



MADAMA BUTTERFLY

SYNOPSIS

ACT I

The marriage broker Goro shows Lt. Pinkerton, USN, the house that Pinkerton has rented to occupy with his bride-to-be, the geisha Cio-Cio-San (Butterfly). Soon they are joined by the U.S. Consul at Nagasaki, Sharpless, who is surprised by the callous marriage contract Pinkerton is about to sign: It is valid for 999 years but can be annulled at the end of each month. He 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 marry one day. Just then, the voice of Butterfly is heard as she and her geisha friends ascend the hill. She is the happiest girl in Japan, she sings, coming to answer the summons of love. Butterfly talks of her unhappy family and tells Sharpless that at fifteen, a geisha is already an old woman. 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. The Imperial Commissioner and Official Registrar then perform the civil wedding ceremony. Sharpless leaves with a word of caution that he believes Butterfly is seriously in love, but Pinkerton has already turned to his new relatives, urging them to celebrate his happiness. 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. As night falls, Pinkerton realizes how much in love he is with Butterfly.

ACT II

Pinkerton has sailed away and three years have passed. Butterfly and her maid Suzuki are still 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 she insists on receiving him as an honored guest. Her hospitality interferes with his efforts to attend to the letter. 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 at last produces his letter, but Butterfly is so carried away by the thought that Pinkerton has written she fails to grasp the meaning of his words. 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, at which Butterfly goes out and returns with Pinkerton's child. She assures Sharpless that Pinkerton would never abandon such a beautiful, golden-haired child. Moved, Sharpless promises to inform Pinkerton of his son and leaves. Suzuki shouts at Goro, who has been saying that nobody knows who the child's real father is. Butterfly threatens him with a dagger and then drives him away. A cannon shot is heard and Butterfly takes up the spyglass and recognizes Pinkerton's ship. Sure that her faith will be rewarded, she and Suzuki proceed to decorate the house with flowers. Butterfly prepares for Pinkerton's arrival. She, Suzuki and the child wait and watch for Pinkerton's return.

Morning comes and still Pinkerton has not returned. When Butterfly carries the sleeping child off, Suzuki sees Sharpless, Pinkerton, and a strange American woman in the garden. Sharpless tells Suzuki that she is Pinkerton's wife. Realizing too late Butterfly's real love for him, and now struck with remorse, Pinkerton bids farewell to the Japanese house. He hurries off leaving Sharpless and Kate to confront Butterfly. When she enters, she soon realized the truth: This is Pinkerton's new wife and that they want to take the child. Butterfly sends them away, telling them that Pinkerton should come for the child in half an hour. She takes her father's dagger and is about to stab herself when Suzuki pushes the child into the room. Butterfly tells the boy that she will die so he can walk freely in the land across the sea. She sends him out to play, then commits suicide. Pinkerton's voice is heard calling in the distance as Butterfly dies.