

MEDIA RELEASE – SYDNEY SUMMER SEASON 2015

Let yourself be swept away by the beauty of *Madama Butterfly*

Directed by Moffatt Oxenbould



One of the world's favourite operas, *Madama Butterfly*, is back by popular demand to delight opera lovers old and new. This luscious production by director **Moffatt Oxenbould** is still one of the most loved in Australia and plays at **Sydney Opera House from 27 January to 28 March 2015**.

This stunning production features Greek soprano **Alexia Vougaridou** (*Tosca*, 2013) in the title role, with Australian tenor **James Egglestone** as Pinkerton and maestro **Gianluca Martinenghi** on the podium.

In what has become an extended season, there will be three Butterflies, **Alexia Vougaridou** (27 January–22 February), Australian soprano **Antoinette Halloran** (25 February–18 March) and finally, Japanese soprano **Hiroimi Omura** to sing in an extended season (19-28 March). Ms Omura performed the role in this production in Sydney and Melbourne in 2012, as well as the highly acclaimed Handa Opera on Sydney Harbour in 2014.

Madama Butterfly now ranks at No.1 in Opera America's list of most performed operas in North America, winning audiences with its iconic arias, including Cio-Cio-San's breathtaking and poignant 'Un bel di vedremo' ('One Beautiful Day') and the beautifully delicate 'Coro a bocca chiusa' ('Humming Chorus').

Set in the early 1900s, the story is the devastating fallout from a cultural clash, where a visiting American takes a young Japanese girl as a temporary wife, always imagining that he would eventually take an American bride. But the girl has a fierce love and loyalty, and resolves to wait for him at whatever the cost.

Madama Butterfly is one of Opera Australia's most celebrated productions. The simple lines, great blocks of colour, bold choreography and clever use of screens and water are like an artwork on stage. The production has been seen not just in Sydney but all over the world, travelling to China, Canada and America.

"We created this production as a team collaboration over a period of nearly three years," says **Moffatt Oxenbould**, former artistic director of Opera Australia, and director of *Madama Butterfly*. "The two designers were commissioned on the eve of their graduation from the three year NIDA design course, and given studio space within The Opera Centre in Sydney to create the design. ... Performers, craftspeople and administrative staff were encouraged to feel an involvement and ownership of the journey from design studio, to workshop, to rehearsal room and eventually to the stage and the audience."

The love and care of its inception clearly shows on stage, and Oxenbould's *Madama Butterfly* is one of the great treasures in the Opera Australia repertoire.

About the opera

Puccini's opera was inspired by **David Belasco's** play *Madame Butterfly* (1900), which was in turn inspired by John Luther Long's short story of the same name (1898). Belasco is widely recognised for bringing a new standard of naturalism to the American stage, and this obviously appealed to Puccini, who is famous for his 'verismo' or real-life style of opera.

The first performances of *Madama Butterfly* took place in February 1904 at La Scala, Milan. They were a disaster, with Puccini subsequently revising the score. The new version premièred at Brescia in May of the same year and was a huge success.

About the artists

Born in Greece, **Alexia Voulgaridou** came to international attention as Mimì in the Bregenz Opera Festival's *La bohème*. She has performed in major theatres throughout Europe and captivated Sydney audiences in 2013 with her passionate performance of Tosca in John Bell's acclaimed production. Ms Voulgaridou sings regularly with Hamburg State Opera, where her many roles include Marguerite (*Faust*), Blanche (*Dialogues des Carmélites*), Cio-Cio-San (*Madama Butterfly*), Nedda (*Cavalleria rusticana*) and Desdemona (*Otello*).

Antoinette Halloran is one of Australia's most accomplished and best-loved sopranos. Ms Halloran performs regularly with all the major Australasian opera companies and symphony orchestras including leading roles in *Madama Butterfly*, *Rusalka*, *La bohème*, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Green Room Award), *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan Tutte*, *Lakmé* and *Tosca*.

Japanese soprano **Hiromi Omura** studied in her home city of Tokyo at the National University of Fine Arts and Music, before embarking on a career which has taken her all over the world. In 2001, Verona's "Le Voci" awarded her the title of Best Lyric Singer of the Year. She has sung the role of Madama Butterfly at the Deutsche Oper in Berlin, in Tel-Aviv, Montréal, Malaga, Cordoba, Lausanne, Warsaw and at the Savonlinna Festival.

With two Helpmann Awards, **James Egglestone** is one of Australia's finest tenors. In 2004 he won both the Johnston Bequest and the Belcanto Scholarship – allowing him to study in Italy and The Netherlands. He performs regularly with Opera Australia with recent roles including Lensky in *Eugene Onegin* and Cassio in *Otello*, as well as roles for all of Australia's state opera companies.

Creatives

Conductor **Gianluca Martinenghi** (until 22 Feb)
Anthony Legge

Director **Moffatt Oxenbould**

Set & Costume Designers
Peter England & Russel Cohen

Lighting Designer **Robert Bryan**

Rehearsal & Movement Director **Matthew Barclay**

Cast

Cio-Cio-San **Alexia Voulgaridou** (until 22 Feb)
Antoinette Halloran (25 Feb – 18 Mar)
Hiromi Omura (19-28 Mar)

Pinkerton **James Egglestone**

Suzuki **Sian Pendry**

Sharpless **Michael Honeyman**

Goro **Graeme Macfarlane**

Kate Pinkerton **Jane Ede**

Bonze **Jud Arthur**

Yamadori **Samuel Dundas**

Commissioner **Jonathan McCauley**

Registrar **Dean Bassett**

With **Australian Opera and Ballet Orchestra**
Opera Australia Chorus

Image: Hiromi Omura in *Madama Butterfly*.

Performance information

Evenings at 7.30pm

January 27

February 5, 7, 10, 12, 14, 20, 25, 27

March 3, 5, 7, 10, 12, 18, 19, 21, 24, 26, 28

Saturday matinee at 1pm

January 31

March 14

Sunday matinee at 2pm

February 22

Running time

Approx 2hrs & 45mins including a 20min interval
Performed in Italian with English surtitles

Bookings

Adult tickets from \$69 (fees may apply)

Group and concession prices available for most performances.

Student Rush available for most performances:
\$50 (fees may apply)

Opera Australia Box Office

(02) 9318 8200

www.opera.org.au

Joan Sutherland Theatre, Sydney Opera House

Media enquiries

Sarah Wilson, Senior Publicist

(02) 9318 8332 / 0405 364 643

sarah.wilson@opera.org.au

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