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NIGHTS AT THE OPERA



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NIGHTS AT THE OPERA

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PUCCINI'S
LA BOHÈME

By E. Markham Lee

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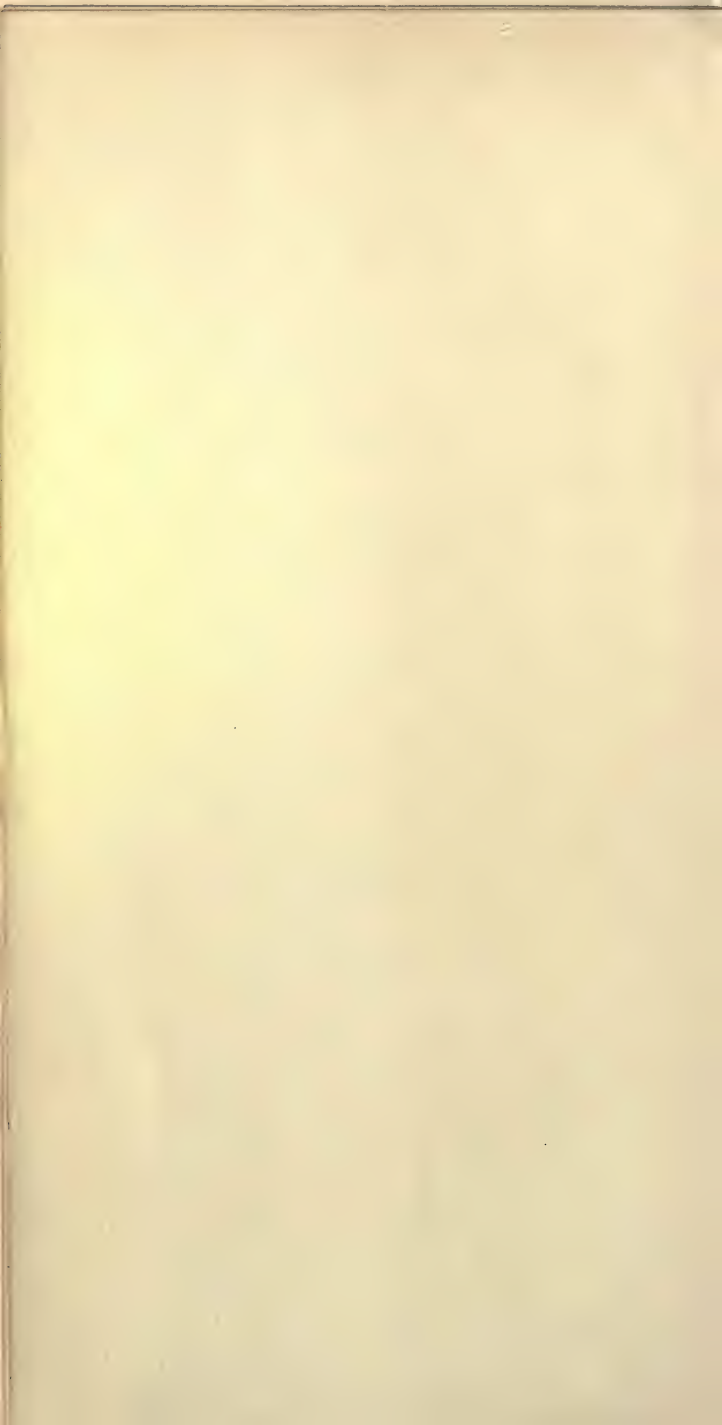
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CONTENTS

- i. The Composer of the Opera PAGE 7
- ii. The Story and its Source 13
- iii. The Presentation of the Opera 23
- iv. The Characters 29
- v. Story and Music side-by-side 31



I. THE COMPOSER OF THE OPERA.

THE sunny land of Italy has given to the world of music composers of opera almost without number: commencing with Peri, whose work is more than three hundred years old, and casting a glance along the centuries until the present day, the names of scores upon scores of opera composers might be reckoned. The majority of these are to us of the twentieth century names only, and their output was for the pleasure of a day, and not for all time.

From a family of musicians, some of whom had been opera composers, springs Giacomo Puccini, who first saw the light of day at Lucca, on 22nd June, 1858.

Puccini's

A gifted grandfather, and a father who won celebrity for his church music, were the immediate antecedents of their far more famous descendant, who is the fifth child of a large family. Like many another who has achieved notable success, Puccini owes much to his mother, who, left a widow with seven children at the age of thirty-three, managed to give him a good musical education, although she was left but scantily endowed with the necessary means of support.

When he was a child he seems to have shown a remarkable lack of ability at ordinary school subjects: as was the case with Tchaikovsky, his general education was a great failure, and he was but an indifferent and an unwilling learner. Music was more assiduously practised, and his lessons at the Lucca Institute of Music under Angeloni, soon resulted in

La Bohème

his taking up some small church appointments as organist. His early leanings towards opera soon became manifest, and his improvisations during Mass were wont to be largely interwoven with operatic themes, to the horror of the celebrant priests.

Puccini's first compositions were performed at Lucca, but he soon felt the need of a larger sphere of action, and a pension having been procured from the Queen of Italy, he started a three years' course at Milan, working under Bazzini and Ponchielli. Some student works there performed revealed the presence of an individuality out of the ordinary, and more especially the possession of a considerable dramatic talent.

Inspired by the encouragement of Ponchielli, the composer of the well-known opera *La Gioconda*, Puccini wrote

Puccini's

his first opera, *Le Villi*, at the age of twenty-five, and it was soon produced with great success. He received £80 for it, but the art of subsistence was a difficult one, and the money was nearly all bespoke. The hand-to-mouth existence, so happily depicted by Puccini in his later opera which is the subject of this book, was one in which he lived during those anxious yet happy days which succeeded the *conservatoire* life at Milan.

Some years elapsed before the appearance of the second opera, *Edgar*, which was staged in 1889; the music of this, although fine, is hampered by an impossible libretto, and the work, although bringing in a considerable sum of money to its composer, was a failure. Much more success attended *Manon* in 1893, written on the picturesque banks of the

La Bohème

Torre del Lago, and Puccini was now able to buy the house in which he was born at Lucca. A few years later, after his marriage, with the money that flowed in from the wonderful success of *La Bohème*, Puccini built himself a charming home beside his favourite lake.

