

At a Glance – *La bohème*
by Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)



OPERA BACKGROUND

- *La bohème* means “Bohemian.” During the time period of this opera (1830), there were a lot of poor, but happy prospective artists living in Paris.
- Puccini’s own life as a young man in Milan served as a source of inspiration for elements of the libretto of this opera.
- Another composer of the time, Leoncavallo, was writing an opera based on the same book and professed to have “priority” on the subject. Puccini responded, “Let him compose. I will compose. The audience will decide.” Puccini’s *La bohème* remains on the TOP TEN most widely performed operas, while Leoncavallo’s version has faded into obscurity.

MAIN CHARACTERS

- Rodolfo (roh-DOHL-foh), tenor – a poor Parisian poet who falls in love with Mimì
- Mimì (mee-MEE), soprano – a poor seamstress suffering from consumption
- Marcello (mahr-CHEH-loh), baritone – Rodolfo’s roommate and a painter who has a relationship with Musetta
- Musetta (moo-ZEH-tah), soprano – a singer who loves Marcello, but enjoys making him jealous
- Schaunard (shoh-NAHRD), baritone – a musician and another roommate
- Colline (koh-LEE-neh), bass – a philosopher and roommate as well

WHAT HAPPENS?

- Four poor, but happy Bohemian men live in an old attic in Paris, France, around 1830.
- Rodolfo, a poor poet, meets and falls in love with Mimì, an equally poor seamstress.
- Rodolfo takes Mimì to the Café Momus to meet his three friends, who are celebrating Christmas Eve. Musetta also arrives and sings the famous aria “Musetta’s Waltz.”
- Rodolfo decides to split up with Mimì when he realizes that she is very sick (consumption) and he can not provide for her. They still love one another.
- The four Bohemians are living happily together as usual when Musetta arrives at their room with the dying Mimì. Rodolfo’s friends go out to find money to buy medicine for Mimì.
- Rodolfo and Mimì are sharing happy memories. Their friends return. Mimì takes her last breath.

YOU’LL WANT TO SEE THIS SHOW IF...

- You love a touching story of friendship and love, told with beautiful melodies
- You are a fan of the musical *Rent* (several of the characters and plotlines are taken from the opera)
- You want to impress your hip friends by recognizing the music and story of *La bohème* in Pop Culture, such as the movies *Moulin Rouge!*, *Moonstruck*, & *Atonement*; the TV series *The Simpsons* (Season 19, Episode 2) and the aforementioned musical, *Rent*.