



# What to Look for in *Madama Butterfly*

- ◆ In opera and theatre, costumes play a huge role in defining a character, and also should enhance what is happening in the story. Set and costume designer Susan Benson chose to use the painstaking traditional technique of hand painting silks and fabrics to create the kimonos for this production. 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?
- ◆ One of the challenges of an opera like *Madama Butterfly*, with its Japanese setting, is that many of the lead roles and chorus members from a variety of ethnicities must appear to be Japanese. This is done using wigs and stage make-up. After seeing the opera, do you think it is appropriate for make-up to be used to make the singers appear to be of another race? Why would a company not simply hire an all-Japanese cast?
- ◆ While the regular COC Orchestra is composed of 56 musicians, for most operas it must be augmented. *Madama Butterfly* requires an orchestra of 70, including one instrument backstage. Listen for it, and check out the [Madama Butterfly Interactive Journey](#) to hear Senior Artistic Advisor Philip Boswell talk about the orchestra and the hidden instrument.
- ◆ Lighting is another major factor in live theatre, though it may not be obvious if you aren't looking for how it changes throughout the performance. How do the changes in lighting throughout the opera enhance the mood and action onstage?
- ◆ The set that Susan Benson created for this production has been critically acclaimed. It features Cio-Cio-San's house as an island in the middle of the stage – watching the production, what do you think this symbolizes?

More information on these and many other aspects of the production can be found in the interactive journey "[Artists and Artisans: the Making of Madama Butterfly](#)" on the COC website: [coc.ca](http://coc.ca).



A scene from *Madama Butterfly* (COC, 2003). Photo: Gary Beechey



Xiu Wei Sun as Cio-Cio-San, Liam Benson as Trouble and Allyson McHardy as Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly* (COC, 2003). Photo: Gary Beechey