

## LA BOHEME

Music by Giacomo Puccini

Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Giulio Ricordi

Virginia Opera at Harrison Opera House

October 3, 7, 9, 11

For tickets call [1-800-982-2787](tel:1-800-982-2787) or [1-866-673-7282](tel:1-866-673-7282)

Hello, I'm Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large.

Virginia Opera's 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary season has opened with a love story of romantic intensity and conflict that is tailor made for the sublime world of this grand musical medium. The novel from which "La Boheme" was adapted has long been forgotten. The opera premiered in 1896 with 29 year old Arturo Toscanini conducting. The elegant, lyrical Puccini score, still goes straight to the heart with the vigor of Cupid's arrow.

The Bohemians are three struggling artists and a philosopher. In this production they have an especially warm, believable relationship with each other as friends whose lives are a continual struggle for existence. Having landed a job, Schaunard, a musician, with a rich baritone voice as sung by Michael Redding, arrives with food, wine and wood to warm the frigid garret where they live. He is welcomed by Rodolfo, played by the handsome, strong and sure tenor, Derek Taylor and the outstanding singer/actor baritone Eugene Brancoveanu whose Marcello, the painter, is vibrantly alive every moment he is on stage. The wine takes its effect. The guys hit the streets leaving Rodolfo behind to finish an article he is writing. Mimi who lives upstairs knocks on the door. Her candle accidentally on purpose has gone out. It's love at first sight for the painter and his most attractive neighbor. Soprano Veronica Mitina has a sweetness of demeanor and her soprano vocal lines soar with emotional force when called for and she can shift to delicate, gentle tones as well when needed.

Everybody ends up in Act II at the Café Momus including Marcello's former lover Musetta sung with restraint by Elizabeth Andrews Roberts. There are problems in this act with director Julia Pevzner's staging. To begin with there are far too many children and she gives them little or nothing to do. The same is true for the other characters. Focus is not clear and the action becomes a messy blur. Poor Musetta has no room to strut her stuff. Granted the set is small but we've seen it better used in other productions. At other times the staging has a too loose feeling and one feels more directorial control is needed. In at least three duets the singers are staged in positions where one of them can't be seen, especially from those seats on the right side of the house where I was sitting

Overall, the production captures the sheer beauty and the deeply moving emotional values of Puccini's La Boheme... The voices are pure and blend especially well with each other and the well modulated orchestra under Peter Marks direction.

When Rodolfo falls in love with Mimi, he says to his friends. "I am the poet, she is the Poetry." But we all know that love is complicated. Many emotions come into play that trick and deceive us. Tragic events occur. In spite of our passions, that poetry can in time become painful prose.

This is Edgar Loessin with Loessin at Large and I'll see you at the next opening...