

OVERTURE OPERA GUIDES

in association with



# La bohème

Giacomo Puccini

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We are delighted to have the opportunity to work with Overture Publishing on this series of opera guides and to build on the work English National Opera did over twenty years ago on the Calder Opera Guide Series. As well as reworking and updating existing titles, Overture and ENO have commissioned new titles for the series and all of the guides will be published to coincide with repertoire being staged by the company at the London Coliseum.

Jonathan Miller's ENO's production of *La bohème* thrilled audiences during its first run in 2009. One of opera's most prolific and successful directors, Jonathan Miller worked closely with designer Isabella Bywater to set this tragic tale of young artists and doomed love in the demi-monde of 1930s Paris during the era of the Depression. The production is inspired by the realism and atmosphere caught in the photographs of Cartier-Bresson and Brassai, as well as being influenced by films from the 1930s such as *Hôtel du Nord* and *Atalante*. This Overture Opera Guide is published to coincide with the production's first revival, conducted by Stephen Lord and with Elizabeth Llewellyn making her company debut as Mimì and Gwyn Hughes Jones and Alfie Boe sharing the role of Rodolfo.

We hope that these guides will prove an invaluable resource now and for years to come, and that by delving deeper into the history of an opera, the poetry of the libretto and the nuances of the score, readers' understanding and appreciation of the opera and the art form in general will be enhanced.

John Berry  
Artistic Director, ENO  
October 2010

The publisher John Calder began the Opera Guides series under the editorship of the late Nicholas John in association with English National Opera in 1980. It ran until 1994 and eventually included forty-eight titles, covering fifty-eight operas. The books in the series were intended to be companions to the works that make up the core of the operatic repertoire. They contained articles, illustrations, musical examples and a complete libretto and singing translation of each opera in the series, as well as bibliographies and discographies.

The aim of the present relaunched series is to make available again the guides already published in a redesigned format with new illustrations, updated reference sections and a literal translation of the libretto that will enable the reader to get closer to the meaning of the original. New guides of operas not already covered will be published alongside the redesigned ones from the old series.

Gary Kahn  
Series Editor

Sponsors of the Overture Opera Guides  
for the 2010/11 Season at ENO

Ian and Catherine Ferguson  
Frank and Lorna Dunphy



# *La bohème*

Giacomo Puccini

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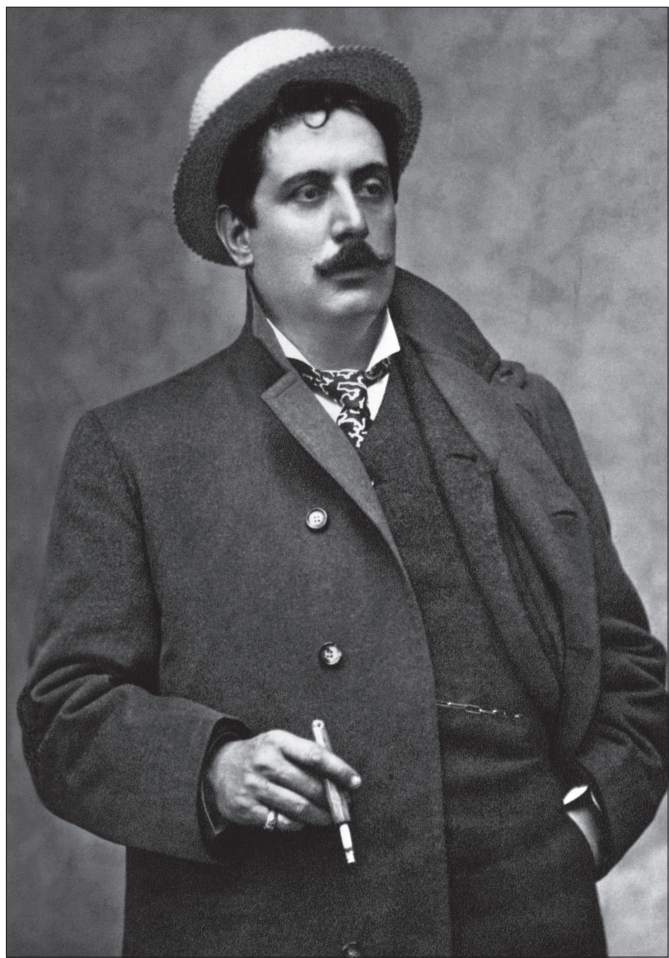
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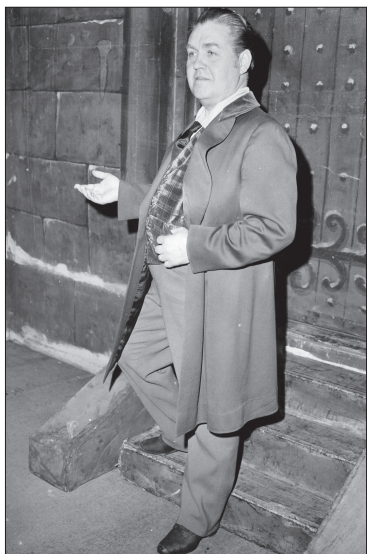




