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OPERA SAN LUIS OBISPO PRESENTS

Giacomo Puccini's **MADAMA
BUTTERFLY**

A CITYWIDE ARTS COLLABORATION



MADAMA BUTTERFLY

JAPAN'S RED SUN RISