

REVIEW: Love at first sight at Regina Opera's 'La Boheme'

BY THOMAS LENIHAN

A recent performance of Puccini's operatic workhorse "La Bohème" began with a cleverly staged battle between the male tenants and their landlord over the rent.

The ensemble work was excellent; most memorable was the Schunard of Kevin Rockower who had brought money and food for the group.

The group departs but Rodolfo, a writer, (Thomas Massey) remains to finish an article. Mimi (Dilara Unsal) arrives seeking a light for her candle. She drops her key and both of them search in the dark. Rodolfo grabs Mimi's hand and sings the famous "Che Gelida Manina" (What a cold hand). Mr. Massey's sparkling tenor voice and his youthful appearance added to the performance. He reached the only tenor

high C in the opera in "la speranza."

Dilara Unsal excelled in "They call me Mimi." The soprano soared as she explained her work sewing flowers. Both she and Mr. Massey blended beautifully in the duet that followed and ended the act.

Act II is set in the Parisian Cafe Momus where Marcelo (HyungJoo Eom) encounters his old flame



Photo by Steven Pisano

Scenes from Regina Opera's "La Boheme."



Photo by Colleen Smith

Musetta (Elisa Sunshine) who sings the famous "Musetta's Waltz," during which she tempts Marcelo with acrobatic high notes and

a stunning red dress. Mr. Eom was vocally strong but his acting was stiff and he

needs to work on diction. The act ends with a rousing choral number with cast saluting an imaginary military parade.

Act III continues with the struggles of both young couples, and Ms. Unsal tenderly sings "Addio senza rancor;" she and Rodolfo part until spring.

Act IV finds Mimi's health declining even more and thus Colline (Geeseop Kim) bids farewell to his overcoat, which he will sell to raise money for Mimi's medicine. Mr. Kim's diction was much improved in this aria.

Ms. Unsal and Mr. Massey were so very touching and delicate in their final duets

which reprise their Act I arias in a Wagner-like approach. Mimi passes away, and Rodolfo renders a heart wrenching sob of "Mimi!" to end the opera.

The cast also included Ken Young as both Benoit the landlord as well as Musetta's sugar-daddy Alcindoro.

The orchestra was also a star of the evening with sweeping orchestral parts ably led by conductor Gregory Ortega. Concertmaster Christopher Joyal excelled on the violin. Harpist Lynette Wardle was particularly moving in her glissandi and her bell-like harmonics. Linda Lehr's stage direction had many creative touches; especially clever was having a young waiter hauled away for ogling Musetta's exposed leg.

The scenery was somewhat sparse compared to the company's previous sumptuous productions of "Hansel and Gretel" and "Aida."

A May production is planned for Verdi's "Il Trovatore."