

Windy City Opera's *La Bohème*:
A Case Study of Producing Micro-Opera in Chicago
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ABSTRACT

This research paper recounts the work done in founding an opera company and putting on its inaugural show. It also provides some of the insights acquired during the process, which may be helpful for other future opera producers in creating a framework and guideposts for starting their own companies. The paper consists of two main sections followed by several short appendices.

The first section methodically reconstructs the process by which Windy City Opera's *La Bohème* was brought to the stage. It covers the background experiences that prompted the author to found her own company, the research and decisions involved, and the interplay between the company's overall goals and the resources available for a first production. The business, casting, rehearsing, and marketing aspects are reviewed in detail, as well as several mistakes that were made during the process that afforded valuable learning opportunities.

The second section follows up on these and other opportunities by sketching an ideal plan that opera startups might follow; the principal topics are timeline, budgeting, fundraising, venue selection, personnel selection, and marketing.

The appendices consist of worksheets and materials meant to illustrate and supplement this written how-to guide, as well as a video of the Windy City Opera production of *La Bohème*.

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Finally, I'd like to thank the Chicago opera community as a whole. The city's opera scene is unique, varied, and exciting, and it would be impossible to list all the creative artists and opera-lovers who make it so vibrant.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of Purpose

Large opera companies can work on a precarious business model – full orchestras, world-class singers, and large venues all of which come with a hefty price tag. In Chicago, no fewer than a dozen¹ “micro-opera” companies have mounted productions—demonstrating a demand for affordable and innovative scaled-down productions. Such scaled-down alternatives provide an outlet and visibility for young artists who wish to hone their craft, while simultaneously enriching the cultural offerings of their communities. Unfortunately, there is very little information available for artists interested in organizing these productions. Which variables must be considered? What are realistic expectations? What tools and resources might already be available to those interested in taking advantage of them?

Knowing that scaling down a production would involve committing to certain priorities, I operated according to several guiding principles. I wanted to give the audience a more intimate, immediate, and innovative experience than they would expect in a traditional opera house. Furthermore, since I knew that I would not be compensating all of the performers monetarily, I wanted the production to provide them a service—both as an opportunity to showcase the skills they have already developed and as an invitation to grow by experimenting with new skills. I also wanted the production process to remain flexible enough to take advantage of the specific resources available and individual strengths of the people involved. Finally, since I am a conductor, and my greatest

¹ See Appendix E.

strengths are on the musical front, I wanted to put the music center-stage—performing with a chamber ensemble instead of with piano alone.

In forming an opera company and producing a small-scale performance of Puccini's *La Bohème*, I was able to explore some of the answers to these questions. In this document I will track the experience, methods, successes, and challenges of this production. Though some aspects of my experience will obviously reflect my specific location, budget, and goals, I hope to provide a starting point for others who may wish to put together similar projects in their own communities.

Methodology

I chose to base my opera company in Chicago, Illinois. Chicago has eight music schools accredited by the National Association of Schools of Music. The neighboring city of Evanston, Illinois, is home to Northwestern University. This concentration of talent aided the process of casting and recruitment. Furthermore, there were already several small opera companies in the area – some of whom were willing to share resources and ideas.

In the first part of this document, I will note and analyze my options and decisions with regard to putting together a realistic budget, finding a venue (for both performances and rehearsals), casting and coaching the singers, deciding on an arrangement, recruiting and rehearsing the chamber ensemble and chorus, marketing, finding sponsorship, and selling tickets. Though this case-study examines only one production in detail, the second part of the document will also discuss potential avenues for future productions. In the appendices, I include publicity materials from Windy City Opera's production of *La*

Bohème, a video of that production, and several files that can be used as templates for those wishing to pursue a similar course. I also include a brief list of some of the micro-opera companies in Chicago along with their distinguishing features and websites, in order to provide the reader with an example of some different approaches that are being successfully pursued in Chicago.

Review of Related Literature

While there are ample resources available to those wishing to grow a theater company or start a non-profit business, I have found very little written on opera productions of this scale. Two books that provide some insight are *How to Start Your Own Theater Company* by Reginald Nelson and *Problems of Opera Production* by Walther Volbach. Nelson's book is tailored to non-musical productions and therefore lacks any advice on that front. Volbach's book is very much on point, but is aimed at large-scale productions. Furthermore, the revised edition was published in 1967, and much of the information is out of date.

The best resource documenting a production in a similar context is Amy Yekel's doctoral dissertation, "Bringing Opera to a Small Community". Though she was working under different conditions – a church-based production in a more rural setting – much of her process runs in parallel to my own.

CHAPTER 2

PRODUCING *LA BOHÈME*

Introduction: Inspiration and Ideas

I first got the idea to start an opera company in the summer of 2014, having just attended a program in Verona, Italy (sponsored by OperAverona) that mounted a concert version of Puccini's *La Bohème* in a span of just ten days. The performances were given with the collaboration of an approximately thirty-person chorus from a local church and a fourteen-player chamber ensemble (the result of OperAverona's partnership with the orchestra of the Arena Opera Festival). At the beginning of the program, I had my reservations about putting on such a small-scale production of a rather large-scale work—but despite the limited time and resources, the performances were of high quality, well attended, and deeply appreciated by the audiences.

This experience opened my eyes to the possibility of producing opera on a small scale. The performance style of these micro-operas would obviously differ greatly from those found in grand opera houses, but it could still offer an intimate and unique experience for audiences as well as a medium for creativity and development for performers.

First Movement: What, When, and Where

Upon my return from Italy, the first thing I did was to research the already-vibrant Chicago opera scene. In addition to the large companies (Lyric Opera of Chicago and its younger sibling, Chicago Opera Theater), I discovered two companies that were already producing opera on the small scale. These were Verismo Opera (now closed), and Main

Street Opera. I met with the producers of both companies, and both were glad to share the details of their models and their advice. Both companies focused on fully-staged productions that were usually performed with piano accompaniment. Furthermore, the majority of their performances took place in the suburbs rather than in Chicago itself. I decided to use a slightly different model—choosing instead to scale down the staging rather than the music, and performing within the city limits.

Before getting started, however, it was vital to choose an opera to produce. *La Bohème* presented itself as the obvious choice for many reasons. First, it has the benefit of being well-known—Operabase lists it as the third most-performed opera in the world with 522 productions in the five seasons 2009/2010 to 2013/2014². This name-recognition makes it attractive to opera-goers and performers alike. Second, though it is a large-scale work, it scales down quite well. It is less than two hours in length, and aside from the complexity in the second act, Puccini's orchestration often lends itself well to a chamber-style treatment. A smaller instrumental ensemble retains the ability to sustain Puccini's melodic lines while simultaneously maintaining the flexibility and *rubato* required for his style. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, I had just studied *La Bohème* in depth over the summer, and I knew that I could rehearse and perform it with very little additional study. This allowed me to keep my time free and focused on the task of the production itself. Finally, before committing to *La Bohème*, I checked with the other opera companies in the area and verified that no other company was planning to mount a similar production of that opera during the 2014/2015 season. I also decided that,

² "Opera Statistics 2013/14." Operabase. <http://operabase.com/top.cgi> (retrieved March 20, 2016).

in keeping with my commitment to offer my performers experience that would transfer smoothly to future full-scale professional productions, we would perform the opera in the original Italian. Furthermore, since I speak Italian, and had recently studied this opera in Italy with native Italian coaches, conductors, and singers, this allowed me to share my expertise on that front with my cast.

The hardest thing about producing opera on this scale is that it feels like trying to piece together a jigsaw puzzle without a clear picture of what the final image should be. The more flexible you can be about which pieces you include, the more likely you are to find some that fit together to create a coherent whole. Thus, I referred to my guiding principles and made a list of priorities, starting with the things that I would be unwilling to compromise on, then moving to things that I would like but could do without. For example, since I am a conductor, I knew that I wanted to have some sort of chamber orchestra for the performances—I was, however, willing to do without a chorus if necessary. While I was hoping to include some elements of staging, I was confident that, if circumstances required, a well-rehearsed and stylistically compelling concert version could be equally moving.

Before setting out to build the production entirely on my own, I decided to follow OperAverona's example, and seek collaboration with already-established organizations. I reached out to several church choirs and chamber orchestras in the Chicago area. In doing so, I hoped to gain rehearsal space and the benefit of working with a group of musicians well-accustomed to making music with one another. I was also hoping to work with their music-directors, to share some of the musical responsibilities in both rehearsal and (perhaps) performances, as well. Unfortunately, while this is an excellent tactic for

production, by the time I reached this step it was already late October, and the ensembles to whom I reached out had already completed their season's programming.

Since it became clear that I would indeed be recruiting my own small ensemble for the production, I could now make projections about what kind of space I would need. Thus, the next step was to secure a venue and dates for the performances. This was, in some ways, the most difficult and time-consuming part of the process. I spent time researching local concert venues and churches to see which ones had hosted similar events. I looked specifically for churches that had successfully held performances of oratorios because that would ensure both adequate space and acoustics for the production I had in mind. These initial efforts, however, were unsuccessful. The churches I contacted were either already booked up, too expensive, or unwilling to take a chance on an opera company mounting its first production. I also reached out to the International House at the University of Chicago, as I had heard that there were grants available for groups wishing to perform in the space. The grant proposals, however, required a full list of the personnel involved. As I had not yet reached the casting stage, I was unable to complete the application. Furthermore, those grants are only available for one performance, and I was very committed to a minimum of two performances in order to justify the time and effort that would go into the rehearsal process.

I finally found a venue almost by chance in talking with someone at a holiday party. I discovered that their church (Church of Our Saviour) had previously hosted small productions, but had not done so in years. I followed up with the building manager and discovered that he hoped to bring more music to the church and was willing to offer us the space for ten percent of the ticket revenue instead of a flat fee. Since this was our first

production, such an arrangement was ideal in that it did not require an up-front expenditure, and the fee would scale with the degree of success of the production. Furthermore, the space itself was large enough to hold a substantial audience, but still intimate enough for the audience to feel a direct connection to the performers—thus harmonizing with my guiding principle of creating an immediate experience for the audience.

The performance dates were determined by two factors. First, Church of Our Saviour is a very active church with many services and events. We had to find a week that had time available not only for the performances, but also for a dress rehearsal. This meant that our production would have to be scheduled far enough in advance that the performers would have time to learn the music, but not so far into the spring that we would interfere with Easter services. Second, I wanted the performances to conflict with as few other events as possible. I spent significant time scouring the websites of various musical organizations, as well as online event calendars in order to find which weekend would have the least competition. Finally, we scheduled performances Friday and Saturday, March 13th and 14th—dates that were well into Lent, but early enough not to conflict with Easter.

Interlude: The Business Nitty-Gritty

Now that I had dates reserved with a venue, I was reasonably sure that the project would go forward. Thus, I decided it was time to officially begin doing business as Windy City Opera. In order to do this, one must officially file a DBA (Doing Business As) form with the county in which business is being done. This ensures that no other

business is already doing business under the same name. The method of filing depends on the county and state. In my case, I was able to go directly to the county clerk, pay a small fee, and have the name registered on the same day. Some counties also require the sole proprietor to arrange for the company's details to be published in a certified legal newspaper for several issues. After having registered Windy City Opera as an official business, I was able to establish a business account with my bank from which I could conduct all the company's financial transactions, as well as an Employer Identification Number (EIN) for tax purposes.

