

INTRODUCTION

One evening in the spring of 1900, while he was in England to supervise the London premiere of *Tosca*, Giacomo Puccini went to the theater to see an evening of one-act plays. One of the plays on the program was a new drama by American playwright David Belasco, called *Madame Butterfly*. Though he knew little English, Puccini was deeply affected by the melodramatic plot. A highlight of the play was a silent fourteen-minute scene simulating the heroine's all-night vigil as she waited for her husband's return home, with the passage of time suggested by Belasco's innovative use of stage lighting. It was that scene that stimulated Puccini's imagination, and he began thinking of ways he could set it to music. Shortened to about three minutes, it became the "Humming Chorus" that provides the transition between the final scenes of the opera *Madama Butterfly*.

This incident tells us a lot about Puccini's approach to operatic practice. Whereas other composers, most notably Verdi and Britten, were convinced that great literature could inspire great music,

Puccini was not much of a reader and was more impressed with visually dramatic incidents. No one else could get so much dramatic impact from quiet moments; think of Tosca's monotone as she holds the knife over Scarpia's body, the way that the stage falls silent when Mimi dies in *La bohème*, the hush that falls over the stage after Liu's understated death aria in *Turandot*, or the poker game in *La Fanciulla del West*.

As for *Madame Butterfly*, according to Belasco, Puccini raced backstage after the performance, embraced him, and begged for the rights to set the play to music: "I agreed at once, and told him that he could do anything he liked with the play and make any sort of contract because it is not possible to discuss business arrangements with an impulsive Italian who has tears in his eyes and both his arms round your neck." The consensus among Puccini's biographers is that Belasco's description was simply an act of self-promotion, but it is true that in the months that followed, the composer became increasingly fascinated with the character of Butterfly, who was to become his favorite heroine. Many critics have wryly commented that we are fortunate that Puccini was not fluent

in English and could not understand the banality of the Pidgin English in speeches like the following: “Aha, that’s ‘Merican way sayin’ good-bye to girl. Yaes, he come back w’en robins nes’ again. Shu’h! Shu’h!...Sa-ey! Why no ‘shu’h’ on you face for?” Yet Puccini created from this simple girl one of his noblest heroines.

This story has a sequel. In 1907, while visiting New York, in connection with the American premiere of *Madama Butterfly*, Puccini took in another Belasco play, *The Girl of the Golden West*, and in the rough gun-slinging title character he saw the potential for a heroine whose love was capable of redeeming her entire society. Thus was born the opera *La Fanciulla del West*. Such was the power of Puccini’s imagination; such is the power of Puccini’s music.

CHARACTERS

Madame Butterfly, also known by her Japanese name Cio-Cio-San (soprano)—a fifteen-year-old geisha

Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton (tenor)—an American naval officer

Sharpless (baritone)—the American consul in Nagasaki

Suzuki (mezzo-soprano)—Butterfly's faithful household servant

Goro (tenor)—a marriage broker

The Bonze (bass)—Butterfly's uncle, a priest

Prince Yamadori (baritone)—a wealthy Japanese man

The Imperial Commissioner (bass)

The Official Registrar (baritone)

Kate Pinkerton (mezzo-soprano)—Pinkerton's American wife

Dolore (non-singing)—Butterfly and Pinkerton's son (his name translates to Sorrow, or Trouble)

Chorus: Yaksude (baritone), Cousin (soprano), Butterfly's mother and aunt (both mezzos)

THE STORY

Madama Butterfly represents Puccini's first attempt to capture the flavor of a non-European nation in his operas. To do so, he not only incorporated melodic fragments of some genuine Japanese songs but also wrote some melodies of his own in the pentatonic (5-note) scale.

At the time that he wrote this opera, Puccini was increasingly feeling the influence of Richard Wagner, whose theories about music drama had dominated the operas of the second half of the previous century. This influence can be seen in three ways in this opera: the increased emphasis on the role of the orchestra in telling the story; the focus on a continuous melodic structure rather than the use of set pieces, such as arias; and the use of recurring musical motifs to bring to mind certain characters and situations from earlier in the opera. One technique that Puccini had used in *La bohème* and employed more extensively in this opera is having the orchestra play a melody while the singers join their voices to the melody in

fragments. Despite the influence of Wagner, however, Puccini never forsook writing beautiful melodies for the human voice.

