

Master Thesis in Music Performance

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# **Challenges in performing Giacomo Puccini`s Madame Butterfly**

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With all my heart, I thank you all!

## **ABSTRACT**

**“Challenges in performing Puccini`s Madame Butterfly”** is a master thesis that will examine this opera through the vocal and performance aspects. This master thesis is written by Jelena Markovic, student of Agder University Conservatory of Music, Kristiansand, Norway, and consists of 44 pages. It is divided in seven sections.

**The first section** will introduce her methods and aims.

**The second section** is the research process and sources used to compile the research.

**The third section** details about Giacomo Puccini`s life and the period during which he wrote his opera “Madame Butterfly”, using information from books written by Mosco Carner and Stanley Sadie. It provides a short synopsis of “Madame Butterfly” based on the book written by Mosco Carner.

**The fourth section** explores the central issue of this master thesis, seen from my own experience and also gives a short analysis of the notational text of “Madame Butterfly”. I have tried to present some of the vocal and technical problems connected with singing the Madame Butterfly role. For the technical issues of the role, I used two books; one written by Biserka and Dusan Cvejic and second written by Lilli Lehman.

**The fifth section** presents my conclusion.

## INTRODUCTION

The world of opera is a magical world, full of excitement, in which through music, words and acting, all united in one-song, a singer can express his or her deepest feelings and emotions.

Studying classical singing, learning about opera and performing, has been a wonderful journey, during which I have learnt much. From the very first time I heard Puccini's opera *Madame Butterfly*, I found it very interesting and still do now. It also presents a great challenge to me as a performer. When I first let singing become an important part of my life, while studying at the Music Academy in Belgrade, I experienced a big disappointment. I was told that my voice was too "big"- with no end and no beginning, no focus of tone and no musical lines. They accepted me because they heard my potential and saw me as a challenge. My problem was that before applying for entrance exam to Academy, I had never in my life, studied classical singing. All my vocal training was couple of months preparing for the entrance exam.

So for me, Academy was like for some of my colleges from high school. I was just passionate lover and admirer of opera, who decided to make her hobby into a job.

My first meeting with the world of Opera was when I was seven years old girl and the first opera I ever watched was *Madame Butterfly*. Since then, throughout all my studying and even now, *Madame Butterfly* by G. Puccini was and has stayed my favorite opera.

I knew that if I was ever to be able to sing at list even one aria of Butterfly, I needed to work double as hard as colleagues.

The Part of Cio-Cio-San is one of the hardest of Puccini's roles, in which the composer put many challenges in front of the singer- both technical and emotional, using a colorful range of senses and feelings.

I have heard performances at the National Opera in Belgrade, listened to some of my older colleagues in their exams singing *Un bel di vedremo* from the second act of *Madame Butterfly*. None of them could awake as much emotions as the performance of this aria sung by the famous Maria Callas. Her ability transport emotions, her ease of singing, truth, passion and the tears in her voice, joy, sorrow...I could feel all of that while I listened to the

CD of her performance and it made me feel like role of Butterfly was not so difficult to sing, making me want to do it. I decided to start with learning aria *Un bel di vedremo* as one of the pieces for my first year final exam. As much as I tried to succeed- to learn it and sing it in a technically correct way, with all the sweetness and gentleness that piece requires, I couldn't.

I felt that inside of me was an erupting volcano full of emotion. My lack of technical skill meant that I was unable to express my feelings and convey to audience the beauty of the music. I had pushed myself past my limits as a singer and I hadn't thought about my technical problems. There was no stability in the high tones, I was too short of breath, had no legato, the end of the phrases sounded like a whisper, standardization of register and mobility of the voice were just some of the problems that I had to deal with. I knew in theory, all the solutions and answers for resolving those technical problems, but I couldn't apply them to my voice. My singing was far from the beautiful belcanto that this aria required. I was despondent and disappointed in myself.

As the time progressed to the end of my education, I managed to resolve most of my technical problems.

I realize now, that back when I was student, my desire to perform the aria and my vocal skills were not at the same level. I haven't returned to the role of Butterfly until now, when I decided to write about it. Through studying Puccini's life and much more focused approach to this opera, I feel the character of Butterfly much more closer to me and after years of performances and concerts, I finally consider myself ready to start learning it.

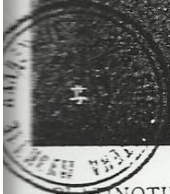
The role of Cio-Cio-San is very complex. It is not just the singing that is difficult- that is just one part. The other is the dramatic aspect of it and the acting, which make performing the role even harder. From beginning of the opera, from the first entrance of Cio-Cio-San and until the very end- the singer is always present on stage. In order to sing the role successfully, an enormous amount of stamina is requested, complete mastery of voice, as well as great physical and mental conditioning and great acting skills.

With great mastery, Puccini carefully considers the human voice and its strengths and weakness. Because of that, the role of Butterfly remains one of the most difficult roles in opera literature.

Through my master thesis, my research question is to explore the vocal and technical aspects of the title role of *Madame Butterfly* and to separate the problems that exist in the role of Cio-Cio-San.

It is a very complex role which, as I have already mentioned, requires both singing and acting skills. Since I am singer, I will concentrate on the singing and through my own experience, try to explain the difficulties with which a singer is going to meet while doing the role of Cio-Cio-San.





FOTINOTIPIA BERTIERI

TORINO-MENTONE

*Giacomo Puccini*



# THE RESEARCH PROCESS

## - METHODS AND AIM

My aim in this work is to try to explain some of the vocal and technical issues of the role of Cio-Cio-San and to try to find a solution by using expert literature which deals with these problems.

## - SOURCES FOR RESEARCH

For my research, I have read some of the expert literature which is connected with this subject, I have watched different performances and productions of *Madame Butterfly* and listened to CD`s with different performers. All those sources will help me while writing my master thesis.

I wanted to use interviews as one of the methods in order to better explain the aim of my research. My plan was to interview my professor from the Music Academy in Belgrade and use her experience as a guide to exploring the difficulties of the role. Unfortunately, she wasn`t available during the period I was doing my research. So, this interview method I will leave to someone else, who will be willing to go deeper in to the topic and the study of complexity of the role of Cio-Cio-San .

