

THE ATLANTA OPERA  
PRESENTS



# MADAMA BUTTERFLY

Giacomo Puccini

EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



# MADAMA BUTTERFLY

## FIRST PERFORMANCE

Feb. 17, 1904 Teatro alla Scala, Milan, Italy

## COMPOSER

Giacomo Puccini

## LIBRETTISTS

Luigi Illica & Giuseppe Giacosa

## CAST

### CIO-CIO-SAN

Yasko Sato

### SUZUKI

Katharine Goeldner

### PINKERTON

Gianluca Terranova

### SHARPLESS

Michael Chioldi

## CREATIVE TEAM

### CONDUCTOR

Carlo Montanaro

### DIRECTOR

Tomer Zvulun

### SCENIC & PROJECTIONS DESIGNER

Erhard Rom

### LIGHTING DESIGNER

Robert Wierzel

### COSTUME DESIGNER

Allen Charles Klein

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Joshua S. Jansen

### EDUCATION COORDINATOR

Alexandria Sweatt



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*Madama Butterfly* from the Atlanta Opera's 2014 production at The Cobb Energy Centre. (photo: Jeff Roffman)

Hello, and thank you for joining us for this production of Puccini's operatic masterpiece, *Madama Butterfly*. Cultures collide when an American naval officer, stationed in Nagasaki, decides to take a Japanese wife. A delicate bride, Cio-Cio-San—fifteen years old and in love, dreams of her new life with the handsome young officer. Renouncing her culture and her family to become a proper American wife, she settles into his home overlooking Nagasaki Harbor, and waits for his ship to return. What could possibly go wrong?

This educator guide has been developed to help you and your students explore *Madama Butterfly*, as well as to familiarize students with the world of opera (vocabulary, history, etc.). The guide approaches these subjects via a wide range of disciplines, including English Language Arts, Science, Music, Theater and Social Studies. Our goal is to provide you with an innovative, multidisciplinary approach to teaching required skills and curriculum, including connections to the Georgia Standards of Excellence.

In using this guide, we hope you will feel free to adapt pages or activities to best meet the needs of your students. A simple activity may be a perfect launching pad for a higher-level lesson, and a complex lesson may contain key points onto which younger students can latch. Please make this guide your own!

We value your feedback and will take it into account in planning future education programs. We look forward to hearing from you, your students, administration, and/or parents following the performance. Thank you again for allowing us to share this opera with you. It is our sincere hope that you enjoy the experience, and we look forward to seeing you and your students at the opera!

The Atlanta Opera  
Education Department  
1575 Northside Drive, Suite 350, Atlanta, GA 30318  
education@atlantaopera.org  
404-881-8801

## IMPORTANT INFO

- **Final Dress Rehearsal:**  
Thursday, April 30, 2020 at 7:00pm
- **Location:** Cobb Energy Centre
- **Performed in Italian with English supertitles**
- **Running time is approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes, including one intermission.**
- **Recommended for Grades 5-12**
- **For more information visit:**  
<https://www.atlantaopera.org/madama-butterfly>

# SYNOPSIS

## WHAT'S THE OPERA ABOUT?

### ACT I

At the turn of the century, on the outskirts of the harbor town of Nagasaki, U.S. Navy Lieutenant Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton inspects the house which he has leased and is soon to occupy with his Japanese bride, Cio-Cio-San, known as Madama Butterfly. Goro, the marriage broker, has arranged both the match and the house with a 999-year contract cancelable at a month's notice. Presently, Sharpless, the United States Consul arrives, and Pinkerton shares with him his carefree philosophy of a sailor and the beautiful Japanese girl who has captivated him. Sharpless tries to persuade him that there is danger in this convenient arrangement; the girl may not regard her vows so lightly. The Lieutenant laughs at such apprehension and proposes a toast to America and the American girl who will someday be his "real" wife.

The hour for the wedding ceremony approaches. Butterfly, accompanied by her friends, arrives joyously singing of her wedding. She tells Pinkerton that since the death of her father she has had to earn her living as a geisha. Her relatives noisily bustle in, commenting on the bridegroom. In a quiet moment, Cio-Cio-San shows Pinkerton her few earthly treasures and tells him that she has secretly renounced her traditional faith in favor of Christianity. The Imperial Commissioner performs the brief ceremony, and the guests toast the couple when, suddenly Cio-Cio-San's uncle, the Bonze, bursts in shouting. A Buddhist priest, he curses her for renouncing her ancestor's religion. The relatives instantly turn on the young bride. When Pinkerton angrily orders all the guests away, Butterfly is left weeping. Pinkerton consoles her with tender words, and as night falls, the lovers share a moonlit duet.

### ACT II

Three years later, with a gaze fixed upon the horizon, Cio-Cio-San patiently awaits her husband's return. Beside her, Suzuki prays to an image of Buddha, imploring the gods for aid. The money Pinkerton left is now almost gone. Butterfly bids her maid to have faith. One day, Pinkerton's ship will appear in the harbor and he will again embrace his beloved wife.

Soon Sharpless enters with a letter from the Lieutenant and tries several times unsuccessfully to explain the reason for his visit. The letter tells of

Pinkerton's marriage to an American girl. But before he can break the news to Butterfly, Goro interrupts, bringing with him a noble suitor, the wealthy Prince Yamadori. Cio-Cio-San greets the prince with dignity but firmly refuses his offer of marriage, insisting that her American husband has not deserted her. Sharpless again attempts to read the letter and gently advises the girl to accept the prince. He asks her what she



Pinkerton and Cio-Cio-San from The Atlanta Opera's 2014 production. (photo: Jeff Roffman)

# SYNOPSIS

## WHAT'S THE OPERA ABOUT?

would do if Pinkerton never returned. Cio-Cio-San proudly carries forth her young son, "Sorrow." As soon as Pinkerton knows of his son, she insists, he will return to them, and that day, "Joy" will become the child's name. If her husband does not come back, she says she would rather die than return to her former life. Utterly defeated, but moved by Butterfly's devotion, Sharpless quickly exits.

A cannon roars from the harbor. Seizing a spyglass, Butterfly discovers that Pinkerton's ship, the Abraham Lincoln, is coming into port. Deliriously happy, she orders Suzuki to help her strew the house with blossoms. As evening falls, Cio-Cio-San dons her wedding gown and with her maid and her son, she prepares to keep vigil throughout the long night.

### ACT III

The pale light of dawn finds Suzuki and the baby asleep. Butterfly still stands watching and waiting. Suzuki awakens with the sunshine and insists that Cio-Cio-San rest. Humming a lullaby, the young mother carries her boy to another room. Before long, Sharpless, Pinkerton and Kate, his new wife, approach the house. Suzuki almost at once realizes who the strange woman is. Overcome with despair,

she reluctantly agrees to aid in breaking the news to her mistress. Pinkerton, now surrounded by evidence of his fragile Butterfly's unwavering faith and devotion, bids an anguished farewell to the scene of his former happiness. He then rushes away leaving the consul to arrange things as best he can. Cio-Cio-San hurries in expecting to find her husband, and instead finds Kate. She instantly guesses the truth and with touching dignity, Butterfly wishes "the real American wife" happiness. She asks Kate to tell Pinkerton that he may have his son if he will return for him in half an hour. Kate sadly departs with Sharpless.

Butterfly orders Suzuki and the child away. She pulls from its sheath the dagger with which her father committed suicide. She reads aloud its inscription, "To die with honor when one no longer can live with honor." As she raises the blade to her throat, Suzuki pushes the boy into the room. Cio-Cio-San drops the knife and embraces her child, passionately imploring him to look well upon his mother's face. After finally sending him off to play, she takes her father's dagger and stabs herself. As Butterfly dies, Pinkerton's voice is heard crying out her name.

*Courtesy of Boston Lyric Opera*



Pinkerton and Cio-Cio-San's wedding that took place in Japan. (photo: Jeff Roffman)

# MEET THE CHARACTERS

CHARACTER	PERFORMED BY	VOICE TYPE	THE LOWDOWN
<b>Cio-Cio-San*</b> <b>(cho-cho-SAHN)</b> *also known as Madama Butterfly	Yasko Sato	soprano	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A 15-year-old geisha in Nagasaki</li> <li>• Young and idealistic, Cio-Cio-San views her marriage contract as a permanent, sacred union.</li> </ul>
<b>Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton</b> <b>(English pronunciation)</b>	Gianluca Terranova	tenor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A lieutenant in the U.S. Navy, stationed in Nagasaki</li> <li>• Dashing but callous, Pinkerton travels the world looking for pleasure—with no regard for how his actions affect others.</li> </ul>
<b>Suzuki</b> <b>(soo-DZOO-kee)</b>	Katharine Goeldner	mezzo-soprano	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maid to Cio-Cio-San</li> <li>• A faithful and empathetic servant, Suzuki remains with Cio-Cio-San throughout her changes in fortune.</li> </ul>
<b>Sharpless</b> <b>(English pronunciation)</b>	Michael Chioldi	baritone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. consul at Nagasaki</li> <li>• Sharpless provides a necessary voice of sympathy and restraint.</li> </ul>

*Courtesy of The Metropolitan Opera*



Sharpless and Pinkerton. (photo: Jeff Roffman)

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF JAPAN

The Japanese archipelago has been inhabited since the Paleolithic Age, and by the eighth century AD had become a powerful and unified state ruled by an emperor. Beginning at the end of the 12th century, a less centralized form of government emerged, with a warrior class of samurai, led by military commanders called the *shogun*, effectively governing the nation. In this era, Japan was a feudal society, with peasants working the land in return for protection by the samurai.

