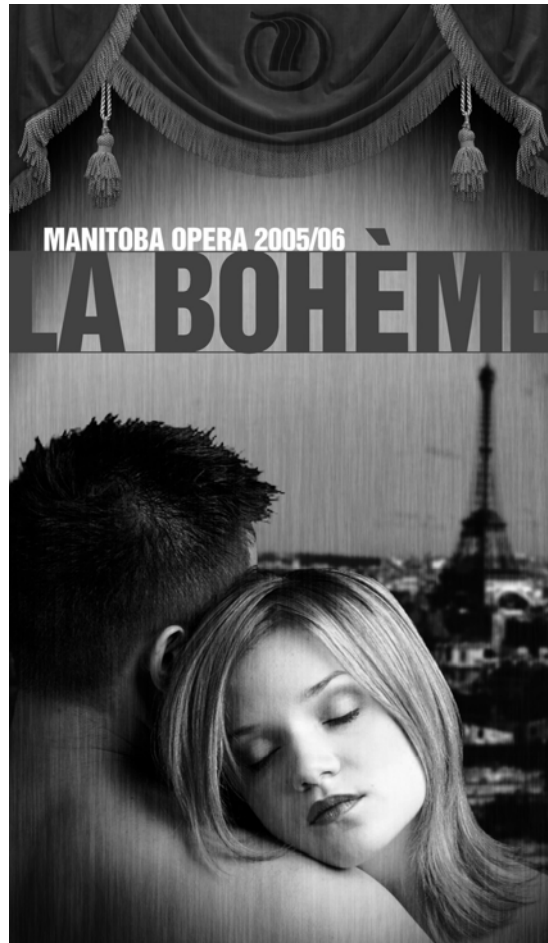


 Manitoba Opera

La Bohème

Composed by: Giacomo Puccini
Libretto by: Giuseppe Giacosa & Luigi Illica
Based on Henri Mürger's *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème*



Study Guide

October 2005

Written & Compiled by: Jane Stewart

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Welcome to Manitoba Opera

This Study Guide has been created to assist you in preparing your students for their visit to the opera. It is our hope that you will be able to add this to your existing curriculum in order to expand your students' understanding of opera, literature, history, and the fine arts. Materials in the Study Guide may be copied and distributed to students. Some students may wish to go over the information at home if there is insufficient time to discuss in class. Make the opera experience more meaningful and enjoyable by sharing with them knowledge and background on opera and *La Bohème* before they attend.

Please Note: The Dress Rehearsal is the last opportunity the singers will have on stage to work with the orchestra before Opening Night. Since vocal demands are so great on opera singers, some singers choose not to sing in full voice during the Dress Rehearsal in order to avoid unnecessary strain.



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A Short Introduction to Opera

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

Opera consists of many dimensions: the human voice, orchestral music, the visual arts (scenery, costumes and special effects), drama (tragedy or comedy), and occasionally dance. The melding of these elements can make you cry tears of joy or sadness, produce laughter or anger, but most importantly transport you to a magical land of music and song.

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

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

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

Operas are divided into scenes and **acts** that contain different types of vocal pieces for one or many singers. An **aria** is a vocal solo that focuses on a character's emotions rather than actions. A **recitative** is sung dialogue or speech that occurs between arias and **ensembles**.

Composers write the **score** or the music for the opera. Sometimes the composer will also write the text of the opera, but most often they work with a **librettist**. The story of the opera is written as a **libretto**, a text that is easily set to music. In the past, the libretto was also bound and sold to the audience. Today, the audience can easily follow the plot with the use of **surtitles**. Surtitles are the English translation of the libretto, which are projected onto a screen above the stage.

There are several differences between opera and musicals like *Phantom of the Opera*. One significant difference is the 'partnership' found between the music and the drama in an opera. While musicals use songs to help tell a story, in an opera, the music contributes to the drama, it does not only accompany it. The musical style is another important difference between the two art forms; opera is usually **classical** and complex, while musicals feature pop songs and sometimes rock and roll. Also, singers in musicals have microphones hidden in their costumes or wigs to amplify their voices. The voices of opera singers are so strong; no amplification is needed, even in a large venue. Furthermore, operas are almost completely sung, while the use of spoken words are more common to musicals. There are some operas with spoken words and these are called **singspiels** (German) and **opera-comique** (French). Examples are Mozart's *The Magic Flute* and Bizet's *Carmen*, respectively.

All terms in **bold** are defined in the Glossary.

