

Legendary Recordings

MADAMA BUTTERFLY

Puccini

**Renata Tebaldi
Carlo Bergonzi
Fiorenza Cossotto**

**Accademia di Santa Cecilia, Rome
Tullio Serafin**

alto

2CD
STEREO



During the 1860s Japan began to open up to the West, with mixed consequences for the states and individuals concerned. A French sailor Pierre Loti (1850–1923), married a geisha and then left her once his shore leave expired, publishing his experiences and impressions of Japan in a celebrated short novel *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887). Europeans were showing considerable interest in Japanese culture: in 1884 a Japanese Exhibition in London's fashionable Knightsbridge inspired Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, the worldwide success of which led to other 'Japanese' musical subjects: Messager adapted Loti's novel in 1893 whilst the Sidney Jones's comedy-opera *The Geisha* enjoyed a longer run even than that of *The Mikado* in 1896. In 1898 Mascagni and librettist Luigi Illica produced a melodramatic opera *Iris* in which a Japanese laundry-girl is abducted, forced to work as a prostitute and drowns herself in a sewer.

In 1898 a story called *Madam Butterfly* appeared in the American *Century Magazine*. Its author John Luther Long, a lawyer from Philadelphia, had never visited Japan but had gained background knowledge of the country from his sister whose husband was a missionary in Nagasaki. The story shared certain details with Loti's story (both heroines have similar Japanese names: Loti's Ki-Hou-San, Long's Cio-Cio-San) and was apparently based upon fact. Long was soon approached for permission to dramatise the story and the rights were obtained by David Belasco (1853-1931), who had written half of his play before permission was granted!

The colourful David Belasco, whose family were descended from Portuguese Jews, was born in San Francisco but was brought up in Canada where he was educated in a Catholic monastery. Having acted in touring productions, he switched to writing and directing pot-boilers similar to those made fashionable by Sardou in Europe, aping Liszt in sporting a clerical collar. Whilst his plays were not well-written, they display a vivid imagination, invoking atmosphere in lengthy stage-directions. Indeed it has often been said that he would have been more effective as a cinematographer, had that medium been more sophisticated at the time. Belasco's one-act play *Madam Butterfly* was first given in March 1900 at the Herald Theater in New York. Seven weeks later, buoyed by its immediate success in the States, Belasco produced his new play in London where it was seen by Puccini, then in England supervising a production of *Tosca*.

Puccini had only a rudimentary knowledge of the English language, but was immediately taken by both the subject and its setting. Belasco allegedly met the composer after the performance and immediately gave permission for Puccini to adapt his play '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'. All other ideas (which included Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande*) were immediately dropped in favour of *Butterfly*. Once the contract with Belasco was signed the task of adapting the play was assigned to Giacosa and Illica who had both worked with Puccini on *Bohème* and *Tosca* (Illica alone supplied the libretto for *Manon Lescaut*).

Puccini familiarised himself with Japanese music and other relevant background material. However domestic problems threatened to disrupt progress with the work; not yet married to his partner Elvira Gemignani, he rarely stayed faithful to her and was having an affair at the time of the opera's composition. In February 1903 Puccini was involved in a car crash that left him walking with crutches for some time. Furthermore, Puccini and his librettists disagreed strongly over the shape of the drama. They had added an opening act giving additional background to Belasco's story but then Puccini's wished to conflate Giacosa's and Illica's second and third acts act into a single uninterrupted piece so that the drama would 'run to the end ... closed, efficient, terrible' (Puccini to his publisher Ricordi). Eventually Giacosa and Illica gave way and the premiere was set for 17 February 1904.

Rosina Storchio (*Butterfly*), Giovanni Zenatello (*Pinkerton*) and Giuseppe de Luca (*Sharpless*) were chosen along with director Giulio Gatti-Casazza (who became Manager of the Metropolitan Opera between 1908 and 1935) and the conductor Campanini. A successful premiere seemed guaranteed. However an anti-Puccini claque in Milan employed spoiling tactics: laughter, catcalls and shouts from the audience that they had heard it all before in *Bohème* reached their pinnacle during the interlude depicting *Butterfly*'s night time vigil. The birdsong effects were totally ruined as the audience joined in with animal and bird noises and Storchio's billowing kimono (caused by a backstage draught) inspired ribald suggestions that she was pregnant with the conductor's child. After such a fiasco there was nothing for it but to withdraw the work.

