Ah, Rodolfo! Ah, Mimì! Ah, LOVE!

Rodolfo, the passionate poet and Mimì, the sensitive, shy seamstress. Together they epitomize “amore”: love itself in the sweetest Italian operatic tradition. I suspect I’ve summarized how many of you opera lovers regard La Bohème: Rodolfo Remembers. However, we mustn’t over-romanticize the two main characters. The portrait drawn by Puccini of Rodolfo and Mimì is a bit at odds with how they’re often thought of. On that score I have some insights to offer, born of my half-century of studying them.

First, Rodolfo. Is he actually a poet? He says he is, but on three occasions he attempts and fails to get anything written: (1) when the curtain comes up in Act I; (2) just prior to Mimì’s fateful knock on his door; and (3) at the start of Act IV. It’s entirely possible that his aspirations as a poet have never measured up to his achievements. His willingness to consign his drama manuscript to the fireplace is another sign of ambivalence. He could end up selling books instead of writing them.

As for his love of Mimì, it’s clear that his notion of love is pretty immature and self-centered, typical of young people. As Act I draws to a close, he bids Mimì A

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MEET THE ARTIST

Brandon Eldredge

By POWERS PETERSON

Before returning to the US in 2018, Virginia Opera Assistant Conductor and Chorus Master Brandon Eldredge spent two years touring in Germany as an opera cabaret pianist. The Cast, a touring group of six, consisted of five opera singers and Brandon as the pianist. The performances “blended a cabaret with the music of opera through the attitude of rock stars.” The performances were in venues similar to small jazz clubs and the songs spanned the repertoire of opera. In one evening the group would perform between ten and twenty excerpts from familiar operas. "Performing takes on the best known arias the likes of Carmen, Traviata, and The Pearl Fishers. The ensemble's goal was to tell a story simply but relatedly and to create a powerful, visceral experience for the audience. Hearing an opera singer in an intimate space allows the audience to experience the massive acoustic of the human voice.”

Continued on page 4
“Tell me you love me,” but he doesn’t say that to her. His jealousy begins in Act II, even though he’s only known Mimi for an hour or so. And, incredulously, when he tells Marcello that Mimi is seriously ill in Act III, his plan is NOT to get her to a doctor; it’s to break up with her. Understand, he’s not a bad person. He’s just young; he hasn’t learned what mature love is yet.

As for Mimi, let’s understand from the outset: throughout Act 1 her interest in Rodolfo is 100% transactional. Yes, she’s a seamstress; she’s also a grisette, the term for a low-level French prostitute. Options were limited for young women of Paris in the 1830s. If unable to find a husband, they faced a life of perpetual poverty. A grisette would seek out young men in hopes of being invited for a meal, with an implicit quid pro quo of going to bed afterwards. In that context, note the subtext of the dialogue at the end of Act 1: Rodolfo suggests that they remain in the garret instead of joining his pals for dinner. Mimi is clear: he will take her to dinner first before any intimacy. It’s also significant that, by Act IV Mimi has risen through the ranks of prostitution to be an actual courtesan. Marcello reports seeing her in the coach of a wealthy man.

Now consider her great aria “Mi chiamano Mimi.” My theory: Mimi has been listening at the Bohemians’ door throughout Act 1. Unwilling to face Christmas Eve by herself, she waits until Rodolfo is alone, then goes about securing a dinner date for herself in true grisette fashion. Everything she says in the aria is calculated to arouse Rodolfo’s interest in her. She’s also been listening carefully to Rodolfo. As the curtain goes up, Rodolfo sings that he’s “looking out at the gray skies and the thousand smoking chimneys of Paris.” Now focus on this line from “Mi chiamano”: “There, in my little room, I look over the roofs and into the sky.” She’s just paraphrased his opening lines, and not by accident.

Both are young. Both are having a difficult time making a go of it in the big city. Both have a lot to learn about what love is and isn’t. The tragedy is that the lesson is learned too late for Mimi.

The Editor’s Notes
By POWERS PETERSON

I can’t forget the song from Follies: “Good times and bum times… I got through all of last year… And I’m still here.” Well, Coloratura is still here, too.

The erudite Glenn Winters’ “A Winters’ Tale” leads off this issue with some thoughts on Mimi and Rodolfo, the lovers in La Bohème: Rodolfo Remembers. Very different from what you probably think.

Coloratura proudly introduces you to Brandon Eldredge, Virginia Opera’s Assistant Conductor and Chorus Master. Brandon explains the role of a chorus master. It’s far more complicated than just making sure a chorus is on key. Read about him in “Meet the Artist.”