Although I have based the next chapter of my master thesis, on mostly my own experience, I have also used other sources which helped me to better understand and explain the vocal and technical aspects of role of Cio-Cio-San .

It was very helpful to read and use literature which was based on Giacomo Puccini`s life and work, the books written by Stanley Sadie ("Puccini and his operas", 2000) and also the harmonic analysis of his opera *Madame Butterfly* by Mosco Carner ("Puccini", 1992).

During my studies at the Music Academy in Belgrade and after, I have had the opportunity to hear and watch a lot of different performances of *Madame Butterfly*. Some of them were very good and some of them were not so good.

I came to the conclusion that no matter good or less good the performance, it is important that each of them is an education experience. I will mention just two of them which left a big impression on me. Those were performances performed by two famous Serbian sopranos and professors at the Music Academy in Belgrade- Radmila Smiljanic and Gordana Jevtovic. Both of them, each in their own way brought to life the beauty of the music and the character of Cio-Cio-San. Prof. Gordana Jevtovic is no longer with us, but her contribution to my work on the role of Cio-Cio-San is considerable.

Nowadays, the use of technical devices is priceless. It allows us to enjoy the music and performances of great singers, recorded from the middle to the end of twenty century, such as Maria Callas, Renata Tebaldi, Mirela Freni, Angela Gheorgiu... I have listened to performances of *Madame Butterfly* from each of them and they are all unique in their interpretation and quite different from each other. But all of them managed to fulfill the same task- to make people (including myself) enjoy and sympathize with role of Puccini`s tragic heroine- Madame Butterfly.

# GIACOMO PUCCINI AND *MADAME BUTTERFLY*

## PUCCINI'S LIFE AND WORK

Giacomo Puccini was born in Lucca in Tuscany, Italy on December 22, 1858, to a family with four generations of music history. After his father's death, he was sent to study music with his uncle Fortunato Magi, an organist. It was expected from young Puccini to continue the family tradition and become an organ player.

Puccini's first contact with opera was through his teacher at the Istituto Musicale. Carlo Angeloni was a respectable composer, mainly of motets and masses. He introduced Puccini to opera with scores of "Rigoletto", "Traviata" and "Il Trovatore" by Verdi.

The event that had the biggest influence on Puccini's decision to dedicate his work and life to opera was a performance of Verdi's "Aida" in Pisa on March 11<sup>th</sup> 1876. In 1880, with help from a relative and a grant from *The Queen of Italy*, Puccini succeeded in entering the Milan Conservatory, even though he was over the age of limit for entrance. He did well enough in his exam to be accepted into the senior composition class.

After finishing at the Milan Conservatory, in 1893, Puccini entered a competition for a one-act opera, promoted by the publisher Edoardo Sonzogno. His librettist was the young poet Ferdinando Fontana, who took the subject for the opera from the short story *Les Vilis* by French writer Alphonse Karr. Although Puccini didn't win the prize, with not even an honorable mention, he caught the attention of musical publisher Giulio Ricordi, head of the *G. Ricordi & Co.* Ricordi was in no doubt that in the composer of *Le Vili* he had found Verdi's successor. He convinced Fontana and Puccini to expand the one-act opera in two and in that form it achieved a modest circulation over the next few years. He also commissioned a second opera, *Edgar* and provided a monthly stipend to Puccini, so that he could compose the music at his leisure. The Four act opera *Edgar*, produced at *La Scala* 1898, was shorted to three acts. Even being shorted, it didn't improve its fortunes. Ricordi was under pressure to withdraw Puccini's allowance, but he didn't. He stood by the composer as his guide and friend until his death in 1912.

The Failure of *Edgar* effected on Puccini's thinking, as when he began with writing his new opera *Manon Lescaut*, he decided to end his cooperation with Ferdinando Fontana.

There were four librettists working on libretto for *Manon Lescaut*, including composer Ruggero Leoncavallo. In the end, mainly due to Puccini's constantly changing his mind at the last moment about the piece structure, only two librettist stayed with him to finish the opera. They were Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa and they stayed with composer for the next three operas and probably his best works- *Tosca*, *La Boheme* and *Madame Butterfly*.

After premiere of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* in 1904 and the fiasco that followed the premiere, his composing became less frequent. In 1906, Giuseppe Giacosa died. In 1909 there was big scandal, Puccini's wife, Elvira accused their maid of having a love affair with the composer. The poor girl committed suicide. A year after the scandal, the composer's new opera *La Fanciula del west* saw the light of day. Although it was a triumphant success, because of a new harmonic elaboration combined with the curbing of the lyrical impulse, the opera did not enter in to the circle of mainstream opera.

In 1912, Puccini's editor and publisher– Giulio Ricordi, died and it was the end of the productive period of the composers career.

Puccini didn't have a big success with his new opera *La Rondine*. 1918 brought the premiere of *Il Trittico*, a work composed of three one-act opera's : *Il Tabaro*, *Suor Angelica*-a sentimental tragedy and *Gianni Schicci*. All three opera's were showing confidence and a new strength in Puccini's composing. Just the last one, *Gianni Schicci* has remained popular and is the most performed, separated from the two others of *Il Trittico*.

Puccini's death in 1924 from throat cancer left his last opera *Turandot* unfinished.

Two last scenes from opera were finished and completed by Franco Alfano, based on the composer's sketches.



Giacomo Puccini was one of the great opera composers from the rich palette of Italian composers. He composed his work in a new and realistic style that gained popularity in the late nineteenth century. His operas were notable for their delightful melodies and three-dimensional female heroines.

## - PUCCHINI AND HIS *MADAME BUTTERFLY*

Unlike his contemporaries, Puccini was writing and producing his operas over long periods. Partly it was because of his fastidiousness in choosing subjects but also because of his constant demands of modifying text.

After finishing *Tosca*, Puccini searched for a suitable subject for his new opera. Among the thousands of ideas that rained down on the composer, the idea of making opera on Alphonse Daudet's burlesque novel *Tartarin de Tarraçon* held his attention on and off for five years. But after going to London to supervise the first English production of *Tosca* at Coven Garden, the right subject was found. In the summer of 1900, a one-act drama *Madame Butterfly* by David Belasco made Puccini fascinated and speechless. It was a drama about a Japanese geisha, her love for an American officer and her tragic devotion. Although Puccini didn't understand English and so wasn't able to follow the dialog, he was nevertheless profoundly gripped by it. That was the sign to him that he has found the right subject for his new opera.





