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La Boheme

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Tuesday Jan 20, 2015



Dimitri Pittas, Evan Boyer, Tobias Greenhaig, Thomas Hammons and Luis Ledesma (Source:Palm Beach Opera)

Palm Beach Opera presented Giacomo Puccini's "**La Boheme**" as the first production of their 2015 season.

This opera is one of the chestnuts of the operatic repertoire. This is the third "La Boheme" that South Florida has seen in as many seasons, but Puccini's classic tale of doomed love is always riveting and moving.

"La Boheme" tells the story of two couples, Rodolfo and Mimi and Marcello and Musetta in Paris in the 1880s. Rodolfo is an aspiring playwright and Marcello is a struggling painter. Rodolfo meets consumptive flower maker Mimi and falls instantly

in love.

Marcello has been having an on-and-off-again affair with the vivacious Musetta. The drama surrounding the two couple's love affair and eventually Mimi's untimely death make up the drama of the piece. If this sounds a little like the musical "Rent" that would be because "La Boheme" was its inspiration.

Palm Beach Opera brought together several world class singers, a magnificent set and glorious 19th Century-styled costuming for this opera. It is a treat for the eyes, the ears and the emotions.

In the role of Rodolfo, tenor Dimitri Pittas showed off a strong upper register with a clear ringing tone. He was charismatic in his role and he had a lot of chemistry with the singers playing the role of his flat mates.

Baritones Luis Ledesma as Marcello, Tobias Greenhaig as Schaunard, and Bass Evan Boyer as Colline were energetic in their roles as the painter, the musician and the philosopher. Their singing was outstanding and all three men gave fine performances.

In the role of Mimi, soprano Keri Alkema was less convincing than her male counter parts. While she sang beautifully, she never really seemed to have much chemistry on stage with any of the men. Her performance was adequate, but somewhat uninspired. Vocally Alkema is a good fit for the role and her voice has considerable size and a nice tone.

The standout performance of the evening was given by Ellie Dehn in the role of Musetta. Dehn was making her Palm Beach Opera debut in this role and it can only be hoped that we'll see her again soon. Her voice was bright and shimmery, her high notes were secure and she knew her character very well. She was a true diva every time she stepped on stage.

Palm Beach Opera Young Artist Nicholas Nestorak performed the tenor role of Parpignol the toy seller and Baritone Thomas Hammons filled out the cast in the dual roles of Benoit and Alcindoro.

The chorus, under the guidance of Chorus Master Greg Ritchey, sang their parts beautifully in the Act Two section of the opera.

The direction by Fenlon Lamb was beautifully done, so much so that everything on stage done by the actors seemed natural and realistic.

The set, which was originally designed for Arizona Opera by Peter Dean Beck, was beautiful and evocative of Paris in the 1880s. The costumes, which were provided by Malabar Limited of Toronto, were lavish with the ruffles, frills and lace common to that time period. The lighting by Ron Vodicka helped complete the picture.

Conductor Daniele Callegari was another one of the superstars of the evening. The orchestra was balanced perfectly with the singers and Callegari was visibly communicating with his performers both on stage and in the pit. It was a musically sensitive performance.

Overall, this production of "La Boheme" was beautifully sung, magnificently conducted and expertly presented.

"La Boheme" ran through January 18 at the Kravis Center for the Performing Arts, 701 Okeechobee Boulevard in West Palm Beach, FL 33401. For tickets and information for upcoming Palm Beach Opera Productions, call 561-833-7888 or visit pboper.org.

Jack Gardner has been producing theater in Dallas and Fort Lauderdale for the past 8 years. He has performed in operas, musicals and dramatic works as well as doing voice-over and radio work. Jack lives in South Florida with his three dogs.

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