

The Jerusalem Opera Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra



Conductor: Omer Arieli | Stage Director: Gabriele Ribis



Madama Butterfly

By Giacomo Puccini Libretto: Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa

November 2024







THE JERUSALEM FOUNDATION מפשת מבי במונה מפירו ליבו שלים The opera "Madama Butterfly" was inspired by a short story of the same name by John Luther Long from 1898. The story was based on the French novel Madame Chrysanthème (1887) by Pierre Loti and was adapted into a play by David Belasco. Puccini, who watched Belasco's play in London in 1900, was captivated by the touching story of Cio-Cio-San, a sensitive and vulnerable Japanese girl who marries Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton, a heartless American naval officer, and is subsequently abandoned by him.

(It should be noted that some scholars claim such events actually took place in Nagasaki at the end of the 19th century).

The composition of the opera took four years. Its premiere took place in February 1904 at La Scala in Milan. Madama Butterfly is one of the most beloved operas in the international repertoire and is regularly performed on stages of opera houses around the world.

The original story is contemporary with Puccini's life, but this production of the Jerusalem Opera places the plot in Nagasaki, in the aftermath of its destruction by the atom bombs at the end of World War II.

Its performance today marks the centenary of the death of G. Puccini in November 1924.



Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge our appreciation over the years to:

Our patrons and the friends of the Jerusalem Opera: Susan Fried, Zakai Ben Chaim, Julie and Jacob Schorr (Gold Sponsors), Murray Newman and Harry Koster, Arnold and Victoria Kisch, Haya and Jaakov Zerem, Susan and Jacques Gorlin, Yehuda and Nurit Rosenberg, Yaacov and Ora Ringel, Adina and Jonathan Halevy, Leah and Moshe Felber, Rocky and Heshie Billet, Dina Avni, Peter Kals, Willy S. Kals, Deborah Goldstein, Yair and Ayala Marocco, Anat Shabo-Perlmutter, Ephraim Abramsohn, Zvi and Yehudith Ohrbach.

Our volunteers: Debbie Azran, Francoise Cafri, Gulie Chamiel, Shlomo Fox, Pnina Yaish, Joe Weizman, Tuvia Blubstein, Peter Kals, Wendy Gardner.

All the opera lovers, patrons and friends of the Jerusalem Opera, who prefer to remain anonymous, whose generous donations and constant support have enabled us to realize the dream of creating and sustaining opera performances in Jerusalem.

In living memory of Thomas "Yaakov" Buchler - "For the ones who bloom in the bitter snow, we raise our cup to them..." Zakai Ben Chaim, Elyan Ben Chaim and Yaron Shiloh.

The Jerusalem Opera was first established in November 2011 with the main goals of presenting opera productions of the highest quality in Jerusalem and promoting Israeli artists.

The Jerusalem Opera's main productions are: the operas by W.A Mozart "Don Giovanni", "The Marriage of Figaro", "The Magic Flute", "Così fan tutte", as well as the operas by G. Puccini "Madame Butterfly" and "Il tabarro", G. Rossini "The Barber of Seville", E. Humperdinck "Hansel and Gretel", G. Verdi "Rigoletto" and "La Traviata", G. Donizetti "L'elisir d'amore", "The Diary of Anne Frank" by G. Frid.

J. Haydn "La Canterina", C. Gounod "La Colombe", the French operettas "Le mariage aux lanternes" by Jacques Offenbach and "Une éducation manquée" by Emmanuel Chabrier, "La Contadina" by J. Hasse, "Armida and Rinaldo" by G. Sarti. All – an Israeli premiere.

The productions of the Jerusalem Opera are staged to highly professional standards and enjoy enthusiastic response from both public and critics.

The Jerusalem Opera receives financial support from the Jerusalem Municipality and from the Israel Ministry of Culture and Sport. However, the future of this inspirational and important initiative depends on the generosity of supporters of culture and others who regard opera as an important piece in the cultural mosaic of Jerusalem, the capital city of Israel.

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About "Madama Butterfly"

Before becoming one of the world's most beloved operas, Madama Butterfly went through five different versions by Puccini. The original two-act version, premiered on 17 February 1904 at La Scala in Milan, was poorly received by the audiences. Puccini then revised the score, splitting the second act into two, with the Humming Chorus bridging the new Act II and Act III. The revised version premiered in May 1904 and was an instant success. The most commonly performed version today is Puccini's fifth and final revision from 1907.

