Madama Butterfly

PRODUCTION INFORMATION

Music: Giacomo Puccini

Text (Italian): Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica

World Premiere: Milan, La Scala
February 17, 1904

Final Dress Rehearsal Date: Monday, January 13, 2014

Note: the following times are approximate

Act I: 10:30am – 11:30am
Intermission (Lunch): 11:30am – 12:00pm
Act II, Part 1: 12:00pm – 1:00pm
Intermission: 1:00pm – 1:25pm
Act II, Part 2: 1:25pm – 2:00pm

Cast:
Cio-Cio-San Amanda Echalaz
Suzuki Elizabeth DeShong
Pinkerton Bryan Hymel
Sharpless Scott Hendricks

Production Team:
Conductor Philippe Auguin
Production Anthony Minghella
Director and Choreographer Carolyn Choa
Set Designer Michael Levine
Costume Designer Han Feng
Lighting Designer Peter Mumford
Puppetry Blind Summit Theatre
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An Introduction to 
Pathways for Understanding Study Materials

The goal of Pathways for Understanding materials is to provide multiple “pathways” for learning about a specific opera as well as the operatic art form, and to allow teachers to create lessons that work best for their particular teaching style, subject area, and class of students.

Meet the Characters / The Story/ Resources
Fostering familiarity with specific operas as well as the operatic art form, these sections describe characters and story, and provide historical context. Guiding questions are included to suggest connections to other subject areas, encourage higher-order thinking, and promote a broader understanding of the opera and its potential significance to other areas of learning.

Guided Listening
The Guided Listening section highlights key musical moments from the opera and provides areas of focus for listening to each musical excerpt. Main topics and questions are introduced, giving teachers of all musical backgrounds (or none at all) the means to discuss the music of the opera with their students. A complimentary CD of the full opera, as well as the full libretto (with English translation), are provided as part of the Guided Listening resources and are sent via mail.

Guiding Questions / Discussion Points
Guiding Questions or Discussion Points appear within several sections of these materials to spark discussion in your classroom and facilitate student exploration. Note that these questions are not intended to serve as “official” learning outcomes for the opera experience; rather, we hope that they act as a point of departure for prompting meaningful analysis and conversation amongst students. We are aware that teachers incorporate the study of opera into their classrooms in many ways and to address a variety of student outcomes, and we expect that individual teachers will adapt these materials to best serve their specific curriculum and instructional goals.

CD and Libretto Provided
Puccini: Madama Butterfly
Leontyne Price, Richard Tucker, Rosalind Elias, Philip Maero

RCA Italiana Opera Orchestra and Chorus

Erich Leinsdorf (Conductor)
Cio-Cio-San/Butterfly (soprano): A naïve girl of 15 who becomes Pinkerton’s wife and falls in love with him.


Sharpless (baritone): The American Consulate.

Suzuki (mezzo-soprano): Butterfly’s maid.

The Bonze (bass): A Buddhist priest who is also Butterfly’s uncle.

Goro (tenor): A marriage broker.

Yamadori (baritone): A Japanese nobleman.

Kate Pinkerton (mezzo-soprano): Pinkerton’s new American wife.
The Story of Madama Butterfly: Synopsis

Act I

Japan, early 20th century. Lieutenant B.F. Pinkerton of the U. S. Navy inspects a house overlooking Nagasaki harbor that he is leasing from Goro, a marriage broker. The house comes with three servants and a geisha wife named Cio-Cio-San, known as “Butterfly.” The lease runs for 999 years, subject to monthly renewal. The American consul Sharpless arrives breathless from climbing the hill. Pinkerton describes his philosophy of the fearless Yankee roaming the world in search of experience and pleasure. He is not sure whether his feelings for the young girl are love or a whim, but he intends to go through with the marriage ceremony. Sharpless warns him that the girl may view the marriage differently, but Pinkerton brushes off such concerns and says someday he will take a real, American wife. He offers the consul whiskey and proposes a toast. Butterfly is heard climbing the hill with her friends for the ceremony. In casual conversation after the formal introduction, Butterfly admits her age, 15, and explains that her family was once prominent but lost its position, and she has had to earn her living as a geisha. Her relatives arrive and chatter about the marriage.

Butterfly shows Pinkerton her very few possessions, and quietly tells him she has been to the Christian mission and will embrace her husband’s religion. The Imperial Commissioner reads the marriage agreement, and the relatives congratulate the couple. Suddenly, a threatening voice is heard from afar—it is the Bonze, Butterfly’s uncle, a priest. He curses the girl for going to the Christian mission and rejecting her ancestral religion. Pinkerton orders them to leave and as they go the Bonze and the shocked relatives denounce Butterfly. Pinkerton tries to console Butterfly with sweet words. She is helped by Suzuki into her wedding kimono, and joins Pinkerton in the garden, where they spend their wedding night.
Act II

Part 1

Three years have passed, and Butterfly awaits her husband’s return. Suzuki prays to the gods for help, but Butterfly berates her for believing in lazy Japanese gods rather than in Pinkerton’s promise to return one day. Sharpless appears with a letter from Pinkerton, but before he can read it to Butterfly, Goro arrives with the latest potential husband for Butterfly, the wealthy Prince Yamadori. Butterfly politely serves the guests tea but insists she is not available for marriage—her American husband has not deserted her. She dismisses Goro and Yamadori. Sharpless attempts to read Pinkerton’s letter and suggests that perhaps Butterfly should reconsider Yamadori’s offer. “And this?” asks the outraged Butterfly, showing the consul her small child. Sharpless is too upset to tell her more of the letter’s contents. He leaves, promising to tell Pinkerton of the child. A cannon shot is heard in the harbor announcing the arrival of a ship. Butterfly and Suzuki take a telescope to the terrace and read the name of Pinkerton’s ship. Overjoyed, Butterfly joins Suzuki in strewing the house with flower petals from the garden. Night falls, and Butterfly, Suzuki, and the child settle into a vigil watching over the harbor.

Part 2

Dawn breaks, and Suzuki insists that Butterfly get some sleep. Butterfly carries the child into another room. Sharpless appears with Pinkerton and Kate, Pinkerton’s new wife. Suzuki realizes who the American woman is, and agrees to help break the news to Butterfly. Pinkerton is overcome with guilt and runs from the scene, pausing to remember his days in the little house. Butterfly rushes in hoping to find Pinkerton, but sees Kate instead. Grasping the situation, she agrees to give up the child but insists Pinkerton return for him. Dismissing everyone, Butterfly takes out the dagger with which her father committed suicide, choosing to die with honor rather than live in shame. She is interrupted momentarily when the child comes in, but Butterfly says goodbye to him and blindfolds him. She stabs herself as Pinkerton calls her name.