La Bohème was written in the years 1891-5, and its immediate acceptance is commented upon elsewhere: it was followed by *La Tosca*, a fine work upon a rather gloomy subject, which was produced in 1900. More successful than this was the delightful *Madama Butterfly* of 1904, and the composer is now (1909) at work upon another subject of American origin, *The Girl of the Golden West*, which is soon to be brought to the boards.

Puccini is a composer of opera, and makes no other claims to musicianship: he shows wisdom in confining himself

Puccini's La Bohème

to work in which he can excel, and his artistic achievements, like his material fortunes, have gone onwards by leaps and bounds. Each opera shows him more fully equipped in the means of dramatic characterization, and he has an unfailing flow of luscious and haunting melody. Seeing that he is still but fifty years of age, the world may look for yet more from his pen, and though it is difficult to criticise his work while it is as yet incomplete, one may be confident that the future output will contain still further manifestations of the lyrical beauty and dramatic strength which have characterized all his operas up to the present.

II. THE STORY AND ITS SOURCE.

HENRY MURGER, one of the most original-minded of French novelists of his day, was a Parisian, who lived from 1822 to 1861. One of a set of "Bohemians" in the artistic sense of the word, his most famous novel, *La Vie de Bohème*, is a series of pictures and sketches of the life which he loved, and under the name of Rudolph we can discern a portrait of Murger himself. Originally published in 1848, this, the most powerful of his books, appeared as a collection of short sketches dealing with the irresponsible, reckless life of the Quartier Latin, "a gay life, but a terrible one."

Puccini's

Bohemianism is a quality difficult to express, and the English title, "The Bohemians," is but an indifferent interpretation of Murger's root idea—let us quote rather his own words from the preface to his book—words which crystallize for us the essential elements of the life which has no counterpart in any other society. He introduces his "bold adventurers" thus: "Their existence of every day is a work of genius, a daily problem which they always contrive to solve with the aid of bold mathematics. When want presses them, abstemious as anchorites; but if a small fortune falls into their hands, see them riding forth on the most ruinous fancies, loving the fairest and youngest, drinking the oldest and best wines, and not finding enough windows whence to throw their money; then—the last crown dead and buried—

La Bohème

they begin again to dine at the *table d'hôte* of chance where their cover is always laid; contrabandists of all the industries which spring from art, in chase from morning to night of that wild animal which is called the crown. *Bohemia* has a special dialect, a distinct jargon of its own. This vocabulary is the hell of rhetoric and the paradise of neologism."

A series of disconnected scenes hardly appears likely as the groundwork of a successful opera—the lack of connected and cumulative interest would seem to bid fair to wreck the whole. But Puccini foresaw the picturesque possibilities of depicting the careless and happy-go-lucky existence of his students and their paramours, and his librettists, Giacosa and Illica, availed themselves of much dramatic license. They adhered to Murger's

Puccini's

plan of dividing the work into four acts, and modelled much of their dialogue on his; but they freed themselves from much that might have fettered the free action of the play, and even enrolled the characters of Mimi and Francine into one individual.

For their first scene the librettists take the attic in the Quartier Latin, in which dwell the poet Rudolph, the musician Schaunard, the painter Marcel, and the philosopher Colline. These four live upon their wits, and it is a sorry life at times. This Christmas Eve, on which the curtain rises, finds them in poor plight, and Rudolph and Marcel have to sacrifice the manuscript of a fine drama in order to keep the stove replenished. To them enters Schaunard, who, having been in luck and earned some money, brings food and wine with

La Bohème

him. The landlord, seeking his rent, is toasted and teased, and then the four friends determine to dine regally outside. Rudolph is left behind for a moment to complete his work, and Mimi, a pretty but fragile and delicate sempstress, who lives on the same staircase, knocks at his door for a light. He, finding her ill and cold, prevails upon her to remain a little by his fire, and when she seeks to go her key is lost. Both grope on the floor in the dimly lighted room for the key, and as their hands meet by chance, the kindred souls also seem to touch, and before long confidences are interchanged and mutual interests discussed. This acquaintance rapidly develops into love, and the climax of the act is an impassioned duet between the two erstwhile strangers, now sworn lovers.

Puccini's

The second act takes place outside the Café Momus: the interest shifts largely from Rudolph and Mimi (who are certainly present amongst the busy crowd, but almost unobserved) to Musetta, a former love of Marcel. The early part of the scene is a vivid picture of animated life, various characters, such as children, work-girls, shopmen, soldiers, and so forth, being displayed upon the canvas. Musetta, coming suddenly upon Marcel, whom in spite of all her coquetry she really loves, gets rid of the elderly admirer whom she has brought hither, and the lovers are reunited. The whole act, clever and brilliant as it is, has no share in the development of the story—it is another and a different picture of Bohemian life.

With the third act we are again concerned with the love of Rudolph and

La Bohème

Mimi: time has passed, and Mimi is anxious about her lover, who is unreasonably jealous and exacting. In the bitter cold of a snowy February she comes to the Barrière d'Enfer to seek Rudolph, whose "love for her was a jealous, fantastic, weird, hysterical love. Scores of times they were on the point of separating. It must be admitted that their existence was a veritable hell-upon-earth." Mimi is worse, and her cough hints at the end. She seeks Marcel's help, and hides behind a tree while he talks to Rudolph, and overhears him say that she is dying. Her tears betray her hiding-place, and Rudolph, overcome with emotion, vows to devote himself to her. The act culminates in a beautiful love-duet, while in an extended bit of by-play Musetta and Marcel have a furious quarrel and part in a tiff.

Puccini's

For the final scene we return to the attic, where the lonely artists, both forsaken by their lady-loves, are seen engaged in an attempt at work. Food and money are scarce, but they brave things with a light heart, and make merry as far as they are able. Yet Rudolph thinks of his Mimi and Marcel of his Musetta. At the height of their forced merriment Musetta enters, having brought with her the dying Mimi, who has wished to see her Rudolph once again. The lovers are left alone as this one steals out to sell something to buy food, and the other to find a doctor. Very touching and pathetic is the scene between the two, as Mimi recalls to Rudolph the day of their first meeting in this very attic: with snatches of phrases that occurred in the first act, she whispers of the magic evening when first love came to them, while

La Bohème

he broken-heartedly bids her husband her strength. The friends return with medicine and remedies, but as they go to the bedside they find Mimi is beyond their aid, and the curtain descends on Rudolph's despairing cry for his lost love "Mimi, Mimi."

