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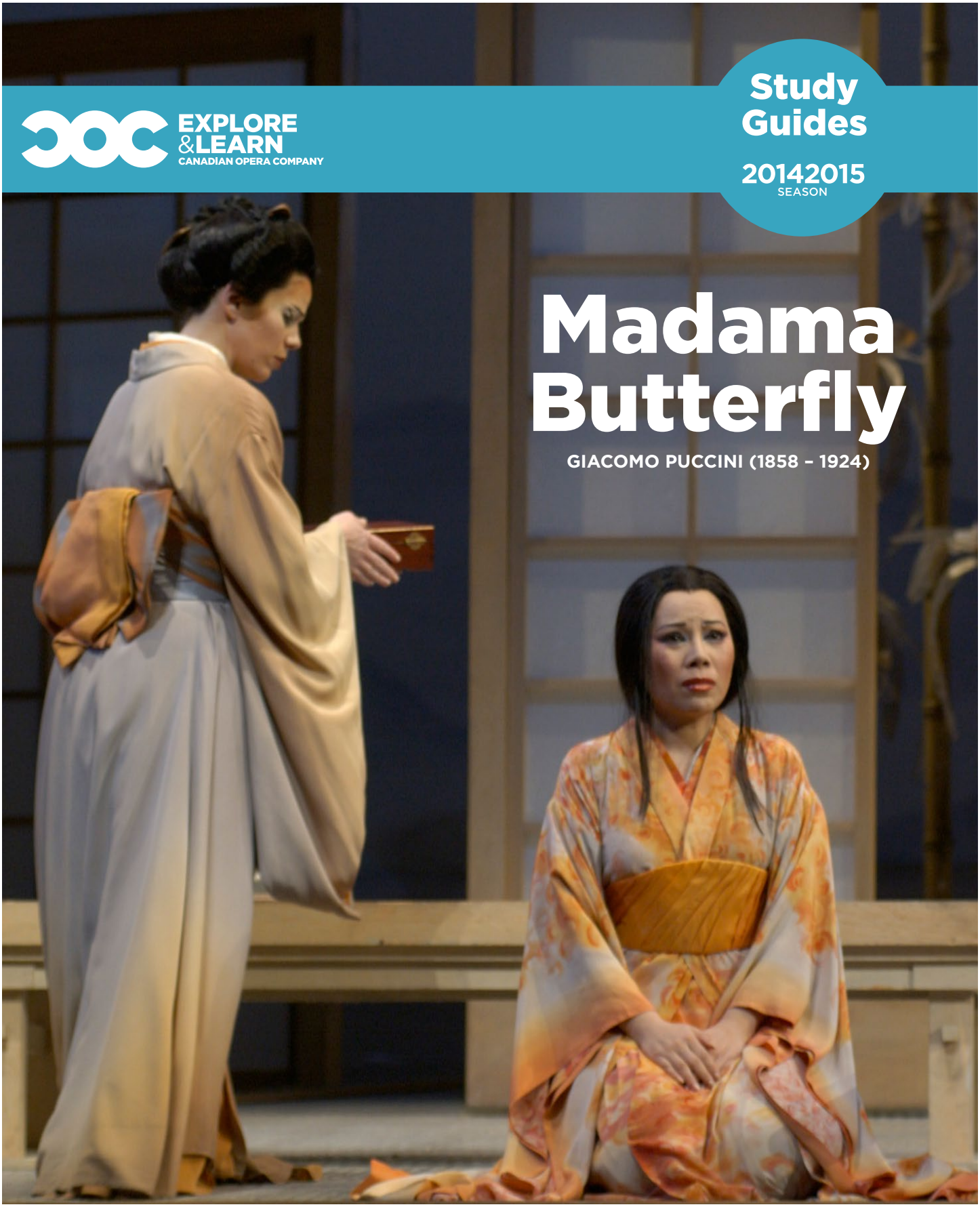

# Madama Butterfly

GIACOMO PUCCINI (1858 – 1924)

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Production originally made possible by John A. Cook

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Above: Xiu Wei Sun as Cio-Cio San in a scene from *Madama Butterfly*. Cover: Allyson McHardy as Suzuki and Xiu Wei Sun as Cio-Cio San. Both photos from *Madama Butterfly* (COC, 2003). Photos: Michael Cooper



# Welcome!

Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* is an enduring and beloved opera. It currently stands as the sixth most-performed opera internationally, according to an online database of opera performances. Even Puccini himself considered it his best work. Containing some of opera's most memorable music and a touching storyline, *Madama Butterfly* is certainly an opera that has stood the test of time.

Musically, *Madama Butterfly* reflects Puccini's varied influences and interests. It features a large orchestra compared to other Italian operas, reflects a Wagnerian influence with its through-composed style, and uses samples of American music and Japanese melodies (including use of a pentatonic scale) to enhance the score.

While not an accurate portrayal of Japan, even for the time in which it was written, viewing *Madama Butterfly* today opens many doors for classroom discussion into orientalism and the Western view of the East, conflicts between America and Japan, ethics, and world religion.

*Madama Butterfly* is presented in Italian with English SURTITLES™.

# Opera 101

## WHAT IS OPERA?

The term "opera" comes from the Italian word for "work" or "piece," and is usually applied to the European tradition of grand opera. Opera is a form of storytelling which incorporates music, drama and design.

Though its origins date back to ancient Greece, the form of opera we are familiar with today started in the late 16th century in Florence, Italy. Count Giovanni de' Bardi was a patron and host to a group of intellectuals, poets, artists, scientists and humanists including Giulio Caccini (composer) and Vincenzo Galilei (father to the astronomer and scientist, Galileo Galilei, who was most famous for his improvements to the telescope). These individuals explored trends in the arts, focusing on music and drama in particular. They were unified in their belief that the arts had become over-embellished and that returning to the transparency of the music of the ancient Greeks, which incorporated both speech and song, and a chorus to further the plot and provide commentary on the action, would present a more pure, natural and powerful way to tell stories and express emotions.

The first opera, *Dafne*, about a nymph who fled from Apollo and was subsequently transformed by the gods into a laurel tree, was composed by Jacopo Peri in 1597. From then on, the early operas recreated Greek tragedies with mythological themes. During the 17th and 18th centuries, topics expanded to include stories about royalty, and everyday or common people. Some operas were of a serious nature (called *opera seria*) and some light-hearted (called *opera buffa*). Since then operas have been written on a wide variety of topics such as cultural clashes (*Madama Butterfly*), comedic farce (*The Barber of Seville*), politicians on foreign visits (*Nixon in China*), the celebration of Canadian heroes (*Louis Riel*), and children's stories (*The Little Prince*), to name a few.

The COC presents works in the western European tradition but musical equivalents to European opera can be found in Japan, at the Peking Opera in China, and in Africa where it is called Epic Storytelling.

**What are the differences between operas, musicals and plays?**

Traditionally operas are through-sung, meaning they are sung from beginning to end with no dialogue in between. Singers must have powerful voices in order to be heard over the orchestra (the ensemble of instrumental musicians that accompanies the dramatic action on stage during an opera). Remember: opera singers don't use microphones!

Musicals are a combination of dialogue and sung pieces and often include choreographed numbers. The singers often use microphones and are accompanied by a pit band which includes more modern instruments like a drum kit, guitar and electronic instruments.

Plays are primarily spoken works of theatre with minimal singing or music.

There are always exceptions to the rule: though *Les Misérables* is through-sung it is still classified as a piece of musical theatre because of its style of music. By the same token, some operas, like Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, have spoken dialogue in addition to singing.

**What does opera feel like?**

Take five minutes out of the school day and instead of using regular voices to converse, ask the class to commit to singing everything. Make an agreement with the students that it's not about judging people's voices but about freeing our natural sounds. Make up the melodies on the spot and don't worry about singing "correctly." Did the musical lines help express or emphasize certain emotions? If so, how?



# Attending the Opera:
## Make the most of your experience

### WELCOME TO THE FOUR SEASONS CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

Photo: Sam Javanrouh

So you're headed to the opera, and there are a few questions on your mind. Here are some tips on how to get the most out of your opera experience.

First, there's the question of **what to wear**. People wear all sorts of things to the opera – jeans, dress pants, cocktail dresses, suits, etc. The important thing is to be comfortable. Wear something that makes you feel good, whether it be jeans or your nicest tie. But skip that spritz of perfume or cologne before you go out; the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts is scent-free. Many fellow patrons and performers are allergic to strong scents.

Once you're dressed, it's important to **arrive on time** for the show. Late patrons cannot be admitted to the theatre, and you may have to watch the first act on a television screen in the lobby rather than from your seat. If you don't have your ticket yet, arrive as early as possible – the line-up for the box office can often be quite long prior to a performance! The main doors open one hour before the performance. Line up there and have your ticket ready to present to the usher. If you have any questions about tonight's performance, drop by the Welcome Desk (just inside the main doors) to ask a member of the COC staff, who are full of useful information not only about tonight's opera, but also about COC programs in general. A **pre-performance chat** takes place in the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre (Ring 3) about 45 minutes before the show. These chats, given by members of our **COC Volunteer Speakers Bureau**, offer valuable insight into the opera and the specific production that you'll be seeing.

Before the opera starts, take the opportunity to **explore the lobby**, known as the Isadore and Rosalie Sharp City Room. Stop by concessions and **pre-order a beverage for intermission or purchase a snack**. Browse the Opera Shop and pick up a memento of your experience at the opera. (Note: the Opera Shop is not open at dress rehearsals.) Walk up the stairs, passing a sculpture as you go, and note the floating glass staircase – the longest free-span glass staircase in the world! On the third floor, you'll see the Richard Bradshaw Amphitheatre, home to our Free Concert Series. You'll also see a mobile by artist Alexander Calder, adding some colour and whimsy to the space.

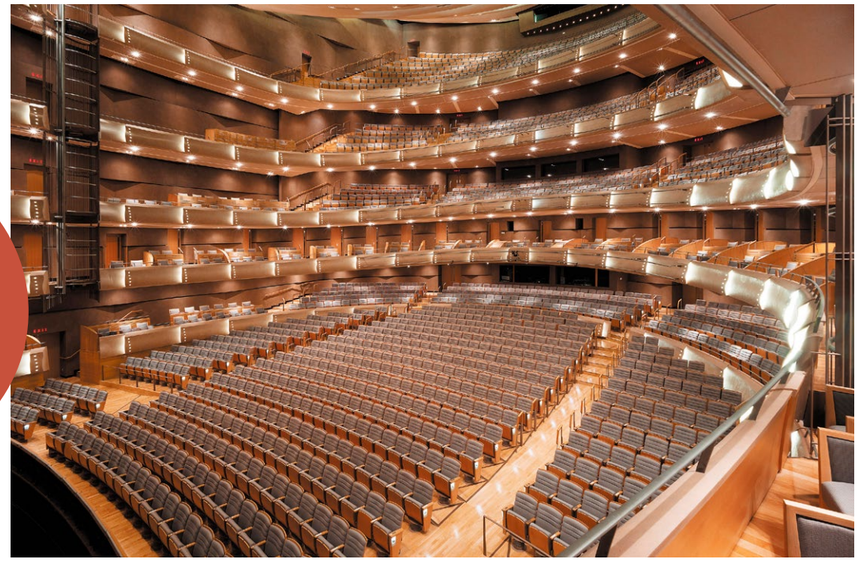
Chimes will ring throughout the lobby **ten minutes** before the performance, reminding everyone to find their seats. Head towards the door noted on your ticket, get a program from the usher, and find your designated seat in R. Fraser Elliott Hall. It's best to use this time to open any candies you might have and turn off your cell phone – the hall is built to carry sound, so small sounds travel further than you may think! Photography is not permitted once the show starts. The design and direction of the show is under intellectual property and only the official COC photographer and/or members of the media can take pictures and even then, only under special circumstances that require prior arrangements.

As the lights go down and the audience quiets, **listen carefully**. Remember all of that traffic you heard in the lobby? And now... not a peep! The auditorium is physically separated from the outside and the ground below, making for the best acoustic experience possible.

Now it's time to sit back and **enjoy the opera**! **SURTITLES™** will be projected on a horizontal screen above the stage. SURTITLES™ originate from the idea of "subtitles", which are most commonly used in foreign films to make them more accessible outside of their country of origin. The COC was the first opera company to adapt this concept for the operatic stage. Slides containing the English translation of the *libretto* (text for the opera) are projected in a more visible place for the audience: above the stage. SURTITLES™ were first used by the COC at the premiere of the opera *Elektra* in 1983. Only the name could be trademarked, as the technology for the projections was already in existence. Opera companies from around the world have adopted this audience initiative under different names, and it has revolutionized opera stages everywhere.

Show your **appreciation to the performers** by laughing at humorous bits or applauding after a well-performed aria. If a performer has pulled off some particularly impressive vocal fireworks, it's absolutely acceptable to yell out your appreciation in addition to applause. You may hear your fellow audience members shouting "bravo!" for a man, "brava!" for a woman, or "bravi!" for a group of performers. Feel free to join in!

***Madama Butterfly*** lasts approximately two hours, 40 minutes, including one intermission.
The opera is sung in Italian with English SURTITLES™.



R. Fraser Elliott Hall.
Photo: Tim Griffith



# Characters and Synopsis

## MAIN CHARACTERS (in order of vocal appearance)

| Name | Description | Voice Type | Pronunciation |
|---|---|---|---|
| B. F. Pinkerton | Lieutenant in the US Navy | Tenor | |
| Goro | A Japanese marriage broker | Tenor | Goh-roh |
| Cio-Cio San (Madama Butterfly) | A young geisha | Soprano | choh-choh-SAHN |
| Suzuki | Cio-Cio San's companion | Mezzo-soprano | soo-ZOO-kee |
| Sharpless | The American consul in Nagasaki | Baritone | |
| Prince Yamadori | Cio-Cio San's rich suitor | Baritone | yah-mah-DOH-ree |
| Yakuside | Cio-Cio San's uncle | Bass | yah-ku-SEE-day |
| Imperial Commissioner | | Baritone | |
| Imperial Registrar | | Baritone | |
| The Bonze | A Buddhist priest and Cio-Cio San's uncle | Bass | BONZ |
| Cio-Cio San's mother | | Mezzo-soprano | |
| Kate Pinkerton | Pinkerton's American wife | Mezzo-soprano | |
| Sorrow | Cio-Cio San and Pinkerton's son | Silent | |

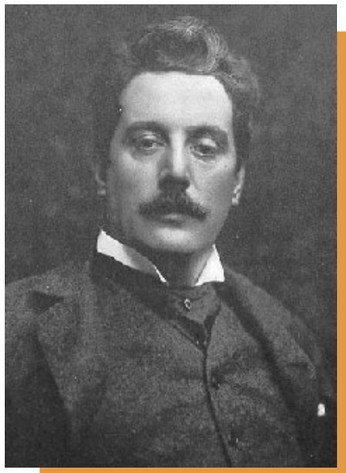
## SYNOPSIS

**ACT I**
*A house in Nagasaki*
Goro, the marriage broker, and Lieutenant B. F. Pinkerton of the United States Navy are inspecting the house where Pinkerton will live with his Japanese bride-to-be, Cio-Cio San (called "Butterfly" by her friends). Sharpless, the American Consul, arrives and expresses doubt about the wisdom of Pinkerton's imminent marriage. Pinkerton makes it clear that this will not be a permanent union, for he plans to marry an American woman later on. Butterfly and her relatives enter, together with Japanese marriage officials, and the consul becomes more concerned when he learns that Butterfly is deeply in love with Pinkerton and is taking their marriage seriously. The festivities are interrupted by the arrival of the Bonze, a Japanese High Priest and Butterfly's cousin. He curses Butterfly for renouncing the faith of her ancestors and becoming a Christian. Pinkerton and Butterfly affirm their love for each other and consummate their union.

**ACT II**
*Three years later*
Butterfly and her companion Suzuki pray for the return of Pinkerton, who has gone away and not yet returned from the United States. Sharpless enters with news that Pinkerton will soon arrive in Japan, but suggests that Pinkerton might not return to her. Butterfly remains firm in her commitment to Pinkerton, who has fathered her young son, and when the wealthy Prince Yamadori arrives she refuses his offer of marriage. A cannon salute in the harbour announces the arrival of Pinkerton's ship, and Butterfly and Suzuki decorate the house in anticipation of his return.

**ACT III**
*The next morning*
Suzuki is asleep, as is Butterfly's son, Sorrow. Butterfly has kept watch through the night. Suzuki wakes and persuades Butterfly to sleep, promising to wake her the moment Pinkerton arrives. Sharpless enters with Pinkerton, who, unable to face Butterfly, leaves before she sees him. Butterfly realizes that Pinkerton has abandoned her forever, forcing her to acknowledge that her life no longer holds any honour. She kills herself, leaving her young son behind.

# Genesis of the Opera



Puccini was handsome and debonair, with a taste for fast cards, fine wine and beautiful women. He's seen here in 1908 in a studio photograph by an unknown artist.

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C. Copyright A. Dupont.

## THE LIFE OF GIACOMO PUCCINI

Giacomo Puccini was born in Lucca, Italy in 1858. Born into a long line of musicians and composers, Puccini was trained as an organist after studying music with his uncle. At the age of 18, after hearing a performance of *Aida*, Puccini resolved to become an opera composer. He soon earned a diploma from the Institute of Music in Lucca, and later graduated with honours from the Milan conservatory. While in Milan, Puccini was surrounded by compositional geniuses: one of his instructors was Amilcare Ponchielli (composer of the opera *La Gioconda*, 1876). He and Ponchielli shared accommodations with Pietro Mascagni (composer of the opera *Cavalleria Rusticana*, 1890). In 1882, Puccini entered his first opera *Le villi* (*The Witches*) into a competition run by the publishing firm of Sonzogno. It didn't win, but it garnered the attention of the publisher Giulio Ricordi, with whom Puccini was to enjoy a lifelong association.

After several moderately successful operas, his first major international success was *Manon Lescaut*, which premiered in 1893 in Turin. After the success of this opera, he built himself a villa in a small town near Lucca. Music publisher Giulio Ricordi connected him with Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, who would come to write the libretti for three of his greatest works: *La Bohème*, *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*. *La Bohème*, one of Puccini's most famous works, premiered in 1896 and was not a great success when it was first produced. It has since become one of the most loved and performed operas in the world. *Tosca*, another one of Puccini's best-loved operas, premiered successfully in Rome in 1900.