ACT I: Early 20th century. The exterior of Pinkerton and Butterfly's new home.

As is typical for Puccini, there is no overture and we are thrown directly into the action. The orchestra plays a tune which sounds Oriental in flavor but is in the form of a fugato, where the instruments enter individually to create a layered effect—definitely a Western form. The tempo of the melody suggests the hustle and bustle of the preparations for Butterfly and Pinkerton's wedding.

As the opera's action begins, Goro, the marriage broker, is showing Pinkerton the new home the latter has just leased, with its various sliding panels. Pinkerton, with his typical attitude of American superiority, criticizes the flimsiness of its construction. Goro introduces Pinkerton to the household servants. Suzuki sings words of welcome, but Pinkerton comments sarcastically about her chattering—the first sign of his dismissiveness of the Japanese people. Later in the act, he will insult Butterfly's family and treat Goro as a servant. Goro lists the

relatives who will be in attendance, slyly adding that Pinkerton and Butterfly will be responsible for their descendants.

Sharpless, the American consul, enters, out of breath from climbing the hill to the house. Pinkerton brags how he has a 999-year lease, which he can cancel on a month's notice. The first line of the "Star Spangled Banner" (which at that time was not yet America's official anthem) is heard in the orchestra, introducing a brief *arioso* (short aria) "Dovunque al mondo" ("All Over the World"), in which Pinkerton brags about how the "Yankee vagabond" goes around the world finding profit and pleasure wherever he can. Sharpless interrupts him by criticizing his "easy creed." Pinkerton goes on to explain that his marriage, like his lease, can be terminated on a month's notice. (This institution of the temporary marriage actually had existed for many years in Japan, giving an aura of false respectability into what was in effect a form of prostitution). Demonstrating the adage that "patriotism is the last refuge of the scoundrel," Pinkerton quiets the old man with a toast, "America Forever!" (sung in English), as the orchestra repeats the first four notes of the anthem. Goro interrupts, suggesting that Sharpless might also

be interested in a similar marriage arrangement, but he is ignored. In another *arioso*, “Amore o grillo” (“Love or Fancy”), Pinkerton describes his fascination. Sharpless tries to warn Pinkerton that Butterfly takes the idea of marriage seriously, but Pinkerton ignores him, choosing instead to drink to his future “American wife.”

Because this scene is more of a dialogue than a formal duet, people used to the earlier style of operatic writing may tend to overlook the beauty of the music, but this scene is vintage Puccini, representing the composer at the height of his power. The composer, incidentally, said he was looking for an American sound in the music for this scene, but it is likely that most listeners will hear it as Italian in style.

Ironically, just as the words “American wife” have been uttered, a Japanese-style melody is heard offstage, and we hear Butterfly sing “Ancora un passo or via” (“One More Step to Go”). Puccini, traditionally preferring understatement to overstatement, has created the perfect introduction for his delicate heroine: ethereal music that makes us feel that she is floating in on a cloud. She

exclaims that she is the happiest girl in the world, and she tells her entourage to bow to Pinkerton.

After some introductions, Butterfly explains that she is from a once-wealthy family that has fallen upon hard times. Sharpless questions her and is dismayed to learn that she is only fifteen years old. He asks her if she has any sisters, and she replies that she has only her mother. Goro chimes in, apparently believing that Sharpless might be looking for an age-appropriate relationship, adding that the mother is a noble lady. Pinkerton asks about Butterfly's father, and some ominous chords accompany the one-word response: "Morto" ("dead").

Butterfly shows Pinkerton some possessions she has brought with her, including a dagger. Goro explains that her father had used it to commit hari-kari at the command of the Mikado. Butterfly goes on to tell Pinkerton that without informing her relatives she has converted to Christianity so that she can pray with her husband.

