

Virginia
Opera

La Bohème

An Opera in 4 Acts

Music by GIACOMO PUCCINI

Premiere and Literary Source

Premiere 1 February 1896, Turin, Teatro Regio; based on Henry Mürger (1822-1861), *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*; libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica

La Bohème

Teacher Guide

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Principal Characters in the Opera

Mimi, a seamstress.....	Lyric Soprano
Musetta, a singer.....	Soprano
Rodolfo, a poet.....	Tenor
Marcello, a painter.....	Baritone
Schaunard, a musician.....	Baritone
Colline, a philosopher.....	Bass
Benoit, the landlord.....	Bass
Alcindoro, a state councillor.....	Bass
Parpignol, a toy vendor.....	Tenor
Customs Guard.....	Bass

Chorus: students, working girls, townsfolk, shopkeepers, street vendors, soldiers, waiters, and children

Historical Background

Henry Mürger was a minor figure on the mid-nineteenth century Parisian literary scene. His *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème* first appeared as sketches in a literary magazine, *Le Corsair*, and were then adapted into a stage play by Théodore Barrière and the author in 1849; so successful was it that the author was even awarded the Legion of Honor. In 1851 he turned the play into a novel, which was widely read and appeared in several languages. Puccini's opera is based primarily on the novel rather than the play. The novel has a number of situations that parallel the events in *La traviata*; one outstanding example is that Mimi is persuaded to leave Rodolfo by his wealthy uncle, who uses the same arguments as Germont père. Today, Mürger's work is known almost exclusively through Puccini's opera, one of the most popular in the entire repertoire, one of the "ABC's" of opera: *Aida*, *Bohème*, and *Carmen*. Mürger's novel was autobiographical, showing the vicissitudes of young artists and their lovers living a precarious existence. Mosco Carner reminds us the novel "is not a literary masterpiece but essentially high-class journalism." Mürger himself lived a "vie de bohème" and died at age 39, partly from dissipation. Several of his friends and characters in the novel died of consumption, the wasting disease of the nineteenth century that was portrayed in a number of artistic portrayals, among them Verdi's *La traviata*. We see Mürger's novel as "romantic," but it in fact was considered one of the first novels of realism, the movement that was such an influence on opera in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

For this work, Puccini's librettists were to be Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, both of whom had contributed significantly to the difficult birth of his previous opera, *Manon Lescaut*. Illica was to make the prose sketches and Giacosa to write the poetry. The librettists adhered to certain ideals in shaping the novel into an opera libretto. They wanted to capture its spirit, reproduce its atmosphere, remain faithful to the characters, keep both comic and tragic incidents, and retain the general outline of the narrative. Mürger had presented the story in four distinct tableaux rather than as a continuous narrative and Puccini and his librettists did the same. Puccini's opera is also "scenes" from bohemian life, but the scenes have a powerfully cumulative effect and even though comedy, albeit on a rather broad level, is included, the ultimate outcome is tragic.

Illica and Giacosa thoroughly achieved their goals even though the task was not an easy one. An opera libretto must be much shorter than a novel or a play to allow for the length of the music, and operatic action requires far fewer characters and incidents than a novel can support. The first thing was to reduce the number of characters, for Mürger's novel was crowded with them. What remains in the opera are essentially the two pairs of lovers, Mimi-Rodolfo and Musetta-Marcello. Schaunard and Colline both lose their lovers and themselves appear fairly sketchy in the opera. Mimi and Rodolfo are the heroine and hero, the sentimental tragic lovers, whereas Marcello and Musetta appear as their comic counterparts. The only character who underwent any kind of change from novel to opera was Mimi. In the original she was meant to be a young girl in the tradition of *Manon Lescaut*, i.e., a girl looking to be kept in luxury, and one who is often bored or in a bad temper, whereas in Puccini's opera she is the epitome of kindness and piety. This change can more accurately be explained--as Julian Budden does in his article on *La Bohème* in the *New Grove Dictionary of Opera*--by realizing that, although in their preface to the printed libretto Giacosa and Illica stated that the operatic Mimi was a composite of two characters from Mürger, Mimi and Francine, she was in fact based almost entirely on Francine. Francine was a minor character who appeared in only one chapter of Mürger's novel, a chapter entitled "Francine's Muff." She is an isolated character, fragile and innocent. This was a brilliant move on the part of the librettists, for this type of character presented a natural contrast with Musetta and provided the opera with a balance of realism and romanticism and of comedy and tragedy, some of the elements that make it such a satisfying work of art.