Puccini was desperately disappointed; having considered *Butterfly* 'the most heartfelt and most expressive opera that (he) had conceived' he felt that its best chance of success lay in it being performed in a smaller theatre. Considerably revised, it was given in Brescia on 28 May 1904 with Salomea Krusceniski in the title role. The opera was now a success; Storchio then sang the opera under Toscanini's musical direction in the first production outside Italy (Buenos Aires July 1904). A year later Emmy Destinn, Caruso and Antonio Scotti sang in the first production at Covent Garden.

Synopsis

Lt. Pinkerton of the US Navy has just bought a house overlooking Nagasaki. He arranges a marriage with the help of Goro, a marriage broker. Goro introduces Pinkerton to Suzuki and other household servants of Cio-Cio-San (Butterfly), the intended bride and elaborates on the wedding ceremony (*Qui verran*). They are joined by Sharpless, the American consul and to the strains of *The Star-Spangled Banner* Pinkerton identifies himself as a roving Yankee who has a girl in every port (*Dovunque al mondo*). Sharpless slightly disapprovingly joins him in toasting their homeland. Before Cio-Cio-San's arrival, the two Americans discuss her qualities but Pinkerton is clear that one day he will have an American wife.

As Butterfly and her friends approach they are happily admiring the view and taking in the aroma of the flowers. Sharpless questions her as to her background and learns that her family have experienced poverty after her father's death, forcing her at the age of 15 to become a geisha. Butterfly's family and other guests gather for the wedding; Sharpless, impressed by Butterfly's manner, counsels Pinkerton against acting too flippantly.

As Pinkerton shows Butterfly the house, she produces some of her possessions including a box containing a sword inherited from her father with which he committed *hara-kiri*. Butterfly has become a Christian, thereby risking being ostracised by her family and the community (*Ieri son salita tutta sola*). Following the marriage ceremony (*E concesso al nominato*) this is precisely what occurs; as the guests congratulate the happy couple, Butterfly's uncle the Bonze (a Buddhist priest) enters and curses Butterfly for deserting Buddhism. As predicted Butterfly is denounced by her family and they are shooed away by Pinkerton. As night falls Pinkerton offers comfort (*Vieni la sera*), but Butterfly is distraught at having become an outcast. She has fallen for his charms but, worried at the meaning of his pet name for her (she has learned that in America butterflies are pinned to the walls in display cases *Vogliatemi beni*), begs him to be gentle. Their two themes become entwined and they enter the house.

Act Two takes place three years later. Pinkerton has sailed back to America. Butterfly is still shunned by society and she and Suzuki (who alone has remained by her side) have few savings left. However Butterfly still believes that her husband will sometime return (*Un bel di*). Sharpless arrives with Goro, who has been attempting to persuade her to marry again. Sharpless has a

letter from Pinkerton that he wishes Butterfly to see but keeps being sidetracked by excited and, he thinks, inane questions from Butterfly. They are interrupted by Butterfly's latest suitor, the wealthy Prince Yamadori whom Butterfly treats with disdain (she clearly now considers herself an American lady). Whilst her back is turned, Sharpless tells Goro and Yamadori of Pinkerton's imminent return. When Sharpless and Butterfly are alone, Sharpless realises that he needs to tell Butterfly the truth, that Pinkerton does not wish to see her, but he is unable to do so. He strongly advises Butterfly to marry Yamadori; in response she shows Sharpless Pinkerton's son. She turns to the child and tells him that she will probably return to her life as a geisha (*Che tua madre dovrà prenderti in braccio*) but would rather die than face this again. Sharpless promises to inform Pinkerton about his son and leaves.

Suzuki brings in the rumour-monger Goro threatening him with the sword. After Goro has run off Butterfly reflects about Pinkerton's hoped for return (*Vedrai, piccolo amor*). She is interrupted by the harbour cannon. It is Pinkerton's ship and Butterfly declares that her belief in Pinkerton has been vindicated. Suzuki goes out to fetch flowers and blossoms and the two women happily decorate the house. Having dressed Butterfly in her wedding outfit, Suzuki and the child fall asleep whilst Butterfly awaits Pinkerton's arrival. Her vigil lasts throughout the night (*Humming Chorus*). At dawn the sailors in the harbour sing and the garden birds twitter. Suzuki awakes and tells Butterfly to get some rest.