The wedding takes place (a brief civil ceremony), but the celebration is cut short by the appearance of the Bonze, Butterfly's

uncle, who is a priest of the local religion. He berates her for abandoning the faith of her ancestors. Pinkerton chases him out, and the rest of the attendees exit with him.

As he had done at the end of the first act of *La Boheme* and was to do again in *La Fanciulla del West*, Puccini leaves the lovers on stage alone for the final ensemble. There follows the fabled wedding-night duet, a sixteen-minute encounter containing some of the most beautiful melodies Puccini ever penned. Actually, the scene is more of a dialogue than a duet, for the two sing together only at the conclusion. Though the two are equal musically, it is clear that this is not a relationship of equals. Pinkerton exclaims that he has captured her as one captures a Butterfly (pinned to a board, she notes), and when she sings of the beauty of the night, all he can say “vieni, vieni” (“come on, come on”). “You are mine,” he declares, never thinking that “I am yours” would be more appropriate. Nevertheless, the duet ends with a magnificent melodic expression from the orchestra as the curtain falls.

ACT II: Three years later. The interior of the home

As we will soon learn, Pinkerton had left Japan shortly after the wedding and has not communicated with Butterfly since. As the curtain opens, Butterfly and Suzuki are praying to their respective gods (Suzuki's prayer is a genuine Japanese folk melody). Butterfly chides Suzuki for not praying to the "American god." They discuss the fact that their money is running low, and Suzuki wonders what would happen if Pinkerton were not to return. As Butterfly reminds Suzuki that Pinkerton promised to return when the robins nest, we hear bird sounds in the orchestra. In the aria "Un bel dì vedremo" ("One Fine Day We Shall See"), Butterfly declares her faith that Pinkerton will indeed return. While this is one of Puccini's most celebrated set pieces, the composer did not set it apart; rather, it grows organically from the dialogue, and the singing ends mid-phrase, leaving the orchestra to complete the melody.

Goro enters, leading Sharpless in. Butterfly asks the consul about American birds, in a line taken directly from the play: "Don't they nest every year?" Goro has been trying to arrange a new match for Butterfly with the wealthy off-divorced Yamadori, who enters and makes his pitch. Goro reminds Butterfly that by Japanese

law desertion constitutes divorce, but over strains of the “Star Spangled Banner,” Butterfly answers, “But not by the laws of my country.” She goes on to describe her exaggerated view of the way in which American law protects women’s rights. Sharpless confides to the other men that Pinkerton has written that, while his ship is returning to Nagasaki, he has no desire to see her again.

Yamadori and Goro leave. Sharpless begins to read to Butterfly a letter he has received from Pinkerton (as the music in the orchestra anticipates the chorus that will conclude the act). Butterfly is so eager to hear news of Pinkerton that Sharpless does not have the heart to disillusion her. When he finally suggests that she should prepare herself for the possibility that Pinkerton will not return to her, she rebuffs him angrily. To a great fanfare from the orchestra, she introduces her two-year-old son. She asks, could Pinkerton deny his own son? She goes on to say that she has no intention of returning to her old life as a geisha and that she would rather die; the melody anticipates the chords which will conclude the opera. Broken-hearted by his knowledge but lacking the courage to say outright what he has been hinting at, Sharpless begins to leave. Suzuki

discovers that Goro is still hanging around, and the two women berate him.

A cannon is heard in the harbor, announcing an incoming ship. As "Un bel di" is heard in the orchestra, Butterfly shouts triumphantly that it is the "Abraham Lincoln." "He has returned," she sings, to the melody of "Star Spangled Banner." In the "Flower Duet," the two women gather flowers to prepare the house for Pinkerton's arrival. Dressing in her bridal costume, Butterfly has Suzuki and her son join her for an all-night vigil. Night descends as they sit silently, and off stage we hear the "Humming Chorus." The effect is magical, contrasting Butterfly's constancy with the audience's foreknowledge of what lies ahead. The stage gradually grows dark as the orchestra fades out, ending the scene.