Second Movement: Who and How

The process described in this section (casting and rehearsing) and that of the following section (marketing) were tightly interlaced in practice, but for the sake of clarity I will discuss them separately.

The first big choice to be made was what kind of cast I was looking for and how to put it together. I knew from the start that I wanted my company to serve the performers as much as the audience. It has always struck me as unfortunate that so many singers have to pay to sing roles at apprentice and training programs before they can be hired by professional opera companies. This expensive process eliminates many singers who are without strong financial backing. In my case, even though I would be unable to provide financial compensation for the cast of the production, at least the cast would not have to pay to be involved.

Furthermore, bigger voices can take some time to develop and some singers "age out" of young artist programs before their voices settle into a clear voice-type. With these

factors in mind, instead of casting younger singers with light voices (specifically suited to the reduced instrumental ensemble and smaller venue), I decided to cast singers who I felt were fully qualified to sing the roles in professional companies, but who had not yet had the opportunity to do so.

I considered holding open auditions, but ultimately decided against it for several reasons. Auditions present the logistical hurdle of finding a venue and hiring a pianist—both of which have a price tag. Secondly, there is no guarantee that the best people for my cast would be available on any one arbitrarily-chosen date. Thus, I chose to cast this first production by word-of-mouth. I emailed various singers, coaches, and voice teachers in the area and asked them to pass around the word about the production to whomever they thought would be qualified and interested. In this way, I collected materials (headshot, resume, and video clips). I didn't receive a lot of responses, but I did receive what I felt were the right ones.

I was able to quickly cast the roles of Mimì, Musetta, and Marcello, but casting Rodolfo was more challenging. Since I had cast rather large voices in the other three main roles, I required a tenor with some heft to meet the vocal demands of the role. Everyone I contacted in the Chicago area had either already sung the role or had a conflict with the performance dates, so I had to extend my search. I did eventually find an Arizona-based tenor (Johnny Huerta) who was willing to come to Chicago for the production. While this was less than ideal, my Mimì (Kirsten Kunkle) was also coming in from Pennsylvania, so I was able to schedule the scenes with just Rodolfo and Mimì towards the end of the rehearsal process. Furthermore, in order to reduce costs for both

Kirsten and Johnny, they stayed with other members of the production—Kirsten with me, and Johnny with our Marcello, Russell Hoke.

In the end, I was able to engage a full cast, as well as covers for Mimì, Rodolfo, Musetta, Marcello, and Schaunard. For the remaining roles, I knew people who had sung them in the past and were willing to step in should there be any emergency. I also had a handful of singers who, together with the covers, would constitute a small chorus. I completed casting in mid-January to give the cast enough time to learn their roles.

The next step was to schedule rehearsals. In many productions, the producers schedule rehearsals and then cast people who are available for those times. Had I tried this method on short notice, I believe I would have wound up with a cast of much more mixed quality. Furthermore, since the Church of Our Saviour is quite a busy church, I was unable to schedule many rehearsals in the space, and I had yet to find and schedule an alternate rehearsal venue.

Thus, I decided to find the cast first and to schedule rehearsals according to their personal availability. In order to do this, I drafted two documents: the first was a spreadsheet of the scenes in the opera and their personnel requirements.³ The second was a calendar filled with all of the cast's scheduling conflicts.

The basic principles for scheduling rehearsals are effectively the same whether one is operating on a large or a small scale. I decided that I would operate on the premise that good artists with good musical instincts and preparation can come together to create a high-quality product very quickly. Just as they would in a larger production, many members of the cast met with me and other coaches to prepare their roles in advance of

³ See Appendix G.

the group rehearsals—thus simplifying the official rehearsal process. Still, I wanted to be sure that the cast members had enough time to work with one another in order to feel comfortable singing as an ensemble. Thus, I made sure that all sections of the opera were touched on multiple times before we started the run-throughs. The most complicated ensembles were introduced as early as possible and repeated several times throughout the process

Meanwhile, I began gathering leads for potential rehearsal venues. The greatest resource I found was the Harold Washington branch of the Chicago Public Library. It has both individual practice rooms and an ensemble rehearsal room that can be reserved in advance for no charge. The ensemble rehearsal room can easily accommodate a group of up to twelve singers. The only limitation is that any one organization is limited to four rehearsals per calendar month. Since our production straddled February and March, I was able to schedule six rehearsals in the space and still have two potential rehearsals reserved in case we needed to retouch anything later in the process. Smaller rehearsals and coachings took place at Northeastern Illinois University, whose practice rooms are open to the public during the afternoon. With these rehearsal locations established, it only remained to find venues for a chorus rehearsal, a rehearsal with the chamber ensemble, and two run-throughs.

I found Lake Street Church, a church in Evanston, Illinois, that could host the rehearsal for the chamber ensemble, as well as the two piano run-throughs. For the chorus rehearsal, I found First Luthern Church of the Trinity, which provided a wonderful opportunity not only to house the rehearsal itself, but also to give our cover cast an opportunity to perform. This also allowed us to do some outreach in a part of Chicago

that rarely hosts opera productions. First Lutheran Church of the Trinity is a small church with a tightly knit community which regularly hosts events for its congregation in a small assembly hall connected to the church itself. Luckily, the Community Engagement Specialist at the church is an opera lover and worked with me to present an abridged cover performance (performed with piano) in the assembly hall. We were given one day of rehearsals on which I was able to schedule both the chorus rehearsal and a dress rehearsal for the cover cast, as well as a donations-based matinee performance on the Sunday following the main run.

Now that I had secured these venues—especially the space for the two full run-throughs with piano—it became clear that it would be possible to add a bit of staging. I, however, have little to no experience with stage-direction. Since we had very limited rehearsal time, I wanted to find someone to collaborate with who would be able to share a bit of guidance without getting caught up in details. One of my cast members recommended a director (Justin Callis) from an organization called Storycatchers. This organization works with underprivileged youth to encourage them to write and mount their own small theatrical productions in schools and juvenile justice facilities. Justin's experience led him to be an ideal collaborator. We made an appointment to meet at Church of Our Saviour so he could see the space and understand its layout. He then came to the first run-through and took about ten minutes before each act to give some basic blocking to the cast. He also shared suggestions as to how best to use the space in an immersive way with the audience. On his recommendation, cast members often entered and exited through the center aisle, and the off-stage chorus parts were sung from the choir loft at the back of the church. Since many of the cast were seasoned performers, this

amount of direction mainly served to give them a framework for their own theatrical instincts, and I was very happy with the result. Furthermore, each cast member made a list of the props that they thought would be useful for their character, and we worked together to discover what we had in our closets that might fit the bill. It was in this way that the production took shape in its final semi-staged format.

Interlude: The Chamber Ensemble

The first decision I made concerned the arrangement for the chamber ensemble. While there are reductions available for *La Bohème*, these are often prepared for larger ensembles than my budget allowed. Additionally, the rental fees for the reductions themselves can be costly. Thus I looked through the score and determined that the best way to approach the arrangement would be for a string quartet to play the original string parts by Puccini, while a pianist used the vocal score to fill in the missing wind parts. This worked to my advantage, since both the original edition of the parts and the vocal score are in public domain.

Hiring the instrumentalists turned out to be the easiest thing about the production. While searching for already-formed string quartets that would be willing to work with us, I came across an organization called The Amadeus Consort. This organization is a group of high-level freelance musicians in the Chicago area organized by John Tuck, an area bass player. I spoke with him to arrange times, personnel, and venues for the rehearsals, and he contracted players who were available and highly qualified for the job. The organization is also affiliated with Lake Street Church which served as a venue for the instrumental rehearsal and the two run-throughs. Additionally, John Tuck was an

excellent collaborator in the project—helping to advise me through the planning process. I could afford four string players and was originally planning on performing with a standard string quartet and piano, but he made the excellent suggestion of substituting a bass in place of the typical cello. The sound of the ensemble was considerably more grounded as a result.

Hiring professional players required a fairly substantial budget. Each player was paid \$100 for each of two rehearsals (one with the instrumental ensemble alone and one dress rehearsal) and \$150 for each of the two performances. This came to \$500 per player. Had I chosen to recruit players with less experience, I could have paid less per service, but I would have had to hold more rehearsals—and pay for more time reserved in a rehearsal venue. Furthermore, since these players were professional union musicians, several of whom regularly play with the Lyric Opera of Chicago, I had no doubt that they would be able to provide the style and flexibility demanded by Puccini's score. This came in especially handy when one of the singers jumped a few lines in one of the performances and the players noticed and smoothly adjusted.

In addition to providing an excellent musical result in performance, there were several other benefits of working with The Amadeus Consort. For example, since some of the players work with the Lyric Opera of Chicago, I was able to get copies of bowed parts from the Lyric for a \$50 printing fee. Additionally, working with such professional players gave me an additional form of exposure, as they all play with various ensembles in the area and were very willing to recommend me for several job possibilities. The only downside of this arrangement is that the singers had only one rehearsal to adjust to hearing the chamber ensemble—an especially difficult task given the reduction of the

orchestral texture to just six instrumentalists. They adjusted quite quickly, but the performances would likely have been more secure if there had been one additional rehearsal with the instrumentalists.

In addition to The Amadeus Consort, I hired a pianist for the performances. In keeping with my commitment to offer opportunities for growth to highly qualified people who might not otherwise have such opportunities, I decided to work with a concert pianist: Jessica Yam. Though she has a strong love for opera, she had never played for an opera production before, and wanted to learn how to do so. She came in from Arizona about ten days before the production opened, played for the final rehearsals, and performed with the chamber ensemble for the performances. There was a bit of a learning curve, but by the end of the process, she had thoroughly adapted to the style of playing required for the operatic context.

It was my original plan to play piano myself for all the rehearsals prior to her arrival. This was a considerable miscalculation. After the first few rehearsals, it became apparent that the cast would benefit from having both a pianist and a conductor rather than one person serving in both roles. Thus, I had to find a rehearsal pianist on very short notice. I eventually found Steven Haschke, a collaborative pianist and flutist. Though a fine player, the short notice did not give him much time to learn the score, and that created a few speedbumps in the rehearsal process. I also invited Laura Guili, a Chicago-based conductor who was once a fellow participant at a masterclass, to aid me as my assistant conductor. She prepared the chorus and helped lead the singers through a few rehearsals while I played piano.

As it turned out, this miscalculation did finally work out in my favor in that Steven also played flute, and was willing to perform with the chamber ensemble for no extra fee. He did a remarkable job of using the full orchestra score to pick out all the major wind solos and add them to the flute part. This added considerably to the sound and texture of the final result.

