. As the illness progressed, it was thought that the sufferer’s soul grew more sweet and spiritual.



Mycobacterium tuberculosis

*-Article written by Alexis Hamilton and re-published with the permission of Portland Opera.*

## A Short Overview of Opera

An opera, like a play, is a dramatic form of theatre that includes scenery, props and costumes. In opera, however, the actors are trained singers who sing their lines instead of speaking them. An orchestra accompanies the singers. A conductor coordinates both the singers on stage and the musicians in the orchestra pit.

Opera consists of many dimensions: the human voice, orchestral music, the visual arts (scenery, costumes and special effects), drama (tragedy or comedy), and occasionally dance. The melding of these elements creates a multi-dimensional theatrical experience.

Opera has its roots in Greek drama and originated in Florence, Italy, in the late 1500's, with a small group of men who were members of the Camerata (Italian for society). The intellectuals, poets and musicians of the Camerata decided they wanted words to be a featured aspect of music. They used ancient Greek drama as their inspiration, including the use of a chorus to comment on the action.

The Camerata laid down three principles for their new art form:

1. The text must be understood; the accompaniment must be very simple and should not distract from the words.
2. The words must be sung with correct and natural declamation, as if they were spoken, and must avoid the rhythms of songs.
3. The melody must interpret the feeling of the text.

The first significant composer to fully develop the ideas of the Camerata was Jacopo Peri (1561-1633), whose opera *Dafne*, based on a Greek myth, was performed in 1594 and is regarded as the first opera.

Operas are divided into scenes and acts that contain different types of vocal pieces for one or many singers. An aria is a vocal solo that usually focuses on a character's emotions rather than actions. A recitative is sung dialogue or speech that occurs between arias and ensembles. It helps to further the action of the story and shape the relationships between the characters.

The story of the opera is written as a libretto: a text that is set to music. Composers write the score or the music for the opera. Sometimes the composer will also write the text of the



The Sydney Opera House

opera, but most often they work with a librettist. In the past, the libretto was also bound and sold to the audience. Today, the audience can easily follow the plot with the use of surtitles - the English translation of the libretto, which are projected onto a screen above the stage.

There are several differences between opera and musicals like *Phantom of the Opera*. One significant difference is the 'partnership' found between the music and the drama in an opera. While musicals use songs to help tell a story, in an opera, the music contributes to the drama, it does not only accompany it.

The musical style is another important difference between the two art forms; opera is usually classical and complex, while musicals feature pop songs and sometimes rock and roll. Also, singers in musicals have microphones hidden in their costumes or wigs to amplify their voices. The voices of opera singers are so strong no amplification is needed, even in a large venue. Furthermore, operas are almost completely sung while the use of spoken words are more common to musicals. There are some operas with spoken words and these are called singspiels (German) and opéra-comique (French). Examples are Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Bizet's *Carmen*, respectively.



The Metropolitan Opera (1937)

## Bringing an Opera to the Stage

Opera combines many great art forms to make something completely different. First and foremost are the performers who portray characters by revealing their thoughts and emotions through the singing voice. The next very important component is a full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singing actors and actresses, helping them to portray the full range of emotions possible in the operatic format. The orchestra performs in an area in front of the singers called the orchestra pit, while the singers perform on the open area called the stage. Wigs, costumes, sets and specialized lighting further enhance these performances, all of which are designed, created, and executed by a team of highly trained artisans.

The creation of an opera begins with a dramatic scenario crafted by a playwright or dramaturg who, alone or with a librettist, fashions the script or libretto that contains the words the artists will sing. Working in tandem, the composer and librettist team up to create a cohesive musical drama in which the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the composer and librettist entrust their new work to a conductor who, with a team of assistants (*repetiteurs*), assumes responsibility for the musical preparation of the work. The conductor collaborates with a stage director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The stage director and conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a design team which will take charge of the actual physical production.



Wendy Nielsen (*Tosca*) and Richard Margison (*Cavaradossi*), *Tosca*, Manitoba Opera, November 2010. Photo: R. Tinker

Set designers, lighting designers, costume designers, wig and makeup designers and even choreographers must all be brought on board to participate in the creation of the new production. The set designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using “blueprint” plans to design the actual physical set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the story line. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are specially trained in the art of stage carpentry. Following the actual building of the set, painters, following instructions from the set designers’ original plans, paint the set. As the set is assembled on the stage, the lighting designer works with a team of electricians to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric, as well as practical way. Using specialized lighting instruments, colored gels and a state-of-the-art computer, the designer, along with the stage director, create a “lighting plot” by writing “lighting cues” which are stored in the computer and used during the actual performance of the opera.