ACT III: Daybreak, same locale

Uncharacteristically for Puccini, a lengthy instrumental passage opens the final scene, concluding with a pentatonic melody. Suzuki sends Butterfly and the toddler off to rest.

Pinkerton and Sharpless enter and tell Suzuki not to fetch Butterfly for the time being. Suzuki sees a woman in the garden, and she immediately understands that she is Pinkerton's wife. "For the little one, the sun has set," she exclaims. The trio that follows is one of Puccini's greatest ensembles, blending three characters singing not together but expressing three different emotions simultaneously. Sharpless informs Suzuki that the Pinkertons wish to take the child home with them, Pinkerton expresses his remorse, and Suzuki tells of her despair. As the trio concludes, Sharpless turns on Pinkerton and reminds him of the warning he had given him before the wedding. Pinkerton sings an *arioso* expressing his remorse; Sharpless's interruptions keep it from being a true aria. (This number was added after the opening night, apparently because Puccini felt that he had not given the tenor enough music to sing). In any event, Pinkerton is

too cowardly to face Butterfly, and he sings farewell not to Butterfly but to the house, as he leaves. Butterfly enters and, seeing Kate in the garden, finally recognizes the truth. She agrees to give up the child on condition that Pinkerton must come for the child himself.

Kate apologizes to Butterfly. Sharpless had previously referred to her as the innocent cause of her troubles. It appears that she had no knowledge of Butterfly when she married Pinkerton. In an earlier version of the opera she had a larger role and was a far less sympathetic character, sharing Pinkerton's racist attitude toward the Japanese people.

Sharpless and Kate leave, and Butterfly asks to be left alone as she takes out the knife her father had used to commit suicide, reading the inscription, "To die with honor when one can no longer live with honor." Suzuki sends the child to his mother, and Butterfly, in her second big aria of the opera, sings him an emotional farewell. When she is finished, she blindfolds him and gives him an American flag to play with. She stabs herself in the throat and dies (cutting oneself across the abdomen was customary for men only). Opera

scholar Arthur Groos speaks of her suicide as asserting “the modicum of tragic freedom a heroine has been allowed in choosing death: the freedom to assert her maternal love even while sacrificing herself for a future denied to her—her son’s assimilation into a Western race and culture.”

Shouting Butterfly’s name three times, Pinkerton enters, along with Sharpless, and is stunned to discover the final result of his thoughtless behavior. The theme we heard earlier, when Butterfly spoke of her own death, thunders from the orchestra, but just when we believe that the opera has concluded, Puccini adds one more unresolved chord, ending the opera on an air of uncertainty rather than finality—perhaps suggesting Pinkerton’s realization of the difficulty of raising a bi-racial child in the America of that era.

GIACOMO PUCCINI

Giacomo Puccini was born in 1858 in the Tuscan village of Lucca, Italy. While he came from a long line of musicians, he was the first in his family to become involved in secular rather than church music. He first encountered opera when he walked seven hours to

sneak into a performance of *Aida*. Recognized early in life for his musical talent, he studied composition formally for several years while living a bohemian existence reminiscent of the characters in *La bohème*. During those years he developed close friendships with two other composers who were also to have a lasting impact on the direction opera was to take after Verdi—Leoncavallo and Mascagni—and he shared a room with the latter for a number of years.

Though he occasionally wrote other forms of music, today Puccini is known almost exclusively for his operas, numbering twelve in all. He began his career with *Le Villi* (1884), which he initially entered in a contest sponsored by the publishing house of Sonzogno. Losing that contest may have been the luckiest break of his life, for it brought him in touch with the rival publisher Giulio Ricordi, who was to play a critical role in shepherding Puccini's career. While *Le Villi* is rarely performed today, it was popular enough to mark Puccini as a composer to be watched.

Edgar (1889) was somewhat a step backward, as some truly beautiful music was overshadowed by an awkward libretto. The composer, however, turned this into a valuable learning experience, and throughout his life he demonstrated an obsessive concern with finding the best subjects for his future operatic projects. One biographer has commented that Puccini rarely read a book or attended a play unless he was examining it as a potential subject for a future opera. The downside of this concern was a vast number of aborted projects, perhaps explaining Puccini's relatively small operatic output; of his dozen operas, four consist of a single act each.