Although later in his career Puccini was to experience difficulty finding suitable libretti, this was not the case with *La Bohème*. In a conversation with his fellow composer Leoncavallo, who had already had a huge success with *I Pagliacci*, Puccini discovered that Leoncavallo was at that time also working on a *Bohème*, writing both the text and music. Leoncavallo in *Il secolo* on 20 March 1893 claimed that he had precedence to the subject, stating that he had already approached the artists he had in mind to create his opera. This did not deter Puccini. The very next day in the Milanese newspaper *Corriere della sera*, Puccini stated that he began working on this opera as soon as performances of *Manon Lescaut* had begun. An open challenge was later proclaimed by Puccini: "Let him compose, I will compose, the public will judge." And it has, for while Leoncavallo's version was popular for a time, as with most of his works it has not withstood the test of time. It does not possess the grace and perfection of Puccini's jewel-like setting. Even though Leoncavallo claimed precedence in beginning the project, his opera appeared more than a year after Puccini's, on 6 May 1897. The friendship between the two composers deteriorated completely as a result of this situation.

His comments in the *Corriere della Sera* notwithstanding, Puccini did not actually get down to work on *Bohème* until July of 1894. He was spending much of his time overseeing productions of his current operas throughout Europe. He had even considered changing to a different subject in the meantime--an opera based on Giovanni Verga's veristic *La lupa*-- but then fortunately reconsidered. As was his usual practice, he began picking apart the libretto and demanding changes, sometimes to the chagrin and fury of his collaborators. Giacosa offered to resign repeatedly throughout his working relationship with Puccini but was always persuaded to reconsider. Just a few of the changes may be mentioned. There was originally to be an entire act that took place in the courtyard of the house where Musetta lives but it adds little to the action except to show Mimi dancing with a student, the Viscontino Paolo, and therefore had to go. (There is such a scene in Leoncavallo's version). In act 1 Rodolfo the tenor originally had no aria, no "Che gelida manina," which is practically unthinkable. Puccini had quite a different concept of Musetta's character than Illica had at first presented and Puccini's ideas eventually won out. He stated that he wanted the Latin Quarter portrayed "the way I described it...with Musetta's scene, which I invented." In the original sketch, act 3 began with some comic episodes, which were excised at Puccini's request. A drinking song and a diatribe against women, both given to Schaunard, were eventually eliminated. Most of the problems came with act 4, issues that were not resolved until a few months before the premiere and the first three acts were completely finished. The entire score was completed on 10 December 1895.

The premiere of *La Bohème* took place in Turin on 1 February 1896, exactly three years after the premiere of Puccini's previous opera, *Manon Lescaut*, at the same theater, the Teatro Regio. The superstitious Ricordi felt this would guarantee the new opera's success and in any case La Scala was controlled by Ricordi's rival publisher, Sonzogno. Giordano's *Andrea Chénier* was also premiered in 1896, and was the only hit at La Scala that season; Sonzogno's other choices caused great dissatisfaction and even ire among the La Scala audience. The conductor for the *Bohème* premiere was the twenty-nine year old Arturo Toscanini. The principal singers were Cesira Ferrani (Mimi), Camilla Pasini (Musetta), Evan Gorga (Rodolfo), Michele Mazzini (Colline), and Antonio Pini-Corsi (Schaunard). Puccini was not overly enthused about the Teatro Regio, the acoustics of which he disliked. Surprisingly, the work was rather a failure initially, especially among the critics, although the first and last acts were generally well received. Recently in Turin Toscanini had given the Italian premiere of Richard Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*, which was taken as kind of a touchstone to which *La Bohème*, with its Gallic brevity, did not measure up. They claimed that Puccini had taken a step backwards towards triviality and was no longer following the "path of progress." There was also trouble with the cast; the Rodolfo in particular was encountering difficulties and the Marcello had had to be replaced shortly before the opening. Subsequently, Puccini made some changes, especially in act 2, when he opened it up and "let in some air." But the opera soon took off around the world, in