According to Belasco, after the performance was over, Puccini came in to the green room and while embracing the playwright, begging him to grant permission to base an opera on his play.

“I agreed at once”, relates Belasco , “and told him he can do anything he liked with the play and make any sort of contract, because it was not possible to discuss business arrangements with an impulsive Italian, who had tears in his eyes and both his arms round your neck.” (Mosco Carner 1979:12)

They signed the contract in April 1902 and Puccini, with his two librettists Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica, started to work on *Madame Butterfly*.

As usual being a perfectionist, Puccini started to explore more about Far Eastern ethnography.

He researched in addition, religious ceremonies and architecture, gramophone records of Japanese music, all this to be better prepared for the masterpiece that was about to made. On the advice of his librettist, Illica, Puccini also met a Japanese actress, Sada Jacco, who was touring Europe. The Composer wanted to hear her speaking in her native tongue, so as to obtain first-hand an impression of the timbre and range of the female Japanese voice, which to Europeans ears was akin to a high twitter.

The Orchestration of the opening act began on 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1902, and by Puccini`s calculations, the opera was supposed to be finished in December 1903. But a motor accident on 25<sup>th</sup> February 1903, in which composer was quite badly injured, postponed the completion.

At not one of his previous opera premieres, Puccini was so sure of success. The cast was excellent, the story exotic and interesting. He had even invited his family members to attend the premier of the opera in which he involved his heart and soul and which he was considering as one of the best and the most modern piece he had ever written. On 17<sup>th</sup> February, 1904, the opera *Madame Butterfly* had its premiere performed at La Scala, Milano and suffered a fiasco. Puccini`s expectations were dashed in a manner more rare in operatic history and even worse than the fiasco at the first performance of Verdi`s *La Traviata*. Giulio Ricordi, Puccini`s publisher and friend, described the premiere in the March 1904 edition of “Musica e musicisti”:

“...The spectacle given in the auditorium seemed as well organized as that on the stage, since it began precisely with the beginning of the opera.” (Mosco Carner 1979: 15).

Puccini was shocked and the fiasco of the original *Madame Butterfly* was a blow he couldn't forget for many years to come.

On 28<sup>th</sup> May, the same year, a revised version of opera was performed in Brescia, with a smaller auditorium than in Milano and was accepted with enthusiastic acclaim. This time, the opera was great success. The Composer had split the disproportionately long second act in two and made some other minor changes. In its new form, Puccini's opera was a huge success.



David Belasco's one-act drama *Madame Butterfly*, was written from a story written by a Philadelphia lawyer, John Luther Long. It was a story that appeared in the "Century Magazine" in 1898 and it was based on an actual incident that had taken place in Nagasaki. The historical geisha was Tsuru Yamamura who had a child with a wealthy English merchant and after he deserted her, she committed suicide.

Both Belasco's and Long's tragic heroines were based on a female character from a novel, an autobiographical drama *Madam Chrysanteme* (1887).

The novel was written by French naval captain and writer Pierre Loti, and it was probably the first novel about a geisha, Chrysantema and the land of cherry blossom.

It was a sort of diary which Pierre kept during his ship's anchorage in Nagasaki. He was to while away the time, "married" to a geisha and that the custom of "marrying" (buying) a geisha was popular amongst the sailors while they were in Nagasaki. The marriage would be over when they sailed away from Nagasaki.

An important difference between Loti's and Long's story was the ending and it is about the geisha's life after her "husband" had sailed away. Loti's geisha continued to live as she was living before Pierre, waiting for another to come and "marry" her. On the other side, based on a real incident in Nagasaki, Long makes a tragic twist: the officer Pinkerton sails back to his country, promising to return soon. After some time, he really does return, but with his real American wife and finds Butterfly with his child. She tries to commit suicide, but ends up just wounding herself. The thought of her child, makes her change her mind. When Pinkerton's real wife comes to Butterfly's house to take the child, she finds it deserted. In the end, the implication is that Butterfly has returned to her former profession.

Puccini's Butterfly rejects turning back to her former profession, steadfastly deciding to wait for her Pinkerton. Who eventually comes back to her, but with his American wife and the wish to take his and Butterfly's son back with him to America. Poor Butterfly crushed and betrayed, commits suicide.



Cio-Cio-San, which is the real name of Puccini's geisha, is nevertheless Puccini's heroine that is first and foremost the most challenging role of all his soprano roles both vocally and mentally. She belongs, at least to us, to a strange tradition of beliefs and behavior, an old culture which she tries to reject, but in the end, is what tells her what to do.

In Puccini`s hands this sad story become an epic tragedy. His illumination of Butterfly`s character is his finest achievement, her internal drama reflected by the music with an insight and empathy that Puccini never surpassed.

## **Synopsis of *Madame Butterfly***

### **ACT I**

A small typical Japanese house on a hill, from whose terrace spreads out a beautiful view over the harbor of Nagasaki. Benjamin F. Pinkerton, a U. S. Navy Lieutenant and Goro, a marriage broker, are looking at the interior of the home in which the groom, Pinkerton is going to live with his bride Cio-Cio-San (called Butterfly). Goro explains the strange, but very practical arrangements of the house in which by the means of sliding doors, you can change the aspects of the rooms. At the clap of Goro`s hands, three servants, among them Suzuki-Butterfly`s personal maid, came to greet Pinkerton. Suzuki starts to make apposite remarks, reminding Pinkerton of value of the smile in all human relationships. When Goro sees that Suzuki`s chatter is starting to bore Pinkerton, he claps his hands once more, sending the servants away and begins to enumerate the guests which were expected to attend the wedding: The American Consul-Sharpless, The Imperial Commissioner and The Marriage Registrar, the bride`s widowed mother and some relatives. The only one who refused to attend the wedding was Bonzo, Butterfly`s uncle, who is a priest. The Consul`s voice, which becomes louder and louder as he approaches the house interrupts Goro`s and Pinkerton`s chatting. They welcome Sharpless and Goro is sent away by Pinkerton to fetch refreshments. Pinkerton explains to the Consul his hedonistic philosophy. He explains that the “Yankee vagabond” is wandering the world on business or pleasure, casting his anchor where and when it is suitable for him and he is not satisfied until he captures a flower on every shore and love of every beautiful woman.

