

THE
PRINCETON FESTIVAL



Puccini's MADAMA BUTTERFLY

Friday, June 12, 2026 – 7pm
Sunday, June 14, 2026 – 4pm

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The Princeton Festival
Performance Pavilion
Morven Museum & Garden

Puccini's MADAMA BUTTERFLY

Music by Giacomo Puccini
Italian libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa
Sung in Italian with English titles.

Rossen Milanov, Conductor
Eve Summer, Stage Director
Blair Mielnik, Scenic Designer
Neil Fortin, Costume Designer
Paul Kilsdonk, Lighting Designer
Carissa Thorlakson, Wig and Makeup Designer
Alexandria Griner, Production Stage Manager
Nate Ben-Horin, Répétiteur/Coach
Tomás Garcia, Chorus Master and Supertitle Operator

CAST

Toni Marie Palmertree, Cio-Cio San
Victor Starsky, Pinkerton
Kayla Nanto, Suzuki
Joel Balzun, Sharpless
Nicholas Nestorak, Goro
Nan Wang, Bonze
Jacob Hanes, Yamadori
Brenna Markey, Kate Pinkerton
Troy Jones, Dolore
and
Princeton Festival Opera Chorus

**These performances are made possible in part
through major gifts from:**

**Yvonne Marcuse
Sarah Ringer**

and significant supporting gifts from:

**Samuel M. Hamill, Jr.
Anne and Zoltan Soos**

**Costumes and sets are supported by the
Sibbri Foundation**



Made possible by funds from the
New Jersey State Council on the Arts, a partner
agency of the National Endowment for the Arts.



SYNOPSIS

Act I

The marriage broker Goro shows Lt. Pinkerton, USN, the house that Pinkerton has rented to occupy with his bride-to-be, Cio-Cio-San (Butterfly). Soon they are joined by the U.S. Consul at Nagasaki, Sharpless, who is surprised by the marriage contract Pinkerton is about to sign: It is valid for 999 years but can be annulled at the end of each month. Sharpless tries to make the carefree lieutenant seriously consider the step he is about to take. Pinkerton asks Sharpless to join him in a series of toasts, among them one to the real wedding and the real American wife he will surely have one day. Just then, the voice of Butterfly is heard as she and her friends ascend the hill for the wedding ceremony. She shows Pinkerton some of her possessions, among them the dagger with which her father had committed hara-kiri at the Mikado's orders. Butterfly tells Pinkerton that she is willing to give up her own gods and to adopt his religion. Butterfly's uncle, the Bonze, arrives. He has heard that Butterfly has renounced her religion, and he calls all her relatives to renounce her. Pinkerton orders them away and then tries to comfort the weeping Butterfly.

Smiling through her tears, she tells him that although everyone else has rejected her, she is happy only with Pinkerton.

INTERMISSION

Act II

Pinkerton has sailed away and three years have passed. Butterfly and her maid Suzuki are living in utter poverty in the house on the hill. Butterfly still believes that Pinkerton will return to her, as he promised, but Suzuki doubts it. Goro brings Sharpless to Butterfly to read her a letter from Pinkerton, but before long they are joined by Goro's client, Prince Yamadori, who hopes to marry Butterfly. She brushes aside his offer, insisting that she is already married. Yamadori leaves and Sharpless asks her what she would do if Pinkerton never came back. Become a geisha again, she answers—or better, die. Sharpless suggests she reconsider Yamadori's proposal, but after Sharpless meets Pinkerton's child, he promises to inform Pinkerton of his son and leaves. A cannon shot is heard and Butterfly takes up the telescope and recognizes Pinkerton's ship. Sure that her faith will be rewarded, Butterfly prepares for Pinkerton's arrival and she and Suzuki decorate the

house with flowers. Butterfly, Suzuki and the child wait and watch overnight for Pinkerton's return.

