

|               |                 |                         |               |
|---------------|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| Marcello..... | André Chang     | Schaunard.....          | Brian Johnson |
| Musetta.....  | Rachel Copeland | Benoit / Alcindoro..... | Jason Budd    |
| Colline.....  | Dan Ewart       |                         |               |



# OPERA WESTERN RESERVE PREPARES FOR FALL MAIN STAGE PRODUCTION OF OPERAS 'BEST TOLD LOVE STORY'

Opera Western Reserve, will present its annual production this fall on the Concert Hall stage at Stambaugh Auditorium, *La Bohème*, a timeless opera in four acts composed by Giacomo Puccini.

“Opera Western Reserve directors, crew, and artists prepare year-round for their main stage production that draws patrons near and far into Youngstown to experience live opera talent,” Scott Skiba, production director for Opera Western Reserve, said.

Skiba first performed with OWR in the production of *Le Nozze Di Figaro* in 2006 and *Rigoletto* in 2007. His directoral debut with OWR was *Carmen* in 2016 and has worked on and off with the company since. Skiba said he then took the position as production director in 2020.

Currently the Director of Opera Studies for the award-winning Baldwin Wallace Conservatory Voice Performance program, Skiba is also the Executive Artistic Director of Cleveland Opera Theater and the Assistant Artistic Director for Hawaii Performing Arts Festival.

“The more I started directing, the more I started enjoying it,” Skiba said. “Opera Western Reserve is a great organization that tries to support, promote and feature talent and artists that live in the region and emerging talent about to be superstars,” he said.

Skiba said opera is a 400-plus-year-old art form and the original interdisciplinary art form in theatre.

“In 100 years from now, people will look at American musical theatre and say,

‘Yeah, that was opera at the time,” he said. “[Opera] tells stories about people, and what happens [in the moment], not necessarily what happened like a museum piece.”

Skiba said opera showcases the most raw human emotion and a performer’s voice creating natural, authentic sounds that must be amplified throughout a concert hall auditorium.

“It’s the human instrument at its extreme highs and lows without amplification,” he said. “Very few people have the discipline and passion to develop their instrument to something they can fill a 2500-seat hall and carry over an orchestra with the passion and drama involved.”

## OWR ARTISTS TAKE THE STAGE FOR LA BOHÈME

*La Bohème*, set around the late 1830’s in Paris, is a triumphant blend of grim reality and soaring romanticism. The story tells the life of a poor seamstress and her struggling musician friends trying to make a living on their own, Skiba said.

Auditions were held in late April to cast the production. Artists sent their pre-screen recordings and from there were invited to audition. Skiba said nearly 60 people were invited to the live audition.

“The [OWR] cast for La Bohème is great. ... A lot of folks who have been with us before, very recently and some not for a while along with some new faces and talents,” Skiba said. “It’s a very popular opera so it sells tickets and on

our journey back after so much struggle [in 2020], it felt like a great choice.”

The opera consists of six main roles who live in an attic apartment from the bohemian era, Skiba said. “Rodolfo” is a poet and he lives with three of his friends, “Schaunard” a music teacher, “Colline” a philosopher and “Marcello” a painter, and two female characters “Mimi” and “Musetta” who are intertwined as love interests.

“The opera opens on Christmas Eve and the guys are there commiserating being freezing cold, and the musician just got paid so they go out on the town and spend their fortune. ... A few months later there is trouble in paradise between the love interests,” Skiba said. “The idea is that through struggle can come greater art.”

Act IV ends with comedic relief and horse play, Skiba said. “It’s a love story with tragedy and comedy. It’s a lot, but beautiful,” he added.

Skiba said he performed and directed the tale many times, but there is always something new to add to the production every time he directs it to make it a timeless love story.

“The singing talent bring different things to the table every time,” he said. “We are adding a lighting designer who will bring more design and intention of storytelling to the lights, so I am excited to keep developing the production value and up the wow-factor as much as we can.”

Tickets are on sale now for La Bohème and can be purchased at [experienceyourarts.org](http://experienceyourarts.org).

# OWR EMERGING ARTISTS UPDATE

This past summer the OWR Emerging Artists traveled to local parks and camps to bring the classic tale of *Three Billy Goats Gruff* to life through operatic performances. Performances were held the week of June 13-17 at YSU’s Youth Camp, Boardman Park, Buhl Park, JCC of Youngstown, The Youngstown Playhouse, and SMART’S arts school.

OWR’s Emerging Artists program strives to take a leadership role in artist training, arts education, and audience development. The OWR Emerging Artists’ primary purpose is to provide those opportunities for the participating Emerging Artists as well as provide education and development opportunities for the community through performance-based programming.

“It was wonderful seeing them bring opera education and entertainment to the community again for children and their families. We look forward to more experiences such as this in the future!” said Education Coordinator Emelia Sherin.

The Emerging Artists also appeared at OWR’s spring fundraiser “Parisian Promenade” and Youngstown State University’s Summer Festival of the Arts



LEFT: Rebecca Enlow-Walker performing at Summer Festival of the Arts



RIGHT: Emerging Artists performing “Three Billy Goats Gruff” in the community.



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