The office of the *shogun* was subject to competition and coups, and rather than being strictly hereditary, the shogunate passed through a variety of powerful families. Beginning in the 1630s, the shogunate led by the Tokugawa family enacted a series of foreign policy measures that effectively closed Japan's borders, preventing immigration and emigration, strictly limiting foreign trade to a small number of designated locations, and prohibiting Christianity. This policy was known as *sakoku*, or "closed country," and its effects on Japan were significant. On the one hand, the Tokugawa shogunate was able to concentrate on domestic issues and ushered in a 300-year era of peace; on the other, their foreign policy prolonged the existence of the feudal system and isolated the country from the industrial developments of the rest of the world.

The policy of *sakoku* ended only after intense pressure from the West, which was very keen to engage Japan in foreign trade. In 1853, the U.S. Navy, led by Commodore Matthew Perry, infiltrated Tokyo harbor with four warships. Under the implied threat of military action, Perry requested that Japan initiate relations with America. Faced with warships of a kind they had never seen; the Japanese had no alternative but to sign the Kanagawa Treaty, which immediately opened two ports to U.S. trade and ended the country's centuries-long isolation.

Not long after the Kanagawa Treaty, the age of the shogunate also came to an end in 1868, when a group of political reformers succeeded in reestablishing a centralized, imperial government. This restoration of power to the emperor is known as the Meiji Restoration, named after Emperor Meiji, who ruled until 1912. During the 45 years of the Meiji era, Japan experienced rapid industrialization, vastly



Japanese ukiyo-e full-color woodblock print. ca 1790  
(Image: {{PD-US-expired}})

increasing its wealth and power, and successfully avoided falling under the expansionist aspirations of the Western powers. The fictional events of *Madama Butterfly* take place during the Meiji era, when Japan was only just adapting to the presence of foreigners, of Christian missions, of international trade, and of the notion of emigration. All these issues are at play in *Madama Butterfly*.

Courtesy of The Metropolitan Opera

## THE COMPOSER

**GIACOMO PUCCINI** (1858-1924)

Giacomo Puccini (Giacomo Antonio Domenico Michele Secondo Maria Puccini) was born on December 22, 1858 in Lucca, Italy. He was one of the greatest exponents of operatic realism, who virtually brought the history of Italian opera to an end. His mature operas included *La bohème* (1896), *Tosca* (1900), *Madama Butterfly* (1904), and *Turandot* (left incomplete).

Puccini was the last descendant of a family that for two centuries had provided the musical directors of the Cathedral of San Martino in Lucca. Puccini initially dedicated himself to music, therefore, not as a personal vocation but as a family profession. He was orphaned at the age of five by the death of his father, and the municipality of Lucca supported the family with a small pension and kept the position of cathedral organist open for Giacomo until he came of age. A performance of Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida*, which he saw in Pisa in 1876, convinced him that his true vocation was opera. In the autumn of 1880, he went to study at the Milan Conservatory, where his principal teachers were Antonio Bazzini, a famous violinist and composer of chamber music, and Amilcare Ponchielli.

After the death of his mother, Puccini fled from Lucca with a married woman, Elvira Gemignani. Finding in their passion the courage to defy the truly enormous scandal generated by their illegal union, they lived at first in Monza, near Milan, where a son, Antonio, was born. In 1890 they moved to Milan, and in 1891 to Torre del Lago, a fishing village on Lake Massaciuccoli in Tuscany.

Puccini returned from Bayreuth with the plan for *Manon Lescaut*, based, like the *Manon* of the French composer Jules Massenet, on the celebrated 18th-century novel by the Abbé Prévost. Beginning with this opera, Puccini carefully selected the subjects for his operas and spent considerable time on the preparation of the librettos. The psychology of the heroine in *Manon Lescaut*, as in succeeding works, dominates the dramatic nature of Puccini's operas. Puccini, in sympathy with his public, was writing to move them to assure his success. The score of *Manon Lescaut*, dramatically alive, prefigures the operatic refinements achieved in his mature operas: *La bohème*, *Tosca*, *Madama Butterfly*, and *La fanciulla del west* (1910; *The Girl of the Golden West*). These four mature works also tell a moving love story, one that centers entirely on the feminine protagonist and ends in a tragic resolution.

The premiere of *La fanciulla del west* took place at the Metropolitan Opera in New York City on December 10, 1910, with Arturo Toscanini conducting. It was a



Giacomo Puccini (Image: {{PD-US-expired}})

great triumph, and with it Puccini reached the end of his mature period. He admitted "writing an opera is difficult." For one who had been the typical operatic representative of the turn of the century, he felt the new century advancing ruthlessly with problems no longer his own. He did not understand contemporary events, such as World War I. In 1917 at Monte-Carlo in Monaco, Puccini's opera *La rondine* was first performed and then was quickly forgotten.

His last opera, based on the fable of *Turandot* as told in the play *Turandot* by the 18th-century Italian dramatist Carlo Gozzi, is the only Italian opera in the Impressionistic style. Puccini did not complete *Turandot*, unable to write a final grand duet on the triumphant love between Turandot and Calaf. Suffering from cancer of the throat, he was ordered to Brussels for surgery, and a few days afterward he died with the incomplete score of *Turandot* in his hands.

*Turandot* was performed posthumously at La Scala on April 25, 1926, and Arturo Toscanini, who conducted the performance, concluded the opera at the point Puccini had reached before dying. Two final scenes were completed by Franco Alfano from Puccini's sketches.

Solemn funeral services were held for Puccini at La Scala in Milan, and his body was taken to Torre del Lago, which became the Puccini Pantheon. Shortly afterward, Elvira and Antonio were also buried there. The Puccini house became a museum and an archive.

The main feature of Puccini's musicodramatic style is his ability to identify himself with his subject; each opera has its distinctive ambiance. With an unflinching

instinct for balanced dramatic structure, Puccini knew that an opera is not all action, movement, and conflict; it must also contain moments of repose, contemplation, and lyricism. For such moments he invented an original type of melody, passionate and radiant, yet marked by an underlying morbidity; examples are the “farewell” and “death” arias that also reflect the persistent melancholy from which he suffered in his personal life.

Puccini’s conception of diatonic melody is rooted in the tradition of 19th-century Italian opera, but his harmonic and orchestral style indicate that he was also aware of contemporary developments, notably the work of the Impressionists and of Stravinsky. Though he allowed the orchestra a more active role, he upheld the traditional vocal style of Italian opera, in which the singers carry the burden of the music. In many ways a typical fin de siècle artist, Puccini nevertheless can be ranked as the greatest exponent of operatic realism.



Left, Luigi Illica; right, Giuseppe Giacosa (Image: {{PD-US-expired}})

## THE LIBRETTISTS

### LUIGI ILLICA (1857-1919)

Italian dramatist Luigi Illica wrote librettos for several important operas around the turn of the 20th century. He worked with Puccini on the texts of *Manon Lescaut*, *La bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly* and wrote librettos for many other operas, including Catalani’s *La Wally* and Giordano’s *Andrea Chénier*.

Illica was born near Piacenza and ran away as a young man. In 1879 he settled in Milan, working as a journalist; during this period, he lost part of his right ear in a duel. He began creating theatre works in 1875, and his first libretto – for Antonio Smareglia’s *Il vassallo di Szigeth* – dates from 1889. In 1892 Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa became the final two librettists to work on Puccini’s *Manon*, bringing the text to completion after its long gestation. Illica and Giacosa also collaborated on *La bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*, with Giacosa versifying Illica’s drafted scenarios. Illica worked independently on more than thirty further librettos, including a number by Giordano and Mascagni.

Though Giacosa’s death in 1906 brought an end to Illica’s most fertile period of collaboration with Puccini, Illica worked on *Maria Antonietta*, ultimately never set by Puccini, until he enlisted for military service in 1915 at the age of 58.

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### GIUSEPPE GIACOSA (1847-1906)

Italian playwright and librettist Giuseppe Giacosa collaborated with Luigi Illica on the librettos for Puccini’s operas *Manon* (with others), *La bohème*, *Tosca*, and *Madama Butterfly*, and at the turn of the 20th century was regarded as Italy’s leading playwright.

Giacosa was born in Collettero Parella, Ivrea, and initially studied law in Turin. His short play *Una partita a scacchi* (*A Game of Chess*, 1873) brought him enough success for him to embark on a literary career. He was a friend of Arrigo Boito’s and wrote plays in a variety of styles. His collaboration with Puccini and Illica began in 1893, when he was brought in to work on the libretto for *Manon*. Giacosa and Illica’s partnership on Puccini’s next three operas involved Illica drafting the scenarios and Giacosa putting them into verse for Puccini to set. Nicknamed ‘the Buddha’, he was a calm presence in these often-turbulent projects.

Other musical projects include an adaptation of *Una partita a scacchi* for Piedmontese composer Pietro Abbà-Cornaglia and a draft for the oratorio *Cain* for Lorenzo Perosi. A planned further collaboration with Illica – a libretto on a Russian subject for Pietro Mascagni – was never realized.

*Courtesy of Opera San Jose and Royal Opera House*



## **CARLO MONTANARO** CONDUCTOR

Since 2001, Carlo Montanaro has conducted opera and concerts in major venues including Teatro dell'Opera in Rome, Teatro Massimo in Palermo, Fondazione Arena in Verona, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Teatro Comunale in Florence, Fondazione Arturo Toscanini in Parma and Teatro Verdi in Trieste (a collaboration which led to a Japanese tour with the Orchestra). Highlights in recent seasons include a debut at Opéra de Monte-Carlo (*Tosca*), at Korean National Opera (*Tosca* and *La bohème*), at Sydney Opera House (*La bohème* and *Lucia di Lammermoor*) and at San Francisco Opera (*Carmen* and *La bohème*), followed by *Rigoletto* at Warsaw Opera, *Maria Stuarda* and *Madama Butterfly* in Seattle, a new production of *Rigoletto* in Frankfurt, *La traviata* at Dallas Opera. Mr. Montanaro was the Music Director at Teatr Wielki in Warsaw from 2011 to 2014. He was discovered by Zubin Mehta, who recommended him to the Hochschule für Musik in Vienna, where he improved his skills under Leopold Hager, Erwin Acél and Yugi Yuasa for three years.



## **TOMER ZVULUN** **CARL W. KNOBLOCH JR. GENERAL & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR** PRODUCTION DIRECTOR

General and Artistic Director of The Atlanta Opera since 2013, Israeli born Tomer Zvulun is one of the leading stage directors of his generation, earning consistent praise for his creative vision and innovative interpretations. His work has been presented by prestigious opera houses in Europe, South and Central America, Israel and the US, including The Metropolitan Opera, Washington National Opera, Seattle, Houston, Dallas, San Diego, Boston, Pittsburgh, Minnesota, Montreal, Buenos Aires, and the festivals of Wexford, Glimmerglass and Wolf Trap, as well as leading educational institutes and universities such as The Juilliard School, Indiana University, and Boston University. He spent seven seasons on the directing staff at The Metropolitan Opera, where he directed revivals of *Carmen* and *Tosca* and was involved with more than a dozen new productions. He is a frequent guest director at companies such as Seattle Opera (*Semele*, *La bohème*, *Eugene Onegin*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*), The Dallas Opera (*Die Fledermaus*, *La bohème*), Houston Grand Opera (*The Flying Dutchman*, *Rigoletto*), Wexford Festival (*Silent Night*, *Dinner at Eight*), Cincinnati Opera (*The Magic Flute*, *Don Giovanni*, *The Flying Dutchman*), Wolf Trap (*Falstaff*, *Don Giovanni*), Israeli Opera (*Dead Man Walking*, *Giulio Cesare*) among others. His European premiere of *Silent Night* at the Wexford Festival received two Irish Times Awards and traveled from Ireland to Washington National Opera, The Glimmerglass Festival and the opera companies of Atlanta, Austin and Salt Lake City. He directed over 15 new productions at his home company in Atlanta, including *Dead Man Walking*, *The Flying Dutchman*, *Soldier Songs*, *Silent Night*, *Maria de Buenos Aires*, *La bohème*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *The Magic Flute*, and *Eugene Onegin*. During Tomer's tenure, the company's fundraising has tripled, resulting in twice the number of productions presented annually. His focus on innovation has garnered national attention and resulted in a Harvard Business School case study chronicling The Atlanta Opera's turnaround, an International Opera Awards nomination, an ArtsATL Luminary Award, and an invitation to deliver a TEDx Talk about innovation in opera.

# CAST & CREATIVE



**YASKO SATO**  
CIO-CIO-SAN

Soprano Yasko Sato makes her Atlanta Opera debut as Cio-Cio-San, a role she has performed at numerous companies, including Teatro Regio di Parma, Teatro dell'Opera di Firenze, Seattle Opera, and Trapani Festival, to name a few.



**KATHARINE GOELDNER**  
SUZUKI

Opera News calls her “a natural actress...with thrilling, laser-like focus” and “luminous tone.” Opera Magazine praises her “stunningly rich mezzo.” With a career that takes her throughout the U.S. and Europe, the “powerhouse” mezzo-soprano Katharine Goeldner is recognized as one of today’s great singers.



**GIANLUCA TERRANOVA**  
PINKERTON

Internationally acclaimed tenor Gianluca Terranova, who made his Atlanta Opera debut in *La bohème*, returns to sing the role of Pinkerton.



**MICHAEL CHIOLDI**  
SHARPLESS

Praised for his “warm, rich tone” (Opera News), baritone Michael Chioldi has received unanimous acclaim from critics and audiences around the world for his portrayals of the dramatic baritone roles. He makes his Atlanta Opera debut as Sharpless.

Opera is a dramatic story told through song. Considered by many to be the most complete art form, it combines all of the elements of art, words, music, drama and dance. The earliest Italian operas were called by several names, such as “favola in musica” (fable in music) and “drama per musica” (drama by means of music). This last title is very close to the dictionary definition, and is the correct basis for any discussion about opera.

The unique thing about opera is the use of music to convey an entire story/plot. This is based on the feeling that music can communicate people’s reactions and emotions better than words (read or spoken) or pictures. Opera takes any type of dramatic story and makes it more exciting and more believable with the help of music. Many famous stories have been made into operas, including *Cinderella*, *Hansel and Gretel*, and *Romeo and Juliet*.

## A BRIEF HISTORY

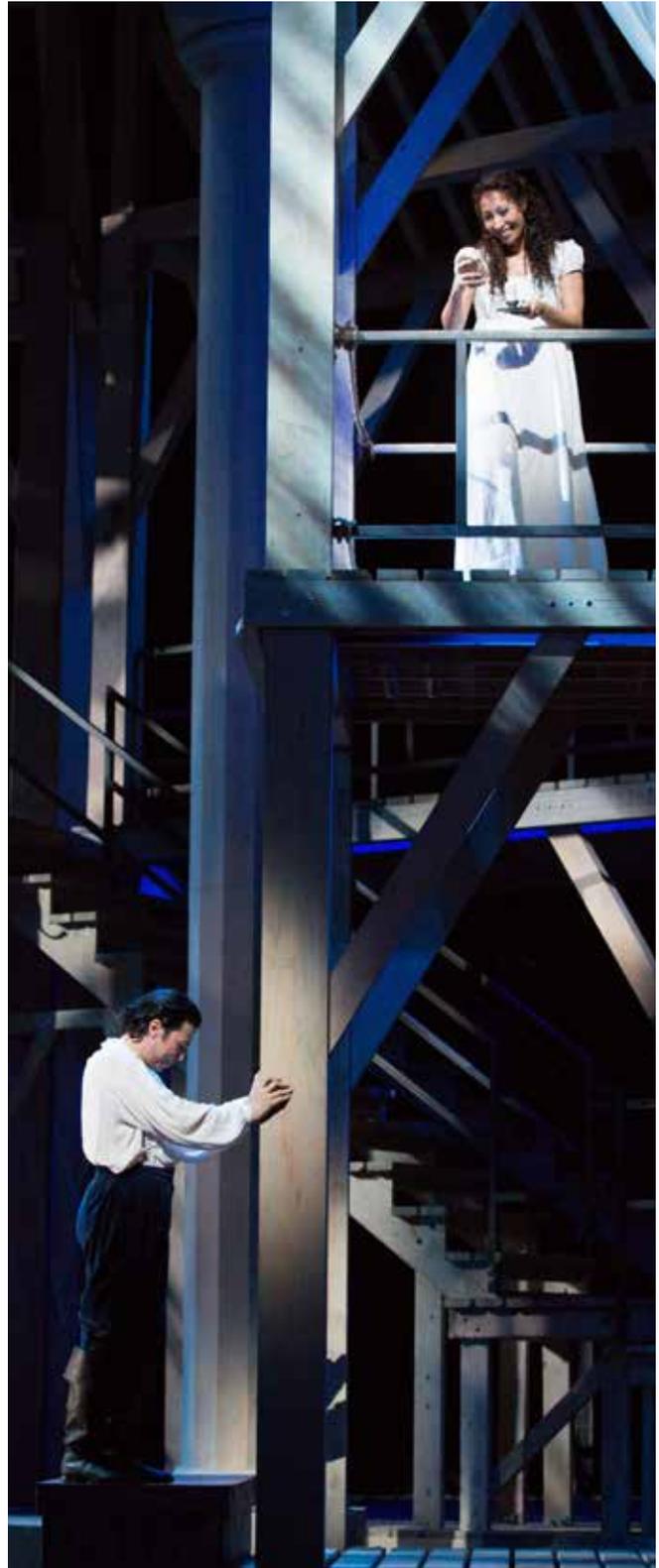
The concept of opera was developing many years before the first opera was written. Its beginning can be traced to the ancient Greeks. They fused poetry and music, creating plays that incorporate song, spoken language and dance, accompanied by string or wind instruments.

In the 1100s the early Christian church set religious stories to music, a style known as liturgical drama. The first true opera, *Daphne* (1597), was composed by Jacopo Peri. It told the story of a Greek mythological character, Daphne, from Ovid’s “Metamorphosis.”