Act III

Morning comes and Butterfly carries the sleeping child off. Sharpless, Pinkerton, and an American woman arrive in the garden, and Sharpless tells Suzuki that the woman is Pinkerton's new wife. Pinkerton hurries off leaving Sharpless and Kate to confront Butterfly, who realizes that the couple has come to take the child away. Butterfly instructs them to return for the child in half an hour. Butterfly performs ritual suicide, as Pinkerton arrives, calling out for her.

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ABOUT THE ARTISTS



Edward T. Cone Music Director **ROSSEN**

MILANOV looks forward to collaborating in 2025-26 with established and emerging artists of the orchestral world and helming the Princeton

Symphony Orchestra's popular June performing arts celebration – The Princeton Festival.

Respected and admired by audiences and musicians alike, he has established himself as a conductor with considerable national and international presence. In addition to leading the PSO, Mr. Milanov is the music director of the Columbus Symphony Orchestra and the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra.

During his eleven-year tenure with The Philadelphia Orchestra, he conducted more than 200 performances. In 2015, he completed a 15-year tenure as music director of the nationally recognized training orchestra Symphony in C in New Jersey and in 2013, a 17-year tenure with the New Symphony Orchestra in his native city of Sofia, Bulgaria.

Mr. Milanov has collaborated with Komische Oper Berlin (Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtzensk*), Opera Oviedo with the Spanish premiere of Tchaikovsky's *Mazepa* and Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle* (awarded best Spanish production for 2015), and Opera Columbus (Verdi's *La Traviata* and *Rigoletto* and Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin*). He has been seen at New York City Ballet and collaborated with some of the best-known choreographers of our time such as Mats Ek, Benjamin Millepied, and most recently Alexei Ratmansky in the critically acclaimed revival of *Swan Lake* in Zurich with Zurich Ballet and in Paris with La Scala Ballet.

Mr. Milanov is deeply committed to music education, presenting Link Up education projects with Carnegie Hall and the Orchestra of St. Luke's and leading the PSO's annual BRAVO! concerts for thousands of school children.

He was named Bulgaria's Musician of the Year in 2005; he won a 2011 ASCAP award for adventurous programming of contemporary music at the PSO; and he was selected as one of the top 100 most influential people in New Jersey in 2014. In 2017, he was recipient of a Columbus Performing Arts Prize

awarded by The Columbus Foundation. He is a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music and The Juilliard School.

Photo by Stephen Pariser



Soprano **TONI MARIE PALMERTREE** (Cio-Cio-San) has become recognized as one of America's most riveting performers of Puccini and Verdi heroines. She has been heard on the stage of San Francisco Opera in the title role of *Madama Butterfly*; of her performance, Janos Gereben from San Francisco Classical Voice wrote: "The young soprano not only met the challenge, but she claimed her place among the finest vocal interpreters of the role heard here recently." Other roles at San Francisco Opera include Nedda in *I Pagliacci* and Liù in *Turandot*. Planned engagements for the 2025-2026 season include a recital for Gradus ad Parnassum, a Valentine's Day Concert with the Reading Symphony Orchestra, a return to OperaDelaware for a role debut of Maddalena in *Andrea Chénier*, soprano soloist in Beethoven's Ninth with the Seattle Symphony, and a return to The Metropolitan Opera to sing the role of Cio-Cio-San in *Madama Butterfly*.



Tenor **VICTOR STARKY** (Pinkerton) received critical acclaim this season for his performance as Manrico in Sarasota Opera's production of Verdi's *Il Trovatore*. He made his role debut as Dick Johnson in Puccini's *La Fanciulla del West* with Wichita Grand Opera, and performed as tenor soloist in the Wichita Symphony's performance of Verdi's *Requiem*. Mr. Starsky returns to the Princeton Festival, where he is honored to sing alongside world-class soprano Sondra Radvanovsky, followed by the role of Lt. B. F. Pinkerton in their production of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. In 2026-27, Starsky will make his European debut singing his first Calaf in Scottish Opera's production of *Turandot*, and returns to Sarasota Opera to debut the role of Števa in Janáček's *Jenůfa*. In 2025, Starsky sang the role of Enzo in Ponchielli's *La Gioconda* with Pittsburgh Festival Opera, Mario Cavaradossi in Princeton Festival's production of *Tosca*, and the title character in Verdi's *Stiffelio* with Sarasota Opera.

