



Gustav Meier  
Music Director  
63rd Season  
5th Subscription Concert  
Klein Memorial Auditorium  
Saturday, April 25, 2009  
8:00 p.m.

---

Gustav Meier, Conductor

Jennifer Black, Soprano  
Mark T. Panuccio, Tenor  
Corey McKern, Baritone  
Malinda Haslett, Soprano

PUCCINI

La Boheme  
(Concert Version)  
Time: about 1830, Paris

Act I  
A Garret

Act II  
The Latin Quarter

Intermission

Act III  
The Barrière (Gate) d' Enfer

Act IV  
In the Garret

---

*Tonight's concert is made possible in part by generous grants from the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism and People's United Bank.*

# PROGRAM NOTES

## Act I

On Christmas Eve in Paris the poet Rodolpho and the painter Marcello are in their cold garret (think 5th floor walk up) trying to work, but not too enthusiastically. They are more concerned about how cold it is and that they have no fuel for their stove. Rodolpho starts a fire with the manuscript of the drama he is writing: it makes an 'enlightening' temporary blaze. In due course, Marcello goes out to join their friends in the Latin Quarter while Rodolpho finishes an article for a journal. Mimi knocks: she is a neighbor and her candle has gone out, she is coughing - the stairs were hard to climb. Rodolpho is smitten. The two sing well-known 'get acquainted' arias to each other. Rodolpho exclaims in "Che gelida manina" (How cold your little hand is) "I am a poet...in dreams of flight and fantasy. I am indeed a millionaire... now two eyes have stolen ev'ry priceless possession of my profession..." Mimi's reply, "Mi chiamano Mimi" (I'm always called Mimi) tells him she "embroiders and makes flowers"...which speak to her "of the wonders the world calls poetic..." They agree to join his friends and leave together as she sings a high C on the word "Amor!" - a famous operatic moment.

## Act II

The scene is an intersection of several streets in the Latin Quarter of Paris: shops are all around and on one side is the Café Momus. Crowds are milling about. Mimi and Rodolpho enter. He buys her a bonnet. They meet Marcello and their other friends at the Café where they all sit at an outside table. Rodolpho introduces Mimi as "an artist...with her our chosen circle is completed...two joyous hearts united blossom in love." They are all gracious to her and she shows off her bonnet. Marcello has been brooding over being alone, but when his onetime lover, Musetta, enters on the arm of her latest middle-aged paramour, he asks for a dose of arsenic. Musetta knows her game, however, and with her famous "Waltz" entices him again. She is unrelenting: "day after day when I am strolling...people praise my dazzling beauty... I savor keenly that intense desire..." and to Marcello... "you fight your heart in vain for you love me again."

## Act III

At the toll gate on the edge of Paris that leads into the Latin Quarter, it is early dawn on a February day and snowing lightly. Lights shine in a tavern at the left. Marcello and Musetta are staying there for a month where he has painted its sign and she sings for patrons. Strains of her waltz come through the window. Rodolpho is there also, having left Mimi the previous night. Mimi enters: she knows Rodolpho loves her, but he is suspicious and jealous. She seeks Marcello's help over whether they should part. She has a coughing fit. Rodolpho comes out: she hides behind a tree. Rodolpho's complaint that she is often flirtatious is only a mask for his real concern: Mimi is desperately ill and he has no means to provide even a warm room for her. Her coughing reveals her presence. There is a caring reunion. In the meantime, Musetta has been responding to the advances of a patron in the tavern. Marcello is furious. A Quartet ends the act in which Mimi and Rodolpho ecstatically agree to stay together until Spring warms the world while the other pair argue.

## Act IV

The scene is again the garret of Act I. Rodolpho and Marcello are trying to work, but memories of Mimi and Musetta intrude. Both ladies are being kept as mistresses in fine style (part of the plot in Mürger's novel, *Scènes de la vie bohème*). The two men break into a duet fondly recalling the past. They return to their hand-to-mouth existence and at the height of some horseplay (a mock duel), Musetta flings the door open, bringing Mimi with her. Mimi has left her wealthy Count and is seriously ill. While Musetta goes out to get a muff and Marcello some medicine, Mimi and Rodolpho, left alone, recall their first meeting and re-acknowledge their love. But it is too late: Mimi dies while the orchestra intones what are probably the most heart-rending strains ever written for such a scene since opera was invented in the late 1590s.

### La bohème

#### Giacomo Puccini (1858 -1924)

Considering that *La bohème* is one of the most likeable, believable and affecting operas ever written, the three-year saga of its composition that took the patient ministering of publisher Giulio Ricordi to hold Illica (scenario), Giacosa (poet) and Puccini (composer) together, make it harrowing to think that the work might never have been finished. Besides internal vicissitudes (Giacosa quits, Puccini can't say exactly what he wants, a lot about what he rejects and is otherwise busy, Illica annoyed) external ones intruded. Leoncavallo, composer of *Pagliacci*, was writing an opera on the same subject at the same time and Wagner's monumental *Götterdämmerung* received its first Italian performance six weeks before Puccini's 'everyday' story in the same theater.

Henri Mürger's collection of short stories, *Scènes de la vie bohème*, published in book form in 1851, tells of four young men who are "gypsies of Parisian culture, artistic neophytes of more imagination than talent, who prefer a life of hardship with no thought for the morrow to the restraints of bourgeois society" (Budden: *Puccini, His Life and Works*). **Rodolpho** is a journalist and playwright; **Marcello**, a painter; Schaunard, a musician, and Colline, a philosopher. **Mimi** is a seamstress who embroiders flowers, but is consumptive. She and Rodolpho become lovers. **Musetta**, "half coquette, half termagant who has no precedent in Italian opera" (Budden), has an on-again/off-again relationship with Marcello. Benoit is the landlord who tries in

vain to collect the rent from the four friends; Alcindoro is an aging temporary paramour of Musetta's and Parpignol, a toy maker who sells his wares to children. Of this cast of characters, the pairs of lovers, Mimi and Rodolpho and Musetta and Marcello are in tonight's concert performance. All other characters and parts of the score are omitted, including "townspeople, soldiers, servants, children, students, working girls, gendarmes etc" called for in the *dramatis personae*. However, this leaves the main story line with its great music of young love set against poverty (not quite abject, nevertheless) and Mimi's worsening health intact. Youth may have one season and wild oats may play a part, but so do the beginnings of deeper relationships (although they may be ended by early death) and finding a station in life. Something like this process is happening here, but told mostly in its early stages.

Verismo was a movement in theater and opera in the later 19th century. At first "a story of contemporary life among ordinary people who express themselves in homelier language" (Budden), verismo gradually became more violent and brutal. Puccini's version is of the earlier sort. "Realistic elements abound in *La bohème* as in no previous opera, whether of Puccini or anyone else" is Budden's opinion. Notable is the way each Act unfolds as a whole, not divided into scenes of set pieces like recitative and aria. "For an Italian opera in which the artificialities of the medium are so little felt there is but one precedent: (Mozart's) *Le Nozze di Figaro* (Budden).

- Burton Hatheway