HOT Season for Young People
2014-15
Teacher Guidebook

LA BOHÈME

NASHVILLE OPERA
From our Season Sponsor

For over 130 years Regions has been proud to be a part of the Middle Tennessee community, growing and thriving as our area has. From the opening of our doors on September 1, 1883, we have committed to this community and our customers.

One area that we are strongly committed to is the education of our students. We are proud to support TPAC’s Humanities Outreach in Tennessee Program. What an important sponsorship this is – reaching over 25,000 students and teachers – some students would never see a performing arts production without this program. Regions continues to reinforce its commitment to the communities it serves and in addition to supporting programs such as HOT, we have close to 200 associates teaching financial literacy in classrooms this year.

Thank you, teachers, for giving your students this wonderful opportunity. They will certainly enjoy the experience. You are creating memories of a lifetime, and Regions is proud to be able to help make this opportunity possible.

Jim Schmitz
Executive Vice President, Area Executive
Middle Tennessee Area
Dear Teachers~

We are so pleased to be able to partner with Nashville Opera to bring students to the invited dress rehearsal of *La Bohème*.

We thank Nashville Opera for the use of their extensive study guide for adults. It will help you prepare your students for the performance with a synopsis, opera background, and musical information. Additional information and short explorations are included in this booklet for you to share with students.

Please look particularly at the opera rehearsal information, which will help students understand the special factors present in an invited dress rehearsal.

Enjoy!

TPAC Education

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This photograph of a Paris street, the Rue des Marmousets by Charles Marville, was taken on a street close to the Latin Quarter where most of the early Bohemians of the 19th century lived. Widely acknowledged as one of the most talented photographers of the nineteenth century, Charles Marville (French, 1813–1879) was commissioned by the city of Paris to document both the picturesque, medieval streets of old Paris and the broad boulevards and grand public structures that Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann built in their place for Emperor Napoleon III.

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This image is available from the State Library of Victoria under the Accession Number: H88.19/83.
Most final dress rehearsals are almost exactly like a performance. The director will stop the action if needed, but it is exceedingly rare and generally only for a technical malfunction on the stage. Like theatre, an opera dress rehearsal is the final chance before the performance to make a complicated collaboration come together seamlessly.

The Nashville Opera’s rehearsal schedule begins with two weeks at the opera rehearsal space in the new Noah Liff Opera Center. Stage action is mapped out, the performers experiment with their characters, and the director’s ideas for the flow of the opera are shared with the cast. The time period may seem short for such a large production. It only works because opera singers begin rehearsals knowing every bit of their music by heart and having rehearsed it themselves over a period of months, sometimes years. If they do not know the role on the first day, the director has the right to replace them immediately. The opera company will fly in a new singer to take over their part. Once opera singers learn a particular role, they keep it in their repertory and play the role many more times at different opera companies around the world.

Four to five days before the first performance, the set is “loaded in” to the theater, and the lights are hung and focused. Students will notice a table in the middle of the orchestra level seats for the stage manager, the director, and the designers. This serves as a central location for communicating with the singers and crew onstage, the conductor in the orchestra pit, and the technicians in the lighting booth. During the final dress rehearsal, students may notice lighting changes as the designer makes final adjustments.

Opera rehearsals use a skilled piano accompanist, but once the company moves into the theater, the performers will have a Sitzprobe rehearsal (a German word meaning to sit and try out.) The Sitzprobe is a “sing-thru” with the orchestra and conductor, concentrating on the nuances of the music only without staging. It is the first time that the orchestra and singers put together the work that they have been doing in separate orchestra rehearsals and staging rehearsals.

A piano tech rehearsal is held without costumes to let the singers get used to the set and give the set crew their first chance to practice scene changes. The next rehearsal is a piano dress rehearsal that adds costumes. Finally, the orchestra dress rehearsal puts all the elements together: lighting, set changes, costumes, the orchestra, and the supertitles (the English translations of the lyrics, called the libretto.) The supertitles will be in operation at the final invited dress rehearsal.

The final dress rehearsal allows the last polish before the performance, and invited dress rehearsals add the final important element to the opera, an audience. Because of the strenuous nature of the singing, a singer may choose to “mark” on the final dress rehearsal in order to preserve their voices for all the performances. "Marking" does not have the same meaning in opera as it does in theatre. In theatre, it means just going through the blocking and the words of the lines. In opera, it specifically means that the singer may choose not to sing at full volume, not pushing their voice to the utmost. All of their acting and vocal expression will be at full power, however, with all the passion and conviction that opera requires. You will be their first audience; they are ready and excited to give you the story and the music.
Step 1~Know the story!

