PAVAROTTI

La Bohème
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La Bohème

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english / italiano

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To the Reader

A year has passed since the death of Luciano Pavarotti, who, to the world at large represented one of the last geniuses of lyric opera and who, to me, also represented a cherished friend. I was bound to Pavarotti over the years by an uninterrupted relationship in which powerful public emotions – working together on Pavarotti International, meeting up with major figures such as the Dalai Lama and Rigoberta Menchú, the grand evenings of music – are intermingled in my memory with highly private moments, like the endless card games we played on rainy New York afternoons and the long conversations in which the quick-wittedness of his sharp mind shone as brightly as a sword.

Therefore, today, in order to remind the world of the departed genius and to remind his friends of the great person that Luciano was, I have created, thanks to the initial prompting and invaluable assistance of Nicoletta Mantovani, the artist’s widow, this homage to him. A volume about Pavarotti and La Bohème, that is to say the opera in which he debuted and one that stayed with him throughout his decade-spanning international career.

This work constitutes the launching of a project that will unfold over the years, a project with the aim of restoring to the world, not so much the measure of Pavarotti’s popularity, still quite intact, but the essence of his most sublime quality, the manner in which he represented the very incarnation of bel canto, of the Italian genius.

Marilena Ferrari
We were very young, Luciano and I, when we had the good fortune to meet each other and make music together. Thinking about him, my mind is flooded with memories, all of them wonderful: in Rome, at La Scala, in Vienna and, of course, all the records, the tours, that last time in Ferrara, in 1996, together with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, when he sang “Recondita armonia” and “E lucevan le stelle” from Tosca, “Un’aura amorosa” from Così fan tutte and “Dalla sua pace” from Don Giovanni. Prior to that particular concert, we had worked together in Ballo in Maschera at the Staatsoper in Vienna, ten years earlier.

We met for the first time in Reggio Emilia. It was the end of April in 1961: I was directing Faust and he had just debuted at the opera in the role of Rodolfo in La Bohème, under the direction of Francesco Molinari Pradelli. From that point forward our paths intersected several times due to both our friendship and shared professional obligations. We recorded a number of operas together and I recall with great pleasure one particular record featuring some little known Verdi arias, not part of the grande repertorio, such as “Oh dolore” from the third act of Attila and the cavatina “Dal più remoto esilio” from the first act of I Due Foscari.

I especially enjoy recalling the Ballo in Maschera with the La Scala Orchestra, featuring Piero Cappuccilli, Shirley Verrett, Elena Obraztsova, Daniela Mazzucato-Meneghini and Luigi Roni. And then Verdi’s Requiem which we did together a number of times, one performance having given rise to a DVD that was recorded in the church of Santa Maria Sopra Minerva in Rome: on the stage he was accompanied that time by Nicolai Ghiaurov, Marilyn Horne and Renata Scotto.

Being in Luciano’s company was always a delightful experience: a lot of fun; I very much respected his approach to music. He was a very easy person to get along with, really spontaneous and full of life, someone with whom I always had a fraternal relationship.
Retracing my memories, I’d say that in many ways La Bohème was the crucial opera in terms of my relationship with Luciano Pavarotti, one of the works that stirs a myriad of extraordinary memories. Indeed, it was during a run of Bohème in Mantua, back in the early Sixties, that Luciano and I met and sang for the first time together. We were almost the same age; he was still a fairly obscure figure, although I already had a few successes to my credit, having debuted early at the age of eighteen. Then, of course, came performances of Traviata in London, I Capuleti e i Montecchi at La Scala and long years filled with great triumphs...

Following that encounter we enjoyed a long relationship based on friendship and shared performances. I remember our debut together at the Metropolitan with Il Trovatore: we were both full of trepidation, joy and butterflies. I remember the countless performances of Traviata and Lucia di Lammermoor – probably the operas that most lastingly defined our work together – which we starred in throughout the world. I remember the presentations of Rigoletto and Lombardi alla Prima Crociata; and I clearly recall an extraordinary Gioconda delivered in San Francisco back in 1979.

Throughout this very long process, La Bohème was our constant companion, as if destiny had decreed our singing those roles; I’ll never forget the performances we gave in places like Miami and Torre del Lago in 1975, but, above all, I remember the pioneering experience of videotaping the performance in 1977 at the Metropolitan, under the direction of James Levine, an event that made opera history.

As we continued to perform together our empathy and ability to work together harmoniously grew, reinforced by our individual technical evolutions. We were brought even closer together by our shared condition as the proud defenders, the standard-bearers, as it were, of Italian bel canto. Indeed, it was thanks
to the two of us that bel canto became so beloved throughout the world, enjoying a truly international fame and popularity. We perhaps had an advantage over our predecessors in this leap to fame thanks to the coverage provided by the new media. Not only did Luciano and I sing on the world’s most prestigious stages, not only did we record the great classics of the opera repertoire, we were given the opportunity to become popular, truly popular, thanks to the impact of television, broadcasting operas as well as interviews and guest appearances on talk shows. For both of us this represented a further occasion for affirming our identities as Italian singers, vehicles of an illustrious tradition and universal passion that the entire world gradually came to embrace. Both of us lived abroad much more than in Italy, but this only served to reinforce our sense of self, our pride in being Italian, a patriotic dignity that we managed to transmit and portray as a positive value, as an absolute cultural and musical quality.

Today the world of opera is composed of an ever broader, ever more cosmopolitan cross-section of the public, no longer limited to the category of sophisticated music lovers, an elite aristocracy of experts; Italian bel canto is now definitively accepted and loved and this is, in no small part, due to Luciano and me.

Luciano, of course, went on to explore even more obviously popular areas of music, although he always managed to maintain his level of excellence, whereas I, for my part, chose to remain faithful to the world of opera.

At a certain point, in slightly more recent times, our paths began moving in different directions, something that is probably inevitable over the course of an entire life. And the occasions to sing together became increasingly rare, but the experiences we shared in our youth forged a respect and affection that always kept us somehow close. When we met again during the celebrations of his fortieth year of singing professionally, it was as if we had seen each other just the day before and I once again heard that old nickname he had given me so many years ago: a name, I’m sorry to inform you, that is destined to remain a secret locked deep within my heart.

I only have one regret now that Luciano is no longer with us. Over the last several decades in which I’ve devoted myself with great passion to directing opera, I never had an opportunity to direct him in a performance. I would have liked to direct him, ça va sans dire, in the great operas that marked our shared professional path. A Traviata, a Ballo in Maschera, or a Bohème with me as director and him on the stage would have been memorable productions, indeed, like those of our best years.
Luciano, a Musical Thrill
by Franco Zeffirelli

“There is nothing to discuss.” I told Luciano. “We have a God who guides us, and that is Puccini, and we cannot dream of searching for roads other than the ones indicated by him.”

Thinking back and revisiting those unforgettable moments that we lived together on the greatest stages of the world stirs uncontrollable emotions in me every time: it is the story of a sincere and ever-fresh connection that emanates from the memory of La Bohème, without a doubt our favorite creature.

Even if one wanted to have fun finding things to correct, new colors and presences, the perfect way in which it was conceived and felt by the composer does not tolerate any further touches, not even jokingly. It is a true and unique masterpiece, with its own unmistakable color, in which the global vision expressed in Puccini’s score has reached the highest and most inspired peaks of a work of art. At the bottom of the heart of everyone of us that has interpreted this work in the now extremely famous 1963 La Scala version, it remains a unique and insuperable case. Personally, I do not hesitate to acknowledge that wherever it has been staged it has been my most successful production and the most universally loved, acclaimed and applauded.

It began as a complete and definitive staging (further polished over time) that toured the world, from Australia to Korea, from Russia to Japan, creating an emptiness around other productions. At New York’s Metropolitan (which to date has witnessed more than 328 performances since 1981) and at the Vienna Staatsoper, this staging has been redone almost every year since 1963, when it was rehearsed and directed for the first time by Herbert von Karajan, at La Scala, where this year it is to play once more.

The memorable Bohème that saw me work together with dear Luciano was a special one and it will remain engraved not only in my dearest memories, but also in La Scala history: it was 22 March 1979 and a great Carlos
Kleiber was on the podium. It was a magical evening, in which everything seemed to work perfectly. Puccini’s great music entered the hearts of everyone and it moved us to tears like never before.

Kleiber confessed to me that it was one of the rare times in which he and the entire orchestra were transported in an aura of unusual harmonies in which stood out “a voice from paradise,” the sublime one belonging to Luciano. Maestro Carlos Kleiber, extremely famous in the music world for his genius, but also for his iron rigor as a musician, also surrendered, like all those that had the good fortune of being present at that historic performance, beginning with yours truly, to the spell of the ideal Bohème incarnated by Luciano.

Everyone spoke with enthusiasm, vehemence and passion of his extraordinary voice. And it truly was extraordinary: his vocal range enabled Luciano to expand the human sound amazingly, adding the effects, timbres and resonances that nature had put at his disposal. It was not, however, only the virtuosity of his extraordinary voice, it was the “intelligence” of his singing and the way he could identify with the situations that Puccini offered him. One only needs to remember the emotion that he managed to create in the third act when revealing to his friend Marcello that his little love, Mimì, was condemned to the grave and embracing Luciano, enveloping him. And the audience remained there transfixed, not a creak to be heard, like someone that watches and is part of a miracle. And then what Puccini had always sought to achieve occurred: suddenly the world of pain and love inundate the entire scene. The tenor’s voice was able to make this secret treasure blossom, and its fragrance seemed to inundate the entire scene.

I met Luciano in the early Sixties, during the auditions for a small, young Traviata that the Rome Philharmonic had engaged me to stage at the Olympic Theater in Rome. They immediately talked to me about him. It seemed like in that this big boy was actually well launched in his career as a soccer player, which was his real love. Yet the splendor of his timbre and the overwhelmingly pleasant nature of his personality made them immediately change his destiny and the agents began to compete for him. I was also an instantaneous victim to his extraordinary fascination as an artist. Before saying goodbye and waiting to decide the destiny of the “Traviatina” project, I gave him some advice, which he listened to very carefully.

He rebelled categorically only on one point: I had dared to discreetly advise him that he was too young to start putting on weight. I should never have said that! I don’t know if he was joking or serious, but he proclaimed in the highest register of his tessitura that if the audience wanted Pavarotti to sing on stage, it would have to accept him “as beautiful and robust as his mom had made him!”

The public, as we know, even started growing fond of Pavarotti’s bulk and powerful look, which became his trademark, popular all over the world. Unfortunately that little “Traviatina” did not take place, but we didn’t lose anything because we soon met up again in some of the greatest theaters and with the greatest directors.

Great, immense, extraordinary his voice! His prerogative was to confront the timbre and customary intonation in the phrases with absolute freedom, in an absolutely original way, completely new yet always faithful to the composer’s wishes. For many it was a defect (he was often accused of a lack of rigor) while for him, in reality, it was the only way, consciously or not, to make his heart beat with that of the creator of those marvelous musical moments.

The uniqueness of his genius was immediately clear to everyone, together with his overpowering temperament. Even in the course of his life his iron determination always came out with a fineness and acuteness of intuition and of choices that one would certainly not have expected from a man of his size. I often joked about it with him, and when I made him fly off the handle with my obsessive “whining” to lose some weight he shut my mouth by proclaiming that I was a great director but that I didn’t understand a thing about the human voice, which must be produced by a powerful and heavy body! How wonderful it was, our walk arm-in-arm along the paths that traced the witchcraft of music: Turandot, Tosca, Bohème.

I remember perfectly well the day in February on which I introduced him to Joan Sutherland at the Metropolitan. As soon as I heard those two voices performing together I had a vision of a fire, of an earthquake, as if a flaming meteorite had plunged to the earth. And thus began the long list of masterpieces that the two “monsters” gave to the world: Lucia di Lammermoor, La Sonnambula, La Traviata. On 17 February 1972 the consecration of the
A miracle arrived: with Donizetti’s *La Fille du Régiment*, where our monsters had the audience in raptures, and Luciano broke every human barrier with nine terrific high Cs. A few years later we met again for *Don Carlos*, which saw us as the protagonists to inaugurate La Scala’s 1992-1993 season. Yet what a different atmosphere was created around that extraordinary production of Verdi’s masterpiece. Right from the start we felt the painful effort of having to breathe a poisoned air. What fueled the conflict, the suspicion and the envy towards that performance that through the golden timbre of Luciano’s voice and the participation of many other great artists probably remains the ideal production of *Don Carlos*? It is not like me to accuse anyone but, as with those crimes that one reads about in the newspapers, the true culprit was not identified and nor will he ever be. Yet one can be sure that on that occasion La Scala was certainly not an affectionate and watchful mother. I don’t want to say anything else. Anyone who wants to know more about it can enquire elsewhere.

I remember the last time that we worked together. It was again with *Tosca*, which we had done together many times at the Met. This time it was for only one performance, at the Rome Opera in January 2000 for the centenary of the premiere performance. The cast was perfect, with Ines Salazar, the young Venezuelan revelation, and Juan Pons, a great Scarpia, and if this treasure were not enough, Placido Domingo gave up singing Cavaradossi and instead directed the historic performance from the podium that evening.

Whatever Luciano sang, he created an air of magic around him: every time he was able to disclose unknown revelations to us, always new and always different, because his performances were new and different in such an amazing way. Everybody wanted to know the reason for that miracle, for that great lesson which his art offered us on every occasion. His answer to our frenetic inquiries was always extremely simple: “Today I sing like this. One must accept the principle that every role is always a new creation to be discovered. We are not here to perform it, we are here to live it.”
The Poetic Reality of
La Bohème

by Michele Girardi
Illica, Giacosa, and Puccini

The end of spring 1891 brought the first contact between two men of letters who were destined to form one of the most famous pairs of librettists a composer ever had at his disposal. Librettist pairs were common in France (Barbier and Carré for Faust and Contes d’Hoffmann, Meilhac with Halevy for Carmen and with Gil for Menotti’s Manon, to name just a few); but only Puccini and Mascagni regularly collaborated with such partnerships in Italy. Puccini’s three best librettos—La Bohème, Tosca, and Madama Butterfly—were provided by Illica and Giacosa, and after the latter’s death in 1906 the composer tried to recapture the successful creative collaboration by finding a replacement.1

Born at Castell’Arquato in the province of Piacenza, Luigi Illica (1857–1919) played a role in the fin-de-siècle world of Italian opera similar to Scribe’s in grand opéra, although Illica wrote fewer works. Before devoting himself exclusively to librettos he wrote about ten prose works, some in conjunction with Ferdinando Fontana. He produced thirty-five librettos in total, including some of the greatest successes by Catalani (La Wally, 1892), Franchetti (Cristoforo Colombo, 1892; Germania, 1902), Smaragdo (Nozze Istriane, 1895), Giordano (Andrea Chénier, 1896; Siberia, 1903), and Mascagni (Iris, 1898; Le Maschere, 1901; Isabeau, 1911). While making a fundamental contribution to the development of “naturalistic” taste in drama, his eclecticism allowed him to treat a wide range of subjects, from exoticism to science fiction. But Illica’s predilections, in particular his skill in creating powerful drama, hid a taste for bel canto that found its match in that of Giuseppe Giacosa (1847–1906). One of

1. This essay is the updated version of Chapter IV (“La Bohème: The Poetic Reality”) of my Puccini: His International Art (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000, 99–144). The monograph is an updated and revised translation of the original edition, Giacomo Puccini. L’arte internazionale di un musicista italiano (Venice: Marsilio, 1951), 2005, 109–147. This present essay has been further integrated and has not appeared previously in print in English. The music examples have been taken from the score of La Bohème (Milan: Ricordi, © 1920, PR 110, reprint 1977). All references in the text, the footnotes and in the examples refer to this score, and include a rehearsal number with the measures number preceding or following it and where necessary, the act and scene number.
2. “Well, I say that neither of us should think about such creatures; that we weren’t created and put on this earth just to sacrifice our existence to such commonplace Manons; and that the chevalier Desgrieux, who is so handsome, so true and so poetic, is only saved from absurdity by his youth and his cherished illusions. At the age of twenty, he can follow his mistress abroad without ceasing to be interesting; but at twenty-five he would have shown Manon the door, and quite rightly too.” Henri Murger, Scènes de la vie de bohème (Paris: Gallimard, 1931), 336.
3. In a letter to Ricordi dated 4 February 1915, Puccini admitted his latent nostalgia: “I am much taken with Susoni and Illica would also accept him as a partner. I was thinking of reviving some of the Giacosian success of the Gaetano union” (Storii, Puccini, Milan: Nuova Arcademia, 1950, reprint 1975, 121). In all of the operas after Butterfly except Gianni Schicchi and Suor Angelica, Puccini had at least two collaborators: La Bohème by Adami, used a scenario by Willner and Reichert; and Il Trittico was reworked by Baris Accademia. Mascagni collaborated with Targioni-Tozzetti, together with Menasci, for six of his fifteen operas.
the most important Italian poets and dramatists of his time, Giacosa had already displayed his elegant Decadent style in *Partita a scoeci* (1873) and *Triumph of the Amour* (1875), medieval dramas in versi martelliani. He essayed realism in the prose comedy *Tristi amori* (1887) and the drama *La signora di Challant* (written in 1891 in Italian for Eleonora Duse, and revived in French by Sarah Bernhardt). In these works, which were joined in 1900 by the masterpiece *Come le foglie*, Giacosa raised the theater of social criticism in Italy to a new level, propelling it into the orbit of contemporary European Decadent drama.4

Poetic elegance and refined control of meter were Giacosa’s particular contributions to the partnership; Illica brought formidable dramatic instinct and a rich flood of ideas. This combination was ideal for Puccini, who himself possessed these qualities in equal measure. And so an extremely successful working method was developed. Priority was given to the dramatic outline on which Puccini based his first musical ideas (and which then supplied a basis for versification), according to an unchanging sequence:

1. adaptation of the drama
2. outlines in verse
3. musical sketches, with directions
4. poetry versification
5. composition and orchestration
6. dramatic revisions
7. poetic revisions
8. musical revisions

Puccini attached great importance to poetic meter and frequently asked his collaborators to adjust a line to fit his requirements, which differed from those of a traditional nineteenth-century opera composer. Dallapiccola has demonstrated brilliantly that a Verdi aria tends to make an emotional crescendo to the third line, or the third pair of lines; Verdi—the fact that he participated actively in the adaptation of subjects, discussing the dramatic articulation in minute detail—developed his idea of the form of a musical passage on the basis of the poetic drafts, and normally requested a fixed meter before starting to compose. Falstaff, in which an obvious move away from “number opera” is due in part to the versification, was the result of his full sympathy with the ideas of Boito, who prepared a dramatic and metrical structure capable of stimulating the composer (a debt Puccini acknowledged after finishing the first act, which he had not composed “without any change in the poetry”).5

For Puccini, however, the musical idea determined the verse meter. This attitude was motivated both by his natural inclination to create a musical image of the plot and setting, and by his tendency to move progressively away from formal structures of the past, which appear divested of their original function, like frames to be filled with new contents. The different role of verse in this changed context has been captured well by Daniela Goldin:

Ilica himself used to say that the verse was no longer the criterion by which a libretto was to be judged, or at least, was no longer the most significant element. Even the famous “cosciorico-cosciorico-bistecca” that Puccini sketched as a model for Musetta’s verses (“Quando meno vo...”) seems to me to demonstrate that in Puccini’s music the value of the verse lies not so much in the number of syllables as in the series of accents and timbres.6

Puccini’s correspondence is examples of demonstrating how meter took a subordinate role to compositional invention. During work on *Manon* he supplied Illica with a macaronic model for “six versi tronchi,” since he had “a rhythmic theme I can’t change, because it’s effective” (Gara, no. 60, 64). This small aside for Des Grieux in the second-act finale is based on a ¼ theme; Puccini had no trouble in fitting the quatriu tronchi into two accents per measure. Albeit not as fanatic a defender of the rights of poetry as Fontana (who taught Puccini about aesthetics when he worked on the *Le Villi* and Edgar libretto and also afterwards), Illica did not always accept this situation without argument, and at least in the beginning attempted to assert his rights via Ricordi. But in vain. A huge number of requests similar to the following landed on his desk (Gara, no. 126, 110):

Since I’m having Musetta sing inside the inn (at the beginning of the third act), I need some lines (in response to Musetta’s song) for the chorus, which is mainly having fun in there. Musetta sings the lyrics from Act II. The coretto must be in meter: quaterni tronchi. Four lines. For example:

Not non dormi, alber re estrem: we drink constantly,
facciam l’amor
signijiam tratten."


8. In the score this becomes “Trallerallè... / Eva e Noè.”

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Later on, both librettists grew accustomed to the composer’s whims, resigning themselves to his sudden changes of mind. While versifying *Tosca*, for example, Giacosa wrote to Ricordi:

_I renew my solemn promise to give you a fair copy of the completed work either this evening or tomorrow morning. Except for the alterations Puccini will suggest! On account of which we will start again from scratch._ (6 July 1896; *Gara*, no. 166, 149)

Whereas Illica was an extremely quick worker, Giacosa liked to take his time, polishing every detail. He often vented his frustration on Ricordi at being obliged “to re-do, revise, add, correct, cut, reinstate, expand here only to condense there” (Gara, no. 123, 115), and threatened three times to withdraw from the project. To convince him that his labor was not in vain, the publisher went so far as to play him a good part of the vocal score of *La Bohème* in preview. On hearing the music to whose birth he had contributed, the first-time librettist’s bitterness vanished: “Puccini has surpassed all my expectations, and I now understand the reason for his tyranny over verses and accents” (Giacosa to Ricordi, 20 June 1895; *Carner*, 96).

