

Opera Night: *La bohème*

FRIDAY | JULY 15 | 8 PM
THE BREAKERS



This concert is dedicated to **an anonymous donor** in recognition of their generous support of Newport Classical.

Shannon Jennings, Mimì | **Dane Suarez**, Rodolfo | **Kenneth Stavert**, Marcello
Emily Misch, Musetta | **Jonathan McCullough**, Schaunard | **Ryan Kuster**, Colline
Emily Geller, Benoit/Alcindoroga | **Charles Kim**, piano

PUCCINI *La bohème*

(Approximate duration 90 minutes with an intermission)

Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924): *La bohème*, Opera in Four Acts, Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, based on the novel *Scènes de la vie de Bohème* by Henri Murger
Puccini's *La bohème*, one of the most popular and beloved Italian operas, had its inception in the quasi-autobiographical novel *Scènes de la vie de Bohème* by Henri Murger (1822-1861) and a play based on it, both dating from the late 1840s. Murger himself had lived the Bohemian life in the Latin Quarter of Paris, and his characters were all drawn from real life, although some were composite sketches. (A bohemian is a person, such as a writer or an artist, living an unconventional life, usually with others.) His Rodolfo is presumably quite autobiographical; Marcel resembles the painter, François Tabar, renowned for planning to paint the parting of the Red Sea, but never succeeding in actually painting the scene. Schaunard is modeled on a bohemian son of a rich toy manufacturer, and Gustave is a mix of two philosophers that Murger knew, Marc Trapadoux and Jean Wallon. Mimi was based on Murger's lover, Marie Vimal, as well as on Lucille Lovet, a fragile young woman who died while Murger was writing the work. Musette was a pseudonym for the artist's model, Marie-Christine Roux.

Murger's book attracted the attention, almost simultaneously, of two Italian opera composers: Puccini, fresh from his first big success, *Manon Lescaut*, and Ruggiero Leoncavallo, fresh from what was to prove his only lasting success, *Pagliacci*. Apparently, Leoncavallo had been thinking about an operatic *Bohème* before Puccini had. When the latter told Leoncavallo of his plans, a minor feud broke out between the two. Leoncavallo's *La Bohème* came out a year after Puccini's, and although initially successful, it soon disappeared from the repertoire.

This opera was composed at the time when opera first was beginning to include common people as characters, and thus it took on considerable interest for a wide public who could empathize with the conditions depicted. Perhaps also because of his inspiring presence and his innovations, Puccini's new realistic opera enjoyed an immediate success, garnering fifteen curtain calls at the debut. Its reception was only lukewarm in Rome a few weeks

later, but when it was performed in Palermo on April 13, 1896, *La bohème* completely succeeded, and it has attracted large audiences ever since.

Although today *La bohème* is uniformly considered a much beloved classic and one of the pillars of the operatic repertoire, many music critics did not have favorable reactions early on. A local critic from Turin described it as "empty and downright infantile." When *La bohème* received its initial performance in New York at the Metropolitan Opera on December 26, 1900, the critic of the *New York Tribune* described it as "foul in subject and fulminant, but futile in its music," continuing by summing up the opera as "silly and inconsequential." It has since become the most performed opera at the Metropolitan Opera, with over 1245 performances since 1900. *La bohème* is not a continuous drama with concentrated plot and character development. As put together by Puccini and his librettists, it is, like Murger's novel, an episodic series of sketches bohemian life in Paris in the middle of the 19th century. This unusual opera has, for over a hundred years, moved its audiences, whose emotions resonate with the romance and the human plight that is depicted. The immediate rush of love at first sight soon yields to something darker when it becomes evident that Mimì, the heroine, is desperately ill, and Rodolfo, her lover, cannot provide for her because of his poverty. © Susan Halpern, 2022.

Emily Geller

Lauded for her "lower extension that has to be heard to be believed," by Seen and Heard International, Emily Geller is a New York City-based performer praised for her "effortless comic delivery." Her upcoming 2022 season includes Elder Constance in Matthew Aucoin's *Second Nature* (Opera Fayetteville), Benoit/Alcindoro in *La bohème* (Newport Classical) and Zita in Gianni Schicchi (Salt Marsh Opera). Recent credits include: Germont in *La traviata* (MassOpera) and the Covid-19 canceled roles of Desiree in *A Little Night Music* (Tri-Cities Opera), Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly* (NJ Association of Verismo Opera), and Florence Pike in *Albert Herring* (Penn Square Music Festival). In 2019, Ms. Geller originated the role of Sylvia in the world premiere of *Chunky in Heat* (Experiments in Opera and Contemporaneous as a part of New York Opera Fest), earning praise from Opera News for the "layers of complexity" brought to the role; Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly* and Flora in *La traviata* (Teatro Lirico d'Europa US Tour); and alto soloist in Handel's *Messiah* (MidAtlantic Symphony Orchestra). Other notable engagements include Prince Orlofsky in *Die Fledermaus* and Mercedes in *Carmen* (Tri-Cities Opera), Alma Hix in *The Music Man* (St. Petersburg Opera), and Oreste in *La belle Hélène* (Opera North).
www.emilygeller.com

