

# Madama Butterfly

***Madama Butterfly*** (Italian pronunciation: [maˈdaːma ˈbatterflai]; *Madame Butterfly*) is an opera in three acts (originally two) by Giacomo Puccini, with an Italian libretto by Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa.

It is based on the short story "Madame Butterfly" (1898) by John Luther Long, which in turn was based on stories told to Long by his sister Jennie Correll and on the semi-autobiographical 1887 French novel *Madame Chrysanthème* by Pierre Loti.<sup>[1][2][3]</sup> Long's version was dramatized by David Belasco as the one-act play *Madame Butterfly: A Tragedy of Japan*, which, after premiering in New York in 1900, moved to London, where Puccini saw it in the summer of that year.<sup>[4]</sup>

The original version of the opera, in two acts, had its premiere on 17 February 1904 at La Scala in Milan. It was poorly received, despite having such notable singers as soprano Rosina Storchio, tenor Giovanni Zenatello and baritone Giuseppe De Luca in lead roles. This was due in part to a late completion by Puccini, which gave inadequate time for rehearsals. Puccini revised the opera, splitting the second act in two, with the Humming Chorus as a bridge to what became Act III, and making other changes. Success ensued, starting with the first performance on 28 May 1904 in Brescia.<sup>[5]</sup>

<i><b>Madama Butterfly</b></i>	
Opera by <u>Giacomo Puccini</u>	
<span></span> <div>Original 1904 poster by <u>Adolfo Hohenstein</u></div>	
Librettist	<u>Luigi Illica</u> <div><u>Giuseppe Giacosa</u></div>
Language	Italian
Based on	<u>John Luther Long's</u> short story " <u>Madame Butterfly</u> "
Premiere	17 February 1904 <div><u>La Scala</u>, Milan</div>

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## Versions

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Puccini wrote five versions of the opera. The original two-act version,<sup>[6]</sup> which was presented at the world premiere at La Scala on 17 February 1904, was withdrawn after the disastrous premiere. Puccini then substantially rewrote it, this time in three acts. This second version<sup>[7]</sup> was performed on 28 May 1904 in [Brescia](#), where it was a great success, with [Solomiya Krushelnytska](#) as Cio-Cio-san. It was this second version that premiered in the United States in 1906, first in Washington, D.C., in October, and then in New York in November, performed by [Henry Savage's](#) New English Opera Company (so named because it performed in English-language translations).

In 1906, Puccini wrote a third version,<sup>[8]</sup> which was performed at the [Metropolitan Opera](#) in New York on 11 February 1907. Later that year, Puccini made several changes in the orchestral and vocal scores, and this became the fourth version,<sup>[9]</sup> which was performed in Paris.

Again in 1907, Puccini made his final revisions to the opera in a fifth version,<sup>[10][11]</sup> which has become known as the "Standard Version" and is the one which is most often performed around the world. However, the original 1904 version is occasionally performed, such as for the opening of La Scala's season on 7 December 2016, with [Riccardo Chailly](#) conducting.<sup>[12]</sup>



[Solomiya Krushelnytska](#) as Butterfly, c. 1904

## Performance history

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Premieres of versions of *Madam Butterfly* in major opera houses throughout the world include the Teatro de la Opera de Buenos Aires on 2 July 1904, under [Arturo Toscanini](#), this being the first performance in the world outside Italy. Its first performance in Britain was in London on 10 July 1905 at the [Royal Opera House](#), Covent Garden, while the first US performance was presented in English on 15 October 1906, in Washington, D.C., at the Columbia Theater. The first performance in New York took place on 12 November of the same year at the [Garden Theatre](#).<sup>[13]</sup> The [Metropolitan Opera](#) first performed the opera on 11 February 1907 under the supervision of the composer with [Geraldine Farrar](#) as Cio-Cio-San, [Enrico Caruso](#) as Pinkerton, [Louise Homer](#) as Suzuki, [Antonio Scotti](#) as Sharpless, with [Arturo Vigna](#) conducting;<sup>[14]</sup> Farrar would sing 95 performances as Cio-Cio-San at the Met between 1907 and her retirement in 1922. *Madama Butterfly* has since been heard virtually every season at the Met except for a

## Act 1

1. A short orchestral prelude with a busy, fugal opening theme, followed by a second theme of more overtly Japanese character, leads straight into the opening scene.