During a visit to London in 1900, Puccini saw David Belasco's one-act play *Madam Butterfly*, which served as the inspiration for his opera. *Madama Butterfly* premiered at La Scala in Milan in 1904.

There was a long break before his next premiere, partly due to a tragedy in his domestic life. In 1906, Puccini had begun living with a married woman, Elvira Gemignani, and was only able to marry her himself when her first husband died. Their marriage was not an easy one and eventually Elvira accused Puccini of having an affair with a servant girl. The tension in the household became intolerable and the girl committed suicide. A court case determined that she had not had an affair with Puccini and Elvira was jailed for five months. The resulting publicity caused Puccini to withdraw from the public eye for a time, and also to separate from his wife. They later reconciled, but their marriage was permanently damaged.

In 1910, Puccini composed *La Fanciulla del West* (*The Girl of the Golden West*) for the Metropolitan Opera in New York; his trio of one-act operas *Il Trittico* (*The Triptych*) also premiered at the Met, in 1918. He died in 1924 of throat cancer before he could finish the final scene of his last opera, *Turandot*. The opera was eventually completed by Franco Alfano and premiered in 1926 at La Scala.



## PUCCINI THE COMPOSER

Puccini wrote operas almost exclusively. A meticulous composer, he worked intensely on his scores, constantly revising his work until he was satisfied. Although his style is firmly rooted in the 19th century Italian tradition, his later works reveal cosmopolitan musical tastes, including the influence of French impressionist composers and the German masters. These variations reflect the musical activity and changes going on around the world during his lifetime. Puccini was frequently learning about new trends in music and art, and continued to reinvent himself. What remains constant, however, are his strong melodies and incomparable attention to orchestral detail. Puccini's operas are some of the most compact, tightly constructed works in the standard repertoire.

## *BUTTERFLY* AND "ORIENTALISM"

It's important to note that while still almost-universally loved, *Butterfly* is in no way an accurate portrayal of Japan, even in the era in which it was written. As is true of most Western art about Asian cultures, *Madama Butterfly* is much more a reflection of Europe's perception of Asia, and reflects many stereotypes of the time. Examining this story and these stereotypes can teach us much more about the West than the East, as they reflect structures and ideals from European society during Puccini's time. This "orientalism" that emerged during the mid-eighteenth century allowed artists to examine issues that were otherwise taboo in European society.


A poster for *Madama Butterfly*, 1908, by Adolfo Hohenstein (1854 – 1928), a German artist who also worked as a set and costume designer, numbering several Puccini operas among his projects.

## THE MUSIC OF *MADAMA BUTTERFLY*

*Madama Butterfly* shows strong evidence of this mixture of influences. Like many operas in the Italian tradition, it comes with strong vocal lines and beautiful lyricism for the main characters. At the same time, the orchestra is larger than in many Italian operas and reflects the influence of the German masters, such as Wagner, with more of a "through-composed" style with a greater sense of continuity and flow (similar to that of a symphony). Like the French impressionist composers, he uses uncommon harmonies to create a more "exotic" sound. Additionally, at this time the United States was just beginning to rise to the world stage and develop its own style and musical culture. Puccini uses "The Star-Spangled Banner" (now the national anthem, but at the time it was the U.S. naval hymn) as a principal motif.

Finally, listen for the Japanese melodies found throughout the opera. During his composition of *Madama Butterfly*, Puccini studied Japanese music to enhance the score. He enjoyed the "exotic" character of the sound, which is based on a pentatonic (five-note) scale. In contrast, Western music is based on octaves, or scales which contain eight notes (see the Listening Guide on page 11 for more information).

## SOURCES FOR *MADAMA BUTTERFLY*

The libretto is based upon two sources, a short story from 1889 written by John Luther Long, a Philadelphia lawyer, and the play later derived from that narrative, by playwright and theatrical producer David Belasco.

John Luther Long claimed that the narrative was based on a true story, which he heard from his sister, who was married to a missionary stationed in Nagasaki. However, a novel already existed with a very similar plotline – Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème*. The novel was published in French in 1887, and an English translation soon followed. Long's narrative is much more compact at only 18 pages, and Belasco's play takes nearly all of its dialogue from this slim work. Librettists Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa expanded upon this story, crafting something with fully realized characters and dramatic action that was a considerable improvement over both sources.

Giuseppe Giacosa (left) and Luigi Illica (above) were Puccini's two librettists for *Madama Butterfly*.

## A BIT OF A SLOW START

*Madama Butterfly* was not always viewed as highly as it is today. During the first performance at La Scala in February 1904, the audience reacted with hostility, urged on by the composer's jealous rivals. A revised version premiered in the northern Italian city Brescia the following May, and was received much more favourably.

*Madama Butterfly* has become one of Puccini's most popular operas. According to Operabase (an online database of opera performances and opera houses) *Madama Butterfly* is currently in the list of top 10 internationally produced operas. Puccini himself considered it his best work, as well as the most technically advanced of all his operas.

As of September 2014, *Madama Butterfly* was number six on Operabase's list of most-performed operas.

Besides the familiar aria, "Un bel di" ("One fine day"), the most recognizable tune in the opera is "The Star-Spangled Banner," quoted in the opening act as Pinkerton and Sharpless drink a toast to America. Back then, the music was familiar as the U.S. naval hymn – it did not become the American national anthem until 1931.


Geraldine Farrar (left) was the Metropolitan Opera's first Cio-Cio San in 1907. The Met's current star Cio-Cio San, Patricia Racette (right), is one of the two sopranos singing the role with the Canadian Opera Company in the fall of 2014.

Photos: (left): unknown. Right: Devon Cass



# Listening Guide

**INTRODUCTION**
Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* is generally considered one of the greatest works to emerge from the Italian *verismo* movement – that is, the short, concentrated period in operatic history which lasted from just 1892 (the premiere of Catalani's *La Wally*) through 1926 (when Puccini's *Turandot* marked its end). *Verismo* was the Italian response to the naturalist movement that originated in French literature, notably in the working-class milieus presented by Émile Zola and Guy de Maupassant. Italy found its equivalent in Giovanni Verga, author of the short story *Cavalleria rusticana* on which composer Pietro Mascagni based his 1890 *verismo*-defining opera of the same title.

Despite its origins in "realism" with stories based on contemporary, working-class life, the operatic iteration of the *verismo* movement soon shifted focus to explore more diverse subject matter which embraced the "exotic." Consider this list of *verismo* heroines who emerged in the decades after 1892: noblewomen (Giordano's Fedora; Cilea's Gloria; and, the nobly born nun Angelica in Puccini's *Suor Angelica*); courtesans (Stephana in Giordano's *Siberia*; Puccini's Magda in *La rondine*) and oriental waifs (Mascagni's *Iris* and Puccini's Liù in *Turandot*). So, it is an oversimplification to view *verismo* opera as dealing solely in subjects drawn from tawdry newspaper headlines (as did Verga's and Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*). The proof is in *Madama Butterfly*, only the most famous example of how composers of this era, including Mascagni, strove to constantly expand and refine their art, searching for new and original subject matter to include such (then) "exotic" cultures like Japan's.

The *verismo* movement may have drawn inspiration from a diverse set of real life and literary sources but musically, it was bound by a much more consistent set of stylistic features. In particular, the vocal line becomes situated on a new level between *arioso* (singing that is more tied to the rhythm of speech than in an aria) and speech: words retain more of their spoken quality and natural clarity, while spontaneously acquiring musical pitch – the result is closer to "sung conversation" than one experiences in *bel canto* (Donizetti, Bellini, Rossini) and Romantic (Verdi) Italian opera. That is not to say that *verismo* abandons the pure lyricism and opportunity for emotional and vocal expansion offered by the aria – indeed that form provides an anchor to the earlier Italian tradition. However, what distinguishes *verismo* from say, the more strict stop and start/*recitativo* (sung dialogue) and *aria* forms of *bel canto* is its more "through-composed" style which results in a greater sense of continuity and flow (similar to that of a symphony).

The tracks listed below are excerpted from *Madama Butterfly*, Decca 417 577-2. Vienna Philharmonic and the Vienna State Opera Chorus, Herbert von Karajan, conductor. Mirella Freni, Luciano Pavarotti, Robert Kerns, Christa Ludwig. You can also experience the Listening Guide online at coc.ca/COCRadio.

**1**

**MUSICAL EXCERPT**
Act II, Aria: "Un bel dì vedremo" ("One fine day we'll see")

**CONNECTION TO THE STORY**
It has been three years since Butterfly's husband, Pinkerton, left Nagasaki and only her maid, Suzuki, has stayed with her. The two women are desperately poor but Butterfly is content to remain in the house and wait, convinced that her husband will return.

**MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE**
"Un bel dì" is arguably the most recognizable aria in the entire operatic repertoire. While it is easy to be swept away by its intoxicating melody, this aria is much more than a pretty tune: its musical structure is complex and sheds light on Puccini's skill in modifying Japanese musical style, blending it with the harmonic structure of the Western tradition. The opening melody in which Butterfly affirms her belief that Pinkerton will return is firmly within the realm of traditional Western harmony. This mirrors Cio-Cio San's self-identification as an "American wife" who lives in what she calls an American house. There is a shift in the harmonic language at 1:15 however on the words "Io non gli scendo incontro. Io no." ("I won't go

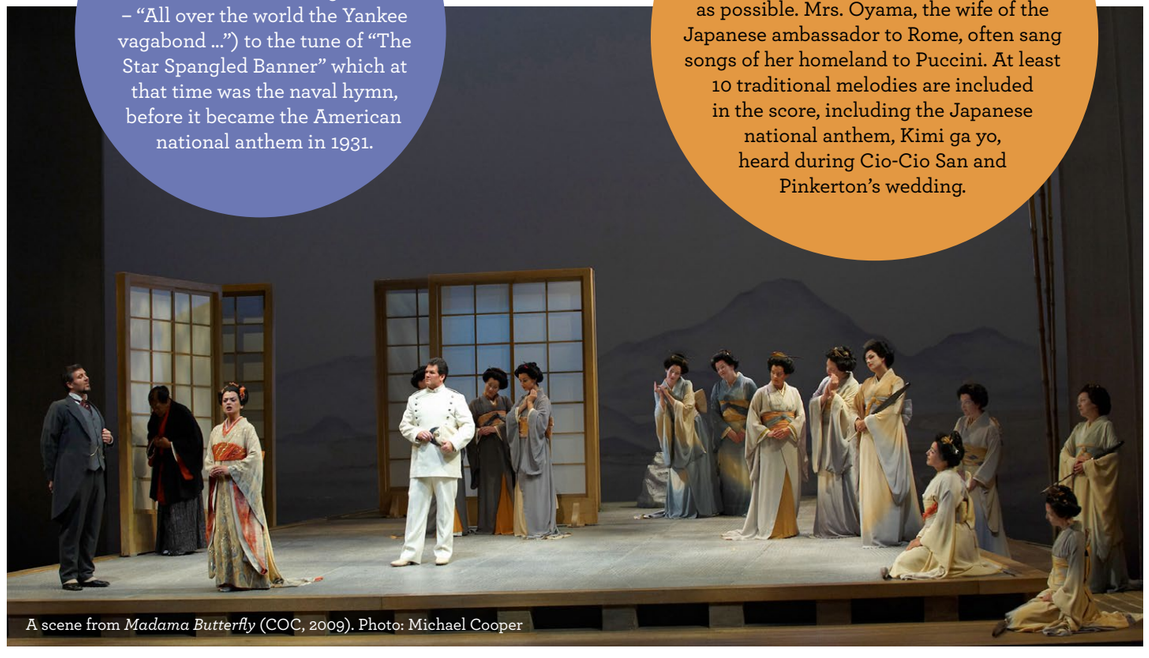
down to meet him. Not I.") Here, the melodic pattern is inspired by what is believed to have been Puccini's favourite Japanese tune. Then at 1:32, the Japanese Yang scale is heard while Butterfly sings "e aspetto gran tempo e non mi pesa, la lunga attesa" ("and wait for a long time, but I won't mind this long waiting"). In both of these phrases, Puccini purposefully incorporates the more open tonality associated with Asian music to reveal that Cio-Cio San has never abandoned her Japanese identity. The composer copied and studied melodies from publications that contained transcriptions of Japanese songs. He also listened to records shipped from Tokyo. It is significant that Puccini inserts these melodies precisely when Butterfly exhibits what is, from a Western perspective, stereotypical Japanese female behaviour: reticence and patience. Musically, it is proof that despite her attempts to Westernize she does not become an American after all.