The Star-Spangled Banner

Contemporary listeners might be surprised to hear the national anthem of the United States quoted more than once in Madama Butterfly. In Puccini's time, however, the song was known as the anthem of the US Navy. Adopted by the Navy in 1889, it only became the official national anthem by a congressional act signed by President Herbert Hoover in March 1931. Lieutenant Pinkerton's aria 'Dovunque al mondo' takes its first two bars directly from the anthem, whereas 'O say, can you see...' is used in later arias by both Pinkerton and Butterfly herself.

The use of the Navy anthem is of great significance: it alludes to the stereotypical behavior of sailors, who were known for forming superficial and temporary relationships with women in various ports, without regard for the impact on the women they abandoned when they sailed away. Through the use of the Navy anthem, Puccini highlights Pinkerton's casual and opportunistic attitude toward his marriage to Butterfly, as if to tell us that this is what one should expect from a sailor.

Puccini uses the anthem in the same aria ('Dovunque al mondo') in which Pinkerton describes to Sharpless the wandering Yankee, who drops anchor as he pleases and takes a girl at every port he arrives at:

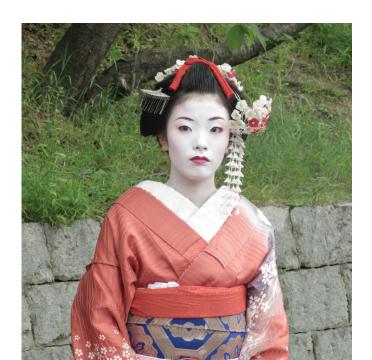
Pinkerton: Life does not satisfy him unless he can claim for his own the flowers of every shore ...

Sharpless: It's a simple, familiar idea ...

Pinkerton: ... the love of every pretty girl.

P: La vita ei non appaga se non fa suo tesor i fiori d'ogni plaga . . . Sha: È un facile vangelo . . . P: d'ogni bella gli amor

Later, Pinkerton raises a toast with Sharpless to his marriage, openly stating that his real intention is to eventually marry an American girl in a true marriage.



Cio-Cio-San - Weakness or Courage?

Cio-Cio-San (Butterfly) is a young girl, just fifteen years old, from a poor family. Her marriage to Pinkerton was arranged by the matchmaker Goro with the consent of her family. Some say she was a victim of their exploitation and view her as a weak figure who does not take control of her fate but is rather swept along by events until she is forced to abandon her son and end her life. But is this really the case?

In the opera, Butterfly is often portrayed as fragile and naive, but all her actions and deeds demonstrate determination and strength.

At the end of the first act she tells Pinkerton:

"They say that beyond the sea, when a butterfly falls into the hands of a man, it is pierced with a pin and pinned to a board!"

Dicon ch'oltre mare se cade in man dell'uom ogni farfalla d'uno spillo è trafitta ed in tavola infitta!

This sentence accurately describes her character: she is completely clear-headed and uses the chilling metaphor of the butterfly to express her deep fears and vulnerability. She is aware of the cultural differences between herself and Pinkerton, knowing that Pinkerton sees her as temporary property or as a passing pleasure, not as a true partner, and thus she is anxious about her fate.

All of Butterfly's actions stem from her own choices, and she demonstrates increasing strength as the opera progresses: she chooses to take the risk and marry Pinkerton despite knowing the differences between them, which shows her determination to take control of her destiny; she decides to leave her family for him and converts to his religion, paying a heavy personal price; she bravely faces the criticism of her family; and she rejects Yamadori and, as a result, perhaps other potential suitors.

In her wonderful aria in the second act – "One Fine Day" ("Un bel di") – she expresses her loyalty to Pinkerton and her absolute devotion to the path she has chosen, even if it is fraught with difficulties.

Her farewell aria is noble and expresses unconditional love for her son. In her decision to abandon her son and give him to Pinkerton, she is not yielding to Pinkerton's request, but rather making an active, thoughtful choice, thereby ensuring a better future for her son, in the land and culture she has chosen, while leaving him with the memory of a mother strong enough to sacrifice herself for him. When all hope is lost, she chooses death with dignity, the death her father bequeathed her. She prefers death to living a life of disgrace, guided by the same sense of self-respect that has driven her throughout the opera.

Thus, Butterfly is not a passive victim of her fate but a character who makes difficult and brave decisions, driven by love, a sense of duty, and honour. Her strength comes from her unwavering commitment to the choices she has made, and she earns the audience's sympathy not out of pity, but because, despite her disadvantaged position, she is the strongest character in the opera.

Synopsis

Act I

Japan. Lieutenant Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton of the U.S. Navy inspects a house overlooking Nagasaki harbor, leased from a marriage broker, Goro. The house includes three servants and a geisha wife, Cio-Cio-San, also known as Madam Butterfly. The lease is for 999 years, with monthly renewals.