He also tells that he is now going to be married in the “Japanese style” which means that he will join in marriage with Butterfly for next 999 years, with the right to cancel the marriage contract each month. Sharpless tries to interrupt Pinkerton several times, but in the end they all stand and toast to Pinkerton`s “America forever”. Sharpless asks Pinkerton what mad desire drove him to this marriage and if he is really in love with his new bride-to-be Butterfly. Pinkerton answers that it is the charm and fragile butterfly-like beauty of his new bride-to-be has bewitched him and that he doesn`t know if he is in love or not.

Sharpless then tells Pinkerton that, even though he hasn't seen, but just heard Butterfly, he was struck by the sweetness and sincerity in her voice and that it would be pity to break the wings of such a fragile butterfly and with them her trusting heart. Then two of them are making another toast, this time to Pinkerton's home and family. At the end of the toast, Pinkerton adds one thing- a toast to his real wedding and real American wife. In that moment, from far away, they hear the voices of Butterfly and her friends approaching the house singing a joyful song. As they approach the house, Butterfly recognizes Pinkerton and points him out to her friends. At that moment, they all bow down in front of him. Sharpless engages Butterfly in conversation and asks her about her family. She tells him that her family is from Nagasaki. Once they were wealthy and rich, but lost all their fortune so she had to earn money as dancing girl. After the Consul asks her about her father, she just says "Death". All her friends start to fan themselves nervously, in embarrassment. She also tells Sharpless and Pinkerton that she is fifteen years old and in her opinion- too old. Goro joins them and announces the arrival of The Grand Commissioner and The Register of marriage. Butterfly greets her relatives who have also come to the wedding. Seeing this scene, Pinkerton laughs at the sight and whispers to Sharpless that it is quite ironic greeting his new relatives-to-be, because the arranged marriage is only for one month. At that Sharpless replies that it may be a farce to him, but to Butterfly is real. Meanwhile, Butterfly tells her relatives about her love for Pinkerton. One of her cousins tells that Goro first proposed Pinkerton to her, but she refused him. Then all the relatives bow in front of Sharpless and Pinkerton, but condescendingly and leave the garden. Pinkerton takes Butterfly's hand and walks out the house, where she shows to Pinkerton her treasured mementos, which she keeps in the voluminous sleeves of her kimono- a mirror, a pipe, a sash, a fan and a narrow sheath. She gravely declares that it is sacred to her and because there are a lot of people around them, she can't show it. Goro whispers to Pinkerton that in the white sheath Butterfly is carrying is dagger, a weapon that the Mikado sent to her father with the command to commit hara-kiri. Butterfly goes on to show to Pinkerton her other treasures including several little statues which represent the souls of her ancestors. She also tells him that yesterday she went to the mission house, rejected her own religion and adopting the faith of her future husband-to-be. She says that none of her relatives know and she doesn't want them to find out, especially her uncle Bonzo, who is a Japanese priest.



The wedding ceremony begins and Goro tells everyone to be quiet while The Commissioner guides Pinkerton and Butterfly to sign the official papers. After that, Sharpless leaves. The relatives are raising a toast to newly married couple, when they are interrupted by the arrival and shouts of Butterfly's uncle Bonzo. He is accusing her of rejecting the religion of her ancestors and marrying Pinkerton and he has come to throw his curse on her and to tell her that he renounces her. The relatives join him in the malediction after they find out about Butterfly's change of religion. Pinkerton stops them and sends them all away. Leave the house cursing and shouting their renouncements at the weeping Butterfly. Pinkerton consoles her. "Viene la sera" is the beginning of beautiful long duet, which ends the first act.

Clapping his hands, Pinkerton calls the three servants, which enter and close up the house. Suzuki comes and prepares Butterfly for her wedding night. Butterfly is happy, but her happiness is tempered as "still the angry voice is cursing me. Butterfly is renounced-renounced but happy". She and Pinkerton, as the night begins to fall and stars start to light up in the sky, exchange words of love and rapture and finally enter into the house.

## ACT II

The Second act is set in Butterfly's house three years after Pinkerton sailed away. Even though he hasn't contacted her, Butterfly is faithfully awaiting his return. In the semi darkness of her room, Suzuki is on her knees and praying in front of the Buddha's image. She prays for Butterfly, that her mistress's suffering may soon be over. Butterfly tells her that the Japanese's Gods are lazy and that the American God will soon come to help her, if only he knew where to find her. Suzuki is concerned about money and tells Butterfly that if Pinkerton doesn't return soon, they will suffer terribly and that not one foreign husband has ever returned to his Japanese wife. Butterfly replies furiously that Pinkerton has arranged with the Consul to pay the house and to put a lock on the doors and that he promised her that he will return when the robins build their nests. Suzuki begins to weep quietly as Butterfly moves to the terrace door, looking to the direction of harbor, starting her aria "Un bel di vedremo", where she explains to Suzuki that one fine day they will see smoke on the horizon and that her Pinkerton will be coming back to her. (Stanley Sadie, 2000:49)

At that moment Goro and Sharpless are enter the garden. Sharpless came with an letter from Pinkerton which he wishes to read to Butterfly, but because of her excitement at the mention of Pinkerton's name, Sharpless is unable to read it. Butterfly asks Sharpless if he know when the robins build their nests in America. Her husband, on the day of his departure, told her that he would come back when the robins build their nests and in Japan they have already built them three times. Sharpless is evasive and answers her that he doesn't know. Butterfly is exited and goes to tell Sharpless that after Pinkerton's departure, Goro was introducing her to number of suitors, on the grounds that she is poor and renounced by her family. The latest one was the wealthy prince Yamadori. At that moment, Yamadori and his servants enter the house. He comes to Butterfly with a marriage proposal, but she rejects him, telling that she is already married. Goro tries to explain to her that according to Japanese law, she is a divorced woman, to which Butterfly answers that for her that law doesn't apply. She is an American wife and it is not as easy to get divorce by the law of "her country". The servants serve white tea, which distracts Butterfly for a moment. Goro uses that moment and whispers to the Prince and Sharpless that Pinkerton's ship has been sighted. Sharpless said that this news was the reason for his visit to Butterfly's home.

