

# *Chattanooga Symphony & Opera*

*presents*

## *La Bohème* *(Giacomo Puccini)*



**allied arts**

The Chattanooga Symphony & Opera is a funded agency of  
Allied Arts of Greater Chattanooga

✓  
“Often a *single experience* will open the young to music for a whole lifetime.”

---Zoltán Kodály

It is our hope that the **CSO Operatunity** (final dress rehearsal on **Tuesday, February 24, 2009 at 6:45 p.m.**) will be an engaging and imaginative experience for each young person who attends. The beauty and grandeur of the **Tivoli Theatre** creates an inspiring atmosphere even as one enters the front lobby. Further inside the sound of the musical instruments warming up and the anticipation of a live performance with professional orchestra and singers, leads one to expect an experience in music that won't be soon forgotten.

*La Bohème* will be performed in Italian with English supertitles.

This booklet has been designed primarily for use by middle and high school music teachers in preparing students for this event. Please let us know if you have suggestions for future materials.

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# Cast and Crew

Rodolfo, a poet (tenor) ..... Eric Fennell  
Marcello, a painter (baritone) ..... Mark Womack  
Colline, a philosopher (bass) ..... Ashraf Sewailam  
Schaunard, a musician (baritone) ..... Jeff Mattsey  
Benoit, a landlord (bass) ..... Ron Ulen  
Mimi, a seamstress (soprano) ..... Christina Bouras  
Parpignol, a toy vendor (tenor) ..... Darrin Hassevoort  
Musetta, a shop girl (soprano) ..... Maureen Francis  
Alcindoro, a councilor of state (bass) ..... Ron Ulen  
Citizens, Shopkeepers, Working Girls ..... CSO Chorus  
Children ..... Chattanooga Girls Choir  
*~~~~~*  
CSO Music Director and Conductor ..... Robert Bernhardt  
Stage Director ..... Helena Binder  
CSO Chorus Master ..... Darrin Hassevoort  
Technical Director ..... Chuck Schmidt  
Stage Manager ..... Sarah Caddell  
Production Coordinator ..... Kathy Allison  
Costume Coordinator ..... Brenda Schwab  
Stage Crew ..... IATSE Local 140

Add L&P + BB as in Figar & photo of Curt  
~~what a Oper from Butterfly~~

## **The Story of La Bohème** - Amal

### **Act I      A garret overlooking the snow-covered roofs of Paris; Christmas Eve**

Marcello and Rodolfo are trying to work, but the cold is too intense. They decide to sacrifice one of Rodolfo's manuscripts to the fire when their friend Colline arrives. Schaunard then arrives with fuel, money, food and drink. Just as they are about to toast Christmas Eve, a knock is heard at the door. It is Benoit, the landlord, asking for the rent. Marcello invites him in and soon Benoit starts boasting about his lady loves. Marcello pretends to be shocked and with great "indignation" they all throw him out into the hall. To great laughter and gaiety, Marcello states: "That is how I pay the rent."

They all decide to go off to the Café Momus for a Christmas Eve celebration. Rodolfo remains behind to finish an article he is writing and tells his friends that he'll be down shortly. While he is writing, he hears a soft knock at the door. It is Mimi, his neighbor. Her candle has gone out and she asks him to relight it. Mimi suddenly becomes faint and Rodolfo helps her to a chair by the fire. Rodolfo, while trying to revive her, sees how ill and pale she looks. Rodolfo lights her candle and she bids him goodnight. Rodolfo sits down to work again, but Mimi returns to tell him that she has forgotten her key. A draft blows out all of the candles and they are in darkness. As they search on the floor for the key, Rodolfo finds it and puts it in his pocket. They continue searching when Rodolfo's hand touches Mimi's. As Rodolfo continues to hold Mimi's hand in his, he tells her about himself: that he is a poet and has a great hopes and dreams (*Che gelida manina*). He then asks her to tell him about herself. She tells him that she is a seamstress and lives alone (*Si. Mi chiamano Mimi*). She sings about her pleasure at seeing the springtime and begins to relate her inmost feelings. They are interrupted by the voices of their friends, calling for Rodolfo to join them. Rodolfo answers that he is not alone and that they will be along shortly.

### **Act II      Christmas Eve in the Latin Quarter.**

Everywhere there are crowds of people milling in and out of the stalls and shops that surround the square. All the friends finally gather at Café Momus and Rodolfo introduces Mimi to them. A generally festive atmosphere pervades with children following Parpignol, the toy seller, and angry mothers sending the youngsters home to bed.