Photo by Visual Victory Studios



KAYLA NANTO (Suzuki) is a mezzo-soprano based in Dallas, TX. This season, she appears as "Suzuki" (Madama Butterfly) with Opera San José, Fort Worth Opera, and The Princeton Festival and as the title role in *Carmen* with Abilene Philharmonic. This fall, she will make her mainstage debut with The Dallas Opera as "Giannetta" (L'elisir d'amore) and as "Lapák/The Woodpecker" (The Cunning Little Vixen).

Kayla spent the past two summers as a Santa Fe Opera Apprentice Singer, where she sang the role of "Countess Ceprano" (Rigoletto), and covered the roles of "Siegrune" (Die Walküre) and "Deirdre" (The Righteous).

Additional performing highlights include "Hansel" (Hansel & Gretel) with both Opera Montana and Opera in the Heights, "Orlofsky" (Die Fledermaus) and "Nettie Fowler" (Carousel) with Pensacola Opera, the title role in the workshop of the new opera Zheng with Opera San José, the title role in *Carmen* with Painted Sky Opera, and "Flora" (La traviata) with Fort Worth Opera.

Kayla is a two-time District Winner in the Metropolitan Opera's Laffont Competition, and winner of first place and The Jonathan

Pell People's Choice Award in The Dallas Opera's Lonestar Competition.

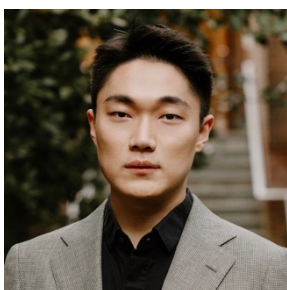


Canadian baritone and composer **JOEL BALZUN** (Sharpless) is establishing himself as a dynamic force on stage. This season's highlights include role débuts as Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* and Tonio in *Pagliacci* with Pacific Opera Project, house débuts with Amarillo Opera (*Pagliacci*), Pittsburgh Opera (*Fellow Travelers*), Maryland Opera and The Princeton Festival (*Madama Butterfly*), Opera Wilmington (*Cavalleria Rusticana*), and Wichita Grand Opera (*Ein deutsches Requiem*), as well as a world premiere by Dale Trumbore with support from the Barlow Endowment. He recently sang the title role in Missy Mazzoli's *Lincoln in the Bardo* for previews and workshops with Chautauqua Opera and The Metropolitan Opera.



NICHOLAS NESTORAK (Goro) is a tenor on the rise since joining the Metropolitan Opera roster in 2021 and making his highly anticipated Met début as Pang in their lavish production of *Turandot*.

Also at The Met, he has covered Pang, Tanzmeister in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Bardolfo in *Falstaff*, and Spoletta in *Tosca*. He returns this season as the Second Priest in the holiday presentation of *The Magic Flute* and covering the Waiter in *Arabella*. In addition to the Met, he portrays Ralph Rackstraw in *HMS Pinafore* with Opera Grand Rapids. In concert, he will be heard as the tenor soloist for Stravinsky's *Pulcinella* with Princeton Symphony Orchestra, as well as two rarely heard works, Dvorak's *The American Flag* and Orff's *Trionfo di Afrodita*, with Columbus Symphony.



NAN WANG (Bonze) is currently a Resident Artist with the Academy of Vocal Arts in Philadelphia.

