

Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*: An Unlikely Success Story

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Puccini's Success

According to his birth certificate, Giacomo Antonio Domenico Michele Secondo Maria Puccini was born on December 22, 1858, though he insisted on the date December 23rd.^[1] When his father died at an early age, the town provided his mother with a modest pension to take care of their seven children. Puccini was six years old.

In accordance with the high expectations placed upon Puccini due to his musical lineage, his mother upheld the family motto of “puro musico, puro asino!”^[2] by sending him to get the best education possible. He was sent to the Pacini Institute and began composing around the age of 16.^[3] Though he had a rocky start, his work began to impress teachers and competition judges, and at the age of 22, he started at the Milan Conservatory with the assistance of grants from the Queen.^[4]

At the Conservatory, cooking meals in dorms was strictly forbidden. In order to circumvent the rules, Puccini and his roommate Pietro Mascagni would alternate shuffling plates and pans while the other improvised music loudly to hide the noise. Puccini would later take inspiration from such care-free, near-poverty pranks when writing *La Boheme*.^[5]

After his graduation from the Milan Conservatory, Puccini immediately collaborated with a family friend librettist to compose the score to *Le Villi* for a competition. His handwriting was so

¹ Carner, Mosco. Puccini: A Critical Biography. 2nd ed. New York: Holms & Meier Publishers, 1977. Print.

² Marek, George R. Puccini. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951. Print.

³ Budden, Julian. Puccini: His Life and Works. *The Master Musicians*. Ed. Stanley Sadie. Oxford University Press, 2002. Print.

⁴ Berger, William. Puccini Without Excuses: A Refreshing Reassessment of the World's Most Popular Composer. New York: Vintage Books, 2005.

⁵ Weaver, William. Puccini: The Man and his Music. *Metropolitan Opera Guild Composer Series*. Ed. Gerald Fitzgerald. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977.

atrocious that his submission was illegible. Though he did not win the competition, his music gained popularity and the success attracted much attention, even from Verdi.^[6] During this time, he carried on a long affair with a married mother of two Elvira Bonturi Gemignani. After the death of his mother, they decided to elope and live together, along with one of Elvira's children from her current marriage, Fosca. The scandal of such an arrangement shocked and outraged his family and hometown, causing a rift among them.^[7] Elvira could not divorce because she was Catholic, though Puccini and Elvira married less than a year after Elvira's husband died in 1904.

After the near-failure of *Edgar*, Puccini achieved great success with *Manon Lescaut*, gaining respect as a prominent composer, as well as financial freedom, and so he purchased his childhood home, which had been sold at the death of his mother.^[8] With *La Boheme* in his late thirties and *Tosca*, success skyrocketed and Puccini solidified his own unique artistic style, which began to influence other musicians of the time. Puccini is said to be "the master at knocking on the doors of our hearts."^[9] His sense of atmosphere gives each opera a distinct personality, though the basic theme of love and tragedy is unchanged. His works are full of passion and pain, with soft touches of joy.

The History of *Madama Butterfly*

Feeling the advancements of age in his early forties, Puccini began searching vigorously for a libretto to be his next big project. While in London for *Tosca* in 1900, Puccini attended a play by David

⁶ Seligman, Vincent. Puccini Among Friends. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1938. Print.

⁷ Weaver, William. Puccini: The Man and his Music. *Metropolitan Opera Guild Composer Series*. Ed. Gerald Fitzgerald. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977.

⁸ Marek, George R. Puccini. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951. Print.

⁹ Ryan, Sarah Kay. "Insights on Madam Butterfly." Texas: Cultural Guild, 1981. Cassette sound recording.