Shannon Jennings

Praised by the *Washington Post* for her dramatic intensity and vocal ability, soprano Shannon Jennings continues to wow critics and audiences alike. In 2021-22, Ms. Jennings makes her house debut as the title role in *Tosca* with Opera Las Vegas, sings Mimì in *La bohème* with Newport Classical, joins Virginia Opera to cover Beatrice in *Three Decembers*, covers Beggar Woman in *Sweeney Todd* at Opera Omaha and sings a recital with Washington Concert Opera.

In the fall of 2020, in place of her house debut as Mimì in *La bohème* with Kentucky Opera (COVID19 - rescheduled to fall 2022), Ms. Jennings joined the company for digital media performances. In the spring of 2021, she joined Palm Beach Opera, singing Erste Dame in *Die Zauberflöte*, and covering both Mimì in *La bohème* and Nedda in *Pagliacci*. This past summer, she returned to Wolf Trap Opera to sing Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* in recital, the title role in Viardot's *Cendrillon* and the Beggar Woman in *Sweeney Todd*. Other recent credits include Micaëla in *Carmen* and the title role in *Tosca* with Annapolis Opera.

Ms. Jennings' apprenticeships include Santa Fe Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, and San Francisco's Merola Opera Program. A formidable competitor, she was a winner of the 2017 Mildred Miller International Voice Competition, a finalist in the 2019 George London Foundation competition, a Capitol District Winner in the 2016-17 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, and a winner of the 2015 Annapolis Opera Vocal Competition. Ms. Jennings holds a Bachelor of Music from Florida State University.

Ryan Kuster

Bass-baritone Ryan Kuster has been acclaimed for his "full and rich voice" (*Dallas Observer*). He has recently performed Escamillo in *Carmen* with Florida Grand Opera, Masetto in *Don Giovanni* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, returned to Opera Colorado in his debut of the title role in *Le Nozze di Figaro* and to Virginia Opera to sing Carl Olsen in Kurt Weill's *Street Scene*. At Dallas Opera he performed the Old Hebrew in *Samson et Dalila* and the Doctor in *La Traviata*. Highlights on the concert stage include the *Messiah* with the Milwaukee Symphony; Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* with Boulder Philharmonic; Brutamonte in Schubert's hidden gem, *Fierrabras*, for the Bard Music Festival; and Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* with the National Symphony Orchestra. Please see www.ryankuster.com for more information.

Johnathan McCullough

Johnathan McCullough was recently nominated for a GRAMMY Award® (Best Opera Recording) for his cinematic adaptation of David T. Little's *Soldier Songs*. He begins the 21/22 season with a string of debuts: Intermountain Opera Bozeman for *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Figaro), Tulsa Opera for *Gianni Schicchi* (Marco), and Portland Opera for *The Central Park Five* (The Masque). Additional engagements include a return to Opera Theatre of Saint Louis for *The Magic Flute* (Papageno) and *The Funny Bone* with Lyric Fest.

Last season he returned to Wolf Trap Opera for Bologne's *L'amant anonyme* (Ophéon) and. Johnathan made his UK debut at English National Opera in a new production of *The Marriage of Figaro* (Count) directed by Joe Hill-Gibbons. He won First Prize in the Gerda Lissner Foundation Song competition singing Mahler's *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen* and was selected by Renée Fleming to take part in the Weill Institute Song Studio at Carnegie Hall where he performed in concert. He will present a solo concert under the Carnegie Hall organization in a future season.

Johnathan made a role/house debut at Opéra de Lausanne in *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Harlequin), returned to Wolf Trap Opera for *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (Figaro) and Opera Philadelphia for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Demetrius). At the Komische Oper Berlin, he returned for a new Calixto Bieto production of *Schreker's Die Gezeichneten* after his successful debut in a new production of Rameau's *Zoroastre* (Oromasès) conducted by Christian Curnyn.

In addition to the standard repertoire, Johnathan is an avid interpreter of new music, working directly with composers Carlisle Floyd, Jennifer Higdon, David T. Little, Missy Mazzoli, and many more. He received a Bachelor of Music degree, Master of Music in Opera degree and Artist Diploma, all from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia.