In opera, it is important to know as much as possible about what is going on beforehand, including the ending. By all means, read the synopsis and libretto; listen to a recording! Once the music, the voices, the setting, the lights, and the dramatic staging come together at the performance, audience members will be better able to fit all the elements seamlessly together into the plot. The plot then becomes the springboard for the real power of opera, the music.

Step 2~Experience the music!

Composers use many tools to communicate with music. They create melodies that evoke a variety of emotions. They use tempos (how slow or fast) and dynamics (how loud or soft) and rhythms (the frequency and pattern of beat). They choose particular instruments to add color to the music they have written. Think of instrument choice as a type of painting for your ears! The term “soundscape” is often used in describing the music of an opera, and it can set the atmosphere and give information about character and plot. What is it telling you?

Step 3 ~Understand the singers!

Opera singers are vocal athletes. They practice every day to exercise their vocal chords and their extensive breath control. The combinations of notes that they have to sing are very difficult, and the things that they can do with their voices are extreme. You can easily compare a regular singing voice and an opera singing voice to a weekend jogger and a gold-medal-winning Olympic track champion! BUT, the reason that their voices are prized is that they can express so much emotion on a grand scale.

Step 4~Plunge in!

This is the most important step. Everything about opera is over-the-top, on the edge, enormous in every way. It’s an art form that thrives on its intensity and passion. Opera stories portray people at their most extreme, and the singers and the music communicate in ways that words alone cannot. You have to let go, allow yourself to stop thinking and analyzing and simply FEEL THE EMOTION!

(with acknowledgements to Opera 101 by Fred Plotkin for idea organization above)
What are Bohemians?

The word “bohemian” has developed many connotations over the years, but the main definition of the group identified in Puccini’s opera comes directly from his source material, Henry Murger’s play, *La Vie de Bohème (The Bohemian Life).* According to Professor Robert Schwarz of Mount Holyoke College, Murger outlines his perspective on Bohemians in his preface to *Scenes de la Vie de Bohème* [his published collection of the short articles that led to the play.]

“Bohemia is a stage in artistic life; it is the preface to the Academy [the esteemed 19th century Académie des Beaux-Arts], the Hotel Dieu [a hospital for the poor], or the Morgue. Today, as of old, every man who enters on an artistic career, without any other means of livelihood than his art itself, will be forced to walk in the paths of Bohemia.”

Schwarz notes that Murger describes three main kinds of Bohemians that frequented the Latin Quarter of Paris:

- **Unknown Dreamers** - amateur artists who do not seek publicity but expect it to come for them. They are poor and often die from poverty. Murger calls this way of life a “blind alley,” and says that this attitude works against them.

- **Amateur** - has a steady income but chooses to live in Bohemia for the fun of it. Once they have had their fill, they will return to the bourgeoisie.

- **Stalwart Official Bohemians** - must be known as an artist to the wider world; though they are not making a lot of money, they are guided by ambition and are expected to soon be “making it” in the world of art. They know both how to be frugal and how to be extravagant and can fit in in squalor or luxury.

The choice of a life of letters and art, eschewing conventional societal rules and shunning materialistic pursuits, can be seen as noble or irresponsible. Murger felt the judgment depended on time of life and self-awareness, and he seemed to feel a balance could be found. The tension between the unconventional and more traditional lifestyles persists today, with pros and cons on both sides. These themes were explored in Jonathan Larson’s Pulitzer Prize-winning rock opera, *Rent,* which famously retells *La Bohème* in a modern context.

Breathe like Singers

The power of opera singer’s breath control is formidable. They must be able to sing very complicated musical passages, to sustain long notes, and to project their voices without microphones. They work all the time on their abdominal muscles, particularly the diaphragm muscle which runs along the bottom of the ribcage.

- Pay attention to your breathing. What part of your body is moving? Place your hands on your stomach just below your ribcage and try to push them out slightly as you breathe in.

- Keep your hands in place, take a breath in, and say “ha!” You should feel your diaphragm jump.

- Try to fill your lungs with the biggest breath you can, and let it out as slowly as you can with a hissing sound.