Third Movement: Getting the Word Out

A very important part of the process is finding a way that an opera company's vision can be turned into a product that can be marketed. This is not limited to the opera production itself, but also includes creating a brand around the opera company. The first step was to create a website. I leased my domain name from Wix because I felt comfortable with the templates and website editor that they provided, but there are numerous other companies that provide similar services. Even before adding information about our production of *La Bohème*, I crafted a short mission statement for the company and worked with a friend of mine to design a logo that I felt reflected the character of the company—a clean, modern take on classic elegance. This way, visitors to the website would get a sense not only of the current production, but also of the company presenting it. I also created two versions of the logo: one standard logo, and one that is somewhat simplified for use on smaller materials.



Figure 1. Windy City Opera company logo (full version)

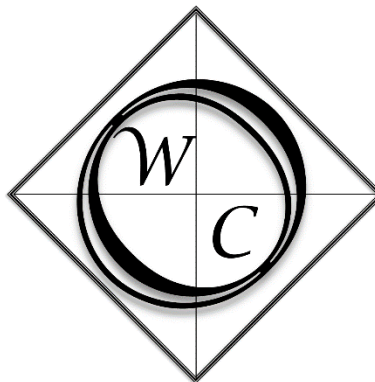


Figure 2. Windy City Opera company logo (simplified)

Once I had the website up and running, I created social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter that I could tie to the site and to our brand. I made a point of following as many local arts organizations as possible. They did not all immediately follow me; however, some did, and that helped Windy City Opera to become an integrated part of the arts scene in Chicago.

The next step was to create a ticketing website and promotional materials for the production itself. For tickets, I considered both Eventbrite and Brown Paper Tickets. Both companies provide a wide variety of options for payment and ticket distribution (including both print-at-home and mobile ticketing options). I eventually decided to list

my event with Brown Paper Tickets due to their lower processing fees. Furthermore, they allow for more customization regarding those fees, by allowing the merchant to choose whether to pay for them or instead to add them to the ticket price. I also set up merchant accounts with Paypal, Amazon, and Google Wallet to give ticket-buyers as much flexibility as possible. My goals were to encourage pre-sales and to average about \$20 per ticket. Thus, I set the price for groups at \$18, students and seniors at \$20, and general admission at \$22. I also wanted to include an option for attendees who wished to contribute more to the production, so I created a price-level for VIP tickets at \$40. VIP ticket-holders got a reserved seat and a program signed by the cast. To simplify ticket sales at the door, there was only one door price: \$25.

In designing the print materials, it was again my goal to create an image that captured the sense of the production. I settled on an 1896 painting of the original set design by Adolfo Hohenstein⁴—which not only reflects the spirit of the opera, but is also thoroughly free of copyright restriction. I used this as the basis of all the imagery for the production on the main website, ticketing website, and print materials. I then designed flyers and postcards which I distributed to music schools around the city, as well as in coffee shops and other storefronts. In the design of these materials, I made sure to include information about the production, the company’s website, how to buy tickets, and a QR code that led directly to the ticketing site.

In seeking to print the flyers and postcards, I contacted several local businesses to see if I could arrange some sort of in-kind gift or discount in return for advertisements in the program. I was hoping to use this as an opportunity to engender community growth

⁴ See Appendix L

and involvement. In the end, however, though I did hear back from several companies who offered us discounts, the online company Vistaprint still offered the best price.

Meanwhile, I continued to develop the company's website and social-media pages. I created Facebook events and used the paid advertising feature to promote them. This allowed me to target users within a certain geographical radius who shared an interest in local arts and performances. I also populated the website with the cast's headshots and bios. Furthermore, I designed a questionnaire⁵ that each cast member could fill out, so that potential audience members could get to know the performers. I published these questionnaires one by one on both Facebook and Twitter over the course of several weeks leading up to the production. This served two purposes: it not only helped to build excitement for the show, but also gave me an opportunity to promote my performers in keeping with my commitment to offer them experience, and visibility.

Marketing was the area of production in which I had the least experience prior to this project. Accordingly, it was the area in which I made the biggest mistake—namely, I did not start early enough to be listed on many online arts calendars and publications. I expected that getting listed would only be a matter of reaching out to the publications and letting them know a few weeks in advance. As it turns out, however, many of these publications are highly selective in what they list and require at least six weeks of lead time. All the same, I did find a calendar on the website for the local classical music station (WFMT), submitted the information, and the production was successfully listed there.

⁵ See Appendix D.

As the performance dates approached, I ran quite a few discount deals on tickets. Not only did this motivate some last-minute sales, it also allowed me to find out which kinds of discounts drew the strongest audience response. Among the most successful of these was a discount offered through Goldstar, a website that offers discounts for many ticketed events. I was doubtful about it at first, because they require that at least half of the tickets listed be offered at half-price. For this production, half of the general admission price was just \$11. This was considerably under the \$20 goal I had set for the average ticket. Finally, I worked with a Goldstar representative to reach an agreement that I would offer ten general admission tickets for \$11, twenty for \$15, and thirty VIP tickets for \$20. As it turns out, when the price to upgrade was not much more than the general price, ticket-buyers proved willing to buy the more expensive ticket. I sold twice as many discounted VIP tickets as I did discounted general admission tickets.

In addition to the promotion with Goldstar, I created a wide variety of discount codes on the ticketing website. I made codes for every local music school and emailed teachers at those schools with information about the production and the discount codes. While those discount codes went unused, another quite successful deal was available through Facebook. I ran an advertisement on the Windy City Opera page with a discount code for \$5 off the regular online ticket price. I also created discount codes for the cast, with the intention of making some compensation available for them. Each cast member was given a unique code that unlocked general admission tickets for \$20. I had intended to give the cast \$5 off every ticket bought with their code, but surprisingly, not one ticket was sold using these codes.

Interlude: Musical and Rehearsal Challenges

Every opera presents its own unique set of challenges, and *La Bohème* is no exception. It is challenging under even the best of circumstances, and in this case, it was rendered even more so by the necessity of condensing the orchestration and texture to something appropriate for the venue and forces at my disposal. The music of the second act was the hardest to scale back. Puccini orchestrated it not only for full orchestra, but also for a many-part chorus (including children) and an on-stage marching band. In contrast, our chorus consisted of the five covers (two sopranos, one tenor, and two baritones), two additional sopranos, and two children (the son and daughter of Noah Gartner, our Schaunard). This turned out to be just enough members for me to rearrange Puccini's chorus parts. In general, two sopranos sang the soprano parts, and the other two switched between the alto lines and the children's lines. In the end, not every part was covered in its entirety, but the texture still sounded full and complete. For the moments when both the orchestra and the marching band are supposed to play, I divided the chamber ensemble so that the strings continued to play the orchestral music, and the piano covered the music for the marching band. This was one element that actually turned out to be much easier in the smaller setting than it would be in a traditional setting. Whereas the entrance and exit of the marching band onstage can create difficulties with synchronization between stage and pit, in this case, the piano remained in one place, and helped everyone lock into one clear tempo.

The musical difficulties with *La Bohème* are not limited to those of orchestration, as Puccini is well-known for necessitating supple flexibility of tempo through the use of *rubato* and *accelerando* in many musical phrases. For this reason, several scenes required

a great deal of rehearsal for the cast to feel comfortable with the changing flow of the music. The most notable of these is the quartet in the third act. Further complicating things was the fact that, since there was no orchestra pit in the church, I was conducting the ensemble to the side of the stage rather than directly in front of the singers. This created some difficulties in maintaining a good visual connection between the chamber ensemble and the singers. Still, while the limited rehearsal time and awkward setup in the venue made it impossible to achieve everything I hoped for stylistically, I was nonetheless pleased with the result.

Finale: Showtime

In many ways, most of the hard work is over long before the performances themselves. Still, there were many elements that had to be put in place before the first downbeat. Since the performances were only semi-staged, we were not using special lighting. I favored the idea of leaving all the lights on in the church so the audience would feel less distanced from the performers. This greatly reduced the setup time in the venue. As we were doing the opera in the original Italian, I felt strongly that there should be very legible supertitles available. To make this possible, I bought two used projectors, two projection screens, three HDMI cables (6-foot, 25-foot, and 50-foot), an HDMI splitter, and three folding tables (one for my laptop and one for each of the two projectors). While the projection screens did cause mild sight-line issues between me and the cast, they made it easy for the audience to see and understand the dialogue and plot from any seat in the space. Our Musetta (Mary Lutz-Govertsen) volunteered to prepare the supertitles, and the assistant conductor ran them in the performances.

We had to be prepared to sell tickets at the door, for which my mother was going to be working at the ticket desk. Thus, I bought a cash box and went to the bank to stock up on small bills. I also bought a Square credit-card reader and installed the associated app on my phone, so we were able to accept credit cards. Furthermore, I printed out the will-call lists from both Brown Paper Tickets and Goldstar, marked off the reserved VIP seats, and prepared a pile of programs for the cast to sign for the VIP ticket-holders. Backstage, I made sure that there was an organized props table, and plenty of water bottles for the cast and instrumentalists.

Elena Guobyte, a friend of mine and a sound and video editor, volunteered her time and effort to help me make audio and video recordings—both of the opera as a whole and of several excerpts that could later be edited into a trailer for the company. Finally, on the evening of the closing performance, I prepared checks for the instrumentalists, and wrote personal thank-you notes for all involved.

Coda

I learned a great deal through the process of starting Windy City Opera and producing *La Bohème*, and I am very proud of the result. Still, there are many stones left unturned that I intend to pursue in future productions. The most obvious of these is budgeting and fundraising. I started this project with approximately \$5000 of my own money saved up and available. While I did expect to make some money back in ticket-sales, I was at peace with the fact that I was unlikely to break even without outside sources of financial backing. Since I was producing this show more or less completely on my own, and this was my first attempt at such a project, I didn't want to spread myself

too thin. It was more important to me to create a quality performance—even at a potential loss—than to spend considerable time fundraising for a production that did not deliver value. Due to my limited experience, I was not sure what we could reasonably expect in ticket sales and donations. This made creating a reliable and realistic budget nearly impossible. Thus, while I did keep an eye on my total costs, I allowed myself the freedom to create the budget as I went. This was a bit risky and I would not recommend it; however, it did serve me well, as it allowed me the flexibility for things such as bringing Justin Callis in to help with staging and hiring Steven Haschke to play piano for some extra rehearsals.

In the end, the production ended up costing approximately \$4000 plus another \$700 for technology (projectors, projector screens, etc.). I count the latter separately because not only can it be used for future productions, but also rented out to other small companies in the area. Thus, I hope those items will eventually recoup their own costs. Ticket sales came to approximately \$2800, which puts the entire production at an approximate \$1200 loss. Still, given that this was the first production of a new company with no established audience base, I feel it was a success. Furthermore, I did not actively raise funds for this production, and I was only beginning to learn how to market it. Now that I have a clear idea of the project, along with promotional materials from this first production, I am confident I could rectify the imbalance in future productions. Still, due to the absence of information on those topics in this narrative, I will address them in detail in Part 2 of this document and include ideas for how to pursue those avenues in the future.