The first great composer of opera was Claudio Monteverdi. Some of his operas are still performed today.

German composer Christoph Gluck’s most famous opera, *Orfeo ed Euridice* (1762), marked a shift in importance from the performers to the drama. It also reduced the amount of recitative and laid the foundations for the progression of the art form.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was another prolific composer during this time and many of his operas like *Le nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro* - 1786) and *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute* - 1791) are still frequently performed around the world.



The Atlanta Opera's 2016 mainstage production of *Romeo and Juliet* at The Cobb Energy Centre. (photo: Jeff Roffman)



## OPERA AROUND THE WORLD

Italy was the first country where opera became popular. It was the homeland of Jacopo Peri and Claudio Monteverdi. In time, this exciting form of entertainment spread to the rest of Europe. France and Germany joined Italy as the principal opera producers. Eventually, opera came to reflect the stories and musical styles of each of these countries.

The Italians have always been famous for their love of singing, and so in Italian opera there has always been great emphasis placed on the singer and the beautiful sounds of the human voice. It wasn't until the late 19th century and early 20th century with the later works of Verdi and the operas of Puccini that a balance was achieved between the role of the orchestra and that of the singer. These two forces were combined to give a more effective presentation of the story.

The French have favored the pictorial side of drama, and this has led to a continuing emphasis on the visual spectacle, especially with dancing. For example, the Paris opera audience in the 19th century would not accept a work for performance if it did not contain a major ballet. Verdi, an Italian composer, had to add ballets to all of his works to get them performed in Paris.

The Germans have always sought to extract from both the Italian and French traditions, and go beyond both in an attempt to present more than just a story. In fact, one of the greatest German opera composers, Richard Wagner, chose legends or myths for most of his opera plots so that he could communicate ideas as well as a story.

## DIFFERENT STYLES OF OPERA

**OPERA SERIA** Serious opera. These stories are often tragic, and typically involve heroes and kings or ancient myths and gods. *Julius Caesar* (1724) by George Frideric Handel is a classic example of opera seria.

**OPERA BUFFA** Comic opera, typically sung in Italian. The jokesters in these operas are typically from the working class, such as maids, peasants, or servants, who keep busy getting the best of their employers. *The Italian Girl in Algiers* (1813) by Rossini is an amusing example of opera buffa.

**SINGSPIEL** or "Sing Play," evolved in German speaking countries out of the comic opera tradition. It includes elements of comic opera, spoken dialogue interjected among the sung phrases, and often, an exotic or fanciful theme. Mozart's *The Magic Flute* (1791) is an example of this style.

**BEL CANTO** This Italian phrase means "beautiful singing". These operas grew from a style of singing emphasizing long phrases, breath control and flexibility in singing both loudly and softly. *The Barber of Seville* (1816) by Gioachino Rossini is a popular example of bel canto.

**GRAND OPERA** Spectacular opera. It is performed with elaborate sets and costumes. Many people are needed to make it happen. Grand opera involves royalty, heroism, an elaborate ballet scene, and can often last for several hours. Charles Gounod's *Faust* (1869 version) is an example of grand opera.

**MUSIC DRAMA** A style of opera that is created by a single artist who writes both the text and the music to advance the drama. This style fuses many art forms, and makes each one as important as the others. *Die Walküre* (*The Valkyries*) (1870) and other operas by Richard Wagner defined this style.



The Atlanta Opera's 2014 mainstage production of *The Barber of Seville* at The Cobb Energy Centre. (photo: Ken Howard)

### TYPES OF OPERATIC VOICES

If you sing in a choir at school or church, you're probably already familiar with the different kinds of voice types. We have the same kinds of voice types in opera, but there are a few differences:

**SOPRANOS** are the highest female voice type, with a range similar to a violin. In opera, they usually sing roles like the Heroine, Princess, Queen, or Damsel in Distress. Sopranos are usually the female lead in the opera.



**MEZZO-SOPRANOS** are the middle female voice type. Their sound is darker and warmer than a soprano. They often perform the roles of witches, sisters, maids, and best friends. Mezzos also play young men on occasion, aptly called “pants roles” or “trouser roles,” such as Hansel in *Hansel and Gretel*.



**TENORS** are the highest male voice type – they often sing roles like the hero, the prince, or the boyfriend. They can sound like a trumpet in both range and color. Tenors can be athletic and energetic as well as sensitive and emotional. They get all the good high notes and a lot of the applause!



**BARITONES** fit between choir tenors and basses – not as high as the tenors, but not as low as the basses. They can play both good and bad characters: sometimes they're the boyfriends or brothers – or the ringleader for some comedic shenanigans – but in serious operas they can be the bad guys.



**BASSES** are the lowest male voice type – they can sound like a bassoon, tuba or low trombone. In a serious opera they can represent age and wisdom (and sometimes evil geniuses), in a comic opera they can make you laugh. Sometimes they steal the show with their super low notes and provide a comforting presence with their warm, rumbly tones.



Think of your favorite story, movie or television show. If that story was turned into an opera, what kind of voice types would be best for each of the characters?

You can hear different kinds of voice types in popular music too. Think about your favorite singers – do they have high voices or low voices? What do you like best about the way they sing?

(photos: Nunnally Rawson, Jeff Roffman, Raftermen)

# IMPORTANT JOBS

## WHO KEEPS THE OPERA RUNNING?

In addition to the singers and musicians you see on stage and in the orchestra pit, there are many other people who help bring the show to life!

**MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR** is responsible for the musical excellence of an opera. They ensure the singers understand the music, sing in the appropriate style, and work with the orchestra to make sure everyone is playing correctly together.

**STAGE DIRECTOR** is responsible for the action on the stage. They work with the designers to create the concept for the production. They help the singers understand why their characters would act in certain ways, and how the characters communicate with each other.

**CHOREOGRAPHER** creates movement or dancing for operas. They study dance, movement and do research on different historical periods.

**PRODUCTION MANAGER** helps make the director's and designers' vision a reality by working with the shops that build the scenery and costumes.

**TECHNICAL DIRECTOR** makes sure that the lighting, scenery, costumes and props are coordinated and that the crews who handle those elements know what needs to be done during the performance.

**STAGE MANAGER** manages the rehearsal schedule and takes detailed notes about the stage directions, lighting cues and scenery changes. During the performance, they are backstage calling all the technical cues and making sure the show runs smoothly.

**SET DESIGNER** creates the concept for the physical environment of the opera and works with the director to create the scenery that helps tell the story. They research history, color, space, architecture, and furniture.

**LIGHTING DESIGNER** helps create the mood of each scene with light, shadow, and color. They also study the music and work with the set designer and the director to decide how light will be used to help tell the story.

**COSTUME DESIGNER** creates the look of the characters with clothing. They choose the fabrics and supervise the construction of the costumes, or selection of pre-made costumes.



The Stage Manager calls cues by watching monitors of a performance of *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* in 2018. (photo: Jeff Roffman)

**WIG & MAKE-UP DESIGNER** creates the hair and make-up styling for the show in tandem with the costumes and the production design. They are also responsible for any special effects make-up like scars, wounds or blood.

**WARDROBE MANAGER** makes sure all the costumes are clean and pressed and coordinates all the costume changes. Dressers help the singers put on their complicated costumes and change their costumes during the performance.

**PROPERTIES (PROPS) MASTER** is responsible for all the objects that the singers touch or move that are not part of their costumes. They do a lot of research to find the perfect period newspaper, set of glasses, bouquet of flowers, or book. They make artificial things look real on stage, like food or drink.

**CREW & STAGEHANDS** includes carpenters and electricians. They assist with the installation of the set on stage once it has been built. During the performance, they are responsible for set and lighting changes.

## HISTORY OF OPERA IN ATLANTA

Opera has been an integral part of Atlanta's cultural fabric since October 1866 when the Ghioni and Sussini Grand Italian Opera Company presented three operas in the city. The performances were well received, and soon after, small touring companies began to bring more full-length operas to Atlanta.

In 1910, New York's Metropolitan Opera brought its tour to Atlanta for the first time. Once a year, for a full week during spring, people flocked to the city to see the Metropolitan Opera's wonderful performances and enjoy the many parties that were hosted throughout the city in celebration of the opera's arrival. Performing at the Auditorium-Armory, the fabulous Fox Theatre, and the Boisfeuillet Jones Atlanta Civic Center, the Metropolitan Opera's annual tour was a major social event. Every night of the week featured the performance of a different opera legend including Enrico Caruso, Birgit Nilsson, Leontyne Price, Frederica



Leontyne Price was one of the first African American featured singers with The Metropolitan Opera Company. This photo appeared in the program for the 1964 tour of *Don Giovanni*, in which she sang the role of Donna Anna. (photo: The Metropolitan Opera Company, *Carmen*, 1964 touring season program book / The Atlanta Opera archives)



The Metropolitan Opera Company's 1961 production of *Turandot* with Birgit Nilsson as Turandot. She sang this role in May that same year at the Fox Theater in Atlanta. (photo: The Metropolitan Opera Company, *Turandot*, 1967 touring season program book / The Atlanta Opera archives)

von Stade, Sherrill Milnes, Marilyn Horne, Plácido Domingo, Beverly Sills, Joan Sutherland, Richard Tucker and Luciano Pavarotti. The Met tour returned to Atlanta until 1986, with the exception of 1931-1939 due to financial complications of the Great Depression.

