

Pittsburgh OPERA NEWS RELEASE

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Pittsburgh Opera opens 2007-2008 season: *MADAMA BUTTERFLY* by Puccini

WHAT

Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*

WHERE

Benedum Center for the Performing Arts

WHEN

Saturday, October 13, **7:00 p.m.***
Friday, October 19, **8:00 p.m.**

Tuesday, October 16, **7:00 p.m.**
Sunday, October 21, **2:00 p.m.**

* Note: The Sat, Oct 13 early start time is due to the Diamond Horseshoe Celebration.

RUN TIME

2:45 with one intermission

LANGUAGE

Sung in Italian with English texts projected above the stage

TICKETS

Start at \$16. Call (412) 456-6666, visit www.pittsburghopera.org or purchase in person at the Theater Square box office at 665 Penn Avenue.

Pittsburgh, PA (9/24/2007) . . . General director Mark Weinstein and artistic director Christopher Hahn announce the first opera of the 2007-2008 season, Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, in a shimmering production—it literally floats on water—from Opera Australia at the Sydney Opera House. While the production and conductor, music director Antony Walker, both hail from Down Under, *Madama Butterfly's* dream cast blends American and international stars of the first magnitude: Chilean diva **Verónica Villarroel**, who has made *Butterfly* her signature role across the globe; and Chinese mezzo **Zheng Cao**, Suzuki in the 2002 *Butterfly* and Sesto in *Giulio Cesare* in 2004. A pair of Americans portray Pinkerton and Sharpless: Americans **Frank Lopardo**, who sang another bad-boy tenor as the Duke in Pittsburgh Opera's *Rigoletto* in 2005 and makes his role debut as Pinkerton; and **Earle Patriarco**, a sensational Figaro here in *The Barber of Seville* in 2003. Filipino tenor **Rodell Rosel** plays Goro, with new Pittsburgh Opera Center artists **Katherine Drago** as Kate Pinkerton, **Jonathan Beyer** as Prince Yamadori, and **Liam Moran** as the Bonze. *Madama Butterfly* is an event of the Pittsburgh Cultural Trust's Australia Festival.

THE OPERA

When American Lieutenant B.F. Pinkerton marries the entrancing Butterfly on a whim, she abandons family, religion—everything for his sake. When Pinkerton returns three years later, it is with his “real” American wife, who wants to take the child back to America. Butterfly agrees to give up her child if his father will return for him. Then, choosing to die with honor rather than to live in disgrace, she commits suicide. A clash of cultures that

unfolds on the intimate stage of the heart, *Madama Butterfly's* gripping drama and eloquent score have made it the most performed opera in the world.

THE PRODUCTION

“I was fortunate enough to be in Sydney while this production was being ‘birthed’,” recalls artistic director Christopher Hahn, “and spent time with the conductor, cast and creative team, as they were bringing their collective vision to the stage. Their excitement was palpable, and the reception on opening night was electric. I little thought that ten years later I would be part of reproducing that experience halfway around the world.” Like the ship’s deck of last season’s *Billy Budd*, this *Madama Butterfly* has a big technical challenge: its famous water pool that surrounds the central playing area. Hahn sent two staffers to Australia earlier this summer to work out some technical issues in advance, and some of the original crew will journey to Pittsburgh to help recreate the set here.

Moffatt Oxenbould, the dean of Australian stage directors who led the award-winning original production, says, “This production evolved as a team collaboration over a period of nearly three years.” Oxenbould points out that Puccini and his collaborators, who wrote the opera more than a hundred years ago, never visited Japan. Taking this idea as their point of departure, the Australian team wanted to reflect “the allure and exoticism that *Butterfly's* creators imagined—as Westerners—to be integral to this faraway oriental world.”