Audience Etiquette

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

- ◆ **Dress** to be comfortable. Many people enjoy dressing up in formal attire.
- ◆ **Arrive** on time. Latecomers disturb the singers and others in the audience. Latecomers will only be seated at suitable breaks - often not until intermission.
- ◆ **Find** your seat with the help of your teacher or an usher.
- ◆ **Remove** your hat. This is customary and is respectful to the artists and to people sitting behind you.
- ◆ **Turn off** cell phones, pagers, digital watch alarms and all electronic devices.
- ◆ **Leave** your camera at home. A flash can be very disturbing to the artists and audience members alike.
- ◆ **Save** all conversations, eating and drinking, and chewing gum, for the intermission. Talking and eating can be disruptive to other audience members and distracts from your ability to be absorbed by the show. The audience is critical to the success of the show – without you; there can be no performance.
- ◆ **Settle in** and get comfortable **before** the performance begins. Read your program before the performance – rustling through the program during the show can disrupt everyone.
- ◆ **Clap** as the lights are dimmed and the conductor appears and bows to the audience. Watch as the conductor then turns to the orchestra and takes up his or her baton to signal the beginning of the opera.
- ◆ **Listen** to the prelude or overture before the curtain rises. It is part of the performance. It is an opportunity to identify common musical themes that may reoccur during the opera.
- ◆ **Sit** still during the performance. Only whisper when it is absolutely necessary, as a whisper is heard all over the theatre, and NEVER (except in an emergency) stand during the performance.
- ◆ **Applaud** (or shout Bravo!) at the end of an aria or chorus piece to show your enjoyment. The end of a piece can be identified by a pause in the music.
- ◆ **Laugh** when something is funny – this is a performance and you are expected to respond!
- ◆ **Read** the English surtitles projected above the stage. Most operas are not sung in English (*La Bohème* is sung in Italian). Use the surtitles to understand the story.
- ◆ **Listen** for subtleties in the music. The tempo, volume and complexity of the music and singing often depict the “feeling” or “sense” of the action or character. Also, notice repeated words or phrases; they are usually significant.

Finally, have fun and enjoy the show!!!

Manitoba Opera

Presents

La Bohème

October, November 2005; Manitoba Centennial
Concert Hall

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Music by Giacomo Puccini
Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica
Based on the Henri Mürger's *Scènes de la Bohème*

First Performance: February 1, 1896, Teatro Regio, Turin, Italy
Sung in Italian with English surtitles

Approximately 3 hours
with two intermissions (20 minutes and 15 minutes respectively)

Cast & Crew

Marcello (a painter)	Baritone	Philip Torre
Rodolfo (a poet)	Tenor	Derek Taylor
Colline (a philosopher)	Bass	Taras Kulish
Schaunard (a musician)	Baritone	Daniel Okulitch
Benoit (a landlord)	Bass	David Watson
Mimi	Soprano	Janinah Burnett
Alcindoro (a councillor of state)	Bass	David Watson
Musetta	Soprano	Monica Huisman
Conductor		Dean Williamson
Director		Rob Herriot
Lighting Designer		Gerald King
Set Designer		Opera Carolina
Costumes		Malabar Toronto
Stage Manager		Paul Skyrzik
Assistant Stage Manager #1		Evan Klassen
Assistant Stage Manager #2		Wanda Bretecher

Pronunciation Guide

La Bohème

Marcello
Rodolfo
Colline

Schaunard
Benoit
Mimi
Alcindoro
Musetta

Lah Boh-EMM

Mahr-CHELL-loh
Roh-DOHL-foh
Kohl-LEE-neh

Shoh-NAHR
Behn-NWAH
Mee-MEE
Ahl-cheen-DAW-raw
Moo-ZET-tah

Giacomo Puccini
Guiseppe Giacosa
Luigi Illica

JAH-koh-moh Pooh- CHEE-nee
Joo-SEP-pay Jaw-KOH-zah
LWEE-jee EEL-lee-kah

About the Composer- Giacomo Puccini



Giacomo Puccini (1858 - 1924)

Born in 1858 in Lucca, Italy, Giacomo Puccini came from a long line of professional musicians. When his father, organist and choirmaster of the San Martino church there, died, Giacomo was only five years old. The post as organist and choirmaster was held, through an uncle, to ensure Puccini could assume the post when he was old enough in order to maintain the line of Puccini musicians presiding there, which went back to Giacomo Puccini, having received that appointment in 1739. Young Puccini began his career as organist there when he was 14.

Despite a reluctance to follow in the family footsteps, his mother's persistence and his own interest in the gadgetry of organs and mechanics of music, Puccini not only held two jobs as a church organist during his teens, he did become a composer.

Puccini was encouraged in his career as a composer by the positive reception for some of his church pieces and a cantata. *Aida*, the latest Verdi opera he saw at age 18, also inspired him. Scholarships from a great-uncle and Queen Margherita of Savoy enabled him to study at the Milan Conservatory from 1880-83.