**FURTHER REFLECTION**
Can you think of other ways that Japanese culture has influenced North American, and specifically, Canadian culture?

Musicians often borrow existing tunes and insert them into their own work – can you name some other examples?

Butterfly's future husband, Lieutenant B.F. Pinkerton, sings his first aria ("Dovunque al mondo lo Yankee vagabond" – "All over the world the Yankee vagabond ...") to the tune of "The Star Spangled Banner" which at that time was the naval hymn, before it became the American national anthem in 1931.

Puccini researched traditional Japanese melodies and imported recordings of Japanese music in order to make the score as authentic as possible. Mrs. Oyama, the wife of the Japanese ambassador to Rome, often sang songs of her homeland to Puccini. At least 10 traditional melodies are included in the score, including the Japanese national anthem, Kimi ga yo, heard during Cio-Cio San and Pinkerton's wedding.



A scene from *Madama Butterfly* (COC, 2009). Photo: Michael Cooper



## 2

**MUSICAL EXCERPT**
Act I: "...E soffitto e pareti..." ("...And the ceiling and the walls...")

**CONNECTION TO THE STORY**
Lt. B. F. Pinkerton of the U.S. Navy, stationed in Nagasaki, Japan, is being shown the peculiarities of the Japanese house which he has just bought. He is joined by the American Consul, Sharpless, for drinks.

**MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE**
In the decades around 1900, the business of writing Italian opera had never been more difficult. The various traditional forms and situations that had sustained the genre through most of the 18th and 19th centuries had lost their significance: each work now had to define a unique aesthetic world. This new drive to discover the "exotic" inspired Puccini to search for subjects marked by some aspect of local colour which possessed a readily applicable musical connotation. For *Madama Butterfly* the result was a unique conflation of Eastern and Western musical traditions which introduced Puccini's audiences to Japanese culture and music. This intriguing mix is introduced right from the start: the opera begins with a fugue (a composition in which a short melody or phrase is introduced by one part and successively taken up by others), one of the strictest musical forms in the Western tradition. The agitated, yet structured nature of the fugue immediately communicates American efficiency as Lt. Pinkerton surveys his new abode and servants scurry around, showing off its amenities. Puccini's use of the fugue also served as a challenge to critics who questioned his harmonically advanced style. He may have felt the need to show off his "learnedness" and mastery of a traditional form before (almost immediately) heading into more musically progressive waters. This can be heard at 1:09 where, the very "Western"-sounding fugue is immediately followed by our first encounter with the more open harmonies Puccini uses throughout the opera to conjure a Japanese setting. One technique used by Western musicians of this period was to incorporate pentatonic scales (five notes per octave in contrast to the Western eight-note scale) which they associated with a rather broadly defined and exotic East.

**FURTHER REFLECTION**
What other cultures (if any) today would you consider to be "exotic" and why?

*Madama Butterfly* is often criticized as yet another example of Western culture's colonial view of Japan. Do you feel this is a fair assessment of the opera? If so, why/why not?

## 3

**MUSICAL EXCERPT**
Act II: "Ebbene, che fareste, Madama Butterfly...E questo? E questo?" ("Well then, what would you do Madam Butterfly... And this one?")

**CONNECTION TO THE STORY**
Sharpless asks Butterfly what she would do if Pinkerton were never to come back. She is appalled at the suggestion and brings in her son for him to see.

**MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE**
In this brutally honest, emotionally raw scene, Sharpless strips away any final illusions Butterfly might have of an idealized "American" family life with Pinkerton. Her response is equally blunt as she asks her servant Suzuki to quickly escort "his Honour" from their home. The mood of the scene is brilliantly conveyed by Puccini's orchestration – listen at 0:52 to the low strings as they ominously creep up the scale starting softly, gradually increasing in volume, mirroring the increasing tension between Butterfly and Sharpless. The expanded use of orchestra is a defining feature of *verismo* opera – Puccini looked beyond the Italian tradition to other national schools, especially the German. The question of Germanic influence

was a controversial subject in Puccini's time and to confuse matters, he left clues supporting both sides of the issue. He was quoted as saying: "I am not a Wagnerian; my musical education was in the Italian school" but also remarked, "Although I may be a Germanophile, I have never wanted to show it publicly." Whether or not Puccini wished to associate himself with Wagner, it is clear that the sound world of the Italian's operas are miles away from the relatively understated, sonically less extravagant *bel canto* opera (the world of Donizetti and Bellini). His scores are not simple to analyze, as they contain thickets of unresolved dissonances, unexpected key changes, *leitmotifs* (recurring musical themes associated with a particular character, object or dramatic situation practically invented by Wagner), shifting rhythms and meters. None of these would have been imaginable without the innovations in orchestral writing pioneered by German composers like Wagner.

This excerpt also highlights one of *verismo*'s other distinguishing musical features: its reliance on short, simple yet overwhelmingly grand vocal climaxes to trigger emotional reactions in the listener and to define character. Listen at 2:41 to the grand orchestral fanfare with Cio-Cio San in full-cry, revealing to Sharpless that she has borne Pinkerton's son ("E questo" – "And this one"). The vocal line here consists of a simple repeated rising interval, yet its placement in the soprano's upper register and the richness of the scoring beneath it communicates intense emotion. The passage is powerful, heart-wrenching and musically concise. No lengthy aria is required to communicate a myriad of ideas and feelings: that for Butterfly, this triumphant moment represents the trump card which will ensure Pinkerton's return yet we (through Sharpless) cannot help but be filled with an underlying sense of foreboding.

**FURTHER REFLECTION**
What other stories (operas, plays, novels, songs) can you think of that deal with the theme of the abandoned woman?

Name some other vocal techniques a composer or song writer might use to signify big emotions.

James Westman as Sharpless, Xiu Wei Sun as Cio-Cio San and Allyson McHardy as Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly* (COC, 2003). Photo: John Currid/ Michael Cooper Photo



4

**MUSICAL EXCERPT**
Act II, Aria: "Tu? Tu?...Piccolo iddio!" ("You? You?... My little god!")

**CONNECTION TO THE STORY**
As Cio-Cio San is about to commit suicide, her maid Suzuki pushes her child into the room. Butterfly says goodbye to him, blindfolds him and, leaving him to play, goes behind a screen to kill herself.

**MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE**
This aria marks the emotional climax of the entire opera. It is also the only moment in which Butterfly expresses herself entirely in a Western idiom without the addition of either authentic, Japanese folk tunes or Puccini's manufactured "Japanese" melodies. She sings directly to her son in a tonal key based on a harmonic minor scale (one of the basic building blocks of Western music harmony). The implication seems to be that in killing herself, she is freeing her son of his Japanese identity (his father has returned to Japan with his American wife to claim his offspring), and so, for the only time in the opera, she is given music free of Japanese associations. In the aria's postlude however, after we hear Pinkerton's all-too late cry of "Butterfly, Butterfly," Puccini purposely resorts to the Japanese folk tune which recurs throughout the opera (listen at 3:38). By committing suicide, Cio-Cio San in fact embraces her Japanese identity, preferring to die with honour than face the shame of being husband-less and giving up her child. Then, in a bold modernist move, Puccini ends the opera on a screaming, unresolved chord (4:25) thereby flouting one of Western music's strictest rules - indeed, its most basic one - that of final tonal resolution (the listener's ear is not given the satisfaction that musically at least, the piece has reached its final resting place). This brief brush with atonality not only suits the tragic conclusion but also acts as the final, conclusive break between mother and son; life and death; West and East.

**FURTHER REFLECTION**
Do you think it's possible for people to completely "lose" their natural culture and assimilate into a new one?

Imagine Cio-Cio San and Pinkerton's son's life in America – what would it have been like?

(l-r) Allyson McHardy as Suzuki and Adina Nitescu as Cio-Cio San in *Madama Butterfly* (COC, 2009). Photo: Michael Cooper

# What to Look for

### THE BEAUTY OF SIMPLICITY

Director Brian Macdonald and designer Susan Benson sought a design that would enhance the story, but not detract from it. There is not a single prop or decoration that is unnecessary or disconnected from the essence of the opera. The lean abstract look of the set and use of space serves to heighten the emotions of the performers, rather than distract from them. Moving screens are used to suggest the house rather than a full realistic set, and it almost seems as though the house itself is an island. What could this isolation symbolize for Cio-Cio San's emotional state for much of the opera?

Right: Three scenes from *Madama Butterfly* (COC, 2003). Photos: Gary Beechey

In opera and theatre, costumes play a huge role in defining a character, and also should enhance what is happening in the story. After beginning her process with historical research, designer Susan Benson chose to present Japan through the lens of European Romanticism, rather than in a historically realistic way. She chose a colour palette symbolic of troubles to come, with bright oranges giving way to stormy greys. Cio-Cio San, Suzuki, and the geishas' kimonos are made of hand-painted silks and fabrics, and similar vat-dyed kimonos and fabrics are used for the remainder of the cast. As you watch the opera, keep in mind the role of a costume designer and the decisions that he or she would have to make about the production – what colours, details and shapes do you see in the costumes that help to describe each character? Do you notice differences between the costumes of the main characters and those of the chorus or smaller roles?

Left and below: Details of the exquisite, hand-painted silk kimonos designed by Susan Benson. Right, top: Xiu Wei Sun as Cio-Cio San and Jorge Antonio Pita as Pinkerton. Right, below: Xiu Wei Sun as Cio-Cio San. Both images from *Madama Butterfly* (COC, 2003). Photos: Michael Cooper

# COC Spotlight: Jennifer Pugsley

Not everyone at the COC is an opera singer... take a peek behind the scenes and learn about the many diverse careers available in the arts!

**Jennifer Pugsley**
*(Media Relations Manager)*

**Position:** Media Relations Manager

**Name:** Jennifer Pugsley

**Role in the Company:** I am responsible for managing all the publicity relating to the Canadian Opera Company's productions, events, initiatives and activities, as well as the general publicity of the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, for the purpose of supporting the COC's reputation for artistic excellence. Basically, I have a hand in arranging anything about the COC that you may read online, in a newspaper or in a magazine; watch in a news or current affairs TV program; or listen to on the radio.

**Hometown:** I was born in Toronto but spent my formative years in Ottawa, with a one-year detour through Kingston.

**Education:** I did a double-major in English and Cinema Studies at the University of Toronto where I earned an honours bachelor of arts degree (Victoria College was my scholastic homebase at UofT), followed by a post-graduate certificate in corporate communications from Seneca College.

**When did you first became interested in opera?** I saw my first opera in high school when I had to review a production of *Die Fledermaus* (I was a drama major at a performing arts high school and reviewing an opera production was a drama class assignment), so I guess that's when I first got interested in opera beyond having heard recordings now and then at home or when going to a symphonic concert with my mom, who wanted to make sure I was exposed to arts and culture growing up. But I don't think I really got interested in opera until I first worked at the COC (back in 2002 as the Public Relations Assistant). Being able to see everything that went on behind-the-scenes in order to bring a production to the stage and watching all the singers and musicians rehearse to deliver a performance of the highest degree of excellence just blew my mind and is really what led me to become interested in opera beyond the occasional viewing. On a free night from work I'll try to see operatic performances presented by other opera companies here in Toronto, and, when I travel now, one of the first things I do is check out if any opera is playing while I'm visiting a city.

**What made you decide to pursue this sort of career path?** I realized at the end of my first year of university, when I was all overwrought about not getting into a by-audition-only acting class and my dreams of being a drama major evaporated, that I probably didn't have the stoicism needed to pursue a life on the stage. I also don't know how keen I was on the less-than-financially robust lifestyle I would have by being a working actor, should I be able to develop the fortitude needed to pursue a career where being judged for a living is part of the job. It was around this time that *The West Wing* TV series started and I just loved the character of CJ Craig, who was the press secretary for the White House. I remember watching the show and thinking that what her character did seemed like the coolest job in the world. I think PR jobs were also trending at the time in the media, in general, particularly jobs as publicists for TV shows and movies, as the latest cool jobs that you could pursue with a university degree. I started reading up about what the profession, the skills you need to be successful and the training required. Most importantly for me, at the time, it seemed like a way to continue to be part of the arts and entertainment world, albeit behind-the-scenes. The beauty of what I do is that if you're smart, organized, a quick study, articulate, a good writer, creative, a problem-solver, i.e. the basic foundation of skills and attributes to public relations and communications, you can work for a number of different companies in a variety of business areas over the course of your career.

