



Giacomo Puccini

Madama Butterfly



The Atlanta Opera Student Shorts

Thursday, October 9, 2008 at The Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre

Music by Giacomo Puccini • Libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica • Sung in Italian with English supertitles
Directed by Bernard Uzan • Conducted by Joseph Rescigno • Designed by Jun Kaneko



THE ATLANTA OPERA

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WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE OPERA

Are you unsure about how to act, what to wear or what you are going to see at the Opera? You are not the only one! Many others, students and adults, are nervous about their first trip to the opera. Read the truth behind some of the most popular opera myths and see if they answer some of your questions about the opera as well!

MYTH #1 OPERA IS BORING AND STUFFY.

Not true! Operas tell some of the most interesting, scandalous, and beautiful stories of all time. It is not unusual to find love triangles, murders, fatal illnesses, and messages from beyond the grave. It's like *Days of Our Lives* set to music!

MYTH #2 OPERA IS SUNG IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE SO I WON'T UNDERSTAND THE STORY.

We can help! It is true that many operas, like *Madama Butterfly*, are sung in languages other than English. Since most people in our audience do not speak Italian, we project English translations, called *supertitles*, of the opera on screens above the stage. This way, you can follow along even if you do not understand the language. You also can read the synopsis of the opera before you arrive. Knowing the story will also help you follow along.

MYTH #3 I NEED TO WEAR A TUXEDO OR A BALL GOWN TO THE OPERA.

While many people like to dress up when they go to the opera, it is definitely not required. Wear something that makes you feel comfortable, but remember that it is a special event and you may want to wear something a little nicer than ripped jeans and a sweatshirt!

MYTH #4 IF I'M A FEW MINUTES LATE, NO ONE WILL CARE. AFTER ALL THE OPERA IS SO LONG, IT DOESN'T MATTER IF I MISS THE FIRST FEW MINUTES.

You don't want to miss the beginning! At most opera houses, the ushers will not seat you if you arrive after the opera has begun, as it is disturbing to the rest of the audience and the performers. If you arrive late, you may need to wait until after the first act before you can enter the hall. And a lot happens in the first act!

HERE ARE A FEW MORE TIPS TO MAKE YOUR TRIP TO THE OPERA MORE COMFORTABLE.

1. Remember: the opera is a live performance. You can hear the performers on stage and that means they can hear you too! Please refrain from talking or whispering during the opera. It is distracting to others around you as well as to the singers. Please do not leave your seat during the performance. This performance of *Madama Butterfly* will be one hour with no intermission.
2. If you have them, please turn off all cell phones, pagers, beeping watches and anything else that may go "beep" in the night!
3. Please do not take photographs or video or audio recordings of the performance.
4. After the orchestra has tuned, the auditorium will become quiet. The conductor, or maestro, will then enter the pit. It is acceptable (and appreciated) to applaud the maestro's entrance. After all, he/she worked very hard to bring this performance to life!
5. If you like what you have seen and heard, let the performers know! It is okay to applaud at the end of songs, called arias, and at the end of a scene. If you *really* liked what you heard, call out "bravo" (to the men on stage), "brava" (to the women) and "bravi" (for all on stage). And of course, a standing ovation is always welcome!

Madama Butterfly

SYNOPSIS...

Act I

A Japanese House above Nagasaki Harbor

After a brief orchestral prelude, we see the American naval officer, **Lieutenant Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton** and the marriage broker, **Goro**. Pinkerton has just leased the house for 999 years, with the option to cancel on one month notice, and plans to live there with his new bride, **Cio-Cio-San (Madama Butterfly)**, a geisha. While they wait for the bridal party to arrive, Goro shows the Lieutenant around the house and introduces him to the three servants. Soon the American Consul, **Sharpless**, arrives, out of breath from the steep climb on a hot day. As the men have a drink, Pinkerton explains the terms of his lease and boasts of the life of the Yankee who travels all over the world enjoying the best of each country, including its women. He adds that he will marry in the "Japanese fashion", again for 999 years, with the option of an annulment every month. Sharpless is disturbed by this and warns him that Cio-Cio-San may take the marriage seriously. Pinkerton laughs it off, and toasts the day on which he will have a *real* marriage, with an American wife.