THE METROPOLITAN OPERA
The Story of *Madama Butterfly*: Guiding Questions

### Act I – Love and Leases
In the first act of *Madama Butterfly*, Pinkerton and Butterfly meet and marry.

- What is the significance of Pinkerton having a lease that runs for 999 years? Do you get the impression that he is planning to stay in Japan for the rest of his life? Why or why not?
- Do you think Pinkerton is in love with Butterfly? How do you know?
- Why does the Bonze curse Butterfly?
- Why does Butterfly become a Christian? What does this show about the nature of her devotion to her husband?

### Act II – Guilt and Honor
Three years have passed and Butterfly, having given birth to Pinkerton’s son, anxiously awaits her husband’s return to Japan.

- Why does Butterfly believe so strongly that Pinkerton will return to her, even when all her friends and relatives tell her to move on?
- Why would Pinkerton bring his new American wife to meet Butterfly? What does this action show about his character?
- What do you think of Butterfly’s choice to end her life? Do you think she dies with honor? Why or why not?
In 1900, Puccini went on a trip to London where he attended a performance of a play by David Belasco, entitled *Madame Butterfly*. The play, a love story taking place amid the westernization of Japan, struck him as good source material, and he was anxious to get to work on an opera based on the theatre piece. He asked Belasco for the rights, but did not get permission for an adaptation for more than a year. In the meantime, he researched the source of Belasco’s work, finding a short story by John Luther Long first published in a magazine. Long’s version had some important differences from Belasco’s play. For one, the story did not end in tragedy. While waiting for the rights from Belasco, Puccini got one of his librettists, Luigi Illica, started on the subject by asking that he begin a synopsis based on Long’s original telling. When Belasco turned over the rights to Puccini, his librettists were able to work with both the story and the play, and they utilized both extensively in creating the final libretto.

Puccini had worked with Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa on *La Bohème* in 1896 and *Tosca* in 1900. *Madama Butterfly* was their third and final collaboration, as Giacosa died only two years after its completion. Giulio Ricordi, Puccini’s music publisher, had set up the partnership between Puccini, Illica, and Giacosa in 1893 in an effort to give Puccini the best possible dramatic minds for creating his operas. The three worked well together, if not without heated debate over the content of the librettos. Part of the reason for the team’s success was their clear division of labor. Puccini, although he often picked the subject or source material, was mostly in charge of the music, which included supervising the development of the libretto so that the music would shine through and catch the dramatic attention of the audience. Illica was in charge of drawing up the plot outline, deciding which events took place in what order, which characters to emphasize or deemphasize, and making other broad decisions in reference to the flow of the drama. Giacosa’s job was to take Illica’s outline and write the actual lines of poetry that each character would sing. He put the text into verses that allowed Puccini room to create arias, recitatives, duets, larger ensembles, and
choruses. In this way, all three artists worked collaboratively, but each with his own particular task to accomplish.

While writing *Madama Butterfly* from the two different sources, the three creators of the opera had some artistic differences. Illica had drawn up and Giacosa had versified a scene for the opera that took place in the American consulate in Japan. They included this segment to offer contrast between Western and Eastern cultures. After the librettists had finished their work, Puccini decided not to set the scene to music. He didn’t think that it was necessary to include in the opera. Both of the librettists were upset that their work was, in effect, being wasted. They begged for the scene to at least be printed in the published libretto, but Ricordi would not allow it. The original libretto also had the opera end happily, with Butterfly’s suicide prevented, as in the Long story. Puccini decided that the Belasco ending had more dramatic force, and asked his librettists to write that ending into the opera instead.

*Madama Butterfly* takes place in Japan, and although the libretto is almost entirely in Italian, with some English and Japanese thrown in, the music includes seven traditional Japanese melodies. These melodies are not separated from the rest of the opera’s music but are instead fully incorporated into Puccini’s unique musical style. The Japanese melodies were used by Puccini to make the environment of *Madama Butterfly* seem more authentic and add to the dramatic tale of cultures meeting. Puccini’s fascination with Asian music and culture continued in his exploration of Imperial China in his final opera, *Turandot*. He was not the first composer to incorporate music from other locales into his work for dramatic effect. Bizet’s gypsy-influenced *Carmen*, Delibes’ Indian-influenced *Lakmé*, Verdi’s Egyptian-influenced *Aida* all fit into this category of operas with exotic music.

*Madama Butterfly* is Puccini’s sixth opera, and although his personal musical style had come into its own, it was still changing. In his earlier works, Puccini had used musical motives, almost like Wagnerian leitmotifs, that were musical phrases associated with certain characters, objects, places, or plot points. In *Madama Butterfly* Puccini continued to use musical phrases that repeat at different moments throughout the
work, but these motives are no longer tied to particular things. They float freely throughout, calling to mind other moments of the opera that are not necessarily related by any particular detail.

*Madama Butterfly* premiered at La Scala in Milan on February 17, 1904. It was disliked at its premiere, and critics and other audience members claimed that Puccini’s score recycled his own previous musical material as well as that of others, calling him a plagiarist. They booed and hissed throughout the premiere, and the singers complained that they could not hear the orchestra above the audience’s noisemaking. Puccini revised the opera and presented the new version in Brescia’s Teatro Grande on May 28, 1904. In this new version the opera was received more favorably, and it soon entered the standard repertoire.

*Madama Butterfly* is the sixth most performed opera in the history of the Metropolitan Opera, and was performed by that company 830 times from 1907 to 2009, with one notable hiatus. While Japan fought against America in World War II, *Madama Butterfly* was not performed at the Met. Virgil Thomson, an American opera composer, was the music critic for the Herald Tribune from 1937 to 1951. In his review of the first Met performance of the opera after the war, Thomson wrote sarcastically: “The war had caused [*Madama Butterfly*] to be put in storage, apparently because it shows Japanese behaving more or less properly and a United States naval officer behaving (with consular benediction) improperly. The work seems to have been extremely popular in Italy during our occupation of that country, Italian families loving to point out to their daughters the unfortunate results of becoming seriously attached to members of our armed forces. It will probably be popular here too now, though less for moralistic reasons than for the fact that it is a beautiful and touching opera.”

An excerpt from Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly* was presented to the Japanese public for the first time in 1914. The performance began with a section of Act II of Puccini’s opera sung in Italian. When the curtain rose, the soprano singing the role of Butterfly sang a medley of the traditional Japanese songs that Puccini had used as his source material. The audience seemed to prefer the Japanese songs to the Italian opera, but
the opera continued to be performed in Japan throughout the 1920s and beyond, in Italian, Japanese, and even in Russian. During World War II, it was banned in Japan, but returned soon after, in its original form and in other adaptations.

Performers and directors of Madama Butterfly, in Japan and abroad, struggle with representation of Japanese culture in the opera. The ethnic details in the opera’s libretto are not always correct. (For example, the gods that Suzuki names in her prayer are garbled and Buddhism and Shintoism are not clearly differentiated.) In 2007, the famous opera scholar Roger Parker denounced the opera as racist and claimed that the music itself, in addition to the plot, contributed to this problem. Puccini uses real Japanese melodies, but takes them dramatically out of context without regard to their original words or purpose.

