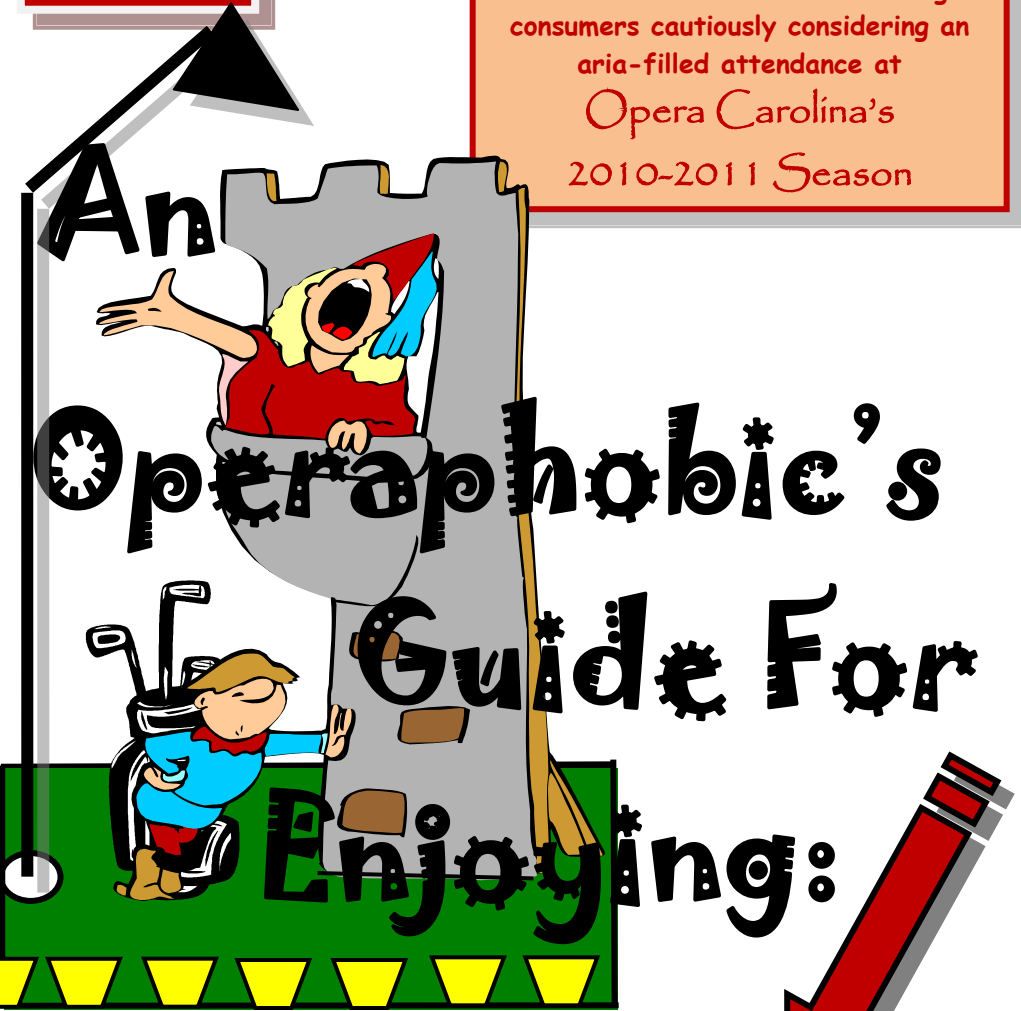
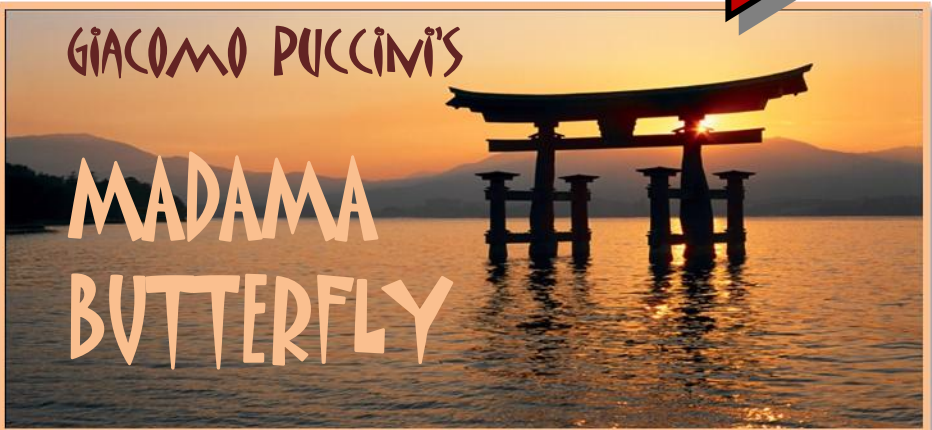


Created to comfort and encourage consumers cautiously considering an aria-filled attendance at Opera Carolina's 2010-2011 Season



GIACOMO PUCCINI'S

MADAMA
BUTTERFLY



Acknowledgements

Greatly appreciated and effective in the development of the *Guide* and all its related “stuff,” were the support, constructive comments and just plain, patient tolerance of:

Maestro James Meena,
General Director and Principal Conductor,
Opera Carolina

Initiated in 2007, J.P. and Sondra Cooney
annually create *Guides* for the
Opera Carolina production season.

They are gifted to the company's Foundation for
education and/or fund-raising programs. During the season,
the *Guides* are posted on the Opera Carolina website.

Consumer Advisory

If you are looking for a staid and sterile read, you have bet on the wrong horse. This *Guide* is liberally larded with at least chuckles, if not laughs. It is constructed optimistically, to be entertainingly informational.



CONSTRUCTIVE *Guide* CRITICISM IS
WELCOMED, BUT
MAY NOT ALWAYS BE RECEIVED
GRACIOUSLY.



Giacomo Puccini's

MADAMA BUTTERFLY

LIBRETTO:*

LUIGI ILlica

and

GIUSEPPE IACOSA

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE:

Italian

PREMIÈRE:

LA SCALA, MILAN

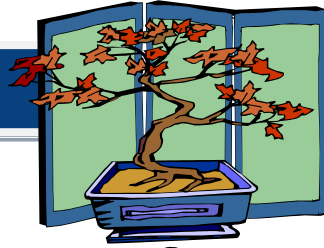
February 17, 1904

*Puccini caricature by
Enrico Caruso*

* A memorable vaudeville comedian Jimmy Durante, frequently said, "Everybody wants ta get in da act." In *Butterfly's* case, he was right on!

The opera was built from a David Belasco play, which in turn was based on a John Luther Long story that was cobbled from a Pierre Loti novel created from at least one probably true incident!

WHERE DO I FIND?



IN TWO MINUTES,¹ MADAMA BUTTERFLY
FROM ALPHA TO OMEGA. [P.6]

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- WHO ARE THESE GENTLE JAPANESE AND AMBULATING AMERICANS, RUMINATING RHYTHMICALLY IN A ROMANCE LANGUAGE? (A.K.A. CAST IN GENDER AND/OR PECKING ORDER.) [P.34]
- TELLING THE TUNEFUL TALE WITH MINUTE MEMOS MENTIONING MEMORABLE MUSICAL MOMENTS. [P.41]

¹ A severely-short summary of the opera's occurrences. Especially designed for those of us with short to no spans of attention.

² How and why our opera reached the stage, and stayed there.

³After the opera's premiere problems, Puccini et. al. reorganized the original two acts into three acts plus adjustments in libretto and music. The *Guide* will comparatively discuss both versions, but will follow the outline of the more frequently played three-act design. The 2012 Opera Carolina production will perform the Puccini et. al. revised Acts II and III, but without intermission. Think, three acts for the price of two!

ACT I. A PREAMBLE PUTS THE PLOT AND PRINCIPALS INTO PLAY. [P.40]

ACT II. TIME HAS FLOWN AS HAS OUR HERO. FORECLOSURE IS FORECAST; HOWEVER, HOPE HOVERS IN THE HARBOR! [P.50]

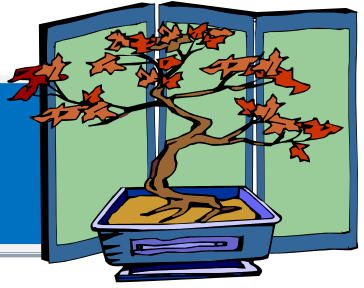
ACT III. HOPE IS HIJACKED AS A NEW HONEY HIKES UP THE HILL. SO OUR HEROINE SAYS SAYONARA! [P.57]

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IN TWO MINUTES,¹
MADAMA BUTTERFLY FROM
ALPHA TO OMEGA.



Developed for those in our audience
with "minimal to no" spans of attention.¹

TIME. 1900, the spring of a new century and a good time for a slightly new spin on the old idea of "boy meets girl" --- especially if you are an American-sailor boy, out-of-town.

SETTING:

GENERALLY, an almost newly minted international port where Admiral Perry has only recently left the neighborhood.

SPECIFICALLY, a sliding, paper-walled house located --- as an old overblown but wildly popular film anthem said, " --- on a high and windy hill---"⁴ conveniently located for the purpose of at least one "hit" aria, to overlook the harbor of Nagasaki, Japan.

THE PLOT.

- Our hero, rather a rotter, but evidently pretty good sailor⁵ and Italian tenor, takes a "temporary" wife while loitering in our Japanese port.
- His target for this hiatus from almost post-Victorian morality, is an under-age⁶ Japanese geisha (our heroine to-

⁴ *Love is a Many-Splendored Thing*. Remember that old potboiler of a movie that was somewhat of a *Madama Butterfly*-style "weepie."

⁵ We know he found his way by ship from the US to Japan and back---at least twice.

⁶For statutory rape purposes, but unfortunately not legally yet in force in either country.

be) he spots while she is hanging around⁷ the US Consul's office.

- The no-good hero sees no problem with a mock marriage, despite fatherly but half-hearted cautionary counsel to the contrary from the local US consul.
- Unfortunately no one tells the bride-to-be about the "let's pretend" ceremony. Means big trouble later.
- A colorful East meets West marriage ritual ensues. It ends badly though when the bride's family led by the Uncle from Hell,⁸ read her out of their genealogy for tossing over the local gods in exchange for a Christian surrogate.
- Fortunately, the wedding shambles are salvaged by one of the longest and perhaps most lush, operatic love duets yet to be concocted for the human ear. **SAYONARA, ACT I.**
- Fast-forwarding three years, the damage has been done. There is a child, our heroine and the household help are almost out of money, and our "hero" left town a long-time ago promising to return--- "when the robins nest." "Not likely," say resident skeptics.
- It being a "fine day" and our heroine a gutsy little gal, warbles in response to the skeptics, probably the most favored soprano aria of the romantic Italian opera era. It says on her behalf and in high "C" country, "He will return, I know it!"
- Well, I'll be damned--- our ersatz hero's boat and himself, they do reappear on cue into the harbor.

⁷ Do not ask!

⁸ A highly placed Buddhist priest (a.k.a. Bonze).

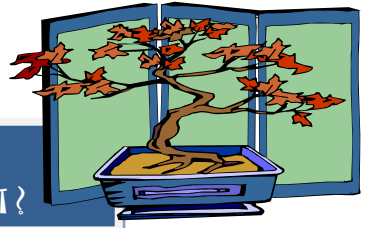
- To celebrate hot on the heels of the boat's arrival, our heroine and her servant-person scattering a lot of cherry blossoms, blast forth with a "welcome home" duet highly valued on the soprano-mezzo soprano operatic hit parade.
- Dusk descends as the women and child wait for the hero to hike the hill to home.
- From the harbor, humming is heard.⁹ *SAYONARA, ACT II*.
- *KON'NICHIIWA, ACT III*. Picking up where we left off the night-before, the women and child still waiting. Soon sounds from the harbor announce the dawning dawn and ships setting sail.
- Unfortunately, our hero brought excess baggage to town this time: his "real American wife." After that, things degenerate rapidly.
- Despite last-ditch efforts by the locals, the done-wrong heroine gives up the child and "offs" herself with Samurai daddy's gift knife from the Emperor (a.k.a. Mikado).¹⁰
- However, amid the building to and from blood-letting, our heroine and beginning-to-repent hero, are given glorious gifts of Puccini-sounds. *SAYONARA ACT III* (or perhaps, *ACT III*).



⁹ If three acts, the curtain curtails the cacophony. If two, read on!

¹⁰No, not Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado*--- all that is at least a couple of other stories and we don't have enough time or space to go there.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? EAST MEETS WEST--- BY TYPO OR INTENT?



Despite its "cut to the chase" narrative, *Madama Butterfly* as will be documented, did have an intriguing number of different sources for its main plot, as well as variations on its central theme.¹¹

One of those progenitor sources was a short story that first used the title *Madame Butterfly*. Some of that story became the source for an American play that in turn inspired Puccini's creative juices. That play was also entitled *Madame Butterfly*. However, when the Italian opera was birthed from the play, its moniker curiously segued into a half-English and half-Italian phrase: *Madama Butterfly*.