Cio-Cio-San, her bridesmaids, and her relatives arrive. Sharpless finds that the bride is only fifteen years old, that her family has come on hard times, so she had to earn her living as a geisha. She shows Pinkerton the few treasures she has brought with her, the most precious being the knife with which her father committed suicide. She also has some *Ottoki*, or small figurines representing the souls of her ancestors. However, she confides, she has been to the Christian mission in Nagasaki and renounced her Buddhist faith; she throws the *Ottoki* away.

The wedding ceremony takes place, supervised by the **Imperial Commissioner** and the **Imperial Registrar**. As the guests toast the newly married couple, a dramatic figure bursts on the scene: It is Cio-Cio-San's uncle, the **Bonze**, who is a Buddhist priest, furious on learning that she has changed her religion. He curses her and demands that her friends and relatives renounce her. As they all leave, Pinkerton comforts his sobbing bride. Helped by her maid, **Suzuki**, Cio-Cio-San changes into her white night attire and joins Pinkerton in the moon-lit garden where they sing a soaring duet.

Act II

Inside Cio-Cio-San's house, three years later

Suzuki, Cio-Cio-San's maid, prays to Buddha for Pinkerton's return and to an end to her mistress's unhappiness. Pinkerton has long since been recalled to America, promising to return "when the robins nest". Cio-Cio-San, refusing to listen to Suzuki's misgivings, sings the aria "*Un bel di*" (One fine day) in which she expresses her certainty that her husband will soon come back.

Sharpless arrives with a letter from Pinkerton in which he is told that Pinkerton will soon be returning with his "real" American wife, and asks Sharpless to tell Cio-Cio-San. Just the sight of the letter throws Cio-Cio-San into such a transport of joy that he cannot bring himself to relay the news to her. They are interrupted by the appearance of Prince Yamadori, a new suitor that Goro has been pressing on Cio-Cio-San. She indignantly asserts that she is already married, and that Pinkerton's leaving does not constitute divorce. After the Prince has departed, Sharpless asks Cio-Cio-San what she would do if Pinkerton never returned. She replies that she might go back to her life as a geisha, but she would rather die. Rushing into another room, she emerges carrying her fair-haired, blue-eyed son, **Trouble**, whose name will be changed to Joy when his

MEET THE COMPOSER...

Giacomo Puccini (1858 – 1924)

Giacomo Puccini was born in Lucca, Italy on December 22, 1858. Puccini's was fifth in a family of seven girls and two boys. His father died when he was a young boy, leaving his mother to care for the Giacomo and his six siblings.

They had very little money, but his mother had great dreams for Giacomo. She arranged for his uncle, Fortunato Magi, to give him music lessons. Giacomo began work at age 11 as a church organist to contribute to the family's finances, and later earned money by teaching music and playing in Lucca's taverns. Puccini saw his first opera when he was 18 years old. Too poor for train fare, he walked 20 miles to see Verdi's *Aida*, and it totally changed his life. He knew that he would not become a church musician like his father, but would turn to opera. He made plans to move to Milan, the center of Italian opera and the home of La Scala, the most famous opera house in Italy. Giacomo enrolled in the Milan Conservatory and began meeting the most influential people in the opera business, slowly working his way up the career ladder. During this time, Puccini lived the life of a poor student. He shared an apartment with two other artists, always scraping for money.

Puccini could not have succeeded without the friendship of Giulio Ricordi, the most important publisher in Italy. Ricordi saw great promise in Puccini, and believed he would become a great opera composer. He paid Puccini a stipend for several years and supported his early attempts at writing opera. His faith in Puccini was paid back beyond the wildest expectations. The Ricordi publishing house would own the performance rights to four of the most popular operas ever written: ***La Bohème*, *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *Turandot*.**

In 1893, at age 35, Puccini premiered his first successful opera, *Manon Lescaut*. It launched his career and made him a front runner in the search for a successor to the great Giuseppe Verdi. Then followed two big hits, *La Bohème* in 1896 and *Tosca* in 1900. After their success, Puccini was in the limelight, overseeing productions of his operas in Europe's greatest theaters. When Verdi died in 1901, Puccini became the future of Italian opera, and he knew that the opera world would expect nothing but the best. His next opera, *Madama Butterfly*, had to be a success.

Madama Butterfly did become a huge success, but it cost Puccini seven years of strife. The opera was cursed with delays, a car accident which severely injured Puccini, a disastrous premiere, and five revisions. In the end, Puccini triumphed with one of the world's most popular operas.

