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Chorus Master **Donald Palumbo**
Assistant Choreographer **Anita Griffin**
Musical Preparation **Donna Racik, Derrick Inouye,**
Howard Watkins*, and **Bryan Wagorn***
Assistant Stage Director **Sara Erde**
Met Titles **Christopher Bergen**
Italian Coach **Hemdi Kfir**
Prompter **Donna Racik**
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A scene from Puccini's *La Bohème*

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Synopsis

Act I

Japan, at the turn of the 20th century. Lieutenant Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton of the U.S. Navy inspects a house overlooking Nagasaki Harbor that he is leasing from Goro, a marriage broker. The house comes with three servants and a geisha wife named Cio-Cio-San, known as Madam Butterfly. The lease runs for 999 years, subject to monthly renewal. The American consul Sharpless arrives breathless from climbing the hill. Pinkerton describes his philosophy of the fearless Yankee roaming the world in search of experience and pleasure. He is not sure whether his feelings for the young girl are love or a whim, but he intends to go through with the wedding ceremony. Sharpless warns him that the girl may view the marriage differently, but Pinkerton brushes off such concerns and says that someday he will take a real, American wife. He offers the consul whiskey and proposes a toast. Butterfly arrives with her friends for the ceremony. In casual conversation after the formal introduction, Butterfly admits her age, 15, and explains that her family was once prominent but lost its position, and she has had to earn her living as a geisha. Her relatives arrive and chatter about the marriage. Butterfly shows Pinkerton her few possessions and quietly tells him that she has been to the Christian mission and will embrace her husband's religion. The Imperial Commissioner reads the marriage agreement, and the relatives congratulate the couple. Suddenly, a threatening voice is heard from afar—it is the Bonze, Butterfly's uncle, a priest. He curses the girl for going to the mission and rejecting her ancestral religion. Pinkerton orders them to leave, and as they go, the Bonze and the shocked relatives denounce Butterfly. Pinkerton tries to console Butterfly with sweet words. Suzuki helps her into her wedding kimono before the couple meets in the garden, where they make love.

Intermission (AT APPROXIMATELY 1:55PM)

Act II

Three years have passed, and Butterfly awaits her husband's return at her home. Suzuki prays to the gods for help, but Butterfly berates her for believing in lazy Japanese gods rather than in Pinkerton's promise to return one day. Sharpless appears with a letter from Pinkerton, but before he can read it to Butterfly, Goro arrives with the latest suitor, the wealthy Prince Yamadori. Butterfly politely serves the guests tea but insists that she is not available for marriage—her American husband has not deserted her. She dismisses Goro and Yamadori. Sharpless attempts to read Pinkerton's letter and suggests that perhaps Butterfly should reconsider Yamadori's offer. In response, she presents the consul with the young son that she has had by Pinkerton. She says that his name is "Sorrow," but when his father returns, he will be called "Joy." Sharpless is too upset to tell her more of the letter's contents. He leaves, promising to tell Pinkerton of the child. A

cannon shot in the harbor announces the arrival of a ship. Butterfly and Suzuki take a telescope to the terrace and read the name of the vessel—it is Pinkerton's. Overjoyed, Butterfly joins Suzuki in decorating the house with flowers from the garden. Night falls, and Butterfly, Suzuki, and the child settle into a vigil watching over the harbor.

Intermission (AT APPROXIMATELY 3:20PM)

Act III

Dawn breaks, and Suzuki insists that Butterfly get some sleep. Butterfly carries the child into the house. Sharpless appears with Pinkerton and Kate, Pinkerton's new wife. Suzuki realizes who the American woman is and agrees to help break the news to Butterfly. Pinkerton is overcome with guilt and runs from the scene, pausing to remember his days in the little house. Butterfly rushes in hoping to find Pinkerton but sees Kate instead. Grasping the situation, she agrees to give up her son but insists that Pinkerton return for him. Dismissing everyone, Butterfly takes out the dagger with which her father committed suicide, choosing to die with honor rather than live in shame. She is interrupted momentarily when the child comes in, but Butterfly says goodbye and blindfolds him. She stabs herself as Pinkerton arrives, calling out for her.