During this production period, the costume designer, in consultation with the stage director, has designed appropriate clothing for the singers to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of highly skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and sewers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using his/her individual measurements. The wig and makeup designer, working with the costume designer, designs and creates wigs which will complement both the costume and the singer, as well as represent historically accurate period fashions.

The principals are the people who have the major roles in an opera. They are professional singers. Principals usually arrive about three weeks before the first performance, with all of their music memorized and a good sense of their character. In rehearsal, they work with the director who helps them block each of the scenes. The director works with the principals to develop their characters and their voice. For the first two weeks they are accompanied by a rehearsal pianist. The week of the show, they move into the Concert Hall and begin work rehearsing on stage with the orchestra in the pit.



Michel Corbeil (*Monostatos*), Andriana Chuchman (*Pamina*),  
*The Magic Flute*, Manitoba Opera, April 2011. Photo: R. Tinker

# The Operatic Voice and Professional Singing

Operatic singing, developed in Europe during the 17th century, places intense vocal demands on the singer. Opera singers rarely use microphones, and therefore must project their voices to fill a large theatre and be heard above an orchestra.

An opera singer learns to use his or her body as an amplification device. By controlling the muscles of the diaphragm, the singer can regulate the amount of breath used. The diaphragm expands and contracts, regulating the air that passes through the vocal cords, causing them to vibrate. The speed of this determines the pitch. As the sound passes through the mouth, it resonates in the upper chest cavities and the sinus cavities of the face and head. These cavities act as small echo chambers that amplify the sound.

Each person's vocal tract is constructed differently. The roles that a singer performs are dependent mostly upon their vocal range, but within the vocal ranges, there are many colours and weights of voice that contribute. Vocal colour refers to the richness of the sound and vocal weight refers to how powerful a voice sounds.

Many singers begin their operatic training in university. Opera students study singing, music history, composition and vocal pedagogy (voice teaching). In addition to music classes, they study diction and often at least one foreign language. After university, their first professional roles are usually small parts, but if they continue to study and train, they may move on to the bigger principal roles.

Professional singers develop a number of roles in their repertoire. Since the principal artists are required to have their parts memorized before rehearsals begin, singers must prepare well in advance of each contract. Even well established singers have voice teachers, and often acting coaches, who help them refine their singing techniques.

Physical health is a major priority to a singer. Contrary to popular belief, not all opera singers are overweight. Opera singers once believed that excessive weight gave added volume and richness to the voice. However, now we know that physical fitness can give similar benefits to a voice. Plus, the overall health benefits of being in shape overshadow any loss of vocal power. Most singers, like professional athletes, try to avoid tobacco, alcohol, and caffeine.

## VOCAL CATEGORIES

### Women

**SOPRANO:** Similar to a flute in range and tone colour. Usually plays the heroine in the opera since a high, bright sound can easily suggest youth and innocence.

**MEZZO-SOPRANO:** Similar to an oboe in range and tone colour. Called an alto in choral arrangements, this voice can play a wide variety of characters including gypsies, mothers, and young men (trouser role).

**CONTRALTO:** Similar to an English horn in range and tone colour. Usually play unique roles including fortune-tellers, witches, and older women.

### Men

**TENOR:** Similar to a trumpet in range, tone, color and acoustical "ring." Usually plays the hero or the romantic lead in the opera.

**BARITONE:** Similar to a French horn in tone color. Often plays the leader of mischief in comic opera or the villain in tragic opera, sometimes even the hero.

**BASS:** Similar to a trombone or bassoon in tone color. Usually portrays old, wise men, or foolish, comic men.

HIGHER

LOWER

## VOCAL COLOURINGS

**COLORATURA:** A light, bright voice that has the ability to sing many notes quickly, usually with an extended upper range.

**LYRIC:** A light to medium weight voice, often singing beautiful sweeping melodies.

**DRAMATIC:** Dark, heavy and powerful voice, capable of sustained and forceful singing.

## Glossary: Important Words in Opera

**ACT:** a section of the opera that is then divided into scenes.

**ARIA:** means “air” in Italian. This is a piece of music written for a one singer (soloist), usually with instrumental accompaniment.

