**Mid Wales Opera’s La Boheme Review –** By Rhiannon White

As a novice to the world of opera, and with no greater knowledge of the plot of Le Boheme than the suspicion from the advertisement that it was likely to be a love story, I had many questions as I sat down to watch the Mid Wales Opera performance. Not the least pressing of which was will it be in English? (It was).

Picture a Parisian street, lined by big windows with moonlight filtering in. With an orchestra that feels as though it’s all around you. I leaned forward in my seat, prepared for a night of culture, and vowed to focus intently on what was happening. And then the opera began.

What struck me was that once I allowed myself to stop concentrating for long enough to listen to the music, the very need to decipher each word became redundant. The four artists communicated not only in words but through music. You could feel the playfulness, the search for adventure but also the longing in the way that they moved, and the way that their voices ran away with one another’s.

The poverty of the artists came through in their clothing, in the monochrome setting, in the bunkbeds, and in the somewhat desperate way with which they communicated. Even from my comfortable seat, I could believe that they were struggling, that they were freezing, yet something about it made the life of a 19th century struggling artist seem strangely appealing.

Then entered Mimi. It seems almost impossible to convey a believable love story within the confines of a few hour’s production. Yet as the voices of Mimi and Rodolfo (played by Galina Averina and Robyn Lyn Evans) harmonised, and then the room opened up to rows of little tables draped with French flags, I found myself entirely believing it. They fell in love on a suspiciously uplifting note, and I naively wondered whether the fortunes of the characters would be onwards and upwards from here.

I was disappointed when the lights dimmed for the interval. During the break I prepared myself by reading the synopsis on the Wikipedia page. I was gratified to note that, bar a couple of the finer details, I had followed the plot of the first half exactly.

By this point, I was really getting into the swing of watching an opera. I sat back and absorbed the bustle of activity across the stage, and allowed myself to become part of it. Then another surprising thing about the opera. It was also funny. My particular favourite was the baguette based equivalent of a sword fight.

And the light relief was very much appreciated as the performance took on a more melancholy turn. I listened for the changes in the music as the lighting dimmed and the tone too became darker. And I knew, following my hastily conducted research, just where this story was headed. But still I found myself wondering whether there was a way that everything would work out happily after all. Because the love of two people can prevail through the toughest of circumstances, right?

When the lights dimmed for a final time, I wanted to wind back time and play it through all over again. I stood to leave, having been cultured, but also entertained. Having left the present day behind for the duration of the performance. And as I filtered out of the theatre after my first opera experience, I found myself on my phone, googling the next one that I should see.