Borrowing elements from *Kabuki*, *Noh*, and *Bunraku* theater traditions, Oxenbould’s team designed a home for *Butterfly* that is utter simplicity: a polished wooden square enclosed by *shoji*, semi-transparent panels that fly in and out. Three bridges that link to the outside world cross the pool of water that symbolizes life itself, and during the Act I love duet, the *shoji* disappear to reveal an immense blanket of stars created by fiber optics. A striking feature of the production is the use of silent extras similar to the *Koken* in *Noh* theater, who move scenery and props and assist with onstage costume changes. Clad like ninjas but in a neutral color to blend in with the set, they are a constant presence that reminds us of the artificiality of *Butterfly's* world and our Western “dream of Japan.”

Zen Buddhism, one of the principal religions of Japan, also played an enormous role in the production concept for the team. Designers Russell Cohen and Peter England wrote, “Zen teaches that less is more... Wood, stone, water, fire, air: the universe distilled into a harmonic equation. Inside is outside. Boundaries are doorways. A bowl of water equals the ocean... One woman’s death equals all life.” Each of these elements is reflected in the isolated, miniature universe they have created for the tragedy of *Butterfly*.

CAST

Butterfly	Verónica Villarroel +	Kate Pinkerton	Katherine Drago +*
Suzuki	Zheng Cao	Goro	Rodell Rosel +
B.F. Pinkerton	Frank Lopardo	Prince Yamadori	Jonathan Beyer +*
Sharpless	Earle Patriarco	The Bonze	Liam Moran +*
		Imperial Commissioner	Brent Stater

+ Pittsburgh Opera Debut
* Resident Artist of the Pittsburgh Opera Center

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Conductor	Antony Walker
Stage Director	Moffat Oxenbould
Set & Costume Designers	Peter England and Russell Cohen
Lighting Design	Robert Bryan
Lighting reproduced by	Simon Tye
Assistant Stage Director	Matthew Barclay

This is an Opera Australia production.

RELATED EVENTS

53rd annual Diamond Horseshoe Celebration Saturday, October 13

Pittsburgh Opera Association kicks off the opening of the 2007-08 season raising funds for Pittsburgh Opera.

This year features An Evening in Three Acts:

Act 1 – 4:00 PM Cocktails and dinner at the Hilton Hotel Ballroom Downtown

Act 2 – 7:00 PM Pittsburgh Opera's opening night production of *Madama Butterfly*

Act 3 – 10:00 PM **OperaBLAST!** A late-nite afterparty featuring fabulous desserts, dancing, and silent auction. Tickets: \$500/350 per person for the evening. OperaBLAST! tickets purchased separately \$60. Call 412-281-0912 for info and reservations.

**Please note that performance tickets are the responsibility of each guest.*

Pittsburgh Opera Preview on WQED-FM (89.3)

Sunday, October 7 and Thursday, October 11, 7:00 – 7:30pm

An in-depth introduction to the singers, music and production of *Madama Butterfly*; also available online beginning October 8th at www.wqed.org/fm.

Free Pre-Opera Talks

One hour before every performance, Benedum Theater.

Join Pittsburgh Opera Artistic Director Christopher Hahn for a lively behind-the-scenes introduction to Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. *Free of charge to all ticket holders. No reservations necessary.*

Meet the Artists!

Immediately following the *Tuesday, October 16* performance, the audience is invited to join Artistic Director Christopher Hahn and members of the cast for coffee and conversation (free).

The production is generously sponsored by
H. J. Heinz Company Foundation
Production Media Sponsors are KDKA and WQED.

Pittsburgh Opera **2007-2008 season sponsors** include:
PNC Foundation (Opening Night Sponsor)
The Bank of New York Mellon (Friday Night Sponsor)

FOR MORE INFO including full synopsis, production photos, and background articles, see
<http://www.pittsburghopera.org>

Pittsburgh Opera, celebrating 69 years of opera in southwestern Pennsylvania, is a member of OPERA America, the national organization for opera companies, and the Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council. Pittsburgh Opera's performances are supported, in part, by the National Endowment for the Arts, Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the PA Department of Community and Economic Development, and Allegheny Regional Asset District. The *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* and WQED-FM are season media sponsors.