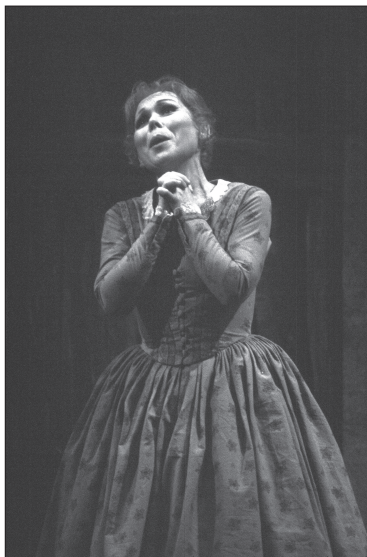


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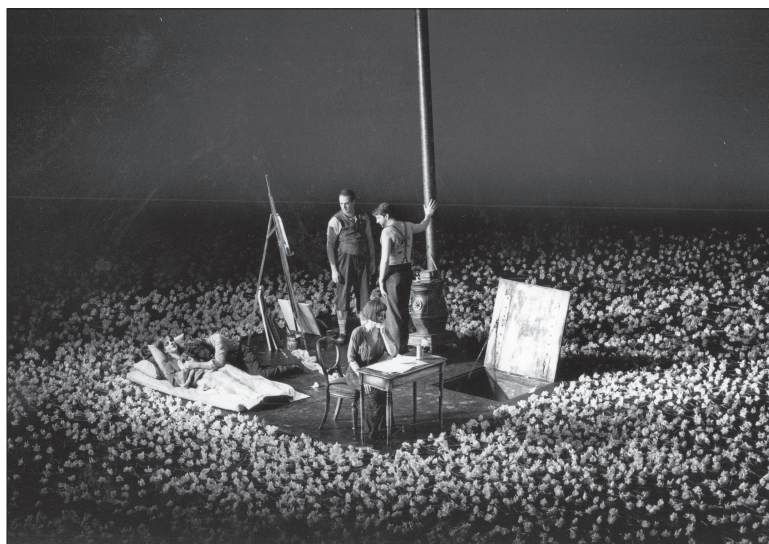


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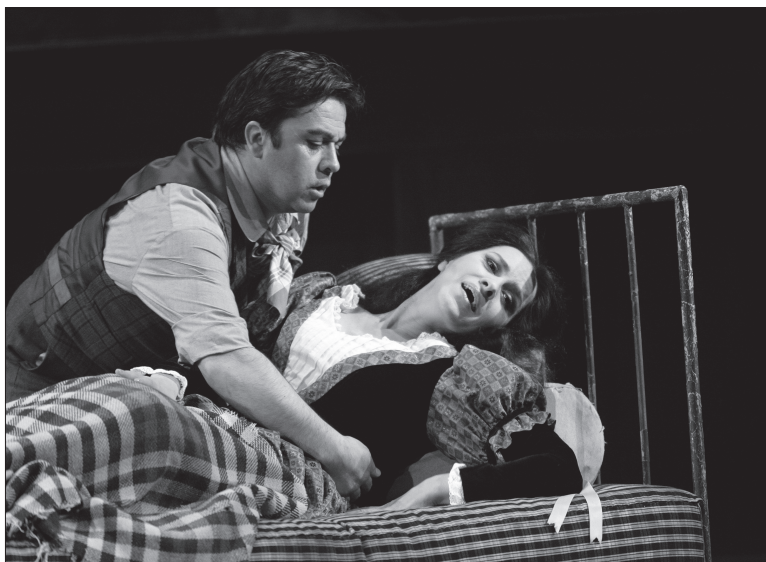