**ASIDE:** a secret comment from an actor directly to the audience that the other characters cannot hear.

**BARITONE:** the middle singing range of the male voice.

**BASS:** the lowest singing range of the male voice.

**BASSO BUFFO:** a bass singer who specializes in comic characters.

**BASSO PROFUNDO:** the most serious bass voice.

**BATON:** short stick that the conductor uses to lead the orchestra.

**BEL CANTO:** Italian phrase literally meaning “beautiful singing.” A traditional Italian style of singing emphasizing tone, phrasing, coloratura passages, and technique. Also refers to the operas written in this style.

**BLOCKING:** directions given to the performers for movement on stage.

**BRAVO:** a form of appreciation shouted by audience members at the end of a particularly pleasing performance. Technically, bravo refers to a male performer, brava refers to a female performer and bravi refers to many performers.

**BUFFO:** from the Italian for “buffoon.” A singer of comic roles (basso-buffo) or a comic opera (opera-buffa.)

**CADENZA:** a passage of singing, often at the end of an aria, which shows off the singer’s vocal ability.

**CASTRATO:** a castrated male prized for his high singing voice.

**CHOREOGRAPHER:** the person who designs the steps of a dance.

**CHORUS:** a group of singers of all vocal ranges, singing together to support the vocal leads.

**CLASSICAL:** the period in music which comes after the Baroque and before the Romantic, roughly from the birth of Mozart to shortly after the death of Beethoven. It represents the greatest standardization in orchestral form and tonality.

**COLORATURA:** elaborate ornamentation of music written for a singer using many fast notes and trills. Also used to describe a singer who sings this type of music.



Jeffrey Springer (*Turiddu*), *Pagliacci*, Manitoba Opera, April 2004. Photo: R.Tinker

**COMPOSER:** the individual who writes all the music for both voice and instrument.

**COMPRIMARIO:** a nineteenth century term referring to secondary or supporting roles such as confidantes, messengers, and matchmakers.

**CONTRALTO:** the lowest female voice range.

**CONDUCTOR:** the person responsible for the musical interpretation and coordination of the performance. The conductor controls the tempo, the dynamic level, and the balance between singers and orchestra. You will see this person standing in the orchestra pit conducting the musicians and the singers.

**COUNTERTENOR:** a male singer with the highest male voice range, generally singing within the female contralto or mezzo-soprano range.

**CRESCENDO:** a build in the volume or dynamic of the music.

**CUE:** a signal to enter or exit from the stage, to move or to change lighting or scenery; or a signal given by the conductor to the musicians.



Jeff Mattsey (*Don Giovanni*) and Stefan Szkafarowsky (*Commendatore*), *Don Giovanni*, Manitoba Opera, November 2003. Photo: R.Tinker

**CURTAIN CALL:** occurs at the end of the performance when all the cast members and the conductor take bows. This can occur in front of the curtain or on the open stage.

**DESIGNER:** a production can have two or three designers: a lighting designer, a costume designer, a set designer, or someone who is both costume and set designer. They work closely with the stage director to give the production a distinctive look.

**DIVA:** literally *goddess* in Italian. An important female opera star. The masculine form is *divo*.

**DRESS REHEARSAL:** the final rehearsal before opening night, includes costumes, lights, makeup, etc. Sometimes it is necessary to stop for adjustments, but an attempt is made to make it as much like a regular performance as possible.

**DUET:** music that is written for two people to sing together.

**ENCORE:** a piece that is performed after the last scheduled piece of a concert. An encore is usually performed because the audience wants to hear more music even though the concert is over.

**ENSEMBLE:** a part of the opera written for a group of two or more singers. This may or may not include the chorus.

**FALSETTO:** the upper part of a voice in which the vocal cords do not vibrate completely. Usually used by males to imitate a female voice.

**FINALE:** the last musical number of an opera or an act.

**GRAND OPERA:** spectacular French opera of the Romantic period, lavishly staged, with a historically based plot, a huge cast, an unusually large orchestra, and ballet. It also refers to opera without spoken dialogue.

**HELDEN:** German prefix meaning “heroic.” Can also apply to other voices, but usually used in “heldentenor.”

**HOUSE:** the auditorium and front of the theatre excluding the stage and backstage areas.

**IMPRESARIO:** the proprietor, manager, or conductor of an opera or concert company; one who puts on or sponsors an entertainment manager, producer.

**INTERLUDE:** a short piece of instrumental music played between scenes and acts.

**INTERMISSION:** a break between acts of an opera. The lights go on and the audience is free to move around.

**LIBRETTIST:** the writer of the opera's text.

**LIBRETTO:** Italian for *little book*. It is the text or story of the opera.

**LYRIC:** used to describe a light-to-medium-weight voice with an innocent quality, capable of both sustained, forceful singing and delicate effects.