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

Because Puccini was so theatrical, critics and academics have always tried to deny him his proper place among serious composers. The public, however, feels differently, and Puccini remains one of operagoers' favourites. Critics also point out that Puccini was more interested in his female characters - his heroines generally being a 'soft, smiling girl driven by emotion rather than by thought.'

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

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

A chain-smoker, Puccini developed throat cancer and was taken to Brussels in 1924 for treatment by a specialist. Though the surgery was successful, Puccini's heart failed, and he died shortly afterward. At the time of his death, he had been working on the most ambitious of his 12 operas, *Turandot*, based on Schiller's romantic adaptation of a fantasy by Carlo Gozzi, the 18th-century Venetian satirist. In *Turandot*

for the first time Puccini wrote extensively for the chorus, and he provided an enlarged, enriched orchestral tapestry that showed an awareness of Stravinsky's *Petrouchka* and other contemporary scores.

Compiled from New York City Opera teachopera.org, Fort Worth Opera 2000 Study Guide, and Tulsa Opera Study Guide 1995-96.

About the Librettists – Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica

Puccini's partnership with the playwright/librettists Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa was one of the most successful in the whole history of Italian opera ~ a meeting of great artistic minds akin to Verdi's association

with Boito and Bellini's with Romani. Although Illica and Giacosa are best remembered for their work with Puccini, each had an active career of his own.

Luigi Illica (1857-1919)

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

He began writing librettos in 1889. While his work on three of Puccini's operas is recognized as his chief contribution to the field, he also wrote librettos for several other composers, including those for Giordano's *Andrea Chenier* (1896-the same year as *La Bohème*), an opera still popular and performed today, and two operas of Mascagni

Giuseppe Giacosa (1847-1906)

Giuseppe Giacosa began his professional life, not as a writer, but as a lawyer. He graduated in law from Turin University and immediately joined his father's firm in Milan. He moved permanently into the literary world, however, when his one-act verse comedy, *Una partita a scacchi*, became a popular success. From 1888-1894 Giacosa held the chair of literature and dramatic art at the Milan Conservatory.

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

Having taken Puccini under his wing, Ricordi was intent on hiring the best writers to work with the young composer on his *La Bohème* - he found them in Illica and Giacosa. The three had a very clear division of responsibilities when working together: it was Illica's job to plan the scenario (i.e. the opera's plan, and division into acts and scenes) and to draft the dialogue; next, Giacosa transformed the prose into polished verse; finally Puccini set this verse to music. This collaboration was such a success that the three worked together (dividing the responsibilities in the same way) on two other operas: *Tosca* (1900) and *Madama Butterfly* (1904).

The collaboration ended with the death of Giacosa in 1906. Puccini continued to discuss the idea of translating the story of Marie Antoinette into an operatic setting with Illica, but this project never came to fruition. For his final operas, Puccini turned to other librettists.

Sources: Julian Budden, "Luigi Illica" and "Giuseppe Giacosa" in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*.

Compiled from Columbia University/New York City Opera Project Fall 2001.

Bohemian Life

In the 19th century France, a bohemian referred to those who lived outside the norms, or lived a 'counter-culture' lifestyle. The name came from the name "Bohemia" - the area now know as the Czech Republic. Since gypsies were believed to have come from Bohemia, and gypsies did not conform to traditional French society, the word Bohemian was applied to those who did not conform.

Both Puccini and Mürger, whose writing formed the basis for the opera story, led 'Bohemian' lives during their young adult lives. Although it was a time of financial need, it was a time of free spiritedness. The main characters in the opera are based on lives and people both the composer and author would have known. The two women were developed from real people. Mimi was based on four working women while Musetta on two, one a nude model for the painter Ingres and the other a woman famous for her love affairs.

Synopsis – *La Bohème*

A coming of age story, opera-style, *La Bohème* was based on articles and a play by Henri Mürger and, to some degree, on Puccini's own period living as a poor student in Milan.

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

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

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

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

From *Opera News*

What To Listen For

La Bohème is a **verismo** opera, meaning it tells the story of ordinary people rather than aristocrats and great heroes. Its costumes and stage settings generally are more realistic to the times in which it is set, rather than having the sumptuous costumes and scenery of some other operas.

ACT I

Che gelida manina – The aria sung by Rodolfo, taking Mimi’s ‘little hand that is frozen’ in his and telling her about himself. She responds with her aria, *Si, mi chiamano Mimì*, telling him her real name is Lucia but she’s always called Mimì and that she is a seamstress and his neighbour.

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

ACT II

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

ACT III

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

Act IV

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

Suggested Audio and Video Recordings

CD

1990 EMI CDS 7541242 (2 CDs)

Orch. Teatro alla Scala Milan, Gianluigi Gelmetti (cond.)

