



The
Florentine
Opera

BRINGING OPERA INTO SCHOOLS

Bronzeville Bohème

THE FLORENTINE OPERA COMPANY EDUCATIONAL TOUR 2021

MEET YOU ON WALNUT STREET



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I remember putting the finishing touches on our season brochure this spring, and how excited we all were for our Muse gala in the fall. This season of the ensemble, the initiation of our Schools on Stage program, and releasing our rich and many-faceted Bronzeville Bohème project into the universe had us all giddy!

Here we are months later in the New World. And as disappointing as a fall without *Rigoletto* feels, I take so much heart from the enthusiasm of you, our audience, enthusiasm shared by our performers and staff as we forge ahead in creating new opera experiences that fit our current circumstances. While we cannot gather and celebrate our “more is more” ethos, our sass and creativity informed a new experience that we can all share safely.

In some ways, pulling back the curtain on an opera is easier on the written page. Our beloved Bronzeville expert and honorary gala chair Sheri Williams Pannell shares her inspirations in setting, storytelling, and biographical alignments with our own Milwaukee legends. Did you know Duke Ellington had ties to a jazz bar in Bronzeville? I didn't. We have treasures to discover in our own community, and we share the spotlight with some of them on this project.

- Milwaukee artist, and 2019 Mary Nohl Fellowship winner, Ras Ammar Nsoroma designed the traveling sets that will bring Bronzeville's history to life for students, in addition to creating Marcello's artwork for our mainstage production.
- Our early-career resident Baumgartner Studio Artists will sing the leads.
- UWM's Corey Collins designs costumes, and our shop builds imaginative sets and props that can travel.
- Our Education and Community Engagement Manager John Stumpff leads sessions in dozens of classrooms each year to ensure that the program meets teachers' curricular goals.
- Local small business Kickball Media will digitally record the production, complete with behind the scenes interviews with artists and the creative team.

Incorporating the wealth of artistry from our mainstage Bohème into our school show means a more meaningful experience for the students, increasing their pride in their hometown. It also means some of our mainstage resources feed directly into our schools, where we continue to fight to keep the arts alive for the next generation. In these pages, discover how we incorporate emotional intelligence, language exposure, and of course the inspiration of opera into a jam packed half hour of wonder.

Thank you for joining us as we celebrate our favorite art form, and unveil our newest school production for you before it goes out to Wisconsin's kids, both virtually and hopefully in person. Our mission in this pandemic is to provide our wonderful programs *free of charge* to all of the schools that need them. This is a big and expensive undertaking, but if we don't celebrate the arts and find comfort through them now, what are they good for? We will work harder, smarter, and hopefully with you at our side to succeed.

Thank you for being part of the Florentine family, and enjoy the show both on these pages and on your screen!

Maggey Oplinger
General Director and CEO

FLORENTINE'S EDUCATION TOUR:

Brings opera to over
15,000 students annually

Partners with 100+ schools
a year, 10 local MPS residency
schools as well as the Boys
and Girls Club

Martin Luther King Jr.
School, St. Marcus School,
Escuela Fratney, Golda
Meir School, and Sherman
Multicultural Arts School
border or are in the greater
Bronzeville neighborhood.

The average poverty rate
of students served is 90.39%,
and the special needs
population is 20.7%.

We work with educators
to make opera hit a complex
bottom line, as they stretch
resources to compound
strong outcomes.

Meeting the Needs of Milwaukee-area Students

A recent study at the Wallace Foundation showed
“engagement in the arts unleashes the imagination,
builds skills and confidence, inspires the formation
of social bonds, increases empathy for others, and
fosters a capacity for delight that can last a lifetime.”

The arts are a refuge and joy, but they also teach soft skills critical to success in the workplace and society, especially in the era of technology addiction and short attention spans. With virtual education and distancing, those soft skills and emotional communication are imperative to our youngest audience's wellbeing and futures.

We're taking a fresh look at how we present opera to our younger audiences, to give them a truer taste of our artform. Pulling from the larger budget of our upcoming mainstage production of *La Bohème*, our school tour production will ensure that young people in the Greater Milwaukee area experience the language, stagecraft and sweeping melody we offer to all opera audiences. While this is an unconventional approach to youth opera programming, kids don't need “watered-down” art; they are open to higher concepts, including foreign languages and substantive storylines, and revel in the over the top sensory experience. So, our *La Bohème* will be sung in Italian with English narration, which gives students a unique opportunity to develop new language and cultural comprehension skills in an entertaining and engaging format. This year, they will also discover Milwaukee's own history. With the help of Bronzeville historian Sheri Williams Pannell, Puccini's *La Bohème* invokes Milwaukee's 1940s Bronzeville, a successfully black-owned and middle class neighborhood.