The success of Puccini's setting of these varied and characteristic scenes is now a matter of history, and this, the composer's fourth opera, has been for some years his most popular one—although it is now quite possible that *Madama Butterfly* may soon become its serious rival. The music is glowing, full of melody, and highly dramatic. The impression of the careless, reckless life "de Bohème" is most cleverly conveyed, while the bright street scene of the second act is full of sparkle and brilliance. The love music offers excellent opportunities

Puccini's La Bohème

for melodious writing, and this is lavishly supplied, the themes being spontaneous and inherently beautiful. The self-centred, coquettish Musetta is remarkably characterized by some of the music allotted to her, while the pathos of the last act is depicted with a skill that belongs to the province of genius.

III. THE PRESENTATION OF THE OPERA.

“**L**A BOHÈME” knew nothing of the struggles which such operas as *Tannhäuser* went through before being received into public favour; there was even no such quickly overcome opposition as the same composer’s *Madama Butterfly* had to endure: with a bound the work soon found itself as dear to the hearts of Italians as were the Verdi operas of the mid-nineteenth century, or the *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci* of a later decade. First produced at the Teatro Regio, Turin, on February 1st, 1896, *La Bohème* soon found its way into England, France, and Germany. We read that Italian babies of the day, with generous southern impulsiveness,

Puccini's

were christened "Mimi" and "Rodolfo" just as those of a year or two later were dubbed "Butterfly."

The original Turin performance was under the direction of Toscanini, when Mimi was played by Ferrani, Musetta being taken by Pasini; the four artist friends were represented by Gorga, Wilmant, Pini-Corsi, and Mazzara respectively.

With a commendable promptitude, the English touring company, known as the Carl Rosa Opera Company, which has done such excellent work in producing opera in English, and operas by English composers, seized upon the new success: fifteen months after the original performance the opera was given (on April 22nd, 1897) at Manchester, under the conductorship of Claude Jacquinet, with the following cast:

La Bohème

Rudolph	-	-	-	R. Cunningham
Marcel	-	-	-	W. Paul
Schaunard	-	-	-	C. Tilbury
Colline	-	-	-	A. Winkworth
Mimi	-	-	-	Alice Esty
Musetta	-	-	-	Bessie Macdonald

Thus, in this country the work was first heard in the provinces. Puccini himself seems to have been present on the occasion, and to have been somewhat horrified at the make-shift disposal of the orchestra. The usual space was insufficient for the large band required, and the drums were put into a box on one side, and the trombones on the other, whence "they gave forth detached blares and pops which really frightened the life out of me, and did not seem to have anything to do with the general musical scheme."¹ On the whole, how-

¹ A more extended account of the production, and of Puccini generally, may be found in Mr. Wakeling Dry's interesting and readable book

Puccini's

ever, Puccini found the artists very amenable to reason, and was quite pleased with the ultimate result. London first heard the work from the same company at Covent Garden, in the autumn of the same year, when it was played many times.

Patrons of the Grand Opera Season had, however, to wait two years until on June 30th, 1899, Mancinelli conducted its first performance, of course in Italian. The principal parts were as follows :

Rudolph	-	-	-	-	De Lucia
Marcel	-	-	-	-	Ancona
Schaunard	-	-	-	-	Gilibert
Colline	-	-	-	-	Journet
Mimi	-	-	-	-	Melba
Musetta	-	-	-	-	Zélie de Lussan

The part of Mimi is a very favourite one with Madame Melba, and one in which

Puccini, published by John Lane, in the "Living Masters of Music" Series.

La Bohème

the great singer shows to particular advantage.

La Bohème is now a regular feature of the *repertoire* at Covent Garden, and is familiar enough to French, American, and German audiences. In Paris it is played at the Opera Comique (for the first time in June, 1898), while in America it is heard both in English and in Italian. It is interesting to note that Leoncavallo (the composer of *Pagliacci*) had previously set a libretto on the same subject to music, but with little success.



IV. THE CHARACTERS OF THE OPERA
IN THE ORDER OF THEIR FIRST
APPEARANCE.

MARCEL, a painter (*baritone*).

RUDOLPH, a poet (*tenor*).

COLLINE, a philosopher (*bass*).

SCHAUNARD, a musician (*baritone*).

BENOIT, a landlord (*bass*).

MIMI, (*soprano*).

PARPIGNOL, a toy-seller (*tenor*).

MUSETTA (*soprano*).

ALCINDORO, a councillor of state
(*bass*).

A Custom-house sergeant (*bass*).

Choruses of Students, Work-girls,
Citizens, Shopkeepers, Street-vendors,
Soldiers, Waiters, Boys and Girls.

Puccini's La Bohème

The Scenario is as follows :

Act I. In the Attic.

Act II. In the Latin Quarter. .

Act III. The Barrière d'Enfer.

Act IV. The Attic.

Time, about 1830 in Paris.

V. STORY AND MUSIC SIDE-BY-SIDE.

FIRST ACT.

THE opera is without overture or prelude : the curtain rises quickly with the first notes of the orchestra, which enunciates a theme that makes constant appearance from first to last, and which may be associated with the happy-go-lucky and exuberant life of the artist-friends, the Bohemians.

Puccini's

Allegro Vivace No. 1

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system begins with a treble clef on the right and a bass clef on the left. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/8. The first system includes a forte (*ff*) dynamic marking and accents. The second system continues the piano accompaniment. The third system features a more active melodic line in the treble clef and sustained chords in the bass clef.

Before us we see a large attic, with windows which disclose a survey of the snow-clad roofs of the Quartier Latin. The room is poorly furnished; an easel, a bed, a few chairs and books, and many packs of cards form its chief contents.

La Bohème

Rudolph looks out of the window, and Marcel the painter is at work on his *magnum opus*, "The passage of the Red Sea." He leaves off constantly to warm his fingers by breathing on them, for it is cold, and there is no fire. As he works he chatters about his picture, the orchestra meanwhile keeping up a running commentary on the initial motive.

Overcome by the cold, Marcel turns to Rudolph, who commences his part with a theme henceforward closely connected with him throughout the opera.

No. 2

Rudolph

Lo-zily ri-sing, see, how the smoke from
thou-sands of chim-neys floats up-ward

orch

Puccini's

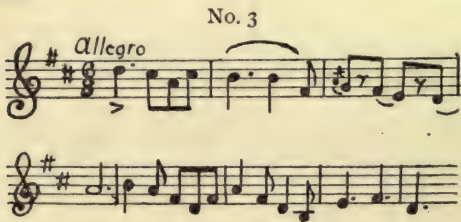
They complain in concert of the cold, which prevents their working, and which they have no means of alleviating, for their rent is sadly overdue, and they have no money. The orchestra ceases, and the broken comments of the two friends in recitative is left cleverly unsupported. At length Rudolph is seized with a brilliant idea—the manuscript of his last drama would make a gorgeous fire, and with scoffing seriousness he and Marcel tear it up, act by act, and going to the stove, recklessly set it alight.