Daniela Dessi (Mi), Adelina Scarabelli (Mu), Giuseppe Sabbatini (R), Paolo Gavanelli (Ma), Alfonso Antoniozzi (S), Carlo Colombara (C)

1991 Koch 315922 (2 CDs)

Orch. Arena di Verona, Anton Guadagno (cond.)

Katia Ricciarelli (Mi), Francisco Araiza (R), Paata Burchuladze (C)

1993 ERATO 0630 10699-2 (2 CDs)

London Symphony Orch., Kent Nagano (cond.)

Kiri Te Kanawa (Mi), Nancy Gustafson (Mu), Richard Leech (R), Gino Quilico (Ma), Alan Titus (S),
Roberto Scandiuizzi (C)

1994 Naxos 553151 (2 CDs)

Czecho-Slovak Radio Symphony Orch., W. Humburg (cond.)

Luba Orgonasova (Mi), Welch (Mu), Dalmacio Gonzales (R), Fabio Previati (Ma)

For additional CD selections, check

<http://opera.stanford.edu/Donizetti/Elisir/disco.html>

VIDEO

Metropolitan Opera

La Bohème

taped January 1982

Conductor: James Levine

Mimi: Teresa Stratas

Musetta: Renata Scotto

Rodolfo: José Carreras

Marcello: Richard Stilwell

Schaunard: Allan Monk

Colline: James Morris

Production - Franco Zeffirelli

141 minutes

Pioneer Classics

Suggested Books

General

Boyden, Matthew. *Opera, The Rough Guide*, The Rough Guides Ltd, 1997.

Brener, Milton. *Opera Offstage*, Walker & Co., 1996.

Cross, Milton. *The Complete Stories of the Great Operas*, Doubleday, 1952.

Earl of Harewood, ed. *The New Kobbe's Complete Opera Book*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976.

Forman, Sir Denis. *A Night at the Opera*, Random House Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1994.

Jellinek, George. *History Through the Opera Glass*, Pro. Am Music Resources, 1994.

Orrey, Leslie (Rodney Milnes ed.). *A Concise History of Opera*, Thames and Hudson, 1987.

Plotkin, Fred. *Opera 101: A Complete Guide to Learning & Loving Opera*, Hyperion, 1994.

Pogue, David Speck, Scott. *Opera for Dummies*, John Wiley & Sons, 1997.

Sadie, Stanley, ed. *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1992.

Simon, Henry. *One Hundred Great Operas and Their Stories*, Doubleday, 1989.

Walsh, Michael. *Who's Afraid of Opera?* Fireside, 1994.

***La Bohème* and Puccini**

[The Complete Operas of Puccini](#) A Critical Guide

by [Charles Osborne](#)

Da Capo Paperback

Puccini: His Life and Works

by [Julian Budden](#)

Master Musicians Series

The Operatic Voice

Operatic singing developed in Europe during the 17th century. The vocal demands are far greater on an opera singer than on any other singer. Opera singers rarely use microphones, and therefore must develop their voices to make a sound that will project and be heard above an orchestra and be heard throughout a large theatre.

After years of practice and study, an opera singer learns to use his or her body as an amplification device. By controlling the muscles of the diaphragm (a muscle beneath the lungs and above the stomach) the singer can regulate the amount of breath used. The diaphragm expands and contracts regulating the air that passes through the vocal cords, which, in turn, causes them to vibrate. The speed at which the cords vibrate determines the pitch. As the sound passes through the mouth it resonates in the upper chest cavities and the sinus cavities of the face and head. These cavities act as small echo chambers and help amplify the sound. The shape of the mouth and the placement of the tongue near the lips contribute to the tone and sound of the words.

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

Professional singers develop a number of roles in their repertoire. Since the principal artists are required to have their parts memorized before rehearsals begin, singers must prepare well in advance of each contract. Singers have voice teachers who help them refine their singing techniques and many will also have an acting coach. Even a well-established singer will have a vocal coach to teach singing and acting techniques for specific roles.

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

After the role has been studied intensely and the singer is hired to perform, they arrive at the opera company for the rehearsals. This time is spent refining the music with the conductor and staging the action with the stage director. Each director has a different idea of how the character should be played, and each conductor has a different idea of how the character should sound, therefore the singer must modify his or her techniques to reach the desired result.

Physical health is a major priority to a singer. Contrary to popular belief not all opera singers are overweight. Conventional wisdom used to state that excessive weight gave added volume and richness to the voice however, in recent years, people have discovered that physical fitness can give similar benefits to a voice. Plus, the overall health benefits of being in shape overshadow any loss of vocal power. Most singers, like professional athletes try to avoid such substances as tobacco, alcohol and caffeine.

