

**From *La Bohème* Stage Director Chuck Hudson
Sacramento Opera: May 8, 10, and 12, 2009**

I lived in Paris for almost a decade working with my mentor Marcel Marceau. Just walking about the City of Light, I would stumble across a café or restaurant once haunted by groups of now famous artists: Isadora Duncan, Gordon Craig and Jacques Copeau in St Germain, Hemmingway and his expatriate literary set near L'Etoile, Gertrude Stein and Alice B Toklas in the Latin Quarter. I would look around my cold little rooms whose windows did not fully shut yet which provided a view of the Eiffel Tower—busy rehearsing a scene for the next day's rehearsal, I would duck as one of us practiced a knife throwing act while another was composing music on a piano or guitar behind the two others rehearsing a fencing scene from a Shakespearean play, while two more juggled clubs across the room, all while listening to the saxophonist sitting out on the tin roof-top.

The first time I listened to *La Bohème*, I knew these people intimately. They are constantly playing word games, story telling games, role playing games in order to keep their creativity alive. They are often starving and cold, but they are also young and in love and filled with the energy of living life. They have a great love and respect for each other's work, and they see things in similar ways. They disagree and argue over things as passionately as they agree with them.

We are “updating” the show to the Paris of the 1890s Belle Epoque: Auguste Rodin and Camille Claudel are sculpting, her brother Paul Claudel is writing, Isadora Duncan is dancing, Gordon Craig is revolutionizing Theatre, the Vienna Secession Movement is replacing The Impressionists, and Gustav Eiffel is constructing his famous Tower for the Paris World's Fair. The Industrial Revolution is in full swing, with electric lighting starting to replace gas, and the corseted mid-nineteenth century morality of “the older generation” is colliding with the free-flowing younger generation already fully expressing itself in Art Nouveau.

Like Verdi's *Violetta*, Mimì is a hot house flower and Love is the green house whose glass panes concentrate the Light in such a way that the flower blossoms more rapidly. Shakespeare warns us of the consequences of this rapid growth in Orsino's “Women are like roses” speech. Viola responds, “Alas that they are so. To die only when they to perfection grow.”