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Michigan State University's Opera Theater is great opera treat. Their LaBoheme last weekend was of professional quality from set to lights to orchestra. And the voices were magnificent; every glorious moment hit right on the button.

Kirk Domer's "lower east side of 2004" set was a techie looking construction of mid-stage steps with raised platforms on either side. The orchestra sat on the stage in front of and under the platforms. It was great looking and the staging took good advantage. The orchestra played crisp and strong under the direction of Raphael Jimenez, who is an energetic and enthusiastic conductor. For Marcello they brought in a young guest artist, Kevin Doherty and he didn't let anyone down. On his knees at the end of Musetta's waltz he was magnificent. The chorus was wonderful in the cafe scene; "the artist formerly known as Parpignol" was played by Bryce Berry as a rock star. Kathryn Stokes was a rich and strong-voiced Mimi and Lateena Dinkins was a perfect Musetta, a great voice with probably the best acting in the show. I went to see senior Matthew Tuell as Rudolfo. I'd first seen and been blown away by him when he was a sophomore in the MSU Opera Theater production of Cosi fan tutti. He was recently one of five students -- the only voice student -- chosen by the MSU School of Music for their honors concert.

The audiences for these productions are small, and tickets are cheap, but the musical experience is unbeatable. Soprano Melanie Helton directs the opera theater. She said in her pre-opera talk last Saturday that the school will be filling two new faculty spots next year.

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