At a table, after all have placed their orders, Marcello and Mimi exchange confidences. Marcello tells Mimi that sometimes love can be quite bitter, and just as they raise their glasses for a toast, the voice of Musetta is heard. Marcello and Musetta are lovers who have had a very stormy relationship. Musetta left Marcello

for an older, pompous admirer, Alcindoro, who now runs along breathlessly after Musetta. She sees Marcello and starts to show off in an effort to catch his attention. When Musetta realizes that she is not getting his attention, she decides to place herself directly in front of him, singing her waltz song (*Quando me'n vo'*). Alcindoro is horrified by this display and tries to quiet Musetta. When she sees that she has again captured Marcello's heart, she decides to get rid of the old man. When he is gone on an errand, Musetta and Marcello run into each other's arms. The waiter comes to the table with the bill and, as they pass it to one another, Musetta puts Alcindoro's bill and the Bohemians' bill together.

### **Act III      A tollhouse at the entrance to Paris (Barrière d'Enfer); dawn.**

Near the gate to the city is a tavern where Marcello and Musetta work. The gate is opened and townsfolk begin to pass through. Mimi has come to the tavern hoping to find Marcello. She is ill and coughs constantly. Mimi expresses to Marcello her love for Rodolfo and asks for help. Sadly, Rodolfo has left her. Marcello sympathizes with Mimi and advises her to forget Rodolfo. At this moment Rodolfo comes out of the tavern. As Mimi hides behind a tree, Rodolfo confesses to Marcello that Mimi is dying and he is unable to take care of her. Mimi, realizing the truth, begins to cry and betrays her presence with violent coughing. While Rodolfo tries to comfort Mimi, Musetta can be heard laughing in the tavern. Mimi starts to leave, reminiscing wistfully about their short life together (*Donde lieta*), but Rodolfo persuades her to stay with him for a while longer, as Marcello and Musetta continue arguing in the background.

### **Act IV      The garret, several weeks later.**

It has been months since Rodolfo and Marcello have heard from Mimi and Musetta. As the men sing of their love for the women, the others arrive with supper. While the men dance and have a mock duel, Musetta suddenly enters with the news that Mimi has collapsed on the stairs. Rodolfo carries her in and tries to warm her hands. All of the friends begin to think of what they can sell to the pawnbroker for some money to help Mimi. Colline sings about giving up his coat, the only thing of value that he owns (*Vecchia zimarra*). Sadly, though, it is too late for Mimi, and Rodolfo begins to realize that she will soon be gone forever.

Anahel

## The Creation of *La Bohème*

Puccini's *La Bohème* was based on a novel by Henry Murger (1822-61) entitled *Scènes de la vie de bohème*. It described the young artists ("Bohemians") in Paris of the 1840s. This was a romantic and somewhat anarchic world where poverty and social nonconformity was considered a badge of honor. Much of the bitterness and social criticism of Murger's novel is softened in Puccini's opera, so that it is not so much a dramatic story or chronicle as an atmosphere, a dream<sup>1</sup>. There is also something here of Puccini's own "Bohemian" student days in Milan. The very opening theme which returns time and again throughout the opera is taken from *Capriccio sinfonico*, Puccini's graduation composition for orchestra. It is a nostalgic picture of youth - a happy time of irresponsible freedom with few burdens or commitments.

The opera *La Bohème* was first performed at the Teatro Regio in Turin, Italy on February 1, 1896 (Arturo Toscanini, conductor). The libretto was prepared by Giuseppe Giacosa (1847-1906) and Luigi Illica (1857-1919).



Giacomo Puccini



Vintage theatrical poster

Menotti

## Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)

Giacomo Puccini, on his 150<sup>th</sup> birthday, has become quite literally the most popular opera composer of all time (at least in the U.S., according to a recent Opera America poll). He inherited the great tradition of Italian opera not only from his own ancestors going back four generations, but also from Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) and other great Italian opera composers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Puccini created operas that were more real and more touching (even heart-wrenching) than anything written

<sup>1</sup> "La Jeunesse Qui N'a Qu'un Temps: *La Bohème* and Its Origins", by Fedele D'Amico (p. 144, *The Puccini Companion*, 1994).

before his time. Works like *La Bohème*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Tosca*, and *Turandot* are still among the most frequently performed operas around the world.

Thanks to the persistence of his mother and a music teacher in Lucca, Italy, who had once studied with Puccini's own great grandfather, he fell in love with music and began to make rapid progress as a pianist and organist. As a young man of 17 he began to write music and became ambitious as a composer. He entered the Milan Conservatory and studied with Antonio Bazzini (1818-1897, who wrote an early *Turandot*) and Amilcare Ponchielli (1834-1886; composer of *La Gioconda*, still one of the standard operatic works). Ponchielli introduced his student to the librettist Fontana who collaborated with Puccini on his first opera, *Le Villi* (1884). The opera was a success and Giulio Ricordi, head of the famous Italian music publishing firm, commissioned him to write his next opera, *Edgar* (1889). With his third opera, *Manon Lescaut* (1893), Puccini scored his first really great triumph as a composer. The opera, with libretto fashioned largely by the composer and publisher, is still in the repertory to this day.