Cast and Production Bios

Chilean soprano and Pittsburgh debutante **Verónica Villarroel** (Butterfly) has been acclaimed for her portrayal of Puccini's Butterfly throughout the world: the Metropolitan Opera, Washington Opera, San Francisco Opera, LA Opera, Dallas Opera, Théâtre du Capitole in Toulouse, Torre del Lago, and Tokyo. She made her debut in Santiago, Chile as Musetta/*La bohème* opposite the Mimì of Renata Scotto, and first sang at La Scala in concert with Plácido Domingo, who has been her frequent partner onstage. Praised in her early career for lyric roles such as Fiordiligi/*Così fan tutte*, Mimì/*La bohème*, and Violetta/*La traviata*, she has recently added *lirico-spinto* roles to her repertoire. Ms. Villarroel has appeared as Elisabetta/*Don Carlos* (the Met, Munich, Washington Opera), Desdemona/*Otello* (Buenos Aires, Munich, Washington Opera), Leonora/*Il trovatore* (Covent Garden, Buenos Aires), and both Margherita and Elena in *Mefistofele* at the Met. She sang Mozart's Elettra/*Idomeneo* at LA Opera opposite Domingo, with whom she has recorded *El Gato Montes* for Deutsche Grammophon and Gomes' *Il Guarany* for SONY. She is the subject of the award-winning documentary, *The Accidental Diva*, and is featured on the EMI's *Domingo Gala* from Covent Garden. Future engagements include *La rondine* with Dallas Opera, *Falstaff* at Lyric Opera of Chicago, and *Don Carlos* in Santiago.

Pittsburgh Opera welcomes **Frank Lopardo**'s role debut as Pinkerton with this production. He made another auspicious debut here as Gustavo in *Un ballo in maschera* in 2002 and was heard most recently as the Duke in *Rigoletto* in 2005. Among the many roles he has made his own are Edgardo/*Lucia di Lammermoor* and Alfredo/*La traviata*. Since his debut with Opera Theater of St. Louis as Tamino/*The Magic Flute*, he has appeared regularly with America's leading opera houses. At the Metropolitan Opera, he has sung numerous roles including the Duke, Edgardo, Tamino, Alfredo, Rodolfo, and Tito/*La clemenza di Tito*. Mr. Lopardo has also sung with San Francisco Opera, Royal Opera House Covent Garden, Paris Opera, Vienna State Opera, as well as many other European companies and orchestras. Mr. Lopardo's discography includes Mozart's Requiem and *Don Giovanni* with Ricardo Muti for EMI; Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and *L'italiana in Algeri* with Claudio Abbado, Mozart's Mass in C Minor with Leonard Bernstein, and Orff's *Carmina Burana* with Andre Previn, all for Deutsche Grammophon; Verdi's *Falstaff* with Sir Colin Davis for BMG; and as Alfredo in *La traviata* and Ferrando in *Così fan tutte* with Sir Georg Solti for Decca.

Zheng Cao (Suzuki) makes her third appearance with Pittsburgh Opera, having been seen previously as Suzuki in 2002 and Sesto/*Giulio Cesare* in 2004. Her recording of Jake Heggie's songs "The Deepest Desire" based on Sister Helen Préjean's diaries is due out in November, and a CD of songs by Ricky Ian Gordon (composer of *The Grapes of Wrath*) comes out next spring. In addition to her opera schedule, she and pianist Lang Lang headline the Olympic World Tour for concerts at the sites of past Olympic games throughout Europe, Asia, and the U.S. Next fall brings the world premiere of San Francisco Opera's *The Bonesetter's Daughter* in a role written for her

by composer Stewart Wallace and author/librettist Amy Tan. She began her career with San Francisco Opera and has performed there as Idamante/*Idomeneo*, Cherubino/*Le nozze di Figaro*, Dorabella/*Così fan tutte*, Nicklausse/*Les contes d'Hoffmann*, Siebel/*Faust*, and Suzuki. Her other credits include Rosina/*Il barbiere di Siviglia* and Suzuki for Washington Opera; Zerlina/*Don Giovanni* and Penelope/*Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria* at LA Opera; Nicklausse at Opera Pacific; Rosina at Michigan Opera; Siebel and Suzuki at San Diego Opera; and Suzuki at the Grand Théâtre de Genève. Recent engagements include Cherubino, Varvara/*Katya Kabanova*, and the world premiere of *Salsipuedes* at Houston Grand Opera.

