

MADAME BUTTERFLY – IN A NUTSHELL

OPERA BACKGROUND

- An Italian opera set in Japan? Puccini never visited Japan. He saw a production in London and fell in love with the heroine of the play *Madame Butterfly* by David Belasco.
- Puccini's desire for authenticity led him to include sections of several Japanese melodies throughout the score. He seemed to immerse himself so much in the study of traditional Japanese songs that even Japanese scholars couldn't always tell what tunes were authentic and which were invented.
- There has been much speculation on the models for the real Butterfly, Pinkerton, and Trouble. Mezzo-soprano Susan Graham recounts the theory that the real Butterfly's son, known in the opera as Trouble or Sorrow, grew up in Nagasaki under the name Thomas Albert Glover. The startling end to this story is that in August 1945, after the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, Tom Glover committed suicide. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovy9sUp3ECs>

CHARACTERS

- Cio-Cio-San, aka "Butterfly", young and idealistic Japanese geisha
- B.F. Pinkerton, Lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, dashing but callous, seeking pleasure wherever he can
- Suzuki, maid to Cio-cio-San, faithful and empathetic, loyal to Cio-Cio-San throughout
- Sharpless, the United States Counsel at Nagasaki, a voice of restraint and sympathy
- Goro, a marriage broker
- Prince Yamadori, Cio-Cio-San's suitor
- Trouble, Cio-Cio-San's child, son of Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton
- Kate Pinkerton, Pinkerton's new American wife

WHAT HAPPENS?

- Cio-Cio-San renounces her family to marry Pinkerton, an American naval officer.
- Pinkerton returns to America, leaving Butterfly and her servant Suzuki, who are barely making ends meet. Three years pass. Cio-cio-San has Pinkerton's son, Trouble.
- Prince Yamadori arrives and asks Butterfly to marry him. Goro and Sharpless encourage Butterfly to accept Prince Yamadori's offer.
- Pinkerton returns, but not alone. He is accompanied by Kate, his new American wife.
- Butterfly stabs herself, exclaiming that "one shall die with honor who no longer can live with honor."

YOU'LL WANT TO SEE THIS SHOW IF...

- you love dramatic, lush and beautiful music, expertly performed by talented singers and instrumentalists.
- You want to experience one of the most beloved operas of all time!
- You like a compelling story with a vulnerable, yet courageous heroine.