Assuming the language change signaled by the Americanized "e" becoming the Italianized "a" was not a type-setter's gaffe, why the linguistically bifurcated title? Why didn't the opera's creative fathers keep the label all in English: *Madame Butterfly*? --- Or, go the extra mile into full Italian: *Madama Farfalla*?¹²

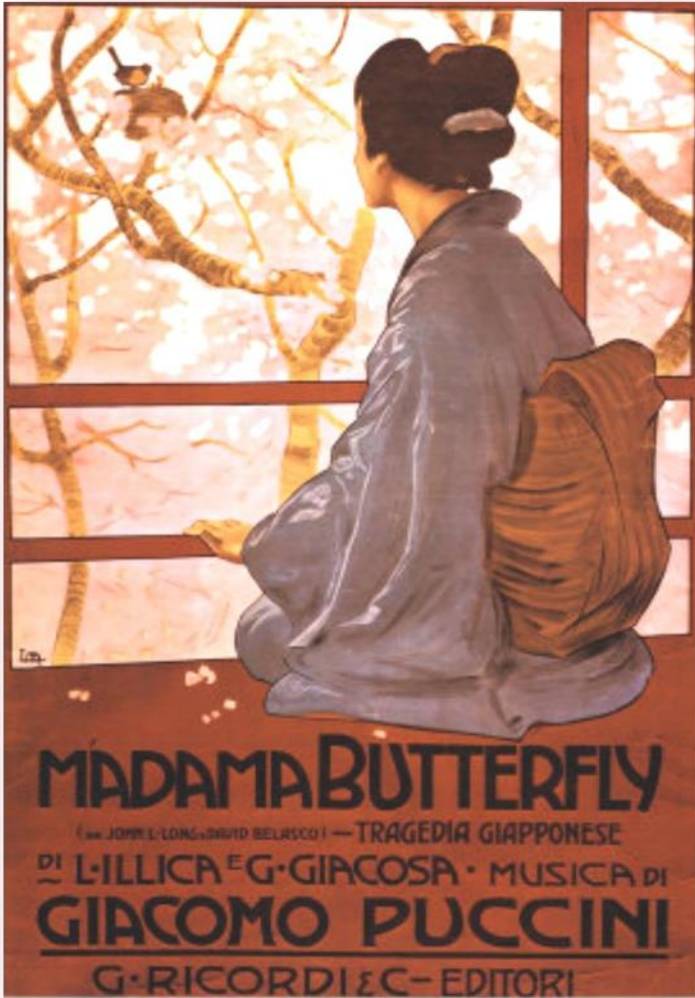
Farfalla is not only an Italian butterfly, it is also pasta twisted into a butterfly shape. Given that gastronomic extension, is it possible the opera's full-Italianized name might have misled the public to assume the subject was a musical reminiscence about Tuscany's first successful female chef. Think about it!

Puccini and his librettists saw their Butterfly tale as an East versus West clash of cultures and customs. Therefore, the opera's Italian cum English

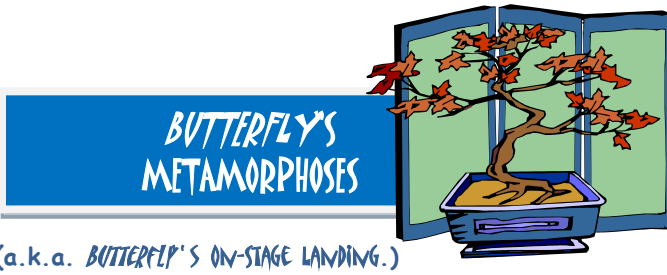
¹¹ For probably a mind-numbing discussion of those sources and variations, keep reading--- they will surface, eventually.

¹² Unfortunately, to English ears that sounds like a symptom of an impending speech impediment.

title reflects that East meets West "ying and yang" conflict theme. That was probably the intent of the authors of the libretto and its musical translation.¹³



¹³ Had it been left up to our spunky Japanese (and also, wannabe American heroine), the piece would have been entitled Madame F.B. Pinkerton. The rationale for that will emerge, --- eventually.



(a.k.a. *BUTTERFLY'S ON-STAGE LANDING.*)

OLDER OPERATIC SIBLINGS. In 1900 Puccini had just moved into his fortieth decade of life. Behind him was almost half¹⁴ of his operatic catalogue. His first two entries,¹⁵ not so great. Then a string of successes: *Manon Lescaut*,¹⁶ his first international winner; *La*

¹⁴ Puccini in his compositional lifetime produced a total of twelve different subject-matter operas. Four of these were only one act, often considered not "full" operas. However, three of those four were combined into one three act opera *Il Trittico*, which then qualifies it as a "full" opera. If you are keeping score, his operatic "kill" count then could be 9 and 1/3.

¹⁵ *Le Villi* (a one acter later rewritten to include a prologue) and *Edgar* (a multiple act "full" grand opera). *Le Villi* despite its lack of critical popularity was significant in that it introduced him to Giulio Ricordi a major Italian musical publisher--- a lifelong professional and publication bond was formed. Giulio died in 1912, but Puccini continued the publication relationship with the son, Tito despite serious "artistic" differences.

Edgar was a critical disaster which Puccini later characterized as "una cantonata" (a blunder). That opera's somewhat complex and bizarre libretto was not Puccini's style. Throughout his life, the composer did learn from his mistakes. The libretto problems of *Edgar* were never repeated.

¹⁶ Possibly to overcome the book problems of *Edgar*, *Manon* had five librettists (somewhat serially) including Ruggero Leoncavallo (yes, that Leoncavallo whose trekking comedians had just premiered the previous year). Ricordi served also as overall advisor, coordinator and peacemaker. There were so many hands in the writing though that no librettist was named when the score was first published.

Bohème,¹⁷ and finally, *Tosca*. However also in 1900, the composer in a move towards either a pun or neologism, described himself as “inoperaio”¹⁸ and was aggressively looking for a new musical subject.

Possible targets included the Metternich play *Pelléas et Mélisande*, Hugo’s novel, Les Misérables, one of Emile Zola’s many novels, and a yet-to-be-written narrative about the bakery queen herself, Marie Antoinette.

PUCCINI AS COMPETITOR. Evidently, nothing whetted Puccini’s creative juices more than a common subject matter race with fellow composers. He crossed topical swords with Massenet over *Manon* and Puccini’s version by today, appears to have at least tied, if not won the pair’s public popularity polls. Puccini’s version of *La Bohème* arrived on stage at about the same point as Leoncavallo’s thus dooming that composer’s version to obscurity despite the strength of its score. While originally enthusiastic over translating *Tosca* into an opera, Puccini subsequently lost interest. That was until Ricordi contracted with another composer for the job. Puccini rushed back to his quill and musical staffs, thus elbowing the rival out of the picture.¹⁹ Because of all this “gottcha” behavior, Puccini seemed to welcome the fact that Debussy was hard at work on his operatic version of *Pelléas et Mélisande*.

¹⁷Although initially thought by the Italians as somewhat musically repetitive (if not downright plagiaristic) of *Manon Lescaut*, *Bohème* has become arguably one of the most popular operas in the standard repertoire.

¹⁸ Depending on your sense of humor and/or appreciation for puns, “inoperaio” could mean “not working” or “without an opera”---- in Puccini’s case, the same thing.

¹⁹For full disclosure of this seamy episode(s) of professional assassination, see the **OPERAPHOBIC’S GUIDE** *Tosca*-spin (#30, June 2009) and *Bohème’s* (#34, January 2010).

ON-STAGE INFATUATION, AGAIN! Towards the later part of 1900, despite Debussy, Puccini's opera subject hunt had not borne fruit. The composer withdrew from the search in order to travel to London to supervise *Tosca's* premiere. While there, friends recommended Puccini see a double playbill production of David Belasco's.²⁰ Half of that double bill was a one act play by Belasco himself, *Madame Butterfly*.²¹ Although Puccini's English allowed him to understand little of the dialogue, the acting was so definitive that the plot and its denouement were quite clear to the composer. He was infatuated--- here was his new opera's subject!^{22 23},

In a 1914 *Harper's Magazine* article, Belasco told the next chapter of Puccini's initial *Butterfly* encounter. The composer burst into the backstage Green Room after seeing the London performance, confronted the Impresario and begged for rights to the play that would permit him to turn it into an opera.²⁴ Belasco indicated during that encounter, "It was impossible to discuss arrangements with an impulsive Italian who has tears in his eyes and both arms around your neck." As intrigued as the Impresario was with the

²⁰In that period, Belasco was "a" (if not, "the") major American playwright, director and impresario. Additionally, he was a dominating figure on the New York theatre and social scenes for fifty years (1880-1930). In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald through Nick his narrator, refers to *Gatsby* (because of his conspicuous consumption) as, "A regular Belasco!" No one in the Fitzgerald reading audience of that time had to ask, "Who's he?"

²¹Note that name's slight, but significant difference from the opera's. If you're puzzled, re-read pp. 9-10.

²²Suppose there had been a "SOLD OUT" sign on the box office that night?

²³This was not the first time Puccini had had a similar play-going experience. Sarah Bernhardt also worked magic on him through her appearance in Sardou's *La Tosca*. For further details on the results of that evening see (again) *Tosca's Operaphobic's Guide*.

²⁴*Butterfly* was not Belasco's last creative contact with Puccini. His play *Girl of the Golden West* famously became Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West*.

thought of a Puccini opera based on one of his plays, he was no fool. Negotiations for the rights took the greater part of a year.

BIRTHING A BUTTERFLY: When Belasco's play text (translated into Italian) was received, Ricordi and Puccini had their libretto creative team of Illica and Giacosa already in place. As this pair had done with the librettos for *La Boheme* and *Tosca*,²⁵ Illica planned the story's dramatic structure and drafted dialogue; Giacosa turned the dialogue draft into verse.

The basic narrative theme of *Butterfly* both as play and opera is quite simple. However, to complicate the efforts of the librettists, there were fictional antecedents to the Belasco play with variations on the play's central narrative theme. Each of these variations offered some confounding and possibly tempting attractions for embroidering the operatic story line. Further, information from various sources provided to Puccini and others indicated the story might not have been fictional. These multiple choices complicated both words and music during the creative periods; they also perhaps in some small manner, contributed to the opera's disastrous premiere.

BACKWARDS FROM BELASCO. The substance of the Belasco "version" of Cio-cio-san's (our Japanese heroine) ill-fated American encounter takes place three years after Pinkerton (our hero) has left Japan. In play form, while compressed into one spoken act, in the final operatic version. It requires two sung acts (II and III) to essentially cover the same dramatic territory.

Pinkerton is the catalyst for most of the play's and opera's plot busy-ness. However on-stage in the play, his is a comparatively

²⁵ This would be the libretto team's last opera for Puccini. Giacosa died in 1906 shortly after the final revisions (Paris) to *Butterfly* were completed. .

minor part; he only enters the scene slightly prior to the heroine's successful suicide.

The most dramatic part of the Belasco production was Butterfly's all night vigil awaiting Pinkerton. Belasco was a master of stage pictures; the vigil sequence as he presented it, lasted some fourteen minutes without a word of spoken dialogue. However, the combination of the body language of the Butterfly actress and the changing lighting effects (from dusk to dawn) were a "coup de theatre."

While the Belasco staging of the piece was startlingly original, the plot and most of the spoken lines were not the playwright's. Their source was an eighteen page piece of fiction in an 1898 issue of *The Century*, a popular illustrated monthly magazine of that time. The author was John Luther Long, a Philadelphia lawyer; his story was entitled (also) Madame Butterfly.²⁶

LONG'S LITERARY LOOP. The opera and the play largely parallel the Long short story in both plot and characters with one critical exception. Long has his Butterfly attempt suicide, but survive, thanks to quick action of Long's equivalent to Suzuki, Butterfly's operatic major servant and confidant. Post-suicide attempt, when the Lt and Mrs. ("real" American wife) Pinkerton come to claim the Butterfly-Pinkerton child, they find the house empty.

It should also be noted that for a lawyer, Long's ethics would be right at home in the 21st century--- his story appears to have been heavily drawn from a 1887 French novel Madame Chrysanthè by

²⁶ One version of all the "borrowing" of source material has Long selecting Belasco to both write and produce a play based on his short story. This version unfortunately appears to be more apocryphal than factual.

Pierre Loti. Neither Loti nor his Madame were acknowledged, much less credited by Long. When confronted with the apparent oversight, Long's defense was truly creative.²⁷

LOTI'S LITERARY RE-LOOP. Loti's works were no strangers to opera libretti. His novel Le Mariage de Loti was the basis for Leo Delibes 1883 opera *Lakme* and Madame Chrysanthè was the source for a light opera also in 1883 by Andre Mesanger.²⁸

Loti's book was "loosely" autobiographical and the central narration concerned a "temporary marriage"²⁹ between a French naval officer and a Japanese geisha. The hero, Pierre was a physician and also doubled as the book's narrator. Chrysanthè unlike Cio-cio-san was a practical business woman, so when the time came for Pierre to leave, they shook hands and off they both went back to their former lives without a backward glance.

THE REAL WORLD PARALLELING THE PLAY WORLD? While the Long short story appeared to be sourced from the Loti work, Long defended his failure to credit Loti with a reality spin. The story, he claimed was based on a true incident told to him by his sister Jennie Correll, who was married to a Methodist missionary in Japan.

Later in life, Long gave series of lectures telling the story of the "real" Madame Butterfly. Her name was Chô-san, a tea-house girl.

²⁷ Read on.

²⁸ Puccini was aware of the previous (and popular) Mesanger work related to the *Butterfly* "model." Did not faze him one bit, just whetted his competitive appetite--- as previously noted.

²⁹ Temporary marriages appeared to be all the rage between Western officers / businessmen working the Japanese treaty ports and Japanese women especially in the years between Perry's Treaty of Kanagawa and the end of the 19th century. The marriages were as portrayed by Puccini, good for 999 years but with a monthly escape clause for the man. Western moral prissiness meets Eastern practicality.

Her American lover had deserted her and their child, but promised to return at a certain time. He had even given the girl a signal to look for in the harbor to recognize his ship. The ship did return, the lover did not.

Chô-san went back to pouring tea and making rice cakes. Jennie stated that she met the now adult-child whose name was Tom Glover.³⁰ The young man claimed his father was an English merchant. End of story, but not of questions.

When Puccini began to develop the score for *Butterfly*, one of the persons with whom he consulted concerning Japanese motifs and folk songs, was Madame Oyama wife of Japanese ambassador to Italy.³¹ During the course of their discussions, she told the composer that she knew a similar story to Long's and that it actually happened.

As intriguing as the multiple story sources and variations, that smorgasbord of narrative options presented problems to both the librettists and Puccini. They suffered from a sensory overload of ideas, but unfortunately also suffered from the (dis)ability to make a narrative decision and stick to it. In the short run, a fatal flaw.

