

Giacomo Puccini

- Period: Post-Romantic (1870-1909)
- Country: Italy
- Born: December 22, 1858 in Lucca, Italy
- Died: November 29, 1924 in Brussels, Belgium
- Genres: Chamber Music, Miscellaneous Music, Opera, Vocal Music

This month's lesson looks at a musician and artist who used the theme of love in their work which is very appropriate since we are very close to Valentine's day.

I am going to present the Italian musician Giacomo Puccini who lived and worked more than 100 years ago. He wrote many operas but "La Boheme" is ONE OF THE MOST FREQUENTLY PERFORMED OPERAS INTERNATIONALLY.

Play Track 1, CD 1 from "La Boheme"

Question : What are you listening to?

Answer: An Opera

Question: What is an Opera?

Answer: It is a musical play with elaborate sets and costumes.

Before movies were made, opera was the most popular form of entertainment. Similar to movies, there were different kinds of opera.

Question: Can you guess what the different kinds of opera might be?

Answer: Comedy, historical drama, realistic drama.

There are a few types of opera.

Grand Opera : Spectacular sets and lot of performers on stage.

Opera Seria: Serious historical or mythological theme

Opera Buffa: Comedy

Opera Versimo : Realistic drama based on emotions.

Puccini's life:

Puccini was an Italian born in 1858. He came from a family of musicians. For many generations, his family had been organists at the church.

Question: What is an organ?

Answer: It is a keyboard instrument.

At the age of 14, he began earning money by playing the piano at a local tavern. At the age of 18, he walked 20 miles to see Verdi's Opera, Aida. He fell in love with opera and decided to spend the rest of his life composing operas. Before Puccini, Verdi was the most famous opera composer. Puccini went to study in Milan and lived the life of a poor artist as portrayed in "La Boheme". He ate cheap food, so that any extra money could be spent on tickets to see operas.

Show Harry Potter, Charlotte's Web books.

Question: What do these books have in common?

Answer: They were made into movies.

Well, Puccini did the same thing. Puccini worked with two other artists to create opera from the then popular book, "Scenes de Boheme" (Scenes from Bohemian life) by Henry Murger. The other two artists were Giacosa and Illica. They wrote the story and the poetry or libretto. (Show ingredients to an opera sheet). The story made sense and the opera is fast paced. "La Boheme" was first performed in 1896. Bohemians are usually artistic people such as composers, poets or artists. They usually did not have a regular job and so they were quite poor. But they were happy and loved to have lots of fun.

This opera has two interwoven love stories. One of Mimi, the sick seamstress and Rodolfo, the poet; and the other of Musetta and Marcello, another Bohemian. Mimi meets Rodolfo when she comes to ask for a match to light her candle. They fall in love. (Play Track 11, cd 1 – duet). The couple decide to part because of Mimi's illness. At the end, Mimi dies in Rodolfo's arms. In another act, Musetta meets her old boyfriend at a café and wants him back in her life. She tries to attract his attention by singing a song about her charm and beauty. (Play Musetta's Waltz – Track 16, CD 1). The play is filled with quarrels, dancing, and tragedy. Even though it has a sad ending, La Boheme is one of the most cheerful and charming of all operas