The secret of this little group of collaborators was the sincere respect each had for the others. They worked under the ever-watchful eye of Giulio Ricordi, who ensured the necessary equilibrium in every situation, and could therefore later claim his own role:

_We all have clear consciences; we worked from the heart, without any preconceptions, serenely enveloped in the pure atmosphere of art. You will excuse me if I say “we” and not “they.” To me it seems that this beautiful Bohème is, if not like a daughter to me, at least a little like a god-daughter._ (Ricordi to Illica, 15 February 1896; *Gara*, no. 157, 143)

**The Battle between the Music Publishers**

Immediately after *I Medici*, the same composer [Leoncavallo] will stage another opera, La Bohème, whose subject is taken from Murger’s novel of that name. This opera, on which our good composer has worked for some months, will be given next year, 1894. ([Il Secolo, 20-21 March 1893]

Maestro Leoncavallo wishes to make known that he signed a contract for the new opera, and has since then been working on the music for that subject (La Bohème). [...] Maestro Puccini, to whom Maestro Leoncavallo declared a few days ago that he was writing
This last letter, signed by Puccini on 23 March, demonstrates better than any other document the climate of artistic competition in which La Bohème was born. It would take many volumes to catalog all the operas and plays of this period that shared subjects, often in a context of open aesthetic and professional rivalry between their respective authors. Thus it is not in the least surprising that Puccini and Leoncavallo thought at exactly the same time that Henri Murger’s Scènes de la vie de Bohème. At the height of “Verismo” opera, such a subject boded particularly well for success. Among other things, it would be an up-to-date topic for the Italian stage, which as usual lagged behind other countries artistically.

At the same time, however, there are good reasons for believing the main points of Leoncavallo’s account of events in Il Secolo, the house journal of his publisher Sonzogno, when he sought to establish his priority in the choice of subject: namely that, during a chance meeting between the two composers in Milan’s Galleria, probably on 19 or 20 March, Leoncavallo described the project to Puccini, who, feigning surprise, seized the opportunity to state his own, similar intentions. It is perfectly plausible that Puccini, an omnivorous reader, had already considered Murger’s work; but he had almost certainly not yet made the decision, as Leoncavallo had, to set it to music. Once again, as had happened with Massenet’s Manon, as and we shall see occur later, the situation provoked a strong competitive impulse in Puccini.

A battle between the composers and their supporters suddenly flared. Thanks to the skill of Edoardo Sonzogno, his firm had become highly competitive, publishing the vocal scores and promoting productions of a large number of French operas as well as those of most of the Verismo composers. A real war was thus launched between the publishers, one that lasted until Madame Butterfly, the last Puccini opera to have its premiere in an Italian theater during the composer’s lifetime.9 Neither Puccini nor Ricordi refrained from underhand methods. While occupied with coordinating denials in the newspapers, Ricordi had already made inquiries about Murger’s author’s rights and how they might be obtained exclusively in order to impede Leoncavallo. Puccini himself informs us of this ploy in a letter to Illica, from which source we also learn that the librettist had already prepared a reply — most likely the communiqué that appeared in the Corriere — which Puccini merely signed. Although undated, the letter was probably written on 22 March:

Curissimo,

Giudìo thinks it better not to respond. I would have struck back. But he thinks that when we have a reply from Paris, and if it is favorable, we will respond and make a big splash. Tell me what you think right away.

If you go for the immediate strike, come to me tomorrow morning as soon as you receive this letter and we will go together to Ricordi and the Corriere — for publication.

I believe that to stay silent is to appear defeated — at least, they and the public will think so. Your response is very noble; and after the reply from Paris it might seem to be based on bad will and resentment.

It is probable that by this time Illica had finished a full dramatic sketch of the opera, since Giacosa, who had immediately been invited to collaborate on the project, was able to compliment him on it, also on 22 March:

Curissimo Illica,

I have read it and admire you. You have been able to extract dramatic action from a novel that always seemed to me exquisite but little suited to the stage. The early acts are marvelously formed. I don’t think the last act is quite right yet; it seems too similar to many others. But you will manage it. The idea of working with you, nimble and generous spirit, pleases me immensely.

[Sign., no. 82, 82-83]

Leoncavallo’s behavior was undoubtedly more sincere; and he did not bear hard feelings for long, although they were justified. A few days after the controversy broke out, Puccini informed Illica that:


10. This letter, along with many other previously unpublished documents from the Biblioteca Pasciniana-Landi di Piemonte [P], Fondo Illica – Poe 181, can be found in Jürgen Maehder, “Immagini di Parigi. La trasformazione del romanzo Scènes de la vie de Bohème di Henri Murger nelle opere di Puccini e Leoncavallo,” in Nuova rivista musicale italiana, 24, no. 3-4 (1998), 402-406. This study contains further information on the genesis of the work, their relationship with the sources, and a discussion of the music of Leoncavallo’s opera. For the exact date of the preceding extracts from the Milan newspapers, see Angelo Foletto, “La guerra degli editori: La Bohème, un caso emblematico di ordinaria concorrenza,” in La Bohème, un caso emblematico di ordinaria concorrenza, in La Bohème (Bologna: Nuova Atl. Edit. 1990), 23-47 (Teatro Comunale di Bologna program book, 1909-1990 season).
Although his *Bohème* also contains some powerful moments, it exists today only as an example of contemporary taste, while Puccini’s has dominated the international repertory ever since its debut. Just as Puccini wrote and tacitly predicted, the public, when called upon to judge, brought the controversy to a permanent close by deciding in his favor.

**From a Serial Story to the Libretto**

For *La Bohème*, Puccini returned for the third time running to a French literary source. Henri Murger’s *Scènes de Bohème* first came out as a serial story, published in installments in the Parisian magazine *Le Corsaire Satan* between March 1845 and April 1849. It was successful enough to prompt the author, together with the dramatist Théodore Barrière, to link some of the brief episodes in a five-act play, *La Vie de Bohème*. The play was first performed on 22 November 1849 at the Théâtre des Variétés, in the presence of Louis Napoléon and all the most celebrated Parisian literati, from Aréne Hencourt to Théophile Gautier, along with many others. For Puccini, barely twenty-seven, the reception rescued him from poverty — that same tedious companion of the heroes in his little stories — and his success was increased by a contract he signed with the distinguished publisher Lévy to shape his work in the form of a novel. Published in 1851 as *Scènes de la Bohème*, it was this source, not subject to copyright, that Puccini and his librettists declared as their basis.15 The particular difficulty of the work lay in extracting a concise, coherent operatic plot faithful to the spirit of the lightly traced impressions outlined in the novel, which had no fewer than twenty-three episodes. Murger’s *Scènes de la Bohème* has five male principals — Illica spurred his acquaintance with the aspiring bohemian Caroli Barbamouche — and two female, not counting Schaunard’s fiancée (Phémie), and Colline’s and Rodolphe’s many lovers (working-girl Louise, actress Sidonie, milliner Laura, and mistresses Séraphine and Juliette). Illica’s most radical departure was in transforming “mademoiselle Lucille, surnommée mademoiselle Mimi”16 into a romantic young girl. In the novel she is married to Rodolphe, but treats him badly and is often unfaithful, either through necessity or for pure pleasure.

The librettist paid great attention to detail, if not quite as much as Leoncavallo. Ideas large and small were taken from eleven chapters, from the name of the magazine for which Rodolfo writes (*Le Castor*), to the Café Monnus where the...
group meets, and the Bal Malibîl visited by Benoît. There is also the manuscript of Rodolphe’s play Le Louange, which burns several times over (chapter 9); the title of Marcello’s painting (Le Passage de la Mer Rouge); and many phrases and short passages transferred almost literally. One example is the second couplet declaimed jokingly by the painter in the concluding story, “La Jeunesse n’a qu’un temps,” from which the baritone’s verses in the Act II concertato reprise of the opera are taken:

\[
\text{Non mio jeanne n’est pas morte; La gioventù non s’è anco morta}
\]

\[
\text{Il n’est pas mort ton souvenir; ne di te morto è il sovvenir.}
\]

\[
\text{Et si à frapper a moi porte \quad Se tu batterai alla mia porta}
\]

\[
\text{Mon cœur, Musette, trah l’oeuvre. \quad \text{t’andrebbe il mio cuore ad ope’r}.
\]

The ideas of the candle blown out by a puff of wind, the lost key, and the nuff to warn the ailing Mimì’s nimb hands were provided by chapter 13 of the novel, “Le Manchon de Francine.” Only for the concluding finale did Illica turn to the play. In the twenty-second chapter of Murger’s novel, the heroine is taken to a hospital, where she dies alone. But in Act V of the play (scenes 2-4), she is taken unexpectedly to Rodolphe; Musette sends Marcel to pawn her jewels, lighting a candle while her friend sleeps; Colline barters his overcoat and one of Nanchino’s garments for 30 sous (in the novel he sells his beloved books); and in the end Mimì collapses dead in the armchair before the curtain falls. While this finale was more suitable for opera, being based largely on ensemble episodes, it was otherwise much more appropriate not to take the play into consideration, thus avoiding the usual clichés of lyric adaptations.

Barrière, a young but already expert author of rondelettes, had helped Murger attain success in La Vie de Bohème by eliminating all the rough edges of the work, creating a dramatic structure on the model of the novel La Dame aux camélias, which had come out in 1848 and was adapted in a matter of months into a “pièce en cinq actes” by Alexandre Dumas fils’s episodes – from which Piave drew Verdi’s La Traviata – had been considered immoral, and were blocked by the censorship; although not published until 1852, they circulated in the meantime throughout Parisian literary society. Barrière’s model is thus so evident as to be uncontestable. Mimì, a kind-hearted courtesan consumed by illness, sacrifices her love for Rodolphe and goes to live with a viscount in order to allow her lover to marry Césarine de Rouvre, a young and respectable widow. It is a union greatly advantageous to Rodolphe’s uncle, the businessman Durandun, the “zio milionario” mentioned by Rodolphe in the opera. Like Germont père, he is the cause of the separation of his nephew and the young grisiette. Everything is resolved in the last act, but only in the final measures does Durandin try to remedy the harm he has done Mimì, giving the marriage his blessing just as the girl dies.

Barrière and Murger could copy Dumas, living as they were in an environment where topical plots were widely exploited; but Puccini neither was able nor wanted to be in competition with La Traviata; in the operatic world obvious models had to be avoided, as did the kind of theatrical success often achieved by adhering to such stereotyped dramatic formulas (one thinks of the earliest example, Alfred de Musset and his Mimì Pinson). What is more, in adaptation from the complex world of the novel, a feature of the original was necessarily lost – the precise references in its short character portraits to well-known personalities of contemporary Parisian art and culture, including Charles Baudelaire and the painter Champfleury. This loss meant that Puccini’s opera was less bound to historical fact, and became more a type of symbolic representation. Its universality would eventually fascinate audiences the world over, allowing them to identify fully with Puccini’s characters; Murger would never have been able to achieve such an impact. In the novel, the characters – like their creator – eventually attain a better standard of living, which leads them to voice bitter observations on their immediate past, coldly and lucidly identifying La Bohème with their recent youth.

The merit of devising the operatic plot from the Scènes de la Bohème lies with Illica, who was immediately charged by Ricordi with adapting the novel for the stage. He worked skillfully and with pressing deadlines. Then the two librettists began a steady collaboration. The original plan envisioned a structure different from that of the definitive version. The first act was divided into two scenes, entitled “In soffitta” [In the attic] and “Al quartiere latino” [In the Latin Quarter] respectively; the second act, “La barriera d’Enfer” [The tollgate at the Boulevard d’Enfer], then became what is now the third act; the fourth act, again “In soffitta,” concluded the opera as we now know it. Between these last two, an episode entitled “Il cortile della casa di via La Bruyère 8” [The courtyard of no. 8 La Bruyère Street] constituted Act III. Here, in order to justify the final farewell scene...
La Bohème

Quando me' n vo soletta per la via

QUADRO II
between Mimi and Rodolfo, the librettists developed an idea from chapter 6 of the novel — “Mademoiselle Musette” — depicting a great party hosted by Musette (evicted by her lover) in the courtyard of her house. In this scene the viscount Paul — whose only remaining trace in the opera is Rodolfo’s phrase in Act III. “Un moscardino / di Visconti / le fa l’occhio di triglia” (“A foppish viscount makes eyes at her”) and Musetta’s in the following, “Intesi dire che Mimi, fuggita / dal visconti era in fin di vita” (“I heard it said that Mimi, having fled from the viscount, was dying”) — arouses Rodolfo’s furious jealousy by attracting the attention of the fickle Mimi. But this kind of scene, one actually set by Leoncavallo, offended Puccini’s implacable sense of form, and he eliminated it despite his librettists’ advocacy. In his opinion, a party at this point would have duplicated the outline of the scene in the Latin Quarter, causing a repetition intolerable in terms of the operatic structure. Against the librettists’ wishes, the two first scenes were separated, creating a symmetrical balance between the first light-hearted pair of episodes and the two anguished final scenes. The creation of the opera was the work of four pairs of hands, with Giulio Ricordi often intervening with useful advice. He suggested, for example, that in Act III Musetta sing from offstage the waltz previously heard at the tables in front of Cafe Monsieur; moreover, he insisted that Illica, who had a passion for accumulating theatrical detritus, eliminate the excess of detail and realistic directions that he had crammed into the original, thus allowing the opera to assume its much-praised conciseness. Illica, in his turn, also played a vital role in dramatic decision-making. Given the difficulties of the Latin Quarter act, he went so far as to prepare a diagram of the stage, which he sent to Ricordi together with the redrafted libretto requested by Puccini “in order to separate the bohemians” (5 January 1894; Gara, no. 98, 96). The staging problems were not easily solved, since the significant events experienced by the individual characters had to be thrown into relief against the background of the dramatic web. It was all meant to be believable, but Illica became aware of a final improbability in the work once it was finished. In Act II, the friends haplessly sit down at tables outside the Cafe, cheerfully bantering despite the chill of Christmas Eve. He remedied this lapse in realism by adding the following stage direction to the libretto:

(Marcello, Schaumard and Colline enter the Cafe Monsieur, but come out quickly, irritated by the crowd who swarm menacingly inside. They carry out a table and a waiter follows them, not in the least incredulous at their wanting to dine outside…)\(^{21}\)

This anomaly has never bothered audiences unfamiliar with the libretto, but it is interesting to note the reasons for Illica’s scruples:

Given the current climate of good faith among our enemies and critics, our satisfaction is a little too naive, believe me! And to leave the bohemians sitting at a little table for an entire act, dining like this without even a single word in the libretto to justify it, is — believe me again — too good a weapon for such gentlemen not to take it up. (To Giulio Ricordi, 7 December 1895 [?]; Gara, no. 147, 134)

But the librettist was decisive in his insistence on modifying Puccini’s first idea for beginning the final scene:

Mimi in bed. Rodolfo at the little table writing, and a stump of candle to light up the stage. That is, with no separation (after the third act) between Rodolfo and Mimi! Like this it is, truly, not only no longer La Bohème, but not Murger’s Mimi either! (February 1894; Gara, no. 101, 99-100)

Illica’s unarguable motivation is clarified in the continuation of this letter, also addressed to Ricordi:

Now I would say that it is already a mistake not to have Rodolfo and Mimi’s separation take place in view of the audience [since the Rue La Bruyère act had been suppressed]; so just imagine if it were not to happen at all! Indeed, the very essence of Murger’s book is precisely that great freedom in love [Bohemian supreme characteristic] with which all the characters behave. Think how much greater, how much more moving would be a Mimi who — although she can by this time live with a lover [the viscount Paolo] who keeps her in silks and velvets — when she feels that tuberculosis is killing her go to die in the desolate, cold attic, just to die in Rodolfo’s arms. It seems impossible that Puccini would not see the greatness of this. (February 1894; ibid.)

Puccini, a born dramatist, had no difficulty in understanding Illica’s reasoning, and accepted the suggestion. Meanwhile, in April 1894 he was seized by doubts and once again considered adapting an opera from Verga’s short story La Lupa, perhaps with the idea of setting it in Sicily (whose Cavalleria Rusticana is based on Verga and set in Sicily) and Leoncavallo (whose Pagliacci is set in Calabria). He went so far as to visit Sicily in order to talk to Verga and study the setting. His infatuation lasted until the following July.

19. In Leoncavallo’s opera it constitutes the second act, entitled “15 April 1838.” — Il corido della casa abitata da Musetta a rue La Bruyère. As well as adopting different vocal registers for his characters, Leoncavallo chose a different formal scheme from Puccini’s, as the titles of the other acts show: “24 December 1837 evening. — Christmas Eve celebration. — The first-floor room of the Cafe Monsieur. — 1838. — Marcello’s attic.” The suppressed act was published by Mario Morini, La Bohème: Opera in quattro atti (nouveau quadri). L’atto denominato “Il corido della casa di Via La Bruyère B’ d’Illica e Giaconsa,” in La Strofa 9, l, 109 (December 1920), 35-49; this is now more conveniently available in Puccini: La Bohème, ed. Arthur Groos and Roger Parker (Cambridge-New York-Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 147-148. The idea of the viscount Paolo who courts Mimi comes from Murger’s twelfth chapter: “Une réception dans la Bohème,” in which he plays hostess with the girl under the table.

20. See Ricordi’s letter to Puccini dated 30 June 1895 (Carnar, 135).

21. See La Bohème… Teatro Regio, 37. We learn from this source (the first printed libretto), as well as from some of Illica’s letters, that the state advisor accompanying Musetta at her entrance is called Aleandro de Minounre (40).
when he became convinced that “the ‘dialogicity’ of the libretto, which is pushed to the ultimate degree, [and] the unpleasant characters, without one single luminous, sympathetic figure,” did not suit his capabilities or ideas. To understand his lack of involvement in the ideals of realism one only need know that the lyric melody introducing Rodolfo (“Nei cieli bigi”) derives from the Lupa sketches, where it extolled Sicily’s enchanting skies and the marvels of Mount Etna.

Finally, at the beginning of 1895, after numerous drafts and much rewriting, Puccini declared himself satisfied with the libretto’s dramatic framework. Giacosa saw to the final poetic revisions while Puccini started to orchestrate those parts of the opera that were already completed. A large number of these final alterations were finished in October 1895. In order to emphasize further the contrast between the bohemians’ euphoria and the imminent tragedy in the last act, Puccini had long been keen on including a brindisi, in the form of an ensemble for the friends, immediately before the arrival of Musetta and Mimì. But he eventually realized that the idea was superfluous, since, as he wrote to Ricordi, the scene was created

Solely for the sake of contrast, and..., does not help the action, since it doesn’t take it one step further. I’m putting the greatest meritment into the herring lunch scene and the dance where Musetta appears amid the greatest uproar, and the aim is achieved. I know well enough from experience that making beautiful academic music in the final act is ruinous. (October 1895; Gara, no. 139, 126-27)

Puccini’s music reveals none of this complex, tortuous dramatic genesis. His masterpiece flows smoothly, passing in a flash like the youth of its characters, a group of friends living in close symbiosis. For this, the composer did not want star singers for the world premiere (at Turin’s Teatro Regio, 1 February 1896), but rather a cast that would work well together on stage, from Cesira Ferrani (Mimì) to Camilla Pasini (Musetta), Evan Gorga (Rodolfo), Tieste Wilmant (Marcello), Michele Mazzara (Colline), and Antonio Pini-Corsi (Schaunard). With the twenty-six-year-old Toscanini as conductor, Puccini had an unexpected guarantee that the whole production would be coordinated in the best possible way, as well as the opportunity to verify that some alterations were needed in the score. Most important among these were a brief scene added to Act II (no. 15 in the current score), and an adjustment to the subsequent concertato finale, revisions carried out during the numerous performances in Italy and abroad. Now that the opera is recognized as one of
the most popular of all time, it is difficult to understand the resistance of the critics at the Turin premiere at the Teatro Regio. Among them, Carlo Bersezio (Gazzetta Piemontese) went so far as to predict that “La Bohème […] will not make a big mark on the history of opera.”

**A Cabin at Torre del Lago**

To find “realistic” background ideas for his new opera, Puccini, unlike Leoncavallo, did not need to go to Paris, a city with which he had a kind of love-hate relationship. The word “Bohème,” notwithstanding its French origins, is typically defined in Italian dictionaries as: “the hand-to-mouth existence of individuals who are ill-fitted to society, and especially of poor, non-conformist artists.” Puccini had experienced this non-conformist poverty personally during his student years at the Milan Conservatory (1880-83), at the height of the Scapigliatura movement, and in the years immediately following. He evoked this situation in a letter to his “zio milionario,” Nicolao Cerù, with an indirect plea for an increase in his small private allowance:

> My studies are going well and I am working. The cold up here is extraordinary, worse than in previous years. I am therefore begging a favor that I hope you will find just. I have to study; and as you know I study in the evenings and far into the night, and having a cold room, I need a bit of fire. I don’t have money because, as you know, what you give me is purely for necessities, and thus I need some help to buy myself one of those cheap charcoal stoves that gets very hot. The cost of the stove is not much, but what worries me is that coal is expensive, and over the month would amount to quite a sum. I have written to my mother about this, and so perhaps something can be arranged between the two of you, because time is pressing and it is getting colder. (6 December 1882: Marchetti, no. 8, 31)

In 1891 Puccini had sufficient means to rent a cabin on the banks of Lake Massaciuccoli near Torre del Lago. This place was to become his private refuge from the worldly obligations imposed on him by success, somewhere he could withdraw to write music during the hours he

Claudio Sartori’s observation about the provenance of the opera’s opening theme (see Ex. 4.2a from Puccini’s 1883 diploma test piece Capriccio sinfonico), as “a falling back on his own expression, the only expression possible for him of a similar spiritual climate” (Puccini, 170), is persuasive.
preferred, from ten at night to four in the morning and beyond, and where he could indulge his passions: from hunting coots to trampling the beach and marshland. As soon as he arrived there he plunged into a social milieu that was to have a significant influence on the conception of La Bohème. On the lake-side, at the foot of the Apuan Alps, lived a group of painters of the Macchiaiuoli school. Their artistic credo was, in the words of Ferruccio Pagni, that art must reflect “the infinite beauty of nature.” Among these painters, Pagni was the closest to Puccini, and he wrote one of the first biographies of the composer to appear after his death.25 To those familiar with this area only as it is today, talk of its natural beauty may seem obscure. At that time, however, the countryside around Massaciuccoli was almost pristine. Even Puccini’s villa, built at the end of the century, did not exist; on the waterfront there were only wooden cabins with thatched roofs in which fishermen lived. It is thus understandable that not only the early Macchiaiuoli painter Pagni, but other, more celebrated ones such as Fattori and Lega, were charmed by the spot, and visited now and then. On arrival, Puccini found the painters already happily absorbed in local life, and – even though he had not yet achieved his considerable fame – his charm as a “great artist” immediately made an impact on the close-knit environment.