³⁰ There is more truth than fiction in Long's sister's tale about the young Glover. For this probably source of the bare bones but potential factual beginning of *Butterfly's* life through the "Glover connection." Also, it appears the Ambassador's wife had the underlying origins correct, but not the outcome. (See *Scene of the Crime?* - p. 68.)

³¹ Puccini was compulsively thorough about assuring Japanese customs, movements and music were accurately and appropriately represented in the opera. As examples, in addition to Madame Oyama, the composer also consulted with a Japanese actress on tour in Milan on the appropriate behaviors for *Butterfly*. He studied Japanese song publications, had records shipped from Japan and also carefully examined Gilbert and Sullivan's use of indigenous music in *The Mikado*. Their score of that piece is still found in Puccini's library. All told, ten authentic Japanese melodies have been identified throughout the *Butterfly* score.

ARTISTIC OPTIONS AND ITALIAN INDECISION. Puccini clearly viewed the underlying structure of the opera as a social clash between East and West concerning cultural expectations. Musically he communicated that conflict in the Fugato that opens Act I. Two circling musical themes, one representing the bustling mechanized West, the other the more placid, delicate and in western eyes, child-like East.

The composer's intent was to underscore the cultural stress more than just musically. For such highlighting, he conceived at least one of the acts to take place in the United States. All the original sources of the story take place in Japan and most within a single twenty-four hour period. The major artistic "differences" between the composer and librettists centered on the opera's location or locations, and the effect of such on the structure of the musical story.

The first structure of the opera's acts had only two, one in the US and one in Japan. The next variation was three acts, all in Japan. However, the additional act (Act I) created by the librettists, was actually intended as a prologue³² to the last two acts which encompassed the original 24 hour period. In the version for the La Scala premiere, a third act was unnecessary as it was linked to the second.

Throughout the almost year, it took for the libretto's development, the men involved could never conclusively commit permanently to one structure or another. Changes were being made up until almost the premiere curtain---- and as it turned out, for several months after that La Scala fiasco.

³²Borrowing heavily from information in the Loti version.

As will shortly be demonstrated, the “fiasco” was most probably a staged demonstration by Puccini’s rivals more than an expression of serious musical dissatisfaction by the audience in the theatre that evening. Even given that, the indecisions of the Puccini et.al. contributed to the problems of that first evening and directly created the opportunity for an operatic mêlée. Whatever, the original libretto was finally completed in 1902 and Puccini finished the musical score very close to New Year’s Eve. 1903.

It appears that there had been so much struggling over structure, that character development was somewhat short-changed. That is perhaps most obvious with Pinkerton. He is demonstrably no clean-cut Jack Armstrong, all-American boy as operatic hero. However, Illica and Giacosa seem to have given the composer scant opportunity³³ to musically portray such a deficient character. As a result, our resident louse comes across as a typical Italian tenor romantically in love.³⁴

AN OLD-FASHIONED (CONTEMPORARY) OPERA: (HANGING) TIMES, (HANGING) PERSPECTIVES. One of the more intriguing perspectives about opera occurs when an old piece composed in the golden age of romantic opera, is heard by today’s audience.

We know that over the 400 years of opera, new instruments are developed, old instruments improved, and voices have changed both in substance and sound. Therefore it is a given, what we hear today is not necessarily what was heard musically or vocally by the original audiences at a work’s inaugural. However, speculation also should not be suspended about the effects of changing times, cultures and environments on the perceptions of

³³ Most are confined to a few, but truly scathing “ugly American” lines interlaced with a contempt for foreigners and disregard for women.

³⁴ Although a really creative stage director can graphically undercut that impression.

and attitudes toward an operatic work--- apart from its music, perse

This writer's bizarrely inquiring mind is intrigued by the potential disconnect of recognition and comprehension when an operatic subject, modern at the time of its premiere is heard by today's audience (*Madama Butterfly* as a convenient "for instance."). Is the message from the libretto the same? Conventional wisdom and historical experience seems to say, "*It ain't necessarily so.*" As evidence:

- We know that censors required Verdi to radically change the time period of *Traviata* originally set in its contemporary 1850ish period, backward before the early 1700s. This was to protect audience sensibilities. A morality tale of 1850 society's hypocrisy towards "working girls" kept in luxury by members of the upper strata would be shocking and unsettling--- too close to home. However, moving it backwards 150+ years makes it "ok;" the central message is diffused over time--- the subject now becomes a non-threatening, quaint decadence of a bygone era.

- *Nabucco* and other Risorgimento (the Italian National Unity movement) operas of Verdi gave to their premiere audiences' eras, a sub rosa revolutionary message--- independent of the opera's setting and time.³⁵

Today, we hear *Madama Butterfly* more than one hundred years after its debut. Do we get the same message as that premiere audience? Probably not, for several reasons:

³⁵ A WWII Berlin production of *Nabucco* played the Babylonians as Nazis. How is that for a change in message?

- The Orient was considerably more exotic and mysterious in the past than today. The opera's Japanese on-stage behaviors and customs seem more usual and less quaint to the modern audience.
- Temporary marriages by “good American boys” to foreign women were socially unpalatable and downright shocking at the turn of the former century.³⁶ Today, probably wouldn't raise an eyebrow. International and interracial marriages are certainly not unusual, nor in the main, socially contestable. Further, marriage itself seems to be evolving into a social custom perhaps, more honored in the breach than the observance.
- Most importantly for the probable message disconnect(s), were international political perspectives: In the opera's premiere year, Japan was at war with Tsarist Russia and would shortly defeat them (1904-05). Because of that event, western European views of Japan had significantly and positively changed. Japan was coming into regard as a potential peer power, not a subservient antiquated feudal monarchy. Wispy remnants of a romanticized image remained though.

In regard to the US, western Europe was developing decidedly anti-American views as the result of our Spanish-American War incursions and its outcomes. To the Europeans, that War was a step to disrupt European colonial power (then at its height.), only to replace it with another power that was rather an upstart. To the La Scala audience, the Pinkerton arrogance

³⁶ On both counts: temporary and foreign.

was a common and acceptable stereotype; a microscopic reflection of growing anti-Americanism.

- Opera at the time of the premiere was very much still a powerful institution for public communication in matters in addition to music. Therefore, the underlying and implicit political and social points of the opera were not missed by western European audiences, but US audiences may not have had the same perspectives.

As a result of the erosions of time, the audience of today viewing Puccini's Japanese story would see and feel the action in a vastly different context. The international political underpinning and the colonial conflicts have to some degree regressed back into a rosy glow of romanticism laced with large dollops of still continuing oriental fascination. However, given the present international physical and philosophical conflicts, we should not assume an old fashioned *Butterfly* could not also stimulate modern sensibilities and attitudes.³⁷

THE "PUCCINI OPERA 'MODEL" Henry James once observed, "An artist is fortunate when his theories and his limitations exactly correspond." Puccini it is said, fits within that mold. He was fully aware of his compositional limitations and seldom ventured beyond them. As the old Johnny Mercer song says, "Accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative---." Puccini learned from his mistakes and never repeated them.³⁸ He found an effective creative rut and was smart enough to stay within it.

³⁷ In this regard, the musical theater hit *Miss Saigon* is largely a retelling of the *Butterfly* story. International political attitudes were updated on that stage and there was a strongly implicit "ugly American" message underlying the musical glitz. Le plus ça change, le plus c'est la même chose. Ne c'est pas ?

³⁸ As example in the case of *Edgar*, he never repeated its error of an inappropriate libretto for Puccinian compositional style.

Following on the heels of Verdi and experiencing early success, great new creative strides were expected of Puccini. He did ascend an operatic Olympus and got higher on the slopes than many other operatic composers. However, he never quite reached Verdi's altitude. As a result, the prevailing attitude among many younger composers in Puccini's time, was that the maestro had, "A bourgeois mentality, a lack of ideals and (only a) commitment to pure commercialism."³⁹ Whatever, almost all of Puccini's works remain alive in the modern repertoire, when those of his detractors have mostly been lost in the dust of operatic history!

PUCCINI'S OFF-STAGE "SOAP OPERA" LIFE = ROUGH WINDS FOR A BUTTERFLY.

Puccini holds the dubious distinction of being injured in one of Italy's first reported automobile accidents (1902). He survived the incident with a compound fracture of the leg. The injury did not mend properly and had to be re-broken. During the later part of his recovery, he developed diabetes. All this seriously delayed his compositional efforts on *Butterfly*.⁴⁰ Those events coupled with his romantic adventures (read on) may also have affected the wisdom of his judgment calls related to the actual production of the opera on its first public appearance.

In the early 1880's Puccini still a bachelor, embarked on an affair with Elvira Gemignani who happened to be already married. Then in 1886, she had a son fathered by the composer. She separated from her husband, but an Italian divorce was impossible. The affair continued until her husband died in 1904; then, Puccini

³⁹ We're sure that many times, Puccini laughed his way to the bank over than statement.

⁴⁰ In fact, the score was completed only two months before the scheduled premiere. One of the critics in reporting on the opera's opening night disaster, blamed the fiasco as the consequences of the diabetic onset, the automobile misadventure and so forth.

married her.⁴¹ Unfortunately, either flush with his new found marital status or just plain hubris, Puccini broke an opening night tradition of his--- no family in the theater. His new bride, newly legitimized 18 year old son and whole extended family were at La Scala that *Butterfly* premiere night. There they were up front and public to witness the debacle. Hang on though; things are not so bad that they cannot get worse!

FIMAGLING A FIASCO.⁴² To set the stage⁴³ for the disastrous events of the February 17, 1904 premiere, a brief review of certain facts:

- Throughout the 19th century at least in France, Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, opera was THE major form of public entertainment.⁴⁴ The public and the press took it very seriously. Success or failure of a major composer's work was important and hotly debated public news.
- The 19th century operatic audience demanded musical innovation on their stages, but not too much or too frequently.⁴⁵ Further, those audiences were instantly, and extremely vocal in terms of approval or disapproval. There was no waiting for the morning reviews with this crowd. The audiences were also little concerned with dramatic continuity. If they liked an aria, chorus etc. or even a whole act, they

⁴¹The wedding ceremony occurred immediately prior to the *Butterfly* La Scala premiere; Puccini left the festivities to oversee the final stages of the opera's first outing.

⁴² For the full story on the operatic origins of the term "fiasco" see *La Cenerentola, Operaphobic Guide #10*, March 2006. In essence, just remember it evolved from the nasty sound a hostile audience could produce by blowing across the mouths of empty wine bottles. Empty wine bottles? This is Italy folks! FYI, in Italian, a flagon (a.k.a. wine bottle) is a fiasco.

⁴³ Pun intended.

⁴⁴ At that time, it was probably the equivalent of today's sports and political "entertainments."

⁴⁵ Bizet's *Carmen* famously ran aground critically for being too "modern".

would stop the ongoing performance by demanding instant repetition, overpowering the singers' voices and orchestra with cries of "Bis!" (encore).

- To Italians, the most major sin a composer could commit was repeating himself musically. Composers should not borrow musical lines from their earlier works. There was considerable critical carping that Puccini's *Boheme* resembled his earlier *Manon Lescaut*. That possibility especially sharpened the "critical" ears of those hearing his successive works.

- The *Tosca* premiere was a tough night although the audience's restlessness stemmed more from potential anarchist bomb tossing, than Puccini plagiarizing himself. Also, the Italian Queen's presence in the theater kept the disruptive spirits of the audience somewhat in check.

- It was not unheard of for operatic publishers and/or clagues of supporters of other composers, to disrupt an operatic premiere especially if the composer was thought to be a rival. This could occur, irrespective of the quality of the work being heard.

MIMING THE PREMIERE STAGE. Puccini and Ricordi may have preconditioned some auditorium hostility by their rehearsal restrictiveness towards the press, as well as the upper echelon of Milan's opera affectionados--- collateral damage, if you will.

Puccini's illness and injury had delayed his compositional efforts on the opera. As a result, the singers had to learn their parts from printers' proofs and even given that, musical sections as they became available, were not always in a chronological order. Further, to prevent loss of the proofs and to keep the music secret

from the public,⁴⁶ Ricordi demanded that the scores remain in the theatre--- tough on the singers and orchestra. Finally, the Puccini powers-that-be eliminated the traditional “open rehearsals” for critics. While this action may have been wise from a short-run business perspective, it was a step off the edge of a cliff in terms of press relations. It offended the press and predisposed their staff critics to find fault with the opera.

If the rehearsal life were not already complicated enough, the creative team continued to debate throughout that period, the advisability of three acts versus two.⁴⁷

THE PREMIERE (CURTAIN IS RAISED AND THE AUDIENCE UP RISES. Despite the possibility of some contributions from the opera’s creative parents and management staff, the opening night debacle has generally been concluded (after the fact) to have been staged by Sonzogno, a Ricordi music publisher rival. Sonzogno’s objective was to trash Puccini to improve the marketability of his stable of composers. Add to that conspiratorial brew, a clique representing the composer Mascagni,⁴⁸ and ready for blood!

⁴⁶The Milan public was notorious for gaining access to the music of a new opera far in advance of its premiere. As a result, the first night audience was often jaded on the melodies before they had even first heard them officially---- and they certainly developed advance critical opinions. To prevent such “leaks,” Verdi is alleged to have withheld the *Rigoletto* “Donna e mobile” until the last possible rehearsal moment. That was hopefully to assure he would not be hearing it weeks in advance among Milanese organ grinders.

⁴⁷ As a reminder, in musical concept, the two and three act versions were almost the same. In the two-act version, the curtain did not descend at the end of the Humming Chorus portion of Butterfly’s vigil for Pinkerton; it thus replicated with music added Belasco’s coup de theatre.

⁴⁸ Why Mascagni? Damned if we or the Internet know for sure! Could be revenge for the *Boheme* Doppelgänger though. However, that’s really another story. So see Guide # 34 *La Boheme* for those duplicitous details.

The events of the evening were subsequently described by Puccini as, "(The first performance was) a Dantean Inferno, prepared in advance." And in addition, "--- a real lynching. What a horrible orgy of madmen, drunk with hate! But my *Butterfly* remains what it is: the most deeply-felt imaginative opera I have conceived!" Ricordi weighed in with the following, "--- the spectacle given in the auditorium seemed as well organized as that on the stage, since it began precisely with the beginning of the opera."