With three tremendous successes behind him and a seat at the top of the opera world, Puccini entered a long period of creative struggling, experimentation, and limited successes. He took a six-year hiatus following *Madama Butterfly*, due in part to the suicide of one of his personal servants and an ensuing court battle. After the buzz died down, Puccini returned to the music world premiering *La Fanciulla del West* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City in 1910. Though it had a lukewarm reception by American audiences, it remains a staple in Italian opera houses.

He would live another 17 years and compose five more operas but only one, *Turandot*, would match the fame of his "big three".

MEET THE CONDUCTOR...

Joseph Rescigno

Atlanta Opera Debut: *Pagliacci*/Carmina Burana, 2006-2007

Joseph Rescigno has performed symphony and opera for over 50 companies on four continents. As Artistic Advisor and Principal Conductor of the Florentine Opera (Milwaukee, WI), where he recently completed his 25th season, Rescigno has conducted some of the more challenging repertory the company has mounted, including *Elektra*, *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Tristan und Isolde*, and *Die Walküre*, and has conducted subscription concerts for the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra. Rescigno has meanwhile maintained a busy guest conducting schedule on the podiums of such companies as the Lyric Opera of Chicago, Washington National Opera, Hungarian State Opera in Budapest, Opera Theater of St. Louis, Seattle Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Vancouver Opera, Opéra de Marseille, and L'Opéra de Montreal.

A proven orchestra-builder, Maestro Rescigno served as Artistic Director of Orchestre Métropolitain in Montreal for four years. With that orchestra and others, he has performed symphonies and concertos from the baroque to the modern era, sometimes conducting from the keyboard in works from the earlier eras. In symphony halls Rescigno has conducted masterworks of the choral literature such as Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Verdi's Requiem, Dvorak's Stabat Mater, Mozart's Mass in C Minor, and Orff's Carmina Burana.

Mr. Rescigno is a native New Yorker and comes from a long line of musicians on both sides of his family. His uncle is the prominent conductor Nicola Rescigno, a founder of both the Dallas and Chicago opera companies. He earned his Master of Music in piano from the Manhattan School of Music, where he studied with composer Nicholas Flagello, among others. He did his undergraduate work in philosophy at Fordham University (Phi Beta Kappa), with a year in Rome where he studied at Università Gregoriana and privately at Santa Cecilia.

MEET THE DIRECTOR...

Bernard Uzan

Atlanta Opera Debut: *Roméo and Juliet*, 2006-2007

Bernard Uzan's extensive background in the arts includes success as general director, artistic director, stage director, librettist, designer, actor, novelist, and most recently an artists' manager. As a stage director and a producer, his productions have graced the stages of 50 opera companies in North America, France, Italy, Switzerland, and South America with more than 300 productions. He has co-designed more than 75 productions that continue to be seen throughout the world. As a librettist and stage director, Mr. Uzan most recently collaborated with composer David Di Chiera and conductor Mark Flint on the new production of *Cyrano*, which made its world premiere at the Michigan Opera Theatre and Opera Company of Philadelphia to acclaim.

A native of France, Mr. Uzan is a graduate of the University of Paris, with Ph.D.s in Literature, Theatrical Studies and in Philosophy. He began his career in the theater as an actor and director, and appeared in leading theaters throughout Europe. He emigrated to the U.S., where he established French Theater in America, which toured for ten years giving 200 performances

A HISTORY OF OPERA IN ATLANTA

Opera has been beloved in Atlanta since 1866! Though there hasn't always been a local opera company, audience members throughout Atlanta have been enjoying opera for over 137 years.

It began when the Ghioni and Sussini Grand Italian Opera Company presented three operas in Atlanta in October 1866. They were well received and soon after, small touring companies began to bring full-length operas to Atlanta. When there wasn't a touring opera company in town, people would throw parties where they could entertain, often with musical presentations. Even without the presence of an opera in town, audience appreciation for opera was growing!

In 1910, New York's Metropolitan Opera first brought its opera tour to Atlanta. By this time, Atlantans were in love with opera. Once a year, for a full week during spring, people flocked to the city to see the Metropolitan Opera's wonderful performances and enjoy the many parties that were hosted throughout the city in celebration of the operas' arrival. It was a magnificent time! The opera was *the* place to see and to be seen, with people crowding the lobbies and balconies. This continued for nearly seven decades, with the exception of 1931-1939, when the Metropolitan was unable to tour due to the Depression.