There are six basic vocal categories:

Women:

Soprano: The highest female voice, similar to a flute in range and tone colour. Usually plays the heroine in the opera since a high, bright sound can easily suggest youth and innocence.

Mezzo-Soprano: The middle-range female voice, similar to an oboe in range and tone colour. Called an alto in choral arrangements, can play a wide variety of characters including gypsies, mothers and even the part of a young man (trouser role).

Contralto: The lowest female voice, similar to an English horn in range and tone colour. Usually play unique roles including fortune-tellers, witches and older women. Not very common.

Men:

Tenor: The highest male voice, similar to a trumpet in range, tone color and acoustical “ring.” Usually plays the hero or the romantic lead in the opera.

Baritone: The middle-range male voice, similar to a French horn in tone color. Often plays the leader of mischief in comic opera or the villain in tragic opera, sometimes even the hero.

Bass: The lowest male voice, similar to a trombone or bassoon in tone color. Usually portrays old, wise men, or foolish, comic men.

The vocal parts overlap each other. The notes that are high for baritone to sing are low for a tenor. The notes that are low for a baritone to sing are high for a bass. For this reason you may see a high range mezzo-soprano singing a soprano’s role or a low range baritone singing a bass’ role.

The following terms can be used to describe special characteristics in a vocal range:

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

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

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

*Compiled from Opera Columbus Study Guide



Glossary: Important Words in Opera

Act- a section of the opera that is then divided into scenes.

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

Aside- a secret comment from an actor directly to the audience that the other characters cannot hear.

Baritone- the middle singing range of the male voice. Daniel Okulitch (Schaunard) is an example of this vocal range.

Bass- the lowest singing range of the male voice. Taras Kulish (Colline) is an example of this vocal range.

Basso buffo (Italian)- a bass singer who specializes in comic characters.

Basso profundo (Italian)- the most serious bass voice.

Baton- short stick that the conductor uses to lead the orchestra.

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

Blocking- directions given to the performers for movement on stage.

Bravo (Italian)- a form of appreciation shouted by audience members at the end of a particularly pleasing performance. Technically, Bravo refers to a male performer, Brava refers to a female performer and Bravi refers to many performers.

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

Cadenza- a passage of singing, often at the end of an aria, which shows off the singer's vocal ability.

Castrato (Italian)- a castrated male prized for his high singing voice.

Choreographer- the person who designs the steps of a dance.

Chorus- a group of singers of all vocal ranges, singing together to support the vocal leads.

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

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

Composer- the individual who writes all the music for both voice and instrument.

Comprimario (Italian)- a nineteenth century term referring to secondary or supporting roles such as confidantes, messengers, and matchmakers.

Contralto- the lowest female voice range.

Conductor- the person responsible for the musical interpretation and coordination of the performance. The conductor controls the tempo, the dynamic level and the balance between singers and orchestra. You will see this person standing in the orchestra pit conducting the musicians and the singers. The conductor for *La Bohème* is Dean Williamson.

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

Crescendo- a build in the volume or dynamic of the music.

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

Curtain Call- occurs at the end of the performance when all the cast members and the conductor take bows. This can occur in front of the curtain or on the open stage.

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

Diva- literally, “goddess” in Italian. An important female opera star. The masculine form is divo.

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

Duet- music that is written for two people to sing together.

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

Ensemble- a part of the opera written for a group of two or more singers. This may or may not include the chorus.

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

Finale- the last musical number of an opera or an act.

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

Helden- German prefix meaning “heroic”. Can also apply to other voices, but usually used in “heldentenor.”

House- the auditorium and front of the theatre excluding the stage and backstage areas.

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

Interlude- a short piece of instrumental music played between scenes and acts.

Intermission- a break between acts of an opera. The lights go on and the audience is free to move around. *La Bohème* has **two** intermissions of **20** and **15** minutes respectively.

Librettist- the writer of the opera’s text. The librettists for *La Bohème* are Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica

Libretto- Italian for “little book.” It is the text or story of the opera.

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

Maestro- means “master” in Italian. Used as a courtesy title for the conductor (male or female).

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

Mezzo-soprano- the middle singing range for a female voice.

Motif or Leitmotif- a recurring musical theme used to identify an emotion, person, place, or object.

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

Opera buffa (Italian)- an opera about ordinary people, usually, but not always comic. First developed in the eighteenth century.

Opera seria (Italian)- a serious opera. The usual characters are gods and goddesses, or ancient heroes.

Opera-comique (French) or Singspiel (German)- a form of opera which contains spoken dialogue.

Operetta- lighthearted opera with spoken dialogue, such as a musical.

Orchestra- an ensemble, led by a conductor, that is comprised of string, woodwind, brass and percussion instruments.