With the success and popularity of the Met's annual tour came a desire for Atlanta to have its own opera company. In 1979, the Atlanta Civic Opera was born, a result of a merger between the Atlanta Lyric Opera and Georgia Opera. The first artistic director was noted composer Thomas Pasatieri. The company's first popular opera production was *La traviata* on March 28, 1980 at the Fox Theatre. The following December, a festive gala was held in Symphony Hall with such noted artists as Catherine Malfitano, Jerry Hadley and Samuel Ramey. In 1985, the company was renamed The Atlanta Opera.

In the fall of 2007, The Atlanta Opera became the first resident company in the new Cobb Energy Performance Arts Centre. In 2013, the company recruited internationally recognized stage director Tomer Zvulun as its General and Artistic Director. In the 2014-2015 season, the company launched the acclaimed Discoveries series of operas staged in alternative theaters around Atlanta. In the 2016-2017 season, the company expanded its mainstage season from three to four productions at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre. The Opera works with world-renowned singers, conductors, directors, and designers who seek to enhance the art form and make it accessible for a sophisticated, 21st century audience. Today, The Atlanta Opera is one of the finest regional opera companies in the nation and continues to adhere to its original 1979 mission to enrich lives through opera.

Lessons included in the Opera Guide are designed to correlate with Georgia Standards of Excellence in English Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, and Fine Arts.

### FINE ARTS

#### Music – Responding

Middle School & High School General Music; Chorus;  
Band; Orchestra RE.1;  
Middle School & High School General Music; Chorus;  
Band; Orchestra RE.2

Types of Operatic Voices  
Pre-Performance Activities  
ELA: Opera Vocabulary  
Write a Review  
The Science of Sound: Operatic Voices & Resonance

#### Music – Connecting

Middle School & High School General Music; Chorus;  
Band; Orchestra CN.1;  
Middle School & High School General Music; Chorus;  
Band; Orchestra CN.2

Synopsis  
Meet the Creators  
Opera 101  
Important Jobs at The Opera  
Opera in Atlanta  
Pre-Performance Activities  
Write a Review  
ELA: Opera Vocabulary  
Vocabulary and Crossword Activity

#### Theatre Arts – Responding

##### TA.RE.1; TA.RE.2

Types of Operatic Voices  
Pre-Performance Activities  
Opera Vocabulary  
Write a Review  
The Science of Sound: Operatic Voices & Resonance

#### Theatre Arts – Connecting

##### TA.CN.1; TA.CN.2

Synopsis  
Meet the Creators  
Opera 101  
Important Jobs at The Opera  
Opera in Atlanta  
Pre-Performance Activities  
Write a Review

### ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

#### ELA - Reading Literary

##### ELAGSERL1; ELAGSERL2; ELAGSERL3; ELAGSERL4; ELAGSERL7

Opera 101  
Pre-Performance Activities  
Opera Vocabulary  
The Science of Sound: Operatic Voices & Resonance  
The Science of Sound: How Sound is Made  
Vocabulary and Crossword Activity

#### ELA - Writing

##### ELAGSEW1; ELAGSEW2

Write a Review  
Additional Activities  
Vocabulary and Crossword Activity

#### ELA - Speaking and Listening

##### ELAGSEL1

Pre-Performance Activities  
The Science of Sound: Operatic Voices & Resonance  
The Science of Sound: How Sound is Made  
Additional Activities

### SOCIAL STUDIES

#### World History; SSWH16

A Brief History of Japan

# SUPPORT

SPECIAL THANKS

The Atlanta Opera would like to thank the following for their generous support of our educational and community engagement programs.



Official Beverage of The Atlanta Opera



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**Capital Group Foundation**

**Mary Brown Fund of Atlanta**

**Camp-Younts Foundation**

**Connolly Family Foundation**

**Kiwanis Foundation of Atlanta**

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**Mr. William E. Pennington**

**The City of Roswell**

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**The David, Helen, & Marian Woodward Fund**

**The Zeist Foundation**

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# THE ATLANTA OPERA

## PRE-PERFORMANCE

### ACTIVITIES PREPARING STUDENTS FOR THE OPERA

Are you worried about how to act or what to wear? You are not the only one! Opera stereotypes can make the art form seem intimidating to lots of people. Having an idea of what to expect at the performance may make it easier to enjoy your experience. Here are some suggestions for things you can do before you visit The Atlanta Opera at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre.

#### START WITH THE STORY

In simple terms, an opera is a story set to music. Before the performance, review the plot synopsis of *Madama Butterfly*. Ask students to consider the story, characters, and setting of the opera. Use the following questions to lead a class discussion:

- What is this opera about?
- What is the time period?
- Who are the main characters?
- What does the character want?
- What are their relationships to each other?
- What do you expect to see and hear at the opera?

#### INTRODUCE VOCABULARY TERMS

Refer to the Glossary of Opera Terms. Discuss with the students which of these terms they may hear and/or see during the performance.

#### DESIGN A PROMOTIONAL POSTER

Create a poster to promote the upcoming performance of *Madama Butterfly*. Display the poster in your school and send samples to The Atlanta Opera at [education@atlantaopera.org](mailto:education@atlantaopera.org).



Students at the Cobb Energy Centre for the Atlanta Opera's Student performance of *La Cenerentola*. (photos: Raftermen)

## OPERA MYTHS

Many people have preconceived ideas about the opera. Read the truth behind some of the most popular opera myths and see if they answer some of your questions about the opera as well!

### **MYTH 1: OPERA IS BORING AND STUFFY**

Not true! Operas tell some of the most interesting, scandalous, and beautiful stories of all time. It is not unusual for operas to include love triangles, murders, fatal illnesses, or messages from beyond the grave.

### **MYTH 2: OPERA IS SUNG IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE SO I WON'T UNDERSTAND THE STORY**

We can help! It is true that many operas are sung in languages other than English. Since many people in our audience do not speak other languages, we project English translations, called "supertitles," on the screen above the stage. This way, you can follow along even if you do not understand the language. You also can read the synopsis of the opera before you arrive. Knowing the story will also help you follow along.

### **MYTH 3: I HAVE TO WEAR A TUXEDO OR A BALL GOWN TO THE OPERA**

Some people like to dress up when they go to an opera performance, but there is no dress code. You will see people wearing everything from jeans to ball gowns. Dressing up can be part of the fun of attending an opera performance, but you should wear whatever makes you comfortable. The opera is a place for everybody.

### **MYTH 4: OPERA SINGERS JUST SCREECH AND HIT HIGH NOTES ALL THE TIME**

Most of the music we listen to today is electronically reproduced and amplified by speakers. Opera is one of the only places you'll hear singers perform without a microphone. All the sounds you will hear at the opera are natural and coming straight from the singers' throats and the orchestra's instruments to your ears. Opera singers have trained for years to project their sound and make it larger than life. While you may not be accustomed to live, unamplified singing, it can be a wonderful experience if you think about how much skill is required.



Students arriving at the Cobb Energy Centre to see an Atlanta Opera performance. (photo: Raftermen)

Here are a few more tips to make your trip to the opera more comfortable.

**REMEMBER:** The opera is a live performance. You can hear the performers on stage, and that means they can hear you too! Please refrain from talking or whispering during the opera. It is distracting to others around you as well as to the singers. Please do not leave your seat during the performance.

Please turn off all cell phones, beeping watches, and anything else that will make noise during the performance.

Please do not take photographs or video or audio recordings of the performance. The light can affect the singers on stage.

If you like what you have seen and heard, let the performers know! It is okay to applaud at the end of songs, called arias, and at the end of a scene. You can even call out "bravo" (to the men on stage), "brava" (to the women) and "bravi" (for all on stage). And of course, a standing ovation is always welcome!



### **ACT / SCENE**

Acts and scenes are ways of categorizing sections of operas. An act is a large-scale division of an opera, and an opera will typically include two to five acts. Acts can be subdivided into scenes, which are often differentiated by a change in setting or characters.

### **ADAGIO**

Literally “at ease,” adagio is a tempo marking that indicates a slow speed. An adagio tempo marking indicates that the performer should play in a slow and leisurely style.

### **ALLEGRO**

Italian for “cheerful” or “joyful,” allegro is the most common tempo marking in Western music, indicating a moderately fast to quick speed.

### **ARIA**

A song for solo voice accompanied by orchestra.

### **BRAVO**

Italian for “nicely done”; shouted by audience members after a performance.

### **CADENZA**

An ornamented musical elaboration played in a free style by a soloist to display his or her virtuosity.

### **CHORUS**

A section of an opera in which a large group of singers performs together, typically with orchestral accompaniment.

### **CRESCENDO**

A gradual raising of volume in music achieved by increasing the dynamic level. When music crescendos, the performers begin at a softer dynamic level and become incrementally louder.

### **DIMINUENDO**

A gradual lowering of volume in music achieved by decreasing the dynamic level. During a diminuendo, the performers begin at a louder dynamic level and become incrementally softer.

### **DYNAMICS**

A musical trait pertaining to loudness and softness. Dynamics encompass a spectrum from **pianissimo** (very soft) to **piano** (soft) to **mezzo piano** (moderately soft), all the way up to **fortissimo** (very loud). Music can shift to another dynamic level either suddenly or gradually, through a **crescendo** or **diminuendo**.