Soon, citizens of Atlanta began to yearn for their own opera company, to represent and support local talent, as well as to provide performances throughout the year, instead of only once in the spring. Several smaller, local opera companies began to crop up. With the arrival of local opera companies, and with troubles of its own, the Metropolitan Opera discontinued its nationwide tour, giving its last Atlanta performance in 1986.

In 1980, The Atlanta Civic Opera was born as a result of two smaller companies merging together, the Atlanta Lyric Opera and the Georgia Opera. Since then, the company has changed and grown tremendously!

The Atlanta Opera was the first resident company in the new Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre upon completion of the facility in fall 2007. Patrons and performers alike are extremely happy with the new theater, acoustically designed for opera.

Besides our mainstage performances, The Atlanta Opera has many services to offer. There are balls and galas to attend, dinners, concerts, opera classes and talks. The Atlanta Opera Studio, founded in 1980, brings children's opera (complete with sets and costumes) opera workshops and master classes to schools throughout the state in an effort to teach students about opera.

The Atlanta Opera strives to present quality opera productions, while educating and fostering a sense of appreciation for the opera within the community. So long as there are those in Atlanta who love music and the art of opera, we can continue to perform and to grow!

SPECIAL THANKS

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Contributors

Portions of this education guide have been contributed by the following opera companies:

Fort Worth Opera
San Diego Opera
Hawaii Opera Theatre

OPERA: THEN AND NOW

INTRODUCTION

Opera combines all of the fine arts: music, drama, visual art, and dance. The performance of an opera includes many craftspeople: costume designers, seamstresses, stagehands, makeup artists and wigmakers; the musicians in the orchestra, the singers in the chorus, and the dancers on stage; the artistic director, stage director and choreographer; the engineers running the computers and lighting. How have major inventions over the centuries affected the opera performances we see? Let's find out!

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

If so many operas are in **foreign languages** how can we understand the story, the humor, or the dramatic situations in which the characters find themselves? Throughout history, on-stage conventions have helped audiences understand the stories of their favorite operas. Period **costumes**, magnificent **stage sets** and elaborate **dances** describe the time and place in which the opera is set. The **stage direction** and **choreography** communicate elements of the story. The **music** conveys emotions and the subtexts of the story. Many opera companies, however, offer their audiences a little more help, with the aid of modern technology. Using large screens above or beside the stage, English translations are projected. These **Supertitles** do not include every word that is sung, but enough to understand the story. As the technology advances, opera companies have begun to move from using slide projectors to computers to project the Supertitles onto the screens.

THE SINGERS

Over the years, the **singers** have changed, too! In early Italian operas, singers did very little acting on stage, focusing on showcasing their voices. Operas often resembled concerts, more than plays. By Mozart's time in the late 18th century, however, singers were encouraged to play out the action in the story, adding the dramatic element that we see on stage today. At that time, the singers sometimes did not always "look the part" they were singing. The singers sometimes did not look like princesses or lovely young maidens, and the prince may not have looked young and handsome. The **bel canto** style of singing, which literally means "beautiful singing," was favored in Italian opera, especially in the operas of Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti. This style focuses on the voice as the most important expressive element in the opera. It is more important than the words and even the orchestra. In later operas by Wagner and Berlioz, the orchestra became a partner with the singers, rather than an accompanist. This meant that the singers had to produce even more power to be heard over a large, rich symphonic orchestra.

THE ORCHESTRA

And what about the huge **orchestra** in the pit? The orchestra provides a framework for the opera by playing recurring themes and providing dramatic clues to the drama while accompanying the singing. But the orchestra wasn't always as we see it today. In the 17th century, some operas were intended for entertainment at private parties, primarily at weddings (Monteverdi's *Orfeo* begins with a wedding scene). The principal accompanying instruments were a **continuo** (a small organ) or **harpsichord** and a few **viols** (stringed instruments). In the 18th century, Mozart began to write his operas for an orchestra of 20 musicians and

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

IT'S ALL IN HOW YOU SAY IT!

Objective: Students will learn about different characteristics through experimenting with vocal interpretations. Students will then analyze character traits of Cio-Cio-San and Lieutenant Pinkerton from the opera *Madama Butterfly*.