There’s much to learn about the technical and artistic efforts required to produce an opera. For “Behind the Scenes” I visited VO’s Wig and Makeup Department in August as they prepared for Das Rheingold. It was full steam ahead for Jim McGough, the resident wig master, and Elyse Messick. Das Rheingold required them to make 6 wigs and a beard from scratch. If you saw the opera, you know they did a fantastic job.

This is my seventh year as the editor of Coloratura. The best parts? Meeting and working with others who are also passionate about opera. That includes the artists I’ve interviewed, the technical support staff who’ve helped with articles, and the readers who’ve appreciated this publication. Not to be forgotten are my colleagues on the Guild Board of Directors. Come join me.

Contact me at Coloratura160@gmail.com.

Photo by DRA
**Letter from the Virginia Opera Statewide Chair**

**DEBORAH WYLD**

Welcome back, Virginia Opera Guild members! We are all SO ready to see live opera! *La Bohème: Rodolfo Remembers* opens on November 5, 2021. This fresh take on Puccini’s opera about Parisian bohemians and young love has all of the emotion, passion, and stunning arias we’ve come to love. This carefully tailored production is shorter and has no intermission. This, plus the absence of the choruses, makes it possible for Virginia Opera (VO) to provide a safe environment for our singers, musicians and audiences. VO has implemented COVID protocols similar to many other performing arts organizations, including the Metropolitan Opera and Broadway theaters.

If you attended our opening production of this 47th season, *Das Rheingold*, performed outdoors at Top Golf in Virginia Beach and in Richmond, you know what an evening that was! Fabulous singers, clever staging, a most unusual setting, and perfect weather. Who could ask for anything more? I think VO merits top prize among opera companies for the most innovative outdoor setting! *Das Rheingold* brought in many new attendees; 60% of single-ticket sales were bought by first-time attendees.

VO has engaged Will Liverman, as our first-ever Creative Partner & Advisor. He and Artistic Director Adam Turner will work to chart creative and community paths for VO. Join me in welcoming Will back to Hampton Roads.

Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Adam Turner has renewed his contract. Adam has overseen the company premieres of several new works and we are most pleased to have Adam continue with VO.

Finally, thank you to each of you who do so much for Virginia Opera! VO couldn’t do it without you!

Deborah Wyld  
Chair, Statewide Board of Directors

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**Where there’s a Will, There’s a Way**

**WILL LIVERMAN**

Will Liverman sang Figaro at Virginia Opera in Rossini’s *The Barber of Seville* (2016). Since then the Virginia Beach native and graduate of the Governor’s School for the Arts has seen his career skyrocket. Will made his debut with the Metropolitan Opera in 2019 in the Met premiere of Philip Glass’ *Akhenaten*. Only two years later, he sang the lead role in the Metropolitan Opera’s 2021 opening night production of Terrance Blanchard’s *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*. Called “a voice for this historic moment” by *The Washington Post*, Will is also the recipient of numerous awards, including the 2020 *Marian Anderson Vocal Award*.

*Coloratura* will have more to say about Will’s new role with Virginia Opera in an upcoming issue. Meanwhile, Will’s concert at the University of Richmond’s Modlin Center for the Arts on October 28 at 7:30 p.m. included songs that portray the trials, tribulations and triumphs of the African-American experience. He will be officially introduced as Virginia Opera’s first ever Creative Partner and Advisor on November 1, 2021. Stay tuned! ❄️
Brandon's initial musical experience was listening to Beethoven cassettes. When a high school piano teacher introduced him to Mozart, Bach and the rest of the classical pantheon, he was hooked. Intending to become a band teacher, he obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Music Education at the College of New Jersey in Ewing, NJ. There he discovered opera and conducting. While studying for his Master's degree in Orchestral Conducting at the University of Illinois (Champaign-Urbana, IL) he was given the opportunity to conduct. With over 900 students and three orchestras in the College of Music, Brandon got much first hand experience at conducting.

Returning to the United States, Brandon auditioned for The Herndon Foundation Emerging Artists Program. After observing Brandon's skills, Maestro Adam Turner thought there might be a fit both for Virginia Opera and for Brandon. When the position of Assistant Conductor and Chorus Master became available, Maestro Turner recruited Brandon.

It's obvious what the conductor of an orchestra does, but the role of Chorus Master is obscure. Being a chorus master involves “not only knowing each member of the chorus’ role, but also choosing the voices to create the appropriate balance of voice types. A chorus master fashions the ensemble for a particular production from the voices available.”

Who are Brandon's musical heroes? For conducting, it's Carlos Kleiber. “There was never a question about the challenge Kleiber was aiming for in a performance. He knew what he wanted to draw from the orchestra and he did it.” For voice, it's Leontyne Price. “Her voice was well rounded and complex, but it was also pure, elegant, and powerful. Her concern for the music shines through in all of her recordings, especially of Strauss.”