### **ENSEMBLE**

A musical piece for two or more **soloists**, accompanied by orchestra. Types of ensembles include **duets** (for two **soloists**), **trios** (for three **soloists**), and **quartets** (for four **soloists**).

### **FINALE**

The last portion of an act, a finale consists of several musical sections that accompany an escalating dramatic tension. Finales frequently consist of multiple ensembles with different numbers of characters.

### **FORTE**

Meaning “loud” or “strong” in Italian, forte is a dynamic level in music that indicates a loud volume. Adding the suffix “-issimo” to a word serves as an intensifier—since forte means “loud,” fortissimo means “very loud.”

### **INTERMISSION**

A break between acts of an opera.

### **LEGATO**

A type of articulation in which a melody is played with smooth connection between the notes.

### **LIBRETTO**

The text of an opera, including all the words that are said or sung by performers.

### **MELODY**

A succession of pitches that form an understandable unit. The melody of a piece consists of the tune that a listener can hum or sing.

### **OVERTURE**

An instrumental piece that occurs before the first act as an introduction to an opera.

### **PIANO**

Abbreviated p in a musical score, piano indicates a soft dynamic level.

### **RECITATIVE**

Speech-like singing in between musical numbers that advances the plot.

### **RHYTHM**

Refers to the way music unfolds over time; it is a series of durations in a range from long to short. Along with pitch, it is a basic and indispensable parameter of music.

### **SCORE**

The complete musical notation for a piece, the score includes notated lines for all of the different instrumental and vocal parts that unite to constitute a musical composition.

### **TEMPO**

Literally “time” in Italian, tempo refers to the speed of a piece of music.

### **TIMBRE**

Pronounced TAM-bruh, a French word that means “sound color.” It refers to the complex combination of characteristics that give each instrument or voice its unique sound.

The following are some of the terms important to the story of *Madama Butterfly*. We have noted when Puccini and his librettists missed the mark on their Japanese translations.

**ABOMINATION** (*noun*)

A thing that causes disgust or hatred; The Bonze, or high priest, thinks the party after the wedding is an abomination.

**BONZE** (*noun*)

A Japanese Buddhist monk, from the Japanese “Bonzo”; Butterfly’s uncle.

**BURLESQUE** (*noun*)

A play or story that makes a serious subject funny or ridiculous; Pinkerton refers to the parade of relatives at the wedding as a burlesque.

**CIO-CIO SAN** (*noun*)

Pronounced *cho-cho-san*, Butterfly’s given name; “San” is an honorific title similar to adding Mr. or Ms. to someone’s English name.

**CONSUL** (*noun*)

A government official living in a foreign city to protect the government’s citizens living in that city; Sharpless is the united states consul in Nagasaki.

**COSMOPOLITAN** (*adjective*)

Having a wide and refined sense of the world through personal experience; Pinkerton thinks Suzuki is cosmopolitan because of her knowledge of Japanese lore.

**ELOQUENCE** (*noun*)

The ability to write or speak well in an effective way; Pinkerton is struck by Butterfly’s eloquence when they first meet..

**FIRMAMENT** (*noun*)

The heavens or sky; Butterfly says Pinkerton is the eye of the firmament for her.

**GEISHA** (*noun*)

Traditional Japanese female entertainers who perform music, dance, and games; debate still exists whether geishas are prostitutes. Butterfly had to work as a geisha when her family feel on hard times.

**HOTOKE** (*noun*)

Butterfly’s wooden figurines that represent her ancestors, appears incorrectly in the libretto as Ottoke.

**KAMI** (*noun*)

The spirits worshiped in the shinto religion; suzuki prays to these spirits after Butterfly’s marriage to Pinkerton

**KIMONO** (*noun*)

Traditional Japanese garment, translates to “thing to wear,” long T-shaped robe that is always wrapped left over right (except in burials)

**NAKODO** (*noun*)

Translates to “the person between people,” matchmaker or marriage broker. Goro is the nakodo between Pinkerton and Butterfly

**OBI** (*noun*)

A sash used to secure a kimono, tied in the back

**RENOUNCE** (*verb*)

To formally declare one’s abandonment of; The bonze renounces Butterfly after she marries Pinkerton and abandons her religion.

**SAGE** (*noun*)

A person of profound wisdom

**SEPPUKU** (*noun*)

“Stomach cutting,” a ritual suicide practice of dishonored samurai. females performed jigaki, a ritual suicide involving cutting arteries in the neck.

**SHOJI** (*noun*)

A door, window or room divider consisting of translucent paper over a wood frame; appears incorrectly in the libretto as shoshi.

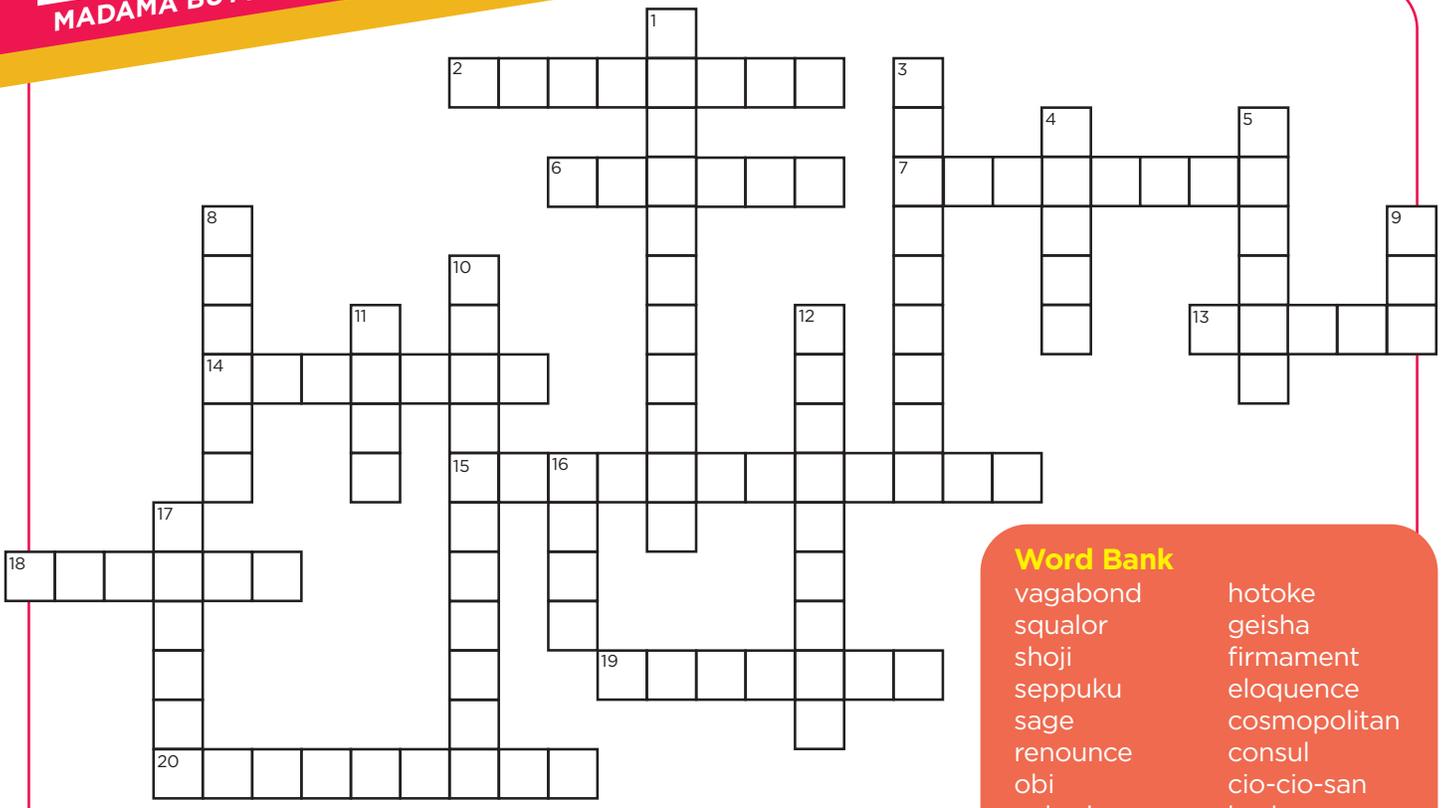
**SQUALOR** (*noun*)

The state of being unpleasant due to neglect; suzuki says the garden, once bare, will be the squalor of winter.

**VAGABOND** (*noun*)

A person who travels from place to place without home or much money; Pinkerton refers to himself as a Yankee Vagabond.