Orchestra pit- sunken area in front of the stage where the orchestra sits.

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

Pitch- how high or low a note sounds.

Prelude- a short introduction that leads into an act without pause.

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

Principal- a major singing role, or the singer who performs such a role.

Production- the combination of sets, costumes, props, and lights etc.

Props- objects carried or used on stage by the performers.

Proscenium- the front opening of the stage which frames the action.

Quartet- four singers or the music that is written for four singers. Also quintet, sextet, etc

Raked Stage- a stage that slants downwards towards the audience.

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

Rehearsal- a working session in which the singers prepare for public performance.

Score- the written music of an opera or other musical work.

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

Soprano- the highest range of the female singing voice. Monica Huisman (Musetta) and Janinah Burnett (Mimi) are examples of this vocal range.

Soubrette (French)- pert young female character with a light soprano voice.

Spinto (Italian)- a lyric voice that has the power and incisiveness for dramatic climaxes.

Stage Areas- refers to the various sections of the stage as seen by those on stage. See diagram in Workshop #1.

Stage Director- the person in charge of the action on stage. He or she shows the singers, chorus and cast where and when to move and helps them create their characters. The stage director develops a concept for how the entire performance should look and feel. He or she works closely with the stage managers, lighting designer, set designers, costume designer and wig and make-up artists to make his or her vision into reality. Rob Herriot is the Stage Director for *La Bohème*

Stage Manager- the person who coordinates and manages elements of the performance. The stage manager for *La Bohème* is Paul Skyrzik.

Supernumeraries (Supers)- appear on stage in costume in non-singing and usually, non-speaking roles.

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

Synopsis- a short summary of the story of the opera.

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

Tempo- speed of the music.

Tenor- the highest natural adult male voice. Derek Taylor (**Rodolfo**) is an example of this kind of singing voice.

Trill- very quick alternation between two adjacent notes. See coloratura.

Trio- an ensemble of three singers or the music that is written for three singers.

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

Verismo describes a realistic style of opera that started in Italy at the end of the 19th century. *La Bohème* is a verismo opera.



Workshop #1– Stage Business

Objectives:

Students will be able to express and apply their knowledge of the areas of the stage through writing and movement.

Students will investigate the historical background of stage positioning.

Pre-class:

Tape a massive grid to the floor of the space you are working in. This can be used to physically point out the areas of the stage as well as be used for the game (“Director Says”).

Activity #1: Group Discussion

Have a group discussion with your class regarding why individuals might need to assign names for the different areas of the theatre, questioning the purpose that it serves.

Activity #2: Historical Significance of the Stage

Explain briefly the historical significance for the set-up of the theatre. Include such points as how the stage was originally raked so that the back portion of the stage was higher than the front portion. This was done because the audience's seats were not raised as they usually are today. It enabled those individuals sitting in the back row of the theatre to see the players clearly. As a result the back of the stage is called up stage and the front of the stage is referred to as down stage.

You may also choose to discuss which areas of the stage are most important. For example, the strongest entrance is from stage left.

Distribute the "Stage Facts" on the next page, so that students can refer to it as you physically go to the taped area that you are explaining. You may choose to have them draw and copy the areas of the stage for themselves.

Activity #3: "Director Says" Game

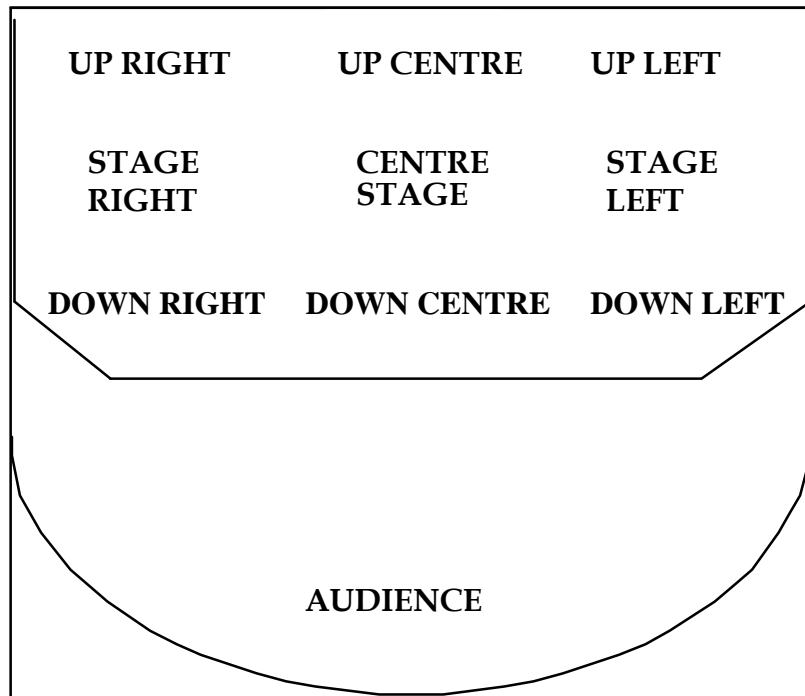
The teacher designates one of the students as the director, or for the first round you can be the director. The remaining students are the performers.