**MAESTRO:** means "master" in Italian. Used as a courtesy title for the conductor (male or female).

**MARK:** to sing, but not at full voice. A full-length opera is very hard on a singer's voice, so most performers mark during rehearsals. During the dress rehearsal singers try to sing at full voice for part, if not all, of the rehearsal.

**MEZZO-SOPRANO:** the middle singing range for a female voice.

**MOTIF OR LEITMOTIF:** a recurring musical theme used to identify an emotion, person, place, or object.

**OPERA:** a dramatic presentation which is set to music. Almost all of it is sung, and the orchestra is an equal partner with the singers. Like a play, an opera is acted on stage with costumes, scenery, makeup, etc. Opera is the plural form of the Latin word *opus*, which means "work."

**OPERA BUFFA:** an opera about ordinary people, usually, but not always comic. First developed in the 18th century.

**OPERA SERIA:** a serious opera. The usual characters are gods and goddesses, or ancient heroes.

**OPERA-COMIQUE:** (*singspiel*) a form of opera which contains spoken dialogue.

**OPERETTA:** lighthearted opera with spoken dialogue, such as a musical.

**ORCHESTRA:** an ensemble, led by a conductor, that is comprised of string, woodwind, brass and percussion instruments.

**ORCHESTRA PIT:** sunken area in front of the stage where the orchestra sits.

**OVERTURE:** an orchestral introduction to the opera played before the curtain rises. Usually longer than a prelude and can be played as a separate piece.

**PITCH:** how high or low a note sounds.

**PRELUDE:** a short introduction that leads into an act without pause.

**PRIMA DONNA:** literally *first lady* in Italian. The leading woman in an opera. Because of the way some of them behaved in the past, it often refers to someone who is acting in a superior and demanding fashion. The term for a leading man is *primo uomo*.

**PRINCIPAL:** a major singing role, or the singer who performs such a role.

**PRODUCTION:** the combination of sets, costumes, props, and lights, etc.

**PROPS:** objects carried or used on stage by the performers.

**PROSCENIUM:** the front opening of the stage which frames the action.

**QUARTET:** four singers or the music that is written for four singers.

**RAKED STAGE:** a stage that slants downwards towards the audience.

**RECITATIVE:** lines of dialogue that are sung, usually with no recognizable melody. It is used to advance the plot.

**REHEARSAL:** a working session in which the singers prepare for public performance.

**SCORE:** the written music of an opera or other musical work.

**SERENADE:** a piece of music honouring someone or something, an extension of the traditional performance of a lover beneath the window of his mistress.

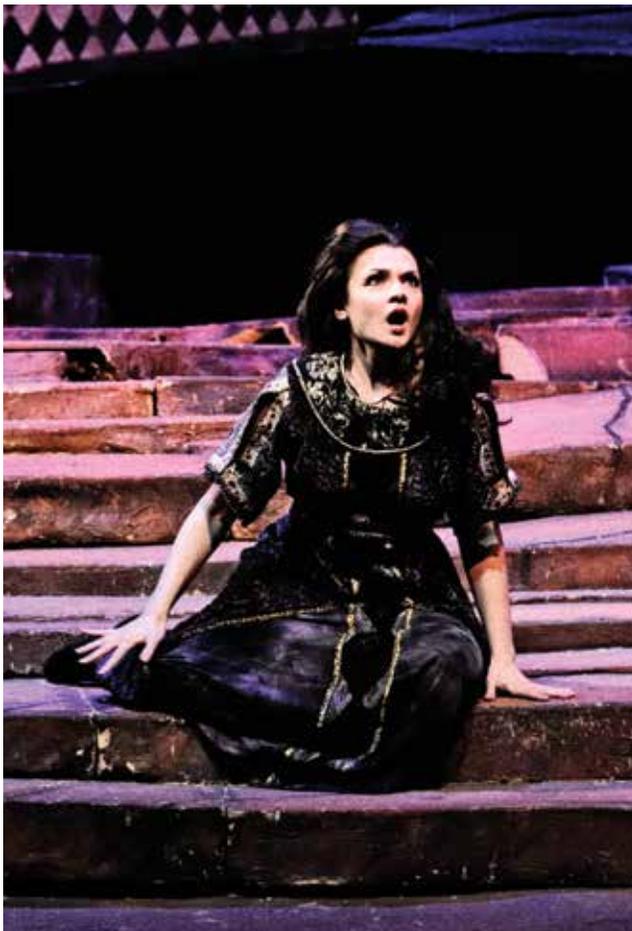
**SITZPROBE:** the rehearsal held on to the main stage for the first time. The entire opera is sung through without any costumes or blocking.

