

Aile Asszonyi (Mimi) and Mart Madiste (Rodolfo) share an intimate embrace in *La Bohème*. Photo by Liina Viru



## La Bohème Puccini

ESTONIAN NATIONAL OPERA

on tour to Vilnius, Lithuania

★★★★

Director Ran Arthur Braun sees the story of *La Bohème* from a child's perspective, in the faltering wake of repression. The primary colours and cartoon projections speak of hope, life as a simple progression into the fulfilment of dreams. Along comes Mimì and blows it all to bits – love goes wrong, art can't save lives, Mimì dies. The combination of Braun's vision and Puccini's music is shattering.

Braun's experience as a choreographer and fight director is evident in the tight dramatic ensembles. The bohemians push, shove and clown as boys do, while carrying Braun's comical aesthetic: their shirts match the colours of the projections, from hand-drawn buildings, winter trees then rubble and fire.

The crowd scenes in Act II have Parisians in yellow raincoats with matching umbrellas; Café Momus flickers and disappears when Musetta (Helena Lokuta) clicks her fingers

demanding a spotlight for her big number. Mart Madiste's likeable Rodolfo has colour and texture in his tenor voice, although there was some fatigue at the top in the performance I heard. Rauno Elp made a heroic turnaround from Amfortas in *Parsifal* to Puccini's playfully jealous Marcello, storming after Musetta. Colline was sung by a huge (vocally and physically) Priit Volmer, and Rene Soom's Schaunard resonated beautifully in the ensembles.

As Mimì, Aile Asszonyi gave everything. She has a supple and powerful lyric soprano, a beautifully controlled vibrato with the pitch centred perfectly. She floated that fiendish top C at the end of Act I, like satin fluttering from a window.

Rosie Johnston

Tallin is a must-go destination for opera lovers, and represents particularly good value. Tickets are €30 and Air Baltic runs cheap flights from most major European cities. A good value hotel, minutes from the opera house and the medieval city centre, is the Hotel Viru, Virusq 4, Tallinn. Tel: +372 6 809 300