

**Cleveland Opera Theater:
Madama Butterfly at Maltz PAC (Apr. 27)**

by Daniel Hathaway



After losing its previous performing venue — the Masonic Auditorium having been sold — Cleveland Opera Theater has found a new home in the Maltz Performing Arts Center at CWRU. On Friday, April 27, stage director Scott Skiba and conductor Domenico Boyagian brought the tragedy of Cio Cio San, alias

Madama Butterfly, to life in an elegantly simple production on the wide stage of the former temple.

Four of the leads carried the show. In the title role, soprano Dina Kuznetsova sang with beauty, power, and eloquence (though, like most Cio-Cio Sans, she could scarcely be mistaken for a 15-year old). As B.F. Pinkerton, tenor John Pickle quickly established his character as a cad, singing handsomely except in his extreme high register, where his voice kicked into an odd sort of overdrive. Baritone Young Kwang Yoo was as fine an actor as a vocalist in the role of Sharpless, the U.S. Consulate. Mezzo-soprano Sandra Ross was bright-voiced and sympathetic as the prayerful maid Suzuki.

As the Marriage Broker, Mark Eldred was an animated actor, but mostly inaudible — and he had some important lines to put across. Smaller parts were efficiently sung and acted by Jason Budd (Zio Bonzo), Bryant Bush (Imperial Commissario), Spencer Lawrence Boyd (Principe Yamadori), Johnathan Stucky (Ufficiale del registro), Gillian Hollis (Kate Pinkerton), Jen Woda (Madre di Cio-Cio San), Nicole Futoran (Zia), Megan Slack (Cugina), Jason Fuh (Zio Yakuside), and Simone Boyagian (Dolore, Cio-Cio San's adorably fidgety son).

Domenico Boyagian paced the show with consummate skill and drew colorful, well-balanced playing from the fine orchestra, using a reduced version of Puccini's original orchestration. The minimal but evocative scenic design by Matthew D. McCarren featured projections by Brittany Merenda that changed subtly from season to season. The two great screens slid open and closed for entrances and exits, and turned characters into shadow puppets when they played scenes from behind — including Butterfly's *seppuku* at the end of the drama.

The beautifully kimonoed chorus added color and texture to the production. Their candle-lit procession down the side aisles of the Maltz during the Humming Chorus created a lovely effect.

Puccini originally structured the opera in two acts, that Humming Chorus acting as a bridge between the two halves of Act Two. Later, *Madama Butterfly* was revised into a three-act work, which makes for a long evening, especially on Friday when the “curtain” rose late and speeches further delayed the start time. Maybe Puccini had the right idea the first time around. It would tighten up the drama, which sags a bit two-thirds of the way through.

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