Pagni and Puccini quickly became friends, and, despite the composer’s natural reserve, he began to join the painter in visiting Giovanni Gragnani’s “wood cabin, with thatched roof.” He used this abode in many ways: in the evenings it changed from a shoemaker’s workshop to tavern for his friends, patronized mainly by the little group of artists. After hunting and fishing with them, Puccini would inflict punishment on the painters in the form of the day’s most popular card games, and in settlement of their debts he would receive pictures and sketches. In the early days, with his many professional obligations, Puccini was often far from Torre, but he remained in contact with Pagni, writing him letters in which nostalgia hides behind a surface of colorful Tuscan phrases:

The season’s greetings to you, to all you Torre people – to Veranzio, Láppore, Diego, Boccia, Stinchi, to the coots, to the large ladies, good Lord, don’t let me think about it. To Signor Ugieno and Signora Ida, if they are also still there. They are all very well indeed. I hope to visit in March. Cieca al tondo con patate alle marchese dal cimbraccolo.26 (22 December 1892; Marchetti, no. 153, 171)

It would not be far-fetched to suggest that this environment exerted a strong influence on Puccini’s choice of La Bohème as a subject, or at least encouraged his enthusiasm for it. The correspondences between a Tuscan reality and the finished artistic product are striking, beginning with the circumstances of the operatic characters: none of the Macchiaiuoli at Torre del Lago was really successful or prosperous, but all were ready for love at any time, and to transform it into romantic pastures. For Puccini, the well-to-do artist still ready to be wrapped in music.

When poor Gragnani had to emigrate to South America in 1894 (like many Italians during this unhappy period – a few years later Pagni was forced to do the same), it was Puccini who proposed purchasing his cabin-cum-tavern to form a private club, christened the “Club La Bohème” in an act of homage to the novel and to the opera then in gestation. Pagni himself made an important observation: That opera was also a little bit about us. Cecco was ‘Colline’, Giacomo – needless to say – ‘Rodolfo’, and the others ‘the merry company’.27 The “Cecco” whom Pagni mentions here was the painter Francesco Fanelli, who lived at Torre del Lago with a young widow. They argued continually, exchanging insults such as “rospo” (“toad”), “vipera” (“viper”), “imbianchino” (“housepainter”) – all of which we find at the end of Act III of the opera. Certainly the opera’s success influenced Pagni’s memories; but Fanelli’s love affair would, in all probability, have stimulated Puccini’s imagination when shaping some of Musetta’s and Marcello’s characteristic traits. Similarly, even the bohemians’ little staged mutinies against bourgeois society – represented by the landlord Benoit and by Musetta’s lover Alcindoro – have their origin in the horseplay and jokes of the club members, among whom was the count Eugenio Ottolini, a pedant astounded by ostentatiousness – in his way, of course – as “rospo” (“toad”), “vipera” (“viper”), “imbianchino” (“housepainter”) – of which we find at the end of Act III of the opera. Certainly the opera’s success influenced Pagni’s memories; but Fanelli’s love affair would, in all probability, have stimulated Puccini’s imagination when shaping some of Musetta’s and Marcello’s characteristic traits. Similarly, even the bohemians’ little staged mutinies against bourgeois society – represented by the landlord Benoit and by Musetta’s lover Alcindoro – have their origin in the horseplay and jokes of the club members, among whom was the count Eugenio Ottolini, a pedant as ostentatious as the philosopher Colline, who is prone to Latinizing even at the Café Momus. As a mark of respect for Murger’s work, Ilica and Giacosa called the opera’s four parts “quadri” (“pictures”) rather than acts. The obvious reference to pictorial art in Murger’s work lives on in this formal denomination, which also emphasizes Puccini’s real-life relationship with the painters. In imaginatively reproducing details from the novel, Puccini made a poetic link with reality, a link constituting one of the characteristics that brings

25. Pagni gives us the most valuable testimony regarding Puccini’s life in those years, which he dictated to his new friend, Guido Marotti. The book, entitled Giacomo Puccini intimo, was first published under both authors’ names in 1926 by Vallecchi in Florence. In the first reprint (1942), Pagni’s name disappeared. Such an unjust omission created confusion among readers, since the first part of the work, attributed to the painter, narrates biographical facts up to 1905 in the first person. This section is of more interest than the second part, written entirely by Marotti, which aspires to criticism rather than biography, but is often confused and dilettantish. The book relates an episode concerning the controversy between Puccini and Leoncavallo regarding priority over the subject of La Bohème (49-50). The brief passage confirms Leoncavallo’s precedence, but its trustworthiness is compromised somewhat by a number of inaccuracies. Another first-hand biographical source is Rinaldo Cortopassi’s smaller volume, I Bohémiens published by Vallerini di Torre del Lago on the second anniversary of Puccini’s death (29 November 1926), and reprinted for the 1930 Puccini celebrations under the title La Bohème intimo dove morace. On this occasion the opera was conducted by Mascagni. Many reconstructions of the artistic milieu of Torre del Lago are based on these sources, as is the present one.


27. Marotti and Pagni. Giacomo Puccini, 62. This assertion contains a good deal of truth, which to some extent transcends the easy hindsight and inevitable hagiography that mediocre biographers too often reserve for great men.
his art closer to the public of any era, and one that allows us to sense the immediate importance of his contact with the Torre bohemians. Take the example of the musician Schaunard, whose beginning of the novel is composing at a piano with an out-of-tune D and exclaims, “Il est faux comme Judas, cet Rô!” (“It is as false as Judas, this D!”). In the second act of the opera, Schaunard utters an analogous phrase — “Falso questo Re!” (“This D is false!”) — while trying out a horn he wants to buy: here Puccini arranges the orchestral parts to produce a dissonance of a minor seventh (also arranged as a major second) between E₆ and D₇, to give a touch of realism to the sound picture (II, from 4). Pagani recalls for us the moment La Bohème was finished:

"That night, while we were playing cards," Giacomo was at the final measures. "Silence, boys," he said suddenly, "I’ve finished!" We left the cards, drawing around him. "Now, I’ll let you hear, start again at — ah! This finale is good." He began at Mimi’s final song, "Sono andati..." As Puccini played and sang this music made up of pauses, suspensions, of light touches, sighs, and breathlessness, gradually a subtle melancholy and pathos that had intensely captured us, and we saw the scene, felt that human torment completely, since here, truly, expression returned to its origin, to its eternal essence: Pain. When the piercing chords of Mimì’s death struck, a shiver ran through us and not one of us could hold back his tears. That delicate girl, our “Mimì,” was lying cold on the poor little bed, and we would no more hear her soft and tender voice. The vision then appeared to us: "Rodolfo," "Marcello," "Schaunard," "Colline" were images of us, or we their reincarnations, "Mimì" was our lover of some time or some dream, and all this agony our very own agony."

This way of hearing, albeit embellished with the inevitable dose of rhetoric (most likely written by Manotti), testifies to a real connection between the imaginary and the real, and claims for the group of painters a certain amount of paternity of the opera. Puccini had already experienced his scapigliata bohemian existence in the Milan years, and was now rekindling it once more, but with the detached gaze of the artist, in the company of his painter friends. After a masquerade party to celebrate the end of his work, Puccini left for Turin in December 1895 to prepare the premiere. Fanelli and Pagani desperately wanted to attend rehearsals or a performance, but the composer, although courteous, would not allow it:

"As for your coming to Turin. There are problems! How could it be done? Among other things, I would certainly have to neglect you, since I am so busy. Come later, to Naples or better still Rome. I will be relaxed there, and able to be with you." (January 1896; Gara, no. 154, 139).

After having fixed La Bohème in an indelible artistic image, Puccini was drawing away from it in order to turn his attention to the singer Gloria Tosca, and the wicked environment of papal Rome at the start of the nineteenth century. The “Club La Bohème” was over.

**Toward the Achievement of a New Style**

The poetry and dramatic peculiarities of La Bohème’s libretto demand that the music adhere with great naturalness to a plot that, except for the passionate effusions of Rodolfo and Mimì, and their deathbed duet, is mostly devoid of static episodes. Finding a new relationship between rapid dramatic articulation and traditional lyric expansiveness was a problem faced by all Puccini’s contemporaries, from Mascagni to Leoncavallo and Giordano. In Italy at the end of the nineteenth century, rigid boundaries no longer existed between comedy, farce, and tragedy; successful blends could already be found in some of Verdi’s operas, from Un Ballo in Maschera (with the glittering Riccardo-Oscar element) to La Forza del Destino, that vast fresco animated by caricatures such as Preziosilla, the grotesque Fra’ Melitone and the sordid peddler Trabuco. Verdi’s La Traviata, unique in opera until that time, had revealed to Puccini how topical, everyday elements could be translated without damage to the basic tenets of opera. But it was from Falstaff that Puccini drew the ideas that enabled him to realize in La Bohème his poetic vision of reality, though within a different genre. The music of Verdi’s last masterpiece traces the action in minute detail, avoiding any suggestion of naturalism, but lending a human dimension even to a magical moment like the fairy scene.

The response to Verdi’s overwhelming legacy among composers of the so-called “Giornale Scuola” was born of a misunderstanding. Believing that they were distancing themselves from old opera, they in fact reinscribed its essence on various levels — individual musical numbers now became the occasion for melodic writing of no great originality. Their ideals merely resulted in bombast, since there was no melodic freshness, only the desire to be realistic, and to plumb the depths of excessive sentiment. At the same time, the melody in the “numbers” became completely detached from the...
connective tissue of the opera, while, whatever the composer’s ability, the recitative – always identifiable as such – was modeled ever more closely on the rhythms of speech. Falstaff, on the other hand, presents fast, uninterrupted action, and the words suggest musical invention that often breaks the bonds of verse structure (although retaining some attention to rhyme) in order to follow the rapidly evolving drama. One passes from dialogue to monologue, to ensembles that contrast men and women, to brief love duets, all rushing past at lightning speed; or rather at the speed of real events, never falling back into the safe haven of set pieces.

Verdi’s final masterpiece, which is in essence no more than a rapid succession of recitatives and ariosos, probably confirmed to Puccini the best way of evading the restrictions of opera divided into arias, duets, and concertati, while remaining within the Italian tradition and creating a unified and coherent organism. In *La Bohème* he was dealing with a topical, everyday plot in which every gesture reflected the commonplaces of life. At the same time, and through the juxtaposition of situations, he had to forge a higher narrative level, communicating through metaphor the idea of a world in which time flies by, and in which youth itself is the protagonist (a perspective clearly indicated in Murger’s novel, if resolved there with some degree of cynicism). In *La Bohème* ironic disenchantment is always immanent, even in the most poetic moments. The passionate phrase “O dolce viso di mite circonfuso alba lunar” (“O sweet face, surrounded by the gentle light of the rising moon”) precedes an explicit invitation to love (“Sarebbe così dolce restar qui;” “It would be so nice to stay here”), but the two moments are fused in a single inspiration. Similarly, when in Act II Rodolfo flamboyantly introduces Mimì to the company, he is met with banter in Latin. The sentimental aspect emerges, without any disruption to the continuity, from a mechanism based on concrete detail, and returns to it transformed into symbol.

The comic element and its coexistence with the sentimental in the first two acts of *La Bohème* has never been sufficiently stressed. Puccini’s opera again resembles *Falstaff* in this juxtaposition, as well as in certain detailed examples of word painting: the little “magic fire music” (I, 5) and the light sprinkle of water with which Rodolfo bathes Mimì’s face as she feels faint (pizzicato violins with flutes a major second apart, 26) produce an almost physical sensation, similar to the diminishing of Falstaff’s belly (cellos and piccolo at four octaves’ distance) and “l’aria che vola” evoked in the subsequent “Onore” monologue (flutes, piccolo, cellos). Even the little dotted theme at the very beginning of *La Bohème,*
which in the course of the opera often returns to recall how love is just one among the many moments in life, is treated similarly to the initial first three beats of Falstaff, the distinctive group of four staccato sixteenth notes that recurs continually through the first part of the opening act. While division into set pieces is still perceptible in Manon Lescaut, despite the coordination of entire sections of the score by means of hidden symphonic devices, in this next opera Puccini relied on a different dramatic style, one based on a musical continuum modeled on the subject’s specific dramatic requirements. It was a possibility that Falstaff unveiled.

A Conversation in Music

The entire opening act of La Bohème illustrates the new path on which Puccini had set out. To achieve an image of a group of penniless artists that was at once individual and collective, Puccini coordinated various parameters with great flexibility — broad lyric melodies, mutable motivic cells, tonality with a semantic function, and bright and varied orchestral colors. The framework of the action, however, is supported by themes that animate the various episodes in which the characters reveal their personalities. In Manon Lescaut, as we have seen, Puccini used a narrative technique that skillfully fused the Italian tradition of reminiscence motives with leitmotivic technique (the latter particularly important in Manon). Likewise, the beginning of La Bohème shows that Puccini was keeping a certain distance from Wagner, depicting his own particular world. He often avoided giving a melody an unequivocal connotation, in order to obtain further dramatic effects through multiple references, frequently using intervallc structures or metrical schemes to bring together seemingly unrelated motives. Consider, for example, the relationship between the following melodic profiles:32

Example 1.1 - I, 32\(^{\text{v}}\) (P)

Example 1.2 - I, 18 (H)

The first, passionate melody begins Rodolfo’s rhetorical declaration of love (Ex. 1.1), and when it reappears at the beginning of the duet with Mimi (I, 41), it establishes their emotional contact with even greater immediacy. But compare it with the motive that dominated the scene in which the friends receive the landlord (Ex. 1.2), which happened earlier in the act. Even though the phrase structure differs, the similarity is unmistakable, and it is unlikely that Puccini was unaware of this, or of other analogous cases (the melody of Rodolfo’s and Marcello’s duet at the start of Act IV also resembles Ex. 1.1). Ambivalence on the semantic level, however, does not mean a lack of justification in terms of dramatic logic: the subtle connection between one theme and another reinforces the impression that a common aura surrounds the characters and their actions, all of them part of a single Bohème. We might also consider Examples 2.2 and 2.3, which relate to Colline and Schaunard; both phrases are in \(\frac{3}{4}\) (like 1.2) and show further similarities (\(2.2\) z and \(2.3\) z\(^{2}\) return on many other occasions).

Let us now turn to the structure of the first part of this act, briefly sketched in the following outline.33

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act IV (mm. 1-702) up to 24</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sec. 1, 1-334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcel, Rodolfo, Coll. plus Schaunard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A, 1, 1-36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L, 111-95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R, 196-211, B, 1, E, 432-44, D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B, 222-31, C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C (2), 239-55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L, 253-65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B, 268-333, G</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this opening section, every character except Marcello is identified by a theme; there is even a little motive for Benoît (I). But the initial motive (4, Ex. 2.1), which begins in the bassoons, cellos, and basses and is then tossed between all sections of the orchestra, climbing rapidly through five octaves in ten measures, is linked to the Bohemian lifestyle, as the following overview of the opera shows:

32. These two melodies are compared in William Drabkin’s stimulating essay, “The Musical Language of La Bohème,” in Giacomo Puccini: La Bohème, ed. Crox and Parker, 58-55. Drabkin maintains that certain procedures obey compositional necessity rather than dramatic logic.

33. Italic capital letters identify subsections dominated by one theme (where it recurs in another part of the opera it is numbered, and appears bold and bracketed 1 = first theme), followed by the measure number and key (an arrow indicates modulating sections), with capital letters for the major mode and lower case for the minor (in each case only the key in which the passage begins is given). The two following outlines (Act I, mm. 763-1126, Act II) use the same elements with vocal incipits added for ease of reading. The data are given in the order they appear in the opera; in sections designated by the same letter the same material is used, and important variants are indicated by superscript numbers.
Carlo Carrà (1881-1966).
In the attic, set sketches for Scenes I and IV of La Bohème, Rome Opera House, 1934. Private collection.

Marcello’s and Mimi’s meeting outside the Cabaret (III, 108) and Rodolfo’s awakening (III, 15) are short fragments of that hand-to-mouth existence; regret for the past is encoded in Mimi’s desire as she separates from Rodolfo (Ex. 2.3), and also in Marcello’s and Rodolfo’s feelings at the beginning of the final act, where the motive returns several times during the friends’ wild antics preceding Mimi’s return to the attic.

Rodolfo’s exuberant melody “Nei cieli bigi” (B, Ex. 3.1) characterizes well both his passionate vitality and his tenderness. It is heard in the flutes (I, 51) when he sacrifices the pages of his pompous drama to revive the fire in the stove. Finally, two horn themes accompany the entrances of Colline (C, Ex. 3.2) and Schaunard (E, Ex. 3.3):

The first part of the act ends with the friends’ exit to the Latin Quarter; the structure shown in the diagram is clearly partitioned into four sections determined by a musical logic faithful to dramatic events, but almost completely free from traditional structures. All the themes except Rodolfo’s melody (B) originate in the orchestra. In musical terms, the free dialectic between the “cieli bigi” (“gray skies”) (B) evoked by the poet and the Bohème motive (A) already brings about a fluctuating exchange between the ideal and the real, and the alternation of subsections in the opening segment is governed by a rigorous formal logic that serves the narrative. The orchestral colors and harmonic palette make decisive contributions to this scheme; for example, when the manuscript is set alight in Act I, the flute comments on the action with the poet’s melody while the harp creates an
This is an important anticipation: the same music will return, in the same key but as a joyous fanfare (Ex. 4: a) during the festive clamor of the crowd at the start of the next act. The effect of characterization is increased by the rehearing, almost as if the music has anticipated the passing of time. Moreover, the extended fanfare provides Puccini with another element through which to sustain the long development of the ensemble, and its echoes in the following act with precise reference to the words (see Ex. 4: c, recalled in the aria “Donde lieta usci,” Ex. 11.1).

The Benoît episode that follows finds the four friends all together, trying to resolve an annoying side-effect of poverty – the payment of rent in arrears. Again, two themes alternate; the filastrocca-like melody with which the friends invite the landlord to a toast (H, Ex. 1.2), and the landlord’s own motive in the minor, little more than a melodic cell characterized by its dotted figure (I, 189). The phrase in C-sharp minor with which Marcello begins to lead the unwanted guest into his trap (“Dica: quant’anni ha,” I, 192), although heavy with irony, has a sense of real melancholy, the bitter taste of nostalgic meditation on the passing of the years.

Up to this point each section has boasted its own themes, but in the fourth and concluding section Puccini adopts the technique of reminiscence. The Latin Quarter theme (F) recalls the friends’ ultimate goal, thus kick-starting the action immediately after the “cieli bigi” melody (B) has drawn attention to Rodolfo and anticipates the unexpectedly sentimental outcome of his remaining in the house. The symmetrical conclusion of this first part of the act arrives with the cheerful reprise of the dynamic Bohème theme (A) as the three friends go down the staircase. The coordination between the episodes is thus fully articulated through formal parameters: a principal theme provides extremely dense connective tissue between three two-theme episodes, and a coda offers a type of summary or recapitulation. However,
Facing page
Postcards printed by the Ricordi Publishing House of Milan, illustrated with scenes from La Bohème.

Fondo Robba, Archivio Storico del Teatro Regio di Torino.

such artifice does not impede the effect of spontaneity on the listener – rather, it brings out the naturalness of the narrative that animates this impudent opening.

Mimi’s and Rodolfo’s amorous meeting – the subject of the second part of the act – does not emerge from the preceding atmosphere. The over-arching musical structure is divided into sections, each corresponding to a state of mind. The following outline indicates the large degree of ambiguity in this structure: formal divisions are indicated on the left, as in the preceding diagram; the right-hand column shows their relationship to the larger contours of a traditional nineteenth-century scene structure.35

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Act I (mm. 763-1126, from 25)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>K “Non sono in vena,” Rodolfo (t 6), 763-73, B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L “Scusi,” Mimi (t 7), 774-83, D, G</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M “Sventata,” (t 8), 831-911, B,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N “Che gelida manina,” Rodolfo (t 9), 912-47, D,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O “Che son?” 947-56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P “In povertà mia finta,” (t 10), 964-83, A,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q “Sì, mi chiamano Mimì,” Mimi, 984-97, D,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R “Mi piaccion quelle rose,” (t 11), 997-1008, D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S “Chi son?” 1009-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T “Non so che farne,” Rodolfo, 1014-31, D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U “Ma quando v’arriva il gelo,” 1032-42, D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V “Germoglia in un vaso una rosa,” 1042-54, D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W “Ehi, Rodolfo,” Marcello, 1055-82, A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X “Ehi! Rodolfo,” Rodolfo, 1083-106, A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y “O suave fanciulla,” Rodolfo, 1106-110, C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Puccini, an experienced man of the theater, kept the needs of the audience in mind: it was always necessary to create an outlet for lyric expansion. When Giacosa received Illica’s first sketch for the two planned solo pieces, he dubbed them “autodescrizioni” (“self-portraits”: Gara, no. 104, 102); their function was obviously as arié di sortita, but Puccini imbued these sections with a sense of evolving narrative – a conversational tone. The underlying traditional structure functioned as a stimulus to Puccini’s fluent thematic invention; as many as seven motives and melodies are employed here, with related variants, in the process setting up material for the subsequent acts.