Belasco at the Duke of York's Theater called *Madame Butterfly* in English, although he could understand none of the dialogue. His interest was immediately piqued by the vivid lighting techniques and of its potential to be transformed for the one-dimensional play to a full-scale opera with more complex characters. In an original example of Belasco's dialogue:

Kate: "Why, you poor little thing...who in the world could blame you or...call you responsible...you pretty little plaything." (Takes Madame Butterfly in her arms)

Butterfly: "No—no playthin'...I am Mrs. Leften—and B. F.—No—no—now I am, only—Cho-Cho-San, but no playthin'..." (Rises, then impassively) "How long you been marry?"^[10]

Puccini applied for the rights of the short story by John Luther Long, which was a Japanese-sympathetic version of Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysantheme*.^[11] He sent the script to Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, the two librettists he previously worked with on *La Boheme*. After much dispute over the final ending, the libretto was eventually completed in 1902. Even then, Puccini—always one to constantly edit and tweak until the very last possible second—cut a scene showing Butterfly in the American consulate, which provided a striking contrast for the audience between East and West in the mind of Illica.^[12] The main subject came about as a result of Western society's new-found love affair with Japanese culture.

¹⁰ Marek, George R. Puccini. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951. Print.

¹¹ Sadie, Stanley and Laura Macy. The Grove Book of Operas. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford Press Inc., 2006. Print.

¹² "Puccini, Giacomo." The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians. 2nd ed. 15th vol. pp. 567-580. Oxford University Press, 2001. Print.

Despite a rather painful delay in early 1903 with a motor accident, Puccini finished the score in December 1903 and the premiere was set for the Teatro all Scala in Milan on February 17, 1904. It was a disaster.^[13]

Because of his “immoral” way of living with Elvira and the aggressive competition that goes along with such widespread success, Puccini had made many enemies in Milan, which was assumed to be the source of such catastrophic reactions from the audience. At one point in the production, people with whistles were placed strategically around the crowd, making the sweet tweets of bird calls in order to enhance the audience’s experience. The audience responded with loud animal noises of their own.^[14] By the end of the night, the reactions of the audience were so hostile that Puccini cancelled all subsequent shows.

However, convinced of the integrity and quality of his work, Puccini allowed it to be shown at another, smaller location with a few editions. These editions include the re-working of Butterfly’s relations, and adding a short break in the middle of the incredibly long Act II. Although it is occasionally penned as a three-act opera, it is technically only two acts, with a short intermission in between the two halves of the second act. With its new premiere, *Madama Butterfly* begins to accumulate the prominence the work deserves and becomes a wildly successful hit.^[15] Even today, it is a popular choice, both in re-staging the “standard” version and as inspiration for Weezer’s *Pinkerton* album and onstage adaptations such as *Miss Saigon*.

¹³ Sadie, Stanley and Laura Macy. The Grove Book of Operas. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford Press Inc., 2006. Print.

¹⁴ Seligman, Vincent. Puccini Among Friends. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1938. Print.

¹⁵ Sadie, Stanley and Laura Macy. The Grove Book of Operas. 2nd ed. New York: Oxford Press Inc., 2006. Print.

Puccini's Later Life

Though Puccini had fame, wealth and success after *Madama Butterfly*, he became increasingly unhappy in his home life. His friends became calling Elvira “the policeman” because of her violent jealousy at Puccini’s “irrepressible womanizing.” Out of work and in search for another libretto, he settled on another David Belasco’s *Girl of the Golden West*. Since Illica was caught up on another work, Puccini found Carlo Zangarini, and dubbed *The Girl* “a second *Boheme*.” Difficulties arose when Giulio Ricordi was no longer able to intervene in problems that arose between composer and librettists, due to poor health.

Another scandal occurred when Elvira accused a devoted local girl who helped at the house in Torre del Lago of having an affair with Puccini. When the girl fled, Elvira filled the town with vicious rumors and slanders. Because of Puccini’s history, the entire village believed Elvira. The girl, insisting on her innocence, killed herself. When the family decided to sue Elvira, a doctor performed an autopsy on Doria and revealed that she was, in fact, a virgin. After the disastrous lawsuit in which Elvira was sentenced to five months in prison, although Puccini convinced the family to later settle out of court, their son Antonio brought them together and all three became a much closer, happier family.

Puccini was struck by the death of Giulio Ricordi, his surrogate father. With his profound reputation, he later completed *La Rondine* and *Turandot*, his last albeit unfinished opera. It was discovered he had throat cancer, too advanced to be treated except by radium therapy. After the therapy, he had to be fed nasally. His children kept watch at his bedside, until Puccini had a heart attack while the radioactive needles were still in his throat. His final words were to Fosca about Elvira.

