

# Consumptive heroine denies "operatic realism"

**La Boheme**  
**Jubilee Auditorium**  
**Saturday, September 30**

review by James Ingram

There is a certain absurdity inherent to opera. I was reminded of this in the last act of the weekend production of Puccini's *La Boheme*. The heroine, Mimi, lies dying of consumption in a freezing Paris apartment, barely able to walk, racked with a horrible cough, all the while bellowing at the top of her lungs.

But the idea of "operatic realism" is com-

... "operatic realism" is comparable with "business ethics" ...

parable with "business ethics" or "military intelligence." Opera was written to be melodramatic popular entertainment and has to be taken as such. *La Boheme* is among the most popular, most melodramatic, and most entertaining, and is full of great music besides. Both its dramatic and musical brilliance were done ample justice in the Edmonton Opera's Saturday production.

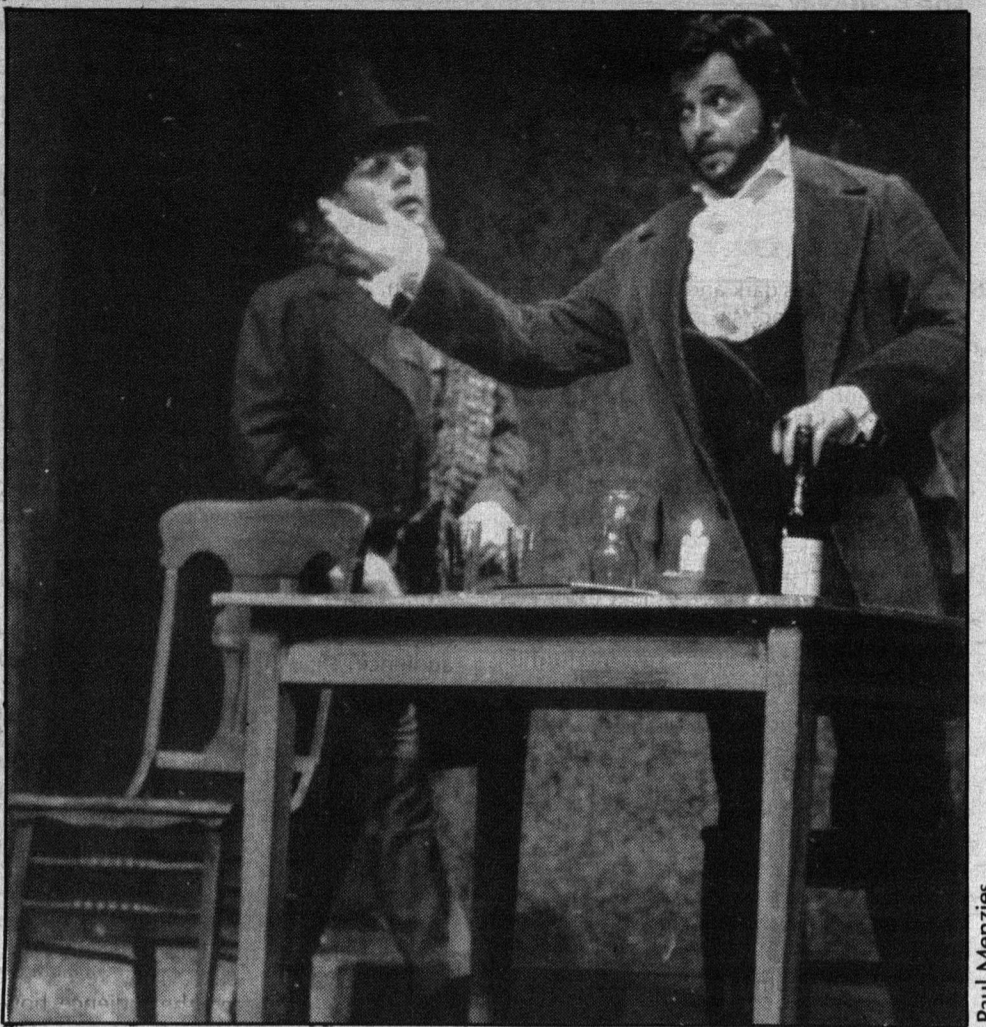
The story is about a group of starving artists in the Paris of the 1830s. The poet among them, Rodolfo, meets and falls in love with Mimi, a beautiful seamstress from upstairs.