The composer’s conception of “Che gelida manina” differed from that of the librettists. The text proposed two
sections, one with lyric verses varying in meter, followed
by seven tercets of seven-syllable lines (with virtuosic
rhyme, between the first lines of the tercets, in pairs,
followed by distichs). Puccini divided it into four parts,
imbuing it with an impetuous lyrical mood, starting from
the first recitative, when the voice rises suddenly to A₃,
(“Cercar, che giova?”; “What’s the use of searching?”);
as the moon rises in the night, illuminating the scene.
In the short recitative-like section (“Chi son?”) the
poet’s first melody (3: “Nei cieli bigni”) reappears, varied
with orchestral brío, and it is better grasped in the next
section, at the words “In povertà mia lieta scialo da gran
sognare” (“In my happy poverty I squander like a fine
gentleman”), an elevated simile referring to his recently
burned literary effort. This return to a previous event
may be read symbolically, again fusing cyclic formal
logic with narrative technique by the reprise of a theme.
The concluding part is the most lyrical (P, Ex. 1.1), with
all the traditional elements, including a high C for the
tenor – almost a madrigalism since it coincides with the
word “speranza” (“hope”).
Mimi’s aria has a more complex structure. Its opening
phrase (L), see Ex. 13.1) is anticipated by the clarinets
(L)36 as the heroine knocks at the door; so this
significant melody also originates in the orchestra, only
later becoming the connective tissue between different
sections in a rondo-like manner. Puccini always begins
Mimi’s theme on the dominant ninth of F, closing on the
dominant of the home key, D major. It is a peculiarity
that distinguishes the leitmotif sufficiently to isolate
it from the context of those subtle feelings quietly
professed in the various sections: “Germoglia in un
vaso una rosa” is similar to “Mi piaccion quelle cose,”
and has the same melody (both firmly link Mimi to
everyday life made up of persons and objects, a central
theme in Puccini’s opera)37; the melody “Sola mi fa
is a lighthearted interlude; at the central moment,
“Ma quando vien lo sgelo,” the voice breaks out in a
unfolding over the most passionate melody of Rodolfo’s
aria (P, Ex. 1.1), romantic love is sovereign, absorbing
every tiny feeling into longing for an ideal they both
desire.
It is thus clear how the traditional arrangement of set
pieces is no more than the vehicle Puccini used to ensure
comprehensibility and emphasize the universality of the
message, and how delicate a formal structure governs
this first act. The sense of a psychological expansion of
time, typical of falling in love, is produced via this
skillful ordering of musical events, and thus acquires
such realistic features.

One legacy of the original layout of the opera, in which
the first two acts were joined together, is that the second
act is a direct continuation of the first, so much so that
were one able to overcome the technical difficulties of the
scene change, and skip the intermission, the sequence
of events would be depicted in real time. Puccini had
already confronted and skillfully resolved the formal
problems of a grand action concertato, at the end of the
third act of Manon Lescaut, but this point in La Bohème
presents even greater difficulties, given that about twenty
minutes of music is required. Before the curtain rises,
the action is preceded by a fanfare of trumpets (F, Ex.
4: a) playing the parallel triads heard when Schaunard
sang the praises of the Latin Quarter, a device that also
underlines the continuity with the preceding act. The
chorus, divided into various groups, takes the form of a
swarming crowd – a sight that usually elicits immediate
applause from the audience.

Puccini’s scenic and formal model was undoubtedly the
first part of Act IV of Carmen, an influence betrayed
not only in the use of mixed choir and children, with
parlante solo passages over orchestral themes, but also
by the poetry, which is crammed with references to
everyday objects. Compare the two beginnings, both
sung by groups of traveling peddlers:

Carmen
À deux couverts! À deux couverts!
La Croix, les habitants! Câbles ! mascaret!

La Bohème
À deux couverts! À deux couverts!
Vénus, côte! Cubbi i marroni!

À deux couverts! À deux couverts!
Nimonds! Siens! Tournes! Panna montata!

À deux couverts! À deux couverts!
Carmenelle! La croissante! Fringuelli,
passez! Fust alle bel!)

À deux couverts! À deux couverts!
Séries et caballeros!
Puccini succeeded in coordinating a larger number of events than Bizet, dividing them between small choral groups and soloists. The simultaneity of the events, all of which occur at lightning speed, almost gives the impression of brief film shots. The friends, shopping at the stalls, have independent musical spaces, as if each were under a spotlight; and so do Rodolfo and Mimì, who talk of love as they push their way through the crowds, with children scampering here and there, running away from their mothers, and the peddlers’ cries rising above them all. Not a single episode in this complex concertato is lost in the surroundings; Schaunard buys a pipe and an out-of-tune horn; Colline crams his recently acquired coat, newly mended, with books; Marcello flirts with the women; Rodolfo presents Mimì with a pink bonnet, asking “Sei felice?” (“Are you happy?”) as the love theme (P) promptly reappears. Finally the group sits down outside the Café and begins to order. The first brief lyric pause allows Rodolfo to present Mimì passionately to his friends. The capricious melody that characterizes frivolity (A) becomes part of the section dedicated to the romantic token of love (“Secondo il palato è miele o fiele;” “It’s honey or gall, according to one’s palate”).

Example 5.1 - I, 16 (W)

The capricious melody that characterizes frivolity (A), derived from the lively theme heard at her first entrance (B; Ex. 5.1), a variant of which occurs at the moments when the dialogue resumes: a realistic note that warns against euphoric love, but which at the same time betrays a nostalgia that he will shortly have every reason to feel. Following a diagram similar to that of the previous act, the musical outline so far reveals a structure divided into sections (as in the first part of Act I), dominated by the fanfare symbolizing the Latin Quarter (F, often heard in varied form) and by the easy-going melody used to throw the characters’ dialogue into relief (T). Furthermore, the Bohème theme (A) becomes part of the section dedicated to the bonnet, at the moment Marcello reacts bitterly to the bonnet, at the moment Marcello reacts bitterly to...
35. The aria was derived from a brief waltz for piano published in the periodical *Armi e arte* (Genoa: Montorfano, September 1894), in a volume that celebrated the dispatch of the flag to the battleship * Umberto I* (see Roberto Inexim, “Genova e la musica: Un valore di Puccini,” in *Musicaaa!*, I, no. 1, 1995, 12-13). For this passage Puccini sent Giacosa the doggerel lines “cocoricò – cocoricò – bistecca” to suggest the poetic meter he needed.


Puccini based the dialog sections on these two themes, which are juxtaposed abruptly, and then brings the action to a halt by interposing at the center the sensual, tripartite slow waltz in E major, “Quando m’en vo’ soletta,” which functions as stage music: a “real” song sung to seduce Marcello.  Finding it impossible to resist such wiles for very long, Marcello takes up the girl’s melody (“ Gioventù mia”) after the ironic concertato, his response doubled by the orchestra at full volume. And then a sudden drop to below pianissimo allows Schaunard’s disenchanted comment (“Siamo all’ultima scena!”; “We’ve reached the final scene!”). The sound of a band coming in from stage right is grafted onto this climax: the sudden incursion of the brass crossing the stage, a “French retreat,” momentarily stirs the onlookers from the static enchantment of the idyll. As usual, in the final moments Puccini applies the technique of reminiscence, the band’s principal theme
being superimposed on and juxtaposed with themes recalling various preceding actions: E when Schaunard turns out his pockets in vain to find money to pay the bill, Musetta’s entrance theme (W), the main transformation of the Latin Quarter theme (E), the noisy repeat of the trumpet fanfare (F), a sound that symbolizes the entire act. It is hard to imagine that Stravinsky did not have this scene in mind when writing much of the first part of Petrushka.

**Everyday Objects**

Nineteenth-century opera is littered with objects: they belong to a theatrical staging practice still immersed in the aura of Romanticism, and they function — in some cases just as importantly as a famous aria — as outward indicators of the plot. In *La Bohème*, such objects signal, and are signs of, the everyday nature of the plot. Glancing through librettos and *mises-en-scène* it is difficult to find precedents for Puccini’s masterpiece. Part of the great encampment scene in Act III of *La Forza del Destino* involves the peddler Trabuco’s merchandise, with “Forbici, spille, sapon perfetto” (“scissors, pins, perfect soap”) and various “oggetti di meschino valore” (“objects of little value”) offered to whoever passes. The wares are not characterized, since what counts is the sale, part of a more general picture of a society at war. The similarity to what happens in the Latin Quarter of Puccini’s Paris is more apparent than real. Verdi focuses on a character who manages as best he can by speculating on the bad luck of those who suffer: this is merely one novelistic episode among many. Puccini, by contrast, devotes a whole act to depicting a modern metropolitan world, one in which everyone is buying, prey to the surrounding frenzy. As mentioned earlier, the fourth act of *Carmen* also brings into the limelight a crowd of merchants, intent on hawking their wares. But the *plaza de toros*, with its abundance of *couleur locale*, is part of a common dramatic technique in which collective merriment functions as an active background that supports part of that identity to the character or situation in a reciprocal relationship. To begin with, objects identify characters with their profession, from Colline’s books to Rodolfo’s ink well and pen. The array of objects in *La Bohème* is vast: they appear on stage, are evoked in the characters’ conversation, or are identified by the crowd in the store windows or on the peddlers’ stalls in the sort of bazaar that spreads out in the square in front of the Café Momus. Each object acquires an identity governed by particular circumstances, but submits part of that identity to the character or situation in a reciprocal relationship. To begin with, objects identify characters with their profession, from Colline’s books to Marcello’s paintings and paintbrush, Schaunard’s horn, and Rodolfo’s ink well and pen.

Food, in many manifestations, acts as a measure of the economic and social value of good and bad fortune in the four friends’ lives, arriving as an unexpected gift from Schaunard in the first act, a sign of their temporary prosperity. It is replaced by the money earned by the musician, which allows the little group to come to an even richer table in the second act but is insufficient to cover the bill. Its return as a category of art history realism means, not the presentation of one reality or another, but an attempt to elevate a part of reality previously considered “unworthy of art” into an object presentable in painting, literature, or music.42

This “reality” permeates *La Bohème*, particularly in the fresco coloring of the second act, in which objects help to define a canvas of everyday events that almost absorbs the characters. The Latin Quarter requires a dramatic and musical articulation different from the traditional frame, a single concertato block with small soloistic episodes; and the surroundings are not limited merely to providing *couleur locale*, as with Mascagni’s fragrant orange groves, or the bells that sound Vespers in Leoncavallo’s pious Calabria, but take an active part in the drama. This feature, and the skill with which it is realized, makes *La Bohème* unique in Italy, although in France Charpentier, who was working along similar lines, completed *Louise*43 around this time. Dahlhaus notes that:

> Essentially, the true protagonist of *Louise* — and even of *La Bohème* — is not the “heroine” whose sad fate the opera recounts, but the city of Paris itself, to whom Charpentier and Puccini give a musical presence. The fact that a “seamstress” becomes involved in a tragedy [...] is one of the associated aspects of dramaturgy in which the location — specifically the milieu of a large city — is not simply the “setting” but one of the “actors” [...] In the street scenes in *Louise* and *La Bohème*, the scenery is less a function of the cost of human characters than the characters a function of the scenery.

The array of objects in *La Bohème* is vast: they appear on stage, are evoked in the characters’ conversation, or are identified by the crowd in the store windows or on the peddlers’ stalls in the sort of bazaar that spreads out in the square in front of the Café Momus. Each object acquires an identity governed by particular circumstances, but submits part of that identity to the character or situation in a reciprocal relationship. To begin with, objects identify characters with their profession, from Colline’s books to Marcello’s paintings and paintbrush, Schaunard’s horn, and Rodolfo’s ink well and pen. Food, in many manifestations, acts as a measure of the economic and social value of good and bad fortune in the four friends’ lives, arriving as an unexpected gift from Schaunard in the first act, a sign of their temporary prosperity. It is replaced by the money earned by the musician, which allows the little group to come to an even richer table in the second act but is insufficient to cover the bill. Its return

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in the last act presages the specter of poverty, which takes a vivid new form in the salted herring provided by Colline. Then the philosopher’s top hat becomes a bucket to hold water that changes into “Champagne,” while poker and tongs are transformed into swords drawn for a duel, noble implements that bring to life the only possession they have left: fantasy. This is a small capital, but the least useful in warding off the tragedy.

Discussion might continue at length along these lines: one can see, at any rate, that the objects outline a world of feelings, affections that are in turn redirected toward the objects, loading them with new emotional significance. This sense of exchange is one of the traits that characterizes the narrative technique of *La Bohème*.

Puccini adopted a detailed technique of musical narration in order to imbue objects with life, transfiguring them in poetic reality. In *La Bohème* the composer deliberately returned to reminiscences, using melodic and harmonic sequences that would immediately be recognized (because unvaried or undeveloped) and applying them, like labels, to situations, people, and objects. They have the function of bringing to mind a recent past that, with its burden of memories and experiences, reappears constantly in the present. The strategy has a particular dramatic logic, since Puccini does not depict evolving characters, but merely a multicolored reality – and at the same time a concept, that of bohemianism – within which the characters seem like emblems. The four artists are identified as part of the precipitate action of everyday life, where love is nothing but a brief biological interlude: the opera’s four acts are a metaphor for a period of life experienced as a group.

Murger called the final chapter of his novel “La jeunesse n’a qu’un temps” (“Youth has but one season”), and the network of motives with which the opera is laced has the sole aim of making perceptible that time passes, never to return. Objects share with the characters the flux of this life, and serve to bind them to the reality of the everyday, be it prosaic or poetic.

When Mimi speaks about herself and her likes to Rodolfo in the first-act aria, she makes immediate reference to objects: “a tela e a seta” (“in cloth and silk”) she embroiders “in casa e fuori” (“at home and elsewhere”); in order to amuse herself she makes “gigli e rose” (“lilies and roses”), and above all she likes “quelle cose che han sì dolce malia” (“those things that have such sweet enchantment”). This melody (Ex. 6.1) recalls her tendency to turn reality into fantasy, raising it to the level of the ideal. The melody is
restated at the end of the solo, and recurs many times during the opera, most notably a few moments after her death, as if to give a secular sign of the end, a serene return to the world of inanimate objects.

In her second aria, “Dónde lieta uscì,” which signals her temporary farewell to Rodolfo at the end of Act III, Mimi itemizes the things she will take with her, as lovers do when they separate. Her little list begins with a “cerchietto d’oro e il libro di preghiere” (“gold bracelet and prayer book”), both metaphorically wrapped up “in un grembiule” (“in an apron”), and in the melody of the first aria which, like a flash of lightning (violins and flutes, Ex. 6.2), becomes attached to these objects:

Example 6.1 - I, 36

Example 6.2 - III, 28

Immediately after this, Mimi mentions the bonnet, the most important object in the whole opera since it symbolizes the period of romantic happiness—a time gone by that the two delude themselves they are able to hold on to. The bonnet was sketched out at the start of Act II by Mimi’s little phrase—seven notes in all: see Ex. 7.1—when she asked her lover for the coveted gift, as the two happily force a musical opening among the crowds. A little later, the music establishes a clear relationship between the bonnet and its wearer: Rodolfo praises the perfect harmony between the brown of her hair and the bonnet’s pink, and the same accompaniment (violins, Ex. 7.2) returns in the last act, to cast the listener back to that moment of lightheartedness. The vein of sentimentality that links the bonnet to her lover’s compliment (woodwinds, Ex. 7.3) intensifies the bitter regret for Mimi’s lost beauty.

Example 7.1 - II, 412

Example 7.2 - II, 66

Example 7.3 - III, 23

Let us now look more closely at the moment when the bonnet appears in the second aria, after having discovered one of the many provocative emotional ploys that lie just beneath the surface of the music. Puccini shifts enharmonically from D-flat major, the key in which the preceding objects were recalled, to A major; the break is slight, but suggests a sense of a hesitation, as if something is suddenly remembered. Mimi mentions the bonnet with a phrase used in the preceding act (Ex. 3, A: cf. Ex. 7.1); the motive turns back on itself aimlessly, a perfect musical translation of everyday language, and prepares and amplifies the melodic outburst toward the soprano’s upper register. It is a gesture of pure lyricism that marks a momentary break with the everyday:

Example 8 - III, 285

Above: Drawing by Adolf Hohenstein for the La Bohème costumes on the occasion of the world premiere presented at the Teatro Regio of Turin: “a student” with the face of Luigi Illica. Milan, Museo Teatrale alla Scala.
From this moment the object, together with the emotion that recalling it has generated, is indelibly imprinted on our memory: we cannot see it, but we hear what passion can be unleashed through a small phrase of seven notes, equal in inspiration to the broad, emotional lyric melody.

The bonnet reappears in Rodolfo’s hands at the beginning of the fourth act, and he clasps it to his heart as though it were his beloved, dedicating to it a touching cantabile, one of the melodic high points of the opera. And then he puts the bonnet back into his coat pocket, pulling it out again in the finale to show it to Mimì, now collapsed on the sofa. The passage is given a musical commentary in the form of a reminiscence, the “bonnet” phrase repeated by the violins and flutes (Ex. 9, X and X'). It is this gesture that awakens the memory of their first meeting, with the repeat of the music that accompanied Mimì’s entrance into the attic.

Example 9 - IV, 235

Bitter lament of happy times, emotion bound to a moment of ephemeral joy, a fragment of everyday existence: the bonnet represents all this. The continuity is broken by the muff that is given her; it is a comfortable object, but one that lacks a past, and at the very moment it satisfies a need, it also heralds Mimì’s death.

Memory and Pain

Adieu, va-t’en, chère adorée,
Bien morte avec l’amour dernier;
Notre jeunesse est enterrée
Au fond du vieux calendrier.
Ce n’est plus qu’en fouillant la cendre
Des beaux jours qu’il a contenus,
Qu’en souvenirs pourra nous rendre
La clef des paradis perdus.43

43. Murger, Scènes de la vie de Bohème, 396. “So farewell, adored darling, truly dead with the last love: our youth is buried in the depths of the old calendar. It is only by poking through the ashes of the beautiful days it held that we may regain in memory the key to lost paradises.”
If in the first two acts of *La Bohème* light-heartedness reigns supreme, the last two speak only of nostalgia, pain, and death. The musical division into thematic sections, and the melodic inclination to recitative-arioso, however, is similar. Mimi, desperately searching for Rodolfo, appears after the music has described dawn over the wintry landscape of a customs point outside Paris, near the Barrière d’Enfer: a masterpiece of *tinta* in which the orchestra simulates falling snowflakes. The effect is achieved by a descending stepwise phrase, staccato in the flutes and harp, with open parallel fifths over a resonant cello pedal, to which the other strings are then added. The same outline is maintained with changing timbres.

Inside the cabaret, Musetta’s voice, singing the melody of the slow waltz (I, III, 317), raises the spirits of the last night owls: glasses tinkle as the dawn workers pass by. Mimi’s theme, which accompanies her entrance, takes us back to the moment she first came into the attic (L) and to her temporary faintness, the first time the music suggested her physical frailty. Puccini abruptly cuts it off in mid-phrase, saving a full quotation for the next act, in which illness will finally overcome the heroine. In the meantime, less than five minutes of music has definitively dispelled any light-hearted echo of lost happiness. A few key gestures establish the new atmosphere. The *Bohème* theme (A) is heard, and Marcello invites Mimi into the cabaret. Her reply is a question— “Is Rodolfo there?”: only four notes murmured gently, a B-flat major triad immediately broken by the first, desperate lyric outburst (“Marcello, aiuto!”), then a passage in minor, like a noose tightening around her throat.

Rodolfo’s realization is announced by his melodies (B and P, III, 14) combined in counterpoint, followed by the *Bohème* theme (A); this sequence, concentrated as it is in a few measures, begins to prepare for the ensuing mood of reminiscence, separation, and detachment from love. But a little later, love returns: “In vain, in vain I hide”; a tragic phrase (Ex. 10.2) which belies the casualness with which Rodolfo had tried, a little earlier and with the same melody (Ex. 10.1), to justify his desertion to Marcello:

Example 10.1 - III, 19

In this altered interval (from minor second, x, to fourth, y), a small detail, lies the infinite ability of music to create an emotional atmosphere, to narrate a feeling beyond words. The subsequent section in A-flat major, “Una terribile tosse” (“A terrible cough”), heightens the sense of desolation, which then becomes acute as Marcello and Mimi’s voices mingle with Rodolfo’s song, with its ultimate, tragic metaphor (“Mimì di serra è fiore;” “Mimì is a hothouse flower”). Only at this point do her sobs and coughing reveal her presence. Marcello is called back into the cabaret by Musetta’s laughter, providing a brief, counterbalancing passage of humor; Mimi then tries to take leave of Rodolfo with her second aria. “Donde lieta uscì” is the first complete essay in reminiscence music in *La Bohème*: in the first section the vocal line unfolds Mimi’s theme (L, from 26), while in the second (“Ascolta, ascolta”) the melody is counterpointed by echoes of the Latin Quarter (F, Ex. 11: see Ex. 4: c) and the first aria, two sections that evoke the simpler aspects of her personality (R, 427 and Q, Ex. 6.2, an idea we will hear again at a key moment in the finale):

Example 11 - III, 27

The three themes recalled in these few measures show us how Mimi is already living in memory. Only in the final section does her voice rise in a passionate lyric outburst (“Se vuoi”); but the revival dies away in a murmur foreshadowing the end: the bonnet, that everyday token of love, is like the medallion in *La Traviata* that Violetta gives Alfredo before dying.
The melancholy of the concluding passage follows the same path: Rodolfo and Mimì begin the piece as a duet, “Addio dolce svegliare alla mattina” (“Farewell, sweet morning awakenings”), with an intensely lyrical melody. It is useful to know the original, the mattinata “Solo e amore” (1888), another example of how Puccini always realized the best moment to use a melodic idea, regardless of the original circumstances of composition:

Example 12 - III, 30

Musetta’s and Marcello’s return onstage transforms the ensemble into a quartet, with an effective juxtaposition between their volatile exchange of insults and the amorous rapture of Mimì and Rodolfo. Musetta and Marcello speak very plainly: “Che mi gridi, che mi canti?” (“What are you shouting about, what are you harping on about?”), exclaims Musetta. “All’altar non siamo uniti” (“We’re not married”); “Bada sotto il mio cappello... non ci stan certi ornamenti” (“Look under my hat; you won’t see those particular ornaments”), replies Marcello. Their words can pass unnoticed, so strong is the memory radiating from the other two, immersed in their idyll. The four voices join in the same melody only when Mimì and Rodolfo decide to wait until spring before separating from each other. The farewell between Musetta and Marcello, however, is prosaic and shouted: “Pittore da bottega!” (“House painter!”), “Viper!” (“Viper!”), “Rospo!” (“Toad!”), “Strega!” (“Witch!”). The Bohème theme peeps through in the orchestra (A, Ex. 2–3), a coda to the piece, confirming the connections between love, youth, and eccentric poverty, and it forms the link to the following episode: four notes like the delicate strokes of a clock marking the course of time that the two are unable to halt. Details such as this greatly intensify the melancholy and nostalgia.