**SOPRANO:** the highest range of the female singing voice.

**SOUBRETTE:** pert young female character with a light soprano voice.

**SPINTO:** a lyric voice that has the power and incisiveness for dramatic climaxes.

**STAGE AREAS:** refers to the various sections of the stage as seen by those on stage.



Andriana Chuchman (*Pamina*), *The Magic Flute*, Manitoba Opera, April 2011. Photo: R.Tinker

**STAGE DIRECTOR:** the person in charge of the action on stage. He or she shows the singers, chorus and cast where and when to move and helps them create their characters. The stage director develops a concept for how the entire performance should look and feel. He or she works closely with the stage managers, lighting designer, set designers, costume designer, and wig and makeup artists to bring his or her vision into reality.

**STAGE MANAGER:** the person who coordinates and manages elements of the performance.

**SUPERNUMERARIES:** appear on stage in costume in non-singing and usually, non-speaking roles.

**SURTITLES:** the English translations of the opera's language, in this production Italian, that are projected above the stage during a performance to help the audience follow the story, much like subtitles in a foreign film.

**SYNOPSIS:** a short summary of the story of the opera.

**TABLEAU:** occurs at the end of a scene or act, when all cast members on stage freeze in position and remain that way until the curtain closes. It looks as though that moment has been captured in a photograph.

**TEMPO:** speed of the music.

**TENOR:** the highest natural adult male voice.

**TRILL:** very quick alternation between two adjacent notes. See coloratura.

**TRIO:** an ensemble of three singers or the music that is written for three singers.

**TROUSER ROLE:** the role of an adolescent boy or young man, written for and sung by a woman, often a mezzo-soprano. Also known as a pants role.

**VERISMO:** describes a realistic style of opera that started in Italy at the end of the 19th century.

# Audience Etiquette

*The following will help you (and those around you) enjoy the experience of a night at the opera:*

- Dress to be comfortable. Many people enjoy dressing up in formal attire, but this is optional and people attend the opera wearing all varieties of clothing.
- Arrive on time. Latecomers disturb the singers and others in the audience. Latecomers will only be seated at suitable breaks - often not until intermission.
- Find your seat with the help of your teacher or an usher and remember to thank them.
- Remove your hat. This is customary and is respectful to the artists and to people sitting behind you.
- Turn off, tune in. Switch off all electronic devices including cell phones, smart phones, iPods, pagers, and digital watch alarms.
- Leave your camera at home and do not use the camera function on your phone during a performance. This can be very disturbing to the artists and audience members.
- Find the “EXIT” signs. Look for the illuminated signs over the doors. You always want to know where the nearest emergency exit is in a theatre.
- If you think you might need a breath mint or cough drop, unwrap it before the performance.
- Settle in and get comfortable before the performance begins. Read your program. This tells you what performance you’re about to see, who created it, and who’s performing in it. You might like to read a synopsis of the opera before it begins.
- Clap as the lights are dimmed and the conductor appears and bows to the audience. Watch as the conductor then turns to the orchestra and takes up his or her baton to signal the beginning of the opera.
- Listen to the prelude or overture before the curtain rises. It is part of the performance and an opportunity to identify common musical themes that may reoccur during the opera.
- Save all conversations, eating, drinking, and chewing gum, for the intermission. Talking and eating can be disruptive to other audience members and distracts from your ability to be absorbed by the show. The audience is critical to the success of the show – without you, there can be no performance.
- Sit still. Only whisper when it is absolutely necessary, as a whisper is heard all over the theatre, and NEVER stand during the performance, except in the case of an emergency.
- Read the English translations projected above the stage.
- Feel free to laugh when something is funny – this is a performance and you are expected to respond!
- Listen for subtleties in the music. The tempo, volume and complexity of the music and singing often depict the “feeling” or “sense” of the action or character.
- Notice repeated words or phrases; they are usually significant.
- Applaud (or shout Bravo!) at the end of an aria or chorus piece to show your enjoyment of it. The end of a piece can be identified by a pause in the music.
- Finally, have fun and enjoy the show!

