

Detroit Opera

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Detroit Opera's 2023–24 Season Opens Oct. 7 with Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*— seen through a new lens



Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* will open the Detroit Opera season on October 7.

Photo: Philip Groshong / Cincinnati Opera

DETROIT, September 7, 2023—On October 7, the 2023–24 Detroit Opera season opens with a spectacular new co-production of *Madame Butterfly*, a beloved favorite of operagoers. You'll hear all the music you know and love, seen through the lens of an all-Japanese and Japanese-American creative team that reframes Puccini's 1904 tragedy as the fantasy of a modern-day Pinkerton. **Matthew Ozawa** directs *Madame Butterfly*, a co-production with Cincinnati Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, and Utah Opera. The creative team includes **Kimie Nishikawa and dots** (scenery design), **Maiko Matsushima** (costume design), and **Yuki Nakase Link** (lighting design). **Kensho Watanabe** will conduct the singers, chorus, and musicians of the Detroit Opera Orchestra. There will be three performances of *Madame Butterfly*: **October 7, 13, and 15.**

The story: In the opera, Cio-Cio-San, a 15-year-old Japanese girl also known as Madame Butterfly, falls in love with B.F. Pinkerton, an American naval officer stationed in Nagasaki. The

two are married, but the marriage is not legally binding. Pinkerton returns to America and leaves her behind in Japan. Three years later, Cio-Cio-San, now with a young son, faithfully waits for Pinkerton's ship to return to the Nagasaki harbor. When he does return, he is accompanied by his new American wife, Kate Pinkerton, who has come to adopt the child so that she and her husband can raise him in America. Cio-Cio-San commits suicide.

Rave reviews for Matthew Ozawa's *Madame Butterfly*: *Opera News* called Ozawa's production "an extraordinary re-envisioning of the opera, a subtle critique that does no violence to the work but focuses attention on what is already there." The *Cincinnati Business Courier* wrote, "In the title role, soprano Karah Son sang radiantly.... She poured out her heart and soul in the showpiece aria in Act 2, 'Un bel di,' as she waited for Pinkerton to return.... She is a Butterfly for a new day.... The concept added an extra layer to one of the best-loved operas of all time that turned out to be both thoughtful and provocative."

Why *Madame Butterfly* matters: Today, it is important to make sure that the people who are telling this story can deal with the representation in a way that truly honors the cultures being depicted. The story is based on a play by David Belasco, adapted from a magazine story by John Luther Long. Neither Long, Belasco, nor Puccini had ever visited Japan. In its coverage of the Cincinnati world premiere of this production in July, the *New York Times* wrote that the opera has "long been criticized for its portrait of Asian women as exotic and submissive, and the use of exaggerated makeup and stereotypical costumes in some productions." Matthew Ozawa has brought to this very Western art form a production that looks in both directions, for an honorable representation of Japanese culture. Ozawa states, "Just as Butterfly is trapped with little agency in the opera, we as Asian Americans have been trapped by many of the traditional depictions of Butterfly's story. We seek now to release this opera's wings for all to experience anew."

Madame Butterfly

[October 7, 13, & 15, 2023](#)

Detroit Opera House

Music by Giacomo Puccini

Libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa

Based on the play by David Belasco

Sung in Italian with projected English translations

Director: Matthew Ozawa

Conductor: Kensho Watanabe

Scenery design: Kimie Nishikawa and dots

Costume design: Maiko Matsushima

Lighting design: Yuki Nakase Link

Co-Production of Detroit Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Pittsburgh Opera, and Utah Opera

Cio-Cio-San, *Madame Butterfly*: Karah Son (soprano)

Lt. Pinkerton: Eric Taylor (tenor)

Suzuki: Kristen Choi (mezzo-soprano)

Sharpless: Nmon Ford (baritone)

Goro: Julius Ahn (tenor)

The Bonze: Kidon Choi (baritone)

Yamadori and Imperial Commissioner: Rolfe Daus (baritone)

Kate Pinkerton: Lisa Marie Rogali (mezzo-soprano)

Performance dates:

Saturday, Oct. 7, 2023, 7:30pm

Friday, Oct. 13, 2023, 7:30pm

Sunday, Oct. 15, 2023, 2:30pm