It has taken me a bit of work, this wish of mine to keep to reality and then to lyricize all these little fragments (spezzatini). And I’ve managed it, because I went as much singing, as much melodizing as possible. The act is made up almost entirely of logical recurrences, except the little duet “Sono andati” and Colline’s Zimarra and a very few other things. (Puccini to Ricordi [November 1895]; Gara, no. 146, 133–134)

The formal structure of the final act is symmetrical with the first (and the setting is the same cold attic). The dimensions are smaller but the division into two contrasting halves is similar; the first half is merry (in this case only superficially), the second dramatic. The time of the events is not specified, and it would be tempting to say that none has passed since the start of the opera, or that they are already living in an eternal spring of memories. The sharp impression of déjà vu is confirmed by the repeat of the theme with which the opera began; but there is none of the orchestral fragmentation we heard earlier, rather an instrumental ensemble that brusquely introduces a conversation already under way. The similarity between the acts can be seen as a moment of recapitulation in a cyclic form; but it is also clear that the heightened dynamic produces a sense of strain, as if there is a need to hide nostalgia, the dominant emotion of this scene.

Rodolfo and Marcello are trying to work, but are hindered by memories of their lovers, evoked by the women’s respective melodies (K, L). Puccini is rather careful in his use of quotation here, only quoting, for example, the initial phrase of “Mi chiamano Mimì,” thus avoiding the theme as it occurred at the heroine’s entrance into the attic; here Marcello is evoking the image of a Mimì far from illness, who goes about “in carozza, vestita come una regina” (“in a carriage, dressed like a queen”). The flute theme finally returns to expose their inactivity to work (K, from 2), as happened to Rodolfo in the first act; but this time nobody will cross the threshold of the attic. After this introduction, the duet “O Mimì tu piú non torni” begins.

As the music progresses, we gradually become aware that Rodolfo’s words encapsulate the essence of the opera. “O Mimì, mia breve gioventù... Ah! vien sul mio cuor; poiché è morto amor!” (“Oh Mimì, my brief youth... Ah! come to my heart; since love is dead!”): the end of love is also the end of youth, which can never return. Before the finale, Puccini wrote another ensemble scene, one that fits into the form as if to function as a scherzo, the aim being to create maximum contrast with the ending by reuniting the four friends in a last gesture of merriment. Again Schaunard and Colline enter, but this time the single ingredient for the meal is a herring. There is no option but to make light of it, and to improvise some tromfooly; a short private performance to avoid thinking about material needs.

After commenting on the action with themes from Act I, the
Musetta: Io detesto quegli amanti che la fanno da mariti

Rodolfo: Vuoi che aspettiamo ancor la primavera?

Musetta: Sempre tua... per la vita
above drawing by Adolf Hohenstein for the La Bohème costumes on the occasion of the world premiere presented at the Teatro Regio of Turin: “a picture seller” with the face of Giuseppe Giacosa. Milan, Museo Teatrale alla Scala.

44. William Drabkin (“The Musical Language,” 95) rightly sees this recurrence as “the only instance of truly Wagnerian development [...]. The references to a Tristanesque sound world with its diminished and half-diminished seventh-chords (and a prominent English horn) are unmistakable.”

All the emotions that the death of a loved one can provoke are arranged in such a way as to arouse the deepest response from the broadest possible audience. Such universality is not solely due to the evocative power of the music, but also to the expert formal strategy that governs the work: the return at just the right moments of the themes that depict Mimì’s character and emotions makes her both familiar and unforgettable.

Furthermore, the music, in recapitulating the recent past, suggests the passing of real time, gathering together every semantic nuance of the text and reconstituting a new entity—a collective memory—on the basis of the order in which the themes are restated. While Mimì is eased on to the bed, the music that accompanied her slight lapse during the first meeting with Rodolfo is heard (L, “Là Da bere”); then comes the second section of her first aria, as accompaniment to Musetta’s narration (Q, IV, from 14, “Dove stia?”). This gives way, with tragic effect, to the love theme (P, IV, 15’, “Ancor sento la vita qui”).

Puccini does not omit a single detail: at the phrase “Ho un po’ di tosse” (“I have a bit of a cough;” Ex. 14.2) a plagal cadence takes us back to the moment in Act III when Mimì confessed to Marcello that Rodolfo had left her (Ex. 14.1). And the implacable logic continues after she offers her message of reconciliation to Marcello and Musetta, with tiny echoes of the second act (see Ex. 7.1-2), and a very subtle reference, almost directed to the unconscious: regretful longing for her beautiful brown hair.

The first new music is Colline’s “Vecchia zimarra,” an arietta that is both moving and essential: this object has a primary role in the ending of the opera, because it represents the emotion and the compassion of all. The earrings that Musetta is about to sell in order to obtain some cordial to
satisfy Mimì’s last wish do not have the same importance as that of the greatcoat which Colline has in the meantime taken off. The object has a past in our aural memory because we were present when the philosopher purchased it, and above all because the garment does not serve solely to protect Schaunard from the cold. His gaunt physique seems to emerge from the coat, which welcomes within its large folds the books that symbolize his passion for culture. The relationship between the philosopher and the coat (anthropomorphized), now destined to cross the threshold of a pawn shop, might well be defined as friendship; and the affection makes this parting very sad. With the garment, another aspect of the group’s youth disappears, and since Colline does not have romantic adventures, his love for culture is the most real sentiment he experiences. It is a feeling that binds him in friendship to “philosophers and poets,” and gives him the strength to face more powerful adversaries.

The bohemians having left, Mimì sings her swan song “Sono andati?” (“Have they gone?”). This desperate melody in C minor (IV, 21) is the last theme in the opera. The phrases descend by step, as if to depict her tiredness, but they are a final, unexpected lyric burst upward: “Sei il mio amor e tutta la mia vita” (“You are my love and my whole life”). Here Mimì’s journey through life comes to a close; and by this stage it has already become a symphonic theme of romantic love, lost, eternally regretted. Only final memories remain: the music of their first meeting returns once more when Rodolfo draws the pink bonnet bought in the Latin Quarter from under a cushion – “Te lo rammenti quando sono entrata la prima volta, là?” (“Do you remember when I came in the first time, there?”) – IV, 24, Ex. 9: again the tragic opposition between past happiness and present sorrow, Mimì sings “Che gelida manina” (A reference to the lost liberty of existence), before she falls back. Everyone rushes to the bedside, and Musetta gives her the muff she wanted: Mimì slips her hands into it and says her last, Shakespearean words before death: “To sleep.” The end is all suffering, Musetta’s futile prayer, Rodolfo’s vain agitation; only Schaunard perceives death, and signals it to the others.

Rodolfo is the last to understand: four first violins create a rarefied atmosphere of momentary peace, playing a few measures from Mimì’s aria (Q, IV, 30) – with an inevitable reminiscence of Violetta, Mimì’s sister in illness;[46] then all that remains is a pedal on A in the clarinet and double bass. Some brief moments of spoken dialog – hope really is the last thing to die – and then, finally, Mimì’s threnody is played by the full orchestra, with Rodolfo’s final high G# desperately calling out her name. Garner saw this passage as Puccinian capitulation to Verismo (Garner, no. 377), but it follows a logic that will also be applied to the finale of Tosca: one significant theme is entrusted with the gesture that expresses the completion of the tragedy. The opera ends with the same bass progression as Colline’s “Vecchia zimarra” (I-VII-VI-VII-I), with the lowered seventh lending a touch of the archaic to the key of C-sharp minor;[47] it is a way of writing “farewell” in music, recalling the moving farewell the philosopher gave to the coat. Even this repetition transmits a message, communicates a sense of material parting beyond the fact that it concerns an object or a person. These are the elements of the “Joyous and terrible life!” conceived by Murger. The musical reminiscence reinforces the atmosphere of death as a metaphor for the end of a stage in life, a musical gesture that awakens an affect rather than suggesting a cause-and-effect relationship.[48] The cadence is the most poignant leave-taking from a world made of persons and things, a world whose traumatic end has been marked by Mimì’s death.

Puccini’s masterpiece departs completely from the conventions of dramatic tradition, given that there is no plot development, but only the actions of the characters, actions that do not have a precise aim, and that death itself is not the result of a free choice, but the consequence of a social condition. Liberated from the constraints of conventional narrative, we can see the metaphoric weight of a tragic event that interrupts the flux of time so sharply. Rereading the Murger quote that introduced this chapter, words spoken by Marcello toward the end of the novel, a level of cynical detachment comes to the fore. Puccini’s Rodolfo, and all those sharing his emotions, are allowed no time for reflection: the tragedy halts the action and fixes their sadness in the infinity of art, allowing La Bohème to live eternally. After this perfect masterpiece, in which not one note is insignificant, Puccini set off on a continuously ascending path, always looking to the future. But with Mimì’s death he too had finally, permanently, taken leave of his youth.

45. Puccini would take up its ending in Act I of Turandot, where it became an important phrase for Calaf, when he sees Turandot: “Oh divina bellezza, o meraviglia.”

46. Consciously or not, Puccini also referred to La Turista with his use of reduced orchestration to imply Violettta’s consumption. See La Touriste, the end of the prelude to Act III, the reading of the letter, right up to the heroine’s final phrase, in all of which the systematic use of a small group of strings connotes the progressive grip of the illness on her.

47. William Drabkin (“The Musical Language,” 83) maintains that this should be seen as a linear elaboration of the final tonic, refusing any semantic interpretation of this repetition that would associate it with a materialistic farewell to life. He likewise notes how the same progression is present at the end of Mimì’s aria (I-III-II-I). Although precipient, the connection is challenged by the fact that the chords are built on the notes of the scale; in Puccini’s time, functional harmony did not have many followers.

48. Garner (no. 377, p. 25) suggests that the reprise of the cadence from Colline’s aria is used “for the sole reason that it is suited to the climate of the musical context,” while Arthur Groos proves much more sensitive to Puccini’s dramatic reasoning when he reminds us: “In the final measures of the opera, the music of Mimì’s ‘Sono andati?’ will blend with his ‘Vecchia zimarra’ emphasizing the mutual associations of lost love and youth, and their utopian past” (“The Libretto,” in Puccini, La Bohème, 79).
Luciano Pavarotti: Rodolfo!
The Tenor's La Bohème

by Michele Girardi
All’alba vincerò!
It was a spring day in 1973. A 19-year-old university
student, still with rather muddled ideas, but already
a confirmed opera lover, I decided to tackle the
“Puccini problem” by taking the highroad. I liked
Mozart and Bellini a lot, Verdi even more (a true
ethical ideal, in addition to an artist one). I was
crazy about Bizet’s *Carmen*, but Puccini’s music
was a problem in some respects. I was attracted to the
modernist musical style of the man from Lucca –
flowing melodist, extremely up-to-date harmonist
and orchestrator, unmistakable right from the first
note –, but at first hearing of *Madama Butterfly*
(“Un bel di vedremo” was almost an anthem for my
mother, who hummed it every day, commenting on
the sad situation of the protagonist, abandoned and
disillusioned) I was not able to overcome, a bit like
what happened to Ferruccio Busoni, the limitations
I felt that a world of small things imposed on the
strength of the drama. I was wrong, obviously, but I
was prey to all the rigidity of my age. I entered the
record shop and decided to buy *La Bohème*. Among
the numerous selections, I chose the most recent
recording. A black and white cover, with the title and
the names of the performers: “Pavarotti-Freni.”
I found the opening formidable, with the *Bohème*
theme that rose hopeful towards the sky with an
unforgettable energy, but when I heard the first
phrase of the protagonist singing the praises of the
Paris skies, however gray, I felt a thrill. When I got
to Rodolfo’s famous solo I could not believe what
I was hearing, that timbre was so seductive, the
masterful phrasing, not to mention the confidence
with which Pavarotti seized the extreme high notes,
and the clearness of his diction: even my generation
– I thought –, not only that of my great-grandfathers,
had produced a tenor able to move by absolute
interpretive intelligence, in addition to his first-
class vocal talent! Of course, I can formulate these
‘technical’ remarks now – at the time I was ‘only’
aware of sharing the emotions of a character more
completely than ever before. That very day I decided
that I would write my undergraduate dissertation on Puccini, and I chose *Turandot* because of the numerous linguistic and hermeneutic problems undoubtedly associated with it. All the same, *La Bohème* continued to be my favorite opera from that time onwards and I have never yet changed my mind.

The cast assembled for that recording was truly extraordinary, including Mirella Freni, Nicolai Ghiaurov, Rolando Panerai and Elizabeth Harwood, not to mention the masterly conducting of Herbert von Karajan, but if it ignited a spark that literally catapulted me towards Puccini’s works, about which (more than twenty years later) I wrote a critical monograph, it was thanks above all to Luciano Pavarotti’s Rodolfo. That is why I wish to dedicate to the memory of the *Bohème* Tenor the analysis in the following pages of that particular magical interpretation – made all the more compelling by the absence of the stage, inviting us to enter an entirely imaginary theater. First of all, though, I would like to offer a few further thoughts about the great man himself, popularizer of the operatic arts but above all a singer, beginning with his death. Luciano Pavarotti passed away at five in the morning on 6 September 2007 and only at dawn could that voice have died, the one that had sung “Nessun dorma” from *Turandot* more than any other, finishing with the high B of “all’alba vincerò” still intact, albeit with the help of a microphone, in his last performance two years ago in Turin when he was already seventy. This feat calls to mind a similar one by Giacomo Lauri Volpi, who sang Puccini’s aria in Barcelona in 1972 when he was eighty, although Volpi sang it in a theater, the setting that the celebrated piece was designed for, and without a microphone, while Pavarotti performed it, as he loved to do, for the benefit of a global audience. What counts, however, is that in both cases the voice seemed to soar above the weight of the years: although he was less long-lived than his illustrious
predecessor and, to cite a proverbial example, than Alfredo Kraus. Luciano confirmed the fact that a great singer, or rather a truly outstanding one, remains precisely that, despite the ravages of age. So much celebrity produces contradictory results: those who censure the compromise between popularity and quality are not wrong (even though it is a problem destined to remain unresolved). Taking opera into the stadiums implies _de facto_ the distortion of an art form that finds its truest expression indoors, and mixing it with popular music as Luciano did, volunteering to lead swarms of pop stars, corrupts its nature and fatefully lowers its level. Among the more frequent criticisms (made even on the occasion of his death, with a poor sense of timing), and from this point the reasoning is far from clear, is one which blames the Artist because the world, impartially, elected him _primo tenore_, while he was that only in his _restricted_ repertoire of Italian Opera, as if the style of our country had not always maintained the pivotal role in the birth, development, consolidation and end of the musical theater in the world since its origins: he was therefore a _primo tenore_ par excellence, despite the aesthetic shortsightedness of others. His aversion to solfeggio and his incorrect sight-reading were then called into question, even though he was in high favor with conductors like Herbert von Karajan and Carlos Kleiber, to cite the names of just two musicians who aimed at perfection (the list is much longer, obviously, and includes all the great conductors that chose to work with him in the course of his extremely long career). 

4. Every listening gives proof of Pavarotti’s excellence: performing a phrasing that is not too tied to a rigid scansion is useful in general, but vital for many of Puccini’s pages. 

Yet his true role was that of an opera singer. What enthusiast does not carry in his heart the crystalline clarity of the Luciano-Rodolfo that I have just mentioned and will speak about at greater length? Or the marvelous _Ballo in Maschera_ at La Scala in 1978, directed by Claudio Abbado? The last time I saw him on stage was in 2001 in _Aida_ at the Metropolitan in New York. The first aria was painful because the tenor was intimidated by the difficulty of the writing, and forced James Levine to follow him from the podium, but just when it seemed that everything was going to go wrong, Luciano overcame his hereditary performer’s nerves, and starting with the next duett-trio he took off towards the sky, sailing through the heavy third act as if it were nothing, to end with the most inimitable brand of lyricism, his own, towards the soft and very sweet finale that Verdi wrote as a farewell to the earth, in which love always wins.

Among the premonitions at the end of summer 2007, in which we all expected the worst, one stands out from the others as deserving of special mention; on a page on his official website, which has been silent since the moment of his death, Pavarotti had declared: “I hope to be remembered as an opera singer, that is as a representative of an art form that found its maximum expression in my Country, and I further hope that the love for opera might always remain of central importance in my life.” These words have the ring of a last confession: he had lived a wonderful glamorous adventure, he had broadened out of all proportion the popularity of Italian opera, interweaving his voice with that of different pop stars, but he knew that all his truth as a man and as an artist was in the tenor register. Everyone bowed before his adventure, from heads of state to everyday people, all united by sincere grief and perhaps for that very reason, like Calaf, he _ha vinto all’alba_ (won at dawn), a sign of palingenesis because he lived it, in the moment of his goodbye, like a return to his more authentic world, that of the operatic Theater, a world that has made, and will still need to make, compromises to survive the ravages of time and the change of interests and perspectives that have produced indifference in those who should and could support it.
Primus inter pares
The theme song for *La Bohème* is strongly established in the first measures, in which the orchestra awakes mumbling in the middle of an ordinary day of two friends talking [4.1]. In the thematic texture that symbolizes the cheerful life (even when it is miserable) of their company of artists, enters the painter Marcello, not at all inspired, even ‘frostbitten’ by the painting he is working on [28°]. The baritone’s singing is supported by the orchestral movement underway, and is thus part of everyday life, but when Rodolfo starts singing the music has a break. He ascends right away to the first high notes (Ex. 3.1, p. 61) and, in completing the phrase (the voice is still cold) up to the A, hits a lyrical-sentimental stride that is established as a key element of the tenor part and of the opera as a whole. Each of the bohemians, except Marcello, is represented upon his entrance by an instrumental theme that will accompany him in the course of the action, but only Rodolfo is identified with a vocal melody, and this is a very important narrative sign, because it gives him the role of protagonist in a group for which he is the expression. Pavarotti begins the melody with an unusual limpidness [58°], and offers the listener the self-confidence of a completely bright voice to accentuate ideal youth, yet at the same time full of resonance, and totally lyrical. The timbre is that of a *contraltino* (like Giacomo Lauri Volpi’s, but warmer and completely devoid of harshness), perfectly homogenous throughout the entire range. Few other parts in the great tenor repertoire demand an opening that so much conditions the overall performance: in the symbolic system of the action it is the poet that dictates the rules to the others, thanks to the scribbling pad of his drama that fuels the fire in the stove. All this duo opening is built around the repeating of Rodolfo’s melody, which adheres to the highly metaphorical texture of the libretto, touching the first high B, with the hope that “L’idea vampi in fiamma” (“The idea
The definition is that of Rodolfo Celletti (“Pavarotti e le opere,” in Pavarotti. 25 anni per la musica, ed. Rodolfo Celletti and Giorgio Corzolani, Modena: Ruggeri, 1986, 169-223: 184). It is worth taking the trouble to re-read the comments of this great voice expert: “Pavarotti’s Rodolfo is spring water. The cordiality, the simplicity, the expansion, the communicativeness, the sparkling beat are those of a man, superimposed on the tenor, who sings, yes – and how! – but with the naturalness of speech. And this is a splendid way to perform a ‘jacket melodrama.’ By which I mean an opera set in a bourgeois environment that is not lacking in naturalistic implications.”

“Dica quant’anni ha,” “Tell me, how old are you?” a phrase that once again reminds us of the passing of time [4-1’37”]. In this environment Pavarotti is unrivaled, and wearing the poet’s clothes he leaves his own at home. There is not a single phrase that does not allow a delicate irony to leak out, without rhetorical indulgence, except where the text requires it. Listen to how he enunciates, at the moment in which the falsehood is engaged and everyone in turn mocks the landlord, “L’uomo ha buon gusto!” (“The man has good taste!”) [2’27”], and a bit later, when the trick suddenly turns towards a small parody of the drama, how he sculpts the ‘moralistic’ reprimand (“E ammorba e appesta / la nostra onesta / magion” “And pollutes and infects / our honest abode” [3’55”]).

At the end the spotlight shifts from the group, and things take a romantic turn: everyone goes out to celebrate, but the poet remains, “per terminar l’articolo di fondo del Castoro” (“To finish off my article for the Beaver”). These may seem like simple details, yet the life of the opera is made up of details like those that emerge in this sudden foreshortening, where every note is charged with meanings:

Example A - I, 1’23 [5]

The violin solo (senza sordina, thus more vibrant in the dialogue with the protagonist) intones the phrase of the ciehi bigi (gray skies) with a yearning touch, while the voice breaks into a short recitative that paraphrases the melody, and rises a fifth for an instant before the instrument moves up in flames”) [2’41”]. It is the first of the ‘madrigalisms’ that bejews the tenor vocal style: Pavarotti’s bright flame, hurled with an ease that immediately allows one to imagine the outcome of the great solo, is sheer sonorous pleasure, and at the same time a pictorial expression of an artistic energy.

In this debut the protagonist must also demonstrate excellent acting talents, together with his companions, first contemplating the fleeting little flame that “scricchiola, increspasi, muòr” (“crackles, curls up, dies”) – prompting “Abbasso l’Autòr!” (“Down with the author!”) –, next joining in the delight of the unexpected meal, offered to the little commune by Schaunard’s talent, and finally taking part in the prank organized by Marcello at the expense of Benoît, the landlord that likes shapely women. Even though we cannot see the scene, the voice alone enables us to imagine what is happening, such is the agility with which Luciano’s presence emerges in the context. La Bohème brings episodes of everyday life to the stage, sewn together in a framework of poetic realism, keeping a distance from Verdi’s modernist outbursts (Otello and Falstaff) as well as from the flashy perspectives of the Scapigliati (still the offspring of opera seria), with everyone in costumes, while here we are in the “jacket melodrama.” At the same time, it is a thousand miles away from contemporary Verismo opera, which is really just an extended version of opera seria – the fact that it is often set amidst the common people being more about offering folkloric passages to opera tourists than because of any real innovative intent. In La Bohème what counts is an interpreter’s ability to integrate with the dense texture of other voices and the orchestra, an intertwining that disentangles into a thousand strands, and to sing with the naturalness of conversing, even when a melancholy strain, or other sentiments that stimulate lyricism, emerge over and above the choral jesting (as in Marcello’s
Facing page

Milan, Teatro alla Scala, 28 April 1965.

