

La Boheme worthy of majors

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Compared to national opera companies, regional opera offers many of the same advantages that farm-team baseball does over the major-league clubs: easier to get to; more-affordable ticket prices; seats closer to the action; and seeing future stars on their way up.

All that and more was true of Salt Marsh Opera's splendid staging of Puccini's La Boheme , Friday night at the Chorus of Westerly's George Kent Performance Hall.

Nothing about the musical or dramatic production, by Simon Holt and James Wright respectively, could be faulted. The sets and lighting were imaginative. The orchestra of 33 members sounded crisp and dynamic, with especially lovely playing by concertmaster Stephen Tieszen and harpist Megan Sesma. Acoustics were exceptional, and the balance between singers and orchestra always well-judged. Subtitles in English aided comprehension of the lyrics.

The vocal quality of the entire cast was very high. Slender, youthful Teresa Eickel was convincing as Mimi. Her singing in the last act, tinged with doomed fragility, was especially touching. Diana McVey's Musetta was self-assured: vain and manipulative in her famous waltz, genuinely tender in Act IV.

Matthew Singer's smooth, rich baritone portrayed Marcello as humane and sympathetic. **Bass David Feiertag's Colline's "Coat Aria" was a highlight of Act IV. In the vocal ensemble numbers, balances and blend were very good.**

Charismatic tenor Brian Cheney's Rodolfo was simply phenomenal. His glorious first-act solo aria was the high point of the entire production. Cheney's commanding stage presence, thrilling vocal beauty, and passionate projection called to mind Franco Corelli. Send Cheney up to the big leagues.

Clearly, Salt Marsh Opera has achieved its goal of becoming an important part of this region's cultural landscape. La Boheme will be repeated at 3 p.m.