A plaque was attached on the outside of Puccini’s childhood home shortly after his death. Its inscription reads (translated from Italian):

“Descending of a long line of musicians worthy of the living tradition of his country, Giacomo Puccini was born here on 22 December 1858, who blended with the new voices of life sounds inspired by

truth and charm, reaffirming, in pure and lively forms, the glorious primacy of our national art in the world.

—The proud city, on the thirtieth day of his death, 29 December 1924”^[16]

Madama Butterfly: Plot Synopsis and Striking Phrases^[17, 18, 19]

Act I

The opera begins with a concise orchestral prelude, stringing together four of Puccini’s ubiquitous themes. In the 1977 London version,^[9] Pinkerton is shown in a sepia color scheme knocking over multiple characters as he runs in slow motion from a house through a field. The desperation of his movements and utter despair on his facial expression foreshadows tragedy as he collapses.

Goro is introducing Pinkerton to his new house, one in which the walls and ceilings move as partitions in the traditional Japanese style during *E soffito e pareti* (And ceilings and walls). Pinkerton good-naturedly proclaims the design “magic” and “a house made of nothing.” When this observation is met by protest from Goro, he pokes his finger through the paper wall to show his point. Despite his joking spurs, Pinkerton is a generous client with wads of yen, whom the crooked Goro is more than willing to accommodate.

¹⁶ Marek, George R. Puccini. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1951. Print.

¹⁷ Giacomo, Giuseppe, Luigi Illica. *Madama Butterfly*. *OperaGlass*. <<http://opera.stanford.edu/Puccini/Butterfly/libretto.html>>. Dec 2003. Libretto.

¹⁸ Puccini, Giacomo. *Madama Butterfly*. International Music Score Library Project. <[http://imslp.org/wiki/Madama_Butterfly_\(Puccini,_Giacomo\)](http://imslp.org/wiki/Madama_Butterfly_(Puccini,_Giacomo))>. Oct 2009. Full Orchestral Score.

¹⁹ Puccini, Giacomo. *Madama Butterfly*. Feat. Luciano Pavarotti, Mirella Freni, Christa Ludwig, and Robert Kerns. London: London Records, 1974. Video Laserdisc.

This package is explained in more detail with Pinkerton's *Dovunque al mondo* (Throughout the world). When traditional tea is brought by Goro at Pinkerton's request, the two Americans both throw out the tea in front of Goro and pour whiskey into the tea cups. Pinkerton then shows Sharpless a lease for the house that lasts 999 years, though he has the option to cancel the contract every month. The three servants introduced earlier are included in the lease, and Pinkerton has purchased a wife for an additional price. The marriage is looked upon by Pinkerton as a parallel arrangement: it is a temporary marriage "in Japanese fashion" in which he can free himself every month. This arrangement fits perfectly into his philosophy on life, which he reveals to Sharpless with a series of photos featuring many different beautiful women around the world he has experienced, saying a Yankee is "not satisfied until he enjoys the joys of every place."

When asked by Sharpless if Pinkerton is truly in love with the bride-to-be Butterfly, Pinkerton is unsure of whether it is *Amore o grillo* (Love or fancy). He passionately enumerates her admirable qualities, saying he must have her "though I may crush her wings by catching her." Sharpless warns him not to "pluck her delicate wings" as the innocent Butterfly seems sincere in her love. Sharpless calls a toast to his family back in America, though Pinkerton toasts to the day he will have "a real wedding and marry a real American bride." This brings the audience to a significant point about Pinkerton: while he enjoys the cultural differences between Japan and America, he does not take the new customs as his own. They are simply a new pleasure to be experienced away from the "real" world.

The Disaster theme plays in the background while the women sing the misty approach of Butterfly coming down the hill in *Ancora un passo* (One step more). Butterfly herself is in complete joy of everything surrounding her, sighing, blissful, contented, and the self-proclaimed "happiest woman in all Japan." The final approach of Butterfly is signaled by Butterfly's fate theme.

The wedding scene is prefaced by the subtly flirting rapport between Pinkerton and Butterfly as they are introduced in *Gran ventura* (May good fortune attend you) in which Butterfly tells Pinkerton and Sharpless she previously had to earn her living as a geisha, though she is of noble birth, in light of her family's sudden poverty.