Argentina, Paris, and London, with many great opera stars such as Nellie Melba, John McCormack, Alessandro Bonci, Jean de Reszke, Fernando de Lucia, and Giovanni Martinelli lending their splendid voices to various productions. Many smaller theaters everywhere gave it in their own vernacular.

Unlike *Manon Lescaut*, which shows evidence of Wagnerian influences in its large orchestration and in its length, *La Bohème* makes its impact through brevity. It is a tightly unified work both musically and dramatically. One of the main themes that runs through it is coldness and its connection with poverty, illness, loneliness, and death. We first meet the Bohemians as they are cold and hungry in their garret; the first physical contact between Mimi and Rodolfo is when he touches her cold hand (“*Che gelida manina*”) and Mimi then sings of how she longs for the coming of spring; act 2 takes place outdoors on Christmas Eve; act 3 is an outdoor snow scene in which Mimi sings of loneliness and death connected with winter; only in act 4, as Mimi is dying with her hands in her muff, are her hands finally warm.

Another unifying device comes through musical reminiscence. Mimi’s musical theme, for example, is the phrase in which she first identifies herself (“*Mi chiamano Mimi*”). Act 4 is constructed largely of themes previously heard that are now transformed. The orchestra plays an important narrative role, telling the audience of important events--Mimi falling asleep, Mimi dying--before the characters onstage are aware of them. Puccini’s orchestration is particularly resourceful. In a number of instances, the delicate chamber-orchestra scoring heightens various aspects of scene painting: the flicker of flames in the stove, the rising of the moon, the rushing warmth of spring arriving. Mimi and Rodolfo, the tender lovers, are accompanied principally by the strings; the more extrovert Marcello and Musetta by the woodwinds; and for the act 2 spectacle, Puccini brings in the brass. In the opening of act 3, the simplicity of staccato chords for flutes and harp in unison over a cello pedal point suggests snow falling and produces a cold sound emotionally. A particular feature of Puccini’s compositional style is to double the vocal line in the orchestra. In the duet concluding act 1 Mimi and Rodolfo sing reinforced by flutes, piccolo, oboes, clarinets, four horns, violins, and cellos, producing a glowing, warm sound.

Detailed Story Narrative

Act I The setting is in the artists' garret in Paris, ca. 1830.

The roofs of Paris are covered with snow. Rodolfo the poet and his friend Marcello the painter are trying to work. The following theme characterizes the bohemian artists: It is Christmas Eve and extremely cold, but they have no money for fuel or food. Marcello suggests chopping up a chair for firewood but instead, Rodolfo burns a five-act play he has been writing. Colline arrives, discouraged, but finds a roaring fire in the garret. Just as the fire is about to die out, Schaunard, the luckiest of the group, enters with money, (and two boys carrying) logs and food.

