

# La Bohème by Giacomo Puccini Opera Western Reserve 11/15/13

ON NOVEMBER 21, 2013

The four occupants of a freezing loft in Bohemian Paris of the late 1800s should be young and high-spirited in spite of their lack of amenities, and they really were in Opera Western Reserve's glowing production of *La Bohème* last week. It's too bad there couldn't be more than one performance, as this one was as near to being sold out as makes no difference. The quartet of male singers were exceedingly well-matched in both vocal quality and physical appearance.

But when push comes to shove, it's really the pairing of Rodolfo and Mimi about whom we care the most. He is the struggling young writer and she the frail seamstress. Shy, lonely, cold in the unheated garret, the two meet and fall in love. Their soaring voices draw us in, whether we will or not. We have no choice in the matter. The other couple, Marcello and Musetta are slightly older and more experienced in the arts of love.

Of course, there are other distractions – the landlord wanting his rent, and the occasional foray out into the warmth of Café Momus. As sometimes happens in real life, too many other people can create even more difficulties, and that happens here, as well. Finally, however, Rodolfo and Mimi are reunited, but – sadly, it's too late.

There wasn't a weak voice in the bunch. **Alex Richardson** and **Marian Vogel** were simply terrific (and terrific together as well) as Rodolfo and Mimi. As Marcello, the painter, **Michael Young** was paired with the saucy Musetta of **Lauren Fry**. **Jason Budd** was soulful in his brief tribute to his overcoat, while **Joel Herold** as the joyful musician Schaunard, was everyone's best friend – bringing food and drink into the cold garret, and livening things up with his horseplay.

The orchestra is amazing, as is the conductor and music director of OWR, **Susan Davenny Wyner**. Several violin solos were beautifully performed by the concertmaster, **Hristo Popov**. **David Vosburgh** was not only the stage director, but also designed the clever sets and translated the text for the supertitles. The sets were a marvel of economy – the opera's four acts were here condensed to two, with two different scenes in each, and it all worked wonderfully well. As stage manager, **Matty Sayre** kept everything moving smoothly and on time.

In the second scene of the first act, set in the street outside the Café Momus, as well as inside the Café, the OWR chorus prepared by **Hae-Jong Lee** and the Girard City Youth Chorus prepared by its director **Sue Ellen Harris-Davis** were superb as various townsfolk, waiters and street peddlers, all celebrating Christmas Eve.

Costumes by **Barbara Luce** of The Costume Kingdom were colorful or tattered as required, while **Rising Sun Entertainment & Productions** provided both lighting design and stage crew. **Salon Stefano** was in charge of make-up and hair design.

In a production as well done as this one was, it's easy to see why Puccini's La Bohème is arguably the most popular opera ever written.

Next year's opera will be Don Giovanni by Mozart, on Friday November 14, 2014 at 7:30 pm. The web-site for more information and eventual reservations is: [OperaWesternReserve.org](http://OperaWesternReserve.org).