

# Eugene opera shines occasionally

"It had its moments," said the man in front of me walking out of the Eugene Opera's Saturday night performance of "La Boheme." I heartily concur.

The Opera's debut performance in the Hult Center for the Performing Arts was a mixed success. The leading characters could carry the hall and gave a great performance, as well they should. Both were played by professional performers from out of town. The chorus, staging and overall back-up for the show were amateurish — a good high

school production.

Jann Jaffee as Mimi in Giacomo Puccini's "La Boheme," a light opera about the life of Bohemians in Paris circa 1830, acted well and sang beautifully. Her voice filled the hall and showed the potential that awaits Eugene's ears, when professional singers use the Silva Concert Hall.

But, except for "moments" when the other lead characters managed to control the hall, the performers were outstaged by the hall itself, and outplayed by the Eugene

Opera Orchestra.

The "moments" occurred when Marcello, played by Neil Wilson, former University music professor, and Musetta, played by Amanda England, sang comic duets which lightened the other "moments" of sorrowful arias and duets between Mimi and Rudolfo, played by Bruce Ford.

The rest of the performance was not up to its surroundings. The set designs filled the stage and that's about all. Jerry Williams should take a lesson from Firebird set designer Peter Dean Beck. The costumes were colorful, except ironically for Mimi's, but nothing spectacular or authentic.

The supporting roles, Coline, Schaunard, and Benoit/Alcindoro sung by Nathan Starling, Michael Morgan, and William Martin respectively, were weak. Starling and Morgan were drowned by the orchestra and rarely reached my seat, Orchestra, row V. Martin just couldn't sing.

I suppose it was heart-rending to see the chorus of Eugene singers and children, but it was not thrilling. If they are Eugene's upcoming

hopefuls, then the future of Eugene opera is in question.

"La Boheme," ironically, was a good choice for Eugene Opera's opening performance. The Libretto, by Giacosa and Illica, had moments of tragedy and comedy. It was sung in English. The opera is short (too short, by the way, for four intermissions). However, it was too much of an opera for the Eugene Opera company on the spacious Silva Concert Hall stage.

by Joan Nyland

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