The American consul, Sharpless, arrives, and Pinkerton shares his carefree philosophy of life, unsure if his feelings for Butterfly are genuine love or just a whim. He intends to marry Butterfly. Despite Sharpless's warning that Butterfly may view the marriage seriously, Pinkerton dismisses the concerns, stating he will eventually marry a real American wife.

Butterfly arrives with her friends for the ceremony. She admits she is 15 and from a once-prominent family that has fallen on hard times, forcing her to become a geisha. She quietly reveals she has visited a Christian mission and intends to adopt her husband's religion. After the marriage, her uncle, the Bonze, arrives and curses her for abandoning her ancestral faith. Pinkerton orders everyone to leave, and the relatives denounce Butterfly. Pinkerton comforts her, and later, they meet in the garden and make love.

Act II

Six years have passed since Pinkerton sailed back to the United States. Cio-Cio-San awaits her husband's return at her home. Suzuki prays to the gods for help, but Butterfly berates her for believing in lazy Japanese gods rather than in Pinkerton's promise to return one day. Sharpless appears with a letter from Pinkerton, but before he can read it to Butterfly, Goro arrives with the latest suitor, the wealthy Prince Yamadori. Butterfly politely serves the guests tea but insists she is not available for marriage and – her American husband has not deserted her. She dismisses Goro and Yamadori.

Sharpless attempts to read Pinkerton's letter and suggests that perhaps Butterfly should reconsider Yamadori's offer. In response, she presents the consul with the young son she has had by Pinkerton. She says that his name is "Sorrow," but when his father returns, he will be called "Joy." Sharpless is too upset to tell her more of the letter's contents. He leaves, promising to tell Pinkerton of the child. A cannon shot in the harbor announces the arrival of a ship – it is Pinkerton's. Overjoyed, Butterfly joins Suzuki in decorating the house with flowers from the garden. Night falls, and Butterfly, Suzuki, and the child settle into a vigil watching over the harbor.

Act III

Dawn breaks, and Suzuki insists that Butterfly get some sleep. Butterfly carries the child into the house. Sharpless appears with Pinkerton and Kate, Pinkerton's new wife. Suzuki realizes who the American woman is and agrees to help break the news to Butterfly. Pinkerton is overcome with quilt and runs from the scene, pausing to remember his days in the little house. Cio-Cio-San rushes in hoping to find Pinkerton, but sees Kate instead. Grasping the situation, she agrees to give up her son but insists Pinkerton return for him. Dismissing everyone, Butterfly takes out the dagger with which her father committed suicide, choosing to die with honor rather than live in shame. She is interrupted momentarily when the child comes in, but Butterfly says to him goodbye and blindfolds him. She stabs herself as Pinkerton arrives, calling out for her.



Gabriele Ribis - Stage Director: Staging concept

Puccini's masterpiece often risks being reduced to a simple postcard depiction of Japan. However, I believe that when the great Italian composer decided to adapt David Belasco's play into an opera, he was primarily captivated by the character of the protagonist—by her unwavering faith in her "husband" and, above all, in love.

Cio-Cio-San appears almost oblivious to what is happening around her, refusing to listen to anyone, which ultimately leads to her near-total isolation. My inspiration for this production comes from the history of war brides—those women who, after World War II, married American soldiers and moved to their husbands' countries, leaving everything behind. In Japan alone, there were about 45,000 such women. Cio-Cio-San could easily have been one of them. She was ready to sacrifice everything for Pinkerton, dreaming of a new life in America.

In the original libretto, Cio-Cio-San's most offensive act is her conversion to Christianity, which leads to her repudiation by her relatives, led by Uncle Bonzo. For the war brides, the "betrayal" was likely seen as more political—a rejection of their country after a devastating defeat, which was still linked to religion, as the emperor was considered a god.

In my staging, I aim to highlight Cio-Cio-San's isolation and the difficult choices that led her to that point, showing once again how vastly different the motivations of love are, compared to those of politics and war.