Goro and Yamadori leave. Sharpless now tries to read the letter to Butterfly, but because of her constant interrupting, he gives up and asks her what she will do if Pinkerton never returns to her. Butterfly is shocked by his question but still answers that there are just two things that she can do: she can go back to her previous job as a geisha or better, to die. Sharpless feels pity for her and gives her some friendly advice to accept the generous offer of marriage from Yamadori. Very upset butterfly calls her maid and asks her to show Sharpless out of the house. As Sharpless is leaving, Butterfly regrets her behavior and asks for forgiveness, explaining that idea of death has passed through her thoughts like "as the clouds pass over ocean". Then she runs to one of the rooms and returns with little three-year old boy with golden hair and beautiful blue eyes. He is her son which she had with Pinkerton. While cuddling the boy, Butterfly ask Sharpless if the boy's father would return if he knew that he had such a beautiful son. Then she kneels in front of her son and repeats her previous statement- rather death than to be a geisha again and starts her beautiful aria "Che tua madre dovra". Sharpless, touched by the scene he's just seen, kisses the boy and ask for his name. Instead of the boy, Butterfly answers that for now his name is Sorrow, but from the day that his father comes back, the boy's name will be Joy. Not knowing what more to say, Sharpless leavings with the promise that he will write to Pinkerton and let him know that he has a son. At that moment, Suzuki drags Goro in the house and explains to Butterfly that he was telling to the people that no one knows who the father of Butterfly's son is. In a fury Butterfly takes her father's dagger with which she threatens Goro, but calms down after Suzuki stops her and takes away the child.

A canon shot is heard from the harbor and announcing the arrival of a ship. Butterfly hurriedly take a telescope and recognizes the name of Pinkerton's ship- Abraham Lincoln. Full of joy and happiness she is tells Suzuki that everyone was wrong and that her Pinkerton loves her and is coming back to her. She sends Suzuki to prepare her bath and the dress from her wedding with Pinkerton, which she will wear when she meets him. As Butterfly asks Suzuki to fill up the house with flowers, they two begin beautiful duet "Tutti I fiori". On Butterfly's command, Suzuki starts to draw the sliding shutters at the back of the room and Butterfly bores three holes on it- one high for her, a lower one for Suzuki and the lowest one for the child, whom she places on a cushion. They all looked through halls into the distance and wait for Pinkerton's arrival. (Mosco Carner, 1979:41)

Night slowly starts to fall. From faraway humming wordless voices can be heard, singing a melancholic tune. Suzuki and the child fall asleep. Butterfly, like a stone statue, still stands, waiting for her Pinkerton to come.

That`s how the second act finishes.

## ACT III

Act three begins at the same place where second finishes. The voices of sailors, from the bay can be heard. Suzuki is slowly waking up and is very sad, because she sees that her mistress is still standing and waiting. Butterfly comforts her and herself by telling her that Pinkerton will come. Then she takes her sleeping child into another room and starts to sing to him a lullaby until she also falls asleep. Suzuki is waiting in the front room and hears a knock on the door. At that moment Sharpless and Pinkerton enter on the threshold. Pinkerton begs Suzuki not to wake Butterfly and that they have come so early hoping that they will find Suzuki alone. Suzuki explains to them that her mistress was waiting for Pinkerton all night. Pinkerton is very surprised how Butterfly could know that he had arrived. Suzuki then explains that, since he left, every day for the last three years her mistress has been watching the flag and color of every ship that enters the harbor in expectation of his return. Suzuki catches sight of a woman and finds out from Sharpless that it is Pinkerton's American wife- Kate Pinkerton. Sharpless and Pinkerton now explain to Suzuki why they wanted to see her alone and not to wake Butterfly. They wanted her help for their delicate task. Pinkerton is supposed to take the child away from Butterfly, back to America with him to make a better future for his son. They needed Suzuki to prepare her mistress for that. Pinkerton admits that he is coward and that he can't face Butterfly and quickly after the conversation he leaves. Suzuki goes to garden to speak with Pinkerton's wife. Kate tells her that she already loves the child and that she will do her best to raise the child as her own. Touched with Kate's sincerity, Suzuki promises her that she will do her best to assure Butterfly gives the child to Kate, but she asked to be alone with her when they speak about it. From the distance, Suzuki hears Butterfly's voice calling her. Butterfly enters the room hoping that Pinkerton is there. She looks excitedly around the room and then sees Suzuki crying. Also at that moment she sees Sharpless and a lady in the garden. After getting no answer from Suzuki to her question of where is Pinkerton, Butterfly starts to suspect the truth. She demands from Suzuki an answer to her questions with simply a short "yes" or "no"- is Pinkerton alive, he has come back and he will never return to her again? Suzuki hardly moved her mouth and answer tonelessly "yes". Butterfly realizes then that the lady that she saw was Pinkerton wife. Utterly calm, she approaches Kate and says that she will give the

child away, but on one condition. In half of hour, Pinkerton, in person, must come to pick up the child. (Mosco Carner, 1979:43)

After Kate and Sharpless leave, Butterfly commands to Suzuki to close all the doors and shutters, so that the room which Butterfly is in, is in total darkness. She asks Suzuki about her child and Suzuki tells her that the child is in the other room playing. Butterfly tells her not to call him, to leave him there and orders to Suzuki to go and join the child. Weeping Suzuki begs her mistress to stay and throws herself to the floor in front of Butterfly's legs. Butterfly drags her to her feet again and pushes her out of the room. Left alone, Butterfly kneels in front of the Buddha's image and starts to pray. She takes her father's dagger and reads the inscription that is written on it: "To die with honor when one can no longer live with honor". At moment whilst Butterfly points the dagger to her throat, Suzuki opens the door of the room and pushes the child inside. Like waking up from a bad dream and overcome with motherly feelings, Butterfly drop her father's dagger and starts to kiss and hug her son. While holding her sons head in-between her hands, Butterfly begins to sing "Tu! Tu! Piccolo Idio". In which she says her farewells to her son.

