

BOSTON LYRIC OPERA

MADAMA BUTTERFLY

WITH ORIGINS IN A GROUNDBREAKING CULTURAL PROCESS, A STARTLING NEW *MADAMA BUTTERFLY* EMERGES

BLO's production, running Sept 14-24, sets the story in 1940s San Francisco.

Untouched, Puccini's soaring score proves resilient and resonant.

Preliminary costume and set design sketches [here](#).

BOSTON – June 22, 2023; updated Aug 2, 2023** – Boston Lyric Opera's new **MADAMA BUTTERFLY** opens at the Emerson Colonial Theatre September 14-24 after a years-long, groundbreaking cultural journey designed to examine the opera's complex production history, embrace the beloved soaring score, and create an intentional production led by Asian and Asian-American artists seeking to reclaim a nearly 150-year-old narrative, and make it resonate with contemporary audiences.

Stage Director Phil Chan's production of composer **Giacomo Puccini's** opera brings the story of Butterfly and American Naval Officer B.F. Pinkerton into the world of 1940s San Francisco, where many Japanese Americans lived and where racial prejudice was heightened by World War II. Here, Butterfly is a performer in the historically inspired world of the city's Chinatown nightclubs of the era, which employed Asian-American artists and drew white American audiences by promising exoticism. Here, Butterfly and Pinkerton fall in love before he leaves for military duty in the Pacific Rim.

Following an unconventional start to their romance, Pinkerton ships off to his military destination, unaware that the love affair with Butterfly has resulted in a pregnancy. Butterfly is swept up in the xenophobic hysteria triggered by the bombing of Pearl Harbor and becomes incarcerated in an American prison camp where she and her son await Pinkerton's return.

Chan (r.), whose organization Final Bow for Yellowface has altered the world of ballet by improving Asian representation onstage and off, makes his opera directing debut. The production features dramaturgy by BLO Artistic Advisor **Nina Yoshida Nelsen** whose prolific singing career has included scores of "Madama Butterfly productions, filmmaker/author **Arthur Dong** whose research and historical documentaries "Forbidden City, USA" and "Hollywood Chinese" inform the world of the new production, as well as Indiana University Director of Asian American Studies **Karen Inouye** and Associate Professor **Ashlyn Aiko Nelson**.



Chan says this new production tells a decisively American story. “All the characters in this MADAMA BUTTERFLY are Americans, and none of the story takes place in Japan – or anywhere outside California,” he says. “As we look to keep the artform thriving, we need to make its stories relevant to the audiences and the people of our time, while making sure the timeless Puccini score is still heard.”



Casting for BLO’s new production includes **Karen Chia-Ling Ho** (l.) as Butterfly, **Alice Chung** as Suzuki, **Dominick Chenes** as Pinkerton; **Troy Cook** as Sharpless, and **Rodell Rosell** as Goro (all five make their Boston Lyric Opera debuts). **Vera Savage** sings the role of Kate Pinkerton, **Matthew Arnold** as Signor Dori, and BLO Emerging Artist **Junhan Choi** in dual roles as Commissioner and Registrar.

In addition to Stage Director **Phil Chan** and the dramaturgy team, the artistic lineup for MADAMA BUTTERFLY includes Set Designer **Yu Shibagaki**, Costume Designer **Sara Ryung Clement**, Lighting Designer **Jeannette Oi-Suk Yew**, Wig and Makeup Designer **Fuji Dreskin**, and Choreographer **Michael Sakamoto**. The BLO Orchestra, comprising 70 players, will be conducted by BLO Music Director **David Angus**. A 20-plus-member cohort of the BLO Chorus will be led by **Brett Hodgdon**.

This MADAMA BUTTERFLY is the first production informed by “The Butterfly Process,” BLO’s extensive exploration of the opera’s history, provenance and impact from its early 20th Century premiere up until today. The year-long initiative examined and provided practical examples of how opera companies can build intentional and authentic productions of traditional works in a way that invites full, equitable participation, inspires new thinking, and strengthens both communities and audiences through the way music and stories are presented. More information on “The Butterfly Process” can be found [here](#).

“The journey to this production has been enormously rewarding, challenging, and eye-opening,” says BLO General Director & CEO Bradley Vernatter. “Not only has ‘The Butterfly Process’ guided our work on operas from the inherited repertoire like this one, it also has begun to inform much of the artistic work we do as an organization. By investigating this historical masterwork and facing its legacy – both positive and negative – we are better equipped to produce an inclusive, intentional future for the artform that includes operas like ‘Madama Butterfly.’”

COMMUNITY EVENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

Boston Lyric Opera plans a series of educational and public events connected to its production of MADAMA BUTTERFLY. Through its work in this realm, BLO is committed to increasing access to opera across the city. Details on these events will be announced later.

TICKETS

Tickets for MADAMA BUTTERFLY are available now with a three- or four-part subscription to BLO’s 2023/24 Season. Individual tickets, which start at \$25, are available via presale on July 18, and to the general public on August 1 at blo.org/butterfly.

CALENDAR LISTING

WHAT: Boston Lyric Opera presents a new production of Giacomo Puccini's MADAMA BUTTERFLY. The production, set in the Chinatown nightclub scene of 1940s San Francisco, features a predominantly Asian and Asian-American artistic team, and is directed by Phil Chan.

WHEN: Four performances from September 14-24, 2023, including: Thu., Sep 14 @ 7:30p; Sun., Sep 17 @ 3p; Fri., Sep 22 @ 7:30p; and Sun., Sep 24 @ 3p.

WHERE: Emerson Colonial Theatre, 106 Boylston Street in Boston, Mass.

TICKETS: Available now with a season subscription. Individual tickets start at \$25, available for presale July 18 and to the general public August 1 at blo.org/butterfly.

INFO: Following a groundbreaking cultural journey designed to examine the opera's complex production history, embrace its beloved soaring score, and create a production that resonates with contemporary audiences, BLO's MADAMA BUTTERFLY brings the story into the world of 1940s San Francisco, where many Japanese Americans lived, and where racial prejudice was heightened by World War II. Here, Butterfly is a nightclub performer who falls in love with the American naval officer Pinkerton and is caught up in American xenophobia during World War II.

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MEDIA INFORMATION

- The artists and artistic teams for BLO's MADAMA BUTTERFLY are available for advance coverage of this groundbreaking production.
- BLO staff are available to talk about the history and process of bringing the production to Boston, including how the company's "The Butterfly Process" informed pre-production, casting and artistic decisions.
- Access to rehearsals and more photo and video assets will be available in August.
- Early media ticket reservations are open now.

For access to artists, rehearsals, assets and media RSVPs, contact John Michael Kennedy, jmk@jmkpr.com, 781-620-1761 or 212-842-1752.

RELEASE UPDATES

** Added preliminary costume and set sketch link, and wig/makeup designer name Aug 2, 2023