Despite its problematic treatment of the meeting of Eastern and Western cultures, Puccini’s opera contains beautiful music and a dramatically engaging love story that will ensure its performance throughout the world for years to come.
Guided Listening: “Dovunque al mondo lo Yankee...”
CD 1, Track 3 | Libretto pp. 59-61

Pinkerton and Sharpless enjoy drinks on the terrace of Pinkerton’s new house. The friends toast to their home country and philosophize about travelers like themselves.

Discussion Points

- Listen to the music at the beginning of this scene.
  - Do you recognize what you hear? What is it?
  - How might this tune, or the sound of the instruments used, differ from traditional Japanese music?
  - Why might Puccini have included this tune in this scene in the opera?

- Pinkerton speaks of a “Yankee vagabond.” What is a “vagabond?”
  - Are the two men talking objectively about a character, or is there a connection to their own lives or to someone they know? Explain your reasoning.

- How does the music work with or against the lyrics in conveying Pinkerton and Sharpless’s convictions? What does the music tell us about these characters? Are they focused and steady or adventurous and volatile, or a combination of both?

- Goro describes Butterfly as “a garland of fresh flowers” and “a star with a golden gleam.” How might you describe the librettists’ choice of words here? Is there a reason why they would have chosen this type of language? If so, what could the reason be? Could it be to characterize Goro as a certain type of character, to add beauty to the libretto, or something else?
**Discussion Points (continued)**

- Note the libretto, particularly Pinkerton’s description of how his bride, Butterfly, makes him feel.
  - Do you get the sense that Pinkerton intends to bring his bride back to America?
  - Is Pinkerton concerned about Butterfly’s well-being? Why doesn’t he take her seriously? Is it because she is young, of a different culture, or something else?
  - Sharpless is concerned that Pinkerton will “pluck off [Butterfly’s] delicate wings.” What does this mean?
Guided Listening: “Cio-Cio-San!”
CD 1, Track 12 | Libretto pp. 76-78

Pinkerton and Butterfly are toasting their wedding when the Bonze, a Buddhist priest and Butterfly’s uncle, suddenly interrupts.

Discussion Points

• Listen to the music. Does this sound like “typical” music one might hear immediately following a wedding?
  o What would you expect to hear? How does what you actually hear differ from what you would expect? Is the music in this scene loud and menacing, upbeat and rejoicing, soft and gentle, or something else?
  o Without looking at the libretto, and concentrating on the sounds you hear, can you make a guess as to what is to come in this scene, and in the opera? How might the musical elements that Puccini employs, such as instrumentation, dynamics etc., serve as a warning to Butterfly?

• At first, the Bonze accuses Butterfly of “renouncing” her family by marrying Pinkerton.
  o Can you recall any stories or plays where a character gives up something or someone very close to him/her in hopes of a better future? Compare and contrast that character’s experience with Butterfly’s.
  o Do you think marrying Pinkerton will mean a brighter future for Butterfly? Why or why not?

• From what you know about the story, why is Butterfly’s uncle, a Buddhist priest, disparaging her? What is the implication of her conversion to Christianity? Based on the reaction of her friends and family, what can you assume about the significance of religion to Butterfly’s family and culture?
Discussion Points (continued)

- Butterfly’s friends and family continuously order her to respond to the Bonze throughout the piece.
  
  o Why doesn’t Butterfly respond to their orders? Is she angry or being stubborn, stunned at her uncle’s denouncement, or showing allegiance to her new husband? What do you know about Butterfly’s personality that clues you in?
  
  o How does the chorus’s repetition of “Answer, Cio-Cio-San!” and “Hou! Cio-Cio-San!” change as the piece progresses? Do they become more persistent or back off? How can you tell from the sound of their voices?

- The Bonze curses Butterfly by uttering the phrase “Kami sarundasico!”
  
  o Is this a real Japanese phrase? What does it mean, or what do you imagine it to mean?
  
  o As a librettist, and using poetic language, write a line of text in your own language for the Bonze to utter in this moment.
Pinkerton and Butterfly are alone together in their garden following their eventful wedding day.

**Discussion Points**

- At the beginning of the piece, Butterfly asks Pinkerton to love her tenderly and “like a child.”
  - Does the music you hear match the words that Butterfly sings? Is the sound full and vibrant or light and airy, or something else? Do you hear a large variety of instruments playing, or only a few different ones? Why might Puccini have chosen to include only a few types of instruments here?
  - What does Butterfly’s request of Pinkerton tell us about her personality, and the way she views herself? Does she think of herself as mature, or still young? Why might she feel this way?
  - Knowing what you know about Pinkerton’s character, do you feel that he is capable of loving Butterfly in the way she asks? Why or why not?

- At 1:30, Butterfly asks Pinkerton to love her gently, “yet as wide as the sky, as deep as the rolling sea.”
  - The librettists have used figures of speech, specifically similes, to emphasize Butterfly’s request. What is Butterfly truly asking of Pinkerton? How might you characterize a love that is gentle but “as wide as the sky” and “deep as the rolling sea?” What are some other similes that could describe that kind of love?
  - Listen to the music, paying close attention to both the orchestra and the singer.
    - Do you notice anything different about the music here? Does the orchestra playing and the singing get louder or softer? Do you hear more instruments than before? Why might Puccini have made this choice?
**Discussion Points (continued from previous page)**

- Butterfly and Pinkerton discuss the Western practice of using a pin to affix a butterfly or other insect to a board or other material for decoration or scientific use. Pinkerton notes that he has “caught” Butterfly in this way. What is the significance of this conversation? What does it tell us about Pinkerton’s intention for the marriage? How can you tell?

- What are the conflicting emotions that Butterfly is struggling with in this scene? What preceding events may have caused these emotions?

- The orchestra continues to play after the singers sing their last notes. How is the orchestra communicating the setting of the scene? Do you hear certain instruments playing phrases that could emulate the stars, the fireflies, the flowers, or something else you imagine to be part of the setting? If so, explain your reasoning.
Guided Listening: “Un bel di”
CD 1, Track 17 | Libretto pp. 88-89

Butterfly anxiously awaits her husband’s return to Japan, imagining what will occur when he finally comes back to her.

**Discussion Points**

- To whom is Butterfly speaking in this scene? It is apparent from the libretto that she is trying to console Suzuki, but might she also be trying to console another as well? Who else could she be trying to console?

- Listen to the music. How does it emulate Butterfly’s emotions in this scene? Is it happy, desperate, confused, or something else? What do you hear that helps you make your choice?

- Have you ever anxiously anticipated someone or something and, like Butterfly, imagined what would occur when it arrived or returned? How did your time spent imagining make you feel? Were you more hopeful, more anxious, or something else?

- What does Butterfly’s conviction in this scene tell us about how her character has transformed in Pinkerton’s absence? Is she still the young, child-like person we met in Act I, or has she changed? Use specific lines from this piece to explain your reasoning.

