

Puccini
**MADAMA
BUTTERFLY**



Tracing the Butterfly Effect

It is said that the flutter of a butterfly's wings can ultimately cause a typhoon on the other side of the world.

Although you cannot trace the typhoon back to the butterfly, it's intriguing to speculate, especially with an opera like *Madama Butterfly*, which emerged from a complex chain of coincidence, serendipity, and a story retold many times.

The story itself is simple: a man looking for a good time, a girl looking for a life – the fallout from careless love, overlaid with the culture clash between Japan and the U.S.

In this particular iteration, a young naval officer lands in Nagasaki and rents a house and a temporary wife. After an idyllic affair, he goes back to what he considers the real world. Butterfly, all too faithful, waits with his child. Eventually he reappears with an American wife to claim the child, and Butterfly kills herself.

The opera's origins lie not only in Puccini's Italy – it was composed in Torre del Lago, premièred in Milan, and resurrected in Brescia – but in Nagasaki, Philadelphia, New York, London – even here in Victoria. It's impossible not to wonder what might have happened ...

1. if a French naval officer hadn't landed in 1885 Nagasaki and embraced the custom of renting a wife for the five weeks his ship was in dry dock.
2. if an American missionary hadn't passed on to her brother a bit of gossip she had heard in Nagasaki.
3. if Puccini hadn't gone to the theatre one night while he was in London for the Covent Garden première of *Tosca*.
4. if the creator of the play Puccini saw in London hadn't caught the theatre bug as a child in Victoria.

1. Nagasaki, 1885

In the summer of 1885, Louis Marie Julien Viaud, a French naval officer, arrived in Nagasaki and entered into a marriage – “valid for as long as the two parties agree” – with a seventeen-year-old girl named O-Kane-san.

Out of his experience came the 1887 novel, *Madame Chrysanthème*, one of some 40 semi-autobiographical novels that he wrote under the pseudonym Pierre Loti. His novels recounted his travels and love affairs in exotic locales and, with their romance and local colour, were lapped up by an appreciative public.

2. Nagasaki - Philadelphia, 1897

Not long after, an American couple, Irvin and Jennie Correll, went to Nagasaki as missionaries of the American Methodist Mission. On returning to Philadelphia in 1897, Jennie told her brother, a lawyer named John Luther Long, a tale she had heard about a tea-house girl named Cho-San who had been abandoned by her lover.

Long was inspired to write a short story, told essentially from the point of view of the girl, Cho-Cho-San, and introducing most of the characters we find in the opera. In his story, Cho-Cho-San attempts suicide but survives, and when Mrs. Pinkerton comes to collect the baby, mother and child have vanished.

3. New York - London, 1900

Long's story was soon discovered and adapted into a one-act play by the influential American theatre impresario David Belasco. Belasco staged a wildly successful production in New York, then toured it to London, where, by a happy fluke, it was seen by Puccini, who couldn't speak English, but was blown away by the production's brilliant theatricality.

Important Notice

Key Notes

Mailing costs are rising, and delivery is unpredictable, often taking a couple of weeks. Therefore, to ensure that your issue of *KeyNotes* reaches you more quickly, beginning in Fall 2015, **we will be delivering the KeyNotes Newsletter online.**

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- **To start receiving POV Enews & emailed notification of KeyNotes**, just email enews@pov.bc.ca or sign up for Enews at www.pov.bc.ca.
- **If you don't have email**, please phone **250-382-1641**. On request, we'll mail *KeyNotes* to donors & subscribers who don't have internet access. We will also have copies at POV events.

These items will be sent by email:

- **Enews** (*KeyNotes* & information on events, operas, & what's going on at POV & in the community)
- **Invitations** to Producers Events

These items will still be mailed:

- **Subscription packages** & marketing materials
- **Invitations** to President's Circle, Impresario Circle, & Bravo Society events.

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KeyNotes
Opera Information
Coming Events

to p. 2

In his biography Belasco recalls that Puccini came backstage *to embrace me enthusiastically and to beg me to let him use 'Madame Butterfly' as an opera libretto. I agreed at once and told him he could do anything he liked with the play and make any sort of contract he liked because it is not possible to discuss business arrangements with an impulsive Italian who has tears in his eyes and both his arms round your neck!*

I never believed he did see 'Madame Butterfly' that first night; he only heard the music he was going to write.

