

# *La Bohème*

## PUCCINI



Pacific Opera Victoria  
February, 2011

## Activity Guide

**Dear Educator,**

Pacific Opera Victoria is proud to present Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème*. This Activity Guide was prepared to help your students get even more out of their opera experience.

Check out our website at <http://www.pov.bc.ca/boheme.html> for inside information about *La Bohème*. Please suggest that your students take advantage of our website. The more your students know about the production, the more they will enjoy it!

See you at the opera!

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jackie Adamthwaite". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jackie Adamthwaite  
Manager of Artistic Programs

# How to enjoy the show and be a great Opera Audience Member!

## Before the show:

- Eat before you come to the theatre. There is no food allowed in the Auditorium.
- Arrive on Time! Quite often we do not seat latecomers and you may have to watch the first-half of the show on one on the lobby TVs.
- Check to see how long the opera is; plan your trip to the bathroom.
- Read the story; the program includes the Synopsis and the Director's Notes.
- Turn your cell phone off – along with anything else that beeps or makes noise.

## During the show:

- Don't talk to your friends. The theatre is designed to carry sound from the stage to the audience and back. Remember, this isn't a Movie, the singers can hear you!
- No eating, or drinking during the performance.
- No cameras or recording devices of any kind can be used in the theatre.
- Please, no feet on seats or railings.
- No shouting or yelling out.

## At the end of the show:

- Clap as much as you like and yell "Bravo" at your favourite singers!
- You can even give a Standing Ovation if you really enjoyed the show!

# Opera Singers

## **What? No microphones?!**

Opera singers make themselves heard through the whole house, over a full orchestra – without amplification. There are no microphones hidden in the set! Instead, opera singers use their training and the acoustics of the theatre to project their voices. In order to do this, opera singers train for longer than doctors. This is partly because they are trying to isolate and train their vocal cords: a mechanism about the size of your little finger nail. This is made doubly hard by the fact that unlike other musicians, singers can't see their instrument, so all of their learning has to be by sensation.

## **Amazing feats of memory!**

Opera singers have to memorize several hours of music for each opera. Operas are usually performed in the language in which they were written, which means that opera singers must perform in – and understand – Italian, German, French, Russian; even Czech!

## **Phew!**

Opera singers do all of these things while they are onstage under hot lights, performing blocking that can be awkward or difficult. Opera singers have to be able to sing lying down, running, jumping, dancing and performing all kinds of other tricky moves. Period costumes like hoop skirts, cloaks and corsets and wigs can also be hot and uncomfortable.

## **Who sings what?**

Here is a very rough guide to the different voice types, starting with the highest (soprano), going right down to the very deepest (bass).

**Soprano:** Sopranos have the highest voices. They usually play the heroines of an opera. This means they have lots of show-off arias to sing, and get to fall in love and / or die more often than other female voice types.

**Mezzo-soprano, or mezzo:** This is the middle female voice, and has a darker, warmer sound than the soprano. Mezzos spend a lot of their time playing mothers and villainesses, although sometimes they get to play seductive heroines. Mezzos also play young men on occasion – these are called trouser roles, for obvious reasons.

**Contralto, or alto:** The lowest female voice. Contralto is a rare voice type. Altos usually portray older females or character parts like witches and old gypsies.

**Counter tenor:** Also known as alto, this is the highest male voice, and another vocal rarity. Counter tenors sing with about the same range as a contralto. Counter tenor roles are most common in baroque opera, but some more modern composers write parts for counter tenors too.

**Tenor:** If there are no counter tenors on stage, then the highest male voice in opera is tenor. Tenors are usually the heroes who get the girl or die horribly in the attempt.

**Baritone:** The middle male voice. In comic opera, the baritone is often the ringleader of whatever naughtiness is going on, but in tragic opera, he's more likely to play the villain.

**Bass:** The lowest male voice. Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom in serious opera, and basses usually play Kings, fathers, and grandfathers. In comic opera basses often portray old characters that are foolish or laughable.

# Review the Opera!

## *La Bohème* - My Thoughts








Pacific Opera Victoria

February 15, 2011



Conducted by  
Maestro Timothy Vernon

Reviewed by: \_\_\_\_\_

The Artists		Description of Character	Description of Voice
Luc Robert  <b>Rodolfo</b>			
Rhoslyn Jones  <b>Mimi</b>			
Alexander Dobson  <b>Marcello</b>			
Giles Tomkins  <b>Colline</b>			
Alexandre Sylvestre  <b>Schaunard</b>			
Marianne Fiset  <b>Musetta</b>			
Doug MacNaughton  <b>Benoit &amp; Alcindoro</b>			

After the Opera...

Re-draw your favourite moment from the Opera!



What is happening in this Scene?

Which Characters are depicted?

What would you change about this Scene?

# Ambitions, Motives, Actions and Consequences

After seeing the production divide your class into 6 groups. Give each group a large sheet of paper and some markers. Assign a character from the Opera to each group. They should write the name of their character at the top of the page.