Puccini's first lasting triumph came in 1893 with *Manon Lescaut*. The audience especially loved the tenor arias which established the style that was to mark much of his later music. *La bohème* (1896) had a less auspicious debut, but it soon caught on with the public and has remained a part of the standard repertoire ever since. For his next project he chose the popular drama *Tosca* (1900) after seeing the play, conspiring with Ricordi to trick the less talented Franchetti into giving up the rights he had acquired to the play.

Next came *Madama Butterfly* (1904). Considering the popularity the opera enjoys today, it is sometimes hard to believe that the premiere performance was a complete disaster. However, it should be noted that the opera we know and love is quite different from the one the audiences saw that night.

Listening to one critic who commented that the opera would benefit from some judicious revisions, Puccini cancelled the rest of the run until he could rewrite and condense several sections. Yet the flaws of the original versions could not completely account for the audience's hostile reaction. Puccini was not personally well liked at the time, and it appears that a number of ticket holders had come with the specific intent of booing the opera off the stage. In any event, by the time the revised version was presented four months later, the hostility had died down, and *Madama Butterfly* quickly established itself as a staple of the operatic repertoire.

With Puccini's reputation firmly established, *La Fanciulla del West* was another triumph, though due to its more complex style of composition, it has unfortunately never achieved the lasting popular

appeal of the three operas which preceded it. Based on his friendship with *The Merry Widow*'s composer Franz Lehár, Puccini then considered composing a Viennese-style operetta, but although many of the melodies in *La Rondine* (1917) have a lilting, operetta-like feel, the piece is through-composed as an opera and it lacks the comic ending associated with the operetta format. A year later this was followed by *Il Trittico* (1918), an evening of three one-act operas: *Suor Angelica*, *Gianni Schicchi* (his one purely comic opera), and *Il tabarro*. *Turandot* (1924), an ambitious mythological work expressing the redemptive power of love, was to be his crowning achievement, but his neglect of his health—in particular his chain smoking—caught up with him and he died in 1924, leaving the third act incomplete. Franco Alfano dutifully used Puccini's sketches to complete the score. It was first performed in 1926, though as a memorial to Puccini, the conductor, Toscanini, chose to omit Alfano's conclusion at the world premiere.

In his personal life, Puccini hardly seems to be the type of person capable of writing such heartbreaking, sensitive music as we find in all of his operas, particularly *Madama Butterfly*. He frequently

engaged in petty feuds. He was not an intellectual, preferring hunting parties and fast cars to more cerebral pursuits. He lived several years with another man's wife, marrying her when her estranged husband passed away. His affairs with various women became legendary, leading to the most traumatic event of his life, when his wife, Elvira, accused their servant girl, Doria Manfredi, of seducing him, hounding her so unmercifully that the girl sank into depression and committed suicide. Only then did a physical examination reveal how baseless Elvira's accusations were. Yet, realizing that his past behavior was responsible for this chain of events, Puccini carried the guilt for the rest of his life. Many critics believe that the tragic character of Liu in *Turandot* is based on Doria.

Over the years, numerous critics have taken issue with the works of Puccini. Some serious music fans decry his pandering to popular taste and his allegedly cheap sentimentality. But the vast majority of the opera-going public has never accepted these attacks. Instead they have responded with all their hearts to a composer whose mastery of the stage and instinct for fitting accessible melodies to intense emotional situations remain unparalleled to this day.

THE MEN BEHIND THE WORDS

David Belasco, whose stage play was the immediate inspiration for *Madama Butterfly*, was one of the most colorful characters in American theater during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Born of Portuguese-Jewish parentage (the family name was originally Velasco) in San Francisco in 1853, he became active in the theater scene there in various capacities. In 1882, he moved to New York, where he became a leading producer of Broadway plays.