Another thing I would do differently in the future is require the cast to be completely off-book for the performances. At the beginning of the project, I was unsure if we would give concert performances or present the work in a semi-staged version. I also didn't know if it would be reasonable to ask the cast to be fully memorized by the performance dates (a mere six to eight weeks away)—especially considering that I was unable to offer paid roles, and that the cast would doubtless have to take other paid work as well. This was a miscalculation on my part. By the time it became apparent that there would indeed be some light staging, there was insufficient time for some cast members to finish memorizing their roles. This resulted in performances for which most—but not all—of the cast was off-book. Still, while this was less than ideal, I believe that the end result was more compelling than it would have been if it had been performed as a concert version.

Moving forward, while I anticipate doing a further production each year based on the model of *La Bohème*, I would also like to move into smaller, more interdisciplinary projects that help shed light on the context in which the music was composed. For example, in the Fall of 2016, I am considering doing a fundraising event at an art gallery that would incorporate an art showing, a philosophical discussion, and a performance of Britten's *Les illuminations*.

If there is one thing that was indelibly ingrained in me during this process, it was the importance of flexibility. Instead of having a rigid plan in advance, I was able to be receptive to the ideas and opportunities that arose throughout the process. I was also able to give the cast freedom to be creative and to trust their own musical and theatrical instincts. Throughout the process, I was deeply impressed by the wealth of opportunities

and avenues available in Chicago. I was even more impressed by the talent, collaboration, and adventurousness I encountered in the area's artistic community. I look forward to many exciting projects in the future.

CHAPTER 3

AN OPERA PRODUCTION QUICK-START GUIDE

Introduction

The following information is intended as a reference guide for aspects to consider in forming a small opera company, especially with respect to the timeline, budget, and fundraising. It is not intended to be a complete or exhaustive study of all the options open to other prospective opera producers. Rather, I hope it can serve as a specific resource for Chicago-based artists, as well as a jumping-off point for artists in other communities.

Getting Started

Timeline

When it comes to production, I believe that starting earlier is better. The sooner there is a clear picture of what is to be presented, who the target audience is, and how it can prove financially viable, the sooner a producer can begin to prepare, fundraise for, and market the production. Though I began thinking about *La Bohème* in September 2014 for a show in March 2015—a sufficient, if not ideal, amount of lead-time—the shape of the production itself did not solidify until late December 2014. Due to this delay, it was impossible to apply for grants in advance, and many marketing opportunities were missed. Furthermore, many tasks must take place concurrently, and it is easy to lose track of the many irons that are in the production fire at any given point in the process.

Therefore, I have attached a sample timeline⁶ with what I think would be an ideal amount of time for preparation: nine months. Still, this is to be used with the understanding that

⁶ See Appendix A.

production is a flexible process and timelines can vary and be compressed under some circumstances.

Budget

Every bit as important as a timeline is a realistic, if approximate, budget. Personnel, music, marketing, auditions, and props all carry price tags, and forgetting to take any element into account can cause issues down the road. Still, for a novice producer, it can be extremely difficult just to piece together all the elements, let alone accurately predict how much each element will cost. For this reason, I am including a budget worksheet⁷ with lines for a wide variety of potential costs. Some elements will be important to some productions and not others. For example, since I am a conductor, it was important to me to work with a small instrumental ensemble. If I had a different area of expertise, I might have chosen to allocate that budget to sets, costumes and lighting instead.

As far as predicting income, an article published by the organization Grantmakers in the Arts suggests a model where 40% of the budget comes from private donations, 50% from ticket-sales, and the remaining 10% from grants and other government programs.⁸ Again, this model takes into account a larger-scale company than the one described in this document, and smaller productions can hope for ticket-sales to cover a higher percentage of the costs. For my production, I did not start early enough to actively

⁷ See Appendix B.

⁸ Renz, Loren. "An Overview of Revenue Streams for Nonprofit Arts Organizations." Grantmakers in the Arts. <http://www.giarts.org/article/overview-revenue-streams-nonprofit-arts-organizations> (retrieved March 21, 2016).

seek grants and donations, but I did see a return of more than 60% of my costs through ticket-sales. Had I applied for and received grants, however, my budget would have been significantly higher (as I would have made it a priority to pay my cast), but the ticket-sales would not necessarily have changed. Therefore, the ticket sales would have accounted for a much lower percentage of the total budget.

Additionally, while it is every company's goal to end the season with a surplus rather than a deficit, it can take some time to see a return on the original investments.⁹ For example, Windy City Opera's first production finished at a loss, but future productions will not start from the same place. We now have a small but appreciative audience base. There are polished marketing materials that we can present to potential backers and advertisers as an example of what we do. We own some useful equipment, and now have video and audio clips that we can use to create promotional videos. While we were unable to compensate the singers, we nevertheless avoided the common model of requiring performers to pay to participate. Even at a loss, this production provided comparable experience for both audiences and the creative team at a relatively low cost, and therefore can be seen as a success.

Fundraising

Grants

Grant applications often require a detailed mission-statement, budget, and timeline (which can be difficult to assemble for an inexperienced producer), but with

⁹ Marks, Gene. "Want to Turn Huge Startup Profits? Here's Why You Need to be Patient." Entrepreneur. <http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/229499> (retrieved March 21, 2016).

adequate planning and lead-time, grants can prove to be an excellent source of funding for projects both large and small. In Chicago, DCASE (Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs & Special Events) not only offers three primary grant programs, it also offers free grant-writing support and workshops. Furthermore, there are other private organizations that offer funding as well. Chicago-based 3Arts (offers funding for women and minority artists), The Joyce Foundation (makes special funding available for projects with community outreach), and The Luminarts Cultural Foundation (provides fellowships to artists, writers and musicians) are three such organizations

Crowdfunding

Whereas traditional forms of fundraising often rely on substantial contributions from a small number of benefactors, crowdfunding is a new trend in fundraising that instead seeks small individual donations from a much larger crowd. By backing clearly-defined campaigns, sponsors can contribute as much or as little as they like to a given project. There are several different models for these campaigns. Some are funded only if the campaign is successful (i.e. the backers pledge to contribute, but the contributions are only collected if the campaign reaches its financial goal), thus offering backers assurance that they will only be donating to successful projects. Other crowdfunding models collect the contributions regardless of the overall success of the campaign. The former model is most common for new inventions and projects that require a minimum amount of money to get off the ground. Campaigns in the arts often operate according to the latter model, however, ensuring that donations are not dependent on the overall success of the campaign. Additionally, backers are often offered thank-you gifts for their donations.

These can range from thank-you cards to private performances—depending on the level of contribution

Kickstarter, Indiegogo, and GoFundMe are examples of crowdfunding sites that offer visibility for a wide range of projects in return for a percentage of the funds raised. Crowdfunding has the potential to be an incredibly fertile source of funding, but it can be a bit of a hit-or-miss prospect. Kickstarter’s own website¹⁰ has some useful statistics showing that of the 289,266 projects launched to date, only 102,340 have been fully funded. Thus, it is vital that the campaign be carefully crafted so as to have the best chance of success. One way to do this is to make sure that the mission and purpose of your project are clear, comprehensible distinct from other similar projects. Having a video can increase your chance of being fully-funded from 30% to 50%.¹¹ Furthermore, websites such as Vision Launch offer statistics about successful campaigns¹², and Crowdfunding.io provides a detailed calculator that estimates how much your campaign is likely to raise.

Individual Donations

Non-profit organizations with 501(c)(3) tax status are able to offer tax incentives to donors. Still, companies who have not yet attained this status have various options for incentivizing personal donations. One very useful option is to become a member of

¹⁰ “Kickstarter Stats.” Kickstarter. <https://www.kickstarter.com/help/stats> (retrieved March 21, 2016).

¹¹ St. Clair, Neil. “How to Make a Crowdfunding Video That Works.” Forbes. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/neilstclair/2014/11/27/how-to-make-a-crowdfunding-video-that-works> (retrieved March 21, 2016).

¹² Zorn, Marc. “Crowdfunding Success Rates by Category.” Vision Launch. <http://www.visionlaunch.com/crowdfunding-success-rates-by-category> (retrieved March 21, 2016).

Fractured Atlas, an organization that is legally registered to fundraise in all 50 states. They offer a fiscal sponsorship program through which smaller organizations can accept donations in a wide variety of contexts for a very small processing fee. Another option is to directly incentivize donors. An example of this would be to allow prospective donors to sponsor a singer, the orchestra, or another specific element of the production. This enables donors to see a direct connection between their donation and the final result. It is also possible to create a Giving Society whose donors are acknowledged in the programs and on the company's website.

Sales of Ads in the Program

Many companies and local businesses look for good advertising possibilities, and sales of ads in the program can be a good source of money for a production. That being said, those same companies and local businesses want to be sure that they will indeed make a return on that purchase. When considering businesses to approach, it is important to carefully target those that share demographics with your opera-goers. This can be based on proximity (e.g. coffee shops near the performance venue), the usefulness of the business to the prospective audience (e.g. music schools and other performing arts organizations), or personal relations (e.g. businesses run by friends and family of the people directly involved in the production). Having determined which businesses to approach, it is helpful to create a rate card including the prices for full-page, half-page, and quarter-page ads and information about the potential reach of the ad (e.g. projected number of attendees). Rates can be higher for in-demand placements such as the front and back inside-covers, and the full color ads available on the back of the program. Prices

should be set high enough that, after factoring in printing costs, there is still a profit margin. It may also be helpful to present the potential advertisers with examples of programs from previous productions—allowing them to see the quality and professionalism of the presentation.

In-Kind Donations

Not all fundraising is measured in dollars and cents. Many production requirements may be met through in-kind contributions. For example, a local printing company may be willing to print programs or flyers at a discount in return for their ad in the program. Local bakeries or grocery stores may be willing to donate food to be sold as concessions in return for a program credit or a placard with their business information on the concessions table. At times, even production staff can be recruited this way, as some universities are willing to collaborate with small companies to create opportunities for students to gain experience and college credit.

Venues

Theaters

Opera houses are obviously ideally suited for opera production. They often have an orchestra pit to house the instrumental ensemble, adequate space backstage and in the wings, and are set up to accommodate professional lighting and other technology that often accompanies theatrical productions. The availability of those ideal specifications comes with a high price tag, so theaters are best suited to large-scale traditional

productions—with sets, costumes, lighting, and orchestra—that will make full use of the space and justify a fairly high ticket-price.

Churches

Churches provide a very viable alternative for smaller-scale productions. Many churches have excellent acoustics and charge a relatively low fee to use the space. Furthermore, they come with a built-in audience base of parishioners. The downside, of course, is that churches were not usually designed with the needs of a theatrical company in mind. There are usually limited options for lighting, supertitles, sets, orchestra, and spaces to use as a backstage. That being said, with a little creativity and flexibility, solutions can be found in many of these areas

Art Galleries and Black-Box-Style Spaces

Another option for more unconventional productions would be art galleries and black-box-style spaces. These allow for a more intimate, direct experience for the audience. They can also be ideal settings for interdisciplinary, innovative events. For example, a production could move from room to room in a gallery with the art itself providing a “set” for the action. Furthermore, such productions can be done in collaboration with visual artists—thus enhancing the community’s engagement with the opera company. Space in such venues, however, is frequently limited. This limits the number of people who can attend, which consequently limits the income from ticket sales. One way to succeed with this model is to keep the cost per performance low and do a higher number of performances—likely with only piano or keyboard accompaniment.