Letting her son to play in the middle of the room after gently bandaging his eyes, Butterfly returns in front of the Buddha's image. Slowly taking the dagger and with her eyes fixed on the child, she goes behind the screen. The sound of the dagger falling down to the ground interrupts the silence and the veil that was thrown over the screen now disappears. With a white veil around her neck and staggering, Butterfly moves next to the child and falls down in front of him. Pinkerton's voice is heard from the distance and became louder and louder. He is calling Butterfly. Together with Sharpless, he enters the house. Weakly pointing to the child, Butterfly dies.



# **MADAME BUTTERFLY AND SINGING CHALLENGES**

## **- ANALYSES OF THE ROLE OF BUTTERFLY AND SINGING CHALLENGES**

Cio-Cio-San is one of the Puccini`s most beautiful but at the same time most demanding role. It is a colossal undertaking, vocally, technically and psychologically, and it requires drama in performance and an extremely subtle balance of delicacy. In order to perform it exactly in the way that composer wanted, a singer has to be at a high level of readiness. It means that all the technical problems are resolved and the singer has complete control over her vocal device so she can use it as an expressional tool. Otherwise the audience will be unable to experience all that the music is intended to provide.

“And if the singer is to be true to the character and the music, she must take corresponding care: she must understand Butterfly with the heart as well as the voice, never exaggerating or appearing in any way sophisticated” (Mosco Carner 1979:7)



The Role of Butterfly is written for a type of voice called *lyrico spinto*- a confident and powerful soprano who can deliver Puccini's music with feeling and lovely vocal coloration. At the same time it has to be both fragile and delicate on one side and strong on the other side, so that voice can penetrate and carry over a very dense orchestra.

From the first entrance of Cio-Cio-San, in the beginning of the first act, Puccini through the music is introducing us to her character. Followed by her friends, she is approaching the house where her beloved American husband Pinkerton and a new life, are waiting for her. As a contrast to allegretto- the dialog between Pinkerton and Sharpless, and allegro- when Goro announces her arrival, Butterfly's entrance is followed by largo.

46 PINKERTON *ALLEGRO* ♩ = 144 *60 STR.*

- na.

GORO (riappare correndo affannato dal basso della collina) (accenna verso il sentiero)  
 Ec-co! Son giun-te al som-mo del pen - dio. Già

Sop. 1: (interno, lontano)  
 Ah!..... ah!.....

Sop. 2:  
 Ah!..... ah!.....

37 *ALLEGRO* ♩ = 144

*f p*

GORO  
 del femmineo sciame qual di ven-to in fo-glia-me s'o-de il bru-  
 ah!..... ah!.....

LE AMICHE DI BUTTERFLY

*LARGO* ♩ = 60

BUTTERFLY (interno)

(sempre interno)

mar!

39 *LARGO* ♩ = 60

*ppp*

BUTTERFLY

Sop. 1:  
 An-co-ra un pas-so or

Sop. 2<sup>da</sup> e 3:  
 Quan-to cie-lo! quan-to mar!.....

Quan-to cie-lo! quan-to mar!.....

*f* *HOODO* *f*

The music is floating and has a dreamy character. With a beautiful accompaniment from the strings and harp, the musical line of Cio-Cio-San came in first plan; long phrases with legato and each of them started in *p* or *pp*. At the beginning, Butterfly must be shown as a completely trusting and artless young girl, what is very difficult for an adult artist to do.

The high tones put the finishing touch to Butterfly's first entrance, in order to fulfill the image of Butterfly's youth, they have to be sang softly with breath control and support.

54 BUTTERFLY

Sop. 1: o - - - - - ve..... s'ac

Sop. 2: ma pri - a di var\_car..... ia

Sop. 3: ma pri - a di var\_car..... ia

BUTTERFLY:

- co - - - - - glie..... il be - ne di chi

so - - - - - glia che..... t'at -

so - - - - - glia che..... t'at -

voi gi ti e mi ra le

*m.f.*

z IIOOOO z

58 (appaiono in scena - hanno tutte grandi ombrelli aperti a vivi colori)

*Lento*

BUTTERFLY *pp*

*Surrou da me te va lu - cali - mori*

sostenuto..... *a tempo* rall. *cal*

- mor,..... son venu - ta al ri - chia - mo d'amor, d'a -

*pp* vol - gittie mi - ra le co - se che ti son ca -

guar - da le co - se che ti son si ca -

guar - da le co - se che ti son si ca -

sostenuto..... *a tempo* rall.

*pp*

BUTTERFLY *LARGO*

- mor!.....

- rel.....

- rel.....

*LARGO*

41

*mf* *pp*

z IIOOOO z

The first act finishes with a beautiful duet between Pinkerton and Butterfly “Viene la sera” which is the longest duet that Puccini ever wrote.

Pinkerton is comforting Butterfly; she is desperate and unhappy because her family has renounced and cursed her. In order to describe her feelings, Puccini starts her line in piano low register, using sixteenth notes. Throughout the duet Pinkerton and Butterfly are exchanging gentle and tender words of love and she expresses her love, passion and devotion to him. Accordingly, Butterfly’s phrases are long, dense with emotion and under constant legato.

Like a water, those phrases are flow one into another. Starting from *pp* and slowly guided through *cresc* to *f*. and then again *p* – This requires a deep, cautiously controlled breath. In order to do succeed that the singer has to show flexibility of voice.

146  
 (Butterfly ha un moto di spavento e fa atto di turarsi gli orecchi, come se ancora avesse ad udire le urla dei parenti: poi si rassicura e con fiducia si rivolge a Pinkerton)

127

*ff*

*AND<sup>te</sup> ANIMATO*  
*con espansione*

Sie - te al - to, for - te. Ri -  
*pa - si - tu - da, Va -*

*p* *con espansione*

*AND<sup>te</sup> ANIMATO*

*pp* *cres.* *poco allarg.*

- de - te con modi si pa - le - si! E di - te co - se che mai non in -  
*cosi tremava! Le mani si ee come una rosa*

*pp* *cres.* *poco allarg.*

II 0000

147

BUTTERFLY

*te - si. Or son con -*  
*cre -* *te* *vi con -*

*a tempo* *p*

BUTTERFLY

*ten - ta, or son con -*  
*sta -* *sta -* *da - ta -*

*pp*

BUTTERFLY

(. Notte completata: cielo purissimo e stellato.)