- Try it again and while you are hissing have a partner count how long you can make the hissing sound or (harder) how long you can make the sound “ahhh.” If you were to practice this every day, you would build the muscle and be able to make sound for longer periods of time, as opera singers can.

Every once in a while during the performance, try to pay attention to which passages seem to require the most breath control.

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Ask STUDENTS:
Who are the modern day Bohemians?
Have they changed since *Rent* opened on Broadway in 1996?
List the pros and cons of the modern “Bohemian” life.

With thanks to Professor Robert Schwarz and his History 255 students at www.mtholyoke.edu
Nashville Opera
presents
La Bohème
Music by Giacomo Puccini
Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica
Based on Henri Murger’s Novel Scènes de la vie de bohème
First performance: Teatro Regio, Turin, Italy February 1, 1896

Directed by
John Hoomes

Conducted by
Jerome Shannon

Cast and Characters

Mimi, an embroiderer.................................................. Danielle Pastin, soprano (debut)
Rodolfo, a poet................................................................. Noah Stewart, tenor (debut)
Marcello, a painter............................................................ Craig Verm, baritone
Musetta, a flirt................................................................. Heather Buck, soprano
Colline, a philosopher.................................................... Paul An, bass
Schaunard, a musician..................................................... Eric McKeever, baritone
Benoit, a landlord......................................................... Peter Johnson, bass-baritone
Alcindoro, a state councilor.............................................. Peter Johnson, bass-baritone

Performances
Thursday, October 9, 2014, 7:00 PM
Saturday, October 11, 2014, 8:00 PM
Andrew Jackson Hall, Tennessee Performing Arts Center
THE PATRICIA & RODES HART PRODUCTION
2 hours, 27 minutes (includes two 20 minute intermissions)

Featuring the Nashville Opera Orchestra

Opera Insights Preview Talks 1 hour prior to curtain.

Tickets
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Or for more information, contact
The Nashville Opera Offices
615-832-5242
www.nashvilleopera.org

Study Guide Contributors:
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Melissa Meyers, Nashville Opera Intern
The Story

Act I – A chilly garret in Paris

Marcello, the painter and the poet Rodolfo try to keep warm by burning pages from Rodolfo’s latest drama. They are joined first by their friend Colline, a philosopher and then Schaunard, a musician. Schaunard has recently gotten a job and has brought money and food. They are celebrating their new-found fortune when there is a knock at the door. Their landlord Benoit has come to collect the overdue rent. The young men invite him to have a drink with them and they urge him to speak of his recent escapades. They pretend to be shocked and throw him out. Colline, Schaunard and Marcello depart for the Café Momus. Rodolfo remains behind to finish writing an article, promising to join them shortly. A gentle tap at the door interrupts him. The visitor turns out to be one of their neighbors, Mimì, who is pale and weak. Her candle has blown out. Rodolfo relights her candle, but just when she is about to leave feels faint. Rodolfo offers her some wine to restore her energy. Mimì then realizes she has lost her key and as they are both searching for it on the stair, their candles are blown out. Rodolfo finds Mimì’s key but hides it in his pocket. The poet takes the girl’s hand and tells her his dreams in the moonlight. Mimì explains that she leads a simple and solitary life. She embroiders flowers for a living. She adores the springtime. From outside, Rodolfo’s friends beckon him to come along to Café Momus. He calls to them to keep two seats for him because he will bring a guest. Rodolfo and Mimì, who are very drawn to each other, leave to join the others.

Act II – Christmas Eve around the Café Momus

There are great festivities going on in the Latin Quarter. Rodolfo buys a pink bonnet for Mimì and Colline buys himself a patched-up coat. In the Café, Marcello’s ex-girlfriend Musetta enters with her elderly admirer Alcindoro. She is obviously still attracted to Marcello, and he to her, but he tries to ignore her as she sings about how popular she is with men. She pretends that her shoes are hurting her and she sends Alcindoro to buy a new pair. When he leaves, she throws herself into Marcello’s arms. When the bill comes, Musetta tells the waiter in the Café that Alcindoro will pay and she leaves with the friends.

