

PUCCINI'S BELOVED *LA BOHÈME* FROM A BRAND-NEW PERSPECTIVE

MIKE BOLTON



La bohème director Yuval Sharon
Photo by Casey Kringlen

just having done our own *bohème* in 2019, we wanted a unique perspective on the work. Yuval's concept of presenting the acts in reverse and ending the opera in a hopeful way seemed to be the perfect solution to meet our collective needs."

To help the viewer move through the opera in reverse order from the death of Mimi to the hope of young love, Sharon introduces a new character, The Wanderer, a narrator who sets the scene with language pulled from Henri Murger's novella that inspired the opera, *Scenes from a Bohemian Life*. The Wanderer is a throughline that guides us from one act to the next.

One of the keys to making this idea successful is to perform the 100-minute opera without intermission. Sharon wants the opera to feel like one brush stroke, like the paintbrush never comes off the canvas.

Joining him for this production is the renowned set designer and instigator John Conklin. The set is on a turntable which denotes the passage of time but allows the scene changes to be effortless and swift. To help specify the time and place of the opera, costumes play a crucial role in defining mid-19th century Paris. The principals' costumes are quite colorful while those for the chorus will feel like the streets of Paris come to life.

Opera Philadelphia looks forward to presenting this unique take on a beloved classic. As no one in the audience will have seen *La bohème* performed like this, the director hopes "everyone will have the same sense of discovery, surprise, and adventure."

Join us for this adventure **April 28 through May 7 at the Academy of Music**. For more information visit operaphila.org.

The set for the Bohemian's garrett in *La bohème*



This Spring Opera Philadelphia presents Puccini's beloved *La bohème* from a brand-new perspective in a provocative new staging by director Yuval Sharon

The idea began fifteen years ago in a conversation between director Yuval Sharon and John Conklin, a set designer and adjunct professor at New York University who encourages his students to imagine the possibilities of a work rather than be hindered by conventions.

A 2017 MacArthur Genius Grant award winner, Yuval Sharon mused, "What if you were to produce *La bohème* in reverse order?" He considered the construction of Act IV, which is similar to that of Act I. Both start with Marcello the painter and the poet Rodolfo lamenting life as bachelors. Their friends Schaunard, a musician, and the philosopher Colline stop by with food and shenanigans begin.

Sharon tested his idea by playing a recording and programming the opera's acts in reverse

order starting with Act IV and ending with Act I. He reacted with tears like he hadn't experienced in a while, overwhelmed just by the inherent beauty of the work itself.

The time felt right to explore this work anew as we slowly emerge from a period of darkness and loss. Says Sharon: "By doing *La bohème* in reverse order and removing the inevitable trajectory to death and destruction, we are prioritizing that the pain and suffering were all worth it because of the magnetic and electrifying love between Mimi and Rodolfo – and not just romantic love but a love of life."

Opera Philadelphia's Vice President, Artistic Operations David Levy is excited to bring this reimagined *La bohème* to the Academy stage. "When planning the 22-23 Season in the early stages of the pandemic, we had to balance postponements and other existing commitments to determine what would be most welcoming for audiences, especially as we could not foresee the state of the pandemic two years in advance. We decided to mount *La bohème*. It's such a great on-ramp for new opera attendees. But,