

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Passionate singing, masterful drama and intense emotion
take the stage in Vancouver Opera's
MADAMA BUTTERFLY

Vancouver, BC ~ Rehearsals are underway for the final production of Vancouver Opera's Golden Anniversary Season: a stunning *Madama Butterfly*, designed by Japanese-born sculptor **Jun Kaneko** and featuring Japanese soprano **Mihoko Kinoshita** in the title role and tenor **James Valenti**, winner of the 2010 Richard Tucker Prize, as Pinkerton.

Opening night is **Saturday, May 29, 2010**, with subsequent performances **Tuesday, June 1, Thursday, June 3, Saturday, June 5, Tuesday, June 8** and **Thursday, June 10**. All performances take place at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Georgia and Hamilton Streets, Vancouver, B.C. and begin at 7:30pm. Tickets are available exclusively at the Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre, online at www.vancouveropera.ca or by telephone (604-683-0222). See complete ticket information below.

VO Music Director **Jonathan Darlington**, acclaimed for his recent work on VO's *The Marriage of Figaro*, conducts the Vancouver Opera Orchestra and the Vancouver Opera Chorus (**Leslie Dala**, Associate Conductor and Chorus Director). The stage director is **Leslie Swackhamer**.

Rooted in Japanese tradition yet decidedly timeless, Kaneko's sets and costumes complement and intertwine perfectly with Puccini's intensely emotional music. The design is "visually daring while remaining true to the essence of the music and drama," raved *Opera* magazine, "Kaneko...has a perceptive eye for theatrical and dramatic effect...a splendidly integrated work of art."

This exquisitely beautiful production will ignite imaginations as it breaks hearts. For a closer look at the process of bringing *Madama Butterfly* to the stage, visit www.vancouveropera.ca for rehearsal footage, cast interviews, podcasts and VO's exclusive Opera Manga.

The Singers

Making her Vancouver Opera début is Japanese soprano **Mihoko Kinoshita**, one of the world's most in-demand Butterflies (Cio-Cio-San). "Her every inflection, physical as well as vocal, is real. Her death is nearly unbearable," praises the *Detroit News*, "...Kinoshita's vocal accomplishment is absolute. ...bound up in Kinoshita's vocal prowess is her stage savvy. Her acting instincts elevate her singing to a devastating naturalism. We believe in this ingenuous Butterfly as surely as she believes in her marriage to the long-departed Lt. Pinkerton."

Also making his VO début is tenor **James Valenti**, winner of the prestigious 2010 Richard Tucker Prize, singing Pinkerton. He has been praised by the *New York Post* for his "even lyric tenor, an aristocratic way with a vocal line and easy confidence" (as well as his "smoldering good looks".) "Like [Pavarotti], he is able to capture the "soul" in singing. Bravo!" raved Dallas' *Pegasus News*.

Mezzo-soprano **Zheng Cao** makes her Vancouver Opera debut as Suzuki. In 1998, she was chosen by conductor Seiji Ozawa to appear as a soloist in Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* for that year's Winter Olympic Games in Japan. Ms. Cao was a winner at the 1993 Palm Beach Opera International Vocal Competition and a 1992 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions finalist.

Baritone **Jeff Mattsey**, praised for the "colors and range" of his voice (*Opera News*) returns to VO to sing Sharpless. Mr. Mattsey can be heard on the recordings *Monteverdi: Vespers of 1610* with the Boston Baroque Symphony, which was nominated for Best Choral Performance at the 41st Grammy Awards, and *A Salute to American Music*. He sang at the Richard Tucker Foundation Opera Gala XVI.

Tenor **Joseph Hu** sings Goro, bringing just the "right amount of simpering and unctuousness to suit the role" (*Opera Tatler*). This also marks his VO début.

Bass **Andrew Stewart**, seen just weeks ago as the hilarious Gardener in VO's *The Marriage of Figaro*, sings The Bonze. Baritone **Andrew Greenwood**, last seen in VO's 2004 production of *Butterfly* reprises his roles as Prince Yamadori and The Commissioner. Mezzo-soprano **Dionne Sellinger** makes her VO début as Kate Pinkerton.

The Story, in brief

In Nagasaki, a pleasure-seeking American naval officer leases a house and weds a young geisha. He is only briefly enchanted with his "Butterfly", while she gives herself wholly to the marriage. When he abandons her and then returns to claim their child, Butterfly is devastated and dishonoured. In a supreme act of devotion to her ancestors, she ends her life. Read a full synopsis at www.vancouveropera.ca.

Background

The origins of the *Madama Butterfly* story are found in many sources. Giacomo Puccini based it on the short story "Madame Butterfly" (1898) by John Luther Long, which was also dramatized by David Belasco. Inspiration also came to Puccini from the novel *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887) by Pierre Loti. There are also reports that the opera was based on events that actually occurred in Nagasaki in the early 1890s.

The first version of *Madama Butterfly* premiered in Milan at La Scala on February 17, 1904. It was, like many now-beloved operas, poorly received. Puccini substantially revised the opera, and on May 28, 1904 it was performed again and enjoyed overwhelming success. Puccini went on to write three more revisions, with the fifth version now considered the standard version.

Madama Butterfly has since become a staple of pop culture, with the story becoming the basis of many film adaptations and the music appearing in everything from dance remixes to animation. A substantial list is available at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madama_Butterfly.

Full Ticket Information

Single tickets are available from the Vancouver Opera Ticket Centre, online at www.vancouveropera.ca, or by phone at 604-683-0222. Visa, MasterCard and American Express are accepted.

Groups: For special pricing for groups of ten or more, call 604-683-0222.

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