As they sit gloating over the welcome heat enters Colline the philosopher, who has returned almost frozen from an unsuccessful attempt to pawn his books. He can hardly believe his eyes, but gladly joins the circle, and as the fire wanes low more and more of the manuscript is thrust upon it. As it burns they discuss

La Bohème

its pages philosophically—here a love scene is perishing—the crackles of the flames are kisses—dreams in bright flame soon disappear. The bright strains of the two themes already quoted serve as an admirable background for all this banter.

But another surprise is in store. A door at the back opens, and to a lively tune



enter two boys with food, wine, cigars, and firewood. Schaunard the musician marches in, and tells a long story of how he has had a lucrative engagement, and has come back with ample funds. The

Puccini's

others pay no attention whatever to his tale, so occupied are they in arranging the meal. At last Schaunard perceives what they are about, and begs them to desist, for it is Christmas Eve, and they must dine outside in the Quartier. We now hear the theme with its quaint succession of consecutive fifths, which generally accompanies any suggestion of "La Vie du Bohème." No. 4

The image shows a musical score for a piano piece, labeled "No. 4". It consists of three systems of music, each with a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The first system shows the beginning of the piece with a treble staff containing chords and a bass staff with a melodic line of eighth notes. The second system continues the piece with similar textures. The third system concludes the piece with a final chord in the treble and a melodic line in the bass.

La Bohème

They fall in with the suggestion, but first drink together to the merry strains of No. 3. An interruption comes in the form of Benoit, the landlord, who is anxious to have some payment of rent. A lengthy scene ensues, in which he gets his money (much to his surprise), is made somewhat intoxicated, and finally driven out of the room by the rowdy young students. The melodious music which attends upon this consists of fresh material, but as little future use of it is made, no quotations are necessary. Having disposed of the landlord, three of the company start off for their evening, but Rudolph remains behind for a few moments to complete an article for his newspaper.

The convivial friends are heard descending the staircase, and Rudolph, extinguishing everything but a single

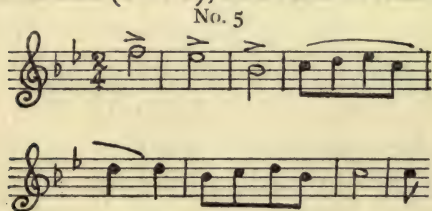
Puccini's

candle, sets himself to his work. No sooner has he commenced than a knock is heard at the door: it is Mimi, the charming little needlewoman of the attic above, whose candle has gone out, and who seeks a light. As she stands at the door a dreadful fit of coughing shakes her, and Rudolph presses her to enter: as she does so she faints, and has to be revived with water. Then a glass of wine and a seat near the fire re-animate her, and she, thanking him, prepares to go. But as she is about to leave she discovers that she has somewhere dropped the key of the little room to which she was making her way; she stands hesitatingly in the doorway, and the wind blows out her candle, and as Rudolph runs across the room with his own to rekindle it, this goes out too, and they are left in darkness. Mimi, profuse in

La Bohème

apologies, begs Rudolph to search for her key, and he gropes about on the floor, where he soon finds it. He pretends not to have done so, however, and as Mimi also stoops to feel for it their hands meet.

Mimi's entry is signalled in the orchestra by a theme to which she, later on, tells Rudolph her name (No. 8). The merry scene in the darkness is mainly sung and played to a version of Rudolph's own theme (No. 2), and runs as follows :



We must notice the expressive and beautiful melody which Rudolph sings as he finds Mimi's hand, and watch for its pathetic reintroduction as she talks of the past on her death-bed in the last act.

Puccini's

No. 6

your ti-ny hand is

The first system of music features a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a piano accompaniment on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature has three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. The vocal line begins with a half note G4, followed by quarter notes A4, B4, and C5. The piano accompaniment consists of a bass line with a half note G2 and a treble line with a half note G4.

frozen! Let me warm it in-to

The second system continues the vocal line with quarter notes D5, E5, F5, and G5. The piano accompaniment features a bass line with a half note G2 and a treble line with a half note G4.

life. Our search is

The third system shows the vocal line with quarter notes A5, B5, and C6. The piano accompaniment has a bass line with a half note G2 and a treble line with a half note G4.

use-less; In darkness all is

The fourth system continues the vocal line with quarter notes D6, E6, and F6. The piano accompaniment has a bass line with a half note G2 and a treble line with a half note G4.

hid - den.

The fifth system concludes the vocal line with a half note G6. The piano accompaniment has a bass line with a half note G2 and a treble line with a half note G4.

La Bohème

Mimi tries to withdraw her hand, but sits listening while Rudolph tells her who he is, his work as a poet, and then his admiration of her own bright eyes. In an impassioned phrase which culminates thus

No. 7

Musical score for 'No. 7' from *La Bohème*. The score is written in G minor (three flats) and 4/4 time. It consists of three staves of music. The first staff begins with the name 'RUDOLPH' above the first note. The lyrics are: 'Bright eyes as yours, be- lieve me, steal my price- less Jew- els In Fancy's storehouse cheris'd'.

RUDOLPH
Bright eyes as yours, be-
lieve me, steal my price- less
Jew- els In Fancy's storehouse cheris'd

he declares that love for her has en- chained him, and that his roving fancy is now captive to her charms. Then he asks her name, and in plaintive phrase she declares

Puccini's

No. 8

they call me Mi-

Mi, But I know not why

There is little to tell of her simple life, for she does but embroider in silk and make flowers : but the flowers she makes have visions for her such as poets know. In simple, artless tones she describes her frugal life, cheered by little save the sunshine and the pleasures of her work; yet even that has its sadness, for the flowers have no perfume. And that is all she has to tell, and she is nothing but a tiresome little neighbour.

La Bohème

Suddenly from the courtyard below comes the sound of the roysterers, who call to Rudolph to join them: he goes to the window and draws the curtain, and the moonlight streams into the room. Mimi inquires who is calling, and on being told goes to the window and stands bathed in the moonlight. Rudolph tells his friends that he is not alone, but that he will bring a companion to the Café Momus: then the two, to the passion-laden strains of the love-theme (No. 7) join in a duet of rapturous emotion: Mimi begs that she may go with Rudolph, and as the orchestra soars along with the simple, and yet richly sonorous melody of No. 6 they leave the room. The curtain falls on an empty stage, the two voices, mingling in soft notes of love, being heard from the distance as the happy couple descend the staircase.

