

Realism, verismo, exoticism, Puccini, and *Madama Butterfly*



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Italian opera of the 19th century

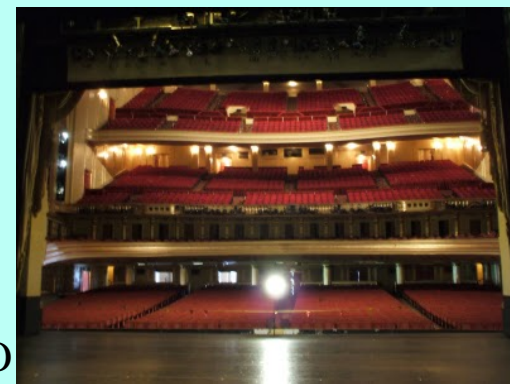
Milano: Teatro alla Scala



- Deeply rooted in national life
- Cared little for Wagner
- Verismo as reaction against Wagner
- Verismo (realism): a phase of naturalism in literature and music characterized by projection on stage of fierce passions, violence, and death
- Expression of intense passion, arouse sensation by violent contrasts, cross section of life, sensational harmonies, concentration
- 1890 Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* (*Rustic Chivalry*) & 1892 Leoncavallo's *I pagliacci* (*The Clowns*) first examples, one act each (unity of intent and passion) like each of the three Puccini operas in *Il trittico* (*The triptych*)

(19th-century) Exoticism

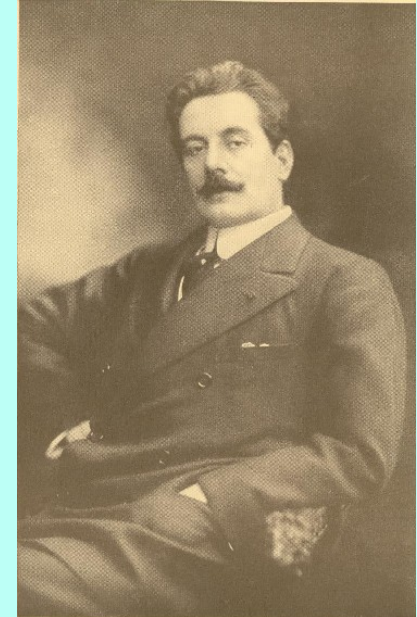
- From travels and Great Exhibition @ Crystal Palace in London (Queen Victoria & King Albert): 1851--imperialism display
- Exoticism or Orientalism (China, Japan...)
- 1978 Edward Said: “Orientalism: pervasive Western tradition, both academic and artistic, of prejudiced outsider interpretations of the East, shaped by the attitudes of European imperialism in the 18th and 19th centuries.”
- In music use of different scales and intervals (pentatonic or whole tone scale, augmented seconds etc.), special instruments, and quote melodies
 - *Madama Butterfly* (Japan)--uses Japanese folk melodies
 - *Fanciulla del West* (California)
 - *Turandot* (China)



SFO

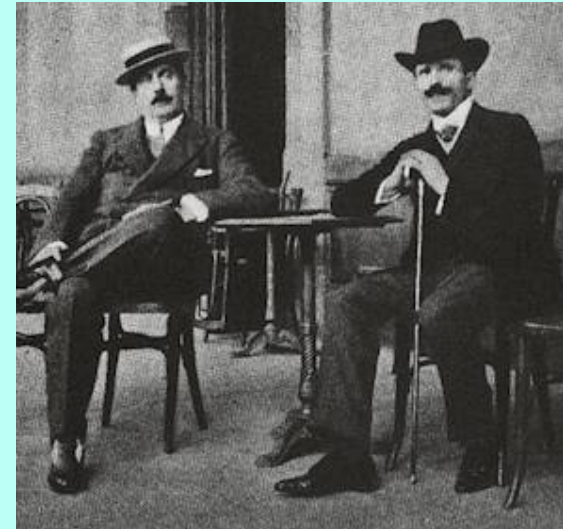
Giacomo Puccini (1858-1924)

- Born in Lucca in musical family
- Father died when he was 5: went to study with uncle. Was unruly and non committed to study
- Became organist but saw *Aida* in Pisa and decided to become opera composer
- 1880 to Milan conservatory
- Relationship with Elvira Bonturi, one son
- 1891 to Torre del Lago by Viareggio
- 1903 serious car accident, long recovery
- 1904 finally marries Elvira
- Was a heavy smoker
- 1924 dies of throat cancer



Puccini's ten operas

- 1882 first opera: *Le Villi*
- 1889 *Edgar*
- 1893 *Manon Lescaut*
- 1896 *La bohème*
- 1900 *Tosca*
- 1904 *Madama Butterfly*
- 1910 *La fanciulla del West*
- 1917 *La rondine*
- 1918 *Il trittico*:
 - *Il tabarro*
 - *Suor Angelica*
 - *Gianni Schicchi*
- *Turandot* (unfinished)



with Toscanini



Table of Puccini's operas, with details about the librettist, the type of work, and the place and year of the premiere