- Do you think Pinkerton will ever come back? When Butterfly and Pinkerton are finally reunited, will it be as Butterfly so vividly imagines? Why or why not?
Guided Listening: “Yamadori, ancor le pene”
CD 2, Track 2 | Libretto pp. 93-96

Prince Yamadori comes to propose marriage to Butterfly, but she refuses, insisting that she is still married to Pinkerton.

Discussion Points

• Prince Yamadori makes a royal entrance in the beginning of this scene.
  o Listen to the music. Is it joyous, frightening, regal, boring, uplifting, or something else? Where might you expect to hear music like this? In school, in a place of worship, in a restaurant, or somewhere else?
  o Yamadori arrives on a “palanquin.” What is a “palanquin?” If you don’t know, try to imagine what it could be.
  o If you were the costume designer for this production, how would you dress Yamadori? Be sure to take into consideration the time period, culture, setting etc.

• Does Butterfly take Yamadori’s proposal seriously? How can you tell? Do you think Butterfly has a chance at happiness with Yamadori? Why or why not?

• Does Butterfly seem at ease throughout this scene, or is she agitated? Think about how her voice sounded in her aria “Un bel di” earlier in the opera, and how it sounds here. Does her voice seem more strained, or freer? How might this be an indication of how she is feeling?

• At 1:42, a familiar tune is played, with Butterfly singing “The Japanese law...Not my country’s law...”
  o Of what country does Butterfly now consider herself a citizen?
  o How does the musical phrase played at this moment compare with what else is happening musically in this scene?
    ▪ Does it blend in or stand out?
    ▪ Is it more majestic or more subdued?
    ▪ Does a different instrument have prominence here?
Discussion Points (continued)

- Does the inclusion of this particular phrase (from the American National Anthem, “The Star Spangled Banner”) emphasize Butterfly’s allegiance to her adopted country only, or also her dedication to Pinkerton? Why or why not?

- This opera takes place at the end of the 19th century. Do you feel that Butterfly’s impression of the American court’s handling of divorce at this time is correct? Why or why not? Use reactions of the other characters as clues, if needed.
Guided Listening: “Addio, fiorito asil”
CD 2, Track 14 | Libretto pp. 112-113

Pinkerton bids farewell to the place where he has known happiness with Butterfly.

Discussion Points

• Is Pinkerton feeling emotional pain over leaving Butterfly again because he is still in love with her, or is his pain a result of the guilt he feels? Do you think he will always regret his treatment of Butterfly? Why or why not?

• The audience sees a new side of Pinkerton in this scene.
  o Do you feel differently about his character? Do you have sympathy for Pinkerton, or do you think he deserves to feel bad for what he’s done? Why or why not?
  o Throughout the second act, Butterfly seems to have lost touch with reality. Is she the only character suffering from denial?

• Listen to the music, paying close attention to the singer portraying Pinkerton.
  o Do you hear any differences in the vocal sound of the singer portraying Pinkerton? What changes does he make to emphasize the depth of Pinkerton’s struggle? Does he sing more smoothly, or is his voice choppier, almost like he is crying?

• Listen to the singing again, paying close attention to the singer portraying Pinkerton.
  o The vocal score calls for the singer portraying Pinkerton to sing a note that is placed higher in his vocal range when he sings the words “love” and “your reproach.” He is also instructed to sing these notes louder.
    ▪ Knowing what you know about what is going on in this scene, why might the composer have made this choice?
Discussion Points (continued from previous page)

- Do you agree with Puccini’s choice here? If you were composing this opera and using the same technique, what words or phrases would you choose to emphasize?

- Why does Sharpless refer to himself as a “prophet” in this scene? What did he predict earlier in the opera?
Guided Listening: “Con onor muore...”
CD 2, Track 17 | Libretto pg. 117

After being told that Pinkerton and his new wife, Kate, hope to take Butterfly’s son away for a better life in America, Butterfly resolves to end her own life so that her son may live without shame.

Discussion Points

• Who is Butterfly speaking to in this scene? Why might the composer and librettists have chosen to have Butterfly speak to her son, who is not old enough to truly understand what is occurring, as opposed to speaking to herself about her unhappiness? Does this technique add an element of drama to the scene? Why or why not?

• Is Butterfly truly sacrificing for her child, or is her sacrifice for herself as well? Do you think she could live knowing that she would never see her son again? Explain your reasoning based on what you know about her character.

• Listen to the music.
  o How would you characterize the feeling of the music in this piece? Is it light and playful, intense and scary, or something else?
  o Does the orchestral music have a certain quality to it that you might associate with the music of a specific culture? If so, what culture does it bring to mind?
  o Does the orchestral music serve purely as vocal accompaniment in this piece, or does it serve another purpose, such as emulating Butterfly’s inner struggle? How can you tell?

• What is the significance of Pinkerton’s line at the end, where he simply yell “Butterfly!”? Do you think he knows what Butterfly has done?
Discussion Points (continued)

• The story of “Madama Butterfly” has been given different endings when used as a source for plays and musical pieces throughout history.
  o Does the opera end as you predicted?
  o If you were composing your own opera or writing your own play using “Madama Butterfly” as source material, how would you choose to end your work?
Giacomo Puccini was born in 1858 in the town of Lucca, located in the northern region of Tuscany, Italy. The Puccini family had a rich tradition of making music, and occupied honored positions in their community for four generations, including composer of sacred and secular music, church organist, and choir master. Michele Puccini, Giacomo’s older brother, was committed to following in the family’s music tradition, but young Giacomo didn’t appear to have the talent or interest in becoming a professional musician. Though tutored in music by his uncle, Giacomo’s chief pleasures seemed to be hunting birds and smoking cigarettes. Only one teacher, Carlo Angeloni, seemed to understand him and, with patience, was able to develop his hidden talent. Before long, Giacomo began to earn modest fees by giving piano and organ lessons, and was able to help build his family’s small income.

Though he would become one of history’s most famous opera composers, Giacomo Puccini did not attend an opera until he was 17 years old, when he traveled twenty miles on foot to see a performance of Verdi’s *Aida* in Pisa. The performance deeply moved Puccini, and inspired him to continue his musical education and begin writing his own operatic works.

In 1880, at age 22, Puccini entered the Milan Conservatory, the main music school in Italy’s most important musical city, where he began studying with Amilcare Ponchielli, a composer whose most famous work is the opera *La Gioconda*. Puccini worked hard and Ponchielli and the other teachers were impressed with the young composer’s talent and dedication. Though his student days were filled with homesickness and poverty, he seemed to thrive in this environment. His poor, struggling artist’s life would later influence his creation of *La Bohème*.

When he graduated from the Conservatory in 1883, Puccini entered a competition to write a one-act opera. He was confident in the quality of his entry, *Le Villi*, but it did not win the competition. However, Guilio Ricordi, a publisher of music and an
influential man in Milan’s musical scene, took interest in Puccini’s work and arranged to have *Le Villi* performed. It was a success with both the public and the critics. Ricordi and Puccini became life-long friends, and their colorful collaboration is well-documented in abundant correspondence.