Tosca (2019) was Brandon's first stint as Chorus Master with Virginia Opera. This summer's Trouble in Tahiti showcased his talents as a pianist, and he was also the assistant conductor of the production. In November he is scheduled to conduct La Bohème: Rodolfo Remembers at the Fairfax performances. Maestro Turner has recruited a very able Assistant Conductor and Chorus Master. ■

Sketch for La Bohème: Rodolfo Remembers

A Chesapeake native and a graduate of the Governor’s School for the Arts, Court has worked as a costume and/or scenic designer for the Virginia Opera presentations of Samson et Dalilah (2017), Earth to Kenzie, (2021), La Bohème: Rodolfo Remembers (2021), and the upcoming Three Decembers (2022). ■
BEHIND THE SCENES
Six Wigs and A Beard
By POWERS PETERSON

Where to begin? The wig master’s process begins with knowing which opera and its time period (ancient Greece, seventeenth century Italy, the goldrush days in California), as well as the setting (traditional, modern, avant garde). Next is the character who will wear the wig and his/her relationship to the other characters. The actual work begins with measuring the singer’s head in several dimensions so that a made-to-order wig cap can be put on a wig block and the hairline outlined. This process accounts for the singer’s current hair length and style, and whether or not there is facial hair.

Most important is the design for the wig. In the new production of Das Rheingold, Jim and Elyse worked from the costume designer Sara Jean Tosetti’s costume sketches. The wig master’s involvement necessitates consultation with the director and the designer, who convey their concept of what the production should look like. And then it’s Jim and Elyse’s job, as Jim says, “to make it happen with the time and resources available.”

Will the wig be made with human or synthetic or even yak hair? Human hair is preferred. Natural hair wigs can last for centuries, but synthetic hair wigs last only a few years. Example: the human and animal hair wigs on Egyptian mummies. The wig caps deteriorated but the hair was intact. Yak hair from Tibet is commonly found in white wigs such as livery, judge and barrister wigs. It’s also common in Santa Claus wigs and beards. At the moment the opera has two yak tails stored for just the right role.

Where does the hair come from? Whether purchased from a European or an American source, the hair probably originally came from Asia. The hair arrives here already dyed. Darker hair colors are less expensive than blonds and grays. A bundle of human hair 22 inches long costs approximately eighty to one hundred dollars. Virginia Opera prefers to use sources in the US, but a long-time supplier in NYC went out of business in 2020, largely because of the pandemic. Ordering hair from England now requires an extended lag time, again due to the pandemic.

Will a stock wig be used or will one made completely by hand? A stock wig has a stretch back to accommodate various head sizes, but the wigmaker has to remove the front to tie it in so that the resulting hairline looks natural. The process of tying a wig in is called ventilating. The tool used is a ventilating hook, a metal implement resembling a needle with a tiny barb on its end.

Refashioning a stock wig takes between thirty and forty hours. Creating a wig from scratch requires eighty to one hundred hours. For Das Rheingold Jim and Elyse created six wigs and a beard.

Editor’s note: Very few opera companies have resident wig masters, craftsmen who can make a wig from scratch. Examples of such companies include The Metropolitan Opera, The Royal Opera House (London), Opera Australia (Sydney). For over twenty years The Virginia Opera has benefitted from the skills of its resident wig master Jim McGough, ably assisted by Elyse Messick. This article illustrates that art. Because of production issues, the wigs discussed in this article are those for Das Rheingold. For additional information on wigs, see the October 2019 issue of Coloratura.

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VIRGINIA OPERA GUILD
2021-2022

Officers & Board of Directors

The Virginia Opera Guild is governed by a Board of Directors, who serve staggered two-year terms. Officers of the Guild serve one-year terms.

Officers
Amber Taylor Reeves, Chair
Powers Peterson, First Vice Chair
Ruth Schepper, Vice Chair
Valerie Neff, Vice Chair
Patricia Blue, Secretary
Jim Deming, Treasurer
Rick Shepard, Historian

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Barbara Buchmann-Smith
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Marianne Nicholson
Martha Lee Shaw
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Dora Lee Taylor
Holly Tracy
Kittie Whitaker

Report to the Members

The Virginia Opera Guild's mission is to support the Virginia Opera (VO) Association.

The estimated value of Guild activities, including cash grants from dues, fund-raising and in-kind contributions, has totaled $20,000 annually (pre-Covid-19).

Our activities are numerous. Consider what the Guild does:

- supporting performers and production teams by promoting VO subscription sales and supporting VO's Housing Program; providing transportation to and from Norfolk’s airport to Harrison Opera House; funding rehearsal dinners for performers and staff.

- sponsoring fundraising events such as the biennial Merchant of Venice Rummage Sale.