The director gives out the directions: "Move upstage", "Move stage right," "Move to up centre," etc. The director may give out directions to the entire group at once, small groups, or individuals e.g.: "All performers with red socks go to stage left."

Students are out if they move in any direction other than the one the director gives. The director gives out directions more rapidly, and any performer who moves in the wrong direction or hesitates is out. You may need to have a judge.

Stage Facts

Opera singers are required to act as well as sing and therefore they must understand the stage set-up. In rehearsals, the director will indicate to the singers what they should be doing and where they should do it. To do this they use a special vocabulary. Take a look at the diagram below in order to understand the different areas of the stage.



Workshop #2 – *La Bohème*

Objectives:

Student will be able to express their knowledge of the storyline of *La Bohème* through verbal and written expression. Students will be able to express their knowledge of character through writing a character sketch

Activity #1: Story of *La Bohème*

Have the students read a version of *La Bohème*. You can use the synopsis found in the Study Guide or most CD versions include a synopsis and often the libretto (There also is a complete translation available at <http://www.bohemianopera.com/bohemelibretto.htm>.) You can choose to read it aloud to the students or have them read it silently. Have the students discuss what happens to the characters and why they think each character behaved the way they did. Do they think a similar story could be told in modern times or can they think of contemporary stories that have a similar theme. You might want to talk especially about the concept of Bohemians and whether they think all the characters, or only some, portrayed Bohemian characteristics.

For a more dramatic approach, read the libretto as a reader's theatre, having students take turns speaking the different roles. If done in this manner, ask the students to put emotion into their voices and encourage exaggeration. You might have to start them off, but this will provide an interesting way of reading the story.

Another approach is to convert the synopsis into an improvised play. Have students create the dialogue between characters at key points in the story.

Incorporate the music. Have the students discuss what they hear. Some discussion topics include:

- What mood does the music create?
- What does the music say about the character?
- How does it say it?
- What emotions are conveyed through the music?

Activity #2: Sharing with a group

After viewing the Dress Rehearsal, have the students discuss what they saw. To help focus conversations, get the students to create a list of qualities that they feel are key to understanding *La Bohème* and its characters.

Activity #3: Creating a journal from point of view of a character

Allow students to pick a specific moment in the opera, preferably a point of conflict for the character. Have the students write a journal of those events from the point of view of their character. Explain to the students that they are to take on the persona of that character and should refer to the character through personal pronouns. Also, remind students that they are only to express information that their character would know.

Character Profile

Name _____

Physical Characteristics (their style and physical attributes)

Psychological Characteristics (mental aspects of character, how do they think about things?)

Emotional Characteristics (are they generally cheerful, sad, snobby, “off-balance” etc.?)

Family

Career/Income (if applicable)

Interests and Hobbies

Workshop #3 - Writing a Review of *La Bohème*

Objectives:

Students will be able to write clear and well-supported expository essays.

Students will utilize observation and critical thinking skills based on real-life, real-time experiences.

Students can submit their writing for publication (school newspaper) or you can send the reviews to Manitoba Opera. We would love to hear what the students thought.

Activity #1- Think-Group-Share

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

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

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

Activity #2- Gallery Walk

Have the groups travel around the room to examine the discussion poster papers. During the walk, students must write down one thing that surprised them, one thing that they didn't think of, and one thing that they would like explained. Once this is done, have a large group discussion about the different ideas that they encountered on their walk.

Activity #3- Outlining your review

Go over the essential aspects of a review including:

- a clearly stated purpose
- a coherent comparison/contrast organizational pattern
- a summary paragraph
- capturing the interest of the reader
- precise nouns
- revision for consistency of ideas

You might give your students a few samples of reviews for fine arts events from the newspaper as examples - or ask them to bring in some reviews they find themselves. Have the students fill out the "Review Outline" worksheet. Once this has been completed, students may write their rough draft.

Activity #4- Peer Conferencing

Students will exchange reviews to critique and edit. Have the students use the "Peer Evaluation" worksheet to help guide them. Encourage the students to focus on effective coordination of ideas in sentences and the correct use of grammar and punctuation.

Activity #5- Creating the final draft

Have students make the appropriate adjustments to their reviews. You could also have the students type the pieces up and organize them into a newspaper. Also have the students complete the "Self-evaluation" worksheet. Include this in the total mark.