Act III – Near the Gates of Paris

At dawn on a snowy morning in February, Mimì approaches the tavern where Marcello and Musetta now live. Mimì tells Marcello that she can no longer remain with Rodolfo because of his jealousy. Suddenly Rodolfo’s voice is heard and Mimì hides from him. The poet informs Marcello that he wishes to terminate his relationship with Mimì as a result of her being fickle and flirtatious, and also because of their frequent arguing. Subsequently, he breaks down and reveals the truth. He admits that he fears for Mimì’s health and believes she will become worse if she remains in his poverty-stricken and chilly garret. Mimì takes a fit of coughing and emerge from her place of hiding. Rodolfo is distraught as he know his sweetheart has heard everything. She bids him farewell but he insists that they stay together until spring as winter would be too lonely a season for them to stay apart. In the meantime Marcello runs back into the tavern as Musetta can be heard laughing and flirting with another man. Marcello and Musetta part in anger while Rodolfo and Mimì resolve to stay together.

Act IV – Back in the garret

Months later, Marcello and Rodolfo lament about their loneliness having both parted from their loved ones. Colline and Schaunard enter offering a small meal. The four bohemians decide to make the most of it, pretending it is a banquet. They dance around the room, laughing and joking and eventually stage a mock sword fight. Their merriment ends as Musetta bursts in with news that Mimì has collapsed on the stairs on her way to see Rodolfo. Mimì is brought upstairs and made comfortable on the bed. With no money for a doctor or medication, Musetta removes her own earrings and urges Marcello to pawn them. Colline decides to sell his prized overcoat to help with the costs. After everyone has left the room, Mimi and Rodolfo are alone. They reminisce about how they first met and their love for one another. They vow to remain together always. The others return with a muff to warm Mimì’s cold hands and news the doctor is on his way. Mimì falls asleep. As Rodolfo shades the window, Schaunard notices that Mimì has passed away. One by one the others realize what has happened. Finally, Rodolfo discovers the truth and cries out her name in desperation.
What to Listen For

Act I

“Che gelida manina”- In this famous aria, Rodolfo takes Mimi’s cold hand and tells her about his life as a poet.

“Sì Mi chiamano Mimi”- Mimi responds by introducing herself and explains that she makes embroidery and longs for the warmth of the spring.

“O soave fanciulla” – In one of the most glorious love duets in opera, Rodolfo and Mimi confess their love and drift off arm in arm to the Café Momus

Act II

Opening Chorus – In this opening of Act II, the stage is filled with passers-by, groups of children, students and shop owners, all singing with our bohemians.

“Quando me’n vo” – Affectionately called Musetta’s Waltz. All the fuss and distraction stops as Musetta takes center stage.

Act III

“O buon Marcello” – Mimi comes to the tavern looking for Marcello. She is extremely weak and wracked with illness. She tells Marcello of Rodolfo’s jealousy and her determination to part from him.

“Donde lieta uscì” – In this moving aria, Mimi bids Rodolfo farewell. She will be brave and go back to work alone.

“Addio dolce svegliare alla mattina!” – This quartet between Mimi, Rodolfo, Musetta, and Marcello reflects on Musetta and Marcello’s quarrel as well as Mimi and Rodolfo’s reconciliation.

Act IV

“O Mimi, tu più non torni” – Rodolfo and Marcello are both distracted by their former loves. They cannot write and paint without being consumed by thoughts of Mimi and Musetta.

“Vecchia zimarra” – Colline bids farewell to his coat in order to help purchase medicine and a doctor for Mimi.

“Sono andati?” – Rodolfo and Mimi sing this final duet together. They sing about their first encounter together and the happy times they shared.

Finale: This death is one of the most touching, from the first spine chilling chord through the hushed fearful exchanges to Rodolfo’s final desperate cry of ‘Mimi! Mimi!’
Recommended Recordings

**AUDIO**

**Label:** London/Decca  
**Performers:** Mirella Freni, Luciano Pavarotti, Elizabeth Harwood, Rolando Paneri, Nicolai Ghiaurov. Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra  
**Conductor:** Herbert von Karajan

**Label:** Angel/EMI  
**Performers:** Victoria de los Angeles, Jussi Björling, Lucine Amara, Robert Merrill Giorgio Tozzi  
**Conductor:** Sir Thomas Beecham

**Label:** Decca  
**Performers:** Renata Tebaldi, Carlo Bergonzi, Ettore Bastianini, Gianna D’Angelo  
**Conductor:** Tulio Serafin

**VIDEO**


A Little Background

When Giacomo Puccini first read Henri Murger’s novel *Scènes de la vie de bohème*, he could not have helped but identify with the characters. He knew only too well the hardships and joys of struggling artists. Born in Lucca, December 22, 1858, Puccini was part of a musical tradition, already four generations old. When Puccini’s own father died, two of his positions (choirmaster and organist at the Church of San Martino and teacher at the Collegio Ponziano) were reserved for the six-year old Giacomo.