# Manitoba Opera

Manitoba Opera was founded in 1969 by a group of individuals dedicated to presenting the great works of opera to Manitoban audiences. Manitoba Opera is the province's only full-time professional opera company. The company attracts internationally renowned artists, highlights the best local talent, and is supported by the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra under the direction of internationally renowned conductors. Manitoba Opera celebrated its 35th Season in 2007/08 by presenting the world premiere of an opera commissioned by the company, *Transit of Venus*.

## Chorus

The Manitoba Opera Chorus, under the direction of Chorus Master Tadeusz Biernacki, is hailed for their excellent singing and acting abilities. The chorus boasts a core of skilled singers who give generously of their time and talents. Some are voice majors at university, a few are singing teachers, but most work in jobs that aren't music related.



*Carmen*, Manitoba Opera, April 2010. Photo: R.Tinker

## Staff

Larry Desrochers  
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Tadeusz Biernacki  
*Chorus Master & Assistant Music Director*

Michael Blais  
*Director of Administration*

Valorie Block  
*Event & Sponsorship Manager*

Livia Dymond  
*Education & Outreach Coordinator*

Sheldon Johnson  
*Director of Production*

Natasha MacDonald-Sawh  
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Tyrone Paterson  
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# Student Activities

## Activity #1: Using the Five C's, Have your Students Analyze the Opera as Drama

**CHARACTERS:** Are they interesting? Believable? Are their actions, words, thoughts consistent?

**CONFLICT:** What conflicts are established? How are they resolved?

**CLIMAX:** To what climax does the conflict lead?

**CONCLUSION:** How well does the conclusion work? Is it consistent? Satisfying? Believable?

**CONTEXT:** What are the historical, physical, and emotional settings? Sets and costumes?

- Give students the synopsis to read and have them re-tell the story after they have read it.
- Ask comprehensive questions.
- Present and discuss the composer and librettist.
- Listen to excerpts from the opera. Watch a DVD of the opera. Have students identify and recognize recurring themes.
- Discuss the historical background, emphasizing the visual and performing arts and history-social science frameworks. Discuss the results of certain events. Whom did they affect? How? Why? Did any changes occur as a result?
- Review the glossary of terms.
- Have the students watch for references to themes in the opera in their everyday lives. The internet, radio, TV, magazines, and movies often refer back to classics.

## Activity #2: Create a Poster, Set, Costume, Press Release, or Ad

- Choose a time and place to set your production.
- Have the students design a poster for *La Bohème* Student Night at the Opera, including such details as the date, the time, and the people involved.
- Have them draw a set for a production of the opera.
- They might also sketch a costume, wig, and makeup for a character in *La Bohème*.
- Have the students write a press release about *La Bohème* Student Night at the Opera, including the date, the time, the people involved, and why it would be exciting or fun to attend.
- Have the students create an ad for the opera. Include whatever you feel is the biggest “selling point” of the opera - what makes it exciting? Why should people come to see it?

### Activity #3: A Review

#### *Step 1 – Think-Group-Share*

Individually, students will write, in point form, the answers to the following questions:

1. What did you like about the opera? What did you dislike?
2. What did you think about the sets, props, and costumes?
3. If you were the stage director, would you have done something differently? Why?
4. What were you expecting? Did it live up to your expectations?
5. What did you think of the singers' portrayal of their characters?

Break the students into groups to discuss their feelings and reactions to the production. Have the students write on poster papers their answers or important points of their discussion. Encourage the students to go beyond the questions posed.

#### *Step 2 – Class Discussion*

Have the whole class examine the poster papers and discuss the different ideas from each group.

#### *Step 3 – Outlining your review*

Go over the essential aspects of a review including: a clearly stated purpose, a coherent comparison/contrast organizational pattern, a summary paragraph capturing the interest of the reader, precise nouns, revision for consistency of ideas. You might give your students a few samples of reviews for fine arts events – or ask them to bring in some reviews they find themselves. Have the students fill out the review outline, then complete a rough draft.

1. Purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)
2. Plot Synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)
3. Paragraph 1 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
4. Paragraph 2 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
5. Paragraph 3 (compare and contrast things you liked or didn't like)
6. Summary/Closing Paragraph

#### *Step 4 - Peer Conferencing*

Students will exchange reviews to critique and edit. Encourage the students to focus on effective coordination of ideas in sentences and the correct use of grammar and punctuation.

#### *Step 5 - Creating the final draft*

Have students make the appropriate adjustments to their reviews. You could also have the students type the pieces and organize them into a newspaper.