Review Outline

Purpose (why are you writing this and who is your audience?)

Plot Synopsis (including who sang what role, etc.)

Paragraph #1 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

Paragraph #2 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

Paragraph #3 (compare and contrast, things you liked or didn't like)

Summary/Closing Paragraph

Optional Activity/Approach

Be a music critic in the 1830s. Students imagine they are living at the time of the first performance of *La Bohème*, in 1896.

Activity #1 – Historical Research

Students will need to learn about the historical context in France (and Europe) in the 1830s and around the time Puccini wrote *La Bohème* (early 1890s). They may want to learn more about the Bohemian lifestyle and what was happening in other art forms (e.g., literature and painting).

Activity #2 – Writing the review

Students may want to create a newspaper from the 1890s, in which their review is included. The review itself could incorporate quotes and/or headlines from actual historical reviews. The students' reviews can follow a similar outline to that for the activity above, but they must remember the time period in which they are pretending to write.

If they design a newspaper, they can try to use similar type styles (font) and page layout as were used in the 1890s.

As with the previous activity, peer and self-evaluations of the reviews can be completed, using the outlines in the following pages.

Manitoba Opera would love to receive a copy of any reviews or newspapers produced by the students. Please forward them to the attention of: Education Coordinator,
Manitoba Opera

380 Graham Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R3C 4K2
204-949-0377 (fax)

Self-Evaluation

Date: _____

Name of Reviewer: _____

Review Title: _____

Scale: 5-Outstanding 4-Above Average 3-Average 2-Needs improvement 1-Unclear
0-Has not been done

Process & Product Assessment:

- _____ Purpose of the piece clearly identified
- _____ Reader clearly taken into account (background, word choice)
- _____ Engaging to the reader (was it interesting to read?)
- _____ Complete sentence structure (grammar, spelling and punctuation)
- _____ Varied length and types of sentences used
- _____ Strong word choices (adjectives, adverbs and nouns)
- _____ Originality and creativity
- _____ Attention to detail and support of beliefs with examples

Total: /40

Comments:

Other Activities

- Study the history and politics of Puccini's time, particularly the year when *La Bohème* premiered (1896); what authors were popular, what scientific discoveries were being made; what was the social and political life in Canada at the time (as well as in Europe).
- Research Puccini's life, especially looking at his impact on music and opera and what influenced him.
- Write a story about your visit to the Manitoba Opera, write us a letter, or draw a picture to illustrate your memories from the experience.

Web sites with additional ideas and resources:

<http://www.clevelandopera.org/tour/educational/boheme/boheme.htm>

<http://www.teachopera.net/>

Opera Comprehension Test

General Opera

1. _____ A theatrical production incorporating both vocal and instrumental music, drama, and sometimes dance.
2. _____ The lowest male vocal range.
3. _____ An instrumental introduction to an opera.
4. _____ The area where the orchestra is seated.
5. _____ The female vocal range lying between soprano and contralto.
6. _____ A song for solo voice in an opera.
7. _____ The highest female vocal range.
8. _____ A song for two voices.
9. _____ The lowest female vocal range.
10. _____ The Italian word meaning "little book."
11. _____ The middle male vocal range.
12. _____ He/she has the artistic view for the performance of the opera.

La Bohème

1. The opera *La Bohème* takes place in _____ (give the location and approximate date).
2. Rodolfo is a _____ (profession).
3. In the first act, Rodolfo meets and falls in love with _____.
4. Musetta was once the girlfriend of _____.
5. *La Bohème* was composed by _____.
6. The libretto (words) for *La Bohème* were written by _____.
7. The role of Marcello is sung by a _____ (vocal category).
8. The role of Mimì is sung by a _____ (vocal category).

Answers

General Opera

1. opera
2. bass
3. overture
4. pit
5. mezzo-soprano
6. aria
7. soprano
8. duet
9. contralto
10. libretto
11. baritone
12. director

La Bohème

1. Paris, 1830s
2. poet
3. Mimì
4. Marcello
5. Giacomo Puccini
6. Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa
7. baritone
8. soprano

Teacher's Evaluation Sheet

Your comments and suggestions are greatly appreciated. Please take a few minutes to fill out this questionnaire and return it to the address below. Thank you for your comments and suggestions.

Name: _____

School: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Fax: _____

Email: _____

Grade(s) you teach: _____

Subjects: _____

Have you attended other performing arts events with your students in the past year?

Yes No

If yes, what were they? _____

How did you find out about Manitoba Opera's Student Night at the Opera?

Were you able to apply the Teacher's Study Guide in your classroom activities prior to coming to the opera?

Yes No

If not, please elaborate: _____

If so, which sections of the Study Guide did you find most useful?

How appropriate was the information provided in the Study Guide?