Title	Librettist	Type	Year
Le villi	F. Fontana, after A. Karr: <i>Les willis</i>	leggenda drammatica in due quadri	MI, 1884
Edgar	Fontana, after A. de Musset: <i>La coupe et les lèvres</i>	dramma lirico	MI, 1889
Manon Lescaut	D. Oliva and L. Illica, after Abbé Prévost: <i>L'histoire du chevalier des Grioux et de Manon Lescaut</i>	dramma lirico	TO, 1893
La bohème	Illica and G. Giacosa, after H. Murger: <i>Scènes de la vie de bohème</i>	opera	TO, 1896
Tosca	Illica and Giacosa, after V. Sardou: <i>La Tosca</i>	melodramma	RM, 1900
Madama Butterfly	Illica and Giacosa, after D. Belasco's stage version of a magazine story by J.L. Long	tragedia giapponese	MI, 1904
La fanciulla del West	G. Civinini and C. Zangarini, after Belasco: <i>The Girl of the Golden West</i>	opera	NY, 1910
La rondine	G. Adami, after A. M. Willner and H. Reichert	commedia lirica	Monte Carlo 1917
Il tabarro	Adami, after D. Gold: <i>La houppelande</i>	opera	NY, 1918
Suor Angelica	G. Forzano		
Gianni Schicchi	Forzano, developed from a few lines in Dante: <i>Inferno</i> , xxx: 32–3, 42–5		
Turandot	Adami and R. Simoni, after C. Gozzi and F. von Schiller	dramma lirico	MI, 1926

Puccini's style

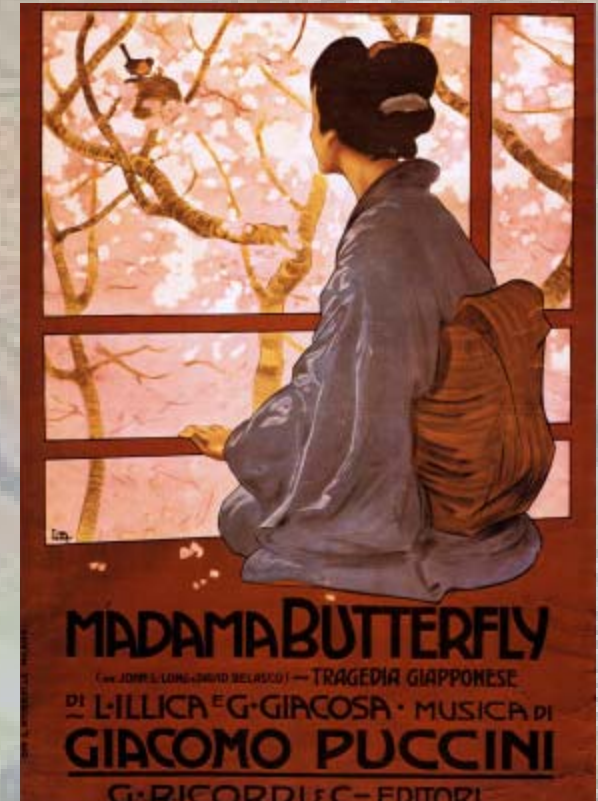
- Melody driven
- Popular appeal of music
- Parlando style of declamation
- Significant motives (leitmotifs)
- No closed numbers, alternation of “conversational” and lyrical portions
- Masterful manipulation of orchestral color, rich orchestration
- “perpetual pregnancy” of melodies, where heightened emotional state is presented
- Insistence on precision in most minute details (e.g., exact tune sung in *Tosca's Te Deum*, exact pitch of St. Peter's bells for *Tosca's* act 3, Japanese melodies in *Butterfly*, etc.)



Madama Butterfly

- *Tragedia giapponese* in two acts to a libretto by G. Giacosa and L. Illica
 - after David Belasco's one-act play *Madame Butterfly* (which Puccini saw in London in June 1900), itself based on
 - John Luther Long's 1895 short story *Miss Cherry-Blossom of Tôkyô*, which in turn was based partly on
 - Pierre Loti's 1887 tale *Madame Chrysanthème*
- Belasco's play had the tragic ending, in Long's story Butterfly's suicide is interrupted by Suzuki and Dolore
- Opened in Milan, Teatro alla Scala, 17 February 1904: disaster, withdrawn (revised version, Brescia, Teatro Grande, 28 May 1904: triumph)

Brescia:
Teatro
Grande



A tale of love and heartbreak in an exotic Japanese Setting: Nagasaki, beginning of 20th century

Dramatis personae

- Cio-Cio-San (Madama Butterfly) (S)
- Suzuki (Butterfly's maid) (MS)
- Pinkerton (US Navy Lieutenant) (T)
- Sharpless (US consul in Nagasaki) (Br)
- Goro (matchmaker) (T)
- Prince Yamadori (T)
- The Bonze (Buddhist priest, Butterfly's uncle) (B)
- Cio-Cio-San's uncles and other officials (B, B, B)
- Cio-Cio-San's mother (MS)
- Aunt and Cousin (S, S)
- Kate Pinkerton (MS)
- Dolore ("Sorrow," Cio-Cio-San's child) (silent)