Emily Misch

A coloratura soprano praised for her "scintillating precision" (*Opera News*), Emily Misch is establishing herself as a clear-voiced, versatile, and intelligent performer. In 2021 Misch returned to the Glimmerglass Festival to sing in *The Magic Flute*; *The New York Times* called her performance "impressive" and "fearsome," and *The Wall Street Journal* said

her "capable, brightvoice...ably navigated the Queen of the Night's coloratura." While there, she also performed the role of Berginella in *Songbird*, a new adaptation of Offenbach's *La Périchole* created by Eric Sean Fogel, James Lowe and Kelley Rourke. Other performances in the 2021-22 season have included *Madame Goldentrill* in *The Impresario* with Syracuse Opera and *Handel's Messiah* with Naples Philharmonic. She also performs as a soloist in *Berg's Wozzeck* with Boston Symphony Orchestra and will perform *Musetta* in *La Bohème* with Newport Classical. In 2019, she joined the Glimmerglass Festival, where she sang *Florestine* in *The Ghosts of Versailles*, a role she reprised with Château de Versailles Spectacles in France for her European debut, as well as Sarasota Opera, where she covered the Queen of the Night in *Die Zauberflöte*. Her 2017-2018 season included the Grand Finals of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions, *Olympia* in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* and *Ruth Bader Ginsburg* in *Derrick Wang's Scalia/Ginsburg* with Opera North, soprano solos in *Mozart's Requiem* and *Haydn's Paukenmesse* with Huntington Choral Society, and the soprano solo in *Carmina Burana* with Altoona Symphony Orchestra.

Kenneth Stavert

Praised for his strong "sense of theatricality," Baritone Kenneth Stavert has performed on operatic, concert and recital stages throughout the United States, Europe and Asia. Some of his recent highlights include *Silvio* in *Pagliacci*, *Papageno* in *Die Zauberflöte*, and *Ping* in *Turandot* (Dayton Opera), *Harlekin* in *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Palm Beach Opera), *Yamadori* in *Madama* (Santa Fe Opera), *Renato* in *Un ballo in maschera*, *Scarpia* in *Tosca* (Opera in the Heights), *Sharpless* in *Madama Butterfly* (Pacific Opera Project) and *Marcello* in *La bohème* (Gulf Shore Opera). In 2022 he made company debuts with Opera Las Vegas as *Sam* in *Trouble in Tahiti* and with Vero Beach Opera as *Schaunard* in *La bohème*. Kenneth's orchestral credits include *Berlioz's Lelio*, *Fauré's Requiem*, *Orff's Carmina Burana*, *Handel's Messiah* and *Mozart's Vesperae solennes de confessore*. He has also been a featured recitalist throughout the United States specializing in less performed English art song.

Dane Suarez

Praised for his "big, heroic voice" and "powerful emotions", tenor Dane Suarez has developed an exciting and varied career. In 2021-2022, Mr. Suarez sings *Canio* in Opera Memphis' production of *Pagliacci*, reprises the role of *Antonin Scalia* in *Scalia/Ginsburg* at the Penn Square Music Festival, makes his Opera Birmingham and Newport Classical debuts as *Rodolfo* in *La bohème*, joins Maryland Opera for a concert, sings *Pollione* in *Norma* with Festival Opera, returns to Opera in Heights as *Manrico* in *Il trovatore*, *Lensky* in *Eugene Onegin* and *Antonin Scalia* in *Scalia/Ginsburg* at and performs as the tenor soloist in *Verdi's Requiem* with the Butler Symphony Orchestra. In 2023, he will join Festival Opera as *Don José* in *Carmen*.

During the 2020-2021 season, Mr. Suarez returned to Opera Memphis as a tenor soloist in concert and performed the roles of *Tamino* in *The Magic Flute* and *Antonin Scalia* in *Scalia / Ginsburg* as well as joining the Memphis Symphony Orchestra for *The Magic of Memphis*, and Maryland Opera for a concert. Other recent operatic credits include *Macduff* in *Macbeth* and *Fenton* in *Falstaff* with West Bay Opera, *Lensky* in *Eugene Onegin* and the title role in *Idomeneo* with Opera NEO, *Pinkerton* in *Madama Butterfly*, *Ruggero* in *La rondine*, *Alfredo* in *La traviata*, and *Canio* in *Pagliacci* with Opera San José and *Erik* in *Der fliegende Holländer* with Baltimore Concert Opera. Mr. Suarez holds a bachelor's degree from Butler University and a master's degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.