Puccini’s second opera, *Edgar*, took five years to compose, but was not well received. Desperate to have his next work make a lasting impression, Puccini chose the story of *Manon Lescaut*, which the French composer Jules Massenet had already adapted for his own opera with considerable success. It was a gamble for the barely-known Puccini to put himself in competition with a recognized master, yet Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut* was a tremendous success and made him famous not just in Italy, but around the world.

Puccini composed three operas over the next decade, all adapted from literary or theatrical sources: *La Bohème* (1896) about struggling artists in Paris, based on Henri Murger’s novel *Scènes de la vie de bohème*; *Tosca* (1900) about the turbulent affairs of an accomplished stage actress and her politically radical lover, based on Victorien Sardou’s play of the same name; and *Madama Butterfly* (1904), a tragic love story between a Japanese geisha and an American naval officer, adapted from David Belasco’s play. Although *La Bohème* and *Madama Butterfly* were not warmly embraced by the critics initially, all three operas soon became standards in the repertoire of opera houses worldwide.

Due to challenges in his personal life, Puccini did not compose any music for six years following *Madama Butterfly*. In 1907, he went to the United States where he supervised productions of *Manon Lescaut* and *Madama Butterfly* at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City. While in New York, he saw the play *The Girl of the Golden West* by David Belasco, which served as the inspiration for his next opera. *La Fanciulla del West*, as it is called in Italian, was given its first performance at the Metropolitan Opera in 1910 with Enrico Caruso among the principal singers. Puccini later composed *La Rondine* (1917) and “The Triptych”, or *Il Trittico* (1918), a set of three one-act operas: *Il Tabarro* (The Cloak), *Suor Angelica* (Sister Angelica), and *Gianni Schicchi*.
Puccini’s life ended in 1924 while he was composing his final work, *Turandot*. Three weeks before his death, suffering from throat cancer, he whispered to his friend and conductor Arturo Toscanini, “If anything happens to me, do not abandon my dear beautiful princess, my Turandot.” On November 29, Puccini died of heart failure while undergoing treatment for the cancer. *Turandot* was completed by Puccini’s friend Franco Alfano. When the opera was first performed, Maestro Toscanini paused for a moment, noting with silence the place in the score where “Puccini put his pen down for the last time.”

Composing opera can be a lengthy process, particularly for composers as detail-oriented as Giacomo Puccini, who composed only twelve operas in his lifetime. Restless and unhappy unless involved in a project, he was rarely satisfied with his creations (though he never tired of attending performances of his favorites). His manuscripts were full of cross-outs, blotches, and an assortment of scribbles, and much of his time was spent travelling the world to conduct rehearsals and oversee performances of his works. He had a great knowledge of the demands of the stage and a keen instinct for theatrical effect.

Unlike his idol, Giuseppe Verdi, Puccini did not focus on heroic figures in his operas; he was best at basic human emotions. Puccini’s operas are loved for their dramatic intensity, memorable melodies, rich orchestral writing, and are performed year after year in opera houses all over the world.
Exoticism, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is the “tendency to adopt something foreign.” Music exhibits exoticism when it is used to evoke a place, people, or culture that is different from that of the composer or the perceived audience. Therefore, music written by a traditional Japanese composer that contained American-flavored music would exhibit exoticism, and music written by a traditional American composer that displayed signs of Japanese traditional music would be exotic as well. Music has long been used to display the foreign, and opera, with its costumes and scenery, has the ability to evoke other cultures in both the aural and visual spheres at once.

During the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries, composers had the will to compose exotic music but, with very little contact with the musical world outside of their home countries, they had no means by which to evoke it. Early "exotic" music is therefore often signaled by the title of a piece, indicating the culture that inspired the work or a specific dance rhythm used. In operas or other dramatic works for the stage, the inspiring culture was often represented through stereotypes. In Rameau’s 1735 opera *Les Indes Galantes*, there are four different exotic locations – a Turkish garden, a Peruvian desert, a Persian market, and a North American forest. The native people are shown performing rituals such as praying to the Incan sun god or taking part in a Persian flower festival. Foreign men are often portrayed as womanizers and the women as sirens. However, the musical content of these 16th through 18th century pieces is almost indistinguishable from other non-exotic music of the time. When composers wanted to create exotic musical effects, they fabricated melodies, harmonies, or instrumentation that sounded strange or different to their ears. However, these imagined sounds had no basis in the actual culture they were trying to evoke.

Many composers in the late 18th century wrote music they called *alla Turca*, or in the Turkish style. This music did sound different from other Western music – it had a more percussive quality and also emphasized woodwinds – but it was still based only
vaguely on actual Turkish music. Ottoman military music, called Janissary music, had made brief appearances in Europe, and composers built their compositions on memories of this music or on other people’s writings about it. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote several pieces in this style, including the third movement of his piano sonata in A and his 1782 singspiel *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, or *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, which showcases interactions between Europeans and Turks.

The 19th century was an era of European colonialization. There were better travel routes and methods of transportation from Europe to the Middle and Far East, and there were therefore more opportunities for Westerners to hear music of other cultures firsthand. If composers did not travel to these foreign realms themselves, they could at least read accounts of other European travelers. The early 19th century therefore saw the rise of the exotic throughout European culture – from visual art, fashion, and decorative style to written literature and music. The increase in exotic music was also brought about by the growing popularity of programmatic music – music meant to evoke a specific time, place, event, or object – and nationalism, or pride in one’s country. Once again, dances were especially important in denoting the exotic. Southern Spain, the Middle East, and East Asia were especially popular locales in which to set operas. Spain was obviously a European country and not as remote as the Far East, but Georges Bizet in his 1875 opera *Carmen* demonstrated the charm of Spanish gypsy music. Carmen seduces Don José with her gypsy airs and dances, and Bizet similarly seduced his audience with this taste of the exotic.

Verdi’s 1871 opera *Aida* has mostly traditional western music, but in his scenes for the Egyptian priests and priestesses, the music suddenly sounds foreign. Puccini, writing a bit later, integrated Japanese traditional music in *Madama Butterfly* and Chinese traditional music in *Turandot* into his personal style. There are not simply Japanese or Chinese scenes; rather, the entire opera is flavored with Eastern music, seamlessly blending with Puccini’s Italianate style.

As borrowing from other cultures became easier and Western music became less tied to traditional musical conventions, such as standard scales and Classical tonalities, exotic music became less exotic. Composers took aspects of exotic music and used
them to expand their personal musical language without specifically evoking another culture. This is known as "submerged" exoticism and can be found in Claude Debussy's work, specifically. In *Pelléas et Mélisande*, which takes place in a mythical land in a mythical time and makes no reference to the Far East, Debussy sometimes uses pentatonic scales, which are traditionally associated with Eastern music. This is simply a part of his personal musical expression.