Madama Butterfly on Demand

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Giacomo Puccini

Madama Butterfly

*Premiere: Teatro alla Scala, Milan, February 1904 (original version);
Teatro Grande, Brescia, May 1904 (revised version)*

The title character of *Madama Butterfly*—a young Japanese geisha who clings to the belief that her arrangement with a visiting American naval officer is a loving and permanent marriage—is one of the defining roles in opera, as convincing and tragic as any figure in drama. Part of the reason for the opera's enduring hold on the popular imagination may have to do with the fact that the mere mention of *Madama Butterfly* triggers ideas about cultural and sexual imperialism for people far removed from the opera house. Film, theater, and popular culture in general have riffed endlessly on the story and have made the lead role iconic. But the opera itself, while neither emphasizing nor avoiding these aspects of the story, focuses more on the characters as real people than on complicated issues of power. The opera survived a disastrous Milan opening night, and Puccini reworked it immediately. In its revised version, the opera enjoyed great success in nearby Brescia a few months later, then in Paris, and soon all over the world. It has remained at the core of the opera repertory ever since, and the lyric beauty of the music for the thoroughly believable lead role has made *Butterfly* timeless.

The Creators

Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924) was immensely popular in his own lifetime. Audiences and critics alike celebrate his operas for their mastery of detail, their sensitivity to everyday subjects, their copious melody, and their economy of expression. Puccini's librettists for *Madama Butterfly*, Giuseppe Giacosa (1847–1906) and Luigi Illica (1857–1919), also collaborated with the composer on his previous two operas, *Tosca* and *La Bohème* (both of which, along with *Butterfly*, are among his most enduringly successful). The opera is based on the play *Madame Butterfly* by playwright and producer David Belasco (1853–1931), a giant of the American theater and a fascinating, if controversial, character whose daring innovations brought a new level of realism and vitality to the stage.

The Setting

The story takes place in the Japanese port city of Nagasaki at the turn of the 20th century, during a time of expanding American international presence. Japan was hesitantly defining its global role, and Nagasaki was one of the country's few ports open to foreign ships. Temporary marriages for foreign sailors were

not unusual. While other time periods have been used in various productions, the issues of East/West cultural conflict as they existed in 1900 cannot be easily ignored in this opera, regardless of when it's set.

The Music

Puccini achieved a new level of sophistication with his use of the orchestra in this opera, with subtle colorings and sonorities throughout the score. The chorus is similarly effective and imaginative, though used very sparingly, notably in the entrance of the relatives in Act I and the unforgettable and enigmatic Humming Chorus in Act II. The opera, however, rests squarely on the performer singing the title role as in few other works: She is onstage most of the time and is the only character that experiences true (and tragic) development. The soprano who sings this role, among the most difficult in the repertory, must convey an astounding array of emotions and characteristics, from ethereal (her entrance) to sensual (the Act I love duet) to intelligent and stinging (her Act II dealings with other Japanese characters) to dreamy-bordering-on-insane (the famous aria "Un bel di") to resigned (the final scene). The vocal abilities needed to animate this complex character are virtually unique in opera.

Met History

Madama Butterfly had its Met premiere in 1907 in grand fashion, with the composer in the audience and Geraldine Farrar and Enrico Caruso in the lead roles. Puccini always maintained that Farrar's voice was too small for the part, yet she sang it with the company to great audience approval 139 times over the next 15 years. In 1922, Joseph Urban designed a production that lasted for 36 years. Temporarily off the boards during World War II, *Madama Butterfly* returned to the Met stage in 1946 and was served well by Licia Albanese (72 performances) and Dorothy Kirsten (68 performances) for the following decade and a half. In a 1958 production (with Antonietta Stella in the title role), director and designer Yoshio Aoyama and Motohiro Nagasaka famously dispensed with the holes in the rice-paper walls that were specified in the libretto for Act II, calling that touch "wholly un-Japanese." This production showcased such stars as Renata Tebaldi, Renata Scotto (debut, 1965), Teresa Stratas, Pilar Lorengar, Martina Arroyo, Raina Kabaivanska, Leontyne Price, and Diana Soviero. A new staging by Giancarlo del Monaco opened in 1994, featuring Catherine Malfitano as the title heroine. The current production, by Anthony Minghella, opened the Met's 2006–07 season with Cristina Gallardo-Domàs and Marcello Giordani in the leading roles.

Program Note

As soon as Puccini recovered from the stressful world premiere of *Tosca* in 1900 (the worries included a bomb scare at the Rome Opera), he began thinking about a new opera. He looked to works by Zola and Dostoyevsky, considering the latter's *From the House of the Dead*, which was later set by Janáček. Though sometimes linked with the verismo, or realist, composers Mascagni, Leoncavallo, and Giordano, Puccini was more interested in an "extended" realism: stories steeped in the details of ordinary life but with a strong guiding theme and an accumulating dramatic thrust. It's a long way from Dostoyevsky to David Belasco, but it was the latter who provided Puccini with the source for his next opera.

In the summer of 1900, in London, Puccini saw the American playwright and director's *Madame Butterfly*. He went backstage and begged for the rights. "I agreed at once," Belasco wrote, "[though] it is not possible to discuss business arrangements with an impulsive Italian who has tears in his eyes and both arms around your neck."

Belasco was born in San Francisco to a Jewish-Portuguese family. As a child, he ran away to join the circus, ended up on Broadway, and became the Steven Spielberg of his time. He used a remarkable facility with stage effects to dress up his plays—most of them derivative, some of them plagiarized. Belasco invented a remarkable series of lighting and scrim effects, which later would be called "montage" and become basic to the way stories are told in films. Puccini instinctively grasped the emotional power of the story of *Butterfly* and its suitability to his musical gifts. The themes of the one-act *Madame Butterfly*—cultural conflict, impossible love, the connection between forbidden love and death, the inevitable dislocation as modern internationalism sweeps away "traditional values"—remain remarkably potent and contemporary. Such prescience was perhaps as much a part of Puccini's genius as anything else.

Belasco (who would inspire Puccini again with *The Girl of the Golden West*) based his play on a short story by John Luther Long, a lawyer from Philadelphia, who had gotten the idea from his sister, who married a missionary and lived in Japan. Her husband converted a geisha to Christianity. Later, the geisha contemplated committing hara-kiri when her American husband deserted her, but she was dissuaded.

In the story, the young girl called Butterfly does indeed kill herself, by inserting a knife between the nerves in the back of her neck—evidently painless and not very bloody; Belasco changed this to the gruesome self-disembowelment one usually sees. (In the Met's current production, director Anthony Minghella chose to use the original method, for which he has staged a simple but striking image.) Criticized by the genteel for its poor taste, the scene gave Puccini what he always needed: an overwhelming final image.

The challenge of developing *Butterfly* into an effective full-length opera was building to that final scene with details that accumulate rather than distract.

Wrestling with this were librettists Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, who looked to the novel *Madame Chrysanthème* by French writer Pierre Loti for additional material. To portray Japanese culture, Illica and Giacosa raided Loti for a range of characters, including a drunken uncle (who got his own theme) and the monstrous little son of Butterfly's cousin.

This approach raised questions among Puccini's associates. Was the incident-filled first act too long? More crucially, where would they find an Italian tenor who wanted to play a part as unsympathetic as Pinkerton? In the opera's first version, he didn't even have an aria.

Work was delayed when Puccini had a serious car accident. His broken leg failed to heal, and the composer was diagnosed with diabetes. He never entirely recovered, walking with a limp for the rest of his life.

Madama Butterfly was given its world premiere at La Scala on February 17, 1904. It was one of the greatest scandals in the history of opera. Ricordi, Puccini's publisher, described how the opera was greeted by "roars, laughter, howls, bellowing, and guffaws." The noise began immediately and virtually none of the music was heard, not unlike the debacle suffered in 1913 in Paris by Igor Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps*.

Puccini was the victim of intrigue and also of a crowd that fell into a lynch-mob dynamic. Rosina Storchio, the first Butterfly, had trouble managing her kimono, which billowed up at one point. "She's pregnant again!" someone shouted from the audience. "By Toscanini!" someone answered, eager to show he was in on the backstage gossip (true, in fact) about the soprano and the famous conductor. When she said her child's name was "Dolore" ("Sorrow"), the battle was truly lost. One of the headlines following this premiere sums it up: "*Butterfly*, Diabetic Opera, Result of an Accident." The opera was taken off the boards after one performance. A shattered Puccini covered La Scala's costs.

With Ricordi's encouragement, Puccini and his collaborators set about revising the score. They softened Pinkerton's character, making him slightly less offensive and, most importantly (for tenors), giving him an aria ("Addio, fiorito asil"). Kate was reduced to little more than a walk-on. Much of the "local color" that had bogged down Act I was cut.

The opera's second premiere, at Brescia on May 28, 1904, was a triumph. It was also a runaway success in Buenos Aires that same year, with Storchio singing and Toscanini conducting. Puccini made further changes for Covent Garden in 1905, when Caruso sang his first Pinkerton. There were even more changes for the Paris premiere in 1906. It is this version that is most widely performed.

In *Butterfly*, Puccini's musical dramaturgy centers on contrasting "Eastern" and "Western" sounds. His method was to utilize native Japanese music, including the Japanese national anthem, as well as Asian orchestral sounds like bells, gongs, and high woodwinds. The combination immediately creates an utterly concrete and convincing ambience. With the utmost delicacy and



What is Bunraku puppetry?

