

**Cleveland Opera Theater:
La bohème (first of three articles)**

by Mike Telin



“*La bohème* is just a winner,” Cleveland Opera Theatre founder Andrea Anelli said during a rehearsal break at Masonic Auditorium. “It was the first opera the company ever put on. We did it at the Beachwood Middle School Auditorium — semi-staged, no chorus, and just with a piano,” Anelli recalled. “It’s really exciting to see the growth of the past ten years in circling back to that opera, but now doing it with full chorus and full orchestra. It’s a fantastic feeling.”

On Friday, April 29 at 7:30 pm and Sunday, May 1 at 3:00 pm at Masonic Auditorium Performing Arts Center, Cleveland Opera Theater will present Giacomo Puccini’s beloved *La bohème*, directed by Scott Skiba and conducted by Domenico Boyagian. Lisa Yanofsky is the assistant director. The opera will be sung in Italian with English subtitles.

The 60-plus member cast also includes a children’s chorus (ages 10 through 15 from nine area schools). The adult chorus is comprised of area singers, including students from the Cleveland Institute of Music, Oberlin, Baldwin Wallace, Kent State, and Tri-C. Filling out the crowd scenes will be over a dozen supernumeraries — non-speaking, non-singing roles in an opera, just like extras in a film.

Giacomo Puccini’s opera centers around the writer Rodolfo (Timothy Culver), the painter Marcello (Brian Keith Johnson), the musician Schaunard (Benjamin Czarnota), and the philosopher Colline (Jason Budd), who are roommates in an attic apartment in Paris’s Latin Quarter. Living a Bohemian existence, the four are barely

scraping together enough money to eat, all the while dodging their landlord (Jason Fuh), and selling their artwork in order to get by.

On Christmas Eve, Schaunard decides to treat his three friends to a night out at the local hot spot, Café Momus. Rodolfo stays behind, and is surprised a few minutes later by a knock at the door. It is the charming seamstress Mimì (Andrea Anelli) who lives in a neighboring apartment. Rodolfo later joins his friends with Mimì in arm, but things heat up when Marcello's on-again, off-again flame, Musetta (Marian Vogel), arrives to cause a scene.



Anelli pointed out that the success of the opera is dependent on the chemistry between the characters of Mimì and Rodolfo. “Tim and I have a very good relationship: the two of us have never played opposite anyone else as often as we have each other. We’re both relaxed, and he’s always been so encouraging and a great colleague. It’s really easy with him. Because the cast is from Northeast Ohio and we’ve worked together so much, a camaraderie has been formed which allows us to interact with familiarity and comfort.”

Regarding advancements COT has made during the past year and a half, Anelli said that the decision to move to Masonic Auditorium was a leap of faith, but after successful productions of *Tosca* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, with this production it feels like the company has reached another level. “I’m really very proud of what we’re putting forth.”

On Wednesday, Mike Telin speaks with the four Bohemian roommates.

Photos: Cleveland Opera Theater's Streetcar in rehearsal; Andrea Anelli and Brian Keith Johnson in Tosca.

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