

## OPERA DIRECTOR FLORIS VISSER UNVEILS HIS RETHINKING OF PUCCINI'S LA BOHEME FOR HIS GLYNDEBOURNE DEBUT, OPENING JUNE 11

### FIRST NEW PRODUCTION OF LA BOHEME AT GLYNDEBOURNE FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS

Dutch opera director Floris Visser's production of Puccini's *La bohème* opens at Glyndebourne Festival 2022 on Saturday June 11. As for all opera directors, Visser is faced with particular challenges when working on such a popular and beloved opera. Visser explains: *"I had to find a way of dealing with Puccini's literalness, and the risk of it becoming sentimental and cliché, plus the many productions that went before us. And present this story of young people learning about life, love and death through a unique and fresh approach."* Visser's response to these challenges is to radically rethink the setting of the opera and to present it in a single setting while remaining in Paris.

Visser spent over a week walking around Paris with his dramaturg Klaus Bertisch searching for the visual inspiration and spark that would give them their entrée to their vision of the opera. Just as they were about to admit defeat they saw: *"an iron gate with behind it one street, perfectly simple, cobblestones, like a Brassai photo. The street went all the way back then suddenly dipped down. I saw people walk away and disappear, like over a bridge. And I looked up and saw the street sign – Passage d'enfer, passage to the underworld. I knew I had my image. Act III is set at the entrance to the catacombs where the sign still reads: "Arrête! C'est ici l'empire de la mort". Act III breathes the sudden presence of death and the underworld. This one street embodied our entire idea, and allowed us to fuse the location, libretto and music into one image and create a metaphor that will enable us to present this much-loved opera in a new, profound way."*

Death is a constant presence in Visser's production, a figure following the opera's heroine Mimi unseen by the other characters. Death is contrasted with life which is represented by Visser's use of the candle that the opera's heroine, Mimi, makes her entrance in the opera carrying: *"She comes to Rodolfo for a match, and her entire body and soul become reinvigorated because she discovers love. She begs Death for more time with Rodolfo, and their parting duet in Act III is a desperate ploy to evade Death as long as possible. Finally Death takes her, unnoticed by the friends who are talking among themselves."*

Jordan de Souza conducts the London Philharmonic Orchestra from June 11 with sets by Dieuweke Van Reij and costumes by Jo Floris.

Following its Glyndebourne Festival run, the production will transfer to the 2022 Glyndebourne Tour this autumn with a new cast. A live recording of the production, filmed this summer, will be released on the new streaming platform Glyndebourne Encore in November 2022.

More information at <https://www.glyndebourne.com/events/la-boheme/>

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#### Editor's Note

*La bohème* is performed at Glyndebourne Festival 2022 from 11 June – 18 August 2022.

**Floris Visser**

Dutch director Floris Visser first rose to prominence in 2013 through his work as Artistic Director of Opera Trionfo. In 2014 he became the youngest director ever to be invited to the Bolshoi Opera, where his staging of *Così fan tutte* was nominated for five Golden Mask awards including Best Production and Best Director. In 2015 his production of Gluck's *Orfeo ed Eurydice* for Dutch National Touring Opera was awarded Opera of the Year by Opera Magazine, and in 2017 his staging of Handel's *Semele* for the opening of the Internationale Händel-Festspiele Karlsruhe was acclaimed by German critics and audiences. Other productions include *La Traviata* for Dutch National Touring Opera and Vivaldi's oratorio *Juditha triumphans* for Dutch National Opera, *Manon* at Operhaus Zurich and *Madama Butterfly* at Oper Graz (2020).

In 2021 he returned to the Händel-Festspiele to direct a highly praised production of *Hercules*, lauded as "outstanding" by Die Welt and "astonishing" by Frankfurter Rundschau. Opernwelt wrote: "*Floris Visser shows Handel's oratorio 'Hercules' in Karlsruhe as a visually powerful psychodrama. He turns Handel's oratorio Hercules upside down and tells the story from the end. With this ingenious setting...Visser transcends the conventional.*" And Opera Now awarded it 5 stars and wrote: "*an exciting production by Floris Visser. In a subtle analysis of Hercules' relationship with his wife Dejanira he depicts the agonising abyss created by jealousy.... the great success of this pioneering production.*"