L'Imperial Commissario (The Imperial Commissioner) features a few bars of the Japanese National Anthem at the arrival of the Imperial Commissioner at the wedding. The Dagger theme is heard at the query of the whereabouts of Butterfly's father, and again in *Vieni, amor mio!* (Come, my love!) when Butterfly shows Pinkerton the few possessions she brought along in her sleeve to their new home. These include a mirror, some rouge, her ancestral statues, and a sword. Though Butterfly is unwilling to talk about it with so many people close by, Goro sneaks to Pinkerton and explains her father committed seppuku with that dagger at the suggestion of the Mikado, the Japanese emperor.

Butterfly confides in Pinkerton before the wedding that she converted from her native religion to Christianity so that she may worship "Pinkerton's God" in *Iera son salita tutta sola* (Yesterday, I went all alone). The short ceremony is performed in *Tutti zitti* (Quiet everyone) as they both sign the marriage certificate: Pinkerton with a signature and Butterfly with an X. The marriage celebrations begin in *Madama Butterfly* (Madam Butterfly), though they are cut short by Butterfly's uncle, the Bonze screaming *Cio-Cio San!* His entrance is heralded by gongs, and is the first appearance of the Curse theme. Having found out Butterfly has renounced her religion, the Bonze decrees the family denounce her. Pinkerton throws everyone out and comforts Butterfly with *Bimba, Bimba, non piangere* (Sweetheart, sweetheart, do not weep). The long love duet between Pinkerton and Butterfly adjourns to the moonlit garden in which Butterfly declares she is "renounced but happy." Butterfly speaks of love and beauty, though Pinkerton speaks only of passion. Butterfly asks if it is true that in America, a man will catch a butterfly and pin its wings to a table. Pinkerton admits it is, yet counters with, "Do you know why? So that she'll not fly away." He embraces her and says, "I have caught you. You are mine." To which she replies, "Yes, for life."

Act II, Part I

Suzuki prays to the Japanese gods for Butterfly to stop crying in *E Izaghi e Izanami* (And Izanagi and Izanami). This prayer scene features a Japanese folk song. The audience learns that Pinkerton left three years ago, Butterfly had his son in his absence, and that they are extremely poor. Butterfly insists Pinkerton will return when he promised, “with roses, when the earth is full of joy, and the robin makes his nest,” despite Suzuki’s gentle probing because Pinkerton left instructions with the consulate to continue paying for the house with strong locks to keep away the mosquitoes and relatives, and to keep her safe. She fantasizes about the day he will return in *Un bel di* (One beautiful day). The melody of this aria is repeated whenever Butterfly imagines Pinkerton’s return.

The now-estranged Sharpless calls upon Butterfly with a letter from Pinkerton in *C’è*. *Entrate*. (She’s there. Go in.), who has asked the consul to gently break it to her that he will never return. At his entrance, it is obvious Butterfly has remained steadfast to her American husband: she is dressed in American garb without rouge, she encourages him to leave his shoes when she says, “This is an American house,” and immediately corrects his initial greeting of “Madama Butterfly” to “Madama Pinkerton.” He is continually interrupted by the enthusiastic Butterfly, who asks him when robins make their nest in America. Once she explains what Pinkerton told her the morning before his departure, and her enduring faith to him, Sharpless becomes rather awkward and sloughs off the question by saying he isn’t sure because he never studied ornithology. The letter becomes such an important prop that it earns its own theme. The Letter music sounds like tip-toeing.

Goro provides further interruption from Sharpless’ unhappy task. Butterfly tells Sharpless he is wicked and immediately after Pinkerton left, he has been trying to marry her off again. The lavish and pompous Prince Yamadori is introduced as her eager and ardent suitor in *Yamadori, ancor le pene* (Yamadori, are you not yet...). Butterfly rebukes him for having so many wives, though the prince replies by saying he divorced all of them also. In Japan, a man is immediately divorced from his wife simply by leaving her. In a charming puppet show with the American Uncle Sam and Kabuki dolls her son has been playing with, Butterfly says that in America, “in the law of her country,” divorce cases must

go before a judge with laws that protect the rights of the wife. Sharpless must admit that this is indeed true. The three men discuss her naivete and Goro reveals Pinkerton is to arrive in Japan soon. Yamadori re-iterates that he would gladly never marry again once he had her, but is offended at her continued refusal and storms out with his entourage.