Patricia Racette (SFO)



Zheng Cao (SFO)



Synopsis Act 1

- Japan, early twentieth century. On a flowering terrace above Nagasaki harbor, U.S. Navy Lieutenant B. F. Pinkerton inspects the house he has leased from a marriage broker, Goro, who has just procured him three servants and a geisha wife, Cio-Cio-San, known as Madama Butterfly. To the American consul, Sharpless, Pinkerton describes his carefree philosophy. He is enchanted with the fragile Cio-Cio-San, but he says he will one day marry a “real” American wife. Entering surrounded by friends, Cio-Cio-San tells Pinkerton how, when her family fell on hard times, she had to earn her living as a geisha. She shows Pinkerton her few earthly treasures. The wedding celebration is interrupted by Cio-Cio-San’s uncle, a Buddhist priest, who curses the girl for having renounced her ancestors’ religion. Pinkerton angrily sends the guests away. Alone with Cio-Cio-San in the moonlit garden, he dries her tears, and she joins him in singing of their love.

Synopsis Act 2

- Three years later, Cio-Cio-San waits for her husband's return, her eyes fixed on the harbor. When the maid shows her how little money is left, Cio-Cio-San urges her to have faith: one fine day Pinkerton's ship will appear on the horizon. Sharpless brings a letter from the lieutenant and suggests Pinkerton may not return. Cio-Cio-San proudly carries forth her child, Dolore (Sorrow), saying that as soon as Pinkerton knows he has a son he surely will come back; if he does not, she would rather die than return to her former life. Moved by her devotion, Sharpless leaves, without having revealed the full contents of the letter. Cio-Cio-San, on the point of despair, hears a cannon report; seizing a spyglass, she discovers Pinkerton's ship entering the harbor. Now delirious with joy, she orders Suzuki to help her fill the house with flowers. As night falls, Cio-Cio-San, Suzuki and the child begin their vigil.

Synopsis Act 3

- As dawn breaks, Suzuki insists that Cio-Cio-San rest. Humming a lullaby to her child, she carries him to another room. Sharpless enters with Pinkerton, followed by Kate, his new wife. When Suzuki realizes who the American woman is, she collapses in despair but agrees to aid in breaking the news to her mistress. Pinkerton, seized with remorse, bids an anguished farewell to the scene of his former happiness, then rushes away. When Cio-Cio-San comes forth and finds Kate, she guesses the truth. Shattered, she agrees to give up her child. Then, sending even Suzuki away, she takes out the dagger with which her father committed suicide, choosing to die with honor. Suzuki pushes the child into the room. Sobbing farewell, Cio-Cio-San sends him to play, then stabs herself. As she dies, Pinkerton is heard calling her name.

Geisha culture

- Geisha are entertainers, not prostitutes
- *Most* are female, not all (there are male geishas)
- They perform as dancers, play classical Japanese instruments (like the shamisen and shakuhaki), and are skilled conversationalists, and tea ceremony performers
- They are trained in expensive special schools
- They start training as very young girls and some are confined to geisha houses (“Okiya”). This until about 1950, then no child labor. Often daughters of geishas.
- Geishas in training (“maiko”) go to school and follow their mentor (“big sister”) around her engagements
- Different dress for maiko and full-fledged geisha
- They wear very elaborate hairdos, makeup (they indicate the level of training) and dress (kimono, obi, etc.)



Exotic music?

- Puccini uses many Japanese melodies, probably learned from a collection of Japanese songs by Y. Nagai and K. Kobatake (1891-2), or possibly from a collection arranged for piano by R. Dittrich (1894-5)
- Carefully studied all elements of Japanese culture and costumes, aided by famous actress Sada Yakko and by the wife of the Japanese ambassador, Mrs. Oyama
- Use of instruments to give peculiar “oriental” color such as bells, Japanese tam tam, cymbals, chimes, triangle, etc.
- Use of non Western exotic scales, such as the whole-tone or the pentatonic scales (e.g. Sakura or Ha-Uta)
- Characterization of situations with appropriate music (e.g. Japanese anthem at their wedding, Pinkerton sings on the Star-Spangled banner, then the Navy anthem)
- Meeting of *two* exotic cultures for Italians: US and Japan



Some notable musical moments

- “Dovunque al mondo” (Pinkerton’s “easy” philosophy, with *Star spangled banner* motif)
- “Vieni, amor mio,” (with Japanese songs Ha-Uta and Sakura and “fate” motive)
- “Viene la sera” (Duet Butterfly-Pinkerton)
- “Un bel dí vedremo levarsi un fil di fumo” (Butterfly’s aria about the joy of Pinkerton’s awaited return)
- “Scuoti quella fronda di ciliegio” (duet Butterfly-Suzuki while adorning the house with cherry blossoms)
- Humming chorus (during Butterfly’s vigil)
- “Addio fiorito asil” (Pinkerton’s parting *romanza*)

[<http://www.operaamerica.org/Content/Archive/OnlineLearning/butterfly/index.html> has
lots of info]