Three people enter the garden: Pinkerton, Sharpless and an unknown woman who remains outside. They have come for the child in order to give it a secure upbringing in the States. Pinkerton now shows remorse for his behaviour (*Addio, fiorito asil*) and rushes away. Suzuki tells the woman (Kate, Pinkerton's American wife) she will talk to Butterfly and Butterfly herself suddenly enters (*Tu, Suzuki*). She takes in the situation at once and tells Kate she may have the child providing Pinkerton himself calls to collect it in half an hour, whereupon Kate and Sharpless leave.

Butterfly can stand no more. She tells Suzuki to shut out the sun and to leave. She then takes down her father's sword and reads the inscription 'He dies with honour who can no longer live with honour'. As she is about to stab herself Suzuki sends in the child. Butterfly embraces the child for the last time (*Tu? Tu? Tu?*). Then behind the screen she stabs herself as Pinkerton rushes in calling her name, with Sharpless at his side.

Renata Tebaldi (1922-2004) studied in Parma, making her debut in 1944. Having sung Desdemona in Trieste (1946), she was invited to appear at La Scala's reopening concert, singing the Prayer scene from *Mosè in Egitto* conducted by Toscanini (who famously described her voice as angelic). She sang at La Scala regularly between 1949 and 1954, and again from 1959 (her absence allegedly due to the management's favouritism towards Callas: the press made much of her supposed rivalry with Callas but each soprano often praised the other). In 1948 she made successful debuts in Florence and Naples and in 1950 began her international career in earnest performing at Covent Garden and in San Francisco. She concentrated her repertoire on the mainstream *spinto* *Fach*, focussing on Verdi, Puccini, Giordano, Cilea and Catalani. In 1955, as her appearances in Europe grew less frequent, she began long associations with the Met and Chicago, singing at the former until 1973 and the latter until 1969. She was a rare visitor to the UK, singing again at Covent Garden in 1955 but thereafter only sporadically in concert, although this did not diminish the affection in which she was held: 700 people turned up for a signing session in 1991. Tebaldi suffered a vocal crisis during the 1960s and refrained from singing for a year when her voice re-emerged intact but darker in colour.

Carlo Bergonzi (b 1924) studied in Parma initially as a lyric baritone and made his debut 1947/8. He sang Figaro, Malatesta, Enrico Ashton, Alfio, Sharpless, Rigoletto and Germont but never felt entirely happy singing as a baritone; low notes below B flat were non-existent and he strained to sing Fs and F sharps above the staff. In 1950 he decided to experiment and discovered he had a top C! Retraining was not unusual: Bergonzi considered it a shrewd move since many tenors left Italy for lucrative contracts in the Americas. At short notice he sang Andrea Chénier (1951) and several Verdi roles in RAI broadcasts. Following his La Scala debut (1953) he sang Alvaro at London's Stoll Theatre and Radamès and Cavaradossi in Buenos Aires. His career continued to flourish after he appeared in the USA (Chicago 1955, the Met 1956) where roles included Don José, Edgardo, Don Carlo, Alfredo, Manrico and Turiddu. His first recital record for Decca was recorded in 1957 and he was signed up to record several complete operas. Although a dependable recording artist for several labels, he often lost out to more 'exciting' singers such as Del Monaco and Corelli. He made a belated Covent Garden debut in 1962 but sang there regularly thereafter until the mid 1980s. On stage he was an uninspiring (indeed slightly comical) performer but vocally he acted superbly and his diction was second to none. In retirement he has coached many young singers and manages his restaurant *I Due Foscari* in Busseto.

Fiorenza Cossotto (b 1935) studied in Turin and Milan with Mercedes Llopart. She first sang at La Scala in 1955 but her debut in a principal role was in the world premiere of Poulenc's *Dialogues*

des Carmélites (1957). The following year she made her debut outside Italy at the Wexford Festival singing Giovanna Seymour *Anna Bolena*, performing that year also at the Wiener Staatsoper. Her London debut occurred in 1959 and within a few years, helped by her early recordings, she was known in many European opera houses. She performed in Chicago (1964) and in 1968 at the Met. A highly dramatic mezzo, she excelled in Verdi and Puccini, and sang well into her 70s. She was married to the bass Ivo Vinco.

