

La Boheme Grec

An opera libretto

Written and recited by

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at Nicholas A Peppas' 60th Birthday Celebration

Act 1

In the apartment

As penniless graduate students, Nico gazes out of the window while Bob is playing Ping Pong. In order to keep warm, they burn the manuscript of Nico's latest paper. Michael arrives with food, wine and money, and he explains the source of his riches, a job with an eccentric Canadian University. The others hardly listen to his tale as

they fall ravenously upon the food. Michael interrupts them by whisking the food away and declaring that they will all celebrate his good fortune by going to Cabot's for ice cream instead.

While they drink, Ken, the Department Chair, arrives to collect the rent. They flatter him and ply him with wine. In his drunkenness, he recites his amorous adventures, but when he also declares he is married, they thrust him from the room--without the rent payment--in comic moral indignation. The rent money is divided for their carousal at Cabot's.

The other students go out, but Nico remains alone for a moment in order to finish a newspaper article [checking the soccer scores], promising to join his friends soon. There is a knock at the door, and Lisa, a model who lives in a flat below, enters. Her electricity has gone out and she asks if she can borrow a candle. She thanks him for the candle, but returns a few seconds later, saying she has lost her key. Nico, eager to spend time with Lisa, finds the key and pockets it, feigning innocence. In two arias (Nico's "Che

gelida manina — What a cold little hand" and Lisa's "Sì, mi chiamano Lisa — Yes, they call me Lisa"), they tell each other about their different backgrounds. Impatiently, the waiting friends call Nico. But Nico and Lisa leave for Cabot's. As they leave, they sing of their newfound love. (Duet, "O soave fanciulla — Oh gentle maiden")

Act 2

Cabot's

A great crowd has gathered with street sellers announcing their wares. (Chorus: "Aranci, datteri! Caldi i marroni — Oranges, dates! Hot chestnuts."). The friends appear, flushed with gaiety; Nico buys Lisa a hat from a vendor. People gossip with friends and bargain with the vendors; the children of the streets clamor to see the wares of the toy seller. The friends enter Cabot's.

[skip the B plot - in the interests of time]

Act 3

West Lafayette, IN

Students pass through the barriers and enter the University. Amongst them is Lisa. She tries to find Bob, who lives in a little tavern nearby where he paints signs for the innkeeper. She tells him of her hard life with Nico, who has abandoned her that night. ("O buon Roberto, aiuto! – Oh, good Roberto, help me!"). Bob tells her that Nico is asleep inside, but he wakes up and comes out looking for Bob. Lisa hides and overhears Nico first telling Bob that he left Lisa because of her coquettishness, but finally confessing that he fears she is disappointed because Nico is unable to get NIH to fund his research. Nico, in his poverty, can do little to help Lisa and hopes that his pretended unkindness will inspire her to seek another, wealthier advisor. Out of kindness towards Lisa, Bob tries to silence him, but she has already heard all. She reveals her presence, and Nico and Lisa sing of their lost love. They make plans to separate amicably (Lisa: "Donde lieta uscì – From here she happily left"), but their love for one another is too strong. As a compromise, they agree to remain together until the spring, when Nico can resubmit his proposal and hope that one of his friends is on study section.

Act 4

Back in the lab

Bob and Nico are seemingly at work, though both are primarily bemoaning the loss of Lisa – Nico is grumpy without Lisa and driving Bob nuts with his griping about the quality of the last conference he attended. (Duet: "O Lisa, tu più non torni" – O Lisa, will you not return?).

Michael arrives with a frugal meal and all parody eating a plentiful banquet, dance together, and sing. Michael also arrives with news: Lisa, who took up with a Dean after leaving Nico in the spring, has left her patron. Michael has brought her back to the lab. Lisa, haggard and pale [what happens when you take up with a Dean], is assisted into a chair. Nico is still penniless and the friends leave to help him find some money. Bob goes to talk with some VC's while Michael leaves to pawn his '67 Mustang (Michael: "Vecchia macchina – Old car"). Left alone, Lisa and Nico recall their past happiness. (Duet, Lisa and Nico: "Sono andati? – Have they gone?"). They relive their first meeting--the candle, the lost key--and, to Lisa's delight,

Nico presents her with the hat he bought her, which he has kept as a souvenir of their love. The others return, with the promise of a tenure track position, but it is too late to help their friend. Nico lapses into unconsciousness – he realizes that he has no choice but to move to Texas. The opera ends as Lisa cries out Nico's name in anguish, and weeps helplessly.