The opening moments of the opera and the auditorium demonstration were quiet at least compared to what occurred subsequently. Things really heated up with *Butterfly's* Act I entrance within a crowd of women friends. Evidently, the opening music of this group initiated off-stage (**Quanto cielo---So much sky!**), reminded the more divisive audience members of the Act III *Boheme* duet. As a result, cries erupted, *Boheme!*, *Boheme!* Parts of the *Butterfly* Act I Love Duet seemed to suffer the same audience hostility; the noise in fact overpowered the singers. By this point, the audience had split into two groups: pro-Puccini and anti-Puccini.

With Act II things got nastier, the only pieces that could be heard in the auditorium were the Flower Duet and *Butterfly's* letter scene with the Consul Sharpless. By this stage (pun!), the cast was complaining they could not hear the orchestra.

The director unfortunately added to the chaos by placing stagehands throughout the audience with bird whistles. His intent? To create a more charming sound picture in the Act II dawn portion of *Butterfly's* vigil. Wrong! As the whistles started up, the hostile portion of the audience went wild. They literally turned the

house sonically, into an animal kingdom of barnyard voices and forest sounds. It was truly “Old MacDonald’s” night at the opera!

The next morning, the Milanese newspapers had a field day reporting on the fiasco. Puccini immediately withdrew the opera from further La Scala production, despite the pleading of its management to the contrary. He also returned to Ricordi, the publisher’s 20,000 lire composer’s fee. He then turned his attention to salvaging the opera.

DAMAGE ASSESSMENT AND BATTLEFIELD SURGERY. The sound-shocked creative team and their management wranglers generally concluded the debacle was largely precipitated by the press sensitized in advance to be hostile and a gaggle of Puccini rivals behaving quite badly.

The opera and production itself were largely judged not to be the main problem. However, Puccini did feel the long second act was a mistake; it was thought the audience could not maintain its concentration.⁴⁹ Finally, the La Scala auditorium was perhaps too large for effective presentation of a small scale, grand opera such as *Butterfly*.

REHABILITATION. As rewrites go, the *Butterfly* revisions were comparatively simple:

- Act II was finally ended at the conclusion of the vigil scene’s Humming Chorus. Act III then commenced with the dawn segment of the vigil scene.

⁴⁹ Perhaps times and behaviors both have changed. Today in Italy, it is usually the two-act version that is presented with great popularity. In addition, we all sit through much longer acts than the original 90 minute Act II *Butterfly* (let’s talk Wagner here) without too much loss of stamina. Further, on the opening night, the audience concentration was long gone before they even got to the vigil scene.

- Goro's presentation to Pinkerton of the wedding officials and Butterfly's family was severely truncated. That eliminated some local color, stage busy-ness, but no major musical segments.
- The relatives' sharp exchanges about the suitability of the marriage, Uncle Yakusidé's sake bender and drinking song(s) were also severely truncated. These excisions may have been smart; the original material ran against the grain of a Puccini opera and the "local color" events were distractions from the central events of the plot; local color as a minor sub-plot if you will. Their disappearance cleared the narrative line.
- In toto, some 130 bars of music were removed. When you comparatively listen to those sequences between the two versions, the loss is not qualitatively apparent—things just seem shorter and simpler--- that was the point!
- Perhaps the most important change was a shift of venue. The revised work was restaged at the Teatro Grande in Brescia—a much smaller house than La Scala. It (re)premiered slightly more than three months after the Milan fiasco. The cast was the same as the original La Scala except for Butterfly. The original Cio-cio-san was repeating her role in the Buenos Aires premiere of the two-act version.⁵⁰

The new Brescia production was a major triumph! Seven of the major arias / ensembles were encored (Bis! Bis!) and Puccini was brought to the stage ten times!!

Tinkering did continue as the opera gained international fame and performances. There was a second slight revision for the London premiere in 1905. Again, some changes for Paris (1906). However, this Opera Comique version was then frozen and

⁵⁰ For hanky-panky details on this, see *Afterthought: Toscanini as Lepidopterist*, p. 65.

became the definitive version we hear today and the basis of Ricordi's printed orchestral score.

THE REST OF THE STORY. With the exception of World War II,⁵¹ over the century plus since its successful re-premiere, *Butterfly* continues to be one of the most popular and frequently performed operas of the Italian romantic era's war horse stable.

Interestingly, the opera spawned two movies. One in 1915 starring "America's sweetheart" Mary Pickford,⁵² and one in 1922 starring everyone's favorite Chinese⁵³ movie villainess, Anna May Wong. That movie entitled *Toll of the Sea*, has gone down in cinema history as the first two-strip Technicolor feature ever made. The opera also can be held accountable for one popular song (1916) that still haunts us today, *Poor Butterfly*. As noted earlier, in the 1980's *Butterfly* was updated and otherwise evolved into *Miss Saigon*.

As for Puccini, he continued his successful operatic ways including *The Girl of the Golden West* Belasco encore. One of his other subsequent operas *La Rondine* was victimized though by poor timing. The composer had contracted with the Vienna Opera to develop the piece. Various complications delayed the effort. By the time it was ready for production, World War I was well underway. Puccini consequently was accused of a lack of patriotism for doing business with the enemy; an acrimonious split with Toscanini among other incidents, resulted.

⁵¹Because of the subject matter and patriotism among the allies, most opera companies removed the piece from their repertoires for the War's duration.

⁵² That's not what I would exactly call type casting.

⁵³ For reasons only known to the logic of Hollywood, the story's locale was moved to China.

Puccini's final entry in the operatic cannon and categorically considered "the last of the romantic era Italian operas" was *Turandot*. The composer unfortunately died⁵⁴ before he finished that opera's final scene and duet.

Franco Alfano, a young Italian composer was selected to finish *Turandot's* final material based on Puccini musical sketches. While at that time, to a young professional it was a heady commission; however, over time it made him more notorious than famous.⁵⁵ He was not Puccini and the bulk of criticism of Alfano's product seemed to find fault with him because of that fact.

The Toscanini/Puccini World War I breach healed and the Maestro was very involved in bringing *Turandot* to the La Scala stage. However, Toscanini almost continually carped about Alfano's efforts both during the surrogate composer's writing and afterwards. The night of the premiere Toscanini conducted. However, in front of the full La Scala house, he audibly refused to continue conducting the opera beyond the point Puccini's music ends (and Alfano's begins). Toscanini then walked off the podium. That's a clout-full of chutzpah!

At Puccini's death, the young Turk Italian opera composers having largely failed to catch the public's imagination and support with their own works, took to criticizing (as noted) Puccini for his attributed "flaws" and as a poor inheritor of the Verdi mantle.

⁵⁴In 1924, of complications stemming from his medical treatments for throat cancer.

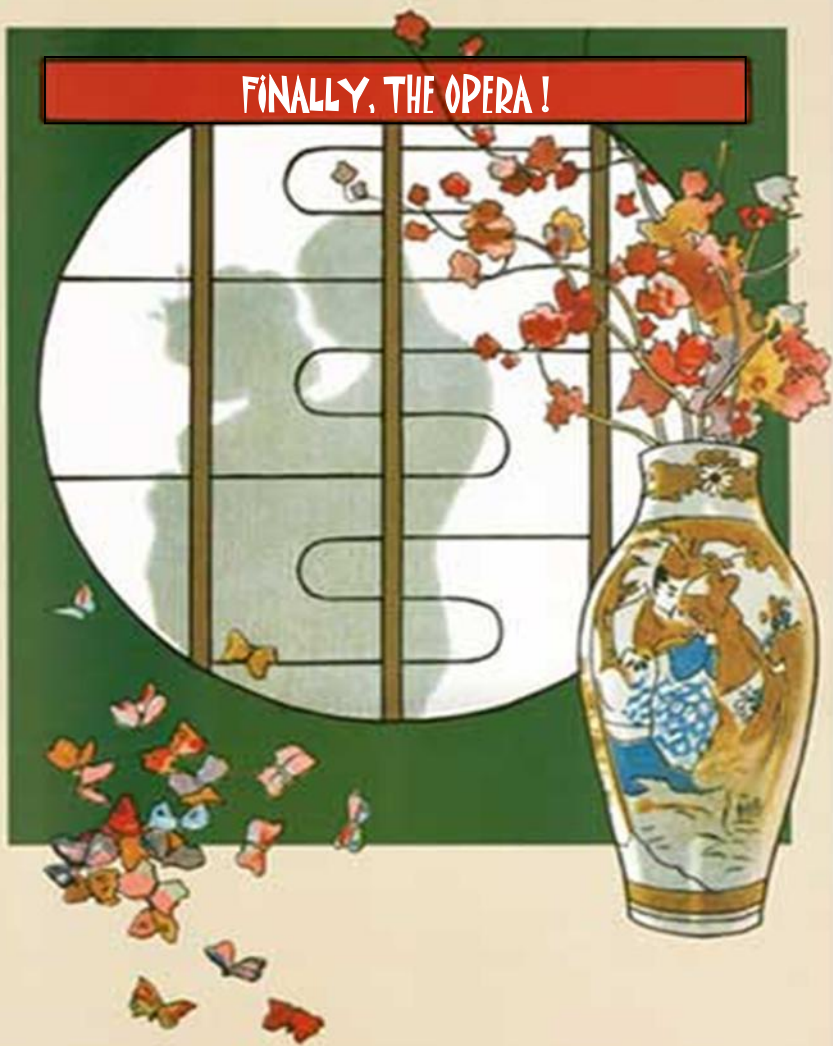
⁵⁵ Alfano is unfortunately remembered more than his music, as the guy who tried to finish *Turandot*. He may be undergoing some musical resurrection though; his opera *Cyrano de Bergerac* that had languished in obscurity for many years has been revived and is gaining popularity in the standard repertoire.

However, the Puccini operatic ladies---- especially his young Japanese bride, continue to play successfully and internationally. Most are well known and respected even among those of us not rabid opera affectionados. As a body of work, they do provide a sure SRO for most opera impresarios.

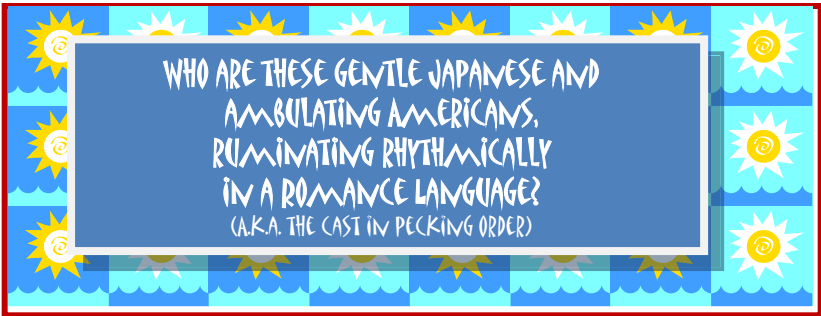
May we all be cursed with such flaws. **ARRIVEDERCI!**



FINALLY, THE OPERA!



MADAMA BUTTERFLY



MAJOR MOVERS AND SHAKERS:

- *Cio-cio-san* [a.k.a. *Madama Butterfly*] (Soprano). Our fifteen year-old heroine is about to be married to a “ugly American” type. Currently a geisha, she is from a formerly aristocratic family that fell on hard times when as suggested by the Emperor, her father fell on a sword. Called “Butterfly” because of her delicate demeanor, this is no part for a zaftig zinger.⁵⁷
- *Suzuki* (Mezzo-soprano). Not included with a passel of other house-hold help in the rental price of our hero’s Japanese hide-away, Suzuki has already been serving Cio-cio-san as a servant. Over the course of the opera, she will evolve into our heroine’s realistic companion and early-warning disaster system. Her English name, as we are told at the same time as hero Pinkerton, is Miss Light Cloud. Throughout the opera, when not practicing common sense, Suzuki chatters, dithers, prays to the gods and scatters cherry blossoms, a lot.
- *Kate Pinkerton* (Mezzo-soprano). In terms of musical lines, this is a really small part. However, when this person

⁵⁷ Although that could have presented some great Sid Caesar or John Belushi comedic moments.

appears, she immediately becomes the “800 pound gorilla” that sets the final denouement into play. A “real American bride” as our less than tactful tenor hero puts it. Given the operatic time and American morality of that period, it is somewhat a puzzlement that the lady doesn’t seem fazed by her Romeo’s former “temporary marriage” and inconvenient child. It is all explained though if one reads the source materials for the opera. Puccini conveniently left out a great deal about Kate’s character. Turns out, she is a callous witch and perfectly matched with her philandering heel-husband.

- *Benjamin Franklin (B.F.) Pinkerton* (Tenor). In the interest of good international relations, our naval officer and lead male belter, should not have been a frequent presence in Japanese ports post-Admiral Perry’s expeditionary force; B.F.⁵⁸ is not a nice guy--- especially for an operatic tenor-hero.⁵⁹ Unfortunately, his ugly American behavior is masked by Puccini’s gorgeous music for this male chauvinist pig. Being a non-Italian-speaking member of the audience also helps fog Pinkerton’s less desirable qualities. However as things play out, at the final curtain he may have become “too late smart.”
- *Sharpless* (Baritone). The American Consul in Nagasaki and quite amiable, for a bureaucrat. He has our hero figured out and tries to cajole him out of the impending disaster marriage, but to no effect. He sings a lot to the tune of “The Star-Spangled Banner” (as do others), Finally, he becomes a reverse (albeit, involuntary) John Alden to Pinkerton’s Miles Standish.

⁵⁸ For some curious semantic chaos around these initials, read on!

⁵⁹ By operatic custom, but not necessarily common sense, the tenor is always a sort-of Boy Scout-type and, if left alive at the final curtain, usually gets the girl. The baritone according to operatic tradition however, is usually the “rotter” and certainly doesn’t deserve the girl .