At 19, he was able to convince a great-uncle to provide him with enough financial support to study in Milan. After successfully passing the entrance exams, he became a student of Ponchielli, the composer of *La Gioconda*. Initially, he thought he would become an orchestral composer, but Ponchielli convinced him otherwise and suggested that he enter a one-act opera competition. While his opera, *Le Villi* did not win, it did attract attention and enough interest to mount a production. When it was performed in May, 1884, the 26-year-old Puccini was rewarded with a scheduled performance at La Scala the following season and the publisher Ricordi bought the publishing rights. Ricordi also commissioned a second opera and gave him an advance of 300 lire a month for two years. When *Edgar* finally premiered in April, 1889, it was a failure because of the libretto.

Puccini’s life between the Conservatory and the premiere of *Edgar* was the period most closely resembling those characters in *La bohème*. Puccini lived basically on beans and raw onions; the exception was a Milanese restaurant, The Aida, which allowed him to run up a tab. When he got his first advance from Ricordi, he rushed to the restaurant, ordered an extravagant meal and then paid off his past bills. He also fell in love during this period, with Elvira Gemignani, the wife of a Lucca merchant. She left her husband to live with Puccini, and they stayed together for the rest of his life.

By 1890, his debts were so great that he considered joining her brother in South America. The success of *Manon Lescaut* changed everything: he was able to build his villa at Torre del Lago, buy a car, and begin to live like the affluent composer he had become. Puccini began work on *La bohème* even though he knew that his friend Leoncavallo was already working on an opera based on the same book.

His determination to set his own version of the story ultimately ruined their friendship, and Leoncavallo was bitter until the end of his life. Surprisingly, especially in view of the opera’s perennial “Top Three” status on opera fans’ lists of all-time favorites, *La bohème* was not a success when Toscanini conducted its premiere on February 1, 1896, at the Teatro Regio in Turin. The public was not impressed and the critics were generally hostile. Puccini later wrote, “I, who have put in *bohème* all my soul and loved it boundlessly and loved its creatures more than I can say, returned to my hotel heartbroken.” Three weeks later, in Rome, the public again was not impressed. Things improved somewhat during performances in Naples, but it was not until April (at a production in Palermo) that the opera caught on with the audience and became the universal success that it has been ever since.

The reasons for the opera’s initial lack of success are hard to identify. *La bohème* does not have the grandeur of Wagner or the nobility of Verdi, its ordinary people living ordinary lives. However, the opera became its own genre. It is a tender love story, showing how the passion of young love may resist the realities of the real world. It shows the joys of love at first sight, the consequences of fragile health and the passage of youth. The story itself has become a timeless reflection on the joys, sorrows and conflicts of real people. While we watch the story of the poet and the seamstress, the painter and party girl, the musician and the philosopher unfold, some audiences will see themselves while others will reflect on the past.
About the Composer

Quick Stats

Full Name: Giacomo Antonio Domenico Michele Secondo Maria Puccini  
Dates: December 22, 1858 – November 29, 1924  
Nationality: Born in Lucca, Italy. Died in Brussels, Belgium.

Life and Career

Giacomo Puccini was born into a long line of talented musicians. Giacomo’s great-great grandfather had held the position of choirmaster and organist at the Cathedral of San Martino. This position would be held by four consecutive generations of Puccini men, including Puccini’s father. As a master of counterpoint, which is a musical form that incorporates two simultaneous melody lines, Giacomo’s father helped him to establish a firm knowledge of music and composition.

At the age of fourteen, Giacomo was already an accomplished organist, performing in his hometown of Lucca. It would not be until the age of twenty-two that Giacomo would finally begin to receive a formal education in music. In 1880, Giacomo entered the Milan Conservatory, but only with the assistance of a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Puccini was fortunate in that he was exposed to a variety of theatrical styles, including opera and spoken drama in his hometown of Lucca, Italy. It is these experiences at the theatre that planted the ideas for stories that Puccini would later shape into some of his most famous operas.