Today both exoticism and submerged exoticism are still prevalent in operas and other musical works. However, in today's global melting pot, it is often difficult to determine what is ours and what is other. John Adam's 1987 opera *Nixon in China* is about the carefully diplomatic meeting of two cultures – Chinese and American. The music subsumes both American and Chinese characters in Adams' minimalist idiom, and Chinese-sounding music is used only as often as American music like jazz. It is unclear in the opera which culture and its music is more exotic. Tan Dun, a Chinese composer whose opera *The First Emperor* premiered at the Met in 2006, grew up in a musical environment that had become very westernized. With his opera he attempted to reintroduce elements of traditional Chinese music into the westernized musical idiom. In his opera he hoped that his "Eastern opera kind of experience and the Western opera knowledge would be melted together very chemically, become something new." It is possible that, in our new international community, musical exoticism will no longer look to foreign lands but to the past or to the future for its new material.
**Madama Butterfly Resources: Online Resources**

Note: click on the blue link below the description to visit the corresponding page.

**Video Clips**

- **Interview: Madame Butterfly – The Story**  
  Informational Video, BBC Four via the Royal Opera House (2011)  
  [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNjYmGZqGJ0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNjYmGZqGJ0)

- **Madama Butterfly – The Metropolitan Opera**  
  Production Trailer/Opera Excerpts/Artist Interview, Metropolitan Opera (2011)  
  [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ikn1Q1Cihyl](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ikn1Q1Cihyl)

- **Madama Butterfly Animated Trailer**  
  Production Trailer, Opera North (2011)  
  [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAQZC_LSMWM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAQZC_LSMWM)

- **Trailer: Madama Butterfly 2011**  
  Production Trailer, The Royal Opera House (2011)  
  [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acQkdboQXSQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=acQkdboQXSQ)

- **Madame Butterfly – Pinkerton and Cio-Cio-San – “Vogliatemi bene”**  
  Opera Excerpt, Houston Grand Opera (2010)  
  [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8FZKUFiH3A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8FZKUFiH3A)

- **Madame Butterfly – “Un bel di”**  
  Opera Excerpt, Houston Grand Opera (2010)  
  [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKPJEh6T4mc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKPJEh6T4mc)

- **Giacomo Puccini’s Madama Butterfly**  
  Production Trailer, Los Angeles Opera (2009)  
  [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXL16AqWZ6A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pXL16AqWZ6A)

- **Madama Butterfly: “Vogliatemi bene” (Patricia Racette, Marcello Giordani)**  
  Opera Excerpt, Metropolitan Opera (2009)  
  [http://bcove.me/4gb7hbvx](http://bcove.me/4gb7hbvx)
Articles

• “In a Floating World, Enter Heartbreak and Puppets” by Steve Smith
  Minghella, a gifted English filmmaker who died in March, offered a gorgeous cinematic
  spectacle. Dancers and puppeteers made for a lively bustle, but Michael Levine’s spare,
  elegant sets focused attention on the principals by surrounding them with vast, empty
  space extended with a mirrored ceiling.

• “This Costume Designer Wears Many Alluring Hats” by Taylor Holliday
  Han Feng entered the small fitting room and all eyes turned toward her, a petite but
  striking figure from the tips of her blond hair to the thick layering of necklaces of her own
  design and the green patent leather of her heels.
  http://online.wsj.com/article/SB122091406147212233.html

• Music Interviews: “Anthony Minghella's 'Madama Butterfly” by Jacki Lyden
  NPR Music, October 22, 2006
  On a dark and glimmering stage the tragic Cio Cio San strolls amid falling cherry petals
  with her faithless American husband, Lieutenant Pinkerton.

• “Madama Butterfly Is Ready for Her Close-Up” by Matthew Guerwitsch
  The New York Times, September 24, 2006
  As opera is a fusion of many arts, directing opera sums up all Mr. Minghella has learned in
  other disciplines. At the same time, he finds in this new line of work an unaccustomed
  freedom.

• “Two for the show” by Kate Kellaway
  The Observer, October 22, 2005
  Film director Anthony Minghella and his wife, choreographer Carolyn Choa, worked
  together on his films. Now they’re staging his first opera, Madam Butterfly - though only
  one of them dreams of Puccini at night.
  http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2005/oct/23/classicalmusicandopera
Additional Resources: The Emergence of Opera

The origins of opera stretch back to ancient Greece, where playwrights used music and dance to augment moments of action in their stories. At this time, it was popular to write plays in Attic, a sing-song language, where half the words were sung and half were spoken. Dance was also a pivotal part of Greek drama; a chorus danced throughout scenes in an effort to highlight the play’s themes.

The philosopher Aristotle, in ‘The Poetics,’ outlined the first guidelines for drama, known as the Six Elements of Drama. Aristotle suggested that a play’s action should take place in one day, portray only one chain of events, and be set in one general location. Over the centuries, playwrights and composers took Aristotle’s advice more seriously. The tradition of including music and dance as an integral part of theatre continued through Roman times and into the Middle Ages. Liturgical drama, as well as vernacular plays, often combined incidental music with acting.

Opera can also be traced to the Gregorian chants of the early Christian Church. Music was an integral part of worship, and incorporated ancient melodies from Hebrew, Greek, Roman, and Byzantine cultures. The Church’s organization of music throughout the early Middle Ages gave it structure, codifying scales, modes, and notation to indicate pitch and rhythm. The chants were originally sung in single-line melodies (monophony), but over time more voices were added to compliment the main melody, resulting in the beginning of polyphony (many independent voices or parts sung simultaneously).

However, the Church objected polyphony, worried that the intricate weaving of melodies and words obscured the liturgical text. Since conveying the meaning of the text was the primary reason for singing in church, polyphony was viewed as too secular by Church leaders, and was banished from the Liturgy by Pope John XXII in 1322. Harmonic music followed, which developed as songs with one-line melodies, accompanied by instruments. Then, in 1364, during the pontificate of Pope Urban V, a composer and priest named Guillaume de Machaut composed a polyphonic setting of
the mass entitled *La Messe de Notre Dame*. This was the first time that the Church officially sanctioned polyphony in sacred music.

Another early contributor to the emergence of opera was Alfonso the Wise, ruler of Castile, Spain, in the 13th century. Also known as the Emperor of Culture, he was a great troubadour and made noted contributions to music’s development. First, he dedicated his musical poems, the “Cantigas de Santa Maria,” to Saint Mary, which helped end the church’s objection to the musical style. His “Cantigas” are one of the largest collections of monophonic songs from the Middle Ages. Secondly, he played a crucial role in the introduction of instruments from the Moorish kingdoms in southern Spain. These instruments, from the timpani to lute, came from Persia and the Arabic culture of the Middle East. Throughout the European Renaissance (14th–16th centuries), minstrels and troubadours continued to compose harmonic folk songs which informed and entertained. Some songs were mere gossip; others were songs of love and heroes. These contained a one-line melody accompanied by guitars, lutes, or pipes.