- staffing beverage tents during Norfolk’s FestEvents.

- publishing Coloratura, the Guild’s production-centered publication, and distributing print copies at Harrison Opera House.

- operating the Gift Shop at Harrison Opera House.

- sponsoring pre-show educational Guild Nights (Norfolk).

- sponsoring social events including a season kick-off event, a hospitality tent at Opera in the Park, a Holiday Luncheon, and an annual Membership Meeting.

We do all of this through our committees: Artist Hospitality, Artist Transport, Communications, Events, Fundraising, Gift Shop, and Membership.

Both Virginia Opera and the Guild have survived the pandemic, so come join us in supporting VO. Contact Rick Shepard, Membership Chair at virginia.opera.guild@gmail.com.
Whether stock or handmade, the wig master has to choose the right hair colors.

Rarely is only one color of hair used. Wotan’s blond wig was actually three different colors. Erda’s wig used five colors to achieve the look desired. The wig masters have to anticipate how many hours it will take and if they have the colors on hand.

Once all those questions are answered, it’s time to create the actual wig. Whether stock or from scratch, the cap is placed on a wig block, pinned in place, and the hairline is drawn. Layers of weft are put in the back. Weft is the result of weaving hair with a heavy duty thread in a three strand formation similar in appearance to a hula skirt. This is sewn to the wig cap in rows. The fronting lace is attached. Then the hairs are attached, strand by strand, to the lace fronting by ventilating. After all that, the wig must be styled. It also may need to be washed and re-styled or just touched up over the course of an opera.

Jim and Elyse anticipate having to create only two or three wigs from scratch for La bohème: Rodolfo Remembers. The reason: the oldest wigs for the full length La Bohème are over twenty years old and still going strong. As are Jim and Elyse.

New Guild Members

We welcome our first-time Virginia Opera Guild members. Their contact information will be listed in the electronic directory. Welcome, all!

Shirley Confino-Rehder
Norfolk

Linda Ferro & Dr. Mark Sorin
Virginia Beach

Adm. Harold W. Gehman, Jr.
Virginia Beach

Ruby Reeves
Portsmouth

Susan Schrader
Norfolk

Dan Smith
Virginia Beach
AT THE HARRISON
La Bohème: Rodolfo Remembers
Music by GIACOMO PUCCINI
Libretto by Luigi Illica & Giuseppe Giacosa

The Production
Conducted by Adam Turner
Virginia Symphony

Stage Director
Keturah Stickann

Scenic Design
Court Watson

Lighting Design
Mary Shabatura

Costume Coordinator
Court Watson

Wig and Make Up Designer
James P. McGough

Production Stage Manager
Jonathan S. Campbell

Assistant Conductor
Brandon Eldredge

Guest Principal Coach & Rehearsal Pianist
Kyle Naig

Assistant Director
Nora Winsler

Scenic Draughtsperson
Andrew Bellomo

The Cast
Rodolfo
Matthew Vickers
tenor

Mimi
Raquel González
soprano

Marcello
Luis Orozco
baritone

Musetta
Marlen Nahhas
soprano

Colline
Eric J. McConnell
bass-baritone

Schaunard
Nicholas Marterano
baritone

Alcindoro
Ricardo L. Lugo
bass

La Bohème: Rodolfo Remembers
Original 1896 poster by Adolfo Hohenstein

The Production
Conducted by Adam Turner
Virginia Symphony

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Lighting Design
Mary Shabatura

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Kyle Naig

Assistant Director
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soprano

Marcello
Luis Orozco
baritone

Musetta
Marlen Nahhas
soprano

Colline
Eric J. McConnell
bass-baritone

Schaunard
Nicholas Marterano
baritone

Alcindoro
Ricardo L. Lugo
bass

La Bohème: Rodolfo Remembers
Original 1896 poster by Adolfo Hohenstein

The Met Live in HD

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<th>Time</th>
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<th>Conductor / Singers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dec 4</td>
<td>12:55 p.m.</td>
<td>Eurydice / Matthew Aucoin</td>
<td>Nézet-Séguin / Morley, Orléanski, Banks, Hopkin, Berg</td>
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<td>Jan 1</td>
<td>12:55 p.m.</td>
<td>Cinderella / Massenet</td>
<td>Villaume / Pratt, Leonard, D’Angelo, Blythe, Naouri</td>
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<td>Jan 29</td>
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<td>Rigoletto / Verdi</td>
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<td>Mar 12</td>
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Contact Information
Join us to support the Virginia Opera Association. Volunteer for a committee or for one of our activities. And don’t forget to check us out on the Virginia Opera website.

Here’s how to contact us:

Write us Virginia Opera Guild
P.O. Box 11572, Norfolk VA 23517

Email us vaopera.guild@vaopera.org

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