

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE April 2, 2008
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Puccini's
La Bohème
live. love. dream!

Vancouver, BC ~ Love and youthful exuberance lead to heartbreak in 19th century Paris, in Vancouver Opera's evocative production of Puccini's **La Bohème** – on for six performances only, April 26 to May 8, 2008 at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. *La Bohème* is one of the most revered operas in the repertoire. With boisterous humour, pathos, and an inspired score, Puccini's lovely opera will sweep you away with romance, joy, and sheer beauty.

Opening night is Saturday, April 26, 2008, with subsequent performances **Tuesday, April 29, Thursday May 1, Saturday May 3, Tuesday May 6 and Thursday May 8, 2008**. All performances take place at the **Queen Elizabeth Theatre**, Georgia and Hamilton Streets, Vancouver, B.C. and begin at **7:30 pm**. Tickets starting at **\$29** are available exclusively at the **Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre**, online at **www.vancouveropera.ca** or by telephone (**604-683-0222**). See complete ticket information below.

An all-Canadian cast of internationally acclaimed singers, under the baton of esteemed Quebec-based conductor **Jacques Lacombe**, will bring Puccini's indelible characters vividly to life. **Soprano Frédérique Vézina** is the frail seamstress Mimi, tenor **Roger Honeywell** is the passionate writer Rodolfo, baritone **Aaron St. Clair Nicholson** is the mercurial painter Marcello, soprano **Monica Huisman** is the flamboyant Musetta, baritone **Alexander Dobson** is the musician Schaunard, and bass baritone **Daniel Okulitch** is the philosopher Colline. Baritone **Terry Hodges** doubles as the put-upon landlord Benoit and Musetta's erstwhile elderly suitor Alcindoro.

The action is staged by **Henry Akina**, General and Artistic Director of Hawaii Opera Theater. Set design is by **Peter Dean Beck**. Lighting design is by **Steve Ross**.

THE SINGERS

Tenor **Roger Honeywell** (Rodolfo), who returns following his affecting performances as Alfredo in 2004's *La Traviata*, has been acclaimed as a performer "with the right kind of heroic mettle to his voice" (*Opera Now*). He recently performed in the American première of Tan Dun's *Tea: A Mirror of Soul* with Santa Fe Opera and the world première of Ricky Ian Gordon's *The Grapes of Wrath* with The Minnesota Opera and Utah Opera.

Soprano **Frédérique Vézina** (Mimi) has established herself as a major new presence on North American opera stages. She has sung Mimi with L'Opéra de Québec and Micaëla in *Carmen* with Edmonton Opera. In 2006 she won first prize at the Concours International de Chant de Marmande, in France. Among the praise she has received: "Vezina was the discovery of the evening. Her rich soprano and radiant characterization conveyed the [character's] nobility and innocence." (Tamara Bernstein, *National Post*)

Baritone **Aaron St. Clair Nicholson** (Marcello) made a remarkable VO début as Valentin in 2006's *Faust*. He has established himself as an artist of the first rank, winning praise for his superb vocal gifts and for the dramatic integrity he brings to his performances. Writing of his performance as Ford in Verdi's *Falstaff*, *San Francisco Chronicle* music critic Joshua Kosman enthused that "...St. Clair Nicholson gave a virtuosic display of vigorous full-throated singing and all out physical comedy."

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Monica Huisman (Musetta) returns to VO for the first time since her forceful performances as Frasquita in 2002's *Carmen*. Ms. Huisman, who began her career as a member of the VO Touring Ensemble, has received great praise for her performances since then. Among many other roles, she has sung Pamina in *The Magic Flute* and *Fiordiligi* in *Così fan Tutte*. Earlier this season, she appeared in the world première production of Victor Davies' *Transit of Venus*, at Manitoba Opera.

Baritone **Alexander Dobson** (Schaunard) makes his VO début in this production. Recent career highlights include the title role in *Wozzeck* conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin in Montreal and Mercutio in *Roméo et Juliette* with Opera Ontario. He has been acclaimed for his musicality and dramatic awareness. "...Dobson's rich voice, nuanced delivery and strong stage presence were mesmerizing..." (John Terauds, *Toronto Star*)

Vancouver-based bass baritone **Daniel Okulitch** (Colline) sang Masetto in VO's 2006 *Don Giovanni*. He came to international prominence on Broadway as Schaunard in Baz Luhrman's acclaimed production of *La Bohème*, in 2002. This season, his growing international career includes the world premiere of David DiChiera's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, at Michigan Opera Theater, and the leading role of Seth Brundle in the world première of *The Fly* at the Opéra du Chatelet, in Paris, directed by David Cronenberg and conducted by Plácido Domingo.

THE STORY, IN BRIEF

On Christmas Eve, frail Mimì and young Rodolfo find love in the impoverished, lively Latin Quarter. Surrounded by art, music, philosophy and good friends, the lovers enjoy a few months of bliss before Mimì's deteriorating health tears them apart. They are reunited, joyfully, as Spring blossoms, but by then it is too late. Mimì passes away, leaving Rodolfo and her dear friends devastated.

BACKGROUND

After his third opera, *Manon Lescaut* (1893), earned him his first widespread recognition, Puccini laboured for the next three years on *La Bohème*, the opera that would ultimately become the foundation for his international fame. Puccini's publisher Giulio Ricordi had introduced him to two young librettists, Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, who worked on *Manon Lescaut* and who became Puccini's most faithful collaborators. Puccini was notoriously difficult to work with, but despite creative struggles, the pair of writers ultimately generated one of the finest opera librettos ever devised, adapted from *Scenes de la vie de Bohème* (1851), a semi-autobiographical novel of artistic life in the Latin Quarter by French writer Henri Murger. The gritty realism of the novel was attractive to Puccini; he had had his own brush with the Bohemian lifestyle during his student days in Milan, and it suited the *verismo* style that prevailed in the 1890s after the premières of Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* (1890) and Leoncavallo's *I Pagliacci* (1892). Moreover, Puccini had a natural empathy for frail women, so it comes as no surprise that he was attracted to the central character, Mimì, and that he wrote for her some of his most exalted music. *La Bohème* had its premiere at Turin on February 1st, 1896, three years to the day after the premiere of *Manon Lescaut*. Surprisingly, the new opera was not as immediately successful as its predecessor, but its reputation grew with every performance. It is now considered essential repertoire for many opera houses around the world.

FULL TICKET INFORMATION

Single tickets starting at \$29 (plus handling fee) are available from the **Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre**, online at www.vancouveropera.ca, or by phone at 604-683-0222. Visa, MasterCard and American Express are accepted.
GROUPS: For special pricing for groups of ten or more, call 604-683-0222.

SPECIAL EVENT: A MASTERCLASS WITH CONDUCTOR JACQUES LACOMBE

"Singing Puccini"

Tuesday, April 8, 2008, 7:30 pm, Alice MacKay Room, Vancouver Public Library

Admission is free.

Maestro Lacombe, soprano Melody Mercredi, tenor Sam Chung and pianist Kinza Tyrrell explore Puccini's music, including selections from *La Bohème*.

THIS PRODUCTION IS GENEROUSLY SPONSORED BY MERCEDES BENZ.