Like most operatic love, however, it's destined to end tragically: living in the frigid tenement, Mimi has contracted tuberculosis and won't live to see the end of the fourth act. Sappy plot line aside, *La Boheme* is a celebration of love and the bohemian spirit, and a young and energetic cast made the best of it.

Tenor Franco Farino led the troupe as Rodolfo, and carried the lead part easily and well. His voice was clear and controlled, not excessively powerful but not lacking in richness. Both his acting and singing were smooth and understated without being wooden, bringing out the flowing melodies and, at the same time, creating a natural and human stage presence. My only problem was that during the more active orchestration in the first act his voice was covered, although that may have been the effect of the Jube's lousy acoustics.

Soprano Stephanie Friede was also excellent in her portrayal of Mimi. Humble in dress and demeanor, she was perfect as a gentle and beautiful girl languishing in poverty. Her voice, like Farino's, was very clear and true to Puccini's lyricism, and was perhaps somewhat more emotional than the tenor's. And very importantly, she was positively svelte for a soprano, which made her performance that much more believable. (As anyone who saw the production of Verdi's *La Traviata* two years ago will testify, it's very difficult to keep a tragic frame of mind while watching an amply insulated Violetta die of consumption.)

The rest of the cast held their own very



Paul Menzies

Two bellowing Bohemians resonate the Jube during Edmonton Opera's production of *La Boheme*.

well, and special notice must go to bass-baritone Phillip Ens, who had an impressively forceful voice that made the Jubilee resonate like a hall half its size. Christopher Mattaliano's direction of the clowning bohemians and the crowded street scene was lively and

entertaining. And the sets brought in from Portland were great, conveying the bleakness of a 19th century garret with enough originality to escape being bland in themselves. The Edmonton Opera's successful opener bodes well for a great season.

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## Traveling Trolls Talk Shop

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song lyrics, there just happens to be some music that either Joe or I have been working on, and we just use that."

Every last Troll is also learned in the ancient art of tap dancing. They won a free month of tap dancing lessons at a dinner once and never looked back.

The Trolls have been full-time comedians for about a year now, trying to turn a onetime hobby into a lifelong career. Thus

far they have managed to eat and sleep with a roof over their heads. They have been able to make some strides — they recently completed a pilot for CBC Television.

They were "discovered" the old-fashioned way: by accident. "When we were working for Yuk Yuk's in Edmonton, the club was approached by Big Dipper Productions of Vancouver, who were interested primarily in standup comedians," explains Cathleen. "Yuk Yuk's decided to send some of our clips on the tape they sent." Although they weren't suited to Big Dipper Productions' original project, they felt that Three Dead Trolls in a Baggie were funny enough to warrant a separate project.

The CBC has a year to decide whether or not they will pick up the Trolls' show, which still doesn't have a title. In the meantime, they are keeping busy as best they can. "Neil's taking up macrame," Cathleen said. Wes added, "we rented scooters in Victoria and pissed off the locals."

The Trolls will appear at Nexus Theatre for their 25th anniversary show at 8:00 p.m. on Friday, October 6th, and at 8:00 and 10:00 p.m. on Saturday, October 7th. Nexus Theatre is located in McCauley Plaza.

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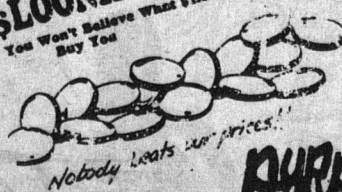
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