- *Goro* (Tenor). A Japanese Sergeant Bilko,⁶⁰ this marriage-broker is a multi-faceted arranger for our hero. House, bride and servants all come out of his little bag of sellable wares. To his benefit, he does too late try to move our heroine into a more lucrative and suitable marriage. Unfortunately for all, no sale.
- *The Bonzo*⁶¹ (Bass). The Buddhist priest from Hell, unfortunately also Butterfly's uncle. He has a brief, but plot-jerking part. The man comes on stage loud and continues to get louder while throwing throw cold water figuratively on the newly married couple, rather than rice. Then he chases Butterfly's relatives, who are enjoying the ceremonial feed, back down the hillside---rapidly.
- *Prince Yamadori* (Baritone). Our heroine's best (and final) shot at a community-condoned and wealthy marriage. Too bad our Butterfly has no yen for his yen; she laughingly kisses off the security of this suitor. Seems among other things, she objects to his multiple wives. If Kate Pinkerton had been so persnickety, we could have had a happier outcome.

⁶⁰ For those who would like you to think they are too young to know, Bilko was a friendly but finagling military factotum, ingeniously played by comedian Phil Silvers for multiple early TV seasons.

⁶¹ In English, "Bonze" - a Japanese monk/religious person. This character will frequently be listed also as "Bonzo." Archives seem to accept both. It may simply be a difference caused by "lost in translation" among Japanese, Portuguese and English. Whatever! Puccini's Bonze is definitely not a refugee from Ronald Reagan's infamous "Bedtime for Bonzo" nor even a close relative of Bonzo the Clown. Also, should not be confused with F. Hunter Thompson's gonzo-type journalism, although come to think of it there is usually some behavioral resemblance between Thompson and Uncle Bonzo. In Japanese, the term's root is from "ritual suicide." Under circumstances, seems appropriate.

VOCALIZING "ALSO RANS"

Cio-cio-san's:

- *Cousin* (Soprano).
- *Mother* (Mezzo-soprano), and---
- *Uncle Yakuside* (Baritone).

A major part of these three roles ended up on the cutting room floor when the original version of the opera underwent major surgery.

When first heard at La Scala, Mom's part generally, was to take on the catty cousin for some not nice and lengthy speculation about the permanence and suitability of the couple-to-be's union.

Uncle Yakuside was well known as a "fun" drunk around Nagasaki neighborhoods. In the original premiere version, thanks to Pinkerton, he got roaring soused and entertained one and all with some Japanese drinking songs.

- *Child "Dolore" / "Sorrow"*⁶² (Non-singing/non-speaking).

A powerful, but mute symbol several times in Acts II and III, The child is destined to have a name change to "Joy" when Dad returns. Poor kid never gets the chance.

- *Commissioner* (Baritone).
- *Registrar* (Baritone).

Two more casualties of the rewrite. Now also largely, "local color."

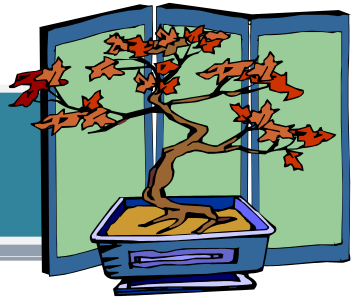
⁶² The child's Italian name is frequently translated as "trouble." Unfortunately, this implies both a problem for Butterfly and a handful of child. Both wrong! "Sorrow" is more precise to the operatic situation.

And finally--- choraling:

- Freeloading *friends and relatives* and---
- Pinkerton's hired *household help*.



TERSELY TELLING THE TUNEFUL TALE
WITH MINUTE MEMOS MENTIONING
MEMORABLE MUSIC.



PRELUDE. Through a very brief *Fugato*,⁶³ Puccini musically establishes his major sub-text of an East versus West cultural clash. The oriental and American themes interweave each other several times and then, the on-stage action begins.

ACT 1

PLACE⁶⁴ A Japanese rental bungalow⁶⁵ located with great access difficulty⁶⁶ on a very high and steep hill overlooking the harbor of Nagasaki, Japan.

TIME. A frenetic mid-afternoon through a romantic nightfall--- most probably in the spring of 1900.

The music of the opening scene extends from the melodies of the *Fugato* and continues its slightly rushing pace.

⁶³ Barely one minute. Often the curtain will rise with the first downbeat of the Prelude. On the other hand, sometimes it goes up with first line of dialogue--- be surprised!

⁶⁴ For all two / three acts.

⁶⁵ Depending on scenic design "vision" and the all-purpose Shoji sliding screens, the exact location of each act within the bungalow is up for grabs.

⁶⁶ Like the running joke concerning the lengthy New York walk-up climb in Neil Simon's *Barefoot in the Park*, visitors to our Japanese bungalow frequently comment on their hard trek up the hill.

Goro is proudly showing to Pinkerton the intricate flexibility of the officer's newly leased home (**E soffitto e pareti---**/**And ceilings and walls---**).⁶⁷ The walls move, sliding in and out; rooms can be created where there are none now and so forth. Pinkerton is both amused and impressed.

Goro as a multi-purpose Japanese Figaro, summons the household servants to be introduced. The principal is Butterfly's companion, Suzuki. After her introduction, the woman immediately begins to chatter, welcoming Pinkerton in the most elaborate and delicately polite phrases. The music both mimics Suzuki's rapid speech pattern and its florid content. Goro senses Pinkerton's rapidly increasing impatience with the chatter and dismisses the servants back into the house.

Pinkerton then switches the conversation to a briefing on the coming wedding ceremony. The rapidity of the accompanying music evolves into a more ceremonial and processional mode. The bride's relatives as enumerated, will be at the ceremony. Pinkerton is assured, a priest-uncle, will **not** honor the event with his presence.⁶⁸

The voice of Consul Sharpless is heard off-stage bemusedly complaining about the steepness of the climb. He enters and admires the view and the features of the house with Pinkerton, again accompanied by the slightly frenetic music. The officer proudly announced he has leased the house for 999 years but has the right, every month to cancel. Not totally devoid of

⁶⁷The bold-face Italian phrase indicates the opening words of major musical segments together with their bold-face English translations.

⁶⁸ Do not bet the family farm on that one!

humor, Pinkerton then observes, “In this country, houses and contracts are equally elastic---.” (**Sono in questo paese elastici del par, case e contratti.**)

Pinkerton calls for whiskey; it is brought on and offered by the servants. At that point, introduced by the first of many musical quotes from “The Star-Spangled Banner,” Pinkerton begins a duet with Sharpless outlining his “philosophy” of life and attitude towards women. (**Dovunque al monde lo Yankee vagabondo---/All over the world the Yankee vagabond---**).

A Hymn and an Anthem: yes, the same tune, but the same symbol?

Puccini musically quoted “The Star-Spangled Banner” throughout *Butterfly*; it is one of the piece’s strongest and most frequent leitmotifs. However, at the time of the opera’s creation, that music represented something different than it does today.

In 1904 when *Butterfly* appeared, “The Star-Spangled Banner” was not our national anthem; it was the official hymn of the US Navy and therefore quite relevant as the background theme for a naval officer.

In 1931, “The Star-Spangled Banner” by act of Congress was named our national anthem. Due to that change, hearing the Puccini musical quotations today does sent a different message, one that relates to a country--- more than Puccini’s original musical symbolic intention of an American naval officer.

Pinkerton concludes his life-style expose with the observation that he is marrying Japanese style for 999 years and that also can be broken off on a monthly basis. Sharpless politely disagrees with the young officer’s outlook. Pinkerton deflects that mild rebuke with a toast to America (and “The Star-Spangled Banner” again).

Sharpless then turns the subject to the bride-to-be--- is she pretty? Goro comments in the affirmative and then at Pinkerton's request, he runs off down the hill to bring the wedding party back. At his departure, the two men now warmed-up conversationally by the whiskey turn their conversation to what underlies Pinkerton's "romance." (**Non so! Dipende dal grado di cotture! --- I don't know, it depends on the degree of infatuation.**) The officer indicates that what he wants, he gets; the consequences bother him, not at all. Sharpless expresses more directly a concern about the "marriage" consequences to Butterfly. Pinkerton brushes away the Consul's warnings with more whiskey and a toast to, "The day when I (Pinkerton) shall have a real wedding and marry a real American bride."

The music throughout this serious subject and warning is at odds with the words. It is Puccini almost at his most lyrical and romantic--- in essence, it converts Pinkerton's callous musing of a randy sailor with a girl in every port, to the elocution-style of a love-sick, school-boy.

At the climax of the duet, an off-stage chorus of women dramatically and lovingly intrudes. Goro rushes on quite out of breath (that hill climb again); Butterfly and her friends are approaching. The women are commenting on the lovely view intermingled with Butterfly's observation about her beautiful wedding day. The three men on stage listen quietly. (**Quanto cielo! Quanto mar!/So much sky, so much sea!**)⁶⁹ Puccini at his theatrical best --- no on-stage action, just pure lovely music and those female voices the composer loved so much.

⁶⁹ Remember this is the point where the La Scala premiere began to go into melt down.

At the end of their observations, the women enter⁷⁰ and the vocal equivalent of social small talk ensues against a background of chatter-mimicking music. (**Gran ventura. / Good fortune attend you.**) Butterfly introduces her husband-to-be as “FB” Pinkerton (rather than “BF”), to her colorful gaggle of friends and relatives.⁷¹ A gallant hero at this point, the lieutenant sympathizes with Butterfly about the difficult climb.

Sharpless then engages Butterfly in conversation about her past. She informs him quite candidly that she is from a formerly rich family that is now quite poor. Our heroine had to become a geisha to support herself and her mother, “A noble lady--- but poor.” When asked about her father, an ominous Japanese melody thunders out of the orchestra and the women begin nervously fanning themselves. Not a diplomat for nothing, Sharpless moves quickly on to another subject. Unfortunately, it concerns the girl’s age. She replies, “Fifteen,” to the great surprise and consternation of both Sharpless and Pinkerton. However, being “men of the world,” they move on. Further speculation is abandoned as Goro announces the arrival of the Imperial officials for the wedding.

Arriving with the Imperial overseers are members of Butterfly’s extended family. A large ensemble segment occurs. (**Fate presto! /Get ready.**) It illustrates the genius of Puccini and his librettists in randomly mingling numerous voices. Their subject here however, is quite prosaic – small talk among relatives,

⁷⁰ *Butterfly* offers few opportunities for true operatic spectacle; however, the entrance of the women can be most colorful and exciting given the right budget and directorial vision.

⁷¹ Ricordi really should have hired a good copy editor! See p.65 for a diminutive discussion of this gaff (?).

friends and strangers while waiting for a wedding ceremony to begin. Some is just mindless chatter; however, other observations especially by one of the family's cousins are less than wedding appropriate: "Butterfly's losing her looks;" "This will never last!"; "The marriage broker offered him to me first and I refused," and so forth. All the musical chatter subsides as Butterfly ends the ensemble requesting her family and friends to bow to Pinkerton.

The relatives disperse throughout the garden and Pinkerton leads Butterfly towards their house. (**Veni, amor mio! / Come, my love!**). As they begin to talk, the opening musical lines of what will be the Love Duet later in the Act are heard. In a brief scene, Butterfly asks Pinkerton's permission to keep some of her possessions---- she has concealed them in the sleeves of her kimono. Our hero has a sudden attack of the "gallants" and becomes genuinely solicitous of her well-being and happiness. Among her small possessions, both in size and number (handkerchiefs, a mirror, a fan, pot of rouge and so forth), is a long case that she treats with great respect. As it appears, the ominous Japanese melody again signals in the orchestra. When asked about the case, Butterfly only replies it is a sacred possession and quickly goes into the house. As the ominous music continues, Goro informs Pinkerton that the father committed hara-kiri at the suggestion of the Emperor. The suggestion was sent with the now encased hari-kari weapon.

Butterfly returns with small religious dolls (Ottoke) she believes hold the spirits of her ancestors. The girl then tells Pinkerton that she has gone to the (Christian) Mission to renounce her own beliefs and share a religion with her husband-to-be. (**Leri son salita tutta sola--./ Yesterday, I went out all alone--.**)

This very brief sad aria is in a minor key, but very much a Puccinian tune; it is sung almost fearfully as Butterfly confesses her family does not know of her action, nor does her Uncle, the Buddhist priest.⁷²

Pinkerton still with his attack of “gallants,” attempts to comfort the obviously distressed Butterfly. However, Goro interrupts, indicating everything is prepared for the wedding ceremony. **(Tutti ziti ! Quiet everyone!).**

During the ceremony conducted by the Commissioner from the terrace of the house, Butterfly kneels before the officials, but Pinkerton stands. The remainder of the wedding guests and relatives watch from the garden. The religious ceremony colored by ringing bells, is quickly concluded.

The new couple moves to mingle with Butterfly’s relatives and guests against a background of a gentle Puccini melody. **(Madama Butterfly).** When addressed by the assemblage as Madame Butterfly, Cio-cio-san is quick to correct them with “Madama F.B.”⁷³ Pinkerton.”

The Imperial officials offer their congratulations and then with Sharpless in tow, leave to go back down the hill. Sharpless before leaving offers Pinkerton one last warning, “**Guidizio**” (Be sensible!).” The Lieutenant waves that caution off as he waves the Consul down the hill.

⁷² In some productions, Butterfly will throw the Ottoko away at the end of her aria.

⁷³ See p. 65 for comment on this curious inversion: accidental and overlooked or, deliberate and unexplained?

Turning his attention to the remaining relatives and guests, Pinkerton makes it clear in an aside to Butterfly, that he would like these people to leave as quickly as possible. However, to be temporarily gracious, he offers a toast. The assemblage responds with a melodic traditional Japanese anthem. (**O Kami, O Kami!**).⁷⁴ The response begins with a small ensemble of guests and then gradually builds into a full choral reverie.

Unfortunately just when everyone is warming to the occasion and their singing, it is rudely interrupted by angry off-stage shouting accompanied by frequent gonging and the orchestra picking up a very militaristic Japanese piece.