Once the other two men leave, Sharpless continues his attempt to read the letter from Pinkerton in *Ora a noi*. (Now for us.) Unable to read the end of the letter in light of Butterfly's unwavering faith and forgiveness, cursing "that devil Pinkerton!" for handing him such an unpleasant task, Sharpless gently asks Butterfly what she would do if Pinkerton were to never return. The question hits her like a death blow, signaled by a low, profound bass note in *Due cose potrei far* (Two things I could do). She is stunned into silence at first, and then slowly tells Sharpless she could do two things: go back to being a geisha, entertaining people with songs, or die. And she would much rather die.

When Sharpless tells her she should accept the Yamadori's offer, she is enraged and asks him to leave in *Ah! M'ha scordata?* (Ah! He has forgotten me?). It is at this point that Butterfly finally reveals the presence of her son to Sharpless. Butterfly says to the child, "Do you know what this man asked your mother to do? Bring you to the city and beg for your bread and clothes..."

Sharpless is overcome with pity, and excuses himself in *Io scendo al piano*. (I will go now.), promising to let Pinkerton know. The snake Goro is found in the house, where Suzuki reveals he's been spreading rumors about her son, saying "in America, a child without a father is an outcast." Butterfly threatens to kill him with the dagger, illustrated by the Dagger theme.

Butterfly spots Pinkerton's ships from the harbor in *Il cannone del porto!* (The cannon at the harbor!), accompanied by the melody of *Un bel di*. She is faint with joy, and excitedly tells Suzuki to pick all the flowers in the garden because she wants "the whole fragrance of Spring in here" when the petals are strewn on the floor. Suzuki warns that it will look like winter if the garden has no blooms, but Butterfly is too overjoyed to care in *Tutti i fiori?* (All the flowers?). Suzuki dresses Butterfly exactly like her wedding night in *Or vienmi ad adornar* (Now come to adorn me). They then sit in the house to wait,

expecting Pinkerton within an hour or two, and poke three holes in the paper wall so they each may see Pinkerton coming in their vigil. Evening falls and the scene darkens to black, except for two red lantern lights in the middle of the house. Act I ends with letter music in background and *Coro a bocca chiusa* (Humming Chorus).

Act II, Part II

Though Suzuki and her son have fallen asleep, Butterfly has remained steadfast all night in *Già il sole!* (The Sun's come up!) Suzuki convinces Butterfly to take the child to her room to rest. Just as they leave, Pinkerton and Sharpless enter the house in *Io so che sue dolore* (I know that her pain), entering cautiously and motioning Suzuki to be quiet, who explains everything, including that Butterfly scrutinized the colors and flags of every ship for the last three years in hopes of seeing Pinkerton. Suzuki spots a woman in the background and discovers Pinkerton has married an American woman, Kate, at which Suzuki declares the “world is plunged into gloom”. In a trio between Sharpless, Pinkerton, and Suzuki, Sharpless tries to reason with Suzuki about mediating to Butterfly that she give her child to Kate to care for, Pinkerton is lamenting the bitter fragrance of the wilted flowers strewn on the floor, and Suzuki is torn as she says, “how can she ask me to ask that of a mother?” Pinkerton is finally filled with remorse and sadly reminisces of his happiness in the marriage home in *Addio, fiorito asil* (Farewell, flowery refuge).

Suzuki requests to be with Butterfly alone to break the news to her. Just as Pinkerton exits, however, Butterfly rushes through the door, having heard voices in *Suzuki! Suzuki!* She immediately searches for Pinkerton, though she only finds Sharpless, Suzuki, and Kate. She slowly realizes everyone is silent and looking at her, and realization dawns on her. She looks off in the distance and says to Suzuki, “Suzuki, you are so kind. Do not cry. You love me so much. Tell me softly, just ‘yes’ or ‘no’... Is he alive?” Suzuki affirms that he is, and so Butterfly understands that Pinkerton has abandoned her, as everyone

predicted. Kate asks Butterfly directly to hand over the child, and pleads forgiveness for being “the accidental cause” of her suffering. Butterfly agrees to hand over her son, on the condition that Pinkerton must fetch the boy himself.