...down a fourth: this produces a distinct contrast between the instrumental expression, tinged with melancholy, and a glimmer of that vague sense of waiting that Pavarotti communicates with a sort of-pathos, as if he wanted to preannounce a special event that in some way he had created within himself. In order to express an analogous amorous tension in a character, Leonard Bernstein wrote an entire song for Tony, the main character in West Side Story (no. 3, “Something’s Coming”) while for Puccini five bars were enough, although the interpreter must seize the spirit of them, otherwise the effect will be lost.

Shortly afterwards the Bohème motive adds a sprinkling of irony, as the friends stumble going down the stairs, but the flutes immediately recall the poet to order, whispering a little motive that acquires dynamism from its breathy trills and skips around the protagonist, who is clearly distracted [52"][52]. And right on cue the long-awaited event materializes in a voice that arrives from offstage, accompanied by clarinets on a carpet of strings. “Una donna!” (“A Woman!”) [6-4"], Pavarotti intones trembling, and then goes on to express, with mezzo voce and enchanting pianissimi, a variety of attitudes concentrated in a few minutes, moving from surprise to anxiety – “Che viso da malata!” (“How very pale her face is!”) [1’04"] is the umpteenth short phrase, but of capital importance, which the tenor enhances by emphasizing ever so slightly the acciaccatura, designed to highlight Mimi’s condition –, to admiration (“Che bella bambina!” “What a lovely girl” [7-30”]), and then to false indifference when she re-lights the candle and starts to take her leave. Hands reach out in the dark, and Rodolfo, more determined than the woman, grasps Mimi’s. The seduction scene begins.
“Che gelida manina” [8], is an aria that has always been a favorite with tenors, for reasons that can be found in the particular character that it has taken on over the years: that of a prototype of the sentimental aria, acknowledged as the love song par excellence by every sort of audience. This universality stems from its apparent simplicity: the tone in which Rodolfo addresses Mimì is conversational, and grafted onto this texture are lengthy lyrical fragments, based on the use of simple metaphors from everyday speech which are accessible to everyone.

The vocal range most suited to this aria is that of the lyric tenor, a register that sits between the tenore di grazia (light-lyric tenor) and the dramatic tenor, which was brought back by Puccini to its maximum splendor precisely thanks to Rodolfo, at a time when the new type of ‘verismo’ tenor (Turiddu-style, to be clear, with the middle range widely developed at the expense of the upper range) was beginning to dominate the stage. The lyric tenor works better than other voices in satisfying the particular needs of Puccini’s refined vocal lines: grace mixed with sensuality and elegant pliability.

Despite the exemplary nature of the vocal writing, this aria contains many difficulties. The most common one is the phrasing in the transitions between the middle and upper registers; a few examples: “Cercar che giova?” (“What is the use of searching?”) [14"], “e qui la luna l’abbiamo vicina” (“and here the moon is near us”) [13"], “e per castelli in aria” (“and for castles in the air”) [2 12"], “e i bei sogni miei” (“and my beautiful dreams”):

Example B - I, 33 [3'02"]

The second obstacle lies in the frequent lyrical expansions, which require the tenor to phrase in an extremely high range:
Phrasing in the high range is also on occasion followed by phrasing in the transition phase (cf. “Talor dal mio forziere,” Ex. 1.1, p. 56 [2’30”] – and take note of the extensive legato marking, which is an indispensable indication to give sense and savor to the text). There are numerous high notes (two B♭, no less than nine A♭). _Dulcis in fundo_ Puccini asks for the emission of the famous high C (take note, once again, of the legato marking that envelops the phrase and the _crescendo_ mark that surmounts the ascending part):

Example D · I, 332 [8-3’32”]

It should be pointed out, however, that there is an alternative version that allows the singer to stop on the lower note (A♭), and go down to D♭, instead of rising to the limits of the tessitura. This suggests that Puccini regarded the famous C as a note rather outside the tenor’s register (and in fact in other operas he also makes it optional). Perhaps he was not completely wrong, but in this case the C has a special importance in the narrative context, because it gives a significant energy to the word “speranza” (“hope”), in line with the traditional use, in melodrama, of the high note as an expressive function – although a good A♭ is always preferable to a bad C. Especially if the singer lowers the key of the aria from D♭ to C major, in order to sing a B♭, as is now almost common practice in many performances.\

The aria ends on a long-held E♭, surmounted by a hairpin that goes from _pianissimo_ to _più che pianissimo_, the last detail in a very rich range of dynamic and agogic nuances, rarely respected by performers in their entirety, such as the many

6. Normally everything is lowered by a half
tone from the violin phrase that starts at I.
'30"; the drop is clearly perceivable, and it
is quite annoying to the ear, as it unbalances
the entire tonal scheme, calibrated with
extreme precision by Puccini.
Genoa, Teatro Margherita, 12 April 1969.

Above

Pavarotti flaunts his best in “Che gelida manina,” showing an intelligence and a musical sensibility that rise above the flattery with which he was surrounded (together with the criticisms that were directed towards him), talents which are fully revealed on more detailed investigation. Clear and amiable, his singing unwinds on a perfect legato right from the start. The dolcissimo marking is perfectly respected, and his first high notes flow easily and are well placed, so much so that the height does not seem to matter to him. Unfettered by any technical problems, Pavarotti is free to decide with the conductor on the tempo most likely to bring out the characteristics of the solo even further. The initial andantino affettuoso is thus slowed down slightly, to leave room for all the coloring nuances of which Luciano’s voice was capable – and the range truly seems inexhaustible! In the extreme clarity of which Luciano’s voice was capable – and the range

shading. Altogether we hear a dazzling example of the ‘conversational’ style of Puccinian singing, perfectly calibrated even in the short recitative that follows (“Chi son?!” [1’29’’]), in which the tenor casts a gloss of exuberant pride over his profession. The opening of the andante lungo “In povertà mia lieta” (“In my happy poverty”) [1’54’’] is textbook, sung in an expansive style, with a perfectly calibrated mezza voce, without a hint of emphatic airs. The extremely legato phrasing of “Talor dal mio forziere” (Ex. 1.1) gives his female listener a shiny timbred jewel box, and gives the impression of a violinist in possession of an incredibly soft touch. With the same softness, and unequalled confidence, Pavarotti rises to the high C, sung in full voice.

In conclusion, the invitation whispered to Mimi with infinite sweetness, asking her to recount something about herself, could not be more persuasive, but after such a unique performance almost all sopranos would feel embarrassed. Fortunately here Mirella Freni steps forward, Luciano’s golden Modenese companion voice, and everything goes well.” In the finale, while the friends’ sarcastic comments resound from offstage as they head towards Momus, soprano and tenor immerse us in the musical and poetic spell that ends the first act. Before blending in a unison of the senses starting with the B3 of “Fremon già nell’anima” and rising together towards the high C in the last bars (the note is not found in the score, not even as a variation, but Pavarotti takes a liberty that is fully justified by the confidence and the quality with which he sings it), Rodolfo pays his companion a compliment that is a small rhetorical jewel: “O soave fanciulla, o dolce viso / di mite circonfuso alba lunar / in te ravviso / il sogno ch’io vorrei sempre sognar!” (“O lovely maiden, o sweet face / bathed in soft moonlight / in you I recognize / the dream that I would dream for ever”) [10]. Beautiful lines, worth reading in themselves, but which the silvery voice of such a protagonist transforms into a sheer delight to the ear.

7. Born in Modena in the same year (1935), Freni and Pavarotti, before having a common career in the world of opera, were breastfed by the same wet nurse, because “their mothers” – Freni writes (In Luciaino Pavarotti, 209) – “both worked at the tobacco plant. Something in the tobacco seeps the milk, which made it necessary to find someone to feed us. Luciano and I had the same wet nurse and I think it is obvious who drank all the milk.”
Losing Oneself in the Crowd
The magnificent, very colorful opening with the three trumpets playing fortissimo and the curtain down, creates a particular sense of time-space concentration that is characteristic of the second act, a choral act par excellence.

The music keeps track of the actions of the characters as they move among the crowd, keeping a special eye on the new couple. Schaunard and Colline buy objects that denote their ‘professions’, a horn for the musician and a “zimarrone” (greatcoat) for the philosopher, in whose roomy pockets a “grammatica runica” (“runic grammar”) will quickly end up. The two lovers also go shopping (and the most important object of them all is Mimi’s little pink bonnet), conversing continuously, until the trumpets add the mute and, with a softened sound, turn their attention to a brief hint of jealousy by the tenor (“Chi guardi? – Sei geloso?” “Who are you looking at? – Are you jealous?” [12]): again in this case Pavarotti does not limit himself to a literal reading of the text, and with his singing he conveys a sort of uneasiness that goes well beyond the gesture of suspicion, and even beyond the “Ah! Sì, tanto!” (“Ah! Yes, so much!”) [16], with which he confirms his own happiness, picking up on the “Fremont già nell’anima,” which is a motto of passion. In the meantime, Marcello, in the name of liberty in love which his friend, for his part, seems to scorn, courts the girls, and vende a un soldo il vergine suo cuor… (offers to sell for a penny his guileless heart).

Finally the lovers sit at the little table at the Café Momus, and it is the time for introductions. Rodolfo accepts the invitation of the strings and here intones, for the first time, a fragment of Mimi’s aria, specifically “Mi piaccion quelle cose” (cf. Ex. 6.1, p. 78), which will come back to echo to the girl in the third-act aria (“Donde lieta uscì,” cf. Ex. 6.2, p. 78):
Then Musetta takes over the stage, and with her Marcello, but beyond the couple that is about to get back together, and the one that has just been formed, is the concept expressed by the baritone when he begins to give in to his ex-lover: “Gioventù mia, / tu non sei morta / né di te è morto il sovvenir!” (“My golden youth, / you are not dead / nor has your memory died”) [4'09'']. And the group’s comment “La commedia è stupenda!” (“What a wonderful comedy!”) while referring in the first instance to Musetta’s tantrums, also alludes to a greater comédie humaine, acted out by so many in the days of their carefree youth.

The verses are steeped in a degree of rhetoric that aims at self-caricature, but Pavarotti also wants to bring out the tinge of melancholy (as he will do shortly afterwards in a brief a parte, admonishing Mimì again: “Sappi per tuo governo / che non darei perdono in sempiterno” “Now let me tell you / I never would forgive you” [14-2'34'']). Then he chooses the option of unmistakable self-irony in the passage that follows,

where the mechanical rhythm of the poetic scansion, in waltz time, also demands it. In the packed dialogue at the coffee table the talents of a singer emerge who was entirely familiar with the early 19th century genre of “half-character” (one of his favorite roles was Nemorino in L’Elisir d’Amore), and we hear how light, almost foolish, the story is, miniatures from the recent past, “Marcello un di l’amò. / La fraschetta l’abbandonò / per poi darsi a miglior vita” (“Marcello used to love her / The wanton flirt abandoned him / to have herself a better time”) [15-2'43'’] – few words, but said with an ease that serves to highlight, at every moment, the transitory nature of the amorous experience.
Snowflakes
The third act of *La Bohème* brings a tragic element to the scene, along with the snowflakes that fall on the Barrière d’Enfer, a city customs point that, with its gate visible in the background, shields the Parisians from what lies beyond its bars, and is also a sort of visual metaphor confining human destiny to the city and in particular the fate of the protagonists in the Latin Quarter, a cage of talented and penniless eccentrics. The entire first part is focused around the figure of Mimì, talking with Marcello; their exchange gives rise to an agonizing tension, because it is about the crisis in her relationship with Rodolfo, and about his jealousy, but the cough that racks the protagonist, a pure stage gesture that is barely acknowledged by the painter, and the consumption that lies behind it, is the real message addressed to the audience. And it is a message of death.

The tenor’s task upon entering the scene is particularly demanding, not only because Mimì’s melodies of high tragic quality have lacerated the listener’s soul, but because, following the narrative logic of mingling the different components that prevails throughout *La Bohème*, Puccini suddenly lightens the music and brings the drama back within the confines of a lover’s quarrel, at least in appearance. Here thus the initial theme of the opera appears again followed by the melody of the *cieli* *bigi*, as if there were still time to wait. But a light immediately goes on: “Già un’altra volta credetti morto il mio cor / ma di quegli occhi azzurri allo splendor / esso è risorto” (“Once before I thought my heart was dead / but at the splendor of those blue eyes / it lived again”) [II.4–16]. Three verses, with as many connected phrases, in which Pavarotti, with a smooth and persuasive voice, especially on the G♯ of the metaphoric “esso” (“it/Love”), does not highlight the tedium, which is fake, but the endlessness of the passionate experience, almost beyond death, which is now approaching. In fact he cannot put up for very long with the

10. From the extremely precise stage directions in the libretto, we learn that Mimì arrives at the Barrière (today place Denfert) coming from rue d’Enfer (boulevard Raspail), which connected the customs house at that time to the Latin Quarter (a distance of roughly three kilometres). A sign, as with the papal Rome of the early 19th century in *Tosca*, of a real and functional relationship between metropolitan Paris and the behavior of the protagonists.
protests from Marcello (who wants to re-engage him in a more light-hearted view of sentimental life, as he had just done previously when boasting of the levity of his relationship with Musetta) and, after a nod in the direction of the “moscardino di Viscontino,” (“dandy little Viscount,”) Rodolfo moves on to the real reasons for his behavior, hinting at the sentimental restlessness of his lover (cf. Ex. 10.1, p. 82 “Mimì è una civetta” “Mimi is a flirt” [5]), although Pavarotti makes it clear that this is not what is really generating his anxiety. Yet the force of the tragedy intensifies a hundredfold at the moment in which the orchestra falls silent and the voice negates in that silence what it had just affirmed, picking up again with the same melody, but now with a completely different connotation. In the meantime Mimi listens unseen, now and again exhaling her own fear, holding back the coughing. Pavarotti throws himself into the long legato phrase that rises with force to the A in “Invan” (“In vain”) without taking a breath (“Ebbene no, non lo son. Invan nascondo / la mia vera tortura,” “No, no I am not. In vain I hide / my true torment,” cf. Ex. 10.2, p. 83 [33”]), and then continues through the range with an impeccable dramatic accent, going back up to a B at the moment when Rodolfo needs to convey the enormity of his frustrated amorous potential:

He then begins the \textit{lento triste} of “Mimì è tanto malata” (“Mimi is so ill”) [6] with a timbre that transmits a moving emotion and foreboding of tragedy. This section is an arduous test for the singer, because it starts with a real lament, above a mournful ostinato in F minor that breaks on the A of “condannata” (“condemned”), and then
moves to the relative major \( (A_\sharp) \) of “Una terribil
tosse / l’esil petto le scuote” (“A terrible cough
racks her fragile frame”) \( (\textit{Sostenuto molto} \ [26^\circ]) \),
a brief foreshortening with the characteristics of
a song from the Art Nouveau period. The voice
rises, hesitating on the dotted notes \( \textit{con la massima}
expressione} \), rippling on the ascending notes and
suddenly jumps a fifth, rising to the \( B_\sharp \) of the word
“sangue” (“blood”). It is a way of transforming a
clinical diagnosis into poetry, in addition to being
a demanding vocal test, not only because of the
texture (prevalently low, resting on a performance
chord, with wide jumps and arpeggios that suddenly
raise the emotional temperature), but above all
because of the variety of approaches required
from the protagonist. Here Pavarotti gives a lesson
in style, translating every detail into singing that
intensifies the slightest dramatic nuance, starting
from the initial \( \textit{mezza voce} \) (the marking says
“\( \textit{tristemente} \)” and I do not know a better way of
accomplishing that), then transmitting Rodolfo’s
terrible interior anxiety, poorly hidden behind
the frivolous melody that makes reference to the
coughing, as if he wanted to conceal the truth, above
all from himself, without success. The three voices
then reunite on the repeat of the initial section, at
the moment in which Rodolfo pronounces the true
sentence, mitigated by the umpteenth comparison
figure, which brings into play (as in the second
act: “dalle sue dita sbocciano i fior” “flowers
blossom from her fingers”) the girl’s flowers
(before ‘artificial’, now cultivated in a hothouse,
therefore weaker): “Mimì di serra è fiore. / Povertà
l’ha scontenta, / per richiamarla in vita / non basta
amor!” (“Mimì is a hothouse flower. / Poverty has
withered her, / to bring her back to life / love is
not enough!” \( [1’52"] \). The outcome is the most
bitter of recognitions: Mimì coughs, and she reveals
herself. There is just enough time for a digression
on the theme of the illness (“\( \textit{Facile alla paura} \)”
“Easily alarmed”, on Mimì’s theme \( [2’46"] \),
before the light counterweight of the vicissitudes between Marcello and Musetta makes a comeback, and Musetta’s laugh draws the painter back inside the cabaret.

Left alone, Mimì and Rodolfo veer towards the pure sentimental genre, steeped in the bitterness of memory. If the aria “Donde lieta uscì” is an authentic jewel, almost an oasis of tenderness (and dignity) for the soprano, the union of the voices in the duet, which turns into a quartet when Musetta and Marcello re-enter the scene, is one of the high points of the entire opera. The two protagonists offer us a remnant of their amorous intimacy for the second time in the course of the drama, but this time they are on the verge of breaking up, and not of getting together as in the first act finale. Nevertheless the music tries to build an eternal amorous present while the story speaks in the past: the only glimmer, almost intermittent, is the return of the little Bohème theme; the rest is new music, which is an indispensable testimony of the present.

Both parts in this predicament are extensively lyrical, but while it is difficult to find a soprano better than Freni, it is surely impossible to cite a tenor that is able to surpass Pavarotti in all the phrases that require mezza voce-abandon like “Addio, sognante vita” (“Farewell, sweet dream of life”), or that is able to communicate the thrill of passion on the Ab of “carezze” like Luciano before blending with his singing partner on the B♭ that illuminates the phrase “Mentre a primavera c’è compagno il sol” (“While in springtime the sun is with us”). A vivacious exchange of sarcastic comments — destined to end in insults — between Marcello and Musetta, a couple inferior in range to the other that is languishing on the stage, sets off the ‘quartet’, and further emphasizes the level of stylization that characterizes the love between Mimì and Rodolfo. Pavarotti reaches the peak of ecstasy when he pronounces, dolcissimo. “Chiacchieran le fontane” (“The fountains murmur.”) with the countermelody of his partner:

Example H - III, 83 [B-3']

Puccini wrote two legato semi-phrases that spin towards the high Ab, and the interpreter follows (and extols, thanks to his perfect rendering of the phrase) the composer’s choice, even though it tosses the wind the coherence of the text proposed by the librettists. A poetic choice, which anticipates the farewell, “Ci lasceremo alla stagion dei fior” [4’29’’], where the protagonist, responding to his beloved, rises again to the high Ab, this time pianissimo and reducing the dynamic to an almost impalpable level.
Mia breve gioventù
The finale of the third act leaves an indelible impression on the listener, but when the scene begins that closes the circle of *Bohème* in symmetry (in act four the curtain rises on the same characters in the same attic apartment as in the first act, the orchestra intones the same theme, even if there are significant changes in the timbral disposition), we take a further step closer to understanding the most authentic message of the opera (our last one will be in the finale). While the catastrophe is postulated by the needs of a tragic genre that, despite the mixing of the sentimental and the comic, prevails right from the moment in which the snowflakes fall in the previous act, it is in the exchange between Marcello and Rodolfo, painter and poet, that the true essence of the opera lies: regret for a lost happiness and nostalgia for the time that has passed and will never return, for youth as the season of love.