*ten - ta.*

*dim.* *rall.....*

II 0000



When it is about dynamic and articulation, the singer have to color with her own voice the main melody, using the instructions which Puccini included in the score.

The duet ends with a crescendo of both the music and their emotions..

162

BUTTERFLY  
-ten-til Quan-ti sguar-di.....  
PINKERTON  
Guar-da: dorme o-gni co-sa! Ah!.....

Handwritten annotations: *voce a 90*, *zreade*, *hako*, *cres.*, *poco rall.*

À II0000 A

163

BUTTERFLY  
not - tel! Tut - to e - sta - ti - co d'a -  
PINKERTON  
Ah!..... vien,.....

Handwritten annotations: *voce*, *Sostenendo*, *cres.*, *molto*, *poco rall.*, *slast*, *stilt uas.*, *Opp.*, *cres.*, *cres. molto*

z II0000 z

“Un bel di vedremo” from the second act, is the most performed aria from this opera. The orchestral introduction and the music in the first six bars of the aria, sound like a distant ship horn, and while listening, you can almost imagine the smoke coming out of the ships chimney. With a sound like from afar, the aria begins with a soft attacca on high tone in *pp*.

And.<sup>te</sup> molto calmo  $\text{♩} = 42$

CANTO

Un..... bel di, ve - dre - mo le -

And.<sup>te</sup> molto calmo

PIANOFORTE

*pp* come da lontano

tho na ore

- var - si un fil di fu - mo sul l'e - stre - mo con fin del

ma - re. E poi..... la na - ve ap - pa - re.....

*poco rall.*

*poco rall.*







The singer has to be aware that the change in the sound, from lighter to a bit darker color, is done in the right way- that the position of the tone in head and well appoggio remain the same. The only thing that is changing is voice volume and intensity.

The aria which follows is “Che tua madre dovra”. The singer has now to apply drama to her singing. It is a very dramatic libretto, underlined with strong support from orchestra. Her light singing is required to be replaced with strength, power, roundness and volume of the voice, although Butterfly is singing to her child and it is expected to be a softer sound. The singer has to be aware of pushing the tone in order to keep up the voice position, because it will force up the neck muscles which will lead to voice tiredness.

After this aria, comes the duet “Tutti I fiori” between Butterfly and her maid Suzuki, which is by character completely the opposite from the aria that it follows. In love and happy because of Pinkerton’s return, Butterfly is putting flowers all around the house. The music is light and floating.

278 (gettando fiori) a tempo

**BUTTERFLY** *allargando.* Tut - ta ia pri - ma - ve - ra, tut - ta,

**SUZUKI** TUTTA LA SECONDA CARNA S

79 *allargando.* Tut - ta ia pri - ma - ve - ra, tut - ta, *a tempo*

**BUTTERFLY** KRASI U. SJAJU SVOM! C'AD PO

**SUZUKI** vo - glio che o - lez - zi qui... in - tor - no, in - tut - ta. Gigli... vio - le?... *p*

**BUTTERFLY** CE - LOS SOBI *Sostenendo*

**SUZUKI** - tor - no... span - di... Se - mi - nia - mo in - tor - no a... *Sostenendo*

r 110000 r

The Opera finishes with the tragic death of Butterfly. Her last aria is “Tu!Tu! piccolo Idio”. Before she commits suicide, Butterfly holding her son for the last time, asking him to take a last look at his mother’s face and not to forget it. Pinkerton has returned to Nagasaki with his American wife and intends to take the boy with him. The music is full of passion; all the aria is in forte dynamic. Compared with first two of Butterfly’s arias, this one is in a faster tempo which follows her emotions. The singer has to arrange their breath and have a full control over tone support. Using sixteenth notes and triola, Puccini tries closely to paint Butterfly’s pain.

358 (prendendo la testa del bimbo, accostandola a sè)

BUTTERFLY *a tempo*

ti Non sa - per - lo ma - i..... per..... te.....  
*ti non sa per lo ma i per te*

*ff a tempo*

BUTTERFLY *con voce di pianto*

..... pei tuoi pu - ri oc - chi, muor But - ter - fly.....  
*pei tuoi puri occhi muore Butterfly*

BUTTERFLY *da un pezzo so - ciev troci u drugi*

per - ché tu pos - sa an - dar di là dal

BUTTERFLY *svet*

ma - - re sen - za che ti ri - mor - da.....  
*ma re senza che ti rimorde*

*p mf f*

*h 110000 h*

The aria finishes almost spoken in piano.

## **FREQUENT PROBLEMS OF THE ROLE**

Although I never performed the role of Madame Butterfly on the stage, I have done parts of it: arias and duets, as a concert performance. I will try, from my own experience and through my professor's experiences who have sung this role, to underline, in theory, some of the vocal and technical problems. The role is very demanding, because from the first entrance (in the beginning of the first act) until the end of the opera, Butterfly is always present on the stage. It requires besides vocal maturity and acting skills, physical, mental and emotional readiness. In order to explain the vocal problems, I will use a book written by famous prima-donna and pedagogue Biserka Cvejic, one from expert in phonetics and opera singer Dusan Cvejic, -"The Art of Singing" and a book written by famous singer Lilli Lehman "Meine Gesangskunst" (Serbian edition "Moja umetnost pevanja" ).

First, I would like to start by explaining what "vocal technique" means. According to Dr. Cvejic "it is an indispensable mechanism which makes it possible for a singer to sing a piece of music as best as he or she can. To create it one requires time, perseverance and patience." (Cvejic2008: 254)

The singing technique is based on the creation of singing models, habits or conditional reflex. It takes time, but once it's formed, it becomes fully automatic. Therefore it takes certain amount of time to learn to sing.