During the 2025–2026 season, he appears as Figaro in *Le nozze di Figaro*, La Roche

in *Capriccio*, and Pistola in *Falstaff* at AVA. Upcoming engagements include Bonzo in *Madama Butterfly* with the Princeton Festival.

Recent engagements include covering Nick Shadow in Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* at Des Moines Metro Opera. At AVA, his performances have included Don Alfonso in *Così fan tutte*, Bartolo in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, Junius in *The Rape of Lucretia*, and Lord Rochefort in *Anna Bolena*. He was previously a Young Artist at the Glimmerglass Festival, where he performed Colline in *La bohème* and covered Count Capulet in *Roméo et Juliette*.

Recent honors include Second Place in the 2025 Giargiari Bel Canto Competition and Fifth Place in the 2026 Giulio Gari Foundation Competition. He was also a District Winner in the 2024 Metropolitan Opera Laffont Competition and recipient of the Stan Sesser Award in Voice at the Manhattan School of Music.



Baritone **JACOB STAFFORD HANES**

(Yamadori), a native of Arlington, Texas, earned his BA in Music, Economics, and Business

Administration from Austin College, where he was a standout in the Austin College Opera Program and served as captain of the football team. He later completed his MM in Voice Performance at DePaul University. Hanes is currently a Resident Artist at the Academy of Vocal Arts (AVA), where this season, he

performed Ford in *Falstaff* and Olivier in *Capriccio*. During the 2024–2025 season, Hanes appeared in the Princeton Festival production of *Tosca* as Sciarrone/Jailer, W.P. Inman in *Cold Mountain* at the Seagle Festival, Guglielmo in *Così fan tutte*, and Valentin in AVA's outreach production of *Faust*. In competition, Hanes earned Second Prize in the Mario Lanza Competition. An accomplished performer of musical theatre, his signature roles include Sweeney Todd in *Sweeney Todd*, Count Carl-Magnus Malcolm in *A Little Night Music*, and Cinderella's Prince in *Into the Woods*.



Soprano **BRENNA MARKEY** (Kate Pinkerton) is swiftly establishing herself as a captivating presence on the opera and concert stage. Praised as a "silky-voiced soprano" (Jersey City Times) with a "full soprano sound" ([NJ.com](https://www.nj.com)) and "expressive range" (Herald-Tribune), she brings both vocal brilliance and dramatic artistry. This season, she makes her Princeton Festival debut as Kate Pinkerton in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* and recently performed her role debut as Pamina in Mozart's *The Magic Flute* with the New Jersey Symphony. Her notable debuts include Sarasota Opera in 2022 as Elisetta in *Il Matrimonio Segreto*, guest artist for Opera Philadelphia's *Madama Butterfly* lecture series, excerpts from *Turandot* at Carnegie's Weill Hall in 2024,

soprano soloist in the Verdi *Requiem* with Opera Southwest, and as Lucia in *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Opera Magnifico in 2025. A distinguished competitor, she is a First Place Winner in the Century Opera and Medici International Competitions and a Semifinalist in the Elizabeth Connell International Competition.



TROY C. JONES (Dolore) is excited to join the Princeton Symphony Orchestra for the Princeton Festival. At 7 years old, he brings energy and enthusiasm to the stage. He made his debut as

Francis the Mouse in American Repertory Ballet's production of *Cinderella*. A student at Princeton Ballet School, Troy loves performing and continues to build his skills. He is bilingual in English and Mandarin. Outside of ballet, he practices figure skating and enjoys reading about dinosaurs, wrestling with friends, and imagining adventurous stories.