Participants

Omer Arieli Musical Director and Conductor

Gabriele Ribis Stage Director

Singers

Olga Senderskaya soprano Cio Cio San – Butterfly

Noa Hope Sion mezzo soprano Suzuki

Ivan Defabiani tenorB.F. PinkertonShahaf Regev baritoneSharpless

Marc Shaimer tenorGoroDima Negrimovskii bassBonzo

Sergey Bartenev tenorPrince YamadoriLev Elgardt bassIl Commissario;

L'ufficiale del registro

David Kovensky bassYakusidéRomi Selig sopranoCousinHerut Ishlach mezzo sopranoMother;

Kate Pinkerton

Wendy Gardner mezzo soprano Aunt Miles Sendersky child Dolore

Chorus Members

Romi Selig, Seerin Tarbush, Angelina Tolstikova, Wendy Gardner, Herut Ishlach, Darina Chizhik, Hedva Schenkolewski, Bar Sharlin, Marc Shaimer, Sergey Bertenev, Neta Modlinger, David Kovensky.

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Omer Arieli Musical Director, Conductor

Conducted The Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra, The Dortmunder Philharmoniker, The American Symphony Orchestra, The Orchestra Maderna, and most Israeli orchestras.

Worked as coach and conductor in many theatres and festivals in Austria, Germany and Italy.

The winner of first prize in international competitions: "Belvedere" – Vienna (2002), and in EAJC – Paris (2005).

Lecturer at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, where he teaches different courses.

Conductor and Music Director of the "Jerusalem Amateur Orchestra" and the "Jerusalem Oratorio Choir".



Gabriele Ribis Stage Director

Has appeared in major opera houses such as Opera di Roma, Florence, Venice, Bologna, Arena di Verona, and others. His international career includes opera houses in Spain, Germany, Italy, Japan, Greece and Russia. He is a regular guest at Opéra Montecarlo and invited to important opera houses such as Zurich Opera, the Israeli Opera, Festival of Perelada (Spain), Les Chorégies d'Orange (France), National Theatres of Prague (Czech Republic), Rijeka (Croatia), Kazan (Russia) and Maribor (Slovenia) and more. His leading roles include the title role in Mozart's "Don Giovanni"; Count Almaviva in "The Marriage of Figaro"; Don Alfonso in "Così Fan Tutte"; Danilo in Lehar's "The Merry Widow"; Belcore and Dulcamara in Rossini's "The Elixir of Love"; Figaro and Bartolo in "The Barber of Sevilla"; Germont in Verdi's "La Traviata"; Marcello in Puccini's "La Bohème"; Sharpless in "Madame Butterfly"; Escamillo in Bizet's "Carmen", among others.

He is often requested to perform contemporary repertoire and premiered twice in the role of Mamoud in "The Death of Klinghoffer" by John Adams in Italy and the Czech Republic.

As a concert performer he has sung programs of sacred music, French and German Lieder.

As Stage Director he directed a number of operas, among them – "Don Giovanni" and "Madama Butterfly". At the Jerusalem Opera he directed "Madame Butterfly", "Rigoletto", "La Contadina", "Don Giovanni" and "La Canterina".

Director of the "Piccolo" opera festival in northern Italy – Friuli Venezia Giulia, and of the Borderless Opera event, between Italy and Slovenia.



Olga Zakrevska, folgastudio.com

Olga Senderskaya soprano

Born in Russia, Olga studied in the Sobinov Music College and at the St. Petersburg Conservatoire. She joined the Mariinsky Theatre Academy of Young Singers under Larissa Gergieva.

She took masterclasses with Elena Obraztsova. Studied in Paris with Ileana Cotrubas.

Was a member of the Artistas de la Centre De Perfeccionament Placido Domingo at the Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia in Valencia, and was invited to be part of the Artists of the Accademia Rossiniana, Rossini Opera Festival in Pesaro.

Olga won an award in the Stanhammar International Singing Competition in Norchoping, Sweden, and first prize in the Gerda Lissner Opera Competition in New York.

Among her operatic performances are: Marfa in "The Tzar's Bride" by Rimsky-Korsakov; Mathilde in Rossini's "Guillaume Tell"; the title role of Rossini's "Semiramide"; Amaltea in Rossini's "Mose in Egitto"; Adele in Richard Strauss' "Die Fledermaus"; Micaela in Bizet's "Carmen"; Donna Anna In Mozart's "Don Giovanni", Violetta in Verdi's "La traviata", Mimi in Puccini's "La Bohème" and others.

She appeared in numerous concert performances in Israel and abroad. Her vocal repertoire includes: soprano solo in "The Sea Symphony" by Ralph Vaughan Williams, Rossini's "Petite Messe Solennelle", Beethoven's 9th Symphony, Mahler's 4th Symphony.

Performs often with the Jerusalem Opera.

She released a debut Lieder CD on the MSR classic label in the USA.

Ivan Defabiani tenor

Lyric tenor, born 1986 in Borgosesia, Italy. He studied with William Matteuzzi and graduated in opera singing at the Conservatory "G. Verdi" in Milan, specializing with Gianfranco Cecchele.

