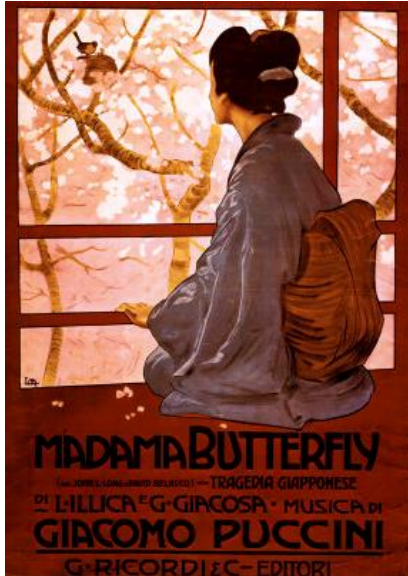


The Pescadero Opera Society presents

Madama Butterfly



Music by Giacomo Puccini
Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica

Based on the play *Madama Butterfly*
by David Belasco

Opera in Two Acts
Sung in Italian

Location: Nagasaki, Japan
Time: early 20th century

Characters

Cio-Cio-San (Madama Butterfly) (soprano)..... Patricia Racette
Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton, a lieutenant in the U.S. Navy (tenor)..... Marcello Giordani
Suzuki, Cio-Cio-San's servant (mezzo-soprano)..... Maria Zifchak
Sharpless, U.S. Consul in Nagasaki (baritone)..... Dwayne Croft
Goro, a marriage broker (tenor)..... Greg Fedderly
The Bonze, Cio-Cio-San's uncle and a Buddhist priest (bass)..... Dean Peterson
Prince Yamadori, a wealthy Japanese suitor (baritone)..... Christopheren Nomura
The Imperial Commissioner (bass)..... Keith Miller
Kate Pinkerton, Pinkerton's American wife (mezzo-soprano)..... Edyta Kulczak
Dolore (Sorrow), Cio-Cio-San's child..... Blind Summer Theatre (puppetry)

Conducted by Patrick Summers
The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, Chorus and Ballet

First performance at the Teatro alla Scala, Milan, Italy, on February 14, 1904

Synopsis

Act I



On a flowering terrace overlooking Nagasaki Harbor, Goro, the marriage broker, is giving U.S. Navy Lieutenant Pinkerton a tour of the home that he is to lease with his new bride, Cio-Cio-San. The lease, as is the custom, is for 999 years — with a convenient monthly cancellation clause that Pinkerton may use at his discretion. Goro then introduces Pinkerton to his three servants, among them Cio-Cio-San’s long-time personal maid, Suzuki. The wedding will take place that day.

Sharpless, the U.S. Consul, arrives breathlessly from climbing the hill. He cautions Pinkerton about this arrangement, saying that the naïve Cio-Cio-San may take her marriage vows very seriously, but Pinkerton cannot be made to take anything seriously. Although he is enchanted with the fragile Cio-Cio-San and looks forward to their marriage, he proposes a toast to the day when he will be married — to a “real” American wife.

Cio-Cio-San is heard in the distance, joyously singing that she is the happiest of women, for love is greeting her at the top of the hill. Accompanied by her relatives, she modestly tells Pinkerton about herself, revealing her age — which is only fifteen. She also tells him that when her family fell on hard times, she had to earn her living as a geisha. Cio-Cio-San then shows Pinkerton her few earthly treasures that she carries in her large Japanese sleeve, including a dagger that her father had used to commit suicide on the order of the Mikado. To Pinkerton’s surprise, she also reveals her intent to embrace his Christian faith and become a true American wife.

The Imperial Commissioner performs the brief guests toast the happy couple. The celebration is Cio-Cio-San’s uncle, The Bonze, a Buddhist priest, who renouncing her religion and betraying her family. on the young bride, renouncing her as well. Pinkerton leave his house.

Alone together in the moonlit garden, Pinkerton and dries her tears. They express their love for each Cio-San’s white bridal robe. Pinkerton and Cio-Cio-San and, lovingly, enter their new home.



wedding ceremony, and the suddenly interrupted by curses Cio-Cio-San for Shocked, the relatives turn angrily orders the guests to

comforts Cio-Cio-San’s other. Suzuki prepares Cio-sing a rapturous love duet

Act II

Three years have passed since Pinkerton left, but Cio-Cio-San has not heard from him. Suzuki, who has been praying to her Japanese gods, tries to tell Cio-Cio-San that he will never come again and shows her how little money is left. Cio-Cio-San urges her to have faith —she sings her famous aria, *Un bel dì* (One Fine Day), sure that one day Pinkerton’s ship will sail into the harbor, and he will once again climb the hill to meet his beloved wife.