Panic sets in among the Japanese --- it is the bride's Uncle from Hell /the Buddhist priest.⁷⁵ (**Cio-cio-san! Abominazione! Cio-cio-san! You are accursed!**). Here Puccini again presents a very effective stage picture: the guests huddling together very frightened, Butterfly by herself, Pinkerton lost in confusion fostered by a language disconnect and Goro, trying to come up with a quick but effective plan to head-off the Uncle. All are surrounded by the thundering music and off-stage threats. The audience can hear the threats coming closer as the Bonzo reaches the top of the hill.

Uncle Bonzo bursts onto the stage in full regalia with retinue in tow. Murder will out! He knows about the trip to the Christian Mission and lets the crowd in on the secret. They are suitably

⁷⁴ Japanese word for spirits / gods/ essence.

⁷⁵ For those who haven't been paying close enough attention to note, we have two uncles figuring in the opera's plot: one is Uncle Yaaside, the happy drunk at the wedding; the other, the Bonzo but more affectionately referred to as, the Uncle from Hell. Don't get them mixed up! It will play havoc with the plot.

horrified and terrified. They join Uncle Bonzo in condemning Butterfly. Her mother however going against the public opinion flow, attempts to comfort her; she is thrust aside by the priest.

Pinkerton really not knowing exactly what is going on has had it with all the noise and his new wife is obviously unhappy. He orders everyone out of the house --- unfortunately not before Uncle Bonzo and the other Japanese renounce Butterfly.⁷⁶ In a great rush they all leave, but for the next few minutes you can hear them descending the hill led by Uncle from Hell as a cheer-leader cursing Butterfly.⁷⁷

The distraught and crying bride is left alone in the middle of the stage;⁷⁸ a still confused and angry Pinkerton remains symbolically off to the side as darkness falls. The big Puccini duet moment has now arrived and the composer does go for broke!

Having witnessed the viciousness of the verbal assault on his wife and her family's subsequent abandonment, Pinkerton's attack of the gallants segues into the words, music and actions of a sympathetic (and romantic) Italian tenor--- the first section

⁷⁶ Except good old Uncle Yauside, he is taking advantage of the confusion to store up on the "open bar" sake.

⁷⁷ One of the great and continuing wonders of Puccini is his genius with the simultaneous and stimulating presentation of stage and musical pictures. The few minutes between the Bonzo's departure and the actual beginning of the Love Duet are a very representative example. Puccini appears not at all afraid to leave the stage devoid of singers or if there, they remain motionless and vocally silent. What musical stimulation occurs is either in the orchestra pit and/or off-stage, he understood the power of inaction. Similar situations in the hands of lesser composers would really be "tarted up."

⁷⁸ Given the size of most opera house stages, one person alone stage center can really seem abandoned and isolated. .

of the Love Duet. He touchingly consoles his still weeping wife (**Bimba, Bimba, non piangere per---/Sweetheart, sweetheart, do not weep---**). Butterfly is overwhelmed by such kindness and begins to lighten up--- a bit. Suzuki is heard at prayer inside as Pinkerton leads Butterfly up to the terrace of the house.

The brief second section of the duet shows a romantic mood beginning to emerge. (**Viene la sera --/ Night is falling---**). Pinkerton summons the servants, who prepare the sliding walls for night. Butterfly calls to Suzuki to bring her nightclothes. A lyrical passage ensues while the servant helps Butterfly change into a pure white gown; then Suzuki leaves. Pinkerton moves to Butterfly as the couple's voices blend into an exchange of romantic "nothings." (**Con moti di scojattolo- / Her movements as delicate---**).

The final, longest, but most musically romantic and seductive portion of the duet begins. (**Bimba dagli occhi pieni di malia--- / Oh little child with bewitching eyes---**). Darkness now has completely fallen, stars and fireflies appear.⁷⁹ Butterfly romantically rhapsodizes. Against her phrases, Pinkerton heard in a continual musical line, urging her into the house (**Vieni, vieni --- Come, oh come---**). As they enter the house, the duet climatically ends with Pinkerton's musically rapturous words: (**Ah! Vien! Sei mia! --- Ah! Come! Be mine!**)

⁷⁹ Stage directors for a few extra bucks can visually go wild with this final Act I scene.

The curtain quietly falls on Act I. Its romantic mood is lushly enhanced as most of the audience rushes off to the Intermission Wine Bar (pun intended)!

ACT II

PLACE. Still, the same Japanese house overlooking the Nagasaki harbor and on top of that difficult to climb and windy hill.

TIME. Three years later, but again springtime. During the Act, the action will move from a pessimistically difficult early afternoon to an evening of optimistic anticipation.

Act II as the previous Act I, begins with a Fugato. The dominant melody is Japanese in form intermixed with snatches of music from Act I.

When the curtain rises, Suzuki is at prayer with a very depressed Butterfly near-by. Suzuki requests the gods to stop Butterfly from crying--- permanently! Butterfly observes that the Christian God would be more prompt in prayer replies, but probably does not know where they live.

Our plucky heroine then switches the subject to household finances. There is practically no money left and if Pinkerton does not return soon, they will be in a very bad way.

Despite Butterfly's insistence, Suzuki doubts that Pinkerton will return. Butterfly not one to lose a point easily, points out that if our hero were not coming back why did he arrange for the Consul to pay the house rent and put new locks on all the

doors?⁸⁰ Suzuki responds with her own question, “Did Butterfly even hear of a foreign husband returning?” The servant is angrily informed that Pinkerton promised to return, “When the robins make their nest.” “He will return (**Tornerà**),” Butterfly emphatically concludes! Suzuki persists in her doubting, so Butterfly trying another tact, describes the circumstances of Pinkerton’s return. (*Un bel di, vedremo---* / *One fine day, we shall see---*).⁸¹

Puccini gifted the clan of operatic sopranos with many “knock ‘em dead” arias. *Un bel di* is probably at that top of that list; its melody has become so generally well known that when bittersweet separation is the theme, it frequently appears as a leitmotif in all manner of movies, commercials and the like. Whatever, even in the hands of a less than vocally talented Butterfly, the song triumphs through pure musical emotion if not vocal talent.

The aria musically ends triumphantly with Butterfly concluding to the weeping servant, “Banish your idle fears, he will return. I know it!” Suzuki then leaves the room at Butterfly’s signal---- probably a move to assure the lead soprano is alone on the stage when her aria’s applause breaks out.

Goro and Sharpless appear in the garden; Goro, seeing Butterfly alone indicates to the Consul that he should go in. Sharpless knocks and then calls, “Madama Butterfly.” Without

⁸⁰ She may have a point or three there.

⁸¹ Reference was made earlier to the obscenely popular song *Love is a Many-splendored Thing* (from the movie of the same name). Now it needs to be pointed out, that pop song and the aria are basically the same tune, but in two different tempos. No comment!

seeing him, our heroine corrects him, “Madama Pinkerton. Prego.”⁸²

The Consul has come with a letter from Pinkerton. However, his attempts to discuss the contents are ignored; Butterfly is intent on being extremely polite and properly “American.” She asks after the health of his ancestors and with Suzuki performing the details, offers a pipe and then cigarettes. Sharpless finally gets the point across that he has a letter from Pinkerton--- who is in good health. Butterfly politely, but happily accepts that news and then quickly asks if the Consul knows when robins nest in America? Sharpless indicates he is at a loss for an answer, he did not study ornithology. The musical exchange between the two tends to parallel the Japanese “melodies” previously heard in the introductory Fugatos.

Goro, who had been wandering the garden and listening, is seen by the pair and interrupts their conversation. Butterfly indicates Goro is a “bad man” who has been trying to palm off a husband on her since Pinkerton left. Goro to protect his reputation, defends his choice of the “rich Prince Yamadori.” After all, Butterfly is very poor now and her relatives have renounced her.

Right on cue, Yamadori appears in the garden with (usually) a very showy retinue in tow.⁸³ In the ensuing scene among

⁸² It is a small curiosity to note, but when Butterfly refers to her sailor lieutenant, it is always FB Pinkerton. However, when Sharpless and Goro refer to him, it is BF Pinkerton. I guess that is why they call this “opera”. Again, see p.66 for additional observation of this curious alphabetical inversion and its operatic intent, if any,

Butterfly and the three men, the music in the main continues in a Japanese “style” except when Butterfly speaks of America--- then we have again, the “Star-Spangled Banner” intermixed with snippets of the Act I Love Duet.

Butterfly receives Yamadori courteously, but laced with mischievous cynicism. The rich man has many wives; Butterfly does not care for that. They have all been divorced; Yamadori will remain “true” only to Butterfly. His argument does not carry the day. Sharpless also despairs he will never get his unhappy information through to our heroine.

Goro attempts one more time, to impress on Butterfly that she has been deserted; that means divorced in Japan. “But not in America,” she counters, drawing in Sharpless to support her argument. In a subsequent exchange among the three men, they sadly comment on Butterfly’s blindness to the facts of her situation. Pinkerton’s ship is due shortly. However, he does not want to see Butterfly and had sent Sharpless to “discourage her.”

Yamadori finally gives up the “courtship” and leaves with his sycophants and Goro tagging behind. Sharpless ever the dutiful bureaucrat, tries one more time with Butterfly and the Pinkerton letter.

In the ensuing scene, the initial music is from the Love Duet; it subsequently becomes a large portion of the Humming Chorus we will hear as the Act closes. Sharpless asks Butterfly to sit beside him and read Pinkerton’s letter with him. As the Consul quotes from the letter, Butterfly consistently ignores the true

⁸³Except in the cases of a Scrooge-like producer and/or stingy season subscribers.

meaning of the words and sees only a bright future. At the climatic point, Sharpless can go no further. He puts the letter back in his pocket with the observation, "That devil Pinkerton!" (*Quel diavolo d'un Pinkerton!*).

Sharpless changes conversational course and asks the happy girl what she would do if Pinkerton never returned? The music instantly changes into a mournful minor key as the Consul pursues Butterfly with the reality of her situation. Her response to "never return" is painfully pragmatic, two options: go back to being a geisha or better, ---die.

Sharpless urges her to accept Yamadori's offer. Butterfly instantly angry, calls Suzuki and asks her to escort the Consul from the house. Butterfly then regrets her hasty dismissal and calls him back. Seeming to accept that Pinkerton has forgotten her, she runs into the next room.

A triumphant Japanese martial melody burst from the orchestra as she exits. As it reaches its climax, Butterfly reenters the room with a small boy perched on her shoulder and observes that Pinkerton should be able to remember a child. (*E questo egli potrà pure scordare? / How can he forget this [child] that I am carrying?*)

Sharpless asks if the child is the Lieutenant's--- to which our spunky heroine asks, "Whoever saw blue eyes in a Japanese child?" Good point! "Does the father know?" is the Consul's response.⁸⁴ "No, but you will write him Mr. Consul!"--- you betcha then he will come across the sea quickly to see a beautiful son.

⁸⁴Operatic folks often seem to speak to each other only in questions.

The triumphant music suddenly shifts into a minor key incorporating snatches from the Love Duet and *Un bel di*. As this occurs, Butterfly in a sad recitation points out in graphic detail the poverty and social horror of the life of a geisha with child in tow. She concedes there is only dishonor in that pathway. *Morta! (Death!)*, she exclaims is better than entertainment dancing.

Sharpless ever ready to face up to a difficult situation, decides it's time to go. On his way out he does ask the child's name. Butterfly responds with the *Un bel di* melody, that his name is currently Dolore (Sorrow); however when his father returns, that will be changed to Gloria (Joy).

As Sharpless exits, the music turns combative and Suzuki is heard screaming in the garden. She enters dragging a terrified Goro. He has been telling the folks in town that the child's father is unknown and that makes the child cursed in America. Butterfly flies (pun!) into a rage, seizes her father's hara-kiri knife⁸⁵ and attempts to stab Goro. However, Suzuki intervenes and he exits quickly with a kick from Butterfly.

Butterfly realizing the child is still in the room, regains her composure and assures the child his father will come to avenge them and take them far, far away to his land. Then --- a cannon shot from the harbor signaling an arriving ship!

Using a spyglass, Butterfly focuses on the incoming ship: it is white with a "Star-Spangled" flag--- American! She frantically searches for its name (*Il nome---- il nome*). Then she triumphantly announces it is Pinkerton's ship: the Abraham

⁸⁵Conveniently available in a small, on-stage religious shrine.

Lincoln! Our heroine feels vindicated; she was the only one that believed. With the Star-Spangled Banner and the Love Duet intermixed, the two women prepare the house to welcome Pinkerton “home.”

Here begins another massive Puccini masterpiece --- the Flower Duet. (*Scuoti quella fronda di ciliegio---* / *Shake a branch of that cherry tree---*). The two women happily frantic, fill the house with petals, flowers and flowering branches from the garden’s fruit trees. The Puccinian melody rises and falls with the entwined voices of Suzuki and Butterfly.

The women having denuded the property of any flowering thing, turn their attention to preparing Butterfly. While Suzuki dresses her in the original wedding kimono, Butterfly muses over how she has “aged”, but how jealous all the local skeptics will be now.

The two women and the child arrange themselves in front of a Shoji screen looking out onto the harbor. Butterfly pokes three holes into the paper panels, --- one for each, so they can see Pinkerton when he first approaches.

Evening has fallen and the rising moon profiles the three figures on the darkening stage. Wait though, before the curtain ---- there is one final Puccini coup. The *Humming Chorus* begins in the form of a Japanese lullaby. No words, just quiet humming of the full chorus accompanied by plucking orchestral strings.

Suzuki and the child nod off to sleep; only Butterfly remains wakefully watching. The off-stage chorus reaches its musical climax, as the curtain falls.

ACT III

PLACE. Still that same convertible house on top of a Japanese-Zugspitz equivalent, overlooking the Nagasaki harbor.