Though he was a prolific writer, his plays would be largely forgotten were it not for the two Puccini operas they inspired. His major contributions to American theatre lay in his mastery of stagecraft, bringing a new level of realism to the stage. Some theatre historians have referred to him as the “Steven Spielberg of his time.” He was a master of stage lighting: “Lights are to drama,” he said, “what music is to the lyrics of a song.” We have already commented on his use of lighting in *Madame Butterfly*. He was such a stickler for detail that in creating a sunset for *Girl of the Golden*

West he remarked, "It was a good sunset, but it was not Californian."

Later in his career, he also made his mark in the emerging silent-film era. Belasco died in 1931. A Broadway theater still bears his name.

For the task of turning Belasco's drama into a workable libretto for an opera, Puccini's publisher Ricordi turned to the duo who had collaborated with Puccini on *Manon Lescaut*, *La bohème*, and *Tosca*: Luigi Illica (1857-1919) and Giuseppe Giacosa (1847-1906). The former was more skilled as a dramatist, the latter as a poet; first Illica would adapt the source into a workable drama, then Giacosa would polish off the language to make it suitable for Puccini's music.

Illica, a sailor in his early days, became one of the major literary figures of his day. He wrote thirty-five librettos, for a variety of composers, and was known for a straightforward style that was perfectly suited for the verismo (realistic) operas which dominated Italian opera of his day. In addition to the aforementioned operas, he also wrote the libretto for Giordano's *Andrea Chénier*, which unlike most operas of the time, was an original play and not an adaptation. After Giacosa's death, Puccini turned elsewhere for his

librettos, feeling that Illica was not capable of writing sufficiently high caliber works on his own.

Giuseppe Giacosa was educated as a lawyer and worked in that capacity until the success of one of his plays convinced him that he could write full time. He was one of the leading playwrights of his day. Nicknamed "The Buddha" because of his calm personality, he successfully kept the other members of the creative team working together despite the numerous disagreements they encountered along the way.

THE U.S., JAPAN, AND THE BUTTERFLY SAGA

Madama Butterfly takes place against a background of a long history of relations between the United States and Japan. For many years prior to the mid-19th century, Japan had been cut off from the rest of the world. This isolation was deliberate, initiated by the action of the Japanese military leader Hideyoshi, who in 1587, resenting the influence of missionaries on his countrymen, banned all foreigners from Japanese soil. While Western nations, especially the U.S., developed a flourishing trade with other Asian nations, Japan

remained isolated. Commodore Matthew Perry's expedition in 1853, representing America's "big stick" diplomacy, virtually dragged Japan into the modern world.

Yet while Japan was willing to establish trade with America, the Japanese remained fearful of the American style of life, especially the open relationships between the sexes. Paradoxically, Americans were puzzled by the casual attitude toward nudity that they observed in Japanese bath houses. The Japanese were also aware of American racism, especially as it affected the fate of the American Indians. The two nations found common cause, however, in 1899, when the Boxer Rebellion in China threatened to stop all foreign trade with that country. During this time, Nagasaki became a major port of call for American ships, especially for sailors seeking some R&R en route to China, including the temporary marriages featured in *Madama Butterfly*.

The first literary expression to describe this temporary marriage arrangement was Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysanthème* (1887), a narrative in which both parties enter into the marriage with an

understanding of its temporary nature and part on friendly terms. The story we know today comes primarily from John Luther Long's *Madame Butterfly*, published in *Century Magazine* in 1898. Long heard the story from his sister, who had served as a missionary in Japan. There actually was a geisha named Cho-san who had entered into such an arrangement with a European man who soon abandoned her and the child, who was raised by his aunt and uncle and was known as Tom Glover. Cho-San eventually remarried and did not commit suicide. Tom's life (a possible subject for some future opera composer) came to a more tragic end. Though he survived the nuclear attack on Nagasaki during World War II, he was so depressed by the event and by the fall of Japan that he committed suicide shortly afterwards.

The opera *Madama Butterfly*, though inspired by Belasco's play, incorporates some of Long's story as well. Like Belasco, Puccini and his librettists turned the story into an indictment of the abuses of American imperialism.

