

By John Andrew Dowd for HippoPress.com

If anyone thinks that New Hampshire has no taste for grand opera, they should attend Philip Lauriat's Granite State Opera performances. The premier work of the season, Puccini's masterpiece "La Boheme," was presented to an enthusiastic audience in Concord's beautiful Capitol Center for the Arts last Friday and Sunday.

Lauriat is a man of many talents: stage director, producer, conductor, and a fine singer. All of the performers were outstanding, and the orchestra, which sometimes may have played over the singers, generally exhibited an ensemble and tonal beauty that was unexpected from such a diverse group of musicians. The excellent job of preparing sets and lighting did much to enhance the experience and the costumes were lavish.

Lauriat (and, of course, Puccini) transported us to late 19th century Paris in winter, where impoverished young bohemians suffer near-starvation and deprivation to practice their arts. These are not people who are concerned with the fluctuations of their stock portfolios, but are a group of idealistic students who persevere.

The story begins near Christmastime and winter has set in as Rodolfo, the poet, decides to sacrifice his latest work to warm the garret where he lives. Ceremoniously, and with amusing dedications, he burns each page in the fire to keep the room warm. This is interrupted by the arrival of friends, philosopher Colline and musician Schaunard, who arrive with money, food and fuel for the fire.

As the action unfolds and the characters are introduced, we see two passionate love stories, one of which is destined to end unhappily.

The opera features a contrast of comedy and tragedy that sometimes, as at the end, occurs so quickly that extreme emotional feelings make the climax one of the most wrenchingly effective in the genre.

The part of Rodolfo was sung by tenor Vincent Wolfsteiner, a newcomer originally from Germany, who has a powerful natural voice and everything that should bring him success as a dramatic singer.

The leading female part of Mimi was performed by Nouná Karapetian, soprano. She started a bit tentatively, but soon blossomed and displayed a beautiful soprano voice and fine acting.

It is a role made more difficult because it is that of a sickly person (perhaps ill with the 19th century scourge, tuberculosis) and required singing while lying down or seated. She received great applause from the audience during the performance and a tremendous ovation at the end.

Martha Warren, a New Hampshire favorite, performed with a special coquettish talent and displayed her magnificent vocal capabilities as Musetta, lover of Marcello. Always fighting and making up with Musetta, James Kleyla played Marcello, her lover, with a fine voice and a comedic flair. Metropolitan Opera Young Artist Morris Robinson, singing the role of Colline, has a fine, powerful voice and presence that should ensure him a successful career in performing operatic roles and recitals. Sumner Thompson rounded out the excellent cast with a very good performance in the role of Schaunard, the musician.