A major reason for the play's impact

was Belasco's technical wizardry, demonstrated most daringly in *Butterfly's* all-night vigil as she waits for Pinkerton to arrive. Belasco devised magical lighting effects for this 14-minute scene during which not a word was spoken. The audience watched in awe as twilight faded, the stars came out, dawn broke, and birds began to sing.

Belasco himself was enormously proud of this scene: *I have been asked many times what I consider my most successful achievement in stirring imagination through the agencies of scenery. I invariably reply that the scene of the passing of an entire night in "Madame Butterfly" has been my most successful effort ... My experiment was hazardous, but it succeeded.*

David Belasco was a popular and successful playwright and a brilliant pioneer in the nascent art of lighting design. But he was much more – an American theatre legend; a five-foot-three control freak who obsessed over every detail of staging a play; an actor, director, producer, and theatre owner (His ghost is said to haunt New York's Belasco Theatre, which he built in 1907).

Belasco specialized in staging sensational melodramas with lavish, meticulously detailed naturalism that extended to such touches as a flock of real sheep, or a restaurant kitchen from which actual cooking smells wafted into the audience. In fact, the term "Belascoism" was coined to describe his romanticized and very popular brand of naturalism.

A flamboyant, larger-than-life showman, Belasco, although Jewish, had a penchant for dressing in black and wearing a clerical collar – hence his nickname, the Bishop of Broadway. Still, his lifestyle was anything but priestly.

Belasco was sued multiple times for plagiarism. A 1912 headline in the *New York Times* read, *Always Being Sued, Sighs David Belasco. Is Accused Continually of Plagiarism by Barbers and Servant Girls, He Says.*

Belasco launched the careers of many actors. He is also said to have invented (or at least perfected) the casting couch and to have invited a succession of aspiring starlets up to his lavish penthouse above the Belasco Theatre.

Rumours and untruths swirl around him. Even his official biography by William Winter, written with Belasco's co-operation, is as slippery and unreliable as its subject, in part because many of Belasco's early memorabilia were destroyed in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, forcing Winter to rely on his subject's erratic and creative memory.

4. Victoria, BC, 1858

David Belasco spent much of his childhood in Victoria. His family arrived in 1858 (the year Puccini was born) with the Fraser Gold Rush. Victoria was a boom town crammed with picturesque characters. It was acquiring its first newspapers, its first commercial brewer, its first soda-water factory, and its first visits from professional theatre troupes.

Belasco lived here from age five to age twelve. His father, Humphrey Abraham Belasco, ran a tobacco shop on Yates Street, and young David attended the Colonial School (near the site of today's Central Middle School) and the Boys' Collegiate School on Church Hill (now Burdett Avenue).

Winter tells us that David's father had performed as a harlequin in London pantomimes and so became involved with the local Victoria Theatre, where young David also appeared in a few small roles. Victoria thus was the scene of David Belasco's first steps toward an acting career and his discovery at an early age of the lure and excitement of the theatrical life that he would later dominate for close to half a century.

5. The Opera, 1904

Puccini and his librettists, Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa, wove strands from all three sources into *Madama Butterfly*. The first act – the meeting and marriage of Butterfly and Pinkerton – was drawn from Long's story, with some local colour pulled from Loti's novel. Belasco's play, which depicts only Butterfly's wait for Pinkerton and his return with Kate, formed the core of the remaining acts.

Puccini wholeheartedly embraced Belasco's wordless vigil scene, adding to

Belasco's magical fusion of silence and light the dimension of music with the Humming Chorus and Intermezzo which, like Belasco's vigil, evoke sunset, night, and morning.

Puccini's next opera,

The Girl of the Golden West, was also based on a Belasco play. In fact Belasco directed the 1910 world première at the Metropolitan Opera, starring Enrico Caruso.

