

Madama Butterfly

Music by Giacomo Puccini

Italian libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa

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 their 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.

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.