(Sharpless) Baritone **Earle Patriarco**'s many roles include the title role in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* (with Pittsburgh Opera in 2003), Marcello and Schaunard/*La bohème*, Taddeo/*L'italiana in Algeri*, Malatesta/*Don Pasquale*, Belcore/*L'elisir d'amore*, Falke/*Die Fledermaus*, Papageno/*Die Zauberflöte*, Lescaut in both *Manon* and *Manon Lescaut*, Valentin/*Faust*, the Husband/*Les mamelles de Tirésias*, and Junius/*The Rape of Lucretia*. He has appeared in many of the world's finest opera houses, including the Metropolitan Opera, San Francisco Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Seattle Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Dallas Opera, Opera Company of Philadelphia, Florida Grand Opera, Glimmerglass Opera, Paris Opera, La Monnaie in Brussels, Munich State Opera, Frankfurt Opera, Stuttgart State Opera, Berlin State Opera, and Madrid's Teatro Real. He has also toured Japan and China with Seiji Ozawa and the Veroza Japan Company. In concert, he has appeared with the Met Chamber Orchestra with James Levine, Hollywood Bowl Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony, and Montreal Symphony. He has recorded *Carmina Burana* with Donald Runnicles and the Atlanta Symphony for TELARC and Lescaut in *Manon* with Antonio Pappano for EMI. Both recordings were nominated for Grammy awards. Upcoming engagements include Dandini/*La cenerentola* at Welsh National Opera and the Met's first production of *Satyagraha* by Philip Glass.

Tenor **Rodell Rosel** (Goro) has already attracted interest among the major opera companies in the U.S. through his appearances at the Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Grand Finals Concert at the Metropolitan Opera 2005. The Manila native made his debut at the Lyric Opera of Chicago in the 2005-2006 season as Remendado/*Carmen* and has also appeared on their stage as the First Priest/*Die Zauberflöte*, Borsa/*Rigoletto* and the Major Domo/*Der Rosenkavalier*. Last season, he sang Altoum/*Turandot* and the Second Jew/*Salome*. Future engagements for 2007-2008 include Ruiz/*Il trovatore*, Benvoglio/*Roméo et Juliette*, and Dr. Blind/*Die Fledermaus* at Lyric Opera of Chicago and Squeak/*Billy Budd* at Houston Grand Opera. Formerly a member of the Ryan Opera Center at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, he has sung Basilio/*Le nozze di Figaro* at Music Academy of the West, as well as Monostatos/*Die Zauberflöte*, Kaspar/*Amahl and the Night Visitors*, and Tinca/*Il Tabarro*, all with Opera Nova in Santa Monica. In addition to his Metropolitan Opera award, Mr. Rosel has won 3rd place from the Palm Beach Opera Competition, 2nd place at the Lotte Lenya Competition, and was a finalist at the Loren Zachary Competition.