Belasco appears to have found the idea of directing opera singers and choristers a bit daunting – but he believed they needed his know-how if they were to become decent stage actors! His notes on the experience are immensely entertaining:

I had never before drilled an operatic company and I set about the task with a good many misgivings. The chorus of more than one hundred people ... were all inclined to gesticulate violently...I was much in doubt whether grand-opera singers who commanded princely salaries and were accustomed to special prerogatives unknown in the dramatic profession would be willing to submit to my dictation... Little by little I tamed this wriggling crowd ...

He clearly enjoyed the experience and perhaps came out of it with a more realistic appreciation of opera singers:

I am glad to have directed the dramatic side of the production ... it taught me that the deities of the world of song are not the eccentric creatures they are so often represented to be, but sensible, obliging, and companionable men and women.

Amen!

Maureen Woodall



Signed souvenir of the première production of *The Girl of the Golden West*. L to R: Giulio Gatti-Casazza, General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera; David Belasco, Playwright and Director; Arturo Toscanini, Conductor, and Giacomo Puccini, Composer.

Cast & Creative Team

An international artist in her North American debut

A sumptuous new production directed by one of Canada's pre-eminent theatre artists

An exciting and gifted cast ...



Jee Hye Han

Being in the right theatre at the right time can really pay off – witness the happy chance of Puccini catching Belasco's *Madame Butterfly* in London and being inspired to create this marvellous opera!

Serendipity was also at play for POV when we found our Butterfly for this production.

Last fall, our Artistic Director, Timothy Vernon, led a European opera tour with POV's former president Michael Morris. On Hallowe'en, the group took in a performance of Puccini's *Turandot* at the Vienna Volksoper.

Timothy had just learned that the soprano we had engaged for the role of Cio-Cio-San was retiring, and the search was on for a new Butterfly. The soprano singing *Turandot* in Vienna was a young South Korean, Jee Hye Han, who so impressed Timothy that he immediately engaged her as Butterfly.

Jee Hye Han made her Vienna Volksoper debut in 2011 in the role of Cio-Cio-San. Reviewers called her *wonderful*, a *One-Woman-Show*, her voice *radiant, mature, powerful, reminiscent of great voices*. Since then she has performed *Turandot* in Vienna, Budapest, and Hong Kong.

We are thrilled to present this marvellous young soprano, making her North American debut here in Victoria!



Director Diana Leblanc is a doyenne of Canadian theatre. A founder of Toronto's Soulpepper Theatre and veteran of 12 seasons at Stratford,

she has received a Gemini Award and the 2014 Silver Ticket Award of the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts (TAPA).

She has previously directed POV's productions of *La traviata* (2001), *Lucia di Lammermoor* (2003), and *The Rape of Lucretia* (2006).



Designer Patrick Clark received rave reviews for the delightful sets and costumes he created in 2013 for *Albert Herring* – brilliant confections that graced the stages

of both the Royal Theatre and Vancouver's Queen Elizabeth Theatre. We welcome his return to design our gorgeous new production of *Madama Butterfly*.



Giuseppe (Joey) Pietrarroia is wearing two hats for this production: he is both **Conductor** and **Chorus Master**. Joey knows *Madama*

Butterfly well: he directed POV's last production in 2008, substituted for Yannick Nézet-Séguin for a 2008 performance in Montreal, and directed Opéra de Québec's 2013 production. Joey is revelling in the chance to again luxuriate in the gorgeous textures and colours of this lovely score.



David Belasco's *Madame Butterfly* marked a milestone in lighting design.

How appropriate then that we can welcome back acclaimed

lighting designer Alan Brodie to light this production!

Alan created the brilliant, hallucinatory lighting for POV's *Macbeth*, as well as the evocative dreamscape of *Mary's Wedding* and our recent productions of *La Bohème* and *Capriccio*.

Adam Luther (Pinkerton) got his start with POV playing another charming cad – Anatol in *Vanessa* – and was praised for his *easy stage presence that underscores the character's charm and cynicism*. We've seen him since as Froh in *Das Rheingold*. Adam performed Pinkerton last year with Michigan Opera Theatre and at Semaine italienne de Montreal.



Adam Luther in *Vanessa*

Bruce Kelly is an old friend of POV, seen most recently as the Music Master in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, the Sacristan in *Tosca*, and the villain Garibaldi in *Rodelinda*. In our last production of *Madama Butterfly*, Bruce brought warmth, compassion – and that mellifluous baritone – to the role of Sharpless. It's a pleasure to welcome his return as this sympathetic character.