PRODUCTION TEAM



Described as having “a gift for translating classic symbolism into familiar detail” with work that is “transfixingly personal,” **EVE SUMMER** (Stage Director) returns to the Princeton Festival following last year’s *Tosca*. This season Eve also directed *La traviata* (Opera Columbus); *H.M.S. Pinafore* (Opera Grand Rapids); *Roméo et Juliette* (The Opera Institute at Boston University); Sankaram and Rourke’s *The Jungle Book* (Resonance Works); *The Pirates of Penzance* (Tulsa Opera), and Menotti’s *The Last Savage* (Odyssey Opera). Hailed “a star of stage directing whose approach refreshes hope for the future of opera,” Eve has recently directed at The Glimmerglass Festival, The Curtis Institute, Opera Saratoga, The Boston Symphony Orchestra, Boston Baroque, Knoxville Opera, Opera Tampa, The Connecticut Early Music Festival, Opera Carolina, Annapolis Opera, Opera Orlando, and the A.J. Fletcher Opera Institute at UNCSCA, among others. Next season, Eve returns to The Curtis Institute for *Orlando Paladino*, Annapolis Opera for *The Pirates of Penzance*, Tulsa Opera for *Così fan tutte*, and debuts at Pensacola Opera with *L’elisir d’amore*.



BLAIR MIELNIK's (Scenic Designer) previous designs for Princeton Festival include *The Barber of Seville* and *Così Fan Tutti*, both with James Marvel. Blair designs for theater, opera, live events, museum exhibition, and venue design. Speakeasy Magick NY, projects for Valentino Moscow and Milan, TSUM Moscow, Monkey 47. He has collaborated as a scenic associate for the Punchdrunk UK for *The Drowned Man*, *Sleep No More*, and *Crash of the Elysium* at the Manchester International Festival. Designs for Weston Playhouse, VT Stage, VA Stage York Theater, and NYC Children's Theater.



NEIL FORTIN (Costume Designer) graduated with a masters in costume design from Boston University and has worked across America and the United Kingdom in designing costumes for both Opera and theater. Fortin most recently designed productions for Opera Columbus (*An Anonymous Lover*) and Boston Baroque (*Idomeneo*). Neil has also designed for Opera Omaha, Boston Lyric Opera, the Boston Conservatory at Berkeley, the American Repertory Theater, and the Huntington Theater to name a few. In the UK, Neil's most recent work includes lavish, pantomime productions of *Jack and the*

Beanstalk and *Cinderella* for the Roses Theater in the Cotswolds. He also runs a historical military business and owns a British-made menswear label with his husband called Thomas Fortin Menswear. This is Fortin's first production with the Princeton Festival but fifth production with stage director Eve Summer.



PAUL KILSDONK (Lighting Designer) is excited to return to Princeton Festival for another fantastic summer season. The Princeton Festival: *Tosca*, *Così fan tutte*, *Barber of Seville*, *Harvey Milk*, *Albert Herring*, *The Impresario*, *Scalia Ginsburg*, and a variety of music events at Morven Museum and Garden. Paul has also designed many productions with Passage Theater: *White Guy on the Bus*, *Song for the Disappeared*, *The Goldilocks Zone*, to note a few. He designed lighting for *The Language Archive* with Bristol Riverside Theatre and *The Beauty Queen of Leenane* at Langhorne Players. Design for McCarter Theatre includes *The Toni Morrison Project*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Eclipsed*, *Coming Home*, and *Lucky Girl*. In his staff position as lighting supervisor with McCarter Theatre, Paul had been responsible for creating the lighting for hundreds of events, including soloist musicians, jazz trios, rock bands, orchestras and festive lighting for the annual galas.



CARISSA THORLAKSON (Wig and Makeup Designer) – Off-Broadway: *Grand Hotel* at New York City Center, *Little Rock* at the Sheen Center, Princeton Festival: *Tosca*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Così fan tutte*, *Scalia/Ginsberg*, *Albert Herring*, *The Impresario*, and *Madama Butterfly* Opera: Opera Lafayette at the Kennedy Center, Opera Philadelphia Theatre: The Old Globe, Papermill Playhouse, A.R.T., Walnut Street Theatre, McCarter Theatre Center, Hartford Stage, Lookingglass Theatre Company, Two River Theatre, Bay Street Theater, A.C.T. of CT. Bristol Riverside, InterAct Theatre Company, Shakespeare Theatre of NJ, Arden Theatre Company, Delaware Theatre Company, Pennsylvania Shakespeare Festival, Arden Theatre Company. She has served as a wig and makeup artist at operas across the country such as Santa Fe, Sarasota, Philadelphia, & Washington National. Carissa also creates custom medical wigs, cosplay wigs, and teaches classes in wigs and makeup. You can find her at CThorwigs.com and @wigician.