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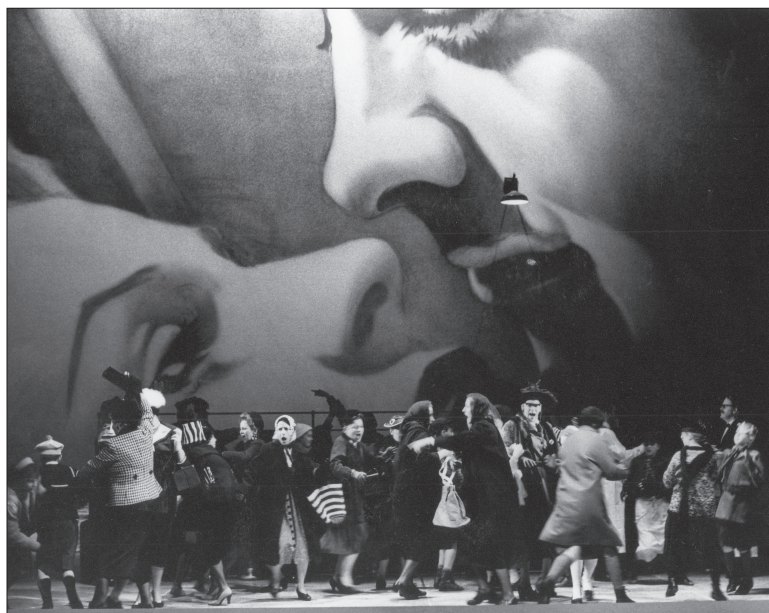




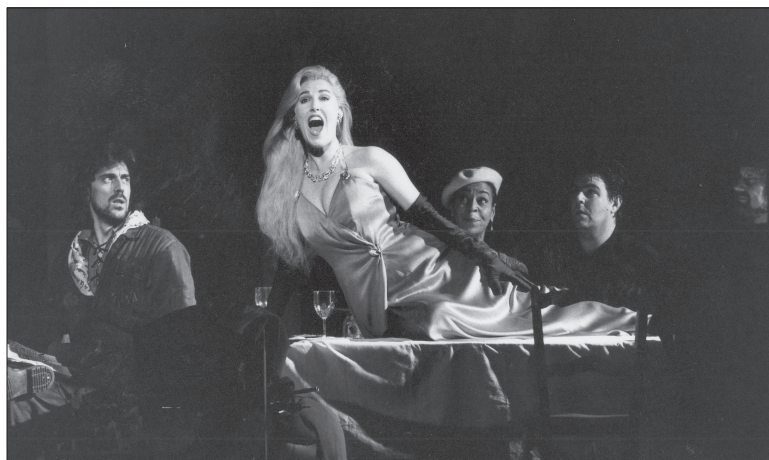
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## Some aspects of *La bohème*

William Ashbrook

When *La bohème* was first introduced at New York's Metropolitan Opera House in December 1900 Henry Krehbiel started off his review of that event in these terms: '*La bohème* is foul in subject, and fulminant but futile in its music'. Today when the esteem and affection with which *La bohème* is regarded are if anything firmer than ever, Krehbiel's alliterative dismissal seems ludicrously stuffy and wide of its mark. Yet among critics of that time Krehbiel's peevishness reflected a not uncommon attitude. In October 1897 when the Carl Rosa Company gave the opera its London première at Covent Garden, one reviewer dismissed the score as 'not stimulating enough to be heard often'. Even its first Italian audiences shared this resistance to what seems today to be the opera's inescapable appeal. This once widespread attitude provides a convenient way to approach *La bohème* afresh, as a work very much of its period, symptomatic of its time.

The critics and general public attending the premiere of *La bohème* at Turin's Teatro Regio on 1st February 1896 found themselves rather lost, not quite knowing how to relate to this novelty. One reason for this sense of disorientation lies in the context created by the operas that preceded it on the Regio's bill. That season had opened on 22nd December 1895 with the Italian premiere of *Götterdämmerung*, conducted by Toscanini, and it would be repeated twenty times during the next months; interlarded in this run of *Götterdämmerung* were five performances of Verdi's *Falstaff*, opening on 28th December. Verdi's final opera was not yet three years old, but this was its second 'edition' at Turin. Both *Götterdämmerung* and *Falstaff* were works that put the Turin public on its mettle because of their relative difficulty and novelty;