Bars and Coffee Shops

As is the case with art galleries, bars and coffee shops lend themselves to intimate, inexpensive productions. Since the business is likely to gain customers and income from hosting events, the cost for the space is often inexpensive or free. Some businesses, in fact, may be willing to pay the company to host the performance. Since such businesses usually operate daily, it is often difficult or impossible to rehearse in the space. In addition, audience members are likely to be eating and drinking, therefore their attention will not be as fully focused on the production. This can, however, serve as an opportunity to break down any existing taboos about opera being “inaccessible” or “elitist,” and a creative producer could potentially use this in a production’s favor. A successful model using this kind of venue could be a small, mobile production that performs in a variety of venues throughout a city—perhaps even doing outreach to parts of a city that rarely have easy access to opera performances.

Unconventional Locations

In addition to all of the above options, there are numerous opportunities to bring opera to less conventional locations. One company making an excellent example of this Chicago area is the Floating Opera Company, an organization dedicated to mounting site-specific opera productions—at times collaborating with Landmarks Illinois. Most recently, they presented a production of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* in the crematorium of Bohemian National Cemetery. Not only did this provide a chilling setting for *Don Giovanni*’s supernatural elements, it also served as a nod to the location of the opera’s

original production in Prague. Furthermore, the production contributed some of its proceeds towards the restoration of the crematorium itself, thereby serving the surrounding community. Still, such productions are not without their challenges. Outdoor and unconventional venues may not always have adequate electricity, heating, or facilities for hosting an opera production. Therefore, it is of the highest importance to adequately vet the space prior to signing a contract with the venue.

Personnel

Production Team

Opera production is a multi-faceted venture that works best with a team that can approach it from many different angles. To list just a few of these angles: fundraising needs to be sought, the cast and orchestra need to be hired and prepared, and the company's presence needs to be heard on social media. This is not to say that one person cannot wear many different hats, but the larger the scale of the company and production the more unwieldy it can become without a properly structured production team. This team can often include (but is not limited to) the producer, marketing team, fundraisers, music director, assistant conductor, rehearsal pianist, chorus master, stage director, stage manager, assistant stage manager, set designer, costume designer, lighting designer, master electrician, master carpenter, props manager, and makeup and wig designer. When putting a team together, it is important to seek people who are competent and confident in their individual fields. Delegation doesn't actually lift a burden unless the party to whom duties are delegated can genuinely take on those duties without constant supervision or instruction. It is also vital to find people who understand the general thrust of the

production and the company mounting it. This is not to say that there must be complete uniformity of ideas and opinions (in fact, I personally believe that the best results evolve from a little healthy disagreement), but all parties must have a clear enough picture of the goal so as not to be working at cross purposes.

Board of Directors

Much as a production team is a group of people with the shared goal of developing a production and making it a success, a Board of Directors can serve the same role on a company-wide scale. The members of the board should come from a variety of backgrounds and have a variety of strengths, but all should be committed to the company's mission and goals. Furthermore, unlike a production team, some of whom do their work far from the public eye, board members serve as ambassadors for your company in the community. Having a diverse and charismatic team of liaisons can open up many varied opportunities for the company. Much has already been written on the topic of the formation of a board, and since my own company is still very small, and I have not yet formed a board myself, I will not attempt to exhaustively cover the topic here. Reginald Nelson's book, *How to Start your Own Theater Company* is particularly useful on the topic. He does an excellent job of clearly and concisely expressing helpful information about the responsibilities, roles, and relationships of the board members to a company and to each other.

Auditions

The casting of principals, covers, and chorus members is a defining factor in the success of a production. Small opera companies have a variety of options when it comes to auditions. One common solution is to hold open auditions over one or two weekends (publicized through Facebook, YAP Tracker, Classical Singer, and the like). This allows for maximum exposure, invites new-comers and unknown talents to become involved with the company, and helps stave off a nepotistic reputation. Coordinating open auditions can be a complicated process, however, and reserving a venue and paying a pianist can add quite a bit to the production's budget. For example, for three six-hour days of auditions, a relatively cheap venue may cost \$50 for each day and a pianist can cost \$50 per hour. This alone adds up to over \$1000 dollars. Companies can circumvent this cost by asking for an audition fee, but this is seen by many as an offense—especially if the roles for which they are auditioning are unpaid. Another option is to require that the people auditioning bring a fee to be paid directly to the pianist or for singers to provide their own pianist. Though this does not cover the costs of venue-rental, it does erase any concerns about the possibility of the company using audition fees to fundraise for the production.

Another option is to do auditions through submitted materials. When I formed a cast for *La Bohème*, this is the option I chose—requesting a headshot, resume, and video clips. While this excludes those who do not have a ready portfolio to submit, and is no perfect substitute for actually interacting with singers in a live audition, this can be a quite successful method of casting. Videos allow a producer not only to hear a singer, but also to see their stage presence. Furthermore, by collecting digital headshots at this early

stage, the marketing staff will already have resources with which to promote the production should the singer be cast. After reviewing the submitted materials, a producer may also decide to invite some singers to a live audition if further information is needed for a decision to be made.

Somewhere in between these two models is a third option. This would be to hold live auditions without charging an audition fee, but not publicizing those auditions widely—working instead by personal recommendation and word of mouth alone. This option can lead to a negative reputation for the company, but it does remove most of the financial burden of the first model while still avoiding the guess-work of the second.

Contracts

Contracts are a staple for most businesses, but it is an unfortunate fact of the micro-opera scene that work is frequently done on an in-kind or volunteer basis. Though no contract is valid without goods or money exchanged, a letter of agreement can still be useful to help clarify the goals and expectations for the company, production, staff, cast, and orchestra. When writing contracts or letters of agreement, it is vital to think ahead not only to the performances, but also to the marketing, costuming, and recording needs of the production. For example, if the performance is to be recorded in order to make promotional clips for future productions, it is important to include that information in the contract. A template for an artist's contract is found in Appendix C.

Marketing

Mission

Before starting any opera production, it is important to have an idea of what you hope to accomplish—at least in broad strokes—and know how to communicate it to your production staff, performers, donors, and audience. The very first thing people will notice about a company is its name. The name should be clear, memorable, and provide some sort of information about who you are as a company. For example, when choosing a name for my company, I avoided using the word “Chicago” because many Chicago-based companies already use it, and it can become easy to get confused about which is which. “Windy City” conveys the same information, but in a more dynamic and memorable way. Aside from the name, the company’s mission statement is the primary medium used to transmit your company’s message. A good mission statement will make clear who you are as a company, what unique value you provide, and to whom you provide that value.

Social Media

There are many lively forms of social media with which one can promote interest in a production. Facebook and Twitter are perhaps the most established of these, but others include Instagram, Snapchat, and LinkedIn. Promotional videos can be posted on YouTube, and there are also neighborhood-based networking options such as Nextdoor and Alignable. By creating and sharing your company’s pages, events, and successes, it is possible to share information about your company and production with a wide audience base. A key to doing so, however, is consistency. The more regularly you post, the more

often there is an opportunity for the audience to see those posts and think of your company. One technique for building this consistency is posting photos and videos throughout the process. These can include interviews with the cast, pictures of important milestones in the productions (e.g. pictures from the first staging rehearsal or of the set being built), and any other interesting information or questions that might capture an audience's attention. Finally, everything should be cross-posted—if you post a picture on Instagram, link to it on Twitter and Facebook. This will help drive your audience across platforms. Furthermore, Facebook offers the option to “boost” posts by allocating a budget to be spent in return for impressions or interactions. In my experience, it has been most helpful to “boost” events because it is possible to pay by the number of event responses. Since nearly every positive event response is connected to a ticket sale, this provides quite tangible returns.

Online Advertising

In addition to advertisements on social media, there are many other opportunities to advertise online. Community calendars are often found on websites for local television channels and radio stations. Most local newspapers also have an online calendar of events, and there are even websites specifically designed to promote events and local businesses. In Chicago, three of these are Metromix, TimeOut, and Choose Chicago. Oftentimes, these websites require that events be submitted far in advance, so ample preparation is needed. Another possibility is to join an organization designed to cross-promote cultural events. Chicago Opera Theater is currently pioneering a program called Opera Underground. This program is available both to small opera companies and to

audience members. Audience members who join get discounted tickets and other perks, and participating opera companies get their events listed on the program's master calendar. Finally, there are interest-based communities to whom a producer can market directly. For example, Meetup is a company helping to connect people with similar interests. By sending press-releases to the organizers of local opera and classical-music meetups, it is possible to directly contact an interested audience.

In-Print Advertising

Though much marketing is done online, there are still opportunities for publicity in print. Sometimes there is no substitute for a well-positioned flyer in a café, or a pile of postcards available in a hotel lobby. Postcards can also be mailed out directly to addresses collected over time from audience members or through services such as Chicago Pressmen or Chicago Direct Mail— both of which provide services to help you print the postcards and target an audience. Both flyers and postcards should have all relevant information about the production as well as information about how to find out more about your organization. Furthermore, the design of the flyers and postcards should be eye-catching, clean, and easily legible in a variety of lightings and from a variety of distances.

Outreach

Outreach should be a vital aspect of every performing arts organization. It can take the form of a cover performance in a community that doesn't often see opera performances, educational lectures, and performances of excerpts at retirement homes,

hospitals, and living communities, to name just a few. Another option can be to offer free or discounted tickets to various organizations who already serve communities that would not otherwise attend. For example, tickets can be made available to Big Brothers Big Sisters of America in such a way that the mentor can buy a ticket and bring their mentee for free. Other organizations such as the Midtown Educational Foundation may gladly promote events to their sizeable base in return for a percentage of the returns on the tickets sold as a result of that promotion. The options are as varied as the communities in which performances take place, but one thing is for sure: outreach, when best executed, has the potential to benefit both the community and the arts organization itself—furthering its audience base, creating performance opportunities for its artists, and helping to engender a more artistic community.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

Returning to the guiding principles established at the beginning of the project, it is worthwhile to take a moment and judge the success of the project according to those very principles. I think my most successful effort was in the realm of providing an enriching and valuable experience for everyone involved. Every one of my singers was vocally qualified, and almost all of them had never performed the roles before. Those that had done so, had never done so with more than just a piano as accompaniment. This production gave them the chance to not only perform, but also to do so in the original language and to work with other talented professionals along the way. They also all gained visibility and made further connections in the area. Furthermore, being strongly aware of the fact that there was no monetary compensation, I made every effort to be respectful of the singers' time—keeping rehearsal commitments to a minimum and scheduling those rehearsals around their individual calendars.