Martin Luther (1483–1546) continued to reform church music by composing music in his native tongue (German) for use in services. He also simplified the style so that average people in the congregation could sing it. Luther turned to the one-line melodies and folk tunes of the troubadours and minstrels and adapted them to religious texts. His reforms had great impact upon the music of Europe: the common people began to read and sing music.

From the church at this time also emerged the motet, a vocal composition in polyphonic style, with Biblical or similar text which was intended for use in religious services. Several voices sang sacred text accompanied by instruments, and this format laid the groundwork for the madrigal—one of the last steps in preparing the way for opera. Sung in the native language of the people in their homes, taverns, and village squares, madrigals were written for a small number of voices, between two and eight, and used secular (rather than biblical or liturgical) texts.
When refugee scholars from the fall of Constantinople (1453) flooded Italy and Europe, their knowledge of the classics of Rome and Greece added to the development of European musical traditions. Into this world of renewed interest in learning and culture came a group of men from Florence who formed a club, the Camerata, for the advancement of music and Greek theater. Their goal was to recreate Greek drama as they imagined it must have been presented. The Camerata struggled to solve problems that confronted composers, and were interested in investigating the theory and philosophy of music. The Camerata also experimented with the solo song, a forerunner of the opera aria.

Not surprisingly, Greek and Roman mythology and tragedies provided the subject matter of the first librettists. The presence of immortals and heroes made singing seem natural to the characters. Composers used instrumental accompaniment to help establish harmony, which freed them to experiment with instrumental music for preludes or overtures. Development of the recitative and the instrumental bridge enabled writers to connect the song, dance, and scene of the drama into the spectacle which was to become opera. This connector-recitative later evolved into a form of religious drama known as oratorio, a large concert piece which includes an orchestra, a choir, and soloists.

Members of the Camerata—Jacopo Peri, Ottavio Rinnuccini, and Jacopo Corsi—are credited with writing the first opera, *Dafne*, based on the Greek myth. Their early efforts were crucial in establishing the musical styles of the new genre in the early 17th century. A sizeable orchestra was used and singers were in costume. *Dafne* became famous across Europe.

The Camerata set the scene, and onto the budding operatic stage came Claudio Monteverdi. He is considered the last great composer of madrigals and the first great composer of Italian opera. He was revolutionary in developing the orchestra’s tone-color and instrumentation. He developed two techniques to heighten dramatic tension: *pizzicato*—plucking strings instead of bowing them; and *tremolo*—rapid repetition of a single note. Modern orchestration owes him as much gratitude as does
opera. In his operas, such as *Orfeo* (1607), the music was more than a vehicle for the words; it expressed and interpreted the poetry of the libretto. His orchestral combinations for *Orfeo* were considered to be the beginning of the golden age of Baroque instrumental music.

Monteverdi’s experimentation with instruments and his willingness to break the rules of the past enabled him to breathe life into opera. He was far ahead of his time, freeing instruments to communicate emotion, and his orchestration was valued not only for the sounds instruments created but also for the emotional effects they could convey. In his work, music blended with the poetry of the libretto to create an emotional spectacle. His audiences were moved to an understanding of the possibilities of music’s role in drama.
Additional Resources: Metropolitan Opera Facts

Wallace K. Harrison, architect
Cyril Harris, acoustical consultant

The current opera house, located at Lincoln Center, is the second home of the Metropolitan Opera. The original Metropolitan Opera House was located at Broadway and 39th Street.

The Met’s new home at Lincoln Center cost $49 million to build and construction took four years.

The Met is the second-deepest building in Manhattan. It consists of ten floors. There are six floors above and three floors below the stage level, and all levels are cushioned with anti-vibration pads for sound-proofing.

The opera season generally runs from September to April, during which time the opera company puts on seven performances per week (two on Saturdays) from a repertoire of 21-25 different operas.

The auditorium can seat 3,800 people on its five tiers: Orchestra, Parterre, Dress Circle, Balcony, and Family Circle. Additionally, there is standing room space for 253 people on various levels.

There are no 90° angles anywhere in the auditorium, and the boxes have irregular, shell-patterned decorations. This design distributes sound evenly throughout the auditorium and prevents it from being “swallowed.”

A single African rosewood tree was used to panel the walls. This tree, imported from London, was almost 100 feet long and about 6 feet in diameter.
The ceiling of the opera house rises 72 feet above the orchestra floor and is covered with over one million 2½-inch square sheets of nearly transparent 23-carat gold leaf. Not only does the gold add to the glamour of the interior, but it also cuts down on the need for maintenance and repainting.

Upon entering the opera house, one may notice that the ceiling in the outer lobbies has a greenish color. These ceilings are covered with a Dutch alloy which contains copper and turns green when it tarnishes.

There are two house curtains in the auditorium – the "Guillotine" curtain, and the Wagner curtain. The Guillotine curtain is made of gold velour, and rises and descends vertically. The Wagner curtain is a design that was conceived by composer Richard Wagner. This type of curtain was first used in 1886 in Bayreuth, Germany and is a motorized tableau drape with an adjustable speed. The existing curtain at the Met is woven of 1,150 yards of gold-pattered Scalamandre silk and was installed in 1990. It is the biggest Wagner curtain in the world.

The "Sputnik" chandeliers were a gift from the Austrian government. The central chandelier is 17 feet in diameter and is surrounded by 8 starbursts of varying sizes. The 12 satellite clusters can be raised to avoid blocking the stage. Altogether, the chandeliers contain over 3,000 light bulbs.

Not all the chairs at the Met are the same size; they vary in width from 19 to 23 inches. This staggered seating arrangement provides the best possible sight lines.

The conductor’s podium is motorized so that it can be adjusted to any height.
Additional Resources: Reflections after the Opera

After every opera performance, the director, conductor, and performers reflect and evaluate the different aspects of their production, so that they can improve it for the next night. In a similar way, these Guiding Questions encourage active reflection, both individually and collectively, on your student’s opera experience.

Think about the portrayal of the characters in the production at the Met.

- How were the characters similar or different from what you expected? Try to identify specific qualities or actions that had an impact on your ideas and thinking.
- Did the performers’ voices match the character they were playing? Why or why not?
- Did any characters gain prominence in live performance? If so, how was this achieved? (Consider the impact of specific staging.)
- What did the performers do to depict the nature of the relationships between characters? In other words, how did you know from the characters’ actions (not just their words) how they felt about the other characters in the story?
- Stereotypically, most opera performers are considered singers first, and actors second. Was this the case? How did each performer’s portrayal affect your understanding of (or connection with) their character?

Consider the production elements of the performance.