It is important to recognize the disposition of the musical echoes in this opening scene, and to trace the relationship between them and the situation to which they refer: if the scene between the baritone and the tenor takes us back to the beginning of the opera, the subsequent reminiscences of the themes of the respective lovers bring us closer to the conclusion of the first act, a development that becomes clear when we hear the motive of the flute with its trills, which called Rodolfo to work, and only belongs to him, and to his encounter with Mimì. After this theme the protagonist should enter, instead the strings intone a variation of “Talor dal mio forziere” [9′1″], the melody that, after having raised the sentimental temperature in the poet’s aria, was repeated in the passionate duo at the end of the first act (“Fremon già nell’anima”). Puccini does not want the protagonist to communicate regret at having lost that particular person, but rather for him to express nostalgia for the kind of spell cast by passionately falling in love, as that feeling is alive in him more than ever, no matter what has happened. At the same time Rodolfo intuitively understands that it is impossible for him
to recover the happiness for which he longs, because
time has passed, and life is devouring individual
destinies. At the beginning of the Andantino mosso
in C major [10], therefore, it is not Mimì's musical
symbol that appears, but the memory of the passion
that she stirred up, and it is this fragment that, for
a moment, lets the feminine ideal shine through.
This duet is also, together with Mimì's solo that
follows, the most important foreshortening of new
music in a scene that is completely encrusted with
sonorous memories, clearly new because the memory
is destined to last beyond the physical limitations.
Pavarotti thoroughly understood all that lies behind
his part, and begins “O Mimì, tu piú non torni” (“O
Mimì, you will never return”) with a messa di roce
that could not be more sweetly melodic, and that
then, all pianissimo, grows a little on the A of “collo
di neve” (“snow-white neck”), until whispering the
revealing metaphor: “Ah! Mimì, mia breve gioventù!”
(“Ah! Mimì, my fleeting youth!”) over a melody
that returns in the last phrase, when the two voices,
moving in parallel thirds, find themselves in unison:
Example J - IV, p. [10-2’5”]

While Marcello vents his emotions in a banal image
(“il mio cuor vile la [Musetta] chiama e aspetta il vil
mio cuor...” “My cowardly heart calls to her and
waits for her, my cowardly heart”), Rodolfo reaffirms
the ideal fact: ‘true’ love died when the liaison
with Mimì ended. Yet the inspiration that Pavarotti puts
into this significant ending (that brings together
the breve gioventù and the morte dell’amore, thanks
to their melodic equivalence), lingering on the
E with a thread of a voice until quenching it, is such
to make us perceive the intensity of the sentiment
and, along with it, the solution of continuity.
If the articulation of this episode is a sort of summary
of the amorous encounter, the whole fourth act
develops following the outline of the first. Between
the sentimental episode and the definitive tragic turn,
Puccini and his librettists thus symmetrically inserted
another ‘comic’ intermezzo: in the first scene in the
attic apartment Marcello and Rodolfo were flaunting
‘philosophical’ reveries while art was subordinated in
vain to the necessity of heating the room, now, after
the reflections on the nature of amorous feelings,
the same friends arrive. Colline and Schaunard, having
left to procure food. In this cycle the quality of the
second part changes: before it was sentimental, now
it is tragic.13 It is not easy to move with nonchalance,
from the time of memories to an eternal present of
misery, especially knowing that it must end in tragedy;
and it is not easy above all for Rodolfo. Even though
Mimì is the only character to which something really
happens in Bohème (she is looking for love, she finds
it, she becomes ill, she changes lover out of necessity
and then she returns to die, closing her own life’s
circle), she suffers the destiny that is her lot, while
Rodolfo takes upon himself all the joys and pains, and
suffers all the tension of the final stage of her illness,
right up to his desperate mourning of her loss.
The quartet scene is very short (less than five minutes
of music), yet extremely intense (it seems to last much
longer), and quite brilliant (one does not want it to
end). So as not to think of the material necessities
one happily regresses, and among the themes of the
individual bohemians (first Schaunard’s [3’02’] then
Colline’s [3’51’]) there is room for Rodolfo’s short
phrase, a sort of nursery rhyme that Pavarotti declaims
with the infinite grace of an eternal child, flaunting a
sort of stylized laugh in the little motive14
Example J - IV, p. [10-3’32”]

Example J - IV, p. [10-3’32”]
that engages the collective joke, made up of liveliness, movement, performance: melodic slivers, tiny fragments of a few measures, dance rhythms and what not. The whole cast moves lightly in the musical plot, and leaps into the choreographic action, which even involves a cloak-and-dagger episode.

The ring-around-the-rosy could go on forever, but instead it crashes abruptly on the E-minor chord, which accompanies Musetta’s fatal announcement: Mimi drags herself up the stairs, prey to the illness [12]. “Ov’è” (“Where is she?”) replies Rodolfo [57] – two syllables that Pavarotti’s voice transforms into a lump of desperation, while the strings cry out in a large accented cadenza that flows into her leitmotif (cf. Ex. 13.2, p. 83 [21]). Only a few seconds are needed for the abyss to open wide, and an emotional vertex is immediately reached at the end of the first exchange between the ex-lovers. “Mi vuoi qui con te?” (“Do you want me here with you?”), she asks – “Ah, mia Mimi, / sempre! sempre!” (“Ah, my Mimi, / always! always!”), he replies [55]; the involvement of the two interpreters is so strong that it drags the listener into the same whirl, which from here on proceeds relentlessly towards the disaster.

“Ah, come si sta bene qui” (“Ah, it is all so pleasant here!”) [2’15’], Mimi sings at the beginning of her theme, Pavarotti quiets her with sweet desperation, evoking the “Benedetta bocca” (“Blessed lips”) [2’36’], on which the thrills of passion still breathe (yet another variation of “Fremon già nell’anima”). But her cold hands can only be warmed “Qui nelle mie” (“Here in mine”) [3’36’], as Rodolfo exclaims, with a trembling accent, before recommending that she rest. Her desperate prayer that follows “Tu non mi lasci? – No! No!” (“You won’t leave me? – No! No!”) [5’21’] develops a new emotional knot, enough to bring you to tears, as even a monosyllabic gesture of reassurance is illuminated by the intelligence of the performer. Little by little the group of friends lean on a great surge of memories but while the reminiscence of Mimì’s aria flows, they start to
Gradually disappear from the musical texture, which now frames the two protagonists more and more in close-up, until, after the last significant gesture, and one that is extremely important for the drama (Colline’s “Vecchia zimarra” [13]), they also disappear from the stage. Philosopher and musician exit accompanied by a moving interlude [14], which stages a last duo recapitulation of the first finale, which Karajan attacks with passion, directing with an elegance that is full of involvement, before leaving the stage free for the epilogue, which begins with Mimi’s great solo, “Sono andati? Fingevo di dormire” [1’05”]. Now the protagonist is framed in full relief, and Pavarotti is her backup. And what backup! One cannot count the times in which he is able to engrave on the musical flow in such a significant way, for every beat of what he sings is illuminated by an unending sensibility towards detail, and harmonized with coherence throughout the whole of the protagonist’s dramatic journey. Just listen to his immediate reaction to the declaration of love that his companion addresses to him at the climax of her solo (“Sei il mio amore, e tutta la mia vita” “You are my love, and my whole life” [2’02”]) modeled on the same melodic expressive fragment, the extremely high phrase (it goes up to A♭ and B♭) “Ah Mimi, mia bella Mimi,” (Ah Mimi, my beautiful Mimi), which he ties in perfectly, varying by a fraction the second crescendo towards the high note:

Example K - IV, 422 [14-2’29”]

And, immediately afterwards, notice the fascinating way in which he offers a comparative figure, sung with infinite sweetness, “Bella come un’aurora” (“Beautiful as a sunrise”) [2’47”], which is actually “a sunset,” as she replies, with a touch of resignation (and a pinch of black humor). “Mi chiamano Mimi” returns, with its melancholy sound [3’47”] and
Pavarotti pulls out all the innocence which he is capable of in convincing himself and the audience that there is still hope (“Torna al nido la rondine e cinguetta” “The swallow has returned to the nest and she chirps” [3′48″]). Yet when Mimì intones “Che gelida manina” [5′19″], taking possession of her lover’s music, the end has truly arrived. In the closing scene [15], the bohemians return to the stage with gifts, a bit of money, the promise of a doctor, but all will be in vain. The last moments are reserved for Rodolfo-Luciano, in which the singer manages to transmit such sorrow that the listener is forced to share the protagonist’s anguish: “Zitta per carità” (“Hush for pity’s sake”) [9″], before the gift of the muff and Mimì’s last little anxiety (“Tu, spensierato! / Grazie. Ma costerà” “You thoughtless fellow! / Thank you. But it cost you dear” [1′50″]), a physical torment. Things continue in the same direction, in keeping with the fundamentals of the entire opera, when the short fragments of the strings echo the girl’s last desire – to sleep, maybe to dream, in reality to die – intoning the melody of “Mi piaccion quelle cose” [4′04″]. A subject that, in the fullness of the emotional tension, reminds us of a symbolic adventure desperately lacking perspectives, materialistic, where the last farewell is the cadenza with which Colline said goodbye to his “Vecchia zimarra” (“Old greatcoat”). But prior to the cadenza comes the torment of the invocation, and the two lacerating G’s in which all Rodolfo’s pain is condensed. Pavarotti’s voice, so luminous until now, cracks to express his grief, bringing the opera to a close in a mood of the most profound emotion. In my turn, I cannot finish without endorsing a declaration by Rodolfo Celletti who, after recalling different performers in the role for one particularity or another, affirms: “I have heard this one and that one, but one thing I feel I must say, under oath, even in a courtroom. I have never heard a voice that belongs to Rodolfo more than that of Luciano Pavarotti.”15
On Stage
I hope at this point that the reader understands that this examination of *La Bohème*, which is so biased towards the tenor's part, was motivated by the excellence of Pavarotti's performance, which I have tried to bring out in this brief assessment. If the recording I have dwelled on reaches such a high level that it has been rarely equaled, it is because the protagonist is surrounded by an equally extraordinary cast, because the orchestra and the chorus play and sing with elegance and unending participation in the drama, because the conductor succeeds in finding new and original solutions, going beyond a performance tradition that he is able to renew right from its roots. It is a performance that helped to produce a shift in critical opinion about Puccini, since after listening to it the composer gained new fans.

Yet no innovation exists if the performers are not able to make their contribution, and the modernity of this new concept is brought to life by the talent of the main vocal couple, and by the perfect blend of the entire cast. After falling in love with *Bohème*, thanks in particular to this interpretation, I had the chance to see a performance of the classic production by Zeffirelli (first staged in 1963, with none other than Karajan conducting) at La Scala. It was 1979, Carlos Kleiber conducted, Ileana Cotrubas sang the role of Mimì, Pavarotti was Rodolfo, at which point he was thoroughly well-known throughout the entire world and, as I said, already highly criticized. One of the points that I did not mention at the beginning of these pages involves his bulk, which according to many commentators made him hardly believable on stage. Having listened to his voice, and above all having heard him move (grant me the synaesthesia) in the antics of the group scenes, I pictured him much thinner, and I still see him that way now. But the pictures of him in circulation at that time proved me wrong. The curtain rose, the performance began; yes, I noticed that he was
not exactly very thin, but as soon as he opened
his mouth the effect was such that my eyes saw
what the voice let them see. A young man, tall,
very agile, great actor, unconventional: Rodolfo
in short.
PAVAROTTI
La Bohème

Italian text / testo italiano
Al lettore
di Marilena Ferrari

Un anno è trascorso dalla scomparsa di Luciano Pavarotti, per il mondo uno degli ultimi geni della lirica, per me, anche, un amico carissimo.

A Pavarotti mi ha legato un rapporto ininterrotto negli anni, in cui potenti emozioni pubbliche – il lavoro comune al Pavarotti International, gli incontri con figure come il Dalai Lama o Rigoberta Menchú, le grandi serate di musica – si inerociano nella mia memoria con momenti privatisissimi, come le interminabili partite a carte nei piovosi pomeriggi newyorkesi e le lunghe conversazioni in cui brillava il suo eloquio schietto e arguto.

Per questo oggi, per ricordare al mondo il genio scomparso e agli amici il grande personaggio che Luciano è stato, ho realizzato grazie all’impulso e alla collaborazione preziosa di Nicoletta Mantovani, vedova dell’artista, questo omaggio. Che parla di Pavarotti e della Bohème, ovvero dell’opera del suo debutto e quella che ne ha accompagnato la pluridecennale carriera internazionale.

È, questo, l’avvio di un progetto che si articolerà nel tempo, per restituire al mondo non tanto la misura della popolarità di Pavarotti, tuttora intatta, ma la sua qualità più alta, quella dell’incarnazione stessa del belcanto, del genio italiano.

Ricordando Luciano
di Claudio Abbado


Ci eravamo conosciuti a Reggio Emilia. Era la fine di aprile del 1961, dirigevamo Faust e lui aveva debuttato all’opera nel ruolo di Rodolfo nella Bohème, con Francesco Molinari Pradelli. Da allora le nostre strade si sono incrociate più e più volte, sia per amicizia che per motivi professionali. Abbiamo inciso insieme diverse opere, e ricordo con piacere anche un disco con arie di Verdi poco note, fuori dal grande repertorio, come “Oh dolore” dal terzo atto di Attila o la cavatina “Dal più remoto esilio” dal primo atto dei Due Foscari.

Mi piace ricordare il Ballo in maschera con l’Orchestra della Scala, con Piero Cappuccilli, Shirley Verrett, Elena Obraztsova, Daniela Mazzuccato-Meneghini, Luigi Roni. E poi il Requiem di Verdi che abbiamo affidato tante volte insieme, in una delle quali, anche un dvd, registrato nella chiesa di Santa Maria Sopra Minerva a Roma: con lui, sul palco, Nicolaj Ghiaurov, Marilyn Horne e Renata Scotto.

Ogni volta che ci si ritrova con Luciano era un piacere, un divertimento, apprezzavo il suo modo di affrontare la musica. Era una persona alla mano, molto presente, viva, con la quale ho avuto sempre un rapporto fratello.
Luciano e a me. 

Scioccando il filo dei ricordi, posso dire che per molti versi La bohème è stata l’opera cruciale del mio rapporto con Luciano Pavarotti, ora quelle che mi suscitano un ondata di ricordi straordinari.

È infatti in una Bohème a Mantova, all’inizio degli anni Settanta, che Luciano e io siamo conosciuti e abbiamo cantato per la prima volta insieme. Eravamo prescortati coetanei: lui era poco più che un débutant, io avvenente esordiente, a diciotto anni. Poi sono venuti una Traviata a Londra, I Capuletti e i Montecchi alla Scala, i lunghi anni dei grandi successi.

Dall’allora è nata, la nostra, una lunga vicenda di amicizia e di performance comune. Ricordo il nostro debutto insieme al Metropolitan con I Trovatore: il regali di entrambi, felicissimi e nervosissimi. Ricordo la quantità innumerevole di “s” la bohème con cui ho incominciato la nostra carriera, a San Francisco, nel 1979.

In queste lunghe anni percorso, La bohème ci ha sempre accompagnati, quasi per un segno del destino penso a quello che abbiamo cantato a Miami, a quella di Torero del Lago nel 1975, ma soprattutto all’esperienza pionieristica della riproduzione video dell’esecuzione del 1977 al Metropolitan, con James Levine direttore, che ha fatto epoca.

Di occasione in occasione l’intesa e l’affiatamento maturavano, anche quando ci si diceva, “che la Filarmonica Romana di renata Scotto è stata certo memorabile come quelle dei nostri anni più felici e nervosi”. Ricordo l’emozione che sapeva creare nel terzo atto nel recita storica, a cominciare dal sottoscritto, con la voce di Luciano che la Filarmonica Romana di renata Scotto ha绳fatto da regista. Con lui mi sarebbe piaciuto fare, per poterlo dirigere da regista. Con lui mi sarebbe piaciuto fare, con lui amare, le opere che hanno visto la nostra unione è stata professionale comune, una Traviata, un Ballo in maschera, una bohème con me alla regia e lui sul palcoscenico sarebbero state certe memorabili come quelle dei nostri anni più felici.

Luciano, poi, si è avventurato in esperienze ancora più apertamente popolari, pur mantengendo il suo livello d’eccellenza, mentre da parte mia ho scelto di rimanere fedele all’opera d’arte. Per un certo periodo, in anni più vicini a noi, le nostre strade si sono un po’ allontanate, così come inevitabilmente forse il nostro tempo e la nostra musica. Ma a noi il bel canto italiano è ormai definitivamente alla categoria dei melomani sofisticati, dell’aristocrazia degli spettatori sempre più estesi e cosmopolite, non più limitata a quelli che abbiamo definito, con Luciano, “megalomanìi”, ai successi che hanno dato vita alla nostra esecuzione pubblica.

Non ci è da discutere” disse a Luciano. “Abbiamo un Dio che ci guida, ed è Puccini, non possiamo negare le sue aree strette se non quelle indicate da lui.

Rigemarkere o rivisitare questi momenti indimenticabili che abbiamo vissuti, se non per quei grani di sapere trasmettere e far apprezzare come un valore positivo, un senso d’identità, un orgoglio per l’italianità, che abbiamo costantemente avuto la nostra identità di cantanti italiani, portatori fondamentali, ma avevamo la possibilità di essere resi popolari, su palcoscenici più importanti, non solo incidevamo dischi, non solo incidevamo dischi, i nuovi media permettevano. Luciano e io non solo cantavamo rispetto a chi ci aveva preceduto, dall’amplificazione che i tecnici ci hanno offerto, ma ci siamo aggiunto per dare un senso di unità e di continuità, per offrire una visione unita a quella della generazione che ci ha preceduto, e sempre con la responsabilità di portare l’arte della voce dentro il cuore del pubblico e degli spettatori.

Portavo con me, ora che Luciano non ci è più, un piccolo rimpianto. In questi ultimi decenni, in cui mi sono dedicato con grande passione a insegnare alla regia lirica, non mi è mai successo di poterlo dirigere da regista. Con lui mi sarebbe piaciuto fare, con lui amare, le opere che hanno visto la nostra unità. Non è una riminiscenza, non è una nostalgia, ma è una constatazione di quanto siamo diventati, non solo come cantanti, ma anche come umani.

Certo, è cambiato il mondo, è cambiato il pubblico, ma il bel canto italiano è rimasto un valore, un simbolo, una tradizione. E io, come Luciano, ho voluto continuare a farlo, a portare la voce, la bellezza, la passione per la musica, anche quando il pubblico non ci ascoltava, anche quando il mondo si allontanava. Ma non ho mai smesso di credere nella potenza della voce, nella sua capacità di attraversare i tempi, di toccare i cuori, di creare emozioni.

In fondo al cuore di ognuno di noi che ha interpretato questa opera nel corso del tempo, si ascoltava e si sentiva la voce di Luciano, la sua voce, la sua interpretazione, la sua passione. E quando ci siamo incontrati di nuovo in occasione della festa di Levine direttore, che ha fatto epoca, ci siamo sorpresi di trovarci in un luogo dove il tempo sembrava non essere più una sfida, ma una promessa di nuovi impegni, di nuove avventure.

Le cose si sono filate, ma il ricordo di quegli anni, di quegli spazi, rimangono come un tessuto che unisce le generazioni, le culture, le esperienze. E io, come Luciano, ho voluto continuare a farlo, a portare la voce, la bellezza, la passione per la musica, anche quando il pubblico non ci ascoltava, anche quando il mondo si allontanava. Ma non ho mai smesso di credere nella potenza della voce, nella sua capacità di attraversare i tempi, di toccare i cuori, di creare emozioni.

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1972 al Metropolitan arrivò la conclusione di questo mito, con le felle, dei rigori di Donizetti, dove i nostri amici mandarono in visibilio il pubblico, e Luciano spezzò ogni barriera umana con nove stupendi di petto. Anni dopo ci ritrovammo insieme con Ippolita e a praticarlo sistematicamente in Italia. Da Illica e Giacosa, pur di convincerlo che le sue fatiche non erano state inutile, e anche dopo la morte di Giacosa (1906) l'editore giunse fino a crearsi un metodo di lavoro perfettamente funzionale. Il secolo è estremamente veloce nel lavoro. Giacosa amava scrivere con agio, limitare ogni dettaglio. Si sfogò con Puccini per essere stato troppo secco, “correggere, tagliare, riappiccicare, gonfiare a dovere per smagrire a sinistra” (Gara, 123, p. 115), e per tre volte minacciò di ritirarsi dal lavoro. L'editore, giunto lì per aiutarlo in anteriore parte dello spartito di Bohème, pur di convincerlo che le sue fattezze non erano state vaste, ed ogni amarezza sparisce quando il drammaturgo, alla sua prima esperienza di librettista, complessa quale musicista aveva contribuito a far nascere: Puccini ha superato ogni mia aspettativa...” e cuopiere adesso la sua tonalità di verso e accenti (Giacosa a Ricordi, 29 giugno 1895, Carner, p. 137).

Lo stesso Ricordi, che per il vero non era più il critico di giudizio di un librettista, o perlomeno non era più l'unità del complesso, poté il suo ruolo di favorevole. Ancora il famoso “toccia, strofina la stessa posizione, ma non ci credo, ma cercare di essere più accorti e più attenti” (Gara, 166, p. 15). In seguito entrambi i letterati si abituano agli esteri, rassegnandosi ai suoi repentini cambi d'idea. Mentre stava versificando il libretto di Turco Giacosa scriveva a Ricordi:

Rinuncio solennemente di darsì a stasera o domattina una gran copia di lavoro compiuto. Sono le modifiche che proponerò al Puccini: Per cui si riconoscerà da me il lavoro compiuto (1896, Gara, 166, p. 149).

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Grazie all’abilità di Edoardo Sonzogno la sua ditta era divenuta Manon quasi certamente non aveva ancora preso la decisione, come avesse già preso in considerazione il lavoro di Murger, ma nuvole. Non è improbabile che il toscano, lettore onnivoro, probabilmente il 19 o il 20 marzo, il compositore napoletano

Esistono comunque parecchi motivi per supporre che le cose (si trattava, fra l’altro di un’opera d’attualità per la scena ponderosi. Perciò non ci sarebbe di che stupirsi se Puccini e artistica in cui nacque

Più di qualsiasi altro documento quest’ultima lettera firmata (“Il Corriere della Sera”, 24 marzo 1893).

Il pubblico giudicherà.

La dichiarazione su “Il Secolo” di ieri del Maestro Leoncavallo non hanno ancora finito il libretto. Resta dunque affermata, e che ne parlò ad Illica e Giacosa, i quali a suo dire, al quale or son due giorni il maestro Leoncavallo dichiarò... [\ldots] Il maestro Puccini, musica di questo soggetto dell’opera di Leoncavallo... Povero disgraziato!... –

Entusiasmo [\ldots] Ed ora ecco preparato bene il terreno per il successo personale, sopprimendo ogni elemento scabroso (nono capitolo), il titolo del quadro di Monet, in appresso fuoruscite, risposte, e avevano guardato con ammirazione. Questo uscì nel 1851 col premiò ascolti, ridescritti e risposte, e avevano guardato con ammirazione. Questo uscì nel 1851 col
La messa a punto dell’opera fu un lavoro di cesellò a quattro mani, con Giulio Ricordi che spesso interveniva per fornire pareti illuminanti. Fu lui, ad esempio, a suggerire che in basso, al terzo, contasse da fondo scena, il vecchio e orizzontalmente intonaco precedente internamente davanti ai tavoli di Cafè Momus; inoltre insistette perché l’opera, immaturo da autentica passione per il vecchio spazio, venisse ben gestita. Ricordi decise di dare la massima bellezza a chi conoscesse soltanto la posizione scenica dei Maccharles (Carulli, Ristori vien dal Cafè, e studiare l’ambiente. L’infatuazione durò fino al l’ultima inverosimiglianza a lavoro già concluso. Nel primo periodo d’autunno (ottobre 1895; Gara, 139, pp. 126-127). Fu scritto il dialetto siciliano Susanna (Colline), Antonio Pini-Corsi (Schaunard). In qualità di ammodernamento dell’opera Monfalcone (Musetta), Evan Gorga (Rodolfo), Tieste Wilmant (Marcello), Camilla Pasini (Petit bateau) e Camilla Pasini (Mimì) e Camilla Pasini (Mimì) e Camilla Pasini (Mimì).