### **- WHAT DOES VOCAL TECHNIQUE REPRESENT?**

According to Dr. Cvejic, the best method to achieve a good vocal technique is the one that is closest to physiology. The Singer is not supposed to color the voice, because coloring it can harm it and do a lot of damage. Also not to force it because in forcing it, the singer uses muscles without proper breath support. Proper singing doesn't allow dynamic force, just good co-ordinate operation of every part of vocal apparatus. The technique is first generated in the singers head and from there it's directed to "the peripheral areas". (Cvejic2008: 256). It is built on the correct use of body, control of muscles and movement.

This last one is connected with stage fright- The singer, in order to properly use vocal technique, need to be relaxed and calm and before every stage appearance to get rid of tension. Vocal technique has to be mastered so that no one can notice even small tensions or any kind of difficulties on singer face while he is performing. Everyone should get impression that the singing happens naturally. In effect- that is the most difficult thing to achieve.

## - **BREATHING**

For all singers, breath is the basic ingredient. It is like the engine for the voice. The air starts to turn into the sound at the larynx level, it then passes through the resonance and articulation cavity where it gets created. After that it comes out of the mouth into the space as an emitted tone. Dr. Cvejic points out some very important facts about breathing:

- Breath control has to be learnt properly and all the time trained, because natural breathing can't fulfill the requirements of artistic singing.
- The vocal apparatus is a very complex and complicated instrument. Tone is first created in the brain "and it is then achieved in the peripheral areas (breathing and articulation muscles)". (Cvejic2008: 257)
- Through breath support, produced tone includes attack, appoggio and tone quality. It means that breathing should be supported by the diaphragm. Breath has to be soft- never constricted so that it ensures flexibility. Also through breathing, the voice becomes more focused and then the tone is in the focus. That is very important when singing from high to lower notes, so that voice doesn't go back into the throat.

## - **APPOGGIO**

It is a coordinated operation of mental and physical functions of the vocal apparatus. Imagined in singers mind, it is an inner elastic tension in the whole of vocal apparatus. Usually it depends of singer physical condition, what kind of appoggio he can manage.

## - HIGH POSITION

Is not possible to make the exact definition of high position, because it is an essence of singing. It can be explained as a complex of mental and physical processes, also as the vocal ability of a singer. To achieve this position, various imaginations and comparisons are required. Dr. Cvejic tried to explain simply the beginning process of high position. Tone emission has to be prepared, imagined and heard in the brain. A vocal model is then created. Then, as nerve impulse, the command for tone emission is sent from the brain, to the peripheral organs, telling them what to do. The taking of breath, mental connection between the diaphragm and the already imagined tone in the head, is made and enables the vocal tube to be free and open. It is important to have absolute control over expiration and to make it impossible for a big amount of air to be released. In that process, the throat must stay free and completely relaxed so to enable the vocal cords to vibrate properly. To allow the tone to go up high into the appropriate spaces for resonance, including the hard palate and the "mask", properly coordinated operation and assistance from the lower organs of the vocal apparatus need to be ensured. Tone is not supposed to be hindered by improper operations of important organs such as the tongue, pharynx walls and the soft palate. When the singer succeeds to do all these preparations, the achievement of tone in high position begins.

Keeping the feeling of tone high position, it is easier to sing through registers- low, mid and high. In order to do that, it is very important to keep the focus of the support. To reach the high tone, focus goes down toward the diaphragm. It is an inner sensation of keeping the breath and not pushing the breathing organs down.

The sensation of high position has to be developed gradually and to make it a conscious operation, it takes a lot of time and hard training. But once it became well trained and fully automatic, it allows beautiful singing.

## - LEGATO

Its very name suggests that it is actually a way of singing characterized by properly linked tones, so that sound can be accurately and directly carried from one tone to another, without breaks and audible undertones. The tones have to be connected- close to each other. The diction has to be clear, so that the spoken message can be understood. Vocal pedagogues, when they work with students, usually try to explain legato with a lot of associations, so it can be easier for the student to understand. “Chi non lega, non canta” – it means that singers who are not linking their tones, do not really sing. It is very important that the words that are spoken, never disrupt the flow of the tone. It is also important to know that a tone sung legato has already been supported by proper breath, and it depends on, and is very closely connected with the singer`s power, will, breathing, including appoggio, attack and vibrancy. (Cvejic2008: 226)

## - PIANO

Piano or “mezza di voce” is a form of singing with appropriate breath support, with a permanently vibrant tone ensuring the presence of overtones, with a tone that is in the focus of resonance and with proper register change technique. It is not supposed to be regarded as a loss of tone. It requires a strict control over balance between breath controlling muscles and the muscles of the larynx.

singing “mezza di voce” properly as it required, can be achieved only after a singers instrument has been completely created.

## **- PREPARATION BEFORE STARTING TO WORK ON AN OPERA ROLE**

When we study an opera role, we must first meet with ideological content of the work. Only after we have a clear picture of the piece, can we start with the elaboration of detail, which creates an impression of the piece, and can't be violated. A complete picture has to radiate from every detail. Therefore we must avoid any waste of the little things in order not to damage the main image. Our main interest has to be related to whole picture, the details should not be distracting. In art, the hierarchy of the relationship between the piece and the sum parts of it, is art for itself. The words carry meaning; and it is not the meaning of the word something in what we express, but also what kind of nuance of meaning is and its relation to the piece.

Each artistic work that we work on, requires a sacrifice of our own "I", because the emotions we are given through the composer's music we merge with our own, so to say- exposing our inside. Since we embody human beings, we can't economize; just with all effort- surrender.

(Lilli Lehman2004: 156)



## CONCLUSION

Being an opera singer is a very demanding job. It requires lots of hard work, but at the same time is very interesting and exciting. It opens up a whole new world of viewing things, different kind of emotions and feelings.

My research task was to try to explain vocal and technical problems that role of Cio-Cio-San requires.

Puccini's "Madame Butterfly" and role of Cio-Cio-San, which was, is, and will remain a big challenge to singers. Not just because of problems that I have tried to explain in my master thesis, but also because of its complexity. It is demanding in both ways- singing and acting, the role of Cio-Cio-San represents one role that even some of the greatest and biggest singers of nowadays don't dare to perform on stage. While doing my research, I came to the conclusion that perfect vocal technique, emotional balance, maturity of the voice and singing and acting skills are required in order to fulfill the task which Puccini put in front of singers by composing this opera. It is also important to be authentic as artist and to put your own mark on each performance.

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