It was not long after his entrance into the Milan Conservatory that Puccini’s interest in opera began to materialize. At the age of twenty-six, Puccini’s first opera, Le Villi, premiered. This opera caught the attention of publisher Giulio Ricordi, who funded Puccini’s second opera, Edgar, in 1889. This relationship between Puccini and Ricordi would last until Ricordi’s death in 1912. Despite moderate attention paid to his first two operas, Puccini’s reputation as a composer did not begin to develop until his third opera, Manon Lescaut in 1893.

While some composers are only remembered for one great masterpiece, Puccini’s status as a composer arose out of three separate operas. Known as Puccini’s “Big Three,” these operas are La bohème (1896), Tosca (1900), and Madama Butterfly (1904). Through the utilization of verismo, or storylines that focus on the rough and gritty aspects of common life, Puccini was able to infuse raw emotion into his characters, as well as the music they sing. This has appealed to countless generations of audiences as Puccini’s characters are completely relatable in that they are passionate, flawed, and ultimately human.

In 1924, Giacomo Puccini was diagnosed with cancer of the throat. He died later that year in Brussels, Belgium. There are disputes as to the cause of Puccini’s death, but most sources believe that he died of a heart attack during an emergency surgical treatment for the cancer. His final opera, Turandot was left unfinished at the time of his death. The last two scenes of the opera were finished by composer, Franco Alfano.
Names: Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica
Dates: 1847-1906, 1857-1919
Nationality: Italian

Life and Career
Giuseppe Giacosa was a successful poet whose fame most came from his operatic partnerships with Puccini. Giacosa was born near Turin, Italy in 1847. He received a law degree from the University of Turin and was working in his father’s law firm when his plays started to gain additional attention. His comedy, *Una partita a scacchi*, was very successful. The success of this comedy encouraged Giacosa to establish himself as a playwright. In 1888, Giacosa moved to Milan where he taught drama and recitation at the Milan Conservatory. However, soon after accepting this position, his plays became successful enough that he was able to leave the conservatory and write full time.

Luigi Illica was a journalist, dramatist, librettist, and a successful poet. He was born at Castell’Arquato in 1857 to a father who was a public notary. Illica spent the majority of his education at a college near Cremona. In 1879 he went to live in Milan where he worked with his cousin’s, Carlo Muscaretti, literary journal. Beginning in 1889, Illica began to write opera libretti. Illica’s success began when he entered the Ricordi publishing company and wrote a libretto to *Manon Lascout* that Puccini finally enjoyed. It was this meeting with Puccini that started Illica’s most important collaboration. After a collaboration between Giacosa and Puccini and the success of the “Big Three” operas, Illica signed up as a volunteer in the Army. He fell off of a horse and was seriously injured. Illica passed away on December 16, 1919.

The collaboration between Puccini, Giacosa, and Illica is one to be remembered. They agreed to divide up the labor evenly: Illica would draft the plot and dialogue, Giacosa would refine the poetry, and then Puccini would set the libretto to music. It is said that the majority of Giacosa’s and Illica’s successes comes from the success of their operatic partnerships with Puccini.

Other Notable Works

*Tosca* (1900) – libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, based on the play by Victorien Sardou

*Madama Butterfly* (1904) – libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, based on a story by John Luther Long

*La fanciulla del West* (1910) – libretto by Guelfo Civinini and Carlo Zangarini, based on the play by David Belasco

*Turandot* (1926) – libretto by Giuseppe Adami and Renato Simoni, based on the play by Carlo Gozzi
Of Further Interest

Puccini’s operas are marked with beautiful, sensuous melodies, colorful harmonies and brilliant orchestration. As Verdi favored monumental, sweeping arias, Puccini preferred shorter arias with memorable melodies in order to succinctly propel the drama.

Puccini had a special proclivity for his female characters, which he portrayed with glorious melody lines and dramatic sensibility. Heartbreaking tragedy befalls many of his heroines, including Tosca, Butterfly, and Liù of Turandot.

Puccini’s American opera, La Fanciulla del West, actually premiered in the United States at the Metropolitan Opera in 1910.

A wealthy opera fan from New York, in exchange for a handwritten, autographed copy of “Musetta’s Waltz” (La bohème), agreed to buy Puccini an extremely expensive motorboat and have it sent all the way to Italy.

Puccini was known for being a reckless driver and was involved in several car crashes.

Two years after his death, Puccini’s remains were interred at his house at Torre del Lago. After his wife’s death in 1930, Puccini’s house was turned into a museum.