Puccini's

SECOND ACT.

By a delightful inconsistency, into which one need not enquire too closely, the scene outside the Café Momus is enacted in apparently glowing summer weather. This hardly tallies with the biting cold of the first act; but the brilliance of the opportunities which this street scene of the Quartier Latin affords enables it, with its crowds of soldiers, students, workgirls, shop-people, etc., to vie with the brightest moments of *Faust* or *Carmen*.

It is evening, and the shops which surround the square are brilliantly lighted, none so brightly as the Café with its big lantern. Rudolph and Mimi walk up and down apart, while outside the various shops are the other members of the fraternity, Marcel, Col-

La Bohème

line, and Schaunard, disporting themselves as they think fit. With merry ring three trumpets blare out the bizarre theme of consecutive fifths (No. 4), while the chorus sings lustily, seeking purchasers for oranges, trinkets, and what not. The curtain rises upon the merry bustling crowd, everyone jostling good-naturedly against his neighbour. All talk of their purchases: Colline of his coat, Schaunard of his horn, Mimi of her bonnet. The dining tables are all crowded, and Marcel and his companions enter the restaurant and secure a table which they bring out with them. So noisy are they that the other people gradually move away, while Rudolph introduces Mimi to his friends, and a meal is ordered.

A diversion is created by the appearance of Parpignol, the seller of toys and

Puccini's

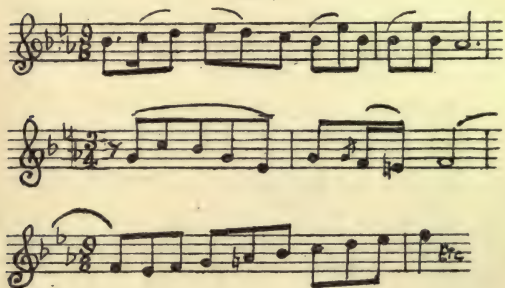
flowers, who makes his way across the stage accompanied by a group of noisy youngsters. The mothers of these have a merry ditty as they try to drag the children away from the toy-seller, and a pretty effect is obtained as they leave the stage, and in the distance one hears their distant clamours, this one for a drum, this one for a trumpet. It is an incident merely, and by no means essential to the story, but it serves as a picturesque and realistic contrast to the doings of the principal characters.

These for their part are busy over their dinner. While engaged upon it the coquettish Musetta, once the favourite of Marcel, enters with her elderly admirer Alcindoro panting and puffing behind her. She is very smart, fascinatingly attired, and pays no heed to the grumblings of her old and fatuous coun-

La Bohème

cillor of State. She sees the artists and secures a table next to them, but they ignore her. During this scene the orchestra has a lively tune to deal with, against which the voices carry on their colloquy.

No. 9



Marcel tells Mimi all about Musetta and her traffickings in the human heart. This lady, furious at being quite ignored, and having no one else at hand, vents her spite on the harmless Alcindoro, on the waiter and the dishes. At last she can endure the slighting indifference of

Puccini's

her former lover no longer, and speaks to Marcel, who still feigns not to hear. Presently she addresses him directly, in a melody that has become world-popular. Like Musetta herself it is coquettish, graceful, fascinating, but with little soul or anything more than the most superficial feeling.

No. 10

Musetta As through the
Street I wander on-ward
Merrily I wander on-ward dsintily.

As she proceeds to recount her charms, and tells of the passion she inspires, Marcel becomes more and more agitated. Alcindoro tries in vain to

La Bohème

stop the singing, which reveals to Mimi how fond the singer is of Marcel, whom yet she has left for a richer lover. The friends all have their comments to make on the situation which has arisen, in an effective and richly coloured *ensemble*, mainly constructed on No. 10. Marcel is on the point of giving way, but Musetta sees that nothing can be done so long as the fidgety State councillor is present, so she invents a device to rid herself of him. Pretending that her shoe hurts her she takes it off, and after much fuss Alcindoro goes to seek a shoemaker. No sooner has he left the stage than Marcel and Musetta embrace, and all are in a state of rapture, which is rudely disturbed by the waiter bringing the bill for the meal.

It is handed from one to another ; but all are practically penniless. Meanwhile

Puccini's

behind the scenes is heard the distant tattoo of the patrol as it approaches the square. A crowd, attracted by the sound, begins to collect, and fills the stage gradually. The music of the earlier portion of the act is skilfully re-introduced, as street-arabs, workgirls, and others pour in. The sight of the throng inspires Musetta with an idea: the waiter is told to add the bills together, and she places them on the table by the chair occupied by Alcindoro. In this excited crowd it will be easy to slip away, and all our artist friends do so, the shoeless Musetta being carried shoulder high by Marcel and Colline. Amidst enormous enthusiasm from the populace, which soon follows it, the tattoo crosses the stage, and with the mob our Bohemians also disappear. The curtain falls on the amusing picture

La Bohème

of Alcindoro, who returns with a pair of shoes, and is presented with the bill of the entire party.

This Act, as will be seen, is pure comedy, and for the time being the interest in the lovers, Rudolph and Mimi, is entirely in the background. For this reason the music is almost wholly of new material, and has little reference to the greater portion of the opera. In the absence of any dramatic *dénouement* this is quite fitting, and the whole scene may be looked upon as a brilliant and scintillating musical clothing to a series of kaleidoscopic stage pictures of great variety. We have here sparkling brightness, humour, coquetry, and merriment, but none of the pathos which was hinted at in the first Act, and which becomes so prominent a feature in the two remaining ones.

THIRD ACT.

The curtain rises upon a scene of chill February: the snow lies deep on the ground round the toll-gate of the *Barrière d'Enfer* and on the Orleans high road which stretches away in the background. A poor tavern is seen, decorated by Marcel's picture on the "Passage of the Red Sea," which has, by stress of circumstances, been turned into a sign-board, "At the Port of Marseilles." The benches beneath the plane trees look cold and uninviting, and the customs officials, grouped round a brazier, are sleeping in the early dawn. The chilliness of all things is cleverly depicted by the orchestra, in a much saddened version of the joyous melody of No. 4. The hollowness of the bare fifths is emphasised by the instrumenta-

La Bohème

tion employed, harps and flutes above the droning tremolo of the cellos.

