

La Bohème

scene liriche in quattro quadri

from the novel “Scènes de la vie de bohème” by Henri Murger

music by Giacomo Puccini, libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica

ACT ONE. *In a Parisian garret.*

On a bitterly cold Christmas Eve, two penniless artists, Rodolfo, a poet, and Marcello, a painter, decide to burn the manuscript of Rodolfo’s latest play to warm up their freezing garret. Colline, a philosopher, enters with Schaunard, a musician who, much to everyone’s surprise, has managed to earn a few coins. They resolve to go out for a celebration dinner in the Latin Quarter. Their rent is overdue and the landlord, Benoît, comes in demanding payment. The young men adroitly get rid of him by teasing him about his adulterous habits, and then set off for the cafe. Rodolfo says that he will follow later since he has an article to finish. Suddenly there is a knock at the door. Mimì, a young girl who lives in the building, asks Rodolfo to help her; her candle has blown out and she is stranded on the staircase. All of a sudden she feels faint. Rodolfo springs to her aid but, as she collapses, she loses her key. Rodolfo is attracted to Mimì, and when his candle goes out too he gropes for her hand in the dark and tells her all about himself. They find themselves falling in love and embrace, and when Rodolfo hears his friends shouting to him to come down they leave together to join them.

ACT TWO. *Christmas Eve in the Latin Quarter.*

Rodolfo, Mimì, Schaunard, Colline and Marcello mingle among the Parisian throng, stopping to make a few purchases. Rodolfo introduces Mimì to the others, who are already seated for dinner at the Cafe Momus. Musetta, Marcello’s former mistress, appears with her latest admirer, the elderly and prosperous Alcindoro. Much to Musetta’s annoyance, Marcello ignores her, and she does her utmost to make him jealous. After sending Alcindoro off on an errand Musetta embraces Marcello, who is still in love with her. The friends depart, leaving the hapless Alcindoro to foot the bill for the hearty meal they have eaten. A band plays as soldiers march in for the changing of the guard.

ACT THREE. *The Barriere d’infer.*

Day is dawning and snow is falling in the neighbourhood where Musetta works as a singer at an inn. Enter Mimì in search of Marcello, who is now a jobbing painter in the same inn. When he appears she tearfully confesses that Rodolfo’s wild jealousy has made life with him impossible, and asks Marcello for his help. Marcello tells her that Rodolfo is in the inn, asleep on a bench, and promises that he will speak to his friend. Mimì conceals herself behind a plane-tree in order to listen to their conversation. The poet tells Marcello that he has decided to leave Mimì: she is wasting away from consumption and he cannot offer her



the warm, comfortable home she needs if she is to recover. On hearing this confession Mimì bursts into tears, and Rodolfo realises that she has been listening. He sweeps her into his arms; but Mimì announces that she plans to leave him. However, the lovers agree that parting in winter is too painful; they decide to wait until April, the «season of flowers», before separating. As they leave the stage, a furious quarrel erupts between Marcello and Musetta.

ACT FOUR. *In a Parisian garret.*

Rodolfo and Marcello are back in their garret. Both have left their mistress- es and gloomily recall happier days. Rodolfo halfheartedly attempts to write and Marcello to paint, but they are overwhelmed by memories of their loved ones. Enter Colline and Schaunard, who launch into a mock duel that sends Rodolfo and Marcello into gales of laughter. But their cheerful mood swiftly evaporates when Musetta arrives with the news that Mimì is on the stairs in a state of exhaustion. Mimì comes in and greets her old friends. Sensing that she is close to death, Marcello rushes off to find a doctor; Musetta and Schaunard go out to raise money for medicine, she by selling her earrings and he his overcoat. Rodolfo and Mimì, left alone, discover that they are still deeply in love, and sing of their first meeting in the garret. Overjoyed at being reunited with her lover, Mimì strokes the muff given to her by Musetta. Then she sinks into unconsciousness. When Rodolfo realises that she is dead, he embraces her brokenheartedly for one last time.