Sharpless, the U.S. Consul, brings a letter from Pinkerton. Cio-Cio-San greets him warmly and shows him her American home. Before Sharpless can read the letter to Cio-Cio-San, Goro enters with a wealthy suitor, the Prince Yamadori. Cio-Cio-San dismisses both the marriage broker and the Prince, insisting that she is still married to Pinkerton. When they are again alone, Sharpless begins to read the letter, suggesting to Cio-Cio-San that Pinkerton may not return to her. Upset, Cio-Cio-San leaves the room and returns, carrying her child, the result of her marriage to Pinkerton. She tells Sharpless that his name is Dolore,

meaning Sorrow but, upon his father's return, his name will be changed to Joy. She says that, once Pinkerton knows he has a son, he will surely return to her. However, if he does not, she would rather die than return to her former life as a geisha. Moved by her futile devotion, Sharpless leaves without having revealed the full contents of the letter.

A cannon is heard — Pinkerton's ship, the *Abraham Lincoln*, has sailed into the harbor! Delirious with joy, Cio-Cio-San orders Suzuki to help her fill the house with flowers. They sing their lovely *Flower Duet* while sprinkling flower petals all around the house. They then cut three holes into the paper screen to await Pinkerton's arrival. As night falls, Cio-Cio-San, Suzuki and the child begin their long vigil. The *Humming Chorus* is heard off-stage. The child gradually falls asleep, Suzuki rests, but Butterfly stares steadfastly out at the harbor below.



Act III

As the curtain opens sailors are heard calling to one another in the harbor. Day is dawning, but Cio-Cio-San has not moved. Suzuki convinces Cio-Cio-San to take the child and get some rest, assuring her that she would wake her as soon as Pinkerton arrives. Cio-Cio-San takes the sleeping child into another room, singing him a lullaby.

No sooner have Butterfly and the child retired than there is a knock at the door. It is Sharpless, accompanied by Pinkerton and his American wife, Kate. Almost at once Suzuki realizes who this woman is and bursts into sobs of despair. She cannot bear to tell Cio-Cio-San, but finally agrees to help in breaking the news to her. Pinkerton, seized with remorse, bids an anguished farewell to his former home and the happiness he has known there. Then he rushes off.



Cio-Cio-San awakens from the other room and calls out to Suzuki. She is sure that Pinkerton has returned! She suddenly notices Kate standing in the garden and asks who she is and what she wants — she suddenly understands everything. She is asked to surrender her child to Kate so that he can be raised as an American child. The shattered Cio-Cio-San agrees to give up her child only if Pinkerton himself returns in a half-hour to pick him up.

Left alone with the child, Cio-Cio-San knows that there is only one thing left to do. She sends Suzuki away. In a poignant aria she bids farewell to her son, begging him to always to remember her. She hands him a doll and an American flag and gently blindfolds him. Then she goes behind a screen and takes out the dagger with which her father had committed suicide, choosing to die with honor rather than live in disgrace. As the dying Cio-Cio-San drags herself toward the blindfolded boy, Pinkerton comes rushing in crying, "Butterfly! Butterfly!" He falls on his knees beside her now lifeless body — and the curtain falls.



Giacomo Puccini

Born: Lucca, December 22, 1858; Died: Brussels, November 29, 1924



As a young boy Giacomo Puccini studied music with his uncle, Fortunato Magi, and the director of the Istituto Musicale Pacini, Carlo Angeloni. He began his musical career at the age of 14 as an organist at St. Martino and other local churches. Seeing a performance of Verdi's *Aida* at Pisa, Italy in 1876, made such an impact on him that he decided to follow his instinct for writing opera. With a scholarship and financial support from an uncle, Puccini was able to enter the Milan Conservatory in 1880.

In 1882, while still a student, Puccini entered a competition for a one-act opera which was announced by the publishing firm of Sonzogno. He and his librettist, Ferdinando Fontana, failed to win, but their opera *Le Villi* came to the attention of publisher, Giulio Ricordi, who arranged a successful production at the Teatro del Verme in Milan, Italy. A second opera was commissioned; however, Fontana's libretto, *Edgar*, was unsuited to

Puccini's dramatic talent, and the opera was coolly received at La Scala in April 1889. This, however, began Puccini's lifelong association with the house of Ricordi.