Schaunard explains that he had been employed by a wealthy aristocrat to play to a neighbor's annoyingly noisy parrot until it dropped dead. Instead he charmed the maid into giving him some parsley, which he fed to the parrot and it died; hence his sudden wealth. True prodigals, they decide to go out to eat. There is a knock at the door and the group has a bit of a tiff with their landlord Benoit, who wants the rent paid. They offer him wine and make jokes about his love life and when he begins to speak of his wife's ugliness and nasty disposition, they pretend to be shocked and throw him out. They then set out to spend Christmas Eve at the Café Momus, except for Rodolfo, who stays behind to finish an article he is writing. There is a knock at the door. It is Mimi, their neighbor, whose candle has gone out. She has a fainting spell but after she recovers Rodolfo lights her candle. Both candles then are extinguished. Mimi has an ominous cough and seems frail. She has dropped her key and she and Rodolfo search for it in the darkness; their hands meet. In a passionate love duet, which is actually at first presented as two separate arias, first for Rodolfo ("**Che gelida manina**") and then for Mimi ("**Si, mi chiamano Mimi**"), each reveals details about his and her life. After an interruption from below by Rodolfo's friends trying to hasten him to the café, and his reply that he is not alone, his and Mimi's and voices join together and they go off to the Café Momus.

Act 2 Christmas Eve in the Latin Quarter.

A crossroads with the Café Momus to one side. Although this act is primarily scenic, it does further our knowledge of the lives of the main characters. The "Momus" motif is a series of fanfares in the brass; the harmonic writing, with its parallel fifths, was dissonant and very bold for its time. The area surrounding the café is very crowded with merrymakers and entertainers and the friends become separated. Rodolfo buys Mimi a pink bonnet. They are all reunited at the café. As they are devouring a sumptuous dinner Musetta, Marcello's erstwhile lover, enters on the arm of Alcindoro, an elderly admirer. Musetta enters to the following theme, one that is associated with her throughout the opera. Musetta, spying Marcello, attempts to get rid of Alcindoro by complaining about the service, smashing a plate, and then bursting into a song ("**Quando m'en vo**"), popularly known as "Musetta's Waltz." This begins as a solo number but then forms the basis for an ensemble. Finally, Musetta declares that her shoes hurt and sends Alcindoro off to buy her another pair. She and Marcello immediately make up. A military parade passes by and Musetta tells the waiter to add everyone's check to hers. After dinner, the Bohemians all go off, leaving Alcindoro, who has returned with the shoes, to pay the bill.

Act 3 The Barrière d'Enfer.

A cold February dawn. Most of Puccini's operas contain a dawn scene, such as the "Humming Chorus" in *Madama Butterfly*. In this case, a descending motif of parallel fifths on flute and harp portrays coldness and impending snow. Claude Debussy, who was famous for painting landscapes and moods in music, in general did not care for the Italian opera composers of Puccini's generation. Yet he is reported to have told Manuel De Falla that no one had described better in music the Paris of that era than Puccini.

Outside a tavern near one of the gates of Paris, Mimi enters to a reminiscence of her motif, which is interrupted by a fit of coughing. She sends for Marcello, who with Musetta is working in the tavern, painting a mural. When Marcello comes out, Mimi explains that Rodolfo has become insanely jealous for no reason (at least in her estimation) and this has destroyed their relationship. Rodolfo himself then comes out of the tavern and Mimi hides behind a tree. Marcello takes Rodolfo to task but Rodolfo explains that Mimi is a flirt and he intends to leave her but he finally admits the truth. He is in fact concerned about Mimi's health--she has tuberculosis--and feels that she would be better away from him for he cannot afford to take care of her. Mimi steps from behind the tree and sings an aria of farewell without hard feelings to Rodolfo. This aria ("**Addio, senza rancor**") is full of reminiscence motives.

Rodolfo joins her in a duet as they decide to stay together throughout the cold winter until spring arrives. This becomes a double duet as Marcello and Musetta are heard quarreling in the background. The melody for this quartet is taken from a song Puccini wrote in 1888, "Sole e amore." Mimi and Rodolfo walk away together, hand in hand.

Act 4 Back in the Bohemians' garret, some months later.