No. II

The musical score consists of two systems of piano accompaniment. Each system has a grand staff with a treble clef on the upper staff and a bass clef on the lower staff. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The first system begins with a piano (*pp*) dynamic marking. The upper staff contains a series of chords and single notes, while the lower staff features a steady, rhythmic accompaniment of eighth notes.

From the tavern come sounds of voices, and then we hear from behind the closed toll-gate the cries of the scavengers who want to get to their work. These are let through, and then

Puccini's

from the inn comes the sound of a merry chorus of girls, above whose voices rises that of Musetta in her valse theme (No. 10). The toll-gate is opened, and the busy toil of day commences. Women with milk, draymen with their carts, peasants with their baskets flit across the stage, and gradually disperse in various directions. Then comes Mimi, racked by violent coughing. She seeks the tavern where Marcel is at work, and enquires of the sergeant about him. From hard by comes the sound of a bell ringing for matins, and in the gloomy daylight people move to and fro from the inn.

Marcel comes from the house, and Mimi tells him how unhappy she is about Rudolph, who is so jealous that they are constantly quarrelling. He is unreasonable, and has now even left her,

La Bohème

and she comes to seek him. She begs Marcel's help, for although they think it best to part, they never seem to have the courage to take so important a step. Mimi, shaken by her cough, is ill, and longs to see Rudolph, and yet not to be seen by him; and as he emerges from the tavern, she hides behind the trees. Musically this dialogue, all of which is supported by glowing orchestral melodies, is largely interspersed with fragments of themes with which we have already become familiar.

Rudolph, agitated and distressed, confides to Marcel his jealousy and his fears for Mimi. It is not merely that she provokes him; but he feels that she is dying, and that his slender means cannot afford the comfort she requires. To a background of rich mellow harmonies

Puccini's

No. 12



he speaks of her fragility. In spite of Marcel's remonstrances and entreaties, he is overheard by the listening Mimi, who has crept nearer. She, poor girl, overcome by the thought that she is dying, bursts into weeping and coughing that betray her presence.

Tenderly Rudolph embraces her, and she in pathetic tones announces to him that she will return to the home which

La Bohème

she left at his bidding. She asks that her little treasures, her bracelet and prayer-book may be returned to her, and then, in an impassioned duet, they recount the rapturous joys which they are renouncing, and which both, in spite of their determination to part, still cherish. As they sing of the kisses and love that will vanish, the voices of Marcel and Musetta are heard from the inn, quarrelling noisily. They enter, he accusing her of flirting, and she spiritedly answering him in such aggravating fashion that they also determine to part company. Their chattering phrases are very cleverly worked into the duet music of Rudolph and Mimi: while the latter are singing, in broad vocal phrases, of the joys of Nature that will still remain to them, the angry couple carry on their bickerings in lively phrases which intertwine with the

Puccini's

suave passages of the love music, while yet never disturbing its flow. Marcel and Musetta ironically take leave of one another, and the stage is left to Rudolph and Mimi, who seem more in love with one another than ever. As the curtain descends upon this short act, their voices are heard in unison singing this glowing and impassioned theme of rapturous melody:

No. 13

Ah that our win-ter
might last for ev-er
Our time, our time for
part-ings when the ro-ses blow

The musical score consists of four staves of music in a single system. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The first staff begins with a treble clef and contains the lyrics "Ah that our win-ter". The second staff continues with "might last for ev-er", featuring a triplet of eighth notes. The third staff contains "Our time, our time for" with a dynamic marking of *f*. The fourth staff concludes with "part-ings when the ro-ses blow", marked *rall* and ending with a fermata over the final note.

La Bohème

FOURTH ACT.

The opening notes of the orchestra tell us that we are back again in the attic of the four Bohemians, and as the curtain rises we see Marcel before his easel and Rudolph at the table, both engaged on pretences of work. They talk of Mussetta, who has been taken up by a wealthy admirer, in whose carriage she drives about, and of Mimi, who has become the companion of a viscount. To the motives of earlier scenes both sing with apparently light hearts, each trying to make the other believe that he is content with things as they are. But both are unhappy, unsettled, and their work only wearies them. Marcel furtively draws from his pocket a bunch of ribbons which he kisses, and Rudolph sighs in plaintive tones

Puccini's

No. 14

Rudolph

Ah Mimi falsefickle hearted Ah, beauteous days de-
parted Those hands so dainty.

The image shows two staves of musical notation in G major, 4/4 time. The first staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is written in a single line with a long slur over it. The lyrics 'Ah Mimi falsefickle hearted Ah, beauteous days de-' are written below the notes. The second staff continues the melody with a 'pp' (pianissimo) dynamic marking above the first few notes. The lyrics 'parted Those hands so dainty.' are written below the notes.

While Marcel joins in notes of lamentation for his lost Musetta, Rudolph takes Mimi's little bonnet from the drawer and gazes lovingly upon it.

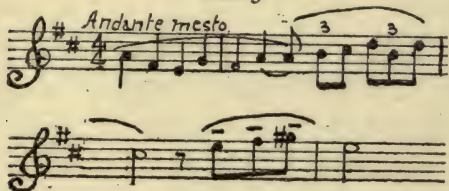
A trace of the old reckless spirit of the first act recurs as Schaunard and Colline enter with some rolls and a herring. All four make pretence of having a fine meal; they put their water-bottle in a hat and call it iced champagne, their crust is a *vol-au-vent*, their herring a salmon. As they banter one another over the meal the orchestra maintains a spirited colloquy of merry theme. Various devices are suggested to keep

La Bohème

up their spirits,—acting, reciting, singing; eventually they clear the room for a dance, and solicit one another as partners with all politeness. This soon leads into a mock duel, carried out with all possible bluster and noise.

When at its height Musetta suddenly appears: she says that Mimi, weak and ill, is at the door. The men rush to open it, and to carry the suffering girl to the bed where she lies surrounded by her old comrades: she has come there to die. The orchestra commences to recapitulate a number of melodies which first we heard when Rudolph and Mimi made acquaintance in this very attic. To the strains of one in which originally

No. 15



Puccini's

Mimi sang of her work as an embroiderer, Musetta tells how she has found the dying girl, who had left her viscount, and wanted to die near to Rudolph.

The warm, genial touch of artist life inspires Mimi with new strength; in the arms of Rudolph she is happy. Musetta inquires of the others what there is to give her, but the resources of the artists are absolutely nil. She takes off her ear-rings, and Marcel goes to sell them, while Musetta herself leaves to find a muff for Mimi's frozen hands. Colline discards his overcoat, and having pathetically bade it farewell, goes off to dispose of it, and the lovers are left alone.