SCHOOL RESIDENCIES

At a growing number of schools, the Florentine residency program helps students gain deeper, hands-on engagement with opera. With twelve schools and partners next season, the Florentine will work in-depth with a classroom or grade level. Students perform alongside our Baumgartner Studio Artists for their parents, teachers and peers. One of the songs the students will learn this year is Cab Calloway's “Minnie the Moocher”; Mr. Calloway was a frequent visitor to Bronzeville during the first half of the 20th century.

STUDENTS LEARN:

- **Teamwork**, matching pitch and singing together in rhythm
- **Leadership**, guiding each other through the performance preparations
- **Problem identification and problem solving** as they decide staging and movement, as well as through self-assessments during rehearsals. They identify what needs to be fixed, and how to make the performance better.
- **Resourcefulness and fine motor finesse** through making costumes in their art classes, using their imaginations and basic art supplies and turning them into costume elements to fit their characters.
- **Exposure to foreign languages**
- **Emotional intelligence and safe expression** through words and music
- That music and the arts are a **fun refuge!**

NEW! SCHOOLS ON STAGE

Two residency partners—the Boys and Girls Club of Milwaukee and Golda Meir School—are participating in our new *Schools on Stage Initiative*, in which they will be coached year-long to perform as the Children's Chorus for our mainstage production of *La Bohème* in May 2021. Golda Meir School is a new residency partner for 2020-21 and lies within the historic boundaries of Bronzeville. These students will work on rhythm, singing in Italian, learning the staging, and will appear with our professional cast in a full opera, with their friends and families in the Community Circle seats, cheering them on!

The program supplies teachers with a comprehensive curricular resource guide, through which students receive **the developmental benefits of arts education, including expanded abstract thinking, emotional connection and intelligence, communication skills, and character development. Students will enhance their literacy, singing and performance skills** as they participate in and learn about opera. Leaning into Bronzeville, students will also celebrate their city as they learn about the poets, painters, and thinkers, past and present, who have made Bronzeville an enduring part of our community.

The Florentine is proud to expand horizons for students from kindergarten through fifth grade with the magic of an art form they may likely not otherwise experience.



Bronzeville Bohème Tour



Sheri Williams Pannell, Stage Director:
Bronzeville Bohème School Tour and
dramaturg, mainstage La Bohème

Sheri Williams Pannell (stage director) is a native Milwaukeean who has performed, directed or written for a number of Milwaukee's theater and arts entities including Bronzeville Arts Ensemble, First Stage, Florentine Opera, Milwaukee Chamber Theater, Milwaukee Fringe Festival, Milwaukee Rep, Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, Milwaukee Arts Museum, and Skylight Music Theatre.

Beyond Milwaukee, Pannell has worked at Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Utah's Old Lyric Theatre, University Opera and University Theater at UW Madison, and the Children's Theater of Madison. Pannell was honored to direct a production as part of the United Nations Conference on Genocide, hosted at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In 2017, Pannell was honored as an Artist of the Year by the City of Milwaukee. A founding member and artistic director at Bronzeville Arts Ensemble, Pannell is also director/teaching artist at Black Arts MKE and co-director of the drama ministry at Calvary Baptist Church. In 2018, Pannell was appointed to the faculty at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Peck School of the Arts as an Assistant Professor in Theatre and Area Head for the Musical Theatre Program. Pannell is a graduate of Spelman College and holds an MFA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison.



Bronzeville Bohème by Giacomo Puccini

Florentine Opera Company Educational Tour 2021
The Bronzeville Bohème inspired by **La Bohème**
Giacomo Puccini

SHERI WILLIAMS PANNELL, STAGE DIRECTOR

INTRODUCTION

What a wonderful challenge! One of the world's most beloved operas, *La Bohème*, will be distilled from a two and half-hour emotional ride to a 30-minute journey for young audiences. This is the tragic story of Rodolpho and his beautiful Mimi, who dies of tuberculosis. To think we will share this story in 2021 after experiencing a devastating pandemic! As Oscar Wilde said, "Life imitates art far more than art imitates life." One more (and quite exciting) detail is that our story will not be set in Paris during the Belle Époque, but in Bronzeville Milwaukee circa 1949-1950's. As a native of Milwaukee who loves celebrating her hometown, this is a project for which I was created! The story is sung in Puccini's native Italian. To help the young audiences follow the story, the script will at times feature the character Rodolpho as the narrator. I am looking to share the familiar arias, duets and humor with our young audiences.

Why Bronzeville Milwaukee? The Sixth Ward, aka Bronzeville, was a vibrant and financially self-sustaining neighborhood primarily occupied by African Americans who migrated to the north for employment. There were two waves of migration of African Americans from the south to the north. The first was 1900- mid 1930s and the second from 1940-1950s. During each migration there were societal factors that made it necessary for the new citizens to create their own community. De-facto Jim Crow and redlining helped create Black owned businesses to meet their needs and kept their hard-earned dollars in Bronzeville. My family moved to Milwaukee in 1952 after my uncle informed my father of the robust steel industry that paid well. He was hired by Rex Chainbelt (Rex Works) as an ironworker. My mother and siblings joined him once my father found housing. Bronzeville provided everything they needed for a new start, including gainful employment, a home, a place to safely keep their money (Columbia Savings and Loan), church (Calvary Baptist Church), neighborhood park, markets, services, schools, and entertainment (Regal Theatre). All of this was in walking distance but if you needed to travel outside the area, a bus or trolley was available.

Scenic Design The story takes place in three locales that I believe support the scenes of the opera – **An attic apartment in Bronzeville – The Flame Night Club – Walnut Street**

Bronzeville business statistics, compiled from Wisconsin's "Negro Business Directory, 1950"

6	Dentists
7	Physicians/Surgeons
11	Registered Nurses
7	Bookkeepers/Accountants
8	Lawyers
8	Notary Publics
11	Banks/Buildings And Loan
12	Realtors
12	Builders/General Contractors
11	Commercial & Fine Artists
9	Photographers
9	Orchestras
2	Music Arrangers
7	Pianists
6	Ice Companies
10	Tailors/Dressmakers
9	Barber Shops
13	Beauty Parlors
19	Cleaners/Laundrettes
23	Restaurants
4	Bar B Que Joints
4	Chicken Shacks
1	Chili Parlor
36	Taverns
38	Churches
2	Night Clubs
2	Ball Rooms
3	Cocktail Lounges
52	Private Social Clubs
173	Licensed Rooming Houses

CHARACTERS AND THEIR BRONZEVILLE COUNTERPARTS

Mimi, Rodolpho, Musetta and Marcello have come to represent the spirit and struggle of young artists. The story will be told through these archetypal characters. To assist us in telling the story in Bronzeville Milwaukee, counterparts have been identified. These historical figures may not share the tragic journey faced by the protagonists of the opera, but they exhibit the creativity and joy despite life's challenges.



Mimi is a sensitive soul. She is a seamstress, lover of the delicate things, roses and enjoys embroidering flowers on garments for pleasure. Mimi yearns for a beautiful life. She is ill with pneumonia.

Our Bronzeville inspiration is Milwaukee Bronzeville Historian, Dr. Irene Goggins. She was an arts patron, socialite, Y's Men Booster, spoken word artist, excellent cook, baker, creator of homemade cards and possessed a deep reverence for God. She was everybody's Auntie Irene.

Rodolpho is a poet and playwright, passionate, hot-headed and in love with Mimi. For our production, he serves as the narrator for the performance.

The Milwaukee Bronzeville inspiration is Cleveland Colbert, author and political activist.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE WISCONSIN BLACK HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES AND MR. CLAYBORN BENSON.



Musetta is a singer, opportunist, tender-hearted and in love with Marcello.

Milwaukee Bronzeville inspirations are Newspaper columnist Mattibelle Woods and dancer Minette "Satin Doll" Wilson.

Mattibelle Woods was a socialite, newspaper columnist who was featured in the Milwaukee Courier, Milwaukee Star, Milwaukee Community Journal, Chicago Defender and Jet Magazine. Ms. Woods reported on the social events such as debutante balls, weddings, inaugural balls, special appointments, notable deaths and concerts for 75 years! Famous for her stylish attire and stiletto heels, Ms. Woods danced the electric slide at her 100th Birthday. She lived to be 103 years.

Minette "Satin Doll" Wilson Dancer and friend of jazz composer and band leader Duke Ellington, who gave Ms. Wilson, the nickname, "Satin Doll." Ms. Wilson eventually owned a nightclub.



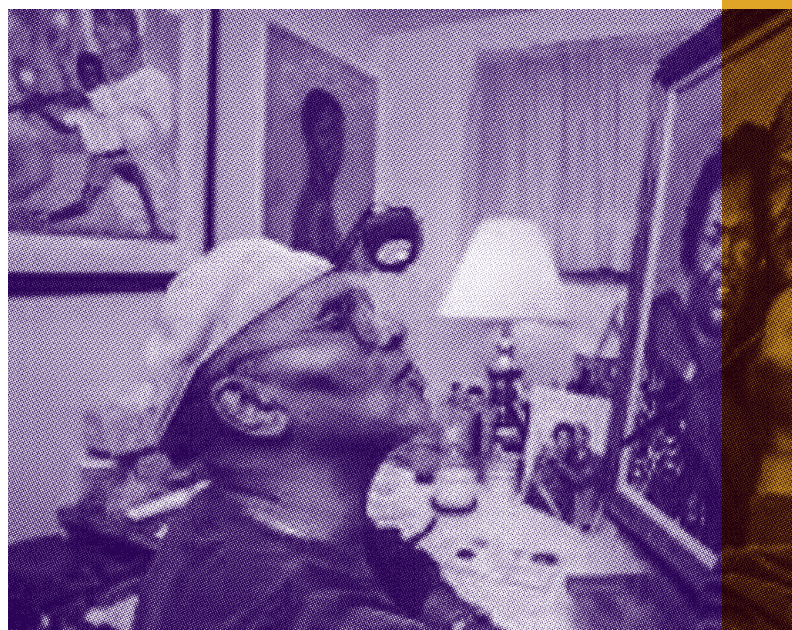
Marcello is a dreamer, lover and in love with Musetta.

Milwaukee Bronzeville Inspiration is renaissance man, Sylvester Sims. Mr. Sims was a boxer, visual artist and an Olympic hopeful in diving. He continued to paint while working for Miller Brewing.

"Back then when I was coming up, very seldom you locked your doors when you left the house. Didn't nobody have nothing for you to take, really. Come in and eat your food. But outside of that they had a screen door with a nail bent to hold it closed," Sims says.

Sims says back then, if you were black in Milwaukee, you didn't harbor much hope of moving to another part of town — he says it was hell to try to buy a home. You didn't even leave Bronzeville for long if you didn't want to be harassed, say at a store or a church.

MILWAUKEE JOURNAL-SENTINEL



Background on the importance of Walnut Street, and The Flame Nightclub, from conversations with Sheri Williams Pannell and Mark Doremus



Walnut Street served as the social and economic heart of Bronzeville, a microcosm reflecting the richness, history and breadth of Milwaukee's full Bronzeville neighborhood. It's a story similar to many Main Street USA archetypal streets. Walnut Street was really the central corridor for commerce and social life in the bronzeville neighborhood – the beating heart of this vibrant community; a street where businesses and social clubs, restaurants and churches all thrived and grew shoulder to shoulder.

“Jazz is a powerful force. It is improvisational in nature and being, and thus is in a constant state of creation. In this way, jazz is very much like community. In a community the people who live there are constantly recreating the place where they live while simultaneously living in what they have created. Thus, both jazz and community are in perpetual motion: always changing and grappling with the impact of those changes. African Americans identified with the music and saw it as a representation of strength and hope. Thus the music helped the people gel into a community that created politically active neighborhood groups to take on the challenges of the day.”

Quoted from
An Improvised World: Jazz and Community in Milwaukee, 1950–1970
Author: Benjamin Barbera



The Flame night club was the pinnacle of jazz music in Milwaukee in 1950, offering a source of high-quality entertainment and a release from daily life struggles. Jazz was vitally important to Bronzeville culture and connected the black community to a larger artistic heritage. The Flame highlighted the diverse draw of Bronzeville's jazz scene, hosting nationally famous acts such as Jabbo Smith, Bernie Young, Dizzy Gillespie, Louis Armstrong, and Duke Ellington. This bastion of intellectual and popular music provided a place for Milwaukee's black and white communities to come together, sharing the joy new exciting music and entertainment tastes.

The Flame stands out among other clubs of the era, serving as the pinnacle of social life – in many ways a unifying force from a racial and class standpoint, and was a tremendous source of pride in the Bronzeville community.

SPIRIT OF BRONZEVILLE 1948-1951
SOURCE: THE WISCONSIN BUSINESS DIRECTORY
EDITED AND PUBLISHED BY DR. MARY ELLEN SHADD.

Thank you for taking this sentimental journey through Milwaukee's Bronzeville history. Together, we will share a tragic story featuring highlights from LA BOHÈME with an infusion of Milwaukee Bronzeville's unique style. Let's make this an exciting Educational Tour for the greater Milwaukee community!

Meet you on Walnut Street,

Sheri Williams Pannell,
Stage Director Florentine Opera Tour,
Spring 2021

Fine Artist Collaborator,
Bronzeville Bohème School Tour
Creative Team



An artist known for his murals, Ras Ammar Nsoroma was born Kevin Wayne Tate on June 20, 1967 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. When he was only a teenager, Nsoroma became aware of the work of Reynaldo Hernandez, an inner-city mural artist, which inspired him. Nsoroma graduated from the Milwaukee High School of the Arts in 1985 and attended the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design. Nsoroma completed his first mural as a senior in high school.

In the late 1980s, Nsoroma moved to Chicago and studied at the Art Institute of Chicago. He returned to Wisconsin and began working as an artist, designing three-dimensional murals on the Fond du Lac Avenue overpass for the north and south wing walls and bridge abutments. In 2000, two of Nsoroma's murals were nominated for inclusion in the book, *Walls of Heritage, Walls of Pride: African American Murals*, a collection of 200 murals spanning three decades of African American mural art. In 2004, Nsoroma designed a mural to celebrate the radio station 1290 WMCS-AM's 25th anniversary of African American community programming; entitled *The Tradition Continues*. Nsoroma utilized photographs and created a compilation of twenty-five portraits of men and women who participated in the growth of the station. Nsoroma is a 2019 Nohl Fellowship winner, and has been recently honored with the City of Milwaukee Arts Board 2020 Mildred R Harpole Artist of the Year award.

Ras Ammar Nsoroma's work can be found through the Five Points Art Gallery and Studios, Fatima Laster – gallery owner.

www.5ptsartgallery.com/ammammar-nsoroma



LEFT:
AFRO BLUE MOTHER
BELOW:
SPIRITUAL MEDICINE
POWER SHIRT



YOU SEE WITH THE ANCESTORS'
VISION, WEARING YOUR
VIRTUE ON YOUR SKIN LIKE A
TATTOO. YOU ARE A DAUGHTER
OF TRADITION.



Ras Ammar Nsoroma



YOU HOLD THE MASTER KEYS TO YOUR DESTINY, FORGED IN THE FIRES OF YOUR SOUL. WILL IT BE SPIRITUALITY OR REVOLUTION? OR BOTH?



ABOVE: OSHUN
RIGHT: SHANGO
LEFT: OYA



5 Points Art Gallery & Studios

A big part of the gala was going to showcase many of Amar's pieces. See where his inspiration comes from and look for his work on the main stage. Amar is doing all of Marcello's artistic output. Ras Ammar Nsoroma's work can be viewed and purchased through 5 Points Art Gallery, at 3514 N. Port Washington avenue, Milwaukee, 53212 or online at www.5ptsartgallery.com/ammar-nsoroma

5 Points Art Gallery & Studios is an art exhibition space focused on increasing representation and collection of local, national, and international contemporary fine and outsider artwork by artists of color and other marginalized groups, in addition to serving as a hearth for exploration, collaboration, professional development, and business expansion in the visual, culinary, and varying art genres.

5 Points Art Gallery & Studios is a conscious reinvestment project, embedded in the operator's childhood North Side Milwaukee neighborhood of Harambee/Williamsburg Heights. "I want to raise awareness and expose art to the community," owner Fatima Laster said. "My goal is to show people that there are jobs in art. I want to be able to show people that somebody who looks like me or identifies with me can do something like this." "Everyone is welcome," stated Laster. **"The mission is not to exclude, but to elevate."**

I knew I wanted the clothing to live in the late 1940's/early 1950's; it was important to me to maintain as much of that sense of history as possible in the clothing. We are using reproduction sewing patterns from the period as inspiration and in some cases to construct the actual costume pieces.

For Mimi I wanted to focus on her delicacy. I was inspired by the fact that she embroiders flowers on clothing so I used this idea by using petal shapes and overlapping lines to recreate the feeling of flower petals.

I knew that I wanted Musetta to be a little more fashionable than Mimi, due to her profession so I put her in a satin cocktail dress with asymmetric tulle accents.

For the men I wanted them to look fashionable in the late 40's/early 50's world but also to have bohemian accents, so I utilized ascots, neckerchiefs, and pattern to achieve this. I kept the men's color palettes very masculine and a bit darker to contrast with the lighter palettes for the ladies, allowing a strong sense of visual interest when all four characters appear onstage together.



PRELIMINARY DESIGN BOARDS FOR EACH OF THE OPERA'S MAIN CHARACTERS



Corey Thomas Collins holds a BA from Oakland University and an MFA from Wayne State University. Corey currently is working as the Costume Shop Manager for the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee. Corey has designed at a variety of theatres across the U.S. including: William Street Repertory, The Purple Rose, Meadow Brook, The Swine Palace, Boars Head, Tipping Point and the Hilberry. He is pleased to collaborate with Sheri Williams Pannell on his Florentine Opera debut project, the Bronzeville Bohème School Tour.

Costume Design



EMILY MICHIKO JENSEN
SOPRANO

Japanese-American soprano Emily Michiko Jensen is praised for her “theatrical instincts and intriguingly versatile instrument.” Last season, Emily debuted as Suor Angelica at IU Opera Theatre, and performed with the Pioneer Valley Symphony in Poulenc’s *Gloria* and Dvorak’s *Te Deum*. She sang Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni* at Boston Opera Collaborative, where she made her company debut as Marguerite (*Faust*) in 2016). Emily was an Apprentice Artist at Sarasota Opera, and a Studio Artist with Chautauqua Opera, where she sang the role of 2nd Soprano in Missy Mazzoli’s *Song from the Uproar*. She returned the following season as a cover in *Hydrogen Jukebox*. Previous roles include Blanche in *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, Foreign Woman in *The Consul*, Suzel in *L’amico Fritz*, Governess in *The Turn of the Screw*, and Tiny in *Paul Bunyan*. Originally from San Diego, California, Emily has degrees from the New England Conservatory, the Eastman School of Music, and Indiana University.

Baritone Steve Valenzuela’s stage experience includes Figaro in Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro*, Nick Shadow in Stravinsky’s *The Rake’s Progress*, Don Giovanni in *Don Giovanni*, Count in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Marcello in *La Bohème*, Danilo in *The Merry Widow*, and Sam in *Trouble in Tahiti*. A Connecticut native, he received his Master of Music degree from Louisiana State University and was awarded the James Sommers Opera Scholarship Award from Western Connecticut State University. During his time at LSU, he performed the role of Howard in David T. Little’s *Dog Days*, which received first place recognition by National Opera Association. An avid recitalist, his favored selections from this repertoire include: Beethoven’s *An die ferne Geliebte*, Mahler’s *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, and Ibert’s *Chansons de Don Quichotte*.



STEVE VALENZUELA
BARITONE



TAYLOR-ALEXIS DUPONT
MEZZO-SOPRANO

Taylor-Alexis DuPont is a young and engaging Mezzo-Soprano from Orlando, Florida. Since graduating with her Masters in Voice from the Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University while studying with Denyce Graves, Taylor-Alexis has performed with the Metropolitan Opera, the Ising International Young Artist Festival in Beijing and Suzhou, China, the Glimmerglass Festival, Prototype Festival, Sarasota Opera, St. Petersburg Opera, Opera Orlando, among others. Performance highlights include *Cendrillon* (Prince Charmant), *Così fan tutte* (Dorabella), *Ruslan and Ludmilla* (Prince Ratmir), *The Snow Maiden* (Lel) and *Pinocchio* (Pinocchio). In addition to performing standard repertoire, Ms. DuPont has premiered new works in collaboration with composers, such as Theodore Christman’s *Unfolded* (Josette). This past year Taylor-Alexis was involved in the second production of *Stinney*: An American execution at New York’s Prototype festival for new opera, and was honored to be a soloist for First Coast Opera’s Marian Anderson tribute concert. Earlier this year Taylor-Alexis was performing as an ensemble member and soloist cover in the Metropolitan Opera’s wildly successful production of *Porgy and Bess*. Taylor-Alexis will return to St. Petersburg Opera for several concert engagements and performances of Samuel Barber’s Opera *A Hand of Bridge* with chamber orchestra. In addition, she will make her debut with Heartbeat Opera as one of the three witches in a new work titled *Lady M*.

Nathaniel Catasca is a tenor from Albuquerque, New Mexico. Graduating with a Bachelor’s of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of Oklahoma and recently the Eastman School of Music, completing a Master’s in Performance & Literature under the study of Robert Swensen. His debut was the character of Ernesto in Donizetti’s *Don Pasquale* in 2017. At the Eastman School of Music, Mr. Catasca participated in many events, such as the role of Tenor I in Ricky Ian Gordon’s *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and taking second place in the Friends of Eastman Opera Vocal Competition. Professionally, Nathaniel was the Tenor Summer Concert Residency Artist for the Florentine Opera Company in Milwaukee, Wisconsin under Scott Stewart and Janna Ernst in the summer of 2019, and the Tenor Young Artist for Hawaii Opera Theatre last fall playing the role of Spoletta in Puccini’s *Tosca*. Nathaniel returned to Hawaii Opera Theatre this past spring partaking in a children’s tour of *Cinderella* and his first production of *Salome*.



NATHANIEL CATASCA
TENOR

BAUMGARTNER STUDIO ARTISTS

Janna Ernst & John Stumpff



Janna Ernst has worked continuously as a vocal coach and répétiteur for over 20 years. She currently serves as the Principal Coach and Pianist for the Florentine Opera. She has served as Music Director at Skylight Opera Theater and has also played for New Orleans Opera, Virginia Opera, and Cincinnati Opera. A dedicated educator, Janna has held teaching, coaching and accompanying positions at Southern Methodist University, the University of Oklahoma and, most recently, the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. She and her husband, Matthew—Principal Trumpet of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra—perform and tour extensively as a duo, giving performances and masterclasses throughout the country. Janna has a Bachelor of Music degree in Piano Performance from San Diego State University, a Master of Music in Collaborative Piano from the University of California, Santa Barbara and a Vocal Specialist degree from the University of Michigan where she studied with renowned collaborative pianist and teacher, Martin Katz. Janna and Matthew reside in Shorewood with their two daughters, Madeleine and Margaret.



John A. Stumpff is the Florentine Opera's Education and Community Engagement Manager. He received his masters in voice from the University of Iowa and, in addition to performing, has taught voice and opera appreciation for over 15 years. He is also an active performer and teacher in the Milwaukee and Chicago region. Florentine credits include Stage Manager in *Prince of Players*, Stage Director in *Sister Carrie*, and Parpignol in *La Bohème*; he has also been a part of Florentine's two Grammy winning recordings, Aldridge's *Elmer Gantry* and Davis' *Rio de Sangre*. John is the tenor section leader and soloist at Queen of All Saints Basilica in Chicago and was recently heard singing as the tenor soloist in Handel's *Messiah*, as well as tenor soloist for a concert of songs by Irish composer Michael McGlynn.

Synopsis of Our School La Bohème

The opera begins in Milwaukee's Bronzeville neighborhood, circa 1950, in the apartment of artists Rodolfo and Marcello. Trying to find inspiration for their latest projects, they are also urgently trying to stay warm in their chilly residence. Marcello gives up on his latest painting and tries to convince Rodolfo to stop writing and come with him to their favorite night club the "Flame". Rodolfo tells Marcello he needs to finish for a deadline, but will join him later in the evening, Marcello leaves.

As Rodolfo attempts to get back to work, there is a knock at the door from Mimi. Mimi, also chilled from the cold, asks if Rodolfo has a match so she can light her stove. There is an immediate attraction between the two and as Rodolfo searches for a match, Mimi loses her key and the two attempt to search for it. As they search, their hands touch and Rodolfo comments on Mimi's chilly hand and then proceeds to tell her a little bit about himself. After, he asks her to tell him more about her. Mimi tells him that her name is actually Lucia and she lives a simple life as a seamstress. Both quickly realize they are in love and Rodolfo asks Mimi to join him that evening at the Flame.

At the Flame, Marcello is center stage as the emcee and sings a song about "Minnie the Moocher", which is really about his ex-lover Musetta. After he sings, he is introduced to Mimi by Rodolfo and before long they hear the laughter of the one and only Musetta. She enters in a flurry of energy and sings of her love of the falling snow, eventually getting everyone in the Flame up to dance. After, she begs Marcello's forgiveness and they reconcile. Before the club closes, the two couples leave, leaving the bill for one of Musetta's many admirers.

The next morning, Mimi, in search of Rodolfo, finds Marcello at the Flame. She explains that she and Rodolfo had a fight and then asks why he's at the club. Marcello tells her that he paints murals for the Flame and they let him stay there to keep warm and that Musetta also teaches singing there. He also lets her know that he will speak with Rodolfo on her behalf. Mimi leaves, but doesn't go far.

Marcello proceeds to shout and wake Rodolfo up to scold him about being mean to Mimi. Mimi overhears, as Marcello presses his friend for answers. Rodolfo eventually confesses that he believes Mimi's cough is more serious and that she needs help. More importantly, she needs someone with more money than him to get her the care she needs. Mimi coughs and Rodolfo realizes she's heard everything. At this same moment, Musetta laughs and Marcello knows she's flirting with someone. The two couples break up and leave in separate directions.

Spring has come to Bronzeville, but both Rodolfo and Marcello are melancholy, because Mimi and Musetta are no longer in their lives. Abruptly, they hear Musetta shout for each of them to help her with Mimi, who is weak from her illness. They get Mimi into a bed to rest, and she tells Rodolfo how happy she is to see and be with him. Mimi tells everyone that she's cold and wishes she could make her hands warm. Musetta decides to pawn her watch to buy Mimi a muff, so Musetta and Marcello leave. Alone, Mimi tells Rodolfo she loves him and that she knew he hid her key from her the first night they met. Musetta and Marcello return and give Mimi a muff to keep her hands warm. She thanks them and asks Musetta for one last thing, to say a prayer for her. She does and at the end of the prayer, Mimi peacefully dies.

DID YOU KNOW...?

Milwaukee's Bronzeville began over 100 years ago when a small group of African American families moved to Milwaukee after the Civil War. During World War I, increasing numbers moved from the farms in southern states in hopes of finding higher-paying factory jobs, escaping Jim Crow segregation, and providing new opportunities for their families. A larger wave of Southerners came north during World War II in the Second Great Migration. In the 50 years from 1900 to 1950, Milwaukee's African American population grew from 900 to over 20,000.

The Golden Era of Milwaukee's Bronzeville neighborhood was during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. While industrial jobs were exhausting and dangerous, they also provided higher incomes and a path to the middle class for these African American families. Family, community, faith, work, and education were pillars of life in this tight knit community.

Casa Ricordi was and is Italy's most famous publisher of musical scores. Guilio Ricordi was a major force in shaping Italian musical culture, particularly the public's taste in opera. Puccini was one of his favorite promising young composers. Despite an early failure at the box office with Edgar, Ricordi supported Puccini through the three and a half years it took him to compose *La Bohème*. Ricordi created a system in which opera house managers who wanted to purchase the rights to one of Verdi's popular operas also had to purchase the rights to an opera by one of Ricordi's less-famous personal favorites — like Puccini.

At the heart of Bronzeville was Walnut Street, thriving with restaurants, barbershops, beauty parlors, record stores, tailors, jewelers, hotels, law firms, and the beautiful Regal Theater. Bronzeville's most popular attraction was its jazz clubs, with jazz legends like Louis Armstrong, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, and Billie Holiday playing in the neighborhood, often after having played gigs downtown.

Giacomo Puccini's opera *La Bohème* is one of the three most popular operas ever written but it was not an immediate success. An opera by a rival Italian composer, Ruggiero Leoncavallo, on the same subject and with the same name, premiered about a year after Puccini's and was quite successful. Puccini may have stolen the idea from Leoncavallo. (Leoncavallo accused Puccini in a scene in a cafe. Puccini said, "Let the public decide which one they like best!") The two operas co-existed in Italian theatres for about ten years before Puccini's came out as the public's favorite version. It's never left the active repertory since, and Leoncavallo's version is all but forgotten. You can find a piece of it in our school *Bohème* though!

Arturo Toscanini conducted the first performance of *La Bohème* on February 1, 1896 at the Teatro Regio in Turin, Italy. In 1946, Toscanini conducted a radio performance that was released to LP records and later compact discs. It is the only recording of a Puccini opera by its original conductor.



BACKGROUND IMAGE: THIS BRONZEVILLE PHOTO OF SEVENTH AND WALNUT STREET (C. 1950) HAS BEEN PROVIDED COURTESY OF THE WISCONSIN BLACK HISTORICAL SOCIETY ARCHIVES AND MR. CLAYBORN BENSON.



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