THE ATLANTA OPERA  
**ELA OPERA VOCAB**  
 MADAMA BUTTERFLY TERMS



**Word Bank**

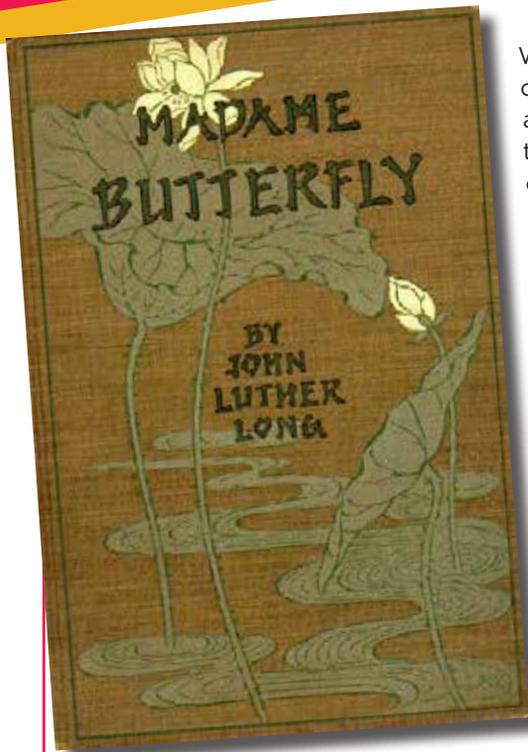
vagabond	hotoke
squalor	geisha
shoji	firmament
seppuku	eloquence
sage	cosmopolitan
renounce	consul
obi	cio-cio-san
nakodo	burlesque
kimono	bonze
kami	abomination

**ACROSS**

- 2. A person who travels from place to place without home or much money
- 6. Traditional Japanese garment, translates to “thing to wear”
- 7. To formally declare one’s abandonment of
- 13. A door, window or room divider consisting of translucent paper over a wood frame
- 14. The state of being unpleasant due to neglect
- 15. Having a wide and refined sense of the world through personal experience
- 18. The person between people, matchmaker or marriage broker;
- 19. Stomach cutting. A ritual suicide practice of dishonored samurai
- 20. The ability to write or speak well in an effective way

**DOWN**

- 1. A thing that causes disgust or hatred
- 3. The heavens or sky
- 4. A Japanese Buddhist monk
- 5. Traditional Japanese female entertainers who perform music, dance, and games
- 8. A government official living in a foreign city to protect the government’s citizens living in that city
- 9. A sash used to secure a kimono
- 10. Butterfly’s given name
- 11. The spirits worshiped in the shinto religion
- 12. A play or story that makes a serious subject funny or ridiculous
- 16. A person of profound wisdom
- 17. Butterfly’s wooden figurines that represent her ancestors



While we often credit Puccini alone with the creation of *Madama Butterfly*, many hands were involved in crafting the story and development of the opera. The opera is based in part on the short story “Madame Butterfly” (1898) by John Luther Long - which was based on stories

told to Long by his sister Jennie Correll and partially on the semiautographical 1887 French novel *Madame Chrysantheme* by Pierre Loti. David Belasco took Long’s short story and created a one-act play entitled *Madame Butterfly: A Tragedy of Japan* (1900) that premiered in New York. The play then opened in London, where Puccini saw it in the summer of 1900.

Inspired by the play, Puccini returned to Italy and began work on an operatic version of the story with his his trusted collaborators Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa. These three partners had experienced great success with Puccini’s earlier operas *Manon Lescaut*, *La boheme*, and *Tosca* and it was proven they worked well together. Illica was responsible for converting the story into a workable operatic form, Giacosa then created dramatic structure and set Illica’s text to verse that would work with Puccini’s music.

#### **DISCUSSION:**

Can you think of other successful partnerships and collaborations in popular culture today? Think of songwriters, producers, and artists; or writers, directors, and actors - all are working together to produce great works for the public to enjoy.

#### **ACTIVITY:**

The librettist is the person who writes the libretto, or text, of an opera. The librettist and composer then work together to set the libretto to music and bring the opera to life. Puccini worked with his librettists Illica and Giacosa to bring *Madama Butterfly* to life.

Write a short story you think would inspire a good opera libretto. Please include:

- at least three characters
- details on the time and setting of the story
- a series of events that build to a climax and resolve
- possibly enhance your story with an unexpected plot twist



Illica, Puccini, and Giacosa. (Images on this page: {{PD-US-expired}})

Reviews of performances are important to every opera company. They help the company know how the performance was enjoyed by audiences, and get other people excited about coming to see the show!

Pretend you are an opera critic. Think about the performance you just saw and write your thoughts like you might see in the newspaper or an online review. Remember that a critic reports both the positive and negative features of a production. You might want to focus on one part of the opera that you particularly liked or disliked. Keep in mind that reviews express the opinions of the person who writes the review, and different people will often have different ideas about the same performance! Below are some tips to get you started.

To write your own review, you can focus on two different elements – what you **saw** and what you **heard**.

### FACTS & OPINIONS

A review often combines two things – facts and feelings. It is a piece of straight reporting in which the reviewer tells the reader what he or she saw (facts), and an opinion piece in which the reviewer tells the reader what they liked or didn't like about those elements (opinions). Here is an example of a reviewer reporting what they saw:

“The town plaza is suggested by Paul Steinberg’s dizzyingly colorful set, with a mosaic floor and walls and piñatas hanging from above.”

For the first part of your review, briefly describe what you saw on stage – report what the sets, costumes and lights looked like. These are the facts about the show.

Next, give your opinion about whether you liked these choices. Did they help tell the story effectively?

### THE ART OF THE ADJECTIVE

Critics need to have a great vocabulary of descriptive words when they write about what they hear so that the people reading their reviews can imagine what it was like to be there. People use lots of different adjectives to describe the voices of opera singers. Here’s a review that’s chock-full of great adjectives:

“The **light, smoky** baritone of George Gagnidze only hints at Rigoletto’s outsize emotions, and the **sweet, pure** soprano of Lisette Oropesa keeps Gilda **sweet** but **inert**. The **handsome, hyperactive** tenor Vittorio Grigolo has two registers, bellowing and crooning, and the conductor, Marco Armiliato, has his hands full trying to keep up with Mr. Grigolo’s **wayward** tempos.”

Sometimes it is very hard to describe the way music makes us feel. While there are definitely objective facts we can evaluate when we listen to music (qualities like loud or soft, fast or slow) most of the time we listen subjectively. This means that every opinion is valid – you don’t have to know anything about opera to be moved by someone’s singing or a beautiful instrumental solo.

Write a few sentences about the character you liked best and why. How did the music help tell you who the character was? Think of five adjectives to describe the way that person’s voice sounded to you. How did it make you feel to listen to them?

### SUM IT ALL UP

In your opinion, what did you like best about the production? What did you think could use some improvement? Would you recommend that other people come see this opera?

Share your critique with us! The Atlanta Opera wants to know what you thought of our performance. If you would like to share your review with us, please send it on!

The Atlanta Opera Education Department, 1575 Northside Dr., NW, Suite 350, Atlanta, GA 30318 or [education@atlantaopera.org](mailto:education@atlantaopera.org)

## CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRAINED VOICE

Singing in Europe and America is now generally divided into two categories: classical and popular. What most people think of as operatic or classical singing developed in Europe hundreds of years ago. This style flourished during the 17<sup>th</sup> century, as opera became a popular form of entertainment and operatic music increased in complexity. The most recognizable characteristics of a classically trained voice are:

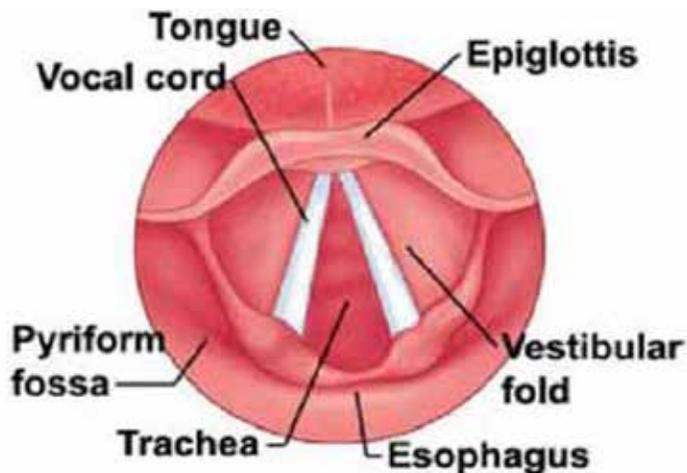
- an extensive range (the ability to sing both high and low)
- varying degrees of volume (loud and soft)
- resonance in the chest and sinus cavities (produces a full or round sound)
- an ability to project or fill a large space without amplification

## TRAINING

Very few people are born with the capability to sing this way. Classical singers take voice lessons about once a week and practice every day for many years in order to develop a beautiful operatic sound. In fact, most trained voices are not mature enough to perform leading roles on a big stage until they're at least 25 years old. Compare that with the most popular singers on the radio today who could release their first albums as teenagers!