### **Activity #4: Have your students act out the story**

Have students consider the characters and the role they play in the story. Choose one of the following:

RODOLFO | MIMI | MARCELLO | MUSETTA

If you were going to play this character, you would have to discover, create, and imagine background, personality, and physical qualities. Some clues are provided in the story and the music and some you need to make up yourself.

*Pretend you are that character and answer the following questions:*

1. What motivates you? How does this affect your actions? What obstacles stand in your way?
2. What steps in the opera do you take to achieve your objectives? What are the results?
3. What obstacles are beyond your control (laws, social status, others' actions)?
4. What are your (character's) greatest strengths? Greatest weaknesses?
5. What is your relationship to the other characters?
6. How is the character's personality expressed through the music of the opera?
7. Can you think of a modern-day character who has similar characteristics and traits?
8. If this character were alive today, how would s/he be more or less successful?
9. What different steps would s/he take to achieve an objective?

### **Activity #5: Write a Biography**

Have students research and write a biography of the playwright, composer, librettist or one of the characters.

### **Activity #6: Create a Journal or Blog from the Point of View of a Character**

Have the students choose a point of conflict, and write a journal or blog of those events from a character's point of view.

### **Activity #7: Write a Letter from One Character to Another**

Have the students choose a moment in the story and have one character write a letter to another, giving them advice for the future. Ethical questions raised by the plot or characters can be addressed.

### **Activity #8: Cast *La Bohème***

Have the students cast modern-day singers or bands as the performers in *La Bohème*. Who did you choose? What are their costumes like? What did you base your decisions on?

### **Activity #9: Tweet About *La Bohème***

Have the students tweet about *La Bohème* Student Night by writing out a twitter in 140 characters. Have students read their tweet aloud to the class and post them to Manitoba Opera's Facebook wall. Try to be clever, funny, or start a conversation.

### **Activity #10: The World in the 1830s**

**Objective:** To learn about the world as it was in the 1830s, the time of *La Bohème*.

- Have the students investigate the status of Canada and Manitoba in the 1830s. What was happening in Paris, France? And elsewhere around the world?
- Ask the students to compare and contrast what life would have been like in the 1830s vs. today. Which modern realities (television, electric lights, cars, mass communication, etc.) didn't exist back then? How would these differences have affected people's lifestyle and what they thought about the world around them?

### **Activity #11: *La Bohème* Mood Board**

Often before artists and designers create their work, they make a mood board to set the tone for the piece. This is usually a poster-sized piece of paper covered in images and words, usually torn from the pages of magazines and newspapers, that together communicates the complex mood of the piece in a way that words can't. It's the same as making a collage, except a mood board is for the purpose of communicating a focused concept.

Have your students go through a stack of old magazines and newspapers to create a mood board for *La Bohème*. They can create one each or work together on a large one for the class. Consider elements like colours, textures, phrases, faces, patterns, and images that represent the opera.

## Activity #12: Opera Comprehension Tests

### *The Opera*

1. \_\_\_\_\_ A theatrical production incorporating both vocal and instrumental music, drama, and sometimes dance.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ The lowest male vocal range.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ An instrumental introduction to an opera.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ The area where the orchestra is seated.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ Considered the first opera.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ A song for solo voice in an opera.
7. \_\_\_\_\_ The highest female vocal range.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ A song for two voices.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ The lowest female vocal range.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ The Italian word meaning "little book."
11. \_\_\_\_\_ The middle male vocal range.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ He/she is in charge of all the action on the stage.

*La Bohème*

1. In which city was the premiere performance of *La Bohème*? \_\_\_\_\_
2. In what year did it premiere? \_\_\_\_\_
3. What is the name of Mimi's illness? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Where does this four-act love story take place? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What is Mimi's profession? \_\_\_\_\_
6. The role of Mimi is sung by a \_\_\_\_\_ (name the singing voice).
7. The role of Rodolfo is sung by a \_\_\_\_\_ (name the singing voice).
8. Who is the composer? \_\_\_\_\_
9. What language is the opera sung in? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Around what year does the story take place? \_\_\_\_\_
11. What does Mimi ask Rodolfo for in the first act? \_\_\_\_\_
12. What type of artist is Rodolfo? \_\_\_\_\_

## Answer Key

### General Opera

1. Opera
2. Bass
3. Overture
4. Orchestra pit or “the pit”
5. *Daphne*
6. Aria
7. Soprano
8. Duet
9. Contralto
10. Libretto
11. Baritone
12. Stage director