This commitment to minimal scheduling, however, turned out to be somewhat at odds with my commitment to musical quality. While I am very proud of what we accomplished in the time we had, Puccini can be a difficult composer to tackle. He demands a thorough knowledge of the Italian language and its rhythms, as well as a supple flexibility in the execution of the *rubato* and *accelerando* which is such an important aspect of Puccini style. Given our rehearsal schedule, though we did take time to work on these aspects of Puccini's musical style, we did not have time to thoroughly internalize it. Furthermore, moving into the church proved to be an issue because it was

difficult to maintain eye-contact between the singers and myself, tempi slowed, and much stylistic nuance was lost.

As regards the audience, I think I was very successful in creating an immediate and intimate experience, but I did not fully take advantage of the opportunity to innovate. While the venue was very conducive to a direct connection between the singers and the public (i.e. the singers were very close to the pews, the lights remained on, and various parts of the action took place in and around the audience), it had no direct relation to the topic of the opera, and there were certain spatial limitations that complicated anything but the most basic staging. Perhaps mounting the production in a café or a bar would have invited the audience into the action—especially in the second act—and made the performance more of an immersive experience.

This idea, in fact, inspired another new opera company to give our *La Bohème* a second life of sorts with a production at Nitecap Coffee Bar. Brenda Turner (Founder and Artistic Director of Opera Ouvert) was a member of the chorus in my production. She is currently mounting a production of *La Bohème* starring several of the covers from Windy City Opera's production and conducted by Laura Guili (who served as my Assistant Conductor). Though Opera Ouvert's production¹³ will lack the chamber ensemble (accompanied instead by piano alone) the audience will be offered different benefits. For example, ticket-holders are invited to bring their own drinks and enjoy a French-inspired meal that is included in the ticket price.

¹³ "Opera Overt presents: La Boheme." Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/events/1680404738877737> (retrieved April 15, 2016).

This leads to the next, and most important, principle: the commitment to flexibility. Much of producing is knowing and relying upon a network of personal connections and local talent. I was partially inspired to do the production because I knew Kirsten Kunkle and knew she'd be a perfect Mimi, I found my stage director through a cast member, I secured a church in which to perform while chatting at a holiday party, and I located a space to rehearse through John Tuck and The Amadeus Consort. Likewise, Brenda got to know the cover cast of *La Bohème* while working on my production, and recognized that, though their voices were lighter and not entirely suited to a full production with an orchestra, they were ideally suited to a small performance with piano accompaniment.

Though not all cities and communities will have the same resources that can be found in Chicago, every community will have its own set of resources ready to be tapped. I believe that a well-connected producer has a good chance of success no matter where they are located. For an example of how such a small production succeeded in a less urban setting, one can look to Amy Yekel's successful production of Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors* in the small community of Shreve, Ohio¹⁴. She tapped resources at her local church, and her production took a distinctly different shape from mine, but the principle of remaining flexible and using the local talent remains the same.

What is one to make of this interest in producing and attending opera on the smallest scale? Is it a sign that the traditional model is falling out of favor? Could this increase in small productions drive audiences away from more prestigious (and more

¹⁴ Yekel, Amy Louise. "Bringing Opera to a Small Community" (DMA diss., Arizona State University, 2012).

expensive) alternatives? I do not believe so. In fact, I believe it to be a healthy addition to the opera scene. In the end, nothing can serve as a replacement for the experience that is found in grand opera houses. Instead, these smaller-scale options give audiences new avenues for experiencing opera in more intimate, adventurous ways.

I believe that what is happening now with micro-opera in Chicago is the result of audiences and artists coming together in a mutually beneficial relationship. There are many opera training-programs that promise roles in return for hefty fees. Some are worth every penny, but at times, the experience is worth little more than a line on a résumé. Through these micro-productions of operas, young artists get hands-on experience with both traditional and contemporary repertoire without taking the same financial damage, and audiences stand in a position to witness and support the artists' development as well as to enjoy the fruits of their labors. Furthermore, reducing production cost and ticket price incentivizes small opera companies to find new venues and novel opportunities for outreach, promoting growth on multiple fronts for the entire opera community.

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APPENDIX A
SUGGESTED PRODUCTION TIMELINE

APPENDIX B
BUDGET WORKSHEET
[Consult Attached Files]

APPENDIX C
ARTIST CONTRACT TEMPLATE

[Consult Attached Files]

APPENDIX D
ARTIST Q&A TEMPLATE

La Bohème – Artist Q&A

1. Where are you from?
2. Which character are you portraying and do you identify with him or her at all in your own life?
3. What appeals to you about working with Windy City Opera?
4. What's something about opera that fascinates you?
5. When did you know performing opera was what you wanted to do with your life?
6. What do you enjoy doing when you are not involved with singing or preparing a role?
7. What did you think of the first opera that you saw/heard?
8. What music has inspired you recently – opera or otherwise?
9. Did you have an experience related to singing, while stressful or unexpected at the time, you now find amusing?
10. Do you sing to your pets? If so, do they enjoy it?
11. Have you ever worn a stage costume outside of the theater?
12. If I could have coffee with any living person, it would be...
13. If you could trade places with anyone for a day, I would choose...
14. Tell us a secret.

APPENDIX E

CHICAGO'S SMALL-SCALE OPERA COMPANIES

List of Some of Chicago's Small-Scale Opera and Vocal Arts Companies

Opera Company	Website	Notes
/kor/ Productions	http://www.facebook.com/korproductions	Small productions and singers' salons in Chicago's bars and cafés
Chamber Opera Chicago	http://www.chamberoperachicago.org	Fully-staged performances of chamber operas
Chicago Fringe Opera	http://chicagofringeopera.com	Productions of contemporary, English-language opera on a variety of scales
da Corneto Opera	http://www.dacorneto.org	Concert productions of opera performed with piano
The Floating Opera Company	http://www.thefloatingoperacompany.com	Site-adaptive productions on a variety of scales, also tours one production a year
Forté Chicago	http://www.fortechicago.com	Innovative and improvisatory all-female interdisciplinary ensemble
Fourth Coast Ensemble	http://fourthcoastensemble.com	Focuses on very small, parlor-styled performances - often of art song as well as operatic excerpts
The Gilbert and Sullivan Opera Company	http://www.gilbertandsullivanoperacompany.com	Fully-staged performances of works by Gilbert and Sullivan, performed with full orchestra
Haymarket Opera Company	http://www.haymarketopera.org	Productions of early operas with chamber orchestra
Main Street Opera	http://mainstreetopera.org	Fully-staged productions in Chicago and its suburbs, usually with piano, but occasionally with the addition of strings
NON:op	http://nonopera.org	Experimental ensemble aiming to change the performer-audience relationship with immersive productions
Opera on Tap	http://www.facebook.com/ootchicago	The Chicago branch of the international organization bringing opera arias to pubs and bars
Third Eye Theatre Ensemble	http://www.thirdeyete.com	Company aiming to stir thought with contemporary and rarely-performed operas and musical theater
Windy City Opera	http://www.windycityopera.com	Semi-staged performances of traditional repertoire with chamber orchestra

APPENDIX F

LA BOHÈME - BUDGET

La Bohème Production Budget

EXPENSES			
SOURCE	PROJECTED	ACTUAL	NOTES/COMMENTS
Artistic Personnel			
Singers - Principals			
Singers - Covers			
Singers - Chorus			
Rehearsal Pianist		300	
Orchestra		2700	5 players (\$500 each), \$200 contracting fee
Music Director			
Stage Director		100	
Other			
SUBTOTAL ARTISTIC PERSONNEL	0	3100	
Administrative Personnel			
Stage manager			
Technicians			
Administrative assistants			
Graphic designer			
Marketing/Social-media Specialist			
Legal assistant			
Other			
SUBTOTAL ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL	0	0	
Venue			
Rehearsal space		150	Venue for 2 run-throughs and 1 orchestra rehearsal
Performance space		289.5	3 Performances, dress rehearsals and chorus rehearsal
Ticket production costs			
House manager			
Ticket takers/Ushers			
Other			
SUBTOTAL VENUE	0	439.5	
Set/Costume			
Set (rental and/or building)			
Costumes (rental and/or creation)		10	Mimi's bonnet (made)
Costume cleaning			
Costumer			
Props			
Lights			
Miscellaneous technology			One-time purchases (not included in total: \$707)
Set transportation			
Other			
SUBTOTAL SET/COSTUME	0	10	
Music			
Royalties			
Rental score/Parts		50	Printing fee for parts
Vocal scores			
Other			
SUBTOTAL MUSIC	0	50	

La Bohème Production Budget (continued)

Marketing			
Flyer design and production		50	
Postcard design and production		40	
Mailing			
Advertising		100	Facebook ads
Program design and production		200	
Photos			
Audio recording of show			
Video recording of show			
Website set up			
Other			
SUBTOTAL MARKETING	0	390	
Concessions			
Food			
Drink		5	Water for cast and orchestra
Cast Party			
Other			
SUBTOTAL CONCESSIONS	0	5	
TOTAL EXPENSES	0	3994.5	
INCOME			
SOURCE	PROJECTED	ACTUAL	NOTES/COMMENTS
Earned Income			
Ticket Sales		2728	\$2895 gross, \$167 fees
Concessions		25	Donated cookies sold at cover performance
Advertising Sales in Program			
Other			
SUBTOTAL EARNED INCOME	0	2753	
Contributed Income			
Individual Donors			
Corporate			
Foundation/Grants			
Government			
Other			
SUBTOTAL CONTRIBUTED INCOME	0	0	
TOTAL INCOME	0	2753	
TOTAL EXPENSES			
	0	3994.5	
TOTAL INCOME			
	0	2753	
TOTAL	0	-1241.5	

APPENDIX G

LA BOHÈME – WHO SINGS WHEN

La Bohème - Who Sings When

Excerpt	Rehearsal #s	pp. (Schirmer)	Rodolfo	Marcello	Colline	Schaunard	Mimi	Musetta	Ben/Aic/S	Parpignol	Chorus
ACT I											
Act I:1	Beg - 17	1-35	X	X	From 4	From 10	--	--	--	--	--
Act I:2	17 - 25	35-58	X	X	X	X	--	--	17-22	--	--
Act I:3	25 - End of Act	58-87	X	*R39	*R39	*R39	X	--	--	--	--
ACT II											
Act II:1	Beg - 4	89-95	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	X
Act II:2	4 - 16	96-124	X	X	X	X	X	--	--	X	X
Act II:3	16 - 27	124-154	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Act II:4	27 - End of Act	154-175	X	X	X	X	X	X	--	--	X
ACT III											
Act III:1	Beg - 8	177-189	--	--	--	--	*R6	*R3	*R6	--	X
Act III:2	8 - 15	189-201	--	X	--	--	X	--	--	--	--
Act III:3	15 - 30	202-221	X	X	--	--	X	--	--	--	--
Act III:4	30 - End of Act	221-236	X	X	--	--	X	X	--	--	--
ACT IV											
Act IV:1	Beg - 5	238-246	X	X	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Act IV:2	5 - 12	247-261	X	X	X	X	--	--	--	--	--
Act IV:3	12 - 20	262-275	X	X	X	X	X	X	--	--	--
Act IV:4	20 - 27	276-285	X	--	--	--	X	--	--	--	--
Act IV:5	27 - End of Act	286-292	X	X	X	X	X	X	--	--	--