TIME. Just before dawn of the day following Act II's evening. This day will not be a "fine" one; it will have more bumps and chuckholes than a country road. For Butterfly, she will end her day in a few hours, well short of midnight. Consider yourself forewarned,

Reminder from the Management I*

Puccini felt the excessive length of the original Act II contributed to the La Scala donnybrook. In addition, the length had been a continuous issue among the composer, the librettists and the publisher; should the opera therefore be two acts or three? We have now arrived at that point of the opera where major, post-premiere surgery was affected. The vigil scene originally scored for one continuous stage event, was split immediately after the Humming Chorus; the musical bridge between dusk and dawn was excised from the score. Act III begins with the dawn portion of the original vigil.

*This "heads up" is provided for those of us who may not have been paying close attention over the previous too-many pages or--- not taking good notes.

Act III begins with a percussionist blast of a Japanese martial melody that we have heard before; it is followed by a pastiche of music from the two previous Acts. The curtain will usually rise at the end of the martial music segment. The three figures from Act II are still on the stage and, exactly as we left them in Act II. The child and Suzuki asleep; Butterfly rigidly standing, watchfully looking out of the Shoji for her long overdue Pinkerton.

In short order, sounds are heard drifting up from the harbor. (*Oh eh! Oh eh! Oh eh! / Heave-ho!*). That chorus of workday sounds fades in the full light of a stage morning,

Reminder from Management.II

Remember at this point in the original production, the director had placed stagehands throughout the auditorium with bird whistles to add to the "dawning" atmosphere. The audience now hell-bent on total destruction enjoined the whistles with a veritable Noah's Ark of bird and animal sounds. Ah, those fun-loving Italians!

Suzuki wakes suddenly (*Gia il sole! / It is morning already!*). With *Un bel di* echoing in the orchestra, Suzuki sends Butterfly off to rest with the child. As Butterfly leaves the stage, she sings a small lullaby to the child (*Dormi amor mio, --- / Sleep my love, ---*).

A knock is heard on the screen and when Suzuki slides the Shoji back, Pinkerton and Sharpless are outside. The orchestra now picks up fragments from the *Love Duet*. The men enter as Suzuki explains the earlier excitement and the long night's vigil. Sharpless in an un-bureaucratic "blame game" mood, chides Pinkerton for the chaos he is causing.

Suzuki hears a noise in the garden and sees an American woman. In an agitated but brief trio, murder is outted. Pinkerton keeps avoiding the point of Suzuki's questions (Who is that woman?), so Sharpless states, "*It is his wife!*" (*E sua moglie!*). The full impact of the situation and the effect it will have on Butterfly, is immediately apparent to Suzuki as the two men attempt to recruit her to assure the "child's future."

The music among the three evolves into a rather dramatic trio (*Vel dissi? / I told you didn't I?*). For Sharpness' part, he alternates between: encouraging Suzuki to support them in what is best for the child and playing a very direct and angry blame game with Pinkerton---- reminding him most specifically of the earlier warnings. (*To so che alle sue pene /I know that we can offer little -*).

Pinkerton exhibiting a heretofore hidden wimpy-side, seems totally divorced from the conversation (and its implications) of the other two. He feels very sorry for himself and romanticizes his role in the entire disaster.

The trio climaxes as Suzuki leaves to bring Kate into the house. Pinkerton announces he is just leaving, period--- the others can clean up his mess.

Before his exit, there is one more burst of the Italian tenor in his farewell to the "happiness" once found in the house on the hill. (*Addio, fiorito asil---* / *Farewell flowery refuge of happiness ---*). He leaves swiftly as Kate enters with Suzuki.

As her hero-husband charges rapidly down the hill, Kate recruits Suzuki to do all the dirty work, telling Butterfly about the coming changes in her life style. Seeing no other way out, Suzuki agrees. When Butterfly is heard calling off-stage (*Suzuki, Suzuki*), Kate also starts to make a run for it. The components of that married pair are ideally matched; really seem to deserve each other, don't they? Unfortunately, Kate only makes it into the garden before Butterfly enters.

Butterfly enters, and seeing the Consul, she assumes Pinkerton is there also. When she cannot find him, she asks if he is dead. Suzuki's response that he is alive. Butterfly adding to a conclusion more quickly than most, realizes she has been "had." (*Ma non viene più / But he is not coming.*) Suzuki acknowledges that unfortunate conclusion.

The now officially "abandoned" wife notices the other woman and correctly concludes her to be the "wife." Continuing to add, she rapidly decides that it is all over for her. (*Tutto è finito ! / All is finished [for me] !*). She accepts that she must abandon her son to the Americans--- so be it! I must obey my husband. This gal does give up too easily. Must be a trait inherited from her Dad. The musical exchange among the three principals up to this point has been dramatically agitated, but largely in a minor key.

As Kate now re-enters to get her two cents worth in, the music shifts softly to Puccini "melodic." In response to Kate's question about Butterfly forgiving her, Butterfly puts on her "happy face" and offers to Kate a la-de-da response, something like, "Don't you all worry about poor little me--- you've got too much happiness already to take care of." Does not make much sense, but seems to get the point across.

Continuing in the melodic line, Butterfly says that she will give up the child, but Pinkerton himself must come to claim him--- come back up the hill in half an hour. Their dirty work successfully concluded, Kate and Sharpless slog back down that damned hill.

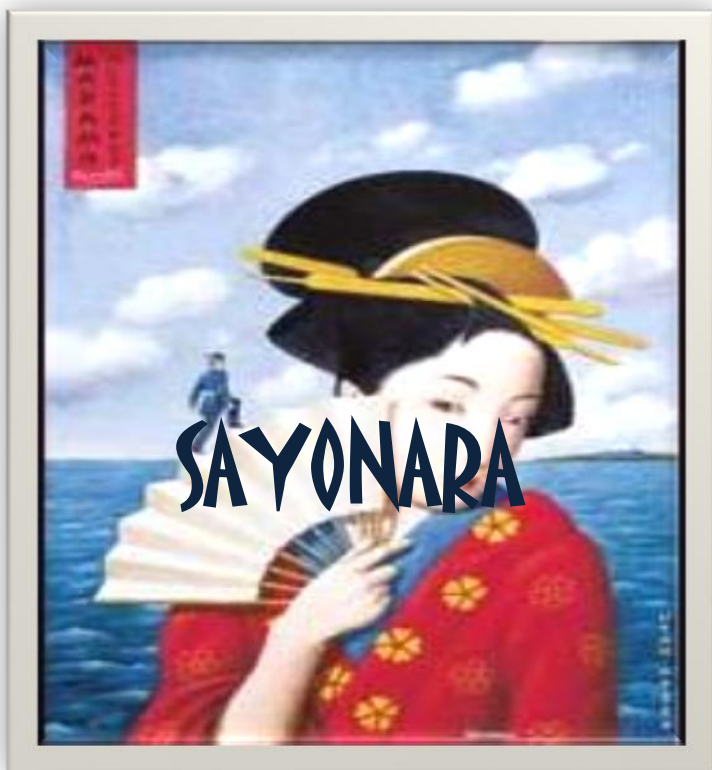
Butterfly weeping, is left on the stage with Suzuki. (*Come una mosca / Her little heart is beating ---*). Butterfly orders the servant to close up the Shoji complaining that there is too much light; the room is too spring-like. She then asks about the child and is told he is playing in the next room. Suzuki offers to call him, but Butterfly orders her to go keep him company. Suzuki politely refuses saying that she will stay with Butterfly. The weeping and pleading servant is then ordered to go. (*Va. Te lo comando. / Go, I order you!*). The music underscoring all this, is reminiscent of the earlier Fugatos especially the Japanese portions.

When Suzuki has left, Butterfly goes to the Buddhist shrine and removes her father's knife. As the music ominously builds with a great deal of percussion and Japanese melody, she reads the inscription on the scabbard (*Con donor muore --- / With honor dies he who cannot live honorably.*) As she raises the knife to her throat, Suzuki pushes the child into the room. A rapid melody follows the child across the room. Butterfly passionately embraces him and sings her goodbye to the child. (*Piccolo Iddio ! Amore mio, --/Little idol! My love, --*).

While the traditional last unsung musical moments of the opera are often "rearranged" in modern productions --- more for shock value than pathos, Puccini's original directions call for the following: Butterfly places the child on the floor facing the audience. She gives him a doll to play with and a small American flag to wave; then, blindfolds his eyes. She picks up the knife and goes behind a screen, never losing eye contact with the child.

Percussion builds in the orchestra and then silence--- the knife is heard falling to the floor. A white scarf draped over the outside of the screen, is slowly pulled from behind. Butterfly reappears with the scarf wrapped around her neck; she collapses to the floor but begins to crawl towards the child.

Outside, Pinkerton can be heard calling, "*Butterfly!*" He bursts into the room just as the girl reaches the child, kisses her son and dies. The omni-present Japanese anthem thunders from the orchestra, as the curtain falls.





AFTER-THOUGHTS AND
OTHER LEFTOVERS.

[CULLED FROM THE CUTTING ROOM FLOOR.]

DESIGNED FOR THAT READER WHO FEELS HE/SHE HAS NOT
YET AMASSED SUFFICIENT, DUBIOUS FACTS ABOUT
OUR ARCAINE SUBJECTS.
(IF WE ARE TALKING ABOUT YOU, READ ON!)

JAPONAISERIE

In 1854, the Treaty of Kanagawa, opened the trade doors between Eastern and Western worlds. Stephen Sondheim in *Pacific Overtures* musically questioned⁸⁶ the positive long-term cultural effects of Admiral Perry's 1853-54 expedition to Japan and that resultant Treaty. Whatever the long-term outcomes, in the short-run the arts of Japan did captivate the Western world.

Slightly more than a decade after Perry sailed away from Kanagawa, Japanese art forms had become a western European craze. A large share of the 1867 Paris Exposition Universelle was devoted to the oriental⁸⁷ influences, most noteworthy the Japanese artistic style of that period. Emphasis was also given to its influence among evolving Impressionists, van Gogh, Monet, Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas and so forth

In 1876, the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition featured a large and extremely popular Japanese pavilion. It was also in that year that the French art critic Phillipe Burty

⁸⁶ One of its more cynical moments is built around the song "Welcome to Kanakawa" which was not the local Japanese chamber of commerce saying hello to American enterprise; rather, it was the local village procurer savoring his anticipated business largess coming from the American sailors as well as instructing his "girls" in ways to acclimate their new Western customers.

⁸⁷ For additional discussion but on a slightly broader subject, see "The Romantic Orient, An European Delusion" a sidebar discussion in *An Operaphobics Guide* # 7 (10.05), *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*.

coined the term “Japonaiserie” for the products of western art forms influenced by Japanese style.

In 1885, Gilbert and Sullivan launched on the unsuspecting British-world *The Mikado*. According to legend and lore, while the team was searching (without a great deal of success) for a libretto subject, Gilbert’s attention was caught by a Japanese sword that fell off the wall in his home. That sword had been earlier purchased by the wordsmith of the duo, while touring a model village established by a company of Japanese in the Knightsbridge section of London. From that clashing metal example of Japonaiserie décor came the inspiration for the three little maids from school and their accompanying gentlemen of Japan.

In 1893, Chicago’s Columbia Exposition in addition to introducing the Ferris Wheel to the world, also featured an elaborate and extensive Japanese pavilion. This exhibit is credited with strongly influencing American architecture and architects, especially Frank Lloyd Wright.

Along with its rapid and wide-spread influences on Western decorative and visual art forms, a craze developed for fiction and non-fiction works about Japan. It was during this period that the un-credited but probable source⁸⁸ for Long’s Madame Butterfly short story appeared as well as the story itself, the Belasco play and

⁸⁸ Madame Chrysanthème

finally shortly thereafter, the Puccini opera. While there is artistic merit in each one of these “variations on a common theme,” the public’s hunger for Japonaisere general subject matter did guarantee a built-in level of public notoriety for each one.

TOSCANINI AS LEPIDOPTERIST: CHASING A BUTTERFLY.

Rosina Storchio sang the role of Butterfly at the opera’s La Scala premiere. At that time, she and Arturo Toscanini were “engaged” in a very public affair. At several points during the chaotic first evening, Storchio’s kimono costume billowed out for reasons unexplained. Those events were greeted with audible, diagnostic cries from the audience including, “Butterfly is pregnant” and “Ah, the little Toscanini”.⁸⁹

Reports indicate despite the embarrassing catcalls, Storchio sang the part in exemplary fashion. However, when the revised opera was to be (re)premiered a few months later in Brescia, Storchio opted out.⁹⁰ Instead she reprised the role, once more in the original version, at its

⁸⁹ Several sources state that Storchio was pregnant with Toscanini’s child at the time of the La Scala premiere. A child was subsequently born, but dead. The timing appears such that she could have been pregnant at La Scala. However, she definitively was not, when she reprised Butterfly a few months later in Argentina with Toscanini conducting.

⁹⁰ After the La Scala debacle, the soprano swore she would never sing Butterfly again in front of an Italian audience. A promise she kept for almost twenty years.

premiere in Buenos Aires. It was a triumph! Toscani conducted. Son of a gun, how about that!

History does not comment on the kimono's behavior in the Southern Hemisphere.

WHAT'S IN A RENAMED NAME?

At the time of the *Butterfly* La Scala premiere fiasco, its rotten hero was christened in the original libretto and Puccinian music: Sir Francis Blummy Pinkerton. At some point after that first night's auditorium riot cooled down, someone must have whispered to Puccini, Giacosa and/or Illica that an American lord was a "no-no" even if he was a rotter. Consequently, at the "second" premiere⁹¹ of the revised score, the name had been pruned to its present form: Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton. However, remaining in the text and accompanying music in some versions (even continuing today), the tenor philanderer is referred to as F.B.⁹² Pinkerton by the Official Registrar during the marriage ceremony and *Butterfly* articulates her married name as Madama F.B. Pinkerton. Whether careless editing or unrealized artistic "intention", the inverted initials remain a curious artifact.

⁹¹ In this case, not an oxymoron.