2. *E soffitto e pareti* ("And ceiling and walls"). Pinkerton and Goro are inspecting a small house which sits on a hill and overlooks the bay. Goro has found the house for Pinkerton and his bride, and is showing him the house, with its sliding doors and small garden. The butler, the cook and the bride's maid, Suzuki, enter the garden and are introduced to Pinkerton. After they leave, Goro tells Pinkerton that everything is now ready and that his intended bride, Butterfly, will arrive soon, as will the American consul, the marriage registrar and all the bride's relatives, except her uncle. Her uncle is a priest and refuses to attend the wedding ceremony. Sharpless, the American consul, has climbed up the hill from the city. He enters the garden, greets Pinkerton and Goro, and admires the view that overlooks Nagasaki's harbor and the sea. Pinkerton tells Sharpless that he has just purchased the little house for 999 years, with the right every month to cancel the agreement. Pinkerton explains that, in Japan, the law is very loose.

3. *Dovunque al mondo* ("Throughout the world"). As the orchestra plays the opening flourish to "The Star-Spangled Banner" (a musical theme which will characterize Pinkerton throughout the opera), Pinkerton tells Sharpless that, throughout the world, the Yankee wanderer is not satisfied until he captures the flowers of every shore and the love of every beautiful woman. "So I am marrying in the Japanese style: for 999 years, but with the right to cancel the marriage each month". Sharpless is critical of Pinkerton's beliefs, but they stand and agree, "America forever". Pinkerton tells Goro to bring Butterfly to him. When Goro leaves, Sharpless asks Pinkerton if he is really in love.

4. *Amore o grillo* ("Love or fancy"). Pinkerton admits to Sharpless that he does not know whether he is really in love or just infatuated, but he is bewitched with Butterfly's innocence, charm and beauty; she is like a butterfly fluttering around and then landing with silent grace, so beautiful "that I must have her, even though I injure her butterfly wings". Sharpless tells Pinkerton that he heard Butterfly speak, when she visited the consulate, and he asks Pinkerton not to pluck off her delicate wings. However, Pinkerton tells Sharpless that he will do "no great harm, even if Butterfly falls in love." Sharpless takes his glass of whisky and offers a toast to Pinkerton's family at home, to which Pinkerton adds, "and to the day when I will have a real wedding and marry a real American bride." Goro re-enters to tell Pinkerton and Sharpless that Butterfly's friends are coming.

5. *Ancora un passo* ("One step more"). Butterfly can be heard guiding her friends to the top of the hill, jubilantly telling them that "Over land and sea, there floats the joyful breath of spring. I am the happiest girl in Japan, or rather in the world." Butterfly and her friends enter the garden. She recognizes Pinkerton and points him out to her friends, and all bow down before him.

6. *Gran ventura* ("May good fortune attend you"). Butterfly greets Pinkerton, who asks about her difficult climb up the hill. Butterfly says that, for a happy bride, the wait is even more difficult. Pinkerton thanks her for the compliment but cuts her off as she continues to compliment him further. Butterfly tells Pinkerton and Sharpless that her family is from Nagasaki and was once very wealthy.

7. *L'Imperial Commissario* ("The Imperial Commissioner"). Goro announces the arrival of both the Grand Commissioner and the Registrar of marriages. Butterfly greets her relatives, who have arrived for the wedding. Pinkerton laughs at the sight and whispers to Sharpless, "This is a farce: all these will be my new relatives for only a month." Sharpless tells him that, even though he considers the marriage contract a farce, she considers it very real. Meanwhile, Butterfly tells her relatives how much she loves Pinkerton. One of her cousins says that Goro first offered Pinkerton to her, but she refused. Butterfly's relatives say that he is like a king, so rich and so handsome, and then, at a sign from Butterfly, all her friends and relatives bow to Pinkerton and walk out to the garden. Pinkerton takes Butterfly's hand and leads her into the house.