APPENDIX H

LA BOHÈME – REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

La Bohème - Rehearsal Schedule															
Date	Time	Location	Description	Rehearsal #'s	Balkin	Brautigam	Dewese	Gartner	Hoke	Huerta	Kunkle	Luis	Lutz	Schiano	Weiser
Mon 2/23	6-9pm	Downtown Library, 8th Flr 400 S State	Beg Act I, Beg Act IV	I (Beg-17, 39); IV (Beg-12)			(X)	X	X			X			X
Wed 2/25	6-9pm	Downtown Library, 8th Flr 400 S State	Act II (no Alc), Act III	Full Acts		X	(X)	X	X			X	X	(X)	X
Tues 3/3	6-9pm	Downtown Library, 8th Flr 400 S State	Act II, Act I Benoit	II (All - Esp 16-End); I (17-25)	X	X	(X)	X	X			X	X	(X)	X
Wed 3/4	6-9pm	Downtown Library, 8th Flr 400 S State	Act IV	Full Act		X	(X)	X	X			X	X	(X)	X
Thurs 3/5	6-9pm	Downtown Library, 8th Flr 400 S State	Act III, Acts I & IV Rod/Mimi duets	III (Full Act); I (25-end); IV (20-27)		(X)	(X)		X		X	X	X	(X)	
Sat 3/7	2-5pm	First Trinity Lutheran Church 643 W 31st	Chorus	II (All), III (Beg-8)		X	X					X		X	
Sat 3/7	6-9pm	First Trinity Lutheran Church 643 W 31st	Cover Rehearsal		X	X	X	X				X		X	X
Sun 3/8	1:30-5pm	Downtown Library, 8th Flr 400 S State	Incorporate Huerta & Kunkle	All	X	Opt	Opt	X	X	X	X	Opt	X	Opt	X
Mon 3/9	6-9pm	Lake Street Chruch 607 Lake St. (Evanston)	Piano Run-through	All	X	(X)	(X)	X	X	X	X	(X)	From 7pm	X	X
Wed 3/11	6-9pm	Lake Street Chruch 607 Lake St. (Evanston)	Piano Run-through	All	X	(X)	(X)	X	X	X	X	(X)	X	(X)	X
Thurs 3/12	2-5pm	Church of Our Saviour 530 W Fullerton	Dress Rehearsal	All	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Fri 3/13	7:30pm	Church of Our Saviour 530 W Fullerton	Performance 1	All	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sat 3/14	7:30pm	Church of Our Saviour 530 W Fullerton	Performance 2	All	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sun 3/15	2:30	First Trinity Lutheran Church 643 W 31st	Cover Performance	TBA	X	X	X	X				X		X	X

APPENDIX I

LA BOHÈME - FLYER

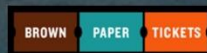


WINDY CITY OPERA PRESENTS:

GIACOMO PUCCINI'S LA BOHÈME

7:30PM - MARCH 13TH & 14TH, 2015
CHURCH OF OUR SAVIOUR, 530 W FULLERTON
TICKETS \$18-\$40 IN ADVANCE, \$25 AT THE DOOR
TICKETS AVAILABLE NOW!

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APPENDIX J

LA BOHÈME - POSTCARD



WINDY CITY OPERA PRESENTS:

GIACOMO PUCCINI'S

LA BOHÈME



7:30PM - MARCH 13TH & 14TH, 2015

CHURCH OF OUR SAVIOUR, 530 W FULLERTON

TICKETS \$18-\$40 IN ADVANCE, \$25 AT THE DOOR

TICKETS AVAILABLE NOW!

BROWN PAPER TICKETS

WINDY CITY OPERA PRESENTS:

GIACOMO PUCCINI'S

LA BOHÈME



Puccini's timeless tale of love and hardship. Starving artists burn their work for winter heat, live larger than life in a frigid attic, and use their wits to stay one step ahead of the landlord. Their harsh circumstances force passion into everything they do, whether in the fascination of Parisian cafés, the exuberance of Christmas on the streets, or the joys and pains of new-found love. Rodolfo and Mimi fall hard for each other—but should they enjoy what time they have, or break things off before it's too late?

Puccini set this story, by turns funny, tender, and poignant, to some of the most beautiful music he ever composed. Windy City Opera's lightly-staged concert production will focus on that music above all; our vocalists, accompanied by a small ensemble, will sing the original Italian and English superlatives will be provided.

FRIDAY AND SATURDAY MARCH 13TH & 14TH @ 7:30PM

Advance Tickets Available at

BROWN PAPER TICKETS

All Tickets \$25 at the Door



\$40 VIP Tickets
\$22 General Admission

For more information, check out our website at:

APPENDIX K

LA BOHÈME - PROGRAM



WINDY CITY OPERA PRESENTS:

**GIACOMO PUCCINI'S
LA BOHÈME**

**7:30PM - MARCH 13TH & 14TH, 2015
CHURCH OF OUR SAVIOUR, 530 W FULLERTON**

LA BOHÈME

MUSIC: GIACOMO PUCCINI

LIBRETTO: LUIGI ILLICA & GIUSEPPE GIACOSA

CAST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

MARCELLO RUSSELL HOKE
RODOLFO JOHNNY HUERTA
COLLINE SAMUEL WEISER
SCHAUNARD NOAH GARTNER
BENOIT/ALCINDORO DOUGLAS BALKIN
MIMI KIRSTEN C. KUNKLE
PARPIGNOL ANTHONY SEEMANN
RAGAZZO PAUL MURPHY-GARTNER
MUSSETTA MARY LUTZ-GOVERTSEN

CHORUS

Douglas Balkin, Bethany Brautigam, Anne Gartner, Chungers Kim,
Joachim Luis, Kate Mongulla, Paul Murphy-Gartner, Alexandra Schiano,
Jamie Spagnola, Brenda Turner

ORCHESTRA

Jessica Yam — piano, Steven Haschke — flute
Strings provided by Amadeus Consort

Catherine O'Shaughnessy — Music Director and Conductor
Laura Guili — Assistant Conductor

PRODUCTION TEAM

Artistic Director..... Catherine O'Shaughnessy
Stage Director Justin Callis
Audiovisual Consultant..... Elena Guobyte



SYNOPSIS

ACT I: *In the four bohemians' garret (Christmas Eve)*

Marcello is painting while Rodolfo gazes out of the window. They complain of the cold. In order to keep warm, they burn the manuscript of Rodolfo's drama. Colline, the philosopher, enters shivering and disgruntled at not having been able to pawn some books. Schaunard, the musician of the group, arrives with food, wine and cigars. He explains the source of his riches: a job with an eccentric English gentleman, who ordered him to play his violin to a parrot until it died.

The friends are interrupted by Benoît, the landlord, who arrives to collect the rent. They flatter him and ply him with wine. In his drunkenness, he begins to boast of his amorous adventures, but when he also reveals that he is married, they thrust him from the room—without the rent payment—in comic moral indignation. The rent money is divided for an evening out in the Quartier Latin.

Marcello, Schaunard and Colline go out, but Rodolfo remains alone for a moment in order to finish an article he is writing. There is a knock at the door. It is a girl who lives in another room in the building. Her candle has blown out, and she has no matches; she asks Rodolfo to light it. As she turns to leave, she realizes that she has lost her key. Her candle goes out in the draft and Rodolfo's candle goes out too; the pair stumble in the dark. Rodolfo, eager to spend time with the girl, takes her hand and tells her of his life as a poet, then asks her to tell him more about her life. The girl says her name is Mimì and describes her simple life as an embroiderer. Soon, the pair realizes that they have fallen in love. As they leave to join their friends at Café Momus, they sing of their newfound love.

ACT II: *Quartier Latin (Christmas Eve)*

A great crowd, including children, has gathered with street vendors announcing their wares. The friends arrive; Rodolfo buys Mimì a bonnet from a peddler. The children clamor to see the wares of Parpignol, the toy seller. The friends enter the Café Momus.

As the men and Mimì dine at the cafe, Musetta, Marcello's former sweetheart, arrives with her rich admirer, Alcindoro. It is clear she has tired of him. To the delight of the Parisians and the embarrassment of her patron, she sings a risqué song, hoping to reclaim Marcello's attention; the ploy works. To be rid of Alcindoro for a bit, Musetta pretends to be suffering from a tight shoe and sends him to the shoemaker to get her shoe mended. Alcindoro leaves, and Musetta and Marcello fall rapturously into each other's arms. Soon, the friends are presented with their bill, and the sly Musetta has the entire bill charged to Alcindoro.



SYNOPSIS (CONTINUED)

ACT III: *At the toll gate, Barrière d'Enfer (late February)*

Peddlers pass through the barriers and enter the city. Mimì appears, seeking Marcello. She tells him of her hard life with Rodolfo, who abandoned her the night before, and of Rodolfo's terrible jealousy. Marcello tells her that Rodolfo is asleep inside, but Rodolfo wakes up and comes out looking for Marcello. Mimì hides and overhears Rodolfo first telling Marcello that he left Mimì because of her coquettishness, but finally confessing that his jealousy is a sham: he fears she is slowly being consumed by a deadly illness. Rodolfo, in his poverty, can do little to help Mimì and hopes that his pretended unkindness will inspire her to seek another, wealthier suitor. Out of kindness towards Mimì, Marcello tries to silence him, but she has already heard all. Her weeping and coughing reveal her presence, and Rodolfo hurries to her. Musetta's laughter is heard and Marcello goes to find out what has happened. Mimì tells Rodolfo that she is leaving him, and asks that they separate amicably, but their love for one another is too strong for the pair to part. As a compromise, they agree to remain together until the spring, when the world is coming to life again and no one feels truly alone. Meanwhile, Marcello has found Musetta, and the couple quarrel fiercely about Musetta's flirtatiousness.

ACT IV: *Back in the garret (some months later)*

Marcello and Rodolfo are trying to work, though they are primarily thinking about their girlfriends, who have left them and found wealthy lovers. Rodolfo has seen Musetta in a fine carriage and Marcello has seen Mimì dressed like a queen. The men both express their nostalgia. Schaunard and Colline arrive with a very frugal dinner and parody eating a plentiful banquet, and engage in a mock duel. Musetta suddenly appears; she found Mimì that day in the street, severely weakened by her illness, and Mimì begged Musetta to bring her to Rodolfo. Mimì, haggard and pale, is assisted onto a bed. Musetta and Marcello leave to sell Musetta's earrings in order to buy medicine, and Colline leaves to pawn his overcoat. Schaunard leaves with Colline to give Mimì and Rodolfo some time together. Mimì tells Rodolfo that her love for him is her whole life. To Mimì's delight, Rodolfo presents her with the pink bonnet he bought her, which he has kept as a souvenir of their love. They remember past happiness and their first meeting—the candles, the lost key. Suddenly, Mimì is overwhelmed by a coughing fit. The others return, with a gift of a muff to warm Mimì's hands and some medicine. Mimì gently thanks Rodolfo for the muff, which she believes is a present from him, reassures him that she is better and falls asleep. As Musetta prays, Mimì dies. Schaunard realizes that Mimì has died. Rodolfo becomes aware that something is wrong. He rushes to the bed, calling Mimì's name in anguish, and weeps helplessly.