Composers and Critics Say

“Puccini looks to me more like the heir of Verdi than any of his rivals.” -George Bernard Shaw, writing on the première of Manon Lescaut in London, 1894

Puccini wrote of his own music style: “[It’s] poetry and again poetry — tenderness mixed with pain; sensuality; a drama surprising and burning; and a rocketing finale.”

“While the ground bass of Verdi’s operas is a battle cry, of Puccini’s it’s a mating call.” -Mosco Carner, one of Puccini’s biographers, commenting on the sensuality of the composer’s melodies.

Puccini’s operas are not always acclaimed by the critics:

“Puccini was not one of the great composers.” - Donald Jay Grout, respected musicologist.

Joseph Kermer, Professor of Music at Oxford in England, asserts that Puccini’s operas were “false through and through,” and goes further to describe Tosca as “a shabby little shocker” and Turandot as “even more depraved.”

After seeing the première of Tosca, one critic remarked that it had “little or no chance of survival.”
A Sound Anatomy of Opera

There are many different kinds of songs in opera. Performers may sing alone, in couples (duets), trios, or larger groups, and there are also moments when no one sings at all — and each composer develops his or her own preferred combinations of these options. The following are the major musical components of an opera:

The Overture
An opera usually begins with an orchestral piece of music called the overture, which functions as an introduction to the opera. The overture generally includes themes that will be heard throughout the opera, and can be anywhere from five to twenty-five minutes long. Before 1800, house lights were not dimmed while the overture played, and audiences would continue to talk, drink, and even play cards. This changed in the nineteenth century when the overture began to take its place as an integral part of the operatic performance. Usually, at the end of the overture, the curtain rises and the story of the opera unfolds through a series of scenes, which are usually organized into acts.

Arias
Italian for “air” or song. Arias are solos performed to the accompaniment of the orchestra. They allow the character to express his or her feelings and reflect on the events of the drama. The focus of an aria is emotions rather than actions, and provides an opportunity for the singer to demonstrate his or her vocal or artistic skill. Some of the most successful composers of arias, such as Mozart, Verdi and Puccini were able to achieve a remarkable balance between memorable melodies that perfectly suit the human voice, and making the music reflect the drama of the text.

Recitatives
Recitative is a type of singing unique to opera, and is used when characters are conversing, or introducing an aria. The text is delivered quickly in a musical way that imitates speech, and has a very limited melodic range. It has no recognizable melody and its rhythms follow those of the spoken word. Recitative is meant to carry the action forward and can be accompanied either by a full orchestra, or, as is often the case in opera written before 1800, by a harpsichord or keyboard instrument.

Ensemble (“together”)
In operas, ensemble singing is when two or more voices of different ranges perform together. These include duets, trios, quartets, quintets, and in one or two instances, even a sextet! In each of these, the way the composer blends the voices will depend on the dramatic requirements of the plot. For instance, in a duet where the characters singing are in love, a composer may show this musically by having each performer sing different music at different times, and gradually bring both lines of music together in harmony as the duet culminates. Conversely, if the characters are in conflict, their music might never be brought together. Georges Bizet used this technique in Carmen: if you listen to the duets sung by Carmen and Don José, you might notice that their musical lines are never completely blended, and this foreshadows their tragic ends.

Chorus
Most operas include music sung by a large group of singers (sometimes as many as 40 or more) called a chorus. The chorus appears on stage most often in crowd scenes. The chorus can provide a stunning contrast to solo or ensemble singing. In one opera by Benjamin Britten, the chorus is played by a single male and a single female (this is in the tradition of ancient Greek theatre).

Orchestral Music
The orchestra is an important part of any opera, and not only because it accompanies the singing and introduces the opera in the overture. The themes (both musical and emotional) of the opera can appear in orchestral introductions and conclusions to arias, recitatives, and choruses, but sometimes the orchestra becomes a character in the story, and has music to play by itself outside of the overture or introduction.
On Operatic Voices

All classical singers fall into one of the categories listed below. A singer cannot choose his/her voice-type...it is something he/she is born with. Composers usually assign a voice type to a character based on his/her personality or age. Read these descriptions for specific examples.

Women

Soprano: The highest female voice, with a range similar to a violin. In opera, the soprano most often plays the young girl or the heroine (sometimes called the Prima Donna), since a high bright voice traditionally suggests femininity, virtue and innocence. The normal range of a soprano is from middle C through two octaves above middle C, sometimes with extra top notes. Most women are sopranos. In La bohème, Mimi and Musetta are sung by sopranos.

