

## Madama Butterfly

A research guide for the performance of Puccini's opera by the LA Opera on October 5 and the live broadcast from the MET on March 7 as part of the Visions and Voices 2008-2009 programming.

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### Events

**Madama Butterfly**  
**A Live Performance by the LA Opera**  
 Sunday, October 5, 2008 : 12:15pm

**Madama Butterfly**  
**A Live Broadcast from the MET**  
 Saturday, March 7, 2009 : 9:00am

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### Introduction

Puccini's operas are filled with interesting female characters. They are often dangerous and cunning, like Tosca, Turandot, and Minnie from *La fanciulla del West*, but they can also show great vulnerability. In this respect, Cio-Cio-San (known as Madama Butterfly in the opera) resembles Mimi in *La boheme*, the protagonist of *Sister Angelica*, and Liu in *Turandot*. For Puccini, this frailty takes on mystical—even divine—qualities.

Robert Wilson's minimalist production for the Los Angeles Opera encourages the audience to pay close attention to the music and dramatic action. Anthony Minghella's colorful production for the MET creates a sharp contrast with its choices for costume and set design. The following resources were selected by Ross Scimeca of the USC Libraries to help you learn more about *Madama Butterfly* and reflect on the artistic choices of Wilson and Minghella while staging the opera.

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Ross Scimeca

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### Further Reading

*Puccini Without Excuses: A Refreshing Reassessment of the World's Most Popular Composer* (Vintage Books, 2005)

By William Berger

Berger's love of Puccini comes from the infectious melodies and characters of his major operas. His book is an excellent study of Puccini's operatic characters.

Music Library ML410.P89B46 2005

*Puccini: His Life and Work* (Oxford University Press, 2002)

By Julian Budden

Budden looks at Puccini the man as well as the composer. He notes the events in his life that directly influenced his choice of libretti for his music.

Music Library ML410.P89B83 2002

*M. Butterfly* (Penguin Books, 1990)

By David Henry Hwang

Hwang's play offers a unique reinterpretation of Puccini's opera, satirizing some of the cultural assumptions that informed the Cio-Cio-San character. David Cronenberg directed a film version starring Jeremy Irons in 1993.

Leavey Library PS3558.W83M2 1990

*Monsieur Butterfly: The Story of Giacomo Puccini* (Stein and Day, 1974)

By Stanley Jackson

Jackson provides an in-depth account of Puccini's fascination with Madama Butterfly, from watching a performance of David Belasco's play in London to the instructions he gave to his librettists for creating the pathos he hoped to achieve in his opera.

Music Library ML410.P89J2 1974

*Madame Butterfly: Japonisme, Puccini, and the Search for the Real Cho-Cho-San* (Stone Bridge Press, 2001)

By Jan van Rij

Van Rij explores interesting issues about the story of Madama Butterfly, such as why Japan became an attractive setting for Puccini and what the historical basis for the play and the opera may have been.

Music Library ML410.P89R55 2001

*The Puccini Problem: Opera, Nationalism, and Modernity* (Cambridge University Press, 2007)

By Alexandria Wilson

This is an interesting, post-modernist study of the reception of Puccini's work in late 19th and early 20th century Italy. Wilson explores numerous other issues, including Puccini's relationship to cultural decadence and turn-of-the-century gendered identities.

Music Library ML410.P89W53

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### Recommended Recordings

The Music Library has three different performances of *Madama Butterfly* on CD:

- The EMI classic performance of Maria Callas with Karajan conducting La Scala from the 1950s

Music Library 9321mus

- Karajan's Vienna performance on Decca from the 1970s with Mirella Freni and Luciano Pavarotti

Music Library 9101mus

- Sinopoli's 1980s DG recording with the Philharmonia starring Freni with Jose Carreras

Music Library 4531mus

Two excellent mid-price recordings of *Madama Butterfly* on CD are:

- Barbirolli with the Rome Opera House Chorus and Orchestra starring Renata Scotto and Carlo Bergonzi on EMI's Great Recordings of the Century series
- Tullio Serafin and the Academia Santa Cecilia of Rome starring Renata Tebaldi and the young Carlo Bergonzi on Decca/London.

It is possible to find these performances on vinyl at stores that carry used records.

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