Rodolfo and Marcello are attempting to work but they have broken up with Mimi and Musetta and are saddened by their lost loves. They sing the duet, "**Ah, Mimi, tu più non torni.**" Schaunard and Colline enter and the four have a spartan meal of herring and bread. In an attempt to raise their spirits, they clown and sing until Musetta bursts in: Mimi is coming but is too ill to climb the stairs. Rodolfo helps her up the stairs and puts her on the bed. Musetta gives up her earrings and Colline his coat to buy medicine and a muff for Mimi. Colline sings a mournful goodbye to his coat, "**Vecchia zimarra.**"

Rodolfo and Mimi are left alone to reminisce and say their farewells. He tells Mimi that she is as beautiful as the dawn and he begins to sing a melody full of passion. They speak quietly of the past and their first meeting, a conversation that is underlined musically by a great deal of reminiscence motifs. The others return, a Musetta gives Mimi the muff, pretending that Rodolfo has paid for it, Musetta prays, and Mimi dies with Rodolfo calling out her name, with the orchestra recalling the last few bars of "Vecchia zimarra."

Meet the Composer Giacomo Puccini

Giacomo Puccini, the creator of some of the world's most beloved operas, was descended from a long line of composers and church organists. He was born in 1858 in Lucca and died in Brussels in 1924 of throat cancer. He began studies in Lucca with Carlo Angeloni at the Istituto Musicale of Lucca. He held various organist positions and wrote music for the church before becoming a student at the Milan Conservatory in 1880, where, like his characters in this opera, he lived a hand-to-mouth existence. Shortly after his graduation, however, his first opera, *Le Villi*, was produced and he began to receive commissions for new works (his second opera, *Edgar*) and an annuity from Italy's leading publisher, Ricordi. His first great success was *Manon Lescaut*, premiered in 1893, which made him a household name throughout Italy. He became even more famous and grew wealthy from *La Bohème* (prem. 1896). *Tosca* (1900) and *Madama Butterfly* (1904) were also extremely popular and have become standard works in the repertoire. His final opera, *Turandot*, was left unfinished at his death in 1924. Arturo Toscanini had the opera completed by Franco Alfano and it was premiered under Toscanini's baton in 1926.

Another of Puccini's works that has only fairly recently gained popularity is known as *Il trittico*, consisting of three diverse one-act operas, *Il tabarro*, *Suor Angelica*, and *Gianni Schicchi*. In addition to possessing traits of *verismo*, a number of Puccini's operas also feature exotic locales and customs: *Madama Butterfly* is set in Japan, *Turandot* in fairy-tale China, and the opera commissioned by the Metropolitan Opera in New York, *La fanciulla del West* (1910), is set in the California of the forty-niners. Both *Manon Lescaut* and *La Bohème* have French origins; indeed, among his full-length works, only *Tosca* has an Italian setting and an Italian heroine.

Puccini emerged as the leading composer among his contemporaries, a group known as *La Giovane Scuola* (The Young School) or The Generation of the '90s. The other members have become known as composers who, although they wrote several works, are known for only one successful opera: Pietro Mascagni with *Cavalleria rusticana*, Ruggiero Leoncavallo for *Pagliacci*, and Francesco Cilea with *Adriana Lecouvreur*. Puccini's popularity has on the contrary grown immensely since his death and several of his works dominate the repertoire. Some of the elements of Puccini's style that caused him to so far outstrip his contemporaries are his great sense of theater, his conjunct (stepwise) melodies with their short, memorable phrases and clear rhythmic outlines, the idiomatic nature of his melodies for great operatic voices, the intense emotional content of his libretti and music, and the power of his orchestra to suggest and sustain mood. Puccini was extremely concerned with finding exactly the right libretto, spending much more of his creative life searching for and rejecting librettos (he was a self-stylized "hunter of fowl and hunter of librettos"), demanding rewriting from his librettists (five different writers worked on *Manon Lescaut*) than he did actually composing. Moreover, he took infinite pains in polishing and revising his scores. He felt that a good play and opera should have "self-evident" action and set works that he had seen as plays in languages he barely understood but was emotionally affected by, notable examples being *Madama Butterfly* from David Belasco's play in English and *Tosca* from Sardou's French vehicle for Sarah Bernhardt.

