

## ***La bohème* - practical exercises**

### **Café Momus**

Opera is about storytelling - *La bohème* in particular gives us a relatively straightforward story and some very clear character types. We are, however, only given a window into the story of their lives. Singers work with the director to flesh out the lives of the characters they portray.

On the InsideOut website, direct your students to the singers' blogs and to the chorus section to discover how singers go about creating their characters.

As a class, listen to the opening of Act Two of *La bohème*. Explain to your students that it is set in a bustling, brightly lit street in the Latin Quarter, outside the Café Momus. It may help to re-read that section of the synopsis to gain more information.

The stage is populated with a rich and varied group of characters, including:

students	working girls	bourgeois	shopkeepers
street vendors	soldiers	waiters	children

Working alone, ask the students to create and develop a character, someone who would be in the street outside the Café Momus. Each student should decide who their character is and why they are in this particular street at this time. Help them to develop their character by asking them where they are going, where they have been and how they are feeling.

Discuss the style of music and how it helps to create the atmosphere. Ask the students to picture what might be going on.

The class will then work together to create the life of the street. Ask the students to take up a position in the room. The teaching space should become the Latin Quarter; indicate where the Café Momus is, perhaps with some tables and chairs. You might want to set up some tables as street stalls.

Ask the students to make a statue of the character they are going to portray. On a signal from you, the street will come to life. If possible, use a recording of the opening of Act 2 to help create the atmosphere, or better still, use a pianist to play it live. Students should allow themselves to react to the music and see how it affects the way their character moves.

As the pupils gain in confidence and knowledge about their character, encourage them to interact with one another.

You may want to call freeze at certain points, in order to focus in on particular characters or situations, and so that students can observe other people's work.

After the task, discuss as a group how the students felt about their character and the other characters they interacted with – what relationships were portrayed? How did the music affect the mood?

Mairi Coyle 2007

Copyright ENO Baylis. These pages are for educational use only and may not be published in any form without permission from ENO Baylis.

ENO Baylis, London Coliseum, St Martin's Lane, London WC2N 4ES  
Telephone +44 (0)20 7632 8484 Fax +44 (0)20 7845 9443  
email [baylis@eno.org](mailto:baylis@eno.org) [www.eno.org/baylis](http://www.eno.org/baylis)