

**LA BOHÈME AN  
OPERA IN  
FOUR ACTS**

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La Bohème an opera in Four Acts by Giacomo Puccini

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**GIACOMO PUCCINI**

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# 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

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~~Price 75 Cents~~

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**CHARACTERS**

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RUDOLPH (a poet) - - - - -	Tenor
SCHAUNARD (a musician) - - - - -	Baritone
BENOIT (a landlord) - - - - -	Bass
MIMI - - - - -	Soprano
PARPIGNOL - - - - -	Tenor
MARCEL (a painter) - - - - -	Baritone
COLLINE (a philosopher) - - - - -	Bass
ALCINDORO (a councillor of state) - - - - -	Bass
MUSETTA - - - - -	Soprano
CUSTOM-HOUSE SERGEANT - - - - -	Bass

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Students, Work Girls, Citizens, Shopkeepers, Street Vendors, Soldiers,  
Restaurant Waiters, Boys, Girls, etc.

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TIME ABOUT 1830—IN PARIS

## SYNOPSIS

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The opera is founded on Henri Murger's book "La Vie de Bohème."

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### ACT I

Rudolph and Marcel are sitting in the latter's attic-studio in the Quartier Latin, in Paris. Marcel is absorbed in his painting. The day is cold. They have no money to buy coal. Marcel takes a chair to burn it, when Rudolph remembers that he has a manuscript which has been rejected by the publishers and lights a fire with that instead. Colline enters, looking abject and miserable. He had gone out to pawn his books, but nobody wanted them. Their friend, Schaunard, however, had better luck. He comes bringing fuel and provisions. They all prepare their meal, when the landlord enters and demands the payment of his rent. The friends offer him a glass of wine and turn him out amidst joking and laughter. After their gay repast they separate and Rudolph remains alone writing.

A knock is heard at the door and Mimi, a little seamstress, who lives on the same floor, appears and asks Rudolph to give her a match to light her candle. As she is about to go out, she falls in a faint. Rudolph gives her wine and restores her to consciousness. She tells him that she suffers from consumption. Rudolph is struck by her beauty and her delicate hands. She notices that she has lost her key and whilst they search for it their candles are extinguished. As they grope on the floor in the dark, Rudolph finds the key and puts it in his pocket. Their hands meet and Rudolph tries to warm her hands and tells her all about his life. Mimi confides her struggles to him and their conversation soon turns upon their love for each other.

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### ACT II

Rudolph's friends have repaired to their favorite Café. It is Christmas Eve and everyone is in festive spirits. All the shops are bright and displaying their goods. Hawkers offer their goods for sale in the streets. Rudolph and Mimi are seen entering a milliner's where Rudolph is to buy her a new hat. Colline, Schaunard and Marcel take their seats in front of the Café, where a table has been prepared for them. Rudolph introduces Mimi to his friends. Musetta, Marcel's flame, with whom he has quarrelled, now enters with Alcindoro. Marcel is deeply moved when he sees her. Musetta notices this and sends Alcindoro on an errand. Whilst he is away, she makes peace with Marcel. The friends find that they have not sufficient money to pay for their supper, so they carry off Musetta and leave their bills to be paid by Alcindoro.

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### ACT III

Months have elapsed, bringing joy and misery to Rudolph and Mimi. Rudolph loves Mimi passionately, but is consumed with jealousy. On a wintry day, Marcel is seen leaving a tavern near the Gates of Paris. He meets Mimi; she looks pale and haggard. She asks Marcel to help her and tells him of Rudolph's love and jealousy, explaining that she must leave

him. Rudolph now comes upon the scene and not seeing Mimi tells of all the miseries of their lives; how he loves her and believes her to be dying of consumption. Mimi's cough betrays her and although she says good-bye to Rudolph they find they cannot part and determine to await the spring. Meanwhile Musetta and Marcel have a violent quarrel.

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#### ACT IV

Marcel and Rudolph are now living together in their attic-studio. Musetta and Mimi have left them. They are seemingly working, but their thoughts wander towards the women they love. Schaunard and Colline enter with rolls and a herring for their meal. They have a wild time and are dancing and singing when Musetta enters and tells them that Mimi is outside so weak and ill that she can go no further. They make up a bed on the couch for her and bring her in. She clings to Rudolph and implores him not to leave her. Mimi reconciles Marcel and Musetta. Musetta tells her old friends that Mimi is dying and gives them her earrings to sell, asking them to get a doctor for Mimi. They all go out leaving Rudolph alone with Mimi. He holds her in his arms and recalls their love. Mimi is seized with a fit of coughing and falls back in a faint. Musetta returns with medicine. Mimi regains consciousness and turning to Rudolph tells him of her love. Musetta falls upon her knees in prayer and Mimi passes away in Rudolph's arms.



