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### **Long Live the Bohemian Life!** *Puccini's beloved opera highlights Opera San José's season*

SAN JOSÉ, CA— **Opera San José** presents Puccini's timeless classic *La bohème*. A story of young love set against the impoverished but joyous lifestyle of 19<sup>th</sup>-century bohemian Paris, *La bohème* is Puccini's most beloved opera and for many the quintessential opera. Eight performances are scheduled from April 23 through May 8 at the **California Theatre**, 345 South First Street in downtown San José. Tickets are on sale at the **Opera San José Box Office**, by phone at (408) 437-4450 or online at [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org). This production of *La bohème* is sponsored by the Applied Materials Foundation, and made possible, in part, by a Cultural Affairs Grant from the City of San José.

Based on Henri Murger's memoir *Scenes de la vie de bohème*, with libretto by **Luigi Illica** and **Giuseppe Giacosa**, *La bohème* is **Puccini** at his most tender and sympathetic. It is Christmas Eve, 1840. Four passionate, yet penniless artists share an attic apartment in the Latin Quarter of Paris: Rodolfo, a poet; Marcello, a painter; Colline, a philosopher; and Schaunard, a musician. Though leading a life of poverty, they are bursting with youthful idealism and a lust for life. When Rodolfo falls for the beautiful but frail seamstress, Mimì, their ill-fated love affair becomes the emotional center of the story, as this band of bohemians experience the joy and the heartbreak of living in the raw splendor of the moment.

*La bohème* premiered on February 1, 1896 at Turin's Teatro Regio and launched its 38-year-old composer into international fame. One of the most performed operas around the world, *La bohème* has touched the hearts of audiences for over a century and has inspired films and most notably the Pulitzer Prize-winning Broadway musical, *Rent*, a modern-age tale of artists and musicians struggling to survive in Manhattan's Lower East Side under the shadow of the AIDS epidemic. *The New York Times* called

**La bohème** “the world’s most popular opera” and for many it is the quintessential opera; a touching story with universal appeal, heightened by the expressive beauty of a beloved composer.

Italian composer **Giacomo Puccini** (1858-1924) is distinguished as one of the most popular composers in opera history. He began his music career as a church organist, but after seeing a production of Verdi’s *Aida* he knew his future was in opera. After his early success with the opera *Manon Lescaut* in 1893, Puccini continued his productive partnership with librettists **Luigi Illica** and **Giuseppe Giacosa** to adapt Murger’s memoir *Scenes de la vie de bohème* for the opera stage. Further collaboration with the librettists resulted in the creation of *Tosca* (1900) and *Madama Butterfly* (1904). **La bohème** was Puccini’s fourth opera and is widely considered a masterpiece. A master of the verismo style, **Puccini** was especially sympathetic to the life of the young Parisian bohemians, having himself been a poor artist in his youth.

**David Rohrbaugh**, Opera San José’s founding Music Director and Principal Conductor, will conduct **La bohème**. **Dr. Rohrbaugh** has conducted more than 60 productions and 600 performances, including company premieres of *La rondine*, *Der fliegende Holländer*, *Falstaff*, *Un ballo in maschera*, and *Werther*. He is a professor emeritus of voice and opera from San José State University, where he taught for 30 years and co-directed the Opera Workshops with Opera San José General Director, **Irene Dalis**. The May 1 and 3 performances will be conducted by **Joseph Marcheso**. **Marcheso** conducted performances of Opera San José’s *Manon* in the 2009-10 season and shared conducting duties in *La Cenerentola*, *The Elixir of Love* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*. He has conducted more than 30 operas with Amato Opera in his native NYC where he was appointed Music Director, and served as conductor and coach at both the Shaker Festival/Albany Symphony and at the Dartington Festival in Dartington, England.

**Timothy Near**, former Artistic Director of San José Repertory Theatre, returns to Opera San José to direct *La bohème*, which she describes as “an opera for all time, because it tells a youthful tale to which we can all relate. We recognize and love these four crazy young artists and their eccentric girlfriends,” says Near. “The recitative is short and energetic and sounds just like people talk; there are great tunes that are loaded with emotional messages and repeated so often we leave the theatre singing. I am thrilled to have the opportunity to remount this beloved Opera San José production, creating the bohemian world of Paris in 1840 with all its colorful eccentricity and youthful passion.”

Previously, **Near** received critical acclaim for her direction of Opera San José's productions of *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *The Crucible*. In 2009, **Near** concluded 22 years as Artistic Director of San José Repertory Theatre, during which time she directed over 35 plays and developed and produced over 25 new works. As a freelance director, she has directed at numerous theaters around the U.S. including the Guthrie Theater, Berkeley Repertory Theatre, La Jolla Playhouse, Ford's Theatre, Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, New York Shakespeare Festival, A Contemporary Theatre of Seattle and most recently, California Shakespeare Theatre, where she received accolades for her riveting production of George Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*.

**Near** directs this revival of Opera San José's acclaimed version of *La bohème* first conceived and directed in 2006 by David Cox with set designs by Kim A. Tolman and costume designs by Barbara Barrett and Patricia Havey. The 2011 production will feature Tolman's new set design for Acts I and IV, new lighting design by Kent Dorsey, and wig and makeup designs by Jeanna Parham.