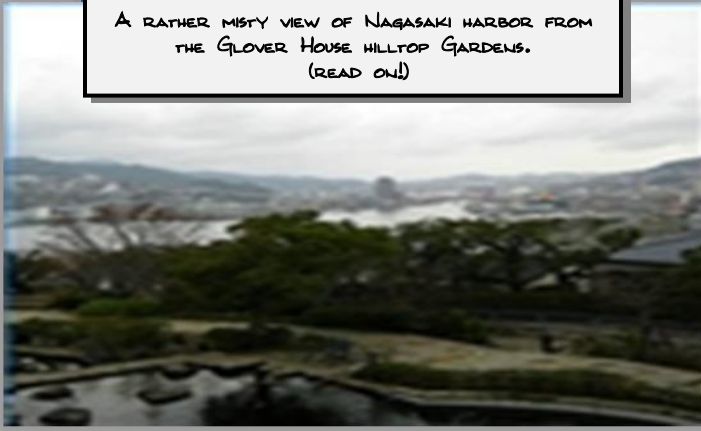
⁹² Francis Blummy or Franklin, Benjamin?

For reasons less curious than cautious, in German-speaking countries Pinkerton's name is frequently changed to Linkerton. It seems the German verb "pinkeln" is in operatic song perilously close aurally to "Pinkerton"; and--- auf Deutsch, "pinkeln" means "to piss." Prudent editing wouldn't you say?

"Cio-cio-san" is our heroine's given name. In the opera, it generally is used only in more formal moments especially with her family. "Butterfly" is actually a form of nickname recognizing her very delicate speech, manner and physical movements. Over the course of the opera, Butterfly herself becomes very persnickety as how she is to be addressed. Early in the opera at the time of the marriage ceremony, she is referred to as Damigella (Miss) Butterfly to which she seems to have no spoken (sung) objections. However, after the wedding ceremony when addressed as Madama (Mrs.) Butterfly, she corrects the speaker(s) reminding them she is now Madama--- Pinkerton. She offers the same correction to the Consul during his Act III appearance. She clearly does not recognize the marriage as a "passing affair" but rather, a change in her life status.



(C) CASTLE (N. S.)
A RATHER MISTY VIEW OF NAGASAKI HARBOR FROM
THE GLOVER HOUSE HILLTOP GARDENS.
(READ ON!)



Andrew Glover, a wealthy Scotsman managed business interests (circa 1860-1910) in Nagasaki. He played a major role in industrializing Japan and seems to have contributed personally and scenically to Long's fictional story that eventually birthed the opera.

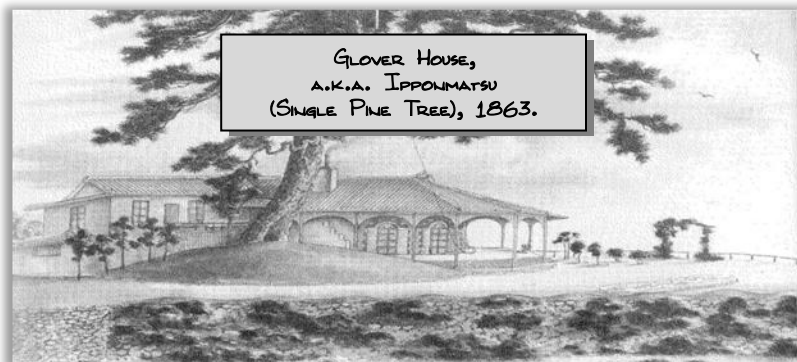
Industrially, Glover brought the first steam locomotive to Japan as well as developing its first coal mine. He assisted in the building of the country's first battleships. This obviously rather busy gentleman is credited also with laying the foundation for today's Mitsubishi Corporation and the Kirin Brewing Company.⁹³

⁹³ The magnificent moustache featured on Kirin beer labels is said to be a tribute Glover, who sported a truly horrendous hirsute upper lip (well documented in early photographs.)

“So what about his operations with our opera,” you ask? Shortly after his arrival in Nagasaki, Glover built a magnificent western-style home, the first ever seen in that city. Apropos to our “story to opera” itinerary, the site of the house and gardens was on a high hill overlooking Nagasaki’s harbor.

“So, the house in the proper location for our opera. Is that all?” Not quite.

Glover had a “common-law marital relationship” with a



Japanese woman which produced a daughter. However, Glover also had a Japanese-English son! The mother was not wife #1, but another Japanese woman.⁹⁴ Glover remained with wife #1 until her death in 1899. It should also be noted, wife #1 frequently wore kimonos with a butterfly embroidered on the sleeve.

⁹⁴ Records still preserved in Nagasaki, document the fact of the son's birth and his parentage. The son's mother later left the Glover relationship, married a Japanese man and died in Japan circa 1905.

All the above contains “smoke” for Long’s story, but no “fire.” The Glover house players and its site certainly contributed grist for an artistic mill as in our view, the story starts with them.

An link between operatic fiction and on-site fact was provided through GI ingenuity. Early in the occupation of Japan by the Americans, the Glover House was nicknamed by an opera-knowlegable G.I.⁹⁵ “the Madama Butterfly” house. Eager to restart its tourist trade, the city happily promoted the “connection.”

Today, the original house, furnishings and grounds supplemented with Puccini and *Butterfly*-related artifacts are visited by hoards of tourists (opera-loving?) eager to worship at the shrine where “it all happened.”⁹⁶

Long ago, any claims of facts from either the opera or Long’s story occurring in the house or to its real world occupants, have been labeled apocryphal. Close, but no horseshoe! Despite that, Glover House has become an international visitors’ shrine in the mold of Juliet’s Verona tomb and Charleston’s Catfish Row home of Porgy and his Bess. Public imagination frequently finagles fiction into fact!

⁹⁵ Also, not an oxymoron!

⁹⁶ It must be remembered, Nagasaki has the dubious historical distinction of being the second city devastated by an atomic bomb in WW II. The Butterfly house and gardens emerged comparatively unscathed from that destruction, but not the harbor below.

SYDNEY SUMMER SEASON 2008



MADAME BUTTERFLY

Opera Theatre Sydney Opera House
11 January 2008

Ticketing:
Tel +612 9318 8200
Fax +612 9310 4917

Group Bookings:
Tel +612 9318 8391
ticketing@opera-australia.org.au
<http://www.opera-australia.org.au>





A Guide to the GUIDES

Operaphobic Guides were developed to amiably assist in making peeling performance introductees,⁹⁷ more aria-affable. Optimistically, the outcomes of such a quixotic quest could be larger numbers of semi-suspicious, nay-saying folks co-opted into at least tasting a heretofore assumed deadly and otherwise, doleful operatic experience.

En masse, the co-opted crowd may never become gourmands, but all would have pleased their mothers by at least, "taking a bite." With our *Guide's* glob guidance, we suspect a few might discover a livelier operatic art than thought. Such feckless folks appropriately disguised to avoid subsequent downloaded derision from coffee-klatch companions, classmates and so forth, might become at least irregular, but informed and performance enjoying attendees. Hope does spring eternal!

The *Guides* principal weapon of cooptation is to "entertainingly inform."^{98, 99} Modestly though, we must admit transforming most operatic plots¹⁰⁰ into chuckles and occasional thigh-slappers is easier than shooting fish in a barrel. If you do not believe me, just read a few operatic plot(boiler)s and then--- ask logical questions.

⁹⁷ Especially involuntary attendees.

⁹⁸ What we call the Mary Poppins "spoonful of sugar" principal.

⁹⁹ Under duress, our three loyally persistent, non-family readers will admit that our almost fifty *Guides* to date have entertained them enormously.

¹⁰⁰ The one guiding rule of *Guides* though is that we never direct snickering to the music. The plots are overkill enough and in the music (truth be told), lays the genius of opera--- although I am sure there are any number of librettists that would disagree.

That "do not maul the music" rule however has had a few exceptions--- primarily some very early Verdi men-in-tights, tippy-toe tunes. As example, see *Macbeth Act II, Scene 2* --- the Banquo "offing."



---and their GUIDERS.



So our indiscriminate readership is aware which member of **An Operaphobic Guide's** "creative" team (JP or Sondra Cooney) is responsible for which gaffs, the division of work between the pair is, he writes them, but she makes them readable.

J.P. Cooney, holds a PhD, but obviously not in a music discipline. He is many years retired from a long, but probably questionable professorial career in university-based graduate education and a bureaucratic career in federal government health policy development (not an oxymoron!). However, most important for current purposes, he is a long-standing opera enthusiast about that art form's wacky, but rewarding wonderments.

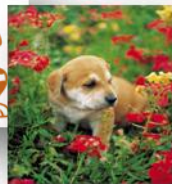
Sondra S. Cooney has a musical background by virtue of education and training. She holds a graduate degree from UCLA and though (semi-) retired, she has had a long successful career in teaching, educational research and policy-development. She is a knowledgeable and fanatic lover of a wide range of musical types. She is also a formidable master bridge player

For their (to-date) fifty-five years of marriage, equipped with a flaming red, felt-tipped pen, Ms. Cooney has diligently pursued and purified JP's errant and "gone missing" commas, grungy syntax and banally baroque sentence structures. She perpetually persists in her quixotic editorial quest, as he never learns.



The Cooneys are long-time, happy residents of a small island off Hilton Head (SC), beach-breechable only by boat or Michael Phelps.

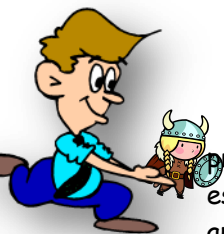
In this idyllic but eccentric existence, they are accompanied by a small Schnoodle and the now, very grumpy ghost of their formerly long-lived, liver-spotted Dalmatian.



Additional enjoyment to the island's idyllic atmosphere is provided by frequent forays onto and most importantly, off the island by other immediate family members. That traveling road show now touts up to twenty-two (22!) second, third and fourth generational members--- most of whom (if old enough) at least go to an opera, some actually love it.



Egged-on by some never-to-be-named regional opera company directors,¹⁰¹ the Cooney's initiated **An Operaphobic's Guide**¹⁰² as a series, eight years ago. By the end of the 2012 season, more than fifty **Guides** (list follows) will have been issued, probably producing plenty of panic in an unsuspecting, but opera-respecting public.



All **Guides** are done pro bono, the majority for opera companies to use in their educational and/or fund-raising programs. The rest, to succor opera-fearing individuals, especially slower running family members, friends and even-- strangers in the street.



¹⁰¹ Who probably should have known better!

¹⁰² Originally named, **Irreverent Guides to Enjoying Opera.**

AN OPERAPHOBIC'S GUIDE

The current series thru 6/1/11.

COMPOSER	OPERA	ISSUE	DATE
Bernstein*	Candide	#20	4.08
Bizet**	Carmen	#35	3.10
Bizet*	Carmen (Encore! Is love better the second time around?)	#36	4.10
Bizet	Les Pêcheurs de Perles	# 7	10.05
Blitzstein***	Regina	#24	6.08
Britten*	Albert Herring	# 8	4.06
De Falla	La Vida Breve	# 13	1.07
Donizetti***	Don Pasquale	#46	6.10
Donizetti***	L'Elisir d'Amore	#22	6.08
Donizetti	Lucia di Lammermoor	# 2	5.04
Floyd***	Susannah	#39	6.10
Gilbert & Sullivan**	The Pirates of Penzance	# 15	4.07
Gilbert & Sullivan**	H.M.S. Pinafore	# 43	5.11
Gounod**	Faust	#25	9.08
Gounod**	Roméo et Juliette	#17	10.07
Leoncavallo**	Pagliacci	# 12	1.07
Mozart**	Così fan Tutte	# 41	10.10
Mozart**	Le Nozze di Figaro	#27	3.09
Mozart***	Le Nozze di Figaro (Factotum fun, redux!)	#37	4.10
Mozart*	Le Nozze di Figaro (Third time's a charm?)	#51	4.12
Mozart	Die Zauberflöte	# 6	5.05
Mozart**	Don Giovanni	#19	3.08
Offenbach*	Les Contes d' Hoffmann	# 16	4.07
Poulenc*	Dialogues of the Carmelites	#28	4.09
Poulenc***	Dialogues of the Carmelites (Encore, " La Terreur.")	#44	6.11
Puccini**	La Bohème	#34	1.10
Puccini***	La Bohème (Bis! Salad days' sad songs)	#45	6.11
Puccini**	Madama Butterfly	# 11	7.06
Puccini*	Madama Butterfly (another "fine day"?)	#40	4.11
Puccini	Madama Butterfly (Bis, until you get it right!)	#49	1.12
Puccini	Tosca	# 5	3.05
Puccini***	Tosca (a déjà vu view)	#30	6.09
Puccini**	Turandot	#29	4.09
Rossini**	Il Barbiere di Siviglia	#26	1.09
Rossini***	Il Barbiere (Once more with feeling!)	#31	6.09
Rossini	La Cenerentola	# 10	3.06
Saint-Saëns	Samson et Dalila	# 4	2.05

Continued next page

COMPOSER	OPERA	ISSUE	DATE
Strauss**	Die Fledermaus	#21	4.07
Tchaikovsky**	Eugene Onegin	#50	3.12
Verdi**	Aida	#18	1.07
Verdi**	Il Trovatore	#48	10.11
Verdi	La Traviata	# 9	1.06
Verdi**	La Traviata (Twice-telling that tawdry tale)	# 42	2.11
Verdi	Macbeth	# 3	10.04
Verdi***	Macbeth (A kilt-kicking encore!)	#38	4.10
Verdi	Nabucco	# 1	10.03
Verdi**i	Otello	#33	10.09
Verdi**	Rigoletto	# 14	3.07
Verdi***	Un Ballo in Maschera	#23	6.08
Weber***	Der Freischütz	#32	6.09
To be continued !			

Developed for: *Atlanta Opera Theater at Georgia State University

** Opera Carolina

*** Des Moines Metro Opera

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HELP BUILD TOMORROW'S ARIA-AFFABLE
AUDIENCE---

ADAPT AN OPERAPHOBE! ¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Yes, **adapt!** No legal-link required; just change their attitude towards vocalizing valkyries by bonding with Brünnhilde!