... rain or dust, cold or heat, nothing stops these bold adventurers.

*Their existence of every day is a work of genius, a daily problem which they always contrive to solve with the aid of bold mathematics.*

*When want presses them, abstemious as anchorites—but, if a little fortune falls into their hands, see them ride forth on the most ruinous fancies, loving the fairest and youngest, drinking the oldest and best wines, and not finding enough windows whence to throw their money; then—the last crown dead and buried—they begin again to dine at the table d'hôte of chance, where their cover is always laid; smugglers of all the industries which spring from art; in chase, from morning till night, of that wild animal which is called the crown.*

*"Bohemia" has a special dialect, a distinct jargon of its own. This vocabulary is the hell of rhetoric and the paradise of neologism.*

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*A gay life; yet a terrible one!*

(H. MURGER, preface to "*Vic de Bohème*") (\*).

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(\*) Rather than follow MURGER's novel step by step, the authors of the present libretto, both for reasons of musical and dramatic effect, have sought to derive inspiration from the French writer's admirable preface.

Although they have faithfully portrayed the characters, even displaying a certain fastidiousness as to sundry local details; albeit in the scenic development of the opera they have followed Murger's method of dividing the libretto into four separate acts, in the dramatic and comic episodes they have claimed that ample and entire freedom of action, which, rightly or wrongly, they deemed necessary to the proper scenic presentment of a novel the most free, perhaps, in modern literature.

Yet, in this strange book, if the characters of each person therein stand out clear and sharply defined, we often may perceive that one and the same temperament bears different names, and that it is incarnated, so to speak, in two different persons. Who cannot detect in the delicate profile of one woman the personality both of Mimi and of Francine? Who, as he reads of Mimi's "little hands, whiter than those of the Goddess of Ease," is not reminded of Francine's little ruff?

The authors deem it their duty to point out this identity of character. It has seemed to them that these two mirthful, fragile, and unhappy creatures in this comedy of Bohemian life might haply figure as one person, whose name should not be Mimi, not Francine, but "the Ideal."

## ACT I

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“ . . . Mimi was a charming girl specially apt to appeal to Rudolph, the poet and dreamer. Aged twenty-two, she was slight and graceful. Her face reminded one of some sketch of high-born beauty; its features had marvellous refinement.

“The hot, impetuous blood of youth coursed through her veins, giving a rosy hue to her clear complexion that had the white velvety bloom of the camellia.

“This frail beauty allured Rudolph. But what wholly served to enchant him were Mimi’s tiny hands, that, despite her household duties, she contrived to keep whiter even than the Goddess of Ease.”

LA BOHÈME

ACT I

IN THE ATTIC

Spacious window, from which one sees an expanse of snow-clad roofs. On left, a fireplace, a table, small cupboard, a little book-case, four chairs, a picture easel, a bed, a few books, many packs of cards, two candlesticks. Door in the middle, another on left.

Curtain rises quickly

RUDOLPH and MARCEL. RUDOLPH looks pensively out of the window. MARCEL works at his painting, "The Passage of the Red Sea," with hands nipped with cold, and warms them by blowing on them from time to time, often changing position on account of the frost.

MAR. (seated, continuing to paint)

This Red Sea passage feels as damp and chill to me  
As if adown my back a stream were flowing.

(Goes a little way back from the easel to look at the picture.)

But in revenge a Pharaoh will I drown.

(Turning to his work.)

And you?

(to RUDOLPH)

RUD. (pointing to the fireless stove)

Lazily rising, see how the smoke  
From thousands of chimneys floats upward!  
And yet that stove of ours  
No fuel seems to need, the idle rascal,  
Content to live in ease, just like a lord!

MAR. 'Tis now a good, long while since we paid his lawful wages.

RUD. Of what use are the forests all white under the snow?

MAR. Now Rudolph, let me tell you  
A fact that overcomes me,  
I'm simply frozen!

RUD. (approaching MARCEL)

And I, Marcel, to be quite candid,  
I've no faith in the sweat of my brow.

MAR. All my fingers are frozen

Just as if they'd been touching that iceberg,  
Touching that block of marble, the heart of false Musetta.

(Heaves a long sigh, laying aside his palette and brushes, and ceases painting.)

RUD. Ah! love's a stove consuming a deal of fuel!

MAR. Too quickly.

RUD. Where the man does the burning.

MAR. And the woman the lighting.

RUD. While the one turns to ashes.

MAR. So the other stands and watches.

RUD. Meanwhile, in here we're frozen.