Mezzo-Soprano: Also called a mezzo; the middle female voice similar to an oboe in range. A mezzo’s sound is often darker and warmer than a soprano’s. In opera, composers generally use a mezzo to portray older women, villainesses, seductive heroines, and sometimes even young boys. Mezzo-Sopranos also often serve as the friend or sidekick to the soprano. The mezzo-soprano’s normal range is from the A below middle C to the A two octaves above it. In La bohème, there is no mezzo-soprano.

Contralto: The lowest female voice, similar in range to a clarinet. Contraltos usually sing the roles of older females or special character parts such as witches and old gypsies. The range is two octaves from F below middle C to the top line of the treble clef. A true contralto is very rare – some believe they don’t exist at all! There are no contraltos in La bohème.

Men

Counter-tenor: The highest male voice, which was mainly used in very early opera and oratorio (a genre of classical vocal music similar to opera but generally based on a religious topic and accompanied by a choir). The voice of a countertenor sounds very much like a mezzo-soprano’s voice and they often sing the same repertoire. Like the contralto, true countertenors are very rare. There is no counter-tenor in La bohème.

Tenor: Usually the highest male voice in an opera. It is similar to a trumpet in range, tone, color, and acoustical ring. The tenor typically plays the hero or the love interest in an opera. His voice ranges from the C below middle C to the C above. The role of Rodolfo in La bohème is sung by a tenor.

Baritone: The middle male voice, close to a French horn in range and tone color. The baritone usually plays villainous roles or father-figures. The range is from the G that is an octave and a half below middle C to G above. In Puccini’s La bohème, Marcello is a baritone.

Bass: The lowest male voice, it is similar to a trombone or bassoon in range and color. Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom in serious opera. In La bohème, Colline, Schaunard, Benoit and Alcindoro are all basses. The range spans from roughly the F above middle C down to the F an octave and a fourth below.
The Nashville Opera is honored to present the following artists in this production of *La Bohème*.

**Director**  
John Hoomes, Artistic & General Director of Nashville Opera  
*Select Nashville Opera Credits:* Andrea Chenier, *Elmer Gantry*, *Samson & Delilah*, *Aida*, *Roméo & Juliet*, *Salome*  
*Other appearances:* Florentine Opera, Arizona Opera, Opera New Jersey, Opera Carolina, Indianapolis Opera

**Conductor**  
Jerome Shannon  
*Nashville Opera Credits:* Andrea Chenier  
*Other Appearances:* Washington National Opera, Tulsa Opera, San Antonio Opera, Anchorage Opera, Lake George Opera Chautauqua Opera

**Mimì**  
Danielle Pastin, soprano  
*Nashville Opera Debut*  
*Other Appearances:* Metropolitan Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, Royal Albert Hall, Santa Fe Opera, Dallas Opera

**Rodolfo**  
Noah Stewart, tenor  
*Nashville Opera Debut*  
*Other Appearances:* San Francisco Opera, Royal Albert Hall, The Wexford Music Festival, Chicago Opera Theater

**Musetta**  
Heather Buck, soprano  
*Nashville Opera Credit:* *Le Pêcheurs de perles*  
*Other Appearances:* Florentine Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, Opera Naples, Metropolitan Opera, Madrid Teatro Real

**Marcello**  
Craig Verm, baritone  
*Nashville Opera Credit:* *Le Pêcheurs de perles*  
*Other Appearances:* Pittsburgh Opera, Austin Lyric Opera, Teatro Municipal de Santiago, Florentine Opera
Schaunard
Eric McKeever, baritone
Nashville Opera Credit: La Traviata
Other Appearances: Metropolitan Opera, Opera Naples, Skylight Music Theatre, Bel Cantati Opera, Dayton Opera

Colline
Paul An, bass
Nashville Opera Credit: Madama Butterfly
Other Appearances: Metropolitan Opera, New York Philharmonic, Brooklyn Arts Song Society, Israel Philharmonic, Orlando Philharmonic

Benoit/Alcindoro
Peter Johnson, bass
Nashville Opera Debut
Other Appearances: Knoxville Opera, Fargo-Moorhead Opera, Brevard Opera, Pine Mountain Music Festival
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LA BOHÈME

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