There is a question of whether the opera is equally critical of Japanese culture. Butterfly seems especially naïve even for a teenager, in her comic depiction of American divorce courts and her infantile views of religion—she worries that the American God (not the Christian God) has forgotten her address. Arthur Groos argues, “While the heroine is initially a victim of Pinkerton’s deception, she also seems to have become a victim of a rigid patriarchal and religious code.” In this context, it should be noted that Puccini appears to have been critical of all religious authority. Angelica, in the opera that bears her name, is as much a victim of these forces in the Catholic Church as Butterfly is of Japanese traditional religion. Rather than seeing the opera as expressing a preference for one culture over another, *Madama Butterfly* is a call for greater understanding among all diverse cultures.

EAST MEETS WEST

Puccini was just one of many opera composers who have been fascinated by the lure of the East. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, composers in search of exotic locations focused more on

the Middle East and the Islamic world, though for the most part their musical styles did not exhibit the influence of that region. Other than some crashing chords in the overture meant to emulate Turkish janissary music, Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* sounds no different from his other compositions, just as the music in Rossini's *The Italian Girl in Algiers* is quintessentially Italian.

Toward the later part of the century, however, many composers began to evoke exotic locales through the inclusion of foreign-sounding musical modes in their works. Bizet introduced Gypsy music in *Carmen* and near-Eastern sounds in *The Pearl Fishers*. The famous Bacchanal in Saint-Saëns's *Samson and Delilah* creates an air of authenticity, as does the Nile scene in Verdi's *Aida*. The principal theme of the grand march in that opera can be played on the natural horn (that is, a horn without valves), an instrument which is known to have existed in ancient Egypt. In 1885, Gilbert and Sullivan exploited the growing interest in the culture of the Orient in *The Mikado*, and while this light opera actually uses Japanese society to satirize British society of their time, Sullivan did use some genuine Japanese melodies. Puccini himself added folk motifs

associated with exotic locales in two other operas: California during the gold rush in *La Fanciulla del West* and China in *Turandot*. In the late-20th century, the most notable operatic treatment of East-West issues was John Adams' *Nixon in China*, a complex attempt to contrast the world views of the two cultures.

The problems caused by romances between Western men and Eastern women have been explored in a number of operas before and after *Madama Butterfly*, including Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* and Delibes's *Lakmé*. Rodgers and Hammerstein included such a story in *South Pacific*, primarily in the subplot, in which a U.S. military officer becomes sexually involved with a Polynesian woman but initially refuses to marry her; the main plot also deals with similar prejudice, as Nellie nearly leaves the European Emil because his first wife was non-white. The authors said the *raison d'être* for the entire show was the song "You've Got to be Taught," a polemic against racial prejudice, though theatre historian Andrea Most has pointed out that the play itself is not free of such bias. Similar bias could be found in *The King and I*, which presents a Eurocentric view of Thailand. The pair explored East vs. West themes once more in *Flower Drum Song*,

a comic depiction of the challenges faced by Chinese immigrants in San Francisco. Stephen Sondheim, in *Pacific Overtures*, explored the way in which Perry's expedition altered Japanese society.

The most direct musical descendent of *Madama Butterfly* is Alain Boubil and Claude-Michel Schoenberg's *Miss Saigon*. This play depicts the romance between Chris, a U.S. military officer, and Kim, a Vietnamese prostitute (albeit one new to the trade). There is even an opportunistic Goro-like character known as "The Engineer." While the plot roughly follows that of *Madama Butterfly*, Chris is more sympathetic than Pinkerton. He is accidentally separated from Kim in the hurried American evacuation of Saigon at the end of the war, and he marries an American woman only after he has given up hope of finding Kim. Nevertheless, the authors still had something to say about the problems caused by such liaisons in the song "Bui Doi," a protest song describing the sad fate of the mixed-race children abandoned by their American fathers. Like *Madama Butterfly*, this play depicts the dangers of American involvement in the affairs of foreign lands.

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