Douglas Balkin (Benoit/Alcindoro) Bass-baritone Douglas Balkin is a native of Geneseo, NY and a current resident of Evanston, IL. He earned his Bachelor's Degree in Vocal Performance from Oberlin Conservatory, and recently completed his Master of Music at the University of Illinois. He has performed in operatic venues all over the world, most recently having appeared in the role of Don Alfonso in Petite Opera's production of *Così fan tutte*. Other favorite roles performed include the Count in *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Fiorello in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, Florian in *Princess Ida*, and King Melchior in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*. Douglas is also a seasoned concert soloist, having sung Pontius Pilate in J.S. Bach's *St. John Passion*, the bass solo for Dvořák's *Stabat Mater*, and the baritone solo for Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem*.



Noah Gartner (Schaunard) Originally from New York, Lyric Baritone Noah Gartner has found a home performing in the Chicago area over the past 10 years. He is very pleased to be revisiting Schaunard with Windy City Opera after first performing the role with dell'Arte Opera Ensemble of New York. Since moving to Chicago, Noah has performed regularly with da Corneto Opera, Petite Opera, and Handel Week Festival in Oak Park. Previous roles include Figaro in *The Barber of Seville*, Valentin in *Faust*, Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*, the Music Master in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Melchior in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, and Ko-Ko in *The Mikado*. Noah's most recent performance as the title role in *Brundibar* with Petite Opera holds a particular significance to him, as it was the first opera performed alongside his 2 wonderfully talented children - Paul and Anne.



Russell Hoke (Marcello) Russell is a seasoned and powerful singer acclaimed for his vocal richness and warmth. He has performed on stages in Europe, the U.K., Brazil, and in houses across the U.S. Having come to opera via a non-traditional path, Russell studied privately as opposed to going to conservatory or college; he is finding his place in the Italian traditions of opera and Verdi in particular. Making his Verdi debut in 2013, he sang the role of Giorgio Germont in *La Traviata* upon his return from São Paulo, Brazil where he sang the villains from Offenbach's masterwork, *Les Contes D'Hoffman*. Russell is also pleased to once again be sharing the stage with Mr. Gartner - having performed with him in *The Barber of Seville* and *Faust* along with many concerts and events. Russell is also glad to once again perform with tenor Johnny Huerta. They became fast friends during their time in Brazil and have worked with Phoenix Opera together in concert. Russell's roles include Germont from *La Traviata*, Nabucco from *Nabucco*, Dottore Bartolo in *The Barber of Seville*, Dr. Dulcamara in *Elixir of Love*, Zio Simone in *Gianni Schicchi*, and many more.





Johnny Huerta (Rodolfo) Juan "Johnny" Huerta was born in Phoenix, Arizona, the youngest of nine children residing in the far Northwest Valley. In 2008, Johnny auditioned for Phoenix Metropolitan Opera's founders, John Massaro and Gail Dubinbaum, and immediately began his professional development. In 2009, Johnny was invited to both Northern Arizona University and Arizona State University to participate in national auditions for an opportunity to attend their exclusive summer programs. He received invitations to NAU's program in Fidenza, Italy and Taos Opera Institute in New Mexico. Mr. Huerta concluded his studies with limited participation in Santa Fe Opera's critically acclaimed summer program.

Mr. Huerta has had the distinctive honor and pleasure of performing concerts with Phoenix Opera and other groups, becoming acquainted with and befriending several international artists featured in PMO's productions. In 2009, Johnny accepted an invitation to join Phoenix Opera's "Los Tres Tenores" alongside colleagues Francisco Renteria and Guillermo Ontiveros. In 2011, Los Tres Tenores debuted at the world renowned Musical Instrument Museum to a sold-out crowd. Later that year, Johnny made his professional operatic stage-debut at the historic Phoenix Orpheum Theater in a lead role in Phoenix Opera's production of *La Traviata*.



Kirsten C. Kunkle (Mimi) A spinto soprano with an extensive lower range, she has performed extensively throughout various genres, including opera, operetta, and musical theatre. Kirsten commissioned and premiered sixteen original compositions, including one of her own, based upon the poetry of her ancestor and poet of the Native American Muscogee Nation, Alex Posey, as part of her graduate studies. She has recorded extensively through the Comic Opera Guild, specializing in the works of Victor Herbert. Her recordings are collected at the Library of Congress and the National Museum of the American Indian at the Smithsonian Institution. She is also on the list of Classical Native American Artists at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian.

Favorite roles include the Mother (*Amahl and the Night Visitors*), Iolanta and Brigitta (*Iolanta*), Lisa (*Pique Dame*), Foreign Woman and Voice on the Record (*The Consul*), Donna Elvira (*Don Giovanni*), Laetitia (*The Old Maid and the Thief*), and the Witch (*Hansel and Gretel*). Kirsten recently made her Carnegie Hall debut as a first place winner of the American Protégé International Vocal Competition. She is represented by MIA Artists Management.





Mary Lutz-Govertsen (Musetta) Mary is delighted to be making her debut with Windy City Opera. An emerging young professional in Chicago, Mary has performed with Third Eye Theater Ensemble, Chamber Opera Chicago, Verismo Opera, Main Street Opera, OperaModa, Opera for the Young, the DuPage Symphony and Chorale, the Music Institute of Chicago, Katydid Opera, and Chicago Symphony Chorus. With these companies, she has been seen as Lucia/*Lucia di Lammermoor*; Donna Anna/*Don Giovanni*; Fiordiligi/*Così fan tutte*; Rosalinde/*Die Fledermaus*; Adele/*Le Comte Ory*; Heroines/*Les Contes d'Hoffmann*; First Lady/*The Magic Flute*; Mimi/*La bohème*, Madame Lidoine/*The Dialogues of the Carmelites*; and Mlle. Silberklang/*Der Schauspieldirektor*. She has been an apprentice at Opera New Jersey, covering the role of Clorinda/*La Cenerentola* and at Opera Cedar Rapids, as Fiordiligi/*Così fan tutte*. A strong supporter of opera in unconventional venues and genres, she is a company member with Lingerie Lyrique, a Chicago-based opera/burlesque fusion company, with Opera on Tap, and with VOX 3, a vocal music collective celebrating opera, oratorio, and art song. This season Mary sings Lucy/*The Telephone* and The Girl/*Hello Out There*, and, in July, will co-produce a small human being.



Anthony V. Seemann (Parpignol) is excited to be a part of Windy City Opera's debut production. He was last seen as Spoletta in *Tosca* with Mainstreet Opera in 2013. He has sung leading roles in *La Bohème*, *The Beggar's Opera*, *Susannah*, *Comedy on the Bridge*, *Die Zauberflöte* and *L'enfant et les Sortilèges*. Currently, he is working on a recital with his new wife, soprano Morgan Seemann (Bishop). Anthony has performed in the Opera Training Institute of Chicago's Summer Scenes Program in 2011, where he sang Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*, and Fenton in *Merry Wives of Windsor*. Anthony attended North Park University for a master's in vocal performance, and received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Northern Illinois University. He is currently studying with Maria Lagios in Chicago. This summer, Anthony and his wife will visit Europe for a motivational trip with performance opportunities throughout Italy, Paris, Florence, Rome and Prague.



Samuel J. Weiser (Colline) is a current graduate student at Roosevelt University's Chicago College of Performing Arts. Last Spring, Samuel graduated cum laude from The Indiana University of Pennsylvania, B.S.Ed. Music Education. Samuel has appeared in such roles as Elder Ott in Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* in 2012 and Sarastro in *The Magic Flute* in 2014 with Undercroft Opera Company in Pittsburgh, PA and as Sicario in Verdi's *Macbeth* in 2013 with Resonance Works Pittsburgh. He has also performed as both Dr. Cajus and Falstaff in Otto Nicolai's *Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor* in Weimar, Germany in 2014 with the Lyric Opera Studio Weimar. Samuel recently received the Michael Brick Scholarship from Roosevelt University. He is a current student of Bruce Hall and will be receiving his Master's of Music degree in May of 2016.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Windy City Opera is delighted to welcome you to our inaugural production of *La Bohème*! Windy City Opera was formed with the intention of providing quality operatic productions in their original languages, featuring performers transitioning from the student to the full-time professional level. We welcome the opportunity to bring this classic to you because of the beauty of its music and its honest portrayal of love and despair. *La Bohème* speaks to the hearts and minds of many audiences; the timelessness of its melodies and the accessibility of its storyline make it a gem of the operatic repertoire.

There have been many people who have aided this production, and we would be remiss if we did not thank them:

Church of Our Saviour for providing us a beautiful rehearsal and performance venue.

First Lutheran Church of the Trinity for offering us a rehearsal space for our chorus and cover rehearsals, as well as a venue for our outreach performance.

John Tuck and the **Amadeus Consort** for recruiting and coordinating the orchestra for this production.

Kirsten C. Kunkle and **Jason W. Dick** for their help with social-media and program design.

Insomnia Cookies for keeping our starving artists (and audience) fed.

Bradley Schuller and **Katherine Bergman** for their mentorship.

And most of all, **Carla and William O'Shaughnessy** and **Stephen Walker** for their constant support, assistance, and belief in this project.

To the many family members, friends, coaches, and accompanists who have provided encouragement and support to our artists.

And to you, our audience members—without your support and attendance, we would not exist. A most heartfelt thanks to all of you.



Catherine O'Shaughnessy
Artistic Director, Windy City Opera

Please feel free to contact Windy City Opera with your comments, ideas, and suggested venues. Feedback is welcome and is important to us when planning future productions.

<http://www.windycityopera.com>
<http://www.facebook.com/windycityopera>
<http://www.twitter.com/windycityopera>

APPENDIX L

LA BOHÈME – HOHENSTEIN'S ORIGINAL SKETCH FOR THE SET



APPENDIX M

LA BOHÈME - VIDEO

[Consult Attached Files]

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

A resident of Chicago, Illinois, Catherine O'Shaughnessy is an active orchestra and opera conductor both in the United States and abroad. In 2010, she made her international professional conducting debut as music director of the Mittelsächsisches Theater's production of *Pyramus und Thisbe* in Freiberg, Germany. She has also conducted the Moscow Philharmonic and the Rousse Philharmonic (Rousse, Bulgaria) in concert. Avidly committed to Chicago's dynamic opera scene, Catherine founded Windy City Opera and conducted its first production (*La Bohème*) in 2015. Additionally, she just completed her first collaboration with The Floating Opera Company and 42nd Parallel as conductor and music director for *Don Giovanni*. Catherine, holds a DMA in Opera Conducting from Arizona State University where she studied with Dr. William Reber, an M.M. from Bowling Green State University, and a B.M. from the University of Michigan. In addition to her musical pursuits, Catherine is passionate about the role of the arts in philosophy and society. She currently serves as co-organizer for two philosophy meet-up groups and presented a paper on the philosophy of passion at the 2013 Humanities Conference at Lincoln University, PA.