Western audiences are accustomed to seeing puppets used in the spirit of provocative comedy (à la Charlie McCarthy or Punch and Judy) or as homespun, educational entertainment for children (*Pinocchio*, *The Muppets*). The puppets featured in the Met's *Madama Butterfly*, on the other hand, have been inspired by Japanese Bunraku puppetry, a serious and sophisticated theatrical art form born in 17th-century Osaka. Most traditional Bunraku plays feature historical storylines and address the common Japanese theme of conflict between social obligation and human emotion. Puppeteers go through lengthy apprenticeships to master the form, which could account for the gradual waning of its popularity. There are still a number of practitioners today in Japan, however, and in the West, Mark Down and Nick Barnes, the founders of Blind Summit Theatre, also take inspiration from this tradition for their puppet-theater presentations. For Anthony Minghella's staging of *Butterfly*, they created Bunraku-style puppets to represent Cio-Cio-San's child and, in a dream sequence, *Butterfly* herself. Generally one-half to two-thirds life size, a Bunraku puppet has no strings and is operated by three highly trained puppeteers, each responsible for a different body part and discreetly visible to the audience. —*Charles Sheek*

The Cast



Pier Giorgio Morandi

CONDUCTOR (BIELLA, ITALY)

THIS SEASON *Madama Butterfly* at the Met and Opera Australia, *Tosca* in Rome, *Rigoletto* in Frankfurt, and *Simon Boccanegra* in Turin.

MET APPEARANCES *Rigoletto* (debut, 2017).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS He spent ten years as principal oboist at La Scala, where he was also assistant conductor to Riccardo Muti and Giuseppe Patanè. In 1989, he became deputy principal conductor at the Rome Opera, and from 1991 to 1996, he was principal guest conductor at the Hungarian State Opera. He has also served as principal guest conductor at the Royal Swedish Opera and Helsingborg Symphony Orchestra. Recent performances include *Aida* in Tbilisi and at Opera Australia and the Royal Swedish Opera; *Il Trovatore* in Verona; *Don Carlos*, *Carmen*, and *Tosca* in Hamburg; *La Traviata* in Rimini and Piacenza; *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci* in Göteborg, Sweden; Puccini's *Le Villi* in Reggio Emilia and Modena; *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre; *Tosca* at Deutsche Oper Berlin; *Otello* at the Royal Danish Opera; and *Simon Boccanegra* in Ravenna and Piacenza.



Elizabeth DeShong

MEZZO-SOPRANO (SELINGROVE, PENNSYLVANIA)

THIS SEASON Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly* at the Met and Covent Garden, Hänsel in *Hänsel und Gretel* in concert with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Pauline in *The Queen of Spades* at Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Falliero in Rossini's *Bianca e Falliero* in Frankfurt.

MET APPEARANCES Arsace in *Semiramide*, the Wardrobe Mistress / Schoolboy / Page in *Lulu*, Hermia in *The Enchanted Island* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Suzuki, the First Norn in *Götterdämmerung*, the Priestess in *Aida*, and Suzy in *La Rondine* (debut, 2008).

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS Recent performances include Suzuki at the Glyndebourne Festival, Ino/Juno in Handel's *Semele* in concert in Paris, Sesto in *La Clemenza di Tito* at LA Opera, Adalgisa in *Norma* in concert at North Carolina Opera, Hänsel in concert with the Royal Scottish National Opera, and Ruggiero in Handel's *Alcina* at Washington National Opera. She has also sung Suzuki at the Bavarian State Opera, Canadian Opera Company, San Francisco Opera, and Santa Fe Opera; Adalgisa at Lyric Opera of Chicago; Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Glyndebourne Festival and in Aix-en-Provence; and Rosina in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* at LA Opera.

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GIACOMO PUCCINI

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Paulo Szot

BARITONE (SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL)

THIS SEASON Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* at the Met, Frank Maurant in Weill's *Street Scene* in Monte Carlo, Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte* at the Paris Opera, and concert appearances with the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra and Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra. **MET APPEARANCES** Dr. Falke in *Die Fledermaus*, the Captain in John Adams's *The Death of Klinghoffer*, Kovalyov in *The Nose* (debut, 2010), Lescaut in *Manon*, and Escamillo in *Carmen*.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS He made his Broadway debut in 2008 as Emile de Becque in *South Pacific*, for which he won the Tony Award for Best Actor in a Musical. Recent performances include Danilo in *The Merry Widow* in Rome, Juan Perón in Andrew Lloyd Weber's *Evita* at Opera Australia, Germont in *La Traviata* in São Paulo and Mexico City, Frank Maurant in Madrid, and Escamillo at the Bavarian State Opera. He has also sung Alexander Hamilton / Bill Clinton / Dick Cheney in the world premiere of Mohammed Fairouz's *The New Prince* at Dutch National Opera, Richard Nixon in John Adams's *Nixon in China* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Sharpless in Marseille, Lescaut in *Manon Lescaut* in São Paulo, and Filip Filipovic in Alexander Raskatov's *A Dog's Heart* at La Scala.