Mimi is lying with closed eyes, Rudolph watching her in silence. The orchestra in notes of calm sadness gives

La Bohème

out a quiet version of the roosting theme No. 3, followed by the tender notes of Rudolph's love theme (No. 7). In faint, feeble voice Mimi tells Rudolph how he has been her only love. Through her mind pass in procession the thoughts of their first meeting; brokenly she sings again, "They call me Mimi, but I know not why." (No. 8). Rudolph brings from its hiding-place the little bonnet that she used to wear: as she nestles against him the thoughts surge through her mind of the happy days when the bonnet was bought (Theme No. 5), of their first meeting in this very room, of the mislaid key, of the hands that met as they both groped in the darkness.

In faint tones she echoes Rudolph's words (No. 6):

"Your tiny hand is frozen;
Let me warm it into life,"

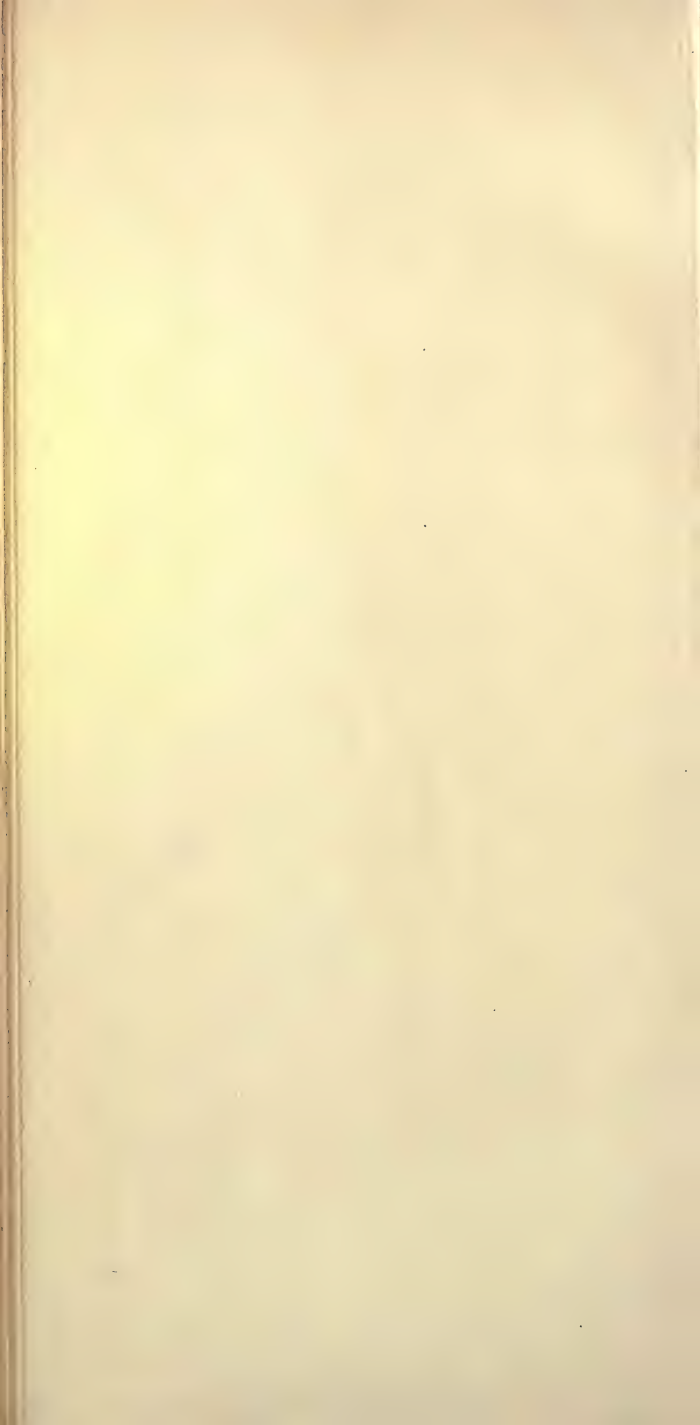
and the lovers are happy in their dreamings of the bye-gone days. But her strength is giving out; the friends return, Marcel with a phial, Musetta with the muff: Mimi whispers through the soft orchestral background (still on the beautiful theme No. 6), of the day when Rudolph gave her the muff: fainter grow her words and she gradually sinks into sleep.

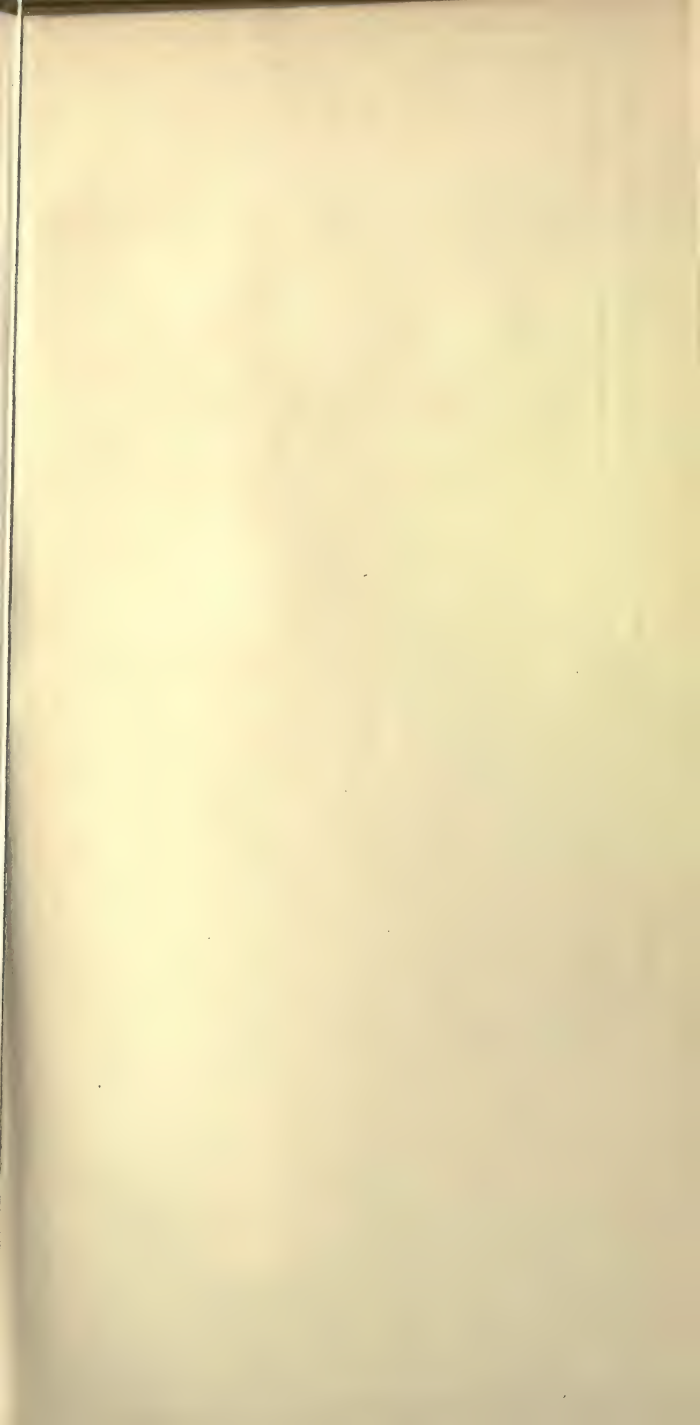
Meanwhile Musetta is busy at the stove, preparing the medicine; she prays for Mimi, while the friends discuss the situation. Schaunard steals to the bedside and whispers to Marcel, "She is dead." Rudolph is still busy with a cloak shading Mimi from a ray of sunlight which has wandered into the room. Colline enters and puts down some money. But as Rudolph sees the glances which the friends are interchanging, as Marcel