Ezio Sordello (b 1927), who studied in Turin and privately with Carlo Tagliabue, made his debut in 1952. Following performances at La Scala during the 1953/4 season Sordello was in demand internationally, singing at the Met in 1956 and in Vienna in 1959. London heard him at the Stoll Theatre during a season of Italian opera in 1960 and in 1961/62 he appeared at Glyndebourne. Following his retirement in 1992 Sordello has taught singing.

Paolo Washington (1932-2008) studied in Florence and made his debut there in small roles during the 1953/54 season. By 1958, his reputation had grown to the extent that he was singing principal roles and featuring in recordings. During the 1960s he became widely sought-after not only throughout Italy, but in 1968 began a long association with the Lyric Opera, Chicago. He was also a regular performer at both the Salzburg and Bregenz Festivals.

Michele Cazzato (1918-79) made his debut in his native Genoa in 1946 and sang at La Scala the following year. He became one of the most respected buffo bass-baritones in Italy and made many recordings. Following his retirement in the late 1960s Cazzato formed an opera company in Genoa specialising in rare 18th century opera and also taught in Teheran.

Tullio Serafin (1878–1968) was an admired conductor of Italian opera and an inspirational vocal coach who helped many singers on the road to stardom, among them Ponselle, Callas and Sutherland. Serafin worked for many years alongside Toscanini at La Scala Milan and also led a number of seasons at the Rome Opera. At the Met in New York he conducted a number of premieres as well as offering insightful performances of works central to the Italian repertory. He made his Covent Garden debut as long ago as 1907 but will probably be best remembered in London for the revelatory performances of *Lucia* in 1959 for which he personally coached Joan Sutherland in the title role.

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Project Co-ordinator: Robin Vaughan (musicalmerit@blueyonder.co.uk)

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MADAMA BUTTERFLY (Puccini:Giacosa & Illica) Rec.1958

Madama Butterfly	Renata Tebaldi
Suzuki	Fiorenza Cossotto
Kate Pinkerton	Lidia Nerozzi
Lieutenant Pinkerton	Carlo Bergonzi
Sharpless	Enzo Sordello
Goro	Angelo Mercuriali
Imperial Commissioner	Virgilio Carbonari
Prince Yamadori	Michele Cazzato
Lo Zio Bonzo	Paolo Washington
Yakuside	Oscar Nanni
Chorus and Orchestra of the Accademia di Santa Cecilia Roma / Tullio Serafin	

CD One (71.57)

Act One

1. E soffitto e pareti	2.20
2. Questa è la cameriera	4.28
3. Dovunque al mondo?	4.13
4. Quale smania vi prende..Amore e grillo	3.46
5. Quanto cielo!...Ancora un passo or via	3.33
6. Gran ventura	4.02
7. L'Imperial Commissario,, l'ufficiale del registro	3.22
8. Vieni, amor mio!	2.50
9. Ieri son salita tutta sola in segreto all Misione	2.12
10. Tutti zitti !	3.06
11. O Kami! O Kami!	0.36
12. Cio-cio-san! Cio-cio-san! Abomonaione!	2.44
13. Bimba, bimba, non piangere	2.04
14. Viene le sera	8.01

15. Vogliatemi bene	8.01
<u>Act Two (Part One)</u>	
16. E Izaghi ed Izanami	7.53
17. Un bel di vedremo	4.54
18. C'è. Entrate	3.52

CD Two (72.00)

Act Two (Part Two)

1. Non lo sapete insomma	2.50
2. Si sa che apir la parta	3.00
3. Ora a noi. Sedete qui	3.06
4. Ebbene, che fareste, Madama Butterfly	2.44
5. E questo? E questo?	2.14
6. Che tua madre	5.09
7. Vespa! Rospo maladetto!	1.57
8. Una nave di Guerra	2.37
9. Scuoti quella fronda di cillegio	5.19
10. Or vienmi ad adonrnar	5.16
11. Coro a bocca chiusa (Humming Chorus)	3.19
12. Intermezzo	8.11
13. Già il sole!	2.07
14. Chi sia?	2.35
15. Io so che alle pene	1.58
16. Non ve l'avevo detto?	1.45
17. Addio fiorito asil	1.50
18. Glielo dirai?	2.13
19. Che vuol a me?	5.50
20. Come una mosca prigionera	2.30
21. Con onor moure..Tu,tu? Piccolo iddio	5.32

Produced by Tony Watts ; Final master by Harvey Summers, Broad Oak Studio