- How did the director choose to portray the story visually? Did the production have a consistent tone? How did the tone and style of each performer’s actions (movement, characterization, staging) compare with the tone and style of the visual elements (set design, costume design, lighting design)?
- How did the set designer’s work affect the production? Did the style of the setting help you understand the characters in a new way?
- How did different costume elements impact the portrayal of each character?
- How did the lighting designer’s work affect the production?
- Did you agree with the artistic choices made by the directors and designers? If you think changes should be made, explain specifically what you’d change and why.
Additional Resources:
A Guide to Voice Parts and Families of the Orchestra

Voice Parts

SOPRANO
Sopranos have the highest voices, and usually play the heroines of an opera. This means they often sing many arias, and fall in love and/or die more often than other female voice types.

MEZZO-SOPRANO, or MEZZO
This is the middle female voice, and has a darker, warmer sound than the soprano. Mezzos often play mothers and villainesses, although sometimes they are cast as seductive heroines. Mezzos also play young men on occasion, aptly called “pants roles” or “trouser roles.”

CONTRALTO, or ALTO
Contralto, or alto, is the lowest female voice. Contralto is a rare voice type. Altos usually portray older females, witches and old gypsies.

COUNTERTENOR
Also often known as alto, this is the highest male voice, and another vocal rarity. Countertenors sing in a similar range as a contralto. Countertenor roles are most common in baroque opera, but some contemporary composers also write parts for countertenors.

TENOR
If there are no countertenors on stage, then the highest male voice in opera is the tenor. Tenors are usually the heroes who “get the girl” or die horribly in the attempt.

BARITONE
The middle male voice. In comic opera, the baritone is often a schemer, but in tragic opera, he is more likely to play the villain.

BASS
The lowest male voice. Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom in serious opera, and basses usually play kings, fathers, and grandfathers. In comic opera, basses often portray old characters that are foolish or laughable.

Families of the Orchestra

STRINGS violins, violas, cellos, double bass
WOODWIND piccolos, flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons
BRASS trumpets, trombones, French horns, baritones, tubas
PERCUSSION bass drums, kettle drums, timpani, xylophones, piano, bells, gongs, cymbals, chimes
Additional Resources: Glossary

adagio  Indication that the music is to be performed at a slow, relaxed pace. A movement for a piece of music with this marking.

allegro  Indicates a fairly fast tempo.

aria  A song for solo voice in an opera, with a clear, formal structure.

arioso  An operatic passage for solo voice, melodic but with no clearly defined form.

baritone  A man’s voice, with a range between that of bass and tenor.

ballad opera  A type of opera in which dialogue is interspersed with songs set to popular tunes.

bel canto  Refers to the style cultivated in the 18th and 19th centuries in Italian opera. This demanded precise intonation, clarity of tone and enunciation, and a virtuoso mastery of the most florid passages.

cabaletta  The final short, fast section of a type of aria in 19th-century Italian opera.

cadenza  A passage in which the solo instrument or voice performs without the orchestra, usually of an improvisatory nature.

chorus  A body of singers who sing and act as a group, either in unison or in harmony; any musical number written for such a group.

coloratura  An elaborate and highly ornamented part for soprano voice, usually written for the upper notes of the voice. The term is also applied to those singers who specialize in the demanding technique required for such parts.

conductor  The director of a musical performance for any sizable body of performers.

contralto  Low-pitched woman’s voice, lower than soprano or mezzo-soprano.

crescendo  Meaning “growing,” used as a musical direction to indicate that the music is to get gradually louder.

diatonic scale  Notes proper to a key that does not involve accidentals (sharps or flats)

ensemble  From the French word for “together,” this term is used when discussing the degree of effective teamwork among a body of performers; in opera, a set piece for a group of soloists.
| **finale** | The final number of an act, when sung by an ensemble. |
| **fortissimo (ff)** | Very loud. |
| **forte (f)** | Italian for “strong” or “loud.” An indication to perform at a loud volume. |
| **harmony** | A simultaneous sounding of notes that usually serves to support a melody. |
| **intermezzo** | A piece of music played between the acts of an opera. |
| **intermission** | A break between the acts of an opera. The lights go on and the audience is free to move around. |
| **legato** | A direction for smooth performance without detached notes. |
| **leitmotif** | Melodic element first used by Richard Wagner in his operas to musically represent characters, events, ideas, or emotions. |
| **libretto** | The text of an opera. |
| **maestro** | Literally “master”; used as a courtesy title for the conductor, whether a man or woman. |
| **melody** | A succession of musical tones (i.e., notes not sounded at the same time), often prominent and singable. |
| **mezzo-soprano** | Female voice in the middle range, between that of soprano and contralto. |
| **octave** | The interval between the first and eighth notes of the diatonic scale. |
| **opera buffa** | An Italian form that uses comedic elements. The French term “opera bouffe” describes a similar type, although it may have an explicitly satirical intent. |
| **opera seria** | Italian for “serious opera.” Used to signify Italian opera of a heroic or dramatic quality during the 18th and early 19th centuries. |
| **operetta** | A light opera, whether full-length or not, often using spoken dialogue. The plots are romantic and improbable, even farcical, and the music tuneful and undemanding. |
| **overture** | A piece of music preceding an opera. |
| **pentatonic scale** | Typical of Japanese, Chinese, and other Far Eastern and folk music, the pentatonic scale divides the octave into five tones and may be played on the piano by striking only the black keys. |
**pianissimo (pp)**  Very softly.

**piano (p)** Meaning “flat,” or “low”. Softly, or quietly.

**pitch** The location of a musical sound in the tonal scale; the quality that makes “A” different from “D.”

**prima donna** The leading woman singer in an operatic cast or company.

**prelude** A piece of music that precedes another.

**recitative** A style of sung declamation used in opera. It may be either accompanied or unaccompanied except for punctuating chords from the harpsichord.

**reprise** A direct repetition of an earlier section in a piece of music, or the repeat of a song.

**score** The written or printed book containing all the parts of a piece of music.

**serenade** A song by a lover, sung outside the window of his mistress.

**singspiel** A German opera with spoken dialogue.

**solo** A part for unaccompanied instrument or for an instrument or voice with the dominant role in a work.

**soprano** The high female voice; the high, often highest, member of a family of instruments.

**tempo** The pace of a piece of music; how fast or how slow it is played.

**tenor** A high male voice.

**theme** The main idea of a piece of music; analogous to the topic of a written paper, subject to exploration and changes.

**timbre** Quality of a tone, also an alternative term for “tone-color.”

**tone-color** The characteristic quality of tone of an instrument or voice.

**trill** Musical ornament consisting of the rapid alternation between the note and the note above it.

**trio** A sustained musical passage for three voices.

**verismo** A type of “realism” in Italian opera during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in which the plot was on a contemporary, often violent, theme.
vocalise  A musical composition consisting of the singing of melody with vowel sounds or nonsense syllables rather than text, as for special effect in classical compositions, in polyphonic jazz singing by special groups, or in virtuoso vocal exercises.

volume  A description of how loud or soft a sound is.
References: Works Consulted

The History of Puccini’s Madama Butterfly


Madama Butterfly Resources: Exoticism and Opera


Additional Resources: The Emergence of Opera


Additional Resources: The Emergence of Opera (continued)