A Short History of Opera

The word *opera* is the plural form of the Latin word *opus*, which translates quite literally as *work*. The use of the plural form alludes to the plurality of art forms that combine to create an operatic performance. Today we accept the word *opera* as a reference to a theatrically based musical art form in which the drama is propelled by the sung declamation of text accompanied by a full symphony orchestra.

Opera as an art form can claim its origin with the inclusion of incidental music that was performed during the tragedies and comedies popular during ancient Greek times. The tradition of including music as an integral part of theatrical activities expanded in Roman times and continued throughout the Middle Ages. Surviving examples of liturgical dramas and vernacular plays from Medieval times show the use of music as an “insignificant” part of the action as do the vast mystery and morality plays of the 15th and 16th centuries. Traditional view holds that the first completely sung musical drama (or opera) developed as a result of discussions held in Florence in the 1570s by an informal academy known as the *Camerata* which led to the musical setting of Rinuccini’s drama, *Dafne*, by composer, Jacopo Peri in 1597.

The work of such early Italian masters as Giulio Caccini and Claudio Monteverdi led to the development of a through-composed musical entertainment comprised of *recitative* sections (*secco* and *accompagnato*) which revealed the plot of the drama; followed by *da capo arias* which provided the soloist an opportunity to develop the emotions of the character. The function of the *chorus* in these early works mirrored that of the character of the same name found in Greek drama. The new “form” was greeted favorably by the public and quickly became a popular entertainment.

Opera has flourished throughout the world as a vehicle for the expression of the full range of human emotions. Italians claim the art form as their own, retaining dominance in the field through the death of Giacomo Puccini in 1924. Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Leoncavallo developed the art form through clearly defined periods that produced *opera buffa*, *opera seria*, *bel canto*, and *verismo*. The Austrian Mozart also wrote operas in Italian and championed the *singspiel* (sing play), which combined the spoken word with music, a form also used by Beethoven in his only opera, *Fidelio*. Bizet (*Carmen*), Offenbach (*Les Contes d’Hoffmann*), Gounod (*Faust*), and Meyerbeer (*Les Huguenots*) led the adaptation by the French which ranged from the *opera comique* to the grand full-scale *tragedie lyrique*. German composers von Weber (*Der Freischütz*), Richard Strauss (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), and Wagner (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*) developed diverse forms such as *singspiel* to through-composed spectacles unified through the use of the *leitmotif*. The English *ballad opera*, Spanish *zarzuela* and Viennese *operetta* helped to establish opera as a form of entertainment which continues to enjoy great popularity throughout the world.

With the beginning of the 20th century, composers in America diverged from European traditions in order to focus on their own roots while exploring and developing the vast body of the country’s folk music and legends. Composers such as Aaron Copland, Douglas Moore, Carlisle Floyd, Howard Hanson, and Robert Ward have all crafted operas that have been presented throughout the world to great success. Today, composers John Adams, Philip Glass, and John Corigliano enjoy success both at home and abroad and are credited with the infusion of new life into an art form which continues to evolve even as it approaches its fifth century.

The Operatic Voice

A true (and brief) definition of the “operatic” voice is a difficult proposition. Many believe the voice is “born,” while just as many hold to the belief that the voice is “trained.” The truth lies somewhere between the two. Voices that can sustain the demands required by the operatic repertoire do have many things in common. First and foremost is a strong physical technique that allows the singer to sustain long phrases through the control of both the inhalation and exhalation of breath. Secondly, the voice (regardless of its size) must maintain a resonance in both the head (mouth, sinuses) and chest cavities. The Italian word “*squillo*” (squeal) is used to describe the brilliant tone required to penetrate the full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singers. Finally, all voices are defined by both the actual voice “type” and the selection of repertoire for which the voice is ideally suited.