ALEXANDRIA GRINER (Production Stage Manager) is thrilled to be returning to Princeton Festival this summer. A selection of credits includes OPERA: *La Boheme* (Chautauqua Opera), *Carmen* (Opera Carolina); *Man of la Mancha*, *Joan of Arc: Trial at Rouen*, *Marriage of Figaro*, *Il Trovatore*, *Don Pasquale*, *La Traviata* (Piedmont Opera); *Tosca*, *Così fan Tutte*, *The Barber of Seville*, *Albert Herring*, *Impresario*, *Scalia/Ginsburg* (Princeton Festival); *Carmen* (Opera North); *Romeo and Juliet* (Boston Lyric Opera). THEATER: *Twelfth Night* (People's Light Theater); *Mrs. Christie*, *I & You: The Musical*, *Primary Trust*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Empire Records*, *Choice*, *Bulrushers*, *Between Two Knees* (McCarter Theater); *Tell Me You're Dying* (Chatauqua Theater Company).



NATE BEN-HORIN's (Pianist/Répétiteur) work as a collaborative pianist has taken him across North America and Europe. This spring he served as Interim Head of Music at Arizona Opera. He is also a returning member of the music staff with the Wexford Festival in Ireland, and has a standing relationship with Opera Columbus following a residency there in 2021-22. Alongside soprano Jaclyn Grossman, he is the co-curator, pianist, and

arranger of Likht Ensemble, a duo specializing in song repertoire from the Holocaust. In addition to his work as a pianist, he is also an active composer, with commissions from Salle Bourgie and City Opera Vancouver in the 2025-26 season.



TOMÁS GARCÍA (Chorus Master) is an Ecuadorian orchestra and opera conductor based in New Jersey committed to reimagining the concert experience through interdisciplinary collaboration. He has conducted productions of *Don Giovanni* and *Carmen* with Rutgers Opera Theater, and has served as assistant conductor for productions including Poulenc's *Dialogues of the Carmelites*, Muhly's *Dark Sisters*, and Daugherty's *Jackie O*, for which he also served as chorusmaster. He has been invited to assist conduct the Orquesta Clásica Santa Cecilia (Spain), Chicago Summer Opera, Opera Neo (San Diego), and Penn's Woods Music Festival. He serves as Associate Conductor of the Modus Operandi Orchestra and has worked with a range of ensembles in both symphonic and operatic settings. Tomás is currently pursuing a DMA in Orchestral Conducting at Rutgers University, where he has conducted Sinfonia and served as assistant conductor for the Rutgers Symphony Orchestra, Opera Theater, and the contemporary ensemble HELIX. His mentors

include Kynan Johns and Gerardo Edelstein. He holds degrees from Penn State, the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the University of Houston, and has worked in masterclass settings with conductors including Carl St. Clair and Donald Schleicher.

PRINCETON FESTIVAL OPERA CHORUS

Tomás García, Chorus Master

SOPRANO I

Sarah Giampietro
Eunjin Lee
Rebecca Shimer

ALTO

Clara Melvin
Anna Musumeci
Genesys Perez-Berrios

SOPRANO II

Susana Leiva
Samantha Murphy
Sonia Sinha

TENOR

Noah Donahue
Royce Strider

**Assistive listening devices and large print programs
are available in the outdoor lobby.**

**No audio or video recording or photography permitted.
Dates, times, artists, and programs subject to change.**