

December 23, 2021 – Giacomo Puccini's *La bohème*

The first two acts of Puccini's *La bohème* take place on Christmas Eve in Paris, so what could be more appropriate for Christmas week on the Thursday Night Opera House? Based on Henri Murger's *Scènes de la vie de bohème* (*Scenes of Bohemian Life*), the opera had its premiere in Turin, Italy, on February 1, 1896 at the Teatro Regio under the baton of the young cellist-turned-maestro **Arturo Toscanini**.

Four young bohemians—the writer Rodolfo (tenor **Roberto Alagna**), the musician Schaunard (baritone **Simon Keenlyside**), the painter Marcello (baritone **Thomas Hampson**), and the philosopher Colline (bass **Samuel Ramey**)—live in poverty in a Parisian garret owned by Benoit (bass **Enrico Fissore**). Rodolfo meets and falls in love with a poor seamstress who calls herself Mimi (soprano **Leontina Vaduva**). At the Café Momus Marcello reunites with his old flame Musetta (soprano **Ruth Ann Swenson**), who tricks her elderly admirer Alcindoro (**Fissore**) into paying their bill. Eventually Rodolfo's jealousy is too much for Mimi, and they agree to separate, since he cannot bear to watch her suffering in their miserable conditions. In the winter, Mimi appears at the garret, desperately ill with tuberculosis. Rodolfo's friends rush out to pawn their few paltry belongings to buy medicine and a warm muff for Mimi. They return to find her dying in Rodolfo's arms.

Antonio Pappano conducts the London Voices, the Boys from the London Oratory School, and the Philharmonia Orchestra in this 1996 EMI recording.

From a 1990 San Francisco Opera performance, here's **Luciano Pavarotti** and **Mirella Freni** in "O soave fanciulla," Rodolfo and Mimi's love duet that ends Act I:
<http://youtu.be/t0-1sQ0XOGE>.

As a bonus, I'll present highlights from a 1951 Munich production of *La bohème*, sung in German, starring **Karl Terkal** as Rodolfo, **Trude Eipperle** as Mimi, **Alfred Poell** as Marcello, **Wilma Lipp** as Musetta, **Karl Hoppe** as Schaunard, and Hans-Hermann Nissen as Colline. Clemens Krauss conducts the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra and Chorus.