Within the five major voice types (*Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, Bass*) there is a further delineation into categories (*Coloratura, Lyric, Spinto, Dramatic*) which help to define each particular instrument. The *Coloratura* is the highest within each voice type whose extended upper range is complimented by extreme flexibility. The *Lyric* is the most common of the “types.” This instrument is recognized more for the exceptional beauty of its tone rather than its power or range. The *Spinto* is a voice which combines the beauty of a lyric with the weight and power of a *Dramatic*, which is the most “powerful” of the voices. The *Dramatic* instrument is characterized by the combination of both incredible volume and “steely” intensity.

While the definition presented in the preceding paragraph may seem clearly outlined, many voices combine qualities from each category, thus carving an unique niche in operatic history. Just as each person is different from the next, so is each voice. Throughout her career Maria Callas defied categorization as she performed and recorded roles associated with each category in the soprano voice type. Joan Sutherland as well can be heard in recordings of soprano roles as diverse as the coloratura Gilda in *Rigoletto* to the dramatic Turandot in *Turandot*. Below is a very brief outline of voice types and categories with roles usually associated with the individual voice type.

	<i>Coloratura</i>	<i>Lyric</i>	<i>Spinto</i>	<i>Dramatic</i>
Soprano	Norina (Don Pasquale) Gilda (Rigoletto) Lucia (Lucia di Lammermoor)	Liu (Turandot) Mimi (La Bohème) Pamina (Magic Flute)	Tosca (Tosca) Amelia (A Masked Ball) Leonora (Il Trovatore)	Turandot (Turandot) Norma (Norma) Elektra (Elektra)
Mezzo-Soprano	Rosina (Barber of Seville) Angelina (La Cenerentola) Dorabella (Così fan tutte)	Carmen (Carmen) Charlotte (Werther) Giulietta (Hoffmann)	Santuzza (Cavalleria) Adalgisa (Norma) The Composer (Ariadne auf Naxos)	Azucena (Il Trovatore) Ulrica (A Masked Ball)
Tenor	Count Almaviva (Barber of Seville) Don Ottavio (Don Giovanni) Ferrando (Così fan tutte)	Alfredo (La Traviata) Rodolfo (La Bohème) Tamino (Magic Flute)	Calaf (Turandot) Pollione (Norma) Cavaradossi (Tosca)	Dick Johnson (Fanciulla) Don Jose (Carmen) Otello (Otello)
Baritone	Figaro (Barber of Seville) Count Almavira (Le nozze di Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Don Pasquale)	Marcello (La Bohème) Don Giovanni (Don Giovanni) Sharpless (Madama Butterfly)	Verdi Baritone Germont (La Traviata) Di Luna (Il Trovatore) Rigoletto (Rigoletto)	Scarpia (Tosca) Jochanaan (Salome) Jack Rance (Fanciulla)
Bass	Bartolo (Barber of Seville) Don Magnifico (Cenerentola) Dr. Dulcamara (Elixir of Love)	Leporello (Don Giovanni) Colline (La Bohème) Figaro (Marriage of Figaro)	Buffo Bass Don Pasquale (Don Pasquale) Don Alfonso (Così fan tutte)	Basso Cantate Oroveso (Norma) Timur (Turandot) Sarastro (Magic Flute)

Opera Production

Opera is created by the combination of myriad art forms. First and foremost are the actors 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.

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 storyline. 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 singing actors and actresses 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.

As the actual performance date approaches, rehearsals are held on the newly crafted set, combined with costumes, lights, and orchestra in order to ensure a cohesive performance that will be both dramatically and musically satisfying to the assembled audience.

La Bohème Essay Questions

Literature

Try your hand writing a poem after researching more about life in the Latin Quarter of Paris. Try to write the poem either about what it was like living then or what your feelings would have been like during the time.

Music

Some of you may have seen or are familiar with the music to the musical *Rent* which is based on *La Bohème*. How do you think the production was different from what is seen in *Rent*?

History

La Bohème was written about the Latin Quarter in Paris where many artists (writers, poets, painters, etc.) were located. What do you think their living conditions were like? How do you think it would have been to live there?