

MADAME BUTTERFLY

GIACOMO PUCCINI

Synopsis

ACT ONE

Near Nagasaki in the early 1900s

American naval officer, Pinkerton, has taken out a 999-year lease on a little house, and is making the final arrangements with the Japanese marriage-broker, Goro, for a Japanese wedding. From a discussion with the American consul, Sharpless, we gather that according to Japanese law the marriage will not be binding. Pinkerton revels in the carefree attitude as a 'Yankee vagabondo' who takes his pleasure where he finds it ('Dovunque al mondo'); Sharpless tries in vain to warn him that his 15-year-old bride, Butterfly, is serious about the marriage. Butterfly enters amid a bustle of friends and relatives, singing happily of the love that awaits her. After shyly greeting Pinkerton, she shows him her belongings - including the ceremonial dagger with which her father killed himself - and the Commissioner performs the wedding ceremony. But the festivities are short-lived; her uncle (the Bonze) arrives and curses her for converting to Christianity, and her relatives and friends immediately join him in rejecting her. Her servant Suzuki prepares her for the wedding night, and she joins Pinkerton in the garden for an extended love duet ('Viene la sera'). He is enchanted with his plaything-wife and, while she speaks tenderly of her love, ardently claims his fluttering, captured butterfly.

ACT TWO

Part One: The same house, several years later

Butterfly and Suzuki are alone. Pinkerton sailed for America three years ago, but Butterfly remains fiercely loyal and describes to Suzuki her dream of his return ('Un bel di'). Sharpless, knowing that Pinkerton has taken an American wife and will soon be arriving in Nagasaki with her, attempts to prepare Butterfly for the shock. But Butterfly will not listen and remains stubbornly faithful; she shows Sharpless the child she has borne Pinkerton without his knowledge, convinced that this revelation will ensure her husband's return. Sharpless leaves, unable to face Butterfly with the truth. A cannon shot is heard and Butterfly and Suzuki see Pinkerton's ship coming into harbor. Butterfly jubilantly prepares for his return, filling the room with flowers and again donning her bridal costume. With preparations complete, the two women and the child sit down to wait for Pinkerton's arrival. Night falls; as Suzuki and the child sleep and Butterfly waits motionless, a humming chorus is heard in the distance.

Part Two

It is dawn and Butterfly has fallen asleep at her post. Suzuki rouses her and she carries the sleeping child into the next room, singing a lullaby. Pinkerton and Sharpless arrive and ask Suzuki to talk to Pinkerton's new wife, Kate, who is waiting outside. Suzuki agrees, but the sight of her distress, together with memories of the past, overcome Pinkerton. He is filled with remorse ('Addio fiorito asil'), and he leaves rather than face the woman he deserted. Butterfly rushes in, searching desperately for Pinkerton, but she sees only the strange woman waiting in the garden. Suzuki and Sharpless manage to break the news that this is Pinkerton's wife, and that her husband will never return to her. Butterfly seems to accept the blow, and agrees to give up her son, asking only that Pinkerton come in person to fetch him. Kate and Sharpless leave; Suzuki tries to comfort Butterfly, but she asks to be left alone. She takes her father's dagger from the wall and prepares to kill herself. Suzuki pushes the child into the room, and Butterfly drops the dagger, momentarily deterred. After an impassioned farewell ('O a me, sceso dal trono'), she sends the child away, and commits ritual suicide just as Pinkerton rushes in calling her name.