Once Butterfly is alone after sending Suzuki away with her son, *Come una mosca* (Like a little fly) features the love theme, curse theme, and dagger theme in rapid succession as you see how Butterfly’s mind works through the day’s events. The moment at which Butterfly makes the decision to follow her father’s path is marked by a low, deep note. She reads the inscription on the dagger aloud: “He dies with honor who can no longer live in honor.”

Suzuki bursts in and shoves the child at his mother. Butterfly is flustered, drops the dagger, and bathes him with hugs and kisses. Suzuki assists Butterfly with the ritual of seppuku and Butterfly’s tragic fate theme in *Con onor muore* (To die with honor) is played as the opera ends. Artistic license has been taken with the exact details of the last scene. In the London version ^[9], Pinkerton (played by Pavarotti) opens the door just in time to see Butterfly (played by Freni) drive the dagger through her throat, and immediately runs away screaming, tearing through the walls of the house. Her death as she falls to the floor is signaled by an ominous loud bass note. In other versions, Butterfly buries the dagger in her throat, covered by a scarf, at the sounds of Pinkerton calling her name outside the house. She merely points to the child, who is blindfolded and waving an American flag, as Pinkerton rushes into the room and drops her hand as she dies. Pinkerton bends over her, sobbing, while Sharpless takes the child.

Leitmotif Development: Pairing Music and Text

Concise, aggressive musical statements charged with emotion. “Puccini generated tremendous energy in very few notes, establish the pace and introducing a rhythmic motive or metric relationships that characterizes certain people or situations throughout the score.”^[5]

At certain points in the opera, Puccini uses Japanese tunes and Japanese-sounding melodies he composed specifically for this opera. The Oriental atmosphere is achieved by high flute tones and a

pentatonic minor scale. The traditional Japanese Cherry blossom song is played as Butterfly removes her few precious items from her sleeve.

No. 1

Allegro ♩ = 132

VIOLINI

I. *ff* *vigoroso*

II. *ff* *vigoroso*

Leitmotif No. 1 (Forboding Theme) appears many times throughout the plot, used by Puccini to represent the shifty purposes and erratic movements of the character. It is also used at the mention of the

No. 2

14 Allegretto moderato ♩ = 112

I. *f* *p*

wedding house, and symbolizes the fishy nature of the entire “package” Goro arranges for Pinkerton. Goro’s Leitmotif is used throughout the opera, in many different forms. For example, it is used in four different keys—C, G, A minor, and E minor—with a variety of dynamic ranges. However, this theme is characterized by utilizing only strings and woodwinds with ubiquitous grace notes (two are seen in Figure 1), always beginning on the upbeat, and stepwise progression to give this musical statement a feeling of unsteady forboding.

Leitmotif No. 2 (Goro’s Leitmotif) symbolizes the marriage itself, and appears whenever the marriage is discussed and as the relatives arrive. Only strings and woodwinds are used.

No. 3

17

a due *ff*

Fl. a due

Leitmotif No. 3 (Sharpless' Leitmotif) appears whenever Sharpless does. No brass or percussion is used. Although he is an American, he is respectful of the Japanese culture.



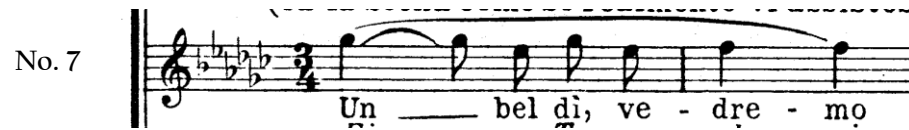
Leitmotif No. 4 (Pinkerton's Leitmotif) appears whenever Pinkerton is onstage, or is mentioned by the characters, the audience is heralded with a few bars of the USA National Anthem (the Star-Spangled Banner), symbolic of both man and country.