Antony Walker, Music Director. Since his debut in 1991, this exciting and prolific young conductor has led 54 operas, 47 large scale choral/orchestral works and numerous symphonic and chamber works with companies in Europe, the United States, and Australia. His conducting schedule has included engagements with Glimmerglass Opera, Opera Australia, Welsh National Opera, Minnesota Opera, New York City Opera, Teatro Comunale di Bologna, Cincinnati Opera, Hawaii Opera Theater, Arizona Opera, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra of Welsh National Opera, Sydney Opera House Orchestra, Adelaide Chamber Orchestra, Barossa Festival Orchestra, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, and with the Pittsburgh Opera Center and Chatham Baroque for Monteverdi's *Ulysses* in 2004. Maestro Walker has recorded 26 CDs and DVDs of the works of Beethoven, Mahler, Mozart, Orff, Fauré, Puccini, Verdi, Purcell, Handel, Bach, and others. His CD collaboration with Teddy Tahu Rhodes garnered the ARIA award for Best Classical Music Album of 2004, and his DVD of Beethoven's "Emperor" Concerto won the international DVD Association Award for Music Excellence for 2005. Releases of additional works including Handel's *Semele*, Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo*, Rameau's *Dardanus*, and Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* have won high praise in reviews. As Artistic Director of Washington Concert Opera, Maestro Walker has championed under-performed works, such as *Béatrice et Bénédicte*, *Stiffelio*, *Roberto Devereux*, *La donna del lago*, *Esclarmonde*, *Luisa Miller*, and Rossini's *Otello*. As Co-Artistic Director of Pinchgut Opera in Australia, he has conducted baroque works including *Semele*, *The Fairy Queen*, *L'Orfeo*, and most recently *Idomeneo* with the Orchestra of the Antipodes on period instruments. Deeply committed to contemporary music, he has conducted many premieres of significant international compositions in his native Australia, among them Arvo Pärt's *St. John Passion*, Poulenc's *Figure humaine*, Iannis Xenakis' *Idmen A and B*, and more than 70 premieres of new Australian works.

Director **Moffatt Oxenbould** has made a significant contribution to the development of opera in Australia. Honoring his illustrious 40-year career in the performing arts, he has received an Order of Australia for his services to opera and Green Room Awards for his production of *Madama Butterfly* (for Best Production and Best Direction). After graduating from the National Institute of Dramatic Art, Mr. Oxenbould joined Opera Australia (known then as the Elizabethan Trust Opera Company) as stage manager. In 1974 was appointed artistic administrator, working with musical director Richard Bonyngé. In 1984 he became artistic director, a position he held for fifteen years. For the company Moffatt directed many works, including productions of *The Rape of Lucretia*, *Il trittico* (for the opening season of the Sydney Opera House in 1973), *Semiramide*, *La clemenza di Tito*, *Idomeneo*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *La bohème*. Since leaving Opera Australia, he has worked as a freelance opera director. He directed a new production of *Simon Boccanegra* (for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Arts Festival); *Idomeneo* (for Houston Grand Opera); and revivals of several of his earlier productions (for Opera Australia, State Opera of South Australia and West Australian Opera). He has also become well known for his series of Sunday night opera broadcasts for ABC Classic FM. In 2005, the ABC published his memoir *Timing is Everything*. This is his first production with Pittsburgh Opera.

Designer **Peter England** graduated from the National Institute of Dramatic Art (NIDA) with a Bachelor's in design and from the University of New South Wales with a Bachelor's in landscape architecture. He is the recipient of the 2001, 2002 and 2004 Helpmann Awards for Best Scenic Design (for the *Awakenings* segment in the Opening Ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games, *Sweeney Todd* and the ballet *Unaipon* respectively), the 1998 and 2002 Green Room Awards for Best Opera Design (for *Madama Butterfly* and *Sweeney Todd* respectively), and the 2006 Green Room Award for Best Dance Design (for *Boomerang*). In 2003 was a finalist in the Pentagon Memorial Design Competition in Washington, DC. Mr. England's opera design credits include *Sweeney Todd*, *Simon Boccanegra*, *La bohème* and *Madama Butterfly* (all for Opera Australia), as well as numerous designs for an impressive array of dance and theater companies in Australia and the UK. His event and installation commissions include *Walking with Dinosaurs—The Live Experience* (for WWTRex), co-designer of *Sydney Handover* (for the Closing Ceremony of the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games), and production designer for the internationally broadcast *City of Sydney Millennium Celebrations* on Sydney Harbour.

Designer **Russell Cohen** graduated from the University of Southern Queensland in 1992 with a Bachelor of Creative Arts and from the National Institute of Dramatic Art in 1994 with a Bachelor of Dramatic Art in Design. His other production credits include co-designer on *La bohème* (for Opera Australia and West Australian Opera), costume designer on *Simon Boccanegra* (for Opera Australia), and set designer for the ARIA Awards (1998 and 1999).