RODOLFO, a Poet

MIMI

MARCELLO, a Painter

COLLINE, a Philosopher

SCHAUNARD, a Musician

MUSETTA

Have the groups discuss and brainstorm their character's ambitions, their dreams, who they love, what they are most passionate about. They may have to dive deep into who they think their character is because not all these questions can be answered by watching the Opera. Each group should then "introduce" their character to the class. After each group has presented, discuss as a class the positive and negative actions each character used to further his or her ambitions. Discuss goal setting and how to positively achieve those goals.

Discuss how the outcome of the story might have changed if certain characters had made different decisions. Talk about how our actions all have consequences, positive and negative.

# Draw a line to connect the Prop (object) to the situation it appears in in La Bohème

## Prop

## Situation

Candle ◇

◇ Colline sells his possessions to buy Mimi medicine.

Earrings ◇

◇ Rodolfo and Marcello try to keep warm.

Muff ◇

◇ Musetta wins back Marcello's attention.

Toys ◇

◇ Rodolfo meets Mimi.

Manuscript ◇

◇ Doesn't actually appear in La Bohème.

Overcoat ◇

◇ Mimi receives a gift before she dies.

Woman's Shoe ◇

◇ Vendors sell all types of treats in front of the Café Momus.

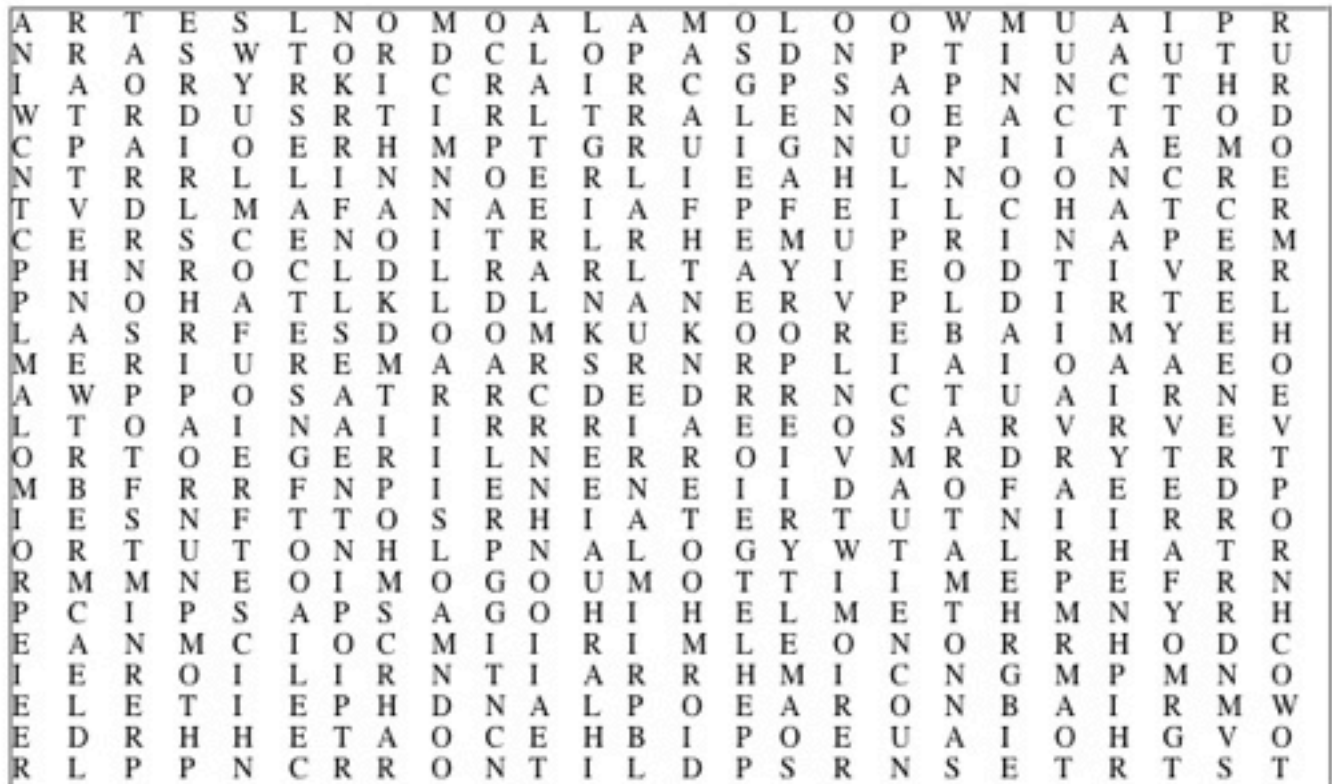
Elephant ◇

◇ Musetta sells her possessions to buy what Mimi needs.

What other props can you remember from the Opera? Write them in below.

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

# La Bohème Word Search



Overcoat

Muff

Painter

Philosopher

Parpignol

Candle

Rodolfo

Tavern

Chorus

Rent

Shoe

Garret

Landlord

Mimi

Key

Bohemian

Manuscript

Winter

Painter

Puccini

## Glossary of commonly used Opera Terms

**ACT:** A portion of an opera designated by the composer, which has a dramatic structure of its own.

**ARIA:** A solo piece written for a main character, which focuses on the character's emotion.

**BACKSTAGE** - any area of the theatre behind the proscenium; can refer to the wings as well as the dressing rooms.

**BATON:** A short stick that the conductor uses to lead the orchestra.

**BEL CANTO:** An Italian phrase literally meaning "beautiful singing." A traditional Italian style of singing that emphasizes tone, phrasing, coloratura passages and technique. Also refers to opera written in this style.