The first opera, for which Puccini himself chose the subject, was *Manon Lescaut*. Produced at Turin in 1893, it achieved a success such as Puccini was never to repeat, and made him known outside of Italy. Among the writers who worked on its libretto were Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, who provided the librettos for Puccini's next three operas. The first of these, *La Bohème*, widely considered Puccini's masterpiece, but with its mixture of lighthearted and sentimental scenes and its largely conversational style, was not a success when produced at Turin in 1896. *Tosca*, Puccini's first excursion into *verismo* (realism) was more enthusiastically received by the Roman audience at the Teatro Costanzi in 1900.

Later that year Puccini visited London and saw David Belasco's one-act play, *Madama Butterfly*. He took this as the basis for his next collaboration with Illica and Giacosa. Puccini considered it the best and most technically advanced opera he had written. He was unprepared, however, for the fiasco of its first performance in February 1904, when the La Scala audience was urged into hostility, even pandemonium, by the composer's jealous rivals. A revised version was given great acclaim at Brescia the following May.

Puccini married Elvira Gemignani, the widow of a Lucca merchant, who had borne him a son as long ago as 1896. The family lived until 1921 in the house at Torre del Lago, which Puccini had acquired in 1891. In 1909 Elvira had accused their servant girl of having an intimate relationship with her husband. The girl committed suicide, and a court case established the girl's innocence. But the publicity affected Puccini deeply and it was the main reason for the long period before his next opera, *La Fanciulla del West* (Girl of the Golden West), an American western based on another Belasco drama. The opera had its premiere at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, in December 1910. In all technical respects, notably its Debussian harmony and Straussian orchestration, it was a masterly reply to the criticism that Puccini repeated himself in every new opera. What it lacked was the incandescent phrase, and this was probably why it had not entered the normal repertory outside Italy.

Differences with Tito Ricordi, head of the firm since 1912, led Puccini to accept a commission for an operetta from the directors of the Vienna Karltheater. The result, *La Rondine*, though warmly received at Monte Carlo in 1917, is among Puccini's weakest works, hovering between opera and operetta and devoid of striking lyrical melody. While working on it Puccini began the composition of *Il Tabarro*, the first of three one-act operas, *Il Trittico*, which follow the scheme of the Parisian Grand Guignol — a horrific episode, a sentimental tragedy, *Suor Angelica*, and a comedy or farce, *Gianni Schicchi*. This last opera of the triptych proved to be the most enduring and is often done without the others, usually in a double bill.

In his early 60s Puccini was determined to “strike out on new paths” and started work on *Turandot*, based on a Gozzi play, which satisfied his desire for a subject with a fantastic, fairy-tale atmosphere, but flesh-and-blood characters. While writing the opera he moved to Viareggio and, in 1923, developed cancer of the throat. Treatment at a Brussels clinic seemed successful, but his heart could not stand the strain and he died, leaving *Turandot* unfinished. It was completed by his good friend, Franco Alfano, and is usually heard that way today. All of Italy went into mourning and, two years later, his remains were interred at his house at Torre del Lago which, after his wife’s death in 1930, was turned into a museum.

Puccini’s choral, orchestral and instrumental works, dating mainly from his early years, are unimportant, though the Mass in A-flat (1880) is still performed occasionally. His operas may not engage us on as many different levels as do those of Mozart, Verdi, Wagner or Strauss, but on his own most characteristic level, where erotic passion, sensuality, tenderness, pathos and despair meet and fuse, he was an unrivalled master. His melodic gift and harmonic sensibility, his consummate skill in orchestration and unerring sense of theatre combined to create a style that was wholly original, homogeneous and compelling. He was fully aware of his limitations and rarely ventured beyond them. He represents Verdi’s only true successor, and his greatest masterpiece and swansong, *Turandot*, belongs among the last 20th-century stage works to remain in the regular repertory of the world’s opera houses.

Madama Butterfly



Madama Butterfly originated as a short story by American lawyer and writer, John Luther Long. It is based on the recollections of Long’s sister, Jennie Correll, who had been to Japan with her husband, a Methodist missionary, and was mainly influenced by Pierre Loti’s 1887 novel, *Madame Chrysanthème*, published in *Century Magazine* in 1898, along with some of Long’s other short fiction.

The story was adapted for the stage by David Belasco, which premiered with great success in New York in 1900, and then quickly crossed the Atlantic for a London production at the Duke of York’s Theatre. Puccini happened to be in London at that time supervising *Tosca* for Covent Garden. Always alert for new operatic material, Puccini went to see *Madama Butterfly: A Tragedy of Japan*. Although his grasp of English was tentative at best, he was very taken with the strong female protagonist. Afterwards he rushed to the “Green Room” to meet the author and secure the rights to the material. As luck would have it, the play

had already inspired an opera by André Messager. Puccini, not to be dissuaded, became intent on creating an even better opera — this might have indeed fueled his inspiration.