Defabiani made his operatic debut as Fritz in Mascagni's "L'Amico Fritz" under Leo Nucci and Donato Renzetti, and was later selected by Riccardo Muti for the Italian Opera Academy. He debuted as Alfredo in Verdi's "La Traviata" under Muti's direction, and also trained at the Soloists' Academy at Teatro alla Scala.

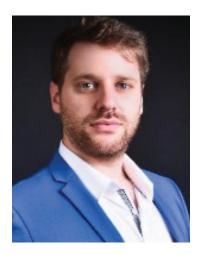
Notable performances include Radames in "Aida" at the Royal Opera House in Stockholm, Macduff in "Macbeth" at the Teatro Municipale in Piacenza, and Riccardo in "Un ballo in maschera" in Ravenna. He has also performed as Pinkerton in "Madama Butterfly", Manrico in "Il Trovatore", and Ismaele in "Nabucco".

International appearances include concerts in Moscow, Seoul, and Kazakhstan, as well as "Pagliacci" and "Cavalleria Rustican" a in Ljubljana. He is also involved in teaching and masterclasses at the Vincenzo Bellini Music Academy in Milan.

Upcoming engagements include "Cavalleria Rusticana" in Rijeka, "Nabucco" and "Il Trovatore" in Ljubljana, and "Turandot" in Split.







Shahaf Regev baritone

Israeli-Hungarian baritone Shahaf Regev was born in Israel. He studied at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance, under Hungarian Soprano Agnes Massini.

Shahaf was a member of "Meitar" Opera Studio of the Israeli Opera. His roles at the Israeli Opera include Papageno in "Die Zauberflöte", Masetto in "Don Giovanni", Figaro in "Le nozze di Figaro", Nardo in "La finta giardiniera" by Mozart, Malatesta in "Don Pasquale" by Donizetti, Il commissario imperiale, Sharpless and Yamadori in "Madama Butterfly", Schaunard in "La bohème", Betto di Signa in "Gianni Schicchi" by Puccini, Gasparo in "Rita" by Donizetti and more.

Shahaf Regev has performed as a soloist with a variety of orchestras, such as the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, the Haifa Symphony Orchestra, the Israel Camerata Jerusalem and others.



חיים קמח

Noa Hope Sion mezzo soprano

Graduated from the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance. She received prizes in various competitions and performs as a soloist in many productions and concerts all over Israel.

Her repertoire includes Baba in Menotti's "The Medium", Rosina in "Il barbiere di Siviglia" by Rossini, Suzuki in "Madama Butterfly" and La Frugola in "Il tabarro" by Puccini, Cherubino in Mozart's "Le nozze di Figaro", Rinaldo in "Armida and Rinaldo" by Sarti and others.

She participated in numerous productions of the Jerusalem Opera and in the Israeli Opera.



Lev Elgardt bass

Lev was born in Russia and immigrated to Israel.

He is a graduate of the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory, the St. Petersburg Conservatory and the Mariinsky Theatre Academy of Young Opera Singers. He is the recipient of the first prize in the 2004 Kiev International Vocal Competition; the Grand Prix at the Golden Hanukkah International Vocal Competition (Berlin, 2008); second prize at the International Rimsky-Korsakov Young Opera Singers Competition, 2016. He has performed as a soloist with the Mariinsky Academy of Young Opera Singers.

His repertoire includes the Water Goblin in Dvorak's "Rusalka"; Zuniga in "Carmen" by Bizet; Don Fernando in "Fidelio" by Beethoven; Masetto in "Don Giovanni" by Mozart and others.

With the Jerusalem Opera he has performed the role of Talpa in "Il tabarro" by Puccini.



Marc Shaimer tenor

Born in Russia and immigrated to Israel.

His repertoire include such roles as Il Duca in "Rigoletto" and Riccardo in "Un ballo in maschera" by Verdi, Rudolfo in "La bohème" by Puccini etc.

As a soloist took part in many different productions with the Israeli Opera, Haifa Symphonic Orchestra, Ashdod Opera, Tel-Aviv Chamber Opera and Opera Eterna.

With Jerusalem Opera he performed the roles of Ubaldo in "Armida e Rinaldo" by Sarti, Tinca in "Il tabarro" by Puccini and Gastone in "La Traviata" by Verdi.



David Kovensky bass



Sergey Bertenev tenor



Dima Negrimovskii bass



Wendy Gardner mezzo soprano



Herut Ishlach mezzo soprano



Romi Selig soprano



Miles Sendersky child