Bruce Kelly in *Madama Butterfly*

Arminè Kassabian amazed us all with her astonishing debut as the Composer in *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Now she returns as **Suzuki**. Last spring she performed Suzuki with Opera Lyra Ottawa and was praised for her *emotional vocal performance and excellently developed character*.



Arminè Kassabian in *Ariadne auf Naxos*

Discover more at www.pov.bc.ca/butterfly.html

Musical Excerpts
Background & Sources
Links & Resources

Synopsis
Artist bios
David Belasco's Victoria

POV Production photos: Emily Cooper

Events Calendar

COMMUNITY EVENTS

INSIDE OPERA at the UNION CLUB

Friday, March 27, 11:45 am to 1:15 pm

Union Club Centennial Ballroom, 805 Gordon St.

Enjoy lunch in elegant surroundings while Robert Holliston presents a special INSIDE Opera, with guests from the cast of *Madama Butterfly*.

Dress code: Business Dress. **\$25 per person includes lunch.**

Please call 250.382.1641 by March 24 to reserve with payment.

INSIDE OPERA with Robert Holliston

Sunday, March 29. Two sessions: 10 am and noon

Phillip T. Young Recital Hall, University of Victoria

Robert Holliston and guests present a guided tour of *Madama Butterfly*. Bring your friends. **Free event. Free parking.**

Please reserve by noon March 27 at 250-382-1641 or rsvp@pov.bc.ca and specify which session you plan to attend.

Sense of Occasion

Thursday, April 9, 6:30 pm. East Lobby, Royal Theatre

Pre-performance reception to celebrate the opening night of *Madama Butterfly*. Gourmet finger foods and wine. Space is limited. Dress is festive.

\$25 per person. Reserve with payment: 250-382-1641.

Master Class with Bruce Kelly

Monday, April 13, 7 pm. West Lobby, Royal Theatre

The baritone playing Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly*, Bruce Kelly is also a voice teacher at the Queen's University Faculty of Music. He will coach three Victoria singers.

Free. All welcome. RSVP to 250-382-1641 or rsvp@pov.bc.ca

AT THE BAUMANN CENTRE

Robert Holliston: *Opera Motifs: Japonisme*

Tuesday, March 31, 7 pm, Wingate Studio, 925 Balmoral Road

In this lecture, Robert Holliston examines the west's fascination with the east and its impact on western art from the mid 19th century onward. **Free.**

All are welcome. RSVP to 250-382-1641 or rsvp@pov.bc.ca

MADAMA BUTTERFLY

Royal
Theatre

April 9, 11, 15, 17, at 8 pm. April 19 at 2:30 pm

Pre-performance lobby lecture an hour before curtain

DONOR RECOGNITION EVENT

President's Circle Working Rehearsal

Saturday, April 4, Royal Theatre

6 pm Coffee and cookies

6:20 pm Discussion with Director Diana Leblanc and Designer Patrick Clark

7 pm Piano Dress rehearsal begins

For members of the Impresario Circle and President's Circle.

Invitations will be sent by mail. RSVP by March 31 to 250-382-1641 or rsvp@pov.bc.ca.



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& IMPRESARIO CIRCLE
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Opera Bus for the *Butterfly* Matinée April 19

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At POV's Royal Theatre performances

At the POV office: 925 Balmoral Road / 250-382-1641

Online at www.pov.bc.ca/raffle.html

An enchanting evening of Opera, Kabuki & cocktails
happening (spring)
COCKTAIL PARTY
Friday, March 27, 8-11 pm
Art Gallery of Greater Victoria
1040 Moss Street
Tickets: \$35 plus \$2.92 service charge
Order online through Eventbrite. Link at www.pov.bc.ca

Co-presented by Pacific Opera Victoria & the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria

We've moved!

The Baumann Centre for Pacific Opera Victoria
925 Balmoral Rd, Victoria

The Baumann Centre houses POV's administration and box office, as well as Wingate Studio, the new home for our opera rehearsals, artist training programs, and community events.

We look forward to welcoming you to our new home!

EDITOR: MAUREEN WOODALL

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