

Puccini's la boheme essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Giacomo Puccini has written a number of operas, including Turandot, Gianni Schicchi, and Madama Butterfly. La Bohème is said to be “one of the most successful and enchanting operas ever written.” Written in the romantic period, the text and score interrelations play an important role in an overall aesthetically and historically pleasing opera. In a story of love found and love lost, Puccini uses text and score to create empathy for the characters of La Bohème. Puccini does so particularly in the aria *Donde lieta uscì*, sung by Mimi towards the end of Act III.

Mimi introduces herself as a seamstress and neighbor looking for Rudolpho to light her candle. They soon develop a romantic relationship which becomes a major plot line in the opera. She is suffering of consumption and her health deteriorates as the opera goes on. By the third act, her health has taken a major hit, and it has been made clear that she is dying. Rudolpho begins to estrange Mimi, feigning jealousy but he soon reveals that he is afraid to watch Mimi die. When Mimi overhears this she confronts Rudolpho and sings this aria as a goodbye.

The aria begins with violins, playing the first line of Mimi's first aria, *Mia chiamano Mimi*. By this time in the opera, this has become a theme for Mimi and Rodolpho's love. She begins singing *Donde lieta uscì al tuo grido d'amore, torn sola Mimì solitario nido*, which translates to I came happily to respond to your call of love, Mimì returns alone to her solitary nest. The melody in the soprano line rises chromatically, with a leap of a fifth at the end of the first phrase, then descends chromatically leaping a fifth to end on E-flat. This creates a dissonance that reflects Mimi's sadness. This

dissonance is also present in the instrumental parts of this part of the aria, as the orchestra follows the soprano with homophony.

Mimi goes on to explain that she will be alone again to her seamstress work. Although there is a sense of sadness in the text, Puccini gives the instrumentation a contrasting whimsical staccato arpeggio which mirrors earlier love melodies. This music is returned to show the yearning for the past and lets the audience, if only for a moment, remember the carefree love that Mimi and Rudolpho initially shared.

Mimi goes on to sing *Addio, senza rancor*, which translates to farewell, without remorse. Although this may seem like a rather sarcastic or bitter comment after the uplifting score in the past two bars, this line is accompanied by two sustained chords. Puccini uses this minimalistic approach to reflect the simplicity of the text itself. Spike Hughes, author of *Famous Puccini Operas*, says, "there is indeed no bitterness, but a great deal of sadness...the whole scene has a strangely moving quality of melancholy and nostalgic regret that such things cannot go on for ever." Although there is no bitterness, you sense a great deal of remorse. This phrase gives the sense of a moment of rest from the silence in the instrumental to the held soprano line.

Rudolpho begins to walk away, but Mimi beckons him with an out of place *Ascolta, ascolta*, or wait, wait and gives instructions of trinkets she would like him to gather. These trinkets include a gold ring and prayer book she has left in a drawer, that she wishes Rudolpho to wrap up and she will send someone to gather them. The score has a dissonant sense at the beginning of each

phrase to show Mimi's sadness, but in a curious contrast staccato arpeggios occur at the end of each phrase once more reminding all that Mimi and Rudolpho may still have love for each other underneath the sadness. It almost acts as a little call to Rudolpho, beckoning him to stay. Again the score comes to a moment of rest, which is used to give a moment for the audience to believe this may be the end.

Mimi cannot leave things as they are, and suddenly remembers something that is another reminder of their early love. Mimi mentions the pink bonnet that Rudolpho had bought her on the night they met, singing, *Bada... sotto il guanciaie c'è la cuffietta rosa. Careful...* she says in a very soft descending leap, the phrase continues quietly and sweetly as if singing too loudly would break the spell of their love. In a dramatic contrast of pitch and dynamic, she sings *Se vuoi, se vuoi, se vuoi, serbarla a ricordo d'amor!* This translates to *If you wish, if you wish, if you wish keep it in memory of our love!* The repetition of *Se vuoi*, suggests that this is a very important detail and although it is only an offer, it seems as though she is begging Rudolpho to take the bonnet. In truth, it has nothing to do with the bonnet, but all to do with Mimi not wanting him to leave no matter if she says goodbye. "...it is a characteristic comment on Real Life made with a touch of genius which makes the end of this third act of *La Bohème* one of the most unashamedly sentimental and irresistibly captivating moments in all opera."

To end this aria, Mimi repeats, in one of the most relatable moments in an opera *Addio, addio, senza rancor*. This single line has a number of meanings behind it from *we must say goodbye*, to *please don't go*. Clearly Mimi does not really want to say goodbye to Rudolpho which makes it extremely easy

to relate to. " To anybody who has ever been in love Puccini has set the whole perplexing business to music in the last few pages of his third act." The music also reflects this state of mixed emotion. Within the short phrase, there are two breaks in the music, and a large pause. Each a moment of reflection for Mimi, Rudolpho and the audience to realize that this goodbye is in fact with remorse and shows that it is extremely difficult for Mimi to say.

This aria is a heart breaking reflection on how difficult it is to say goodbye when in love. Not only is the text easy to relate to, but it is set to a beautiful score that reflects the text and the emotions of the characters to give a clear, intention based interpretation of Mimi's farewell in the third act of Puccini's La Bohème which all can identify with.

Bibliography

Book

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Score

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