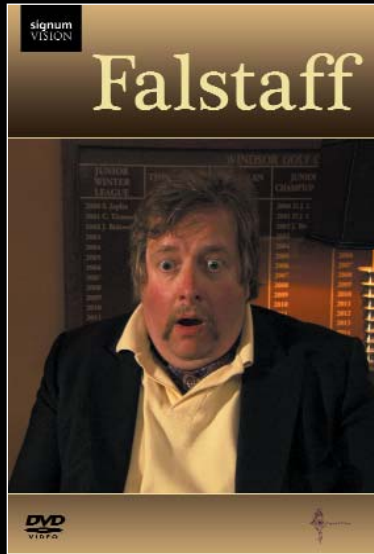


signum
VISION

BOHEME

ALSO AVAILABLE ON
SIGNUMVISION

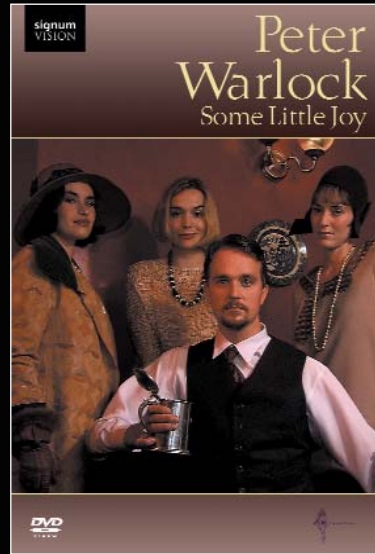


Falstaff

SIGDV0001

Written and directed by Tony Britten
Based on the opera by Verdi and Boito

Verdi's timeless masterpiece brought up to date in a hilarious new English version, shot on and around a golf course.



Peter Warlock: Some Little Joy

SIGDV0002

Written and directed by Tony Britten

A film drama about a man who, by his death at thirty six, had composed some of the most perfect gems of English songwriting and elevated hedonism to an artform.

DVD
VIDEO



Music Theatre London

Available through most record stores and at www.signumrecords.com For more information call +44 (0) 20 8997 4000

BOHEME

GIACOMO PUCCINI

ORCHESTRATED AND CONDUCTED BY **TONY BRITTEN**

Mary Lincoln	Mimi
Graham Mackay-Bruce	Rodolfo
Darryl Knock	Marcello
Tim Bruce	Schaunard
Ian K. Jervis	Colline
Simon Masterton-Smith	Alcindoro
Maria Kesselman	Musetta
Nigel Planer	Benoit
Costume Designer	Yvonne Milnes
Production Designer	Alice Herrick
Editor	David Hillier
Sound Designer	Toby Alington
Director of Photography	Sam McCurdy
Executive Producer	Clive Donner
Producer	Philip Partridge
Writer & Director	Tony Britten

DVD Authoring and Design by Richmond Studios



Written and Directed by Tony Britten

Released in association with Capriol Films Ltd. www.capriolfilms.co.uk
Shot in high definition entirely on location in England. www.signumrecords.com
Design and Artwork - Woven Design www.wovendesign.co.uk



Music Theatre London

signum
VISION

www.signumrecords.com

BOHEME

CHAPTERS

Act 1	The Mill
Act 2	The Pub
Act 3	Outside
Act 4	Back at the Mill

EXTRA FEATURES

Commentary by Tony Britten, Clive Donner,
Ian K. Jervis and Mary Lincoln.



www.signumrecords.com

BOHEME

INTRODUCTION

The film “Bohème” is based on Music Theatre London's stage production of the opera. Over the years MTL has endeavoured to de-mystify opera by creating productions which use actor-singers performing modern, idiomatic English versions of the core repertoire. Set in the present day and accompanied by new chamber orchestrations, the work has delighted both audiences new to opera and experienced opera goers, who appreciate that a new look at the form need not be disrespectful to the source material. Interestingly, the company has been highly successful in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and at the Vienna Festival, despite the material being sung in English.

The joy of working on “La Bohème” has been that Puccini writes with such muscular passion about real people in real situations. Although his operas were composed during the final flowering of the grand, romantic tradition, they are in essence intimate pieces which explore complex human issues. The power of the music is not just about beautiful lines, but unflinching accurate reflections of the emotional journey that his characters go on. Add to that a highly developed understanding of narrative and dramatic structure, and it becomes clear that a work like “La Bohème” should be a film maker's dream!