The following year, an Italian translation of the story was sent to Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, Puccini’s librettists. Puccini worked on *Butterfly* for two years, which is a relatively short time, considering that he had to stop composing for eight months because he was badly injured in a car accident and suffered a compound fracture of his right leg. His shinbone had to be rebroken in order to set properly — a slight limp would remain. Recovery was slow, and it was also discovered that he suffered from diabetes. Puccini returned to writing *Butterfly* as soon as he was able, and completed the score on December 27, 1903.

In the course of composition, Puccini became fascinated with *japonaiserie*, and discussed “authentic” Japanese motifs and folksongs with the wife of the Japanese ambassador, as well as the details of Butterfly’s behavior with a Japanese actress on tour in Milan. The opera was slated for La Scala in Milan. Rehearsals went well — musicians and stagehands were said to have been moved to tears after the execution of some passages.

The premiere on February 17, 1904 was a fiasco. Greeted by the yells of the public, a reaction that was quite possibly “staged” by rival publisher, Sonzogno and the composers he had under contract, Puccini withdrew his opera. The next morning Puccini wrote, “It was a real lynching! Those cannibals didn’t listen

to one note. What a horrible orgy of madmen, drunk with hate! But my *Butterfly* remains what it is — the most deeply-felt and imaginative opera I have conceived!”

Almost immediately, Puccini started revising *Butterfly*. In the first act many details were eliminated and the wedding scene was tightened. The second act, initially 90 minutes long, was divided into two scenes, the first scene ending with the *Humming Chorus*. (In Italy, *Butterfly* is still enjoyed in two acts, while in America the opera is broken into three-acts.) Pinkerton’s aria, “Addio, fiorito asil,” was added, and the final encounter with Pinkerton’s American wife, Kate, was reworked.

The revised version of *Butterfly* was presented on May 28, 1904 at the smaller provincial opera house, Teatro Grande, in Brescia, with the same cast as at La Scala, except for the Polish soprano, Salomea Kruszeniski, as Cio-Cio-San. This time it was a stupendous success — with thirty-two curtain calls and seven encores. Puccini’s faith in *Butterfly* was vindicated, and the opera officially began its journey toward continuing international fame and success.



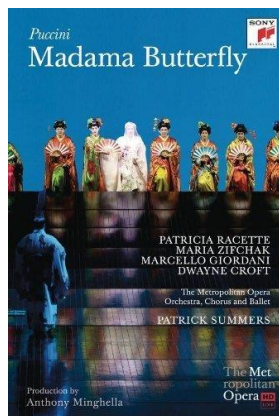
Puccini called *Madama Butterfly* his favorite work, one he never tired of listening to in its entirety. Japan’s best-known opera singer, Tamaki Miura, won international fame for her performances as Cio-Cio-San, and her statue, along with that of Puccini, can be found in Glover Garden, Nagasaki’s top tourist attraction featuring Japan’s oldest Western-style house set in a beautiful garden overlooking Nagasaki Harbor.

Madama Butterfly is a staple of the standard operatic repertoire, and appears as #1 on Opera America’s list of the 20 most-performed operas in North America.



Madama Butterfly: The Video (2009)

Starring Patricia Racette, Maria Zifchak and Marcello Giordani



This Met production of *Madama Butterfly* is a gorgeous cinematic spectacle. Michael Levine’s sparse but elegant sets focuses attention on the principals by surrounding them with vast, empty space extended with a mirrored ceiling. This extraordinary production of Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* will shamelessly tug at your heartstrings.

Director Anthony Minghella took this work back to its Japanese roots, incorporating elements of Noh theater. *Butterfly*’s hillside house becomes a “zoned” acting space, cut through with small, sliding shoji. Black-clad kuroko stagehands move, ghost-like through its movable walls. Colorful, authentic Japanese costumes are used very cleverly. Minghella’s finest touch, however, was to turn *Butterfly*’s three-year-old son, Trouble, typically played by a cute child in a sailor suit, into a life-sized Bunraku puppet. Manipulated with amazing art and skill by three black-clad members of a troupe called Blind Summit Theatre, this amazing puppet moves with eerily human gestures. His bald head and face with a wizened, hopeful yet anxious look had the audience alternately chuckling, sighing and weeping, even more so than if it were a real child.

Patricia Racette returns to the Met stage after her first appearance in the title role drawing a wide-range of critical acclaim. Her singing is robust, nuanced and passionate. Hers was a performance not to be missed. Mr. Giordani is in good voice as Pinkerton, as is Maria Zifchak as Suzuki.