**What is a typical day like for you? What things are you responsible for?** Every day is different, which is part of why I love what I do. Doing the same thing, day in, day out, would bore me out of my mind. I love the thrill that my job offers me by way of constantly meeting new people and new things. One day I might be writing a press release about the COC's upcoming production or an event and getting it approved to send out to the media. The next day, I might be at a photo or film shoot as part of a story being done on an artist working with the COC. I might be coordinating an interview with an artist currently in Europe, who is coming to the COC in six months, but needs to talk to a magazine here in Toronto in the next few days. If we're a few days away from an opening night, I'll be at a rehearsal until 11 p.m./11:30 p.m. and then be at our photographer's studio the next morning at 8:30 a.m. choosing pictures that were taken the night before (if I'm lucky – sometimes I'll be picking pictures right away and have been at the office until 2 a.m. doing photo selection). I could be researching a new media outlet to approach about covering the COC. Or I could be writing an article for a COC publication or another media outlet about what's happening at the COC.

Without fail, though, every day, I'm doing two things. One, scanning through newspapers (yes, I still read the actual

Jennifer (far right) at the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts with (left to right) soprano Sasha Djihanian, AGO Communications Manager Caitlin Coull and director Atom Egoyan. Photo: Dave Cox

paper!) and magazines and websites to find out what is being written about in the arts world, here in Toronto, in Canada and the rest of the world. Two, I'm sending/answering e-mails or making phone calls to members of the media, talking to reporters, editors, producers about what's coming up at the COC and working on stories that allow the public to learn more about the COC, encouraging them to attend one of our performances, events or programs.

**If someone was interested in becoming a media relations manager, what would you recommend they have in terms of skills or experience?** You have to be articulate and be a good writer, because if you can't express yourself eloquently, succinctly and intelligently then you have a problem right off the top. It is called communications for a reason.

You must be organized and be able to think critically. You must be curious and always want to learn more.

The saying, "Jack of all trades," sums up exactly what you need to be in this business because you need to be able to retain and explain a lot of information about a lot of different things. After all, you're the one who has to convince reporters, editors and producers that what your company is doing is important and interesting enough that they should be writing and talking about it too, and you can't do that without becoming a bit of an expert in any subject that could come your way.

**What do you love most about your career?** The people, no question. This career has allowed me to meet, talk and work with some incredibly gifted people, and play a small role in helping to bring what they do to a wider audience of people.

**What do you enjoy the least about your career?** While I love being really busy – sometimes it feels like the busier it gets the more productive I become – I also don't always enjoy how busy and long my work day can be. There are weeks when I'm in the office every day (including Saturdays and Sundays) by 7:30 a.m. (my liquid breakfast of a venti latté in hand), forget to eat lunch, and get home after 10 p.m., when I either eat a slapped-together sandwich or relive the glory days of university by making up a batch of Mr. Noodles because it only takes five minutes to make.

**What surprises you most about this career?** You can never know enough. There's always something more to learn, whether it is to do with what you're promoting or what you can do to reach an even wider or different group of people with the story you're trying to promote.

**Favourite part about this upcoming production of *Madama Butterfly*?**
It's so beautifully simple and cleanly directed. There's no clutter standing between you and your connection with the singers and the music. Everything, from the design of the sets and costumes to the staging has been geared to make you connect with the story of Cio-Cio San and her ultimate heartbreak.

**What do you enjoy outside of opera?**
I love to read and go to the movies. I can binge-watch a TV series with the best of them. I dream of travelling way more than I actually do because the work schedule limits when and for how long I can get away from the office. I don't get out and see live theatre as much as I would like to but I try and get up to the Stratford and/or Shaw festivals at least once or twice a season. I love discovering a new, fabulous restaurant for dinner or brunch because getting together with friends and family and catching up over a fine meal is my idea of a good time – and while I can and do cook, I hate the clean-up that follows. I also enjoy taking the opportunity to rock out at a concert when I can – U2, Beyoncé and Lady Gaga are all on my bucket list of artists to see.



# Active Learning

One of the best parts of taking your students to the opera is the discussion and further exploration the opera can inspire. Take a deeper look into the themes and story of *Madama Butterfly* with these discussion questions and ideas for further exploration.

**DISCUSSION**

- Are there certain melodies and motifs in this opera that you recognize from elsewhere? Where have you heard them before?
- *Madama Butterfly* premiered in 1904. Use the opera to encourage critical thinking about the time period in which it was written, including concepts like orientalism and how Western society viewed Eastern cultures at that time. Why would an opera with such an inaccurate and outdated perspective still be performed so widely today?
- Discuss what elements make *Madama Butterfly* such an enduring and well-loved opera. What, in particular, did your students enjoy?

**EXTENSIONS**

- Take this opportunity to study Japanese history and gain a more informed perspective on Japanese society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. How would you adapt the opera to more accurately reflect Japanese society?
- Read more about the costumes in "What to Look For" on page 16. Kimonos are still worn today and have important traditional and cultural significance in Japan. Research kimonos and their history. When are they still worn today? In a younger class, design your own to decorate your classroom!
- What happens to Sorrow after the curtain comes down? It is assumed that he will return to the U.S. with his father. What is his life like there? Write a diary entry for Sorrow two years after the end of the opera about his daily experiences and how his life has changed.

See the Listening Guide on page 11 for more great discussion starters!

Did viewing the opera spark some scintillating debates or discussions? Would your students like to share examples of their work with the COC? E-mail us at **education@coc.ca**. We'd love to hear from you!

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Education & Outreach
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Fax: 416-363-5584
education@coc.ca



The COC gratefully acknowledges: Canada Council for the Arts / Conseil des Arts du Canada; Toronto Culture; Ontario Arts Council / Conseil des arts de l'Ontario, an Ontario government agency / un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario

*Madama Butterfly* Study Guide contributors and editors: Claire Morley, Associate Manager, Editorial; Gianmarco Segato, Adult Programs Manager; Katherine Semcesen, Associate Director, Education and Outreach; Vanessa Smith, School Programs Manager; Gianna Wichelow, Senior Manager, Creative and Publications | Produced by the Canadian Opera Company © 2014

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*Above: Workshop at Howard Park Jr. P.S. Photo: COC, 2013*