*La bohème* features current and former members of Opera San José's resident company in principal roles. Tenors **Alexander Boyer** and **Christopher Bengochea** alternate in the role of the handsome, yet insecure poet, Rodolfo. Previously sharing the title role in David Carlson's *Anna Karenina*, sopranos **Jasmina Halimic** and **Jouvanca Jean-Baptiste** will play the role of Mimi, the poor seamstress suffering from consumption. Baritones **Torlef Borsting** and **Krassen Karagiozov** alternate as Marcello, the young painter and Rodolfo's best friend, and the role of the philosopher Colline will be shared by bass-baritone **Isaiah Musik-Ayala** and bass **Silas Elash**. Sopranos **Sandra Bengochea (Rubacalva)** and **Jillian Boye** perform the role of Marcello's flirtatious girlfriend, Musetta. And after delighting Opera San José audiences for four years, former resident artist **Daniel Cilli** returns to the California Theatre stage to play Schaunard, the musician.

### About Opera San José

**Opera San José**, performing at the historic **California Theatre** in downtown San José, is a professional, regional opera company that is unique in the United States. Maintaining a resident company of principal artists, Opera San José specializes in showcasing the finest young professional singers in the nation. In addition to mainstage performances, Opera San José maintains extensive educational programs in schools and in the community at large, and offers *Preview* lectures and *Introduction to Opera* talks for all mainstage productions.

***La bohème***  
*Opera San José presents Puccini's poignant love story*

In Italian with English Supertitles

Cast:	<u>April 23, 28, May 1, 3</u>	<u>April 24, 30, May 6, 8</u>
Rodolfo	Alexander Boyer•	<b>Christopher Bengochea</b> †
Mimi	Jasmina Halimic•	Jouvanca Jean-Baptiste•
Marcello	Torlef Borsting•	Krassen Karagiozov•
Schaunard	Daniel Cilli	Daniel Cilli
Colline	Isaiah Musik-Ayala•	Silas Elash•
Musetta	<b>Sandra Bengochea</b> †	Jillian Boye
Benoit	Paul Murray	Paul Murray
Alcindoro	Stephen Boisvert	Stephen Boisvert
Parpignol	Lee Steward	Lee Steward

• Resident Company † Casting Change

**What:** Opera San José presents Puccini's timeless classic ***La bohème***. A story of young love set against the impoverished, but joyous lifestyle of 19<sup>th</sup>-century bohemian Paris, ***La bohème*** is Puccini's most beloved opera and for many the quintessential opera. Eight performances are scheduled from April 23 through May 8 at the **California Theatre**, 345 South First Street in downtown San José. Tickets are on sale at the **Opera San José Box Office**, by phone at (408) 437-4450 or online at [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org). This production of ***La bohème*** is sponsored by the Applied Materials Foundation, and made possible, in part, by a Cultural Affairs Grant from the City of San José.

**Who:** Composer: Giacomo Puccini  
Libretto: Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica; based on the novel *Scènes de la vie de bohème* by Henri Murger  
Conductor: David Rohrbaugh  
Assistant Conductor: Joseph Marcheso (2 performances- May 1 and 3, 2011)  
Stage director: Timothy Near  
Designers: Kim A. Tolman (sets); Barbara Barrett and Patricia Havey (costumes); Kent Dorsey (lighting); Jeanna Parham (wigs/makeup)

**Dates:** April 23, 24m, 28, 30; May 1m, 3, 6, 8m; 2011

**Time:** "m" indicates matinee at 3pm; all other performances are at 8pm

**Location:** California Theatre, 345 South First Street between San Carlos and San Salvador streets, downtown San José

**Tickets:** \$51–\$101 (includes city facility usage fee) from Opera San José Box Office, 2149 Paragon Dr., San José, CA 95131; 408-437-4450; 408-437-4455 fax; [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org)

Available 90 minutes prior to curtain at the California Theatre box office only: Seniors (65 and older) 10% discount; Students 25 and younger (with student ID) \$11. Group discounts available for parties of 10 or more.

**Photo:** [http://www.operasj.org/boheme\\_hiresimage.html](http://www.operasj.org/boheme_hiresimage.html)

**Press Room:** <http://www.operasj.org/pressroom.html>

To learn more about *La bohème*, please visit [www.operasj.org](http://www.operasj.org) and consider these opportunities:

*La bohème* Preview/Panel Discussion: April 12, 12 noon, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Library, 150 E Fernando Street, downtown San José. Free vocal preview with members of the cast, followed by a panel discussion with members of the creative team. For information, call 408-437-4450.

*La bohème* Preview/Lecture: April 12, San Jose Woman's Club, 75 South 11<sup>th</sup> Street, downtown San José. Doors open at 6:30pm for wine and light hors d'oeuvres; program 7-8pm. Vocal preview with members of the cast, followed by a lecture by General Manager, Larry Hancock. For tickets (\$25), call 408-437-4450.

Introduction to Opera: Before each performance (except opening night), General Manager, Larry Hancock, will present a free 45-minute talk about the opera at the California Theatre, beginning at 6:30pm prior to evening performances and at 1:30pm prior to Sunday matinees. No reservations required.

Opening Night Dinner: A three-course dinner with a performance by a resident artist for Opera San José patrons before the opening night performance on Saturday, April 23. St. Claire Hotel, 302 South Market street, downtown San José. \$60 per person for a three-course dinner catered by Il Fornaio Restaurant. For menu and reservations, call the Opera San José Box Office at 408-437-4450.

Meet the Artists: Meet members of the cast, the stage director, and the conductor immediately after the close of the opening Sunday matinee, April 24, at the California Theatre. Free for matinee attendees.

Amici Night: April 28. Members of Opera San José's Amici Club (young professionals 35 and younger) are invited to the VIP Lounge at the California Theatre for wine and light hors d'oeuvres at 7pm, prior to attending the 8pm performance.

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