### *La Bohème*

1. Turin, Italy
2. 1896
3. Tuberculosis
4. Paris
5. Seamstress
6. Soprano
7. Tenor
8. Giacomo Puccini
9. Italian
10. 1830
11. a match for her candle
12. a poet

Manitoba Opera would be pleased to receive a copy of any work related to this opera produced by your students. Please forward to:

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or

ldymond@manitobaopera.mb.ca

# Winnipeg Public Library Resources

## Books

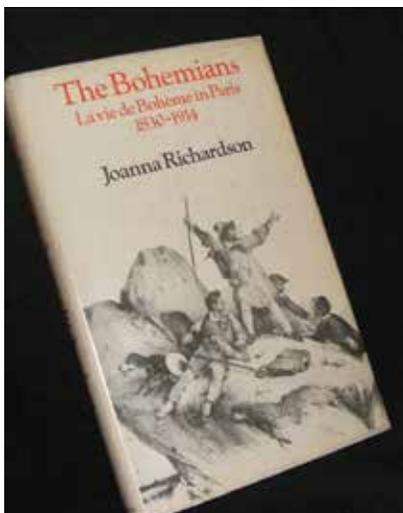
The New Grove Masters of Italian Operas:  
Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Verdi, Puccini  
[by Philip Gossett et al.]  
New York: Norton, c1983  
Call No.: 782.1092 NEW

Sopranos, mezzos, tenors, bassos, and  
other friends [by Schuyler Chapin]  
New York: Crown, c1995  
Call No.: 782.1092 CHA

Bohemian Paris: culture, politics, and the  
boundaries of bourgeois life, 1830-1930  
[by Jerrold E. Seigel]  
New York: Viking, c1986  
Call No.: 944.36 SEI

Scènes de la vie de Bohème  
[by Henry Murger]  
Ottawa, eBooksLib, c2004  
Call No.: ONLINE

The Bohemians: la vie de Bohème in  
Paris, 1830-1914 [by Joanna Richardson]  
London: Macmillan, c1969  
Call No.: 709.443 RIC



## Scores

La Bohème / music by Giacomo Puccini;  
libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa; English  
translation by Ruth and Thomas Martin  
New York: G. Schirmer, c1954  
Call No.: SCORE 782.1 PUC

## Sound Recordings

La Bohème [Puccini]  
England: EMI Records, [1956], p1986  
Call No.: CD OPERA PUCCINI BOH

Puccini without words  
CBS Records, 1990  
Call No.: CD OPERA PUCCINI OPE

Puccini [Puccini]  
EMI Classics, p2004  
Call No.: CD OPERA PUCCINI OPE

## DVD Recording

La Bohème [Puccini]  
Kultur International Films, c2008 ;  
West Long Branch, 2009.  
Call No.: DVD 792.542 BOH

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La Bohème Study Guide. Canadian Opera Company. 1 November 2013. < [http://files.coc.ca/studyguides/Boheme\\_StudyGuide\\_1314.pdf](http://files.coc.ca/studyguides/Boheme_StudyGuide_1314.pdf)>

"Synopsis of La Bohème." The Metropolitan Opera Guild. 30 September 2013. < <http://www.metoperafamily.org/metopera/season/synopsis/boheme>>

Sadie, Stanley, ed. The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

## **Works Cited**

(General)

*This study guide was compiled accumulatively and includes information from the following sources accessed at various unknown dates since 2000:*

ClassicalMusic.about.com  
BehindTheNames.com  
Bellevue University  
The Billboard Illustrated Encyclopedia of Opera  
The Canadian Opera Company  
Encyclopedia of Manitoba  
Encyclopedia of the Opera by David Ewen  
Fort Worth Opera Study Guide  
GradeSaver.com  
La Scena  
Lyric Opera of Kansas City  
Manitoba Archives  
Metropolitan Opera  
musicwithease.com  
Music.MSN.com  
New York City Opera  
Opera America Learning Centre  
operabuffa.com; Opera Columbus Study Guide  
Opera News  
Operas Every Child Should Know  
Opera Lyra Ottawa Study Guide  
Opera Today  
Orchestra London Study Guide  
Pacific Opera  
San Diego Opera Study Guide  
San Francisco Opera Guild Study Guide  
schubincave.com  
A Season of Opera  
Skeletons from the Opera Closet  
timelines.com  
Tulsa Opera Study Guide  
University of Chicago Press  
University of Manitoba  
University of Texas  
University of Waterloo  
Rimrock Study Guide  
Virginia Opera Study Guide  
Winnipeg Free Press  
Wikipedia  
The World's Great Operas

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