



La boheme: Libretto - An Opera in Four Acts

L. Illica, G. Giacosa

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Libretto

La Bohème

An Opera in Four Acts

Libretto by

G. Giacosa and L. Illica

English Version by

W. Grist and P. Pinkerton

Music by

Giacomo Puccini

La bohème is an opera in four acts, composed by Giacomo Puccini to an Italian libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, based on *Scènes de la vie de bohème* by Henri Murger. The world premiere performance of La bohème was in Turin on 1 February 1896 at the Teatro Regio, conducted by the young Arturo Toscanini. Since then, La bohème has become part of the standard Italian opera repertory and is one of the most frequently performed operas worldwide. In 1946, fifty years after the opera's premiere, Toscanini conducted a performance of it on radio with the NBC Symphony Orchestra. This performance was eventually released on records and on Compact Disc. It is the only recording of a Puccini opera by its original conductor

According to its title page, the libretto of La bohème is based on Henri Murger's novel, *Scènes de la vie de bohème*, a collection of vignettes portraying young bohemians living in the Latin Quarter of Paris in the 1840s. Although usually called a novel, it has no unified plot. Like the 1849 play by Murger and Théodore Barrière, the opera's libretto focuses on the relationship between Rodolfo and Mimì, ending with her death. Also like the play, the libretto combines two characters from the novel, Mimì and Francine, into a single Mimì character. Early in the composition stage Puccini was in dispute with the composer Leoncavallo, who said that he had offered Puccini a completed libretto and felt that Puccini should defer to him. Puccini responded that he had had no idea of Leoncavallo's interest and that having been working on his own version for some time, he felt that he could not oblige him by discontinuing with the opera. Leoncavallo completed his own version in which Marcello was sung by a tenor and Rodolfo by a baritone. It was unsuccessful and is now rarely performed.

Much of the libretto is original. The main plots of acts two and three are the librettists' invention, with only a few passing references to incidents and characters in Murger. Most of acts one and four follow the novel, piecing together episodes from various chapters. The final scenes in acts one and four—the scenes with Rodolfo and Mimì—resemble both the play and the novel. The story of their meeting closely follows chapter 18 of the novel, in which the two lovers living in the garret are not Rodolphe and Mimì at all, but rather

Jacques and Francine. The story of Mimì's death in the opera draws from two different chapters in the novel, one relating Francine's death and the other relating Mimì's.

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