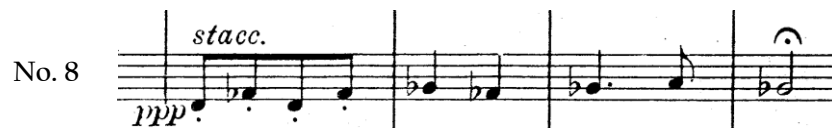
Leitmotif No. 5 (Love Theme) is made of a few combined musical statements which represent different types of love. 5a and 5b are concerned with the bridal party, relatives, and elements of the Love Duet while 5c represents Butterfly's own personal thoughts of love towards Pinkerton throughout the day. 5c is repeated many times, including in the final notes of the opera.



Leitmotif No. 6 symbolizes how Butterfly's family curses and renounces her after finding out she converted to Christianity for Pinkerton.



Leitmotif No. 7 symbolizes Butterfly's faith and hope in one of the most famous arias of the entire opera as she sings "Un bel di"



Leitmotif No. 8 is the Dagger theme. This appears whenever the dagger is mentioned (at the introductions and when threatening Goro), when Butterfly declares she'd rather die than go back to being a geisha, as she reads the inscription of the dagger, and at her death.

Analysis of Madama Butterfly

Form

With *Madama Butterfly*, Puccini has "taken his musical brush and painted a heart-rending production" of psychological depth, tenacious faith, and despair.^[1] Puccini affected the form of opera in his time through two methods: complex development of his characters and by his use of orchestral themes.

As seen in the original dialogue of Belasco's play, Puccini took previous stereotypes and misconceptions of Japanese women rampant during society's fashionable obsession with the newly-discovered Eastern culture and transformed them into complex, fascinating characters with whom we feel a growing sense of empathy and compassion that transcends the cultural barrier.

Many musical innovations were implemented in *Madama Butterfly*: Puccini all but gets rid of the overture, has the lead tenor as a weak, unheroic character, and develops a more integrated style of music. This style involves blending the music and text in such a way that vividly captures the emotions of onstage characters to each individual audience member by re-defining the orchestra's role. Previously, orchestra was mainly used to emphasize vocalizations and to fill interludes. In *Madama Butterfly*, the orchestra doesn't have a clear stopping point for applause after the many arias and duets. Puccini uses the orchestra much like a Greek chorus in that it issues comments and warnings of the plot as it unfolds, and reveals deeper insights into the minds of the characters.^[1]

The Importance of Names

Butterfly says during the love scene, "They say that abroad, every butterfly—if it falls into a man's hands—is transfixed with a pin and fastened to a table." This is exactly what happens to Cio-Cio-San as she is captured by Pinkerton, who "mounts" her both emotionally and sexually. Butterfly is even physically "pinned" in the last scene as she thrusts the dagger through her throat. Sharpless, though wise in this case, refuses to actively participate in the plot other than mediation. Pinkerton is a weak character, much like his comical name. Kate has no other role or character development other than being the typically American wife and is thus fitted with a typically common American name.

The Many Facets of Butterfly

Throughout the production, we see a range of emotions from Butterfly. In Act I, she is a young girl in love, who experiences extreme emotions that quickly switch back and forth: excited to be Pinkerton's bride, fearful at her renouncement by her family, soothed by Pinkerton after only a few words, fearful again at the idea that he might misuse her, and then she quickly regains trust in him again. In Acts II Part I and Part II, she shows her growth to full womanhood by turning on Goro—she's immune to his manipulation and remains steadfast in her faith. And yet, she experiences contradictory emotions, which switch between tender reminiscences and tragic despair. Puccini uses music to show the emotional development of

characters. Butterfly's fear is shown as we sense her fear as she feels threatened and hurt. Her pride and tenderness shines forth for her son as she shows him to Sharpless. Fury arises from her at Goro's remarks. Supreme joy reigns during the flower duet, which only heightens the magnitude of her despair at the realization of Pinkerton's abandonment and betrayal. Ultimately, the main conflict of Madama Butterfly is "the juxtaposition of Eastern and Western values."^[5] Butterfly believed she was marrying in the American fashion, whereas Pinkerton believed he was marrying in the Japanese fashion. It's a tragedy without a true villain, only weak characters and strong ones.