Materials: List of Characteristics, *Madama Butterfly* Student Short synopsis.

I. CHARACTERIZING THROUGH VOCALIZATION

When trying to characterize people in books or plays, we not only look at what they say, but we listen to how they say it. Sometimes, the inflection in the voice can change the meaning of a simple sentence. In opera or musical theater, the inflection can be dictated through the musical line: for example, an "ah" sung in a very high register and very loud could be an exclamation of fear or surprise, while the same "ah" sung in a low register and quietly could be a sigh or contentment or sadness.

- A. Have your students take a simple phrase like "Well, that's the way it is" or "I don't know about that" or a sentence of your choosing, and say it with different inflections to change the meaning. Students may refer to the character list to give them ideas about how to deliver the line. Remember that more than one characteristic can fit an inflection. Go around the room and have each student deliver a line choosing a characteristic and then discuss the different ways to say it.
- B. Write a brief, 4-8 line dialogue between two characters. (Use simple, emotion-neutral statements such as "Hello. How are you? Some weather we're having.") Have pairs of students interpret and deliver this same dialogue. Discuss how each group interpreted and delivered the scene differently. What did the different interpretations tell us about the relationship between the characters, their moods, their characters, etc.
- C. On the blackboard, list the different emotions the students demonstrated and discuss how these emotions could help them make judgments about different individual's character.

II. CHARACTER ANALYSIS

When going to see an opera that is in another language, it is important for the students to know the story before they get to the theater so they can understand what's going on onstage. Knowing the characters and how they react to one another is an important aspect of understanding a story.

- A. Have students read the synopsis of *Madama Butterfly*. Discuss the students' impressions of the characters and storyline. Ask the students to predict how Puccini may portray the character traits and storyline through music. What character traits might he accentuate? How might those traits be illustrated by the performers?

TOPICS FOR WRITING AND DISCUSSION

1. Should Cio-Cio-San have married Prince Yamadori? Why or why not?
2. What are the differences between Pinkerton's and Cio-Cio-San's attitudes about their marriage?
3. What was Cio-Cio-San's life like before she married? After she married?
4. In *Madama Butterfly*, Cio-Cio-San believes that Pinkerton will come back when everyone else tells her he will not. Have you ever believed that something would happen when many other people told you that it wouldn't? Did you prove everyone else wrong? How did you feel? Describe the situation.
5. What would you have liked or disliked about living in Japan if you had lived there at the time of *Madama Butterfly*? What about now?

Characters – Are they interesting and believable? Are their actions, thoughts, and speeches consistent?

Conflict – What are the conflicts that are established? How are they resolved?

- Conflict between Pinkerton and Cio-Cio-San's backgrounds and religions
- Conflict between Cio-Cio-San and her family, especially the Bonze
- Conflict between Cio-Cio-San and Suzuki as to whether or not Pinkerton will return
- Conflict between Suzuki and the Americans who want her help in convincing Cio-Cio-San to give up her child

Climax – To what climax does the conflict lead? How effective is it?

Conclusion – How well does the conclusion work? Is it consistent with the characters and the conflicts? Is it believable and satisfying?

Context – What is the setting, historical, physical, and emotional? Do the sets and costumes communicate the proper context?

Discuss the following **feelings** displayed by characters in *Madama Butterfly*.

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| <u>Love</u> | Cio-Cio-San's love for Pinkerton Cio-Cio-San's love for her child Differences between love (Cio-Cio-San) and infatuation (Pinkerton) |
| <u>Hope</u> | Cio-Cio-San's hope that Pinkerton will return |
| <u>Sadness</u> | When Cio-Cio-San's family abandons her When Suzuki believes that Pinkerton will not return |
| <u>Joy</u> | When Cio-Cio-San marries Pinkerton When Cio-Cio-San sights Pinkerton's ship |
| <u>Despair</u> | When Cio-Cio-San realizes she must give up her child When Cio-Cio-San gives up her child |
| <u>Pride</u> | When Cio-Cio-San shows Sharpless her child When Cio-Cio-San uses her father's dagger to commit suicide |

RESEARCH TOPICS FOR UPPER GRADES

1. History of the relationship between Japan and the United States. Include Admiral Perry and his role in opening Japan to the West.