**BUFFO:** From the Italian for "buffoon." A singer of comic roles (basso-buffo) or a comic opera (opera-buffa).

**BLOCKING:** Directions given to actors for on-stage movements and actions.

**BRAVO (BRAH-voH):** Literally, a form of applause when shouted by members of the audience at the end of an especially pleasing performance. "Bravo" is for a single man, "brava" for a woman, and "bravi" for a group of performers.

**COLORATURA:** Elaborate ornamentation of vocal music using many fast notes and trills.

**CORD, VOCAL:** The wishbone-shaped edges of muscles in the lower part of the throat whose movements create variations in pitch as air passes between them.

**DIAPHRAGM:** A muscle beneath the lungs and above the stomach which acts as a trampoline does, pushing the air from the lungs at a desired rate.

**DIVA:** Literally "goddess," it refers to an important female opera star. The masculine form is divo.

**DROP (n.)** - a flat piece of cloth that is flown – ie. It "drops" from the flies. Often it is elaborately painted. Some stage sets are made up entirely of painted "drops"

**ENCORE:** Literally means "again." It used to be the custom for a singer to repeat a popular aria if the audience called "encore" loudly enough. This is still done in the middle of an opera in countries such as Italy, but it is rare elsewhere. Soloists frequently give encores at the end of a concert but not an opera.

**ENSEMBLE:** Two or more people singing at the same time, or the music written for such a group.

**FALSETTO:** A method of singing above the natural range of the male voice. Often used in opera for comic effects such as a man imitating a woman.

**FLAT** - a piece of hard stage scenery that is flat. A wall can be made from a series of flats. Flats used to be made always of canvas stretched on a wooden frame. This made a good surface for painting and kept the flats very lightweight. Flats are now often made from very thin plywood instead of canvas.

**FLIES (n.)** - the area above the stage where scenery, lights, etc. are hung. Anything that goes up and down to/from the flies is said to fly or be flown.

**GREENROOM** - The lounge in the lower level where performers and crew can relax.

**HOUSE** - strictly speaking, the theatre. However, it is often used to refer to the audience seating area, the auditorium. Example: "The house is open" means the audience is or has been admitted.

**LEGS** - Draperies or flats that hang vertically, usually at the sides of the stage as masking.

**LIBRETTO** - the words or text. This is like the script of a play. Very often (almost always) the words will be in a foreign language.

**MAESTRO (mah-EHS-troh):** Literally "master;" used as a courtesy title for the conductor. The masculine ending is used for both men and women.

**PROSCENIUM** (pronounced pro-see'-nee-um) - the wall that separates the stage from the audience. The "proscenium opening" acts as a picture frame for the stage action.

**RAKE** - a slanted stage floor.

**RECITATIVE:** Words sung in a conversational style, usually to advance the plot. Not to be confused with aria.

**RÉPÉTITEUR (reh-peh-ti-TEUR):** A member of the music staff who plays the piano for rehearsals and, if necessary, the piano or harpsichord during performances. They frequently coach singers in their roles and assist with orchestra rehearsals.

**SITZPROBE (ZITS-proh-bah):** Literally, "seated rehearsal," it is the first rehearsal of the singers with the orchestra and no acting.

**STAGE MANAGER:** The person in charge of the technical aspects of the entire opera, including light changes, sound effects, entrances (even of the conductor) and everything else that happens.

**SUPER** - short for supernumerary; just a fancy operatic word meaning "extra".

**SYNOPSIS** - a short description of the plot or story-line of the opera.

**TROUSER ROLE:** A role depicting a young man or boy but sung by a woman.

**UPSTAGE (adv)** - the back of the stage.

**UPSTAGE (vb)** - to attract attention or distract the audience away from the proper focus.

**WINGS** - areas at either side of the stage where people wait to make entrances and scenery is stored.

## Teacher's Comments

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: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade(s) you teach: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_ Subjects: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you attended other arts events with your students in the past year? Yes No

If yes, what were they? \_\_\_\_\_

Were you able to use the Teacher's Study Guide and Activity Guide in your classroom activities before attending the opera? Yes No

If not, please elaborate: \_\_\_\_\_

If so, which sections of the Study Guide and Activity Guide did you find most useful? \_\_\_\_\_

How appropriate was the information provided in the Guides? \_\_\_\_\_

What would you add/delete: \_\_\_\_\_

Did you spend classroom time discussing the performance after your students attended the opera?  
Yes No

Do you have any comments about the performance itself? \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to receive information on our future Student Dress Rehearsals? Yes No

How would you like to receive information? Fax Email Letters Other \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to:

Jackie Adamthwaite, Manager of Artistic Programs  
1815 Blanshard Street, Suite 500, Victoria, BC, V8T 5A4 or by fax: 250-382-4944