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attuale, osservare previsione che a quel tempo il passaggio nei dintorni del Massaferro era quasi incontaminato. Non esisteva nemmeno la via di Puccini, che fu costruita alla fine del secolo, e qui la prima presenza di gente che nel determinato tratto dei personaggi di Marcello e Musetta. Sempre restando nel campo delle suggestioni, anche le piccole ricevute ispirate dal bohème dell'opera non riuscirono, la società che Puccini e Mattevi colpirono e la cultura dei generi della musica, ai primi cento anni del Seicento e dell'ambiente della musica sotto il dominio della nobiltà e dell'aristocrazia, che trasformò l'arte in un oggetto di mercato. Nelle sue composizioni, Puccini espresse un senso dell'agiatezza di una classe che si distingueva dal mondo dei borghesi, ma che era anche una classe che cercava di recedere dalla realtà della borghesia. Dal punto di vista della musica, Puccini fu un musicista che si distinse per la sua capacità di creare un mondo fantastico che si era ispirato alla realtà della borghesia, ma che aveva una dimensione poetica e artistica che lo distingueva dalle altre forme artistiche contemporanee. Puccini fu un musicista che creò un mondo fantastico che era anche una rappresentazione della borghesia, ma che era anche una rappresentazione di un mondo che si era distinto dalla realtà della borghesia.
Tutto il quadro iniziale della Bohème è un esempio compiuto della nuova via batattata dal compositore. Per fissare un ritratto individuale e collettivo del gruppo di artisti squattrinati Puccini coordinò in scelte di particolari: esempi melodici lirici, agli effetti musicistici: tonalità in funzione semantica, colori luminosi e vari in ordine. Il traslo della situazione poggia comune su temi che animano i diversi episodi in cui i protagonisti rivelano il proprio carattere. Guardando alla tecnica narrativa applicata in Manon Lescaut, è facile constatare l'abilità con cui venacolano fino il retaggio italiano della reminiscenza e la tecnica del Leitmotiv (cui Manon risulta più vincolata). L'avvicino di Bohème ci consente altresì di percevere come Puccini andasse prendendo le devote distanze da Wagner, configurando un suo modo peculiare. Esplorò spesso, ad esempio, di dare una connotazione unica alle melodie, per ricavare ulteriori funzionalità drammatiche tramite rimandi polivalenti, ricorrendo frequentemente al seguente schema: a due

La prima appassionata melodia dà inizio alla retorica – Esempio

La melodia del duetto tra Rodolfo e Marcello, che dunque appare per primo. L'affinità motivo che domina la scena in cui gli amici ricevono il padrone di casa (es. 1.2), e che dunque appare per primo. L'affinità con trasporto i pregi del Quartiere Latino Fa, maggiore, che sa d'organetto, su cui il musicista decanta la tradizionale tecnica del parlante. Il tema del musicista si allena a un'idea secondaria (K5) con grande regolarità: su questo diletto meccanismo poggia l'esempio. In questo scorcio non si tratta di esprimere sentimenti particolari, ma soltanto di coordinare le azioni del famelico gruppetto che, incurante di Schumann, si affaccenda intorno al camino e alla tavola. Il pocho viene interrotto da una cantilena di trudi parallele in Fa maggiore, che sa d'organetto, su cui il musicista decanta con trasporto i pregi del Quartiere Latino (F).

La prima appassionata melodia dà inizio alla retorica – Esempio

La prima appassionata melodia dà inizio alla retorica – Esempio
Il successivo episodio di Brinniet presenta il quarto finalmente rimuovi nel rispeciare un inestimabile confine al problema della povertà, il pagamento dell'affitto arretrato. Anche qui sottolineiamo la legislazione minore, che ha un fondo di malinconica verità, e l'amour sapore di una melodiegetica situazione degli anni che passano.

Finalmente a questo momento ogni scena ha espresso propri temi, ma dalla quarta e conclusiva Puccini adotta la tecnica della reminiscenza. Il tema del Quartiere Latino (F) ricorda la meta del quartetto rimembrando in moto l'azione; soltanto dopo la melodia dei "cibi bili" (B) porta l'attenzione su Rodolfo, e anticipa l'ingresso carattere sentimentale dei suoi iniziali, ma un fondo di malinconica verità, e l'amour sapore di una melodiegetica situazione degli anni che passano.

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Il repertorio di oggetti della Bohème è vastissimo; essi compaiono in scena, o vengono evocati nei discorsi dei protagonisti, oppure identificati dalla folla nelle vetrine dei negozi o sui bufali degli ambulanti in quella sorta di bazar che è la piazza antistante il Café Momus. Ogni oggetto acquista un'identità a seconda delle circostanze, ma in un rapporto di reciprocità cede un po' di se stesso al personaggio o alla situazione. Da connotare dalle cose che identificano i personaggi nella loro professione, dai libri di Colline al quaderno di Marcello, dal corsa di Scarpia al calamino e alla prima di Rodolfo.

Il culmine, nei suoi parti diversi, è il tempestoso incitare alla fanfara, e la conducibile, e l'addosso, e la situazione. A cominciare dalle cose che ciascun individuo a se stesso, che ciascun individuo a se stesso, che ciascun individuo a se stesso, che ciascun individuo a se stesso, che ciascun individuo a se stesso.

La platea di terra, color locale sparo a pere mani, è inserita nel contesto drammatico del momento in cui l'opera si svolge, e la stessa esatta situazione che ciascun individuo a se stesso, che ciascun individuo a se stesso.

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Sui due temi, l'uno dei quali trapassa nell'altro senza del rimpianto per la perduta bellezza di Mimì: 38 La giovinezza non ha che una stagione – La giovinezza non ha che una stagione – La giovinezza non ha che una stagione – La giovinezza non ha che una stagione – La giovinezza non ha che una stagione – La giovinezza non ha che una stagione – La giovinezza non ha che una stagione – La giovinezza non ha che una stagione – La giovinezza non ha che una stagione – La giovinezza non ha che una stagione – La giovinezza non ha che una stagione.
Torniamo ora a guardare con maggiore attenzione al momento in cui la cuffietta appare nella seconda aria, dopo aver scoperto una delle tante esiti emotivi che la musica è nascostamente in grado di offrire alla nostra sensibilità. Puccini passa con enunciata una sinfonia di melodie, in cui il coro delle grida e il richiamo del vecchio pastore come di chi rammenti improvvisamente qualcosa. Mimì, con un gesto di piacere, richiama il passato e insieme a lui l'emozione, e insieme a lui l'emozione con una melodia lirica.

Amaro rimpianto del tempo felice, riconquista un appunto di un momento di effimera gioia, frazione del quotidiano: la cuffietta rappresenta tutto questo. Una continuità che viene spezzata dal mancato riconoscimento. A questo punto, la musica può scatenare grazie a quella frase di sette note unica, emozionante passione possa scatenare grazie a quella frase di sette note, una frase lacerante (es. 10.2), sconfessa la disinvoltura con cui venivano ricordati i precedenti oggetti, a La maggiore: la rotura è lieve, ma suggerisce il senso di un'esitazione, come se la musica stesse cercando di farsi strada tra le dissonanze timbriche.

Se ne perdi il nastro ideale di una frase di sette note, una frase che aveva un nastro ideale di una frase di sette note, una frase che aveva un passo giusto: "Il ritorno in scena di Musetta e Marcello trasforma l'insieme in un quartetto, con l'efficace contrapposizione fra le coloritissime suonature di batteria e cornamusa, che sembravano essere per così dire una seconda musica, una musica che era accompagnata da una melodia di Rodolfo. In questo momento, si è come se la musica si fermi e si guardi intorno, come se la musica si fermi e si guardi intorno, come se la musica si fermi e si guardi intorno, come se la musica si fermi e si guardi intorno.

Sulla stessa linea è il sentimento malinconico del brano conclusivo, che Rodolfo e Mimì attaccano come un duetto a gradevolissima "Addio dolce svegliare alla mattina" (A): un finale di Rodolfo, sulla stessa melodia (es. 10.1), aveva cercato di motivare a Marcello la sua fuga di casa.

Solo quattro note sussemmate con dolenzia, una triade di Re maggiore subito rotta dalla prima disperata espansione lirica ("Marcello aiuto"), poi il passaggio al minore, quasi come un modo che le stesse sorga la gola. Il ritratto di Rodolfo è sancito dalla sua melodia (B e P, n. 14) combinata in contrappunto e seguita dal tema della bohème (A): questi due usi di rimandi concentrati in pochissime battute comincia a prefigurare il clima del ricordo, della separazione, del distacco dall'amore. Ma ecco che dopo il risveglio torna: "L'addio dolce svegliare alla mattina" su una melodia d'intenso lirismo. Uscite conoscere la sua origine, la malinconica "Sole e amore" (1853), ancora un esempio di come Puccini, al di là delle circostanze in cui un'idea melodica nasceva, sapesse sempre al tempo opportuno trovarle e svolgerne in un momento chiave il loro effetto.

Esempio 7.1 - n. 4°
Esempio 7.2 - n. 6°
Esempio 7.3 - n. 28°
Esempio 8.2 - n. 20°
Esempio 10.1 - n. 19
Esempio 12 - n. 30°
Esempio 11 - n. 27
Esempio 10.12 - n. 27
impazienti dei strumenti, che introduce concretamente un discorso già iniziato. Questo accorgimento si può leggere in chiave formale, come momento di amplificato riepilogo in scene chiuse. Ma è del tutto evidente che l’esasperazione suona producendo una sensazione di eufasia quasi a voler nascondere la nostalgia, sentimenti dominanti di questa scena. Rodolfo e Marcello stanno tentando di lavorare, ma il ricordo delle amanti, evocate dalle rispettive melodie (II-V-I, I) lo interrompe. Puccini anche qui si rivela piuttosto preciso, ad esempio nel citare solo la frase iniziale di “Mi chiamo Mimì”, evitando il tema così come si presenta all’ingresso della fanciulla in solfa, in questo momento, infatti. Marcello sta evocando l’immagine di una Mimi lontana dalla malattia, che gira “in carozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivico del flauto interne torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infine torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infine torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infine torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infine torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infine torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infine torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infine torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infine torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infine torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infine torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infine torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infine torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infine torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infine torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infine torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infine torna per smascherare la loro incapacità di recitare quello che gira “in carrozza, vestita come una regina”. Il motivo del flauto infi...
..
osservazione, peraltro il Mimì (I-II-III-II-I). Ottima anche nella conclusione dell’aria di successione al basso si presenti nota altresì come la stessa congedo materialistico dalla vita. E finale, rifiutando qualsiasi che si tratti di una strategia della “Bohème”.

Drabkin (p. 45) trova che la fine del preludio all’atto terzo, la lettura fosse, . Si veda il finale La traviata riferimento, conscio o inconscio che “mal sottile” Puccini ebbe a progressivo imporsi della malattia piccoli gruppi di archi connota il protagonista prima della frase del vocale del principe Calaf alla vista, come significativa frase conclusiva nel primo atto di “mal sottile” Puccini ebbe a progressivo imporsi della malattia piccoli gruppi di archi connota il protagonista prima della frase del vocale del principe Calaf alla vista, come significativa frase conclusiva nel primo atto di

La bohème di Giacomo Puccini: 100 anni dopo, in “La bohème” di Giacomo Puccini: 100 anni dopo, in

La bohème di Giacomo Puccini: 100 anni dopo, in “La bohème” di Giacomo Puccini: 100 anni dopo, in

38. Carl Dahlhaus, Die Musik

39. Carl Dahlhaus, Die Musik

40. Carl Dahlhaus, Die Musik

41. Murger, Scènes de la Vie de Bohème, cit., p. 396.

42. Legittimamente Drabkin (Il linguaggio musicale della “Bohème”, cit., p. 114) ritiene questa ricorrente "Amico se non nove case di silenzio magnetico della Bohème ... Gli accordi di settima di terza specie e ... Gli accordi di settima di terza specie e ... il problema-Puccini imboccando la strada maestra.

43. Luciano Pavarotti: Rosso e nero. La voce del 6 settembre 2007, e non poteva che morire sul far della magistrale concertazione di Herbert von Karajan e Carlos Kleiber, per citare solo i nomi degli interpreti: “Pavarotti-Freni”.

44. Carl Dahlhaus, Die Musik

45. Drabkin (Il linguaggio musicale della “Bohème”, cit., p. 101) ritiene che si tratti di una strategia musicale da volgere come un’elaborazione lineare della tonica finale solitamente puntuale, interpretazione elettiva di questa ritenute, che lo legge, così, a un modo musicale idiosincrasia della vita. Il nota altrimenti come lo stesso successivo al basso si presenti anche nella conclusione dell’aria di sette (4-8-11-8-4). Ossa osservazione, peraltro il
vissuto una bella avventura\(\ldots\) come un ritorno al suo mondo più autentico, quello del Teatro lirico, un mondo che ha avuto, e avrà ancora, assai nei toni, di continuità. Egli sale immediatamente subito ai primi acuti (es. 3.1, I, 123 [5]) per avvolgere la frase e la forcella che ne sormonta la parte più bassa (La Bohème, n. 3, ben nove La Bohème). Esempio – I, 123 [5]

Il violino solo (senza viola, dunque più vibrante nel dialogo col protagonista) intona, con tocco struggente, la frase dei cibi begli, mentre la voce stacca un breve recitativo enfatico la frase: “Per un mondo è puro piacere sonoro, e al tempo stesso espressione pittorica di uno slancio d’artista. In questo esordio il protagonista deve anche dimostrare eccellenti dotti di attore, assieme ai suoi compagni, prima contemplando l’effimero freschierelo che “scricchiola, increspasi, muore” (dunque “Abbasso l’Autor!”), poi umendosi alla gioia del pasto insieme, offerto a piccola musica, e deciso e congiunto con la locuzione “coo la battaglia piangente il fianco” e il suo barlume di quel senso di attesa indefinita che Pavarotti fa percepire con una sorta di pothos, come se volesse premunirsi un evento speciale in qualche modo che costruito dentro di sè. Allo scopo di esprimere un analogo tema amoroso di un personaggio."

Il rango vocale più adatto per questo brano è quello del tenore lirico, registro che sta a metà fra il tenore di grazia e quello drammatico, caratterizzato da un registro alto, che si evince nel dialogo col protagonista, ma che chiama in causa ancora il passato del tempo [4-5].

Il secondo scoglio sono le frequenti espansioni liriche, che portano il tenore a fraseggiare in zona decisamente acuta.

Esempio C – t. 33 [6-05']

Si verifica inoltre che al fraseggio in zona acuta ne segue uno in zona di passaggio (cfr. “Talor dal mio forziere”, es. 3.1, p. 105 [2'30"] e si noti l’ampio schermo, che è un indicatore imprescindibile per dare senso e sapore ai versi). Gli acuti sono numerosissimi (cfr. Sia,, ben nove La Bohème). Dal tuo jocu La Bohème prevede l’emissione del famoso Do di potto (si noti, ancora una volta, la legatura che avvolge la frase e la formella che ne sormonta la parte ascendente):

Esempio D – t. 33 [6-33']

Il secondo accento è suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e suonato con un’acuta e si noti l’ampio schermo, che è un indicatore imprescindibile per dare senso e sapore ai versi).

Si deve rilevare, tuttavia, che chi ne ha prevista essere molto interessante per il cantante a far si che la frase e la formella che ne sormonta la parte ascendente:
La voce divenne più appassionata e giovanile esuberante al personaggio –, che, se non rispetta la forcella, conferisce un tono di eccellenza. La musica riesce a inquadrare le azioni dei personaggi mentre si muovono tra la folla, riservando una specie di raccordo fonico che si approfondisce nell'aria del quadro terzo ("Donde lieta uscì", cfr. es. 6.2, p. 193): poi Musetta conquista il proscenio, e con lei Marcello, ma al di sopra della coppia che sta per riconciliarsi, e di quella che si è appena formata, sta il concetto espresso dal "Fremon già nell'anima" ch'è motto di passione. Intanto Marcello, in nome della libertà in amore che il compagno, dal canto suo, s减enda ugualmente, condivide la gioia e l'atto di accarezzare il passato prossimo.

Perdita tra la gente

Le scene si intercalano in modo continuamente variato, ma sempre con la心理健康. L'azione avviorà la trama in modo da imporre un effetto forte e dinamico nella successiva fase della recitazione. Le scene si alternano in modo da creare un effetto di tensione e ritmo.
parla al passato; l’unica spia, quasi a intermittenza, è il ma in un momento di rottura, e non d’unione come amorosa per la seconda volta nel corso della narrazione, delle voci nel duetto, che evolve in quartetto quando un’oasi di tenerezza (e dignità) per il soprano, l’unione fra Marcello e Musetta, la cui risata richiama il pittore torna alla ribalta il contrappeso leggero della vicenda sulla paura”, sul tema di Mimì [2’46'’], ed ecco ancora di una divagazione sul tema della malattia (”Facile aghiuzioni: Mimì tossisce, e si rivela. Appena il tempo basta amor!” [1’52’’]. L’esito è la più amara delle

Ma breve gioventù

Il finale terzo lascia un’impressione indelebile nell’ascoltatore, ma quando attacca il quadro che chiude con simmetria il cerchio della Bohème (il sipario si alza sui medesimi personaggi nella stessa soffitta, l’orchestra intona lo stesso tema, anche se con significativi cambiamenti) la fotonemesi impone (e raddoppia il vuoto di Rodolfo). Il protagonista si ammala. In un ulteriore gradino verso la ricezione del messaggio che Pavarotti mette in questa significativa chiusura (che accosta la breve gioventù alla morte dell’amore, grazie all’identità melodica, solfeggiosi) con un filo di voce fino a smorzarlo, è tale da farci percepire l’intensità del sentimento e, insieme, la soluzione di continuità. Se l’articolazione di questo episodio è una sorta di raccourci dell’incontro amoroso, l’intero quadro quasi si svolge seguendo la falsariga del primo. E l’episodio sentimentale e la definitiva svolta tragica. Puccini e suoi librietisti hanno perciò inserito simmetricamente un altro intermezzo buffo: nella prima scena in soffitta di Marcello e Rodolfo s’innesta lo scherzo collettivo, fatto di brio, movimento, e riducendo la tensione della fase finale della malattia di lei, fino alla resa perfetta della frase) la scelta del compositore, rispondendo all’amata, sale nuovamente al La, acuto, stavalta in pianissimo riducendo dimanica fin quasi all’impassibile.

Vivacità e movimento, ma soprattutto per la varietà di atteggiamenti richiesti a due, e che innesta lo scherzo collettivo, fatto di brio, movimento, treca, svolgimenti melodici, fraternizzioni di poche battute, trionfi di danza e quant’altro. Tutto il gruppetto di interpreti si muove leggero nella trama musicale, e si butta nell’azione consueta, che prevede persino un episodio di coppia e spada.

Il girarotto indubbiamente potrebbe durare all’infinity, e invece si schianta col passo dell’accordo di Mu minore, che accompagna l’annuncio finale di Musetta. Mimì si trascina salendo le scale, in preda alla malattia [12]. "Ov'è" replica Rodolfo [7’’]; due sillabe che la voce di Pavarotti trasforma in un grumo di disperazione, mentre gli amici urlano un’ampia cadenza che anticipa veramente "tutto è finito", ma che si interrompe subito. Pochi secondi sono bastati per spalancare un abisso, a dispetto delle parole "Era tuttora tempo di muovere" del primo scambio fra gli ex amanti. "Mi vuoi con tu? – Ah, mia Mimì, sì sempre! sempre! risponde lui [55'’]. la partecipazione dei due interpreti è così forse da trasformare l’ascoltatore nello stesso viaggio, che da qui in poi in una palinsesto verso la scia, Ah. "Ah, mia, mia Mia!" [53'’], canta Mimì sulla testa del suo tema, Pavarotti la zittisce con dolce disperazione, evocando la "Benedetta bocca" [236’’], vale un altro intermezzo "di donne" (cfr. es. 13.2, p. 196 [21’’]). Leitmotiv del sentimento e, insieme, la soluzione di continuità, grazie all’identità melodica, solfeggiosi) con un filo di voce fino a smorzarlo, è tale da farci percepire l’intensità del sentimento e, insieme, la soluzione di continuità. Se l’articolazione di questo episodio è una sorta di raccourci dell’incontro amoroso, l’intero quadro quasi si svolge seguendo la falsariga del primo. E l’episodio sentimentale e la definitiva svolta tragica. Puccini e suoi librietisti hanno perciò inserito simmetricamente un altro intermezzo buffo: nella prima scena in soffitta di Marcello e Rodolfo s’innesta lo scherzo collettivo, fatto di brio, movimento, e riducendo la tensione della fase finale della malattia di lei, fino alla resa perfetta della frase) la scelta del compositore, rispondendo all’amata, sale nuovamente al La, acuto, stavalta in pianissimo riducendo dimanica fin quasi all’impassibile.

La scena a quanto è brevissima (meno di cinque minuti di musica), ma intonsissima (paro che duri molto più a lungo), e brillantissima (si vorrebbe che non finisse mai). Per non pensare alle necessità materiali si regredisce espressamente "il mio amore", risuonando al tempo stesso un dolce rincorsa che innesta lo scherzo collettivo, fatto di brio, movimento, e riducendo la tensione della fase finale della malattia di lei, fino alla resa perfetta della frase) la scelta del compositore, rispondendo all’amata, sale nuovamente al La, acuto, stavalta in pianissimo riducendo dimanica fin quasi all’impassibile.

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E immediatamente dopo, si presti attenzione al modo 
crescendo dell'uomo che si sovrappone al 
protagonista ruota un cast altrettanto straordinario, 
e che attacca a I, 2918: lo slittamento 
mezzo tono dalla frase dei violini 
6. Di solito si abbassa tutto di 
la naturalezza di chi parla. E questo 
della commozione più profonda. A mia volta, non posso 
di Rodolfo. La voce di Pavarotti, sin qui così lucente, 
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