La Bohème

hastens to embrace him, the sad truth is revealed to him, and rushing to the bedside he calls with anguish, "Mimi!" to one who answers not. As the curtain falls we see Musetta kneeling weeping by the bedside, and Rudolph, heart-broken, vainly endeavouring to call back life to the form of his loved one.

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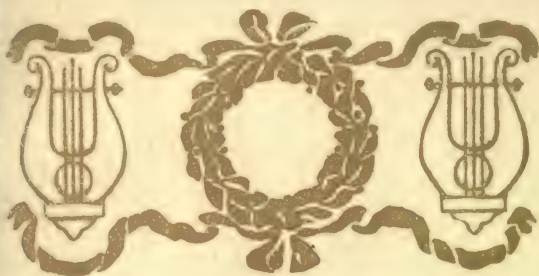


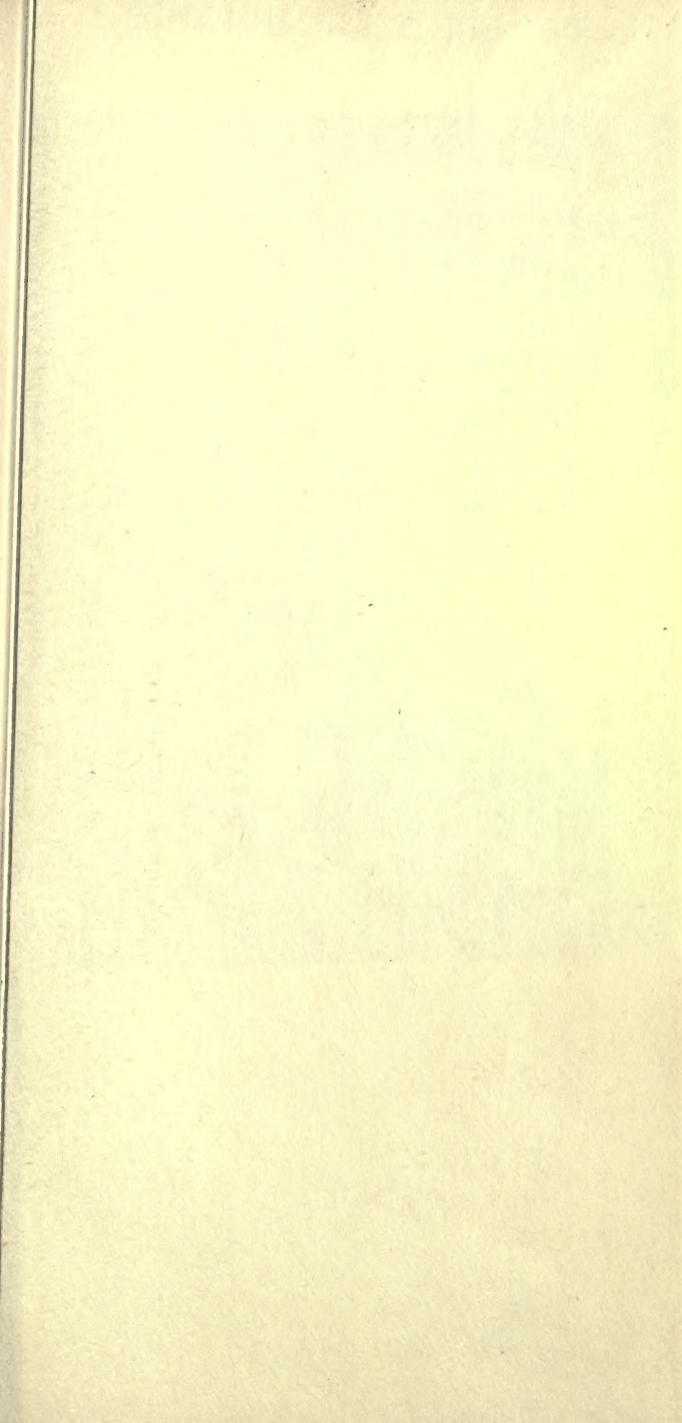


NIGHTS AT THE OPERA



NIGHTS AT THE OPERA





Chelida manira.

Your tiny hand is frozen! Let me warm it in
 Our search is useless; In darkness all is hid
 Ere long the moonlight fair shall serve to aid
 Yes, in the moonlight our search let us resume
 One moment, pretty maiden, while I tell you in
 Who I am, what I do, and how I live, shall I?
 I am a poet. What's my employment? Writing.
 Hardly! I've wit, though wealth be wanting; I
 And fashion all inspire me with passion,
 In dreams and fond illusions castles in the
 Richer is none on earth than I.
 Bright eyes as yours, believe me, steal my peace
 In fancy's storehouse cherished. Your roguish
 Of all my truant fancies, regrets I do not chide
 For now life's rosy morn is breaking, now gold
 Now that I've told my story, pray tell me your
 Tell me frankly who are you? Say, will you te

Mt Chiamano Mimi