Puccini's next opera, *La Bohème* (1896), became one of the most beloved of all operas and has recently even been produced successfully on Broadway. Next came *Tosca* (1900), and *Madama Butterfly* (1904), which also became staples of the repertory. The libretti for all three of these operas were by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa.

When *Madama Butterfly* was produced at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, Puccini was invited to produce a new opera to be premiered at the Metropolitan Opera. After seeing a play by David Belasco, *The Girl of the Golden West*, he decided to make his own operatic version, entitled *La Fanciulla del West* (1910). After the success of *Fanciulla*, Puccini created three one-act operas, also first performed at the Metropolitan Opera: *Il Tabarro*, *Suor Angelica*, and *Gianni Schicchi* (1918). Another opera, *La Rondine*, was premiered at Monte Carlo in 1917. Puccini's final opera, *Turandot*, was left unfinished at his death, but the final scene was completed by Franco Alfano and was performed for the first time at the La Scala theatre in Milan in 1926.



## Glossary

- Aria** A generic Italian word for featured solos in opera. They are self-contained selections (for the most part) and it is customary to applaud at the end, even if the dramatic action is suspended momentarily because of it. An example of an aria (pronounced “ah-ree-ah”) in *La Bohème* is “Che gelida manina” sung by Rodolfo in Act I.
- Libretto** Literally, “little book” in Italian. This term is used for the text of an opera. Librettos (or libretti) are often fashioned from an historical account, a play, a novel, or a traditional story and made to fit the music written by the composer. Usually the libretto is written by someone other than the composer, most often a poet or accomplished writer, but in some cases the words and the music are written by the same person (e.g., Richard Wagner). The same is true for Broadway musicals, a distant American cousin of Italian opera.
- Recitative** A more flexible and rhythmically free type of vocal music (than the steadier set pieces such as arias and duets). In some cases it is almost a speech-like patter. Recitatives (pronounced “retch-it-tah-teeves”) tend to be used when the plot is moving forward; set pieces tend to be used when the character’s inner feelings or emotions are depicted. Recitatives often precede a set piece, serving as a kind of musical introduction. In the case of Puccini, virtually the entire opera is like one extended recitative, occasionally interrupted by an aria or ensemble piece.

## What Is Opera?

Opera is simply a story that is sung throughout (or nearly so) with orchestral accompaniment. It usually includes all the trappings of a theatrical event as well, including costumes, sets, and dancing. Opera has been around since the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and was invented as a lavish court entertainment by composers in Italy such as Giulio Caccini and Claudio Monteverdi. Since that time composers in many different countries, including the U.S., have written operas meant for the enjoyment of all people (e.g., Mozart, Rossini, Verdi, Puccini, Offenbach, Strauss, Menotti).

Operas, like plays, are divided into acts and scenes. There is generally some kind of opening orchestral music, called the overture or prelude, which serves to set the mood and prepare the audience for some of the musical highlights to follow. When the curtain rises on the first act the story begins as a soloist, or perhaps a chorus, start to sing and gradually draw the audience into a different world of grand emotions and events. Sometimes the story is a tragic one and feelings of sadness or anger are felt through the music and singing. At other times the story is a comic one and feelings of happiness and celebration are experienced. At moments of repose or reflection in the story, set pieces (arias, duets, trios) reflect in regular, steady rhythms the inner states or emotions of the characters. In moments of action, "recitative" (a more flexible type of vocal music, almost speech-like patten in some cases) usually reflects the forward movement of the plot.

The orchestra, which accompanies virtually every part of the opera, is seated in the orchestra "pit" directly in front of the stage. The conductor (music director) will take a bow at his initial entrance before the overture and again at the beginning of each act. There is usually an intermission between acts in a full-length opera.

The most important and essential aspect of opera, however, is not the costumes, the sets, the dancing, or even the orchestra. It is the human voice, especially solo voices. Ever since the first operas in Italy, where the singers somehow imagined that they were re-creating ancient Greek drama, the solo voice has reigned supreme in the world of opera and generated the most enthusiasm for this art form. Because of the ever-increasing size and power of the orchestral accompaniment (not to mention the increasing size of opera theatres) over the following centuries, singers were compelled to cultivate bigger and louder voices in order to be heard (this was before the invention of the microphone) and to express the overpowering emotions demanded by composers such as Giuseppe Verdi and Giacomo Puccini. In our own day, singers must undergo rigorous training for many years, like Olympic athletes, in order to perfect the bigger-than-life, yet captivatingly beautiful singing voice that opera lovers have come to expect.