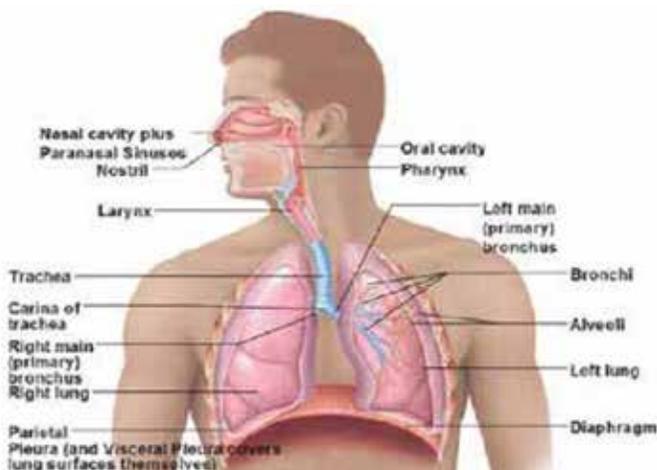
## THE VOCAL CORDS

Science tells us that all sound is made by two things vibrating together. The same concept applies when we talk or sing. The sounds we make are really just the vibration of two little muscles called the vocal cords. The vocal cords are held in the larynx, which is sometimes called the voicebox or (in boys) the Adam's Apple. These two little cords of tissue vary in length but are typically 1 - 2 inches long. When you want to say something, your brain tells your vocal cords to pull together until they're touching lightly. Then, air pushes through them, and the vocal cords begin to vibrate, opening and closing very quickly. This vibration creates a sound. The pitches you sing are dependent on the speed at which the cords vibrate. A faster vibration creates a higher pitch. The length of the cords also affects the pitch of the voice. Longer cords make a lower voice.



## BREATHING / SUPPORT

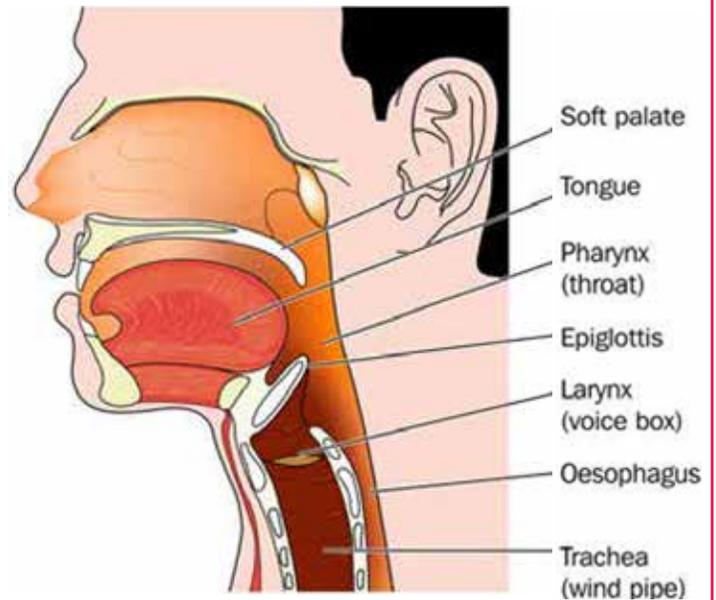
In order to sing long phrases with a lot of volume and a good tone, singers must breathe in a specific manner, making use of the entire torso area (lungs, ribs, diaphragm and viscera). As they breathe in, each part of this network does its job: the lungs fill up with air, which forces the ribs to expand and the diaphragm (a flat muscle below the lungs) to move down. As the diaphragm descends, the viscera (stomach, intestines and other organs) are forced down and out. Singers describe this feeling as fullness in the low stomach or filling an innertube around their waist. Expelling the air, or singing, is essentially a slow and controlled movement of those muscles. If all of the air escapes from the lungs quickly, the tone of the voice will sound breathy and will lack intensity. Successful opera singers must be able to isolate the diaphragm and ribs, controlling the rate at which they return to their original positions. This allows for a consistent stream of air that travels from the lungs, through the larynx and out of the mouth.



## RESONANCE

One of the most obvious characteristics of an operatic voice is a full, resonant tone. Singers achieve this by lifting their soft palate. This is a part of the mouth that most people don't ever think about and can be difficult to isolate. Here are some simple exercises to feel where it is and hear the resonance in your voice when you lift it: Start to yawn. Feel that lifting sensation in the back of your mouth? That is the soft palate going up. With a relaxed mouth, slide your tongue along the roof of your mouth, from your teeth back toward your throat. You should feel your tongue go up, then down (that's your hard palate), then back up again. That soft, fleshy area at the very back is your soft palate. Say the word "who" like you would say it in normal conversation. Now, say "hoooo" like a hoot owl. Can you hear the difference?

Say the sentence "How do you do?" as if you were British. Lifting the soft palate is the foundation for the resonance in a singer's voice. With a lot of practice, a singer can lift his or her palate as soon as they begin to sing, without even thinking about it.



The Atlanta Opera's 2008 mainstage production of *Cinderella* at The Cobb Energy Centre featured Jennifer Larmore in the title role. (photo: Tim Wilkerson)

## YOUR SENSE OF SOUND: ENERGY & EQUIPMENT

Sound is important to human beings because it helps us to communicate with each other. Your sense of sound also helps you to enjoy music like opera. Musicians use sounds to communicate thoughts or feelings. But what is sound exactly? How do we hear it?

## THE ENERGY: HOW SOUND IS MADE

Sound is vibrating air. Sounds can vibrate in different patterns. These patterns are called sound waves. The different patterns change the sound we hear. Listen to traffic on a busy street. Noise like this is disorganized sound. Now listen to a piece of music. Music is sound and silence that is organized into patterns.

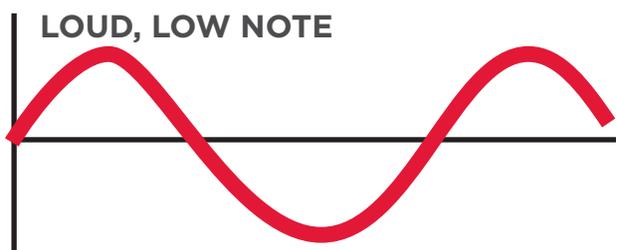
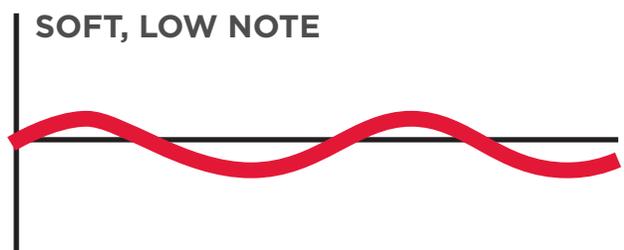
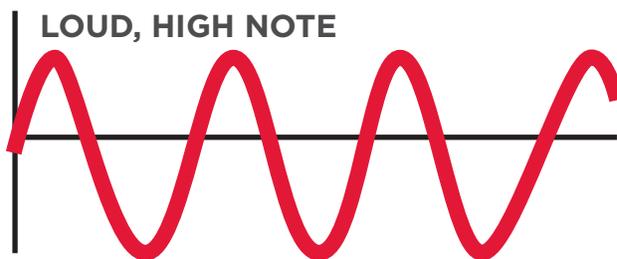
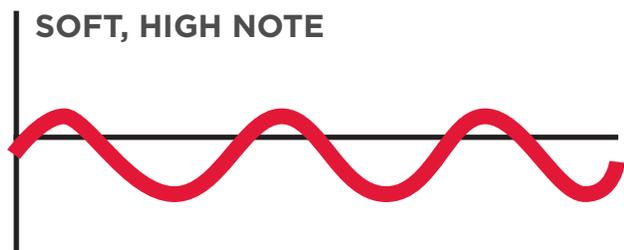
## THINK ABOUT IT!

How are the sounds of traffic and music different? How does each sound make you feel? Can traffic sound like music? Can music sound like traffic?

Sound waves can vibrate many times in one second. The number of times a sound wave vibrates in one second is called its frequency. The frequency tells how high or low the sound will be. This is called pitch. High-pitched notes vibrate at a fast rate, so they have a high frequency. Low-pitched notes have a slow frequency. In opera, the highest pitches are usually sung by women. Very low pitches are sung by men.

Just as the speed of the sound wave determines the pitch, the shape of the wave determines how loud or soft the sound will be. This is called volume.

This is what sound waves look like:



## TRY THIS!

Stretch a rubber band between your thumb and forefinger on one hand. Pluck it a few times. Can you see and feel the vibrations? What happens if you pluck the rubber band harder? Softer? Change the shape of the rubber band by making it longer and thinner. What do you hear?



Sorrow, Suzuki and Cio-Cio-San. (photo: Jeff Roffman)

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

- The Atlanta Opera Website:  
<https://www.atlantaopera.org/opera101/education/>  
<https://www.atlantaopera.org/performance/madama-butterfly/>

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION:**

- From *Aria Code: The Shattered Illusions of Puccini's Madama Butterfly*  
<https://slate.com/podcasts/studio-360-with-kurt-andersen/2019/12/aria-code-puccini-madama-butterfly>
- Sex, betrayal, suicide: is *Madama Butterfly* too sordid to stage today?  
<https://www.theguardian.com/music/2018/jun/05/metoo-madama-butterfly-puccini-geisha-opera-women-exploitation>
- Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*: a beginner's guide:  
<https://www.classicfm.com/composers/puccini/guides/madama-butterfly-synopsis-pictures/>

### **RECORDING SUGGESTIONS:**

- *Madama Butterfly* recording from Vienna State Opera with Luciano Pavarotti and Mirella Freni  
<https://open.spotify.com/album/23W9Axn8o18Lyz7twID47Q>

### **ARTIST WEBSITES:**

- <https://imgartists.com/roster/yasko-sato/>
- <https://www.katharinegoeldner.com/about>
- <http://www.gianlucateranovait/pagina.asp?idp=1>
- <http://www.michaelchioldi.com/artist.php?view=bi>