The updating of the story of “La Bohème” was never going to be a problem - boys get drunk and behave badly today just as they did in nineteenth century Paris, girls still have sugar daddies and dodgy landlords still complain

about unpaid rent! However the character of Mimi required examination. Whilst making her a drug addict seemed an obvious solution, I needed to be sure that this would be dramatically credible, and that the audience would not lose sympathy with her. Not being in any way an expert on drug abuse, I commissioned research which threw up some sobering statistics. It is well documented that heroin addiction is widespread throughout the world, what may be less well known is that often there are few outward physical signs of the problem. People generally don't die of heroin poisoning, but an associated condition - hepatitis brought on by sharing dirty needles, liver failure, septicaemia and so on. And people certainly don't become addicts because they are bad or immoral - they are more often than not reacting to peer group pressure, lonely or just plain unlucky.

Having learned some of these unpleasant facts I felt able to relate them to poor Mimi, a victim whose untimely demise forces Rodolfo, Marcello, Schaunard and Colline to come to terms with real life. As Colline expresses it in my version of the famous “Coat” aria: “We've been children at play, and now its time that we grew up - the kindergarten's closing”.

With regard to the “kindergarten” it is important to note that Puccini had the true dramatist's gift of interpolating humour into a serious situation, which not only makes the narrative more engaging but underlines the ultimate tragedy. I believe we have been successful in making the comedy scenes genuinely comedic, largely through the talented artists whose work has such a particular quality.



In practical terms “Bohème” was extremely challenging to produce. It is shot on film, in and around Deptford, a fairly run down area of south east London. I knew I wanted the setting to be gritty and realistic, and the moment that I discovered the main location - Mumford’s, a derelict flour mill, (now converted into luxury flats), I knew that we had struck gold. Not only did it provide the boy’s “squat”, a huge pillared area that my production designer fell in love with, but we were able to take over the entire floor below and turn it into a mini studio, with costume department, make up area, cutting room and production offices. The public house round the corner from the mill not only became the location for act two, but provided extras and did the catering! I don’t know if the people living in the little garden square where we shot act three were deaf, or merely terribly polite, but no-one objected to four days of Puccini roaring out from loudspeakers - perhaps they just liked the music!

If one is lucky, making a film can be a joy from beginning to end, and so it was with “Bohème”. Artists, musicians, creatives and crew displayed a level of commitment and passion that I believe is reflected on the screen. I can’t help thinking that were Puccini alive today, he would be as keen as I am to explore the potential of dramatically engaging opera on screen. After all, he was the finest exponent of “verissimo” - the concept of portraying truth and realism in an essentially unrealistic art form - for which the medium of film is so manifestly suited.

© Tony Britten 2008



SYNOPSIS

Four young men, Rodolfo a playwright, Marcello an artist, Schaunard a musician and Colline a philosopher, live in happy chaos in a squat in south east London. What little money they have tends to be spent on booze and dope, with occasional allowances for food. They spend a lot of their time avoiding Benoit, a dodgy caretaker entrusted with collecting the rent, something that doesn’t happen often. Into this sybaritic mess comes the enigmatic Mimi, an embroiderer who lives upstairs. She and Rodolfo fall immediately in love.

Marcello has a highly charged relationship with Musetta, a beautiful but flighty girl whose love for him is often outweighed by her desire for financial comfort. Her present paramour is Alcindoro, an older man with loads of money and no taste whatsoever. On the night that Rodolfo and Mimi meet - Christmas Eve, they all spend a riotous evening in the local pub, where Musetta decides to get rid of “Alci” and go back to Marcello.

Rodolfo moves in with Mimi and all is well for a while, but they are under increasing strain. Mimi is clearly unwell, and seems to be hiding something from Rodolfo. He loves her passionately, but is not mature enough to deal with his feelings of confusion and jealousy. After a few months the lovers part and Rodolfo goes to where Marcello and Musetta are staying to seek solace. Mimi follows him, and tells Marcello about Rodolfo’s overwhelming jealousy. She and Rodolfo meet accidentally, and vow to try once more, at least “until the roses bloom again”. Meanwhile Marcello and Musetta have one fight too many and part forever.

Some months later Marcello and Rodolfo, on their own again are back with the other guys at the squat. A drunken evening is interrupted by the appearance of Musetta, who has found Mimi dying outside. They bring her in and she and Rodolfo reaffirm their love. Musetta knows Mimi’s secret - she is a heroin addict, and Marcello is sent out to get her one last fix. Colline sells his beloved flying jacket to raise some cash, and Musetta buys Mimi some gloves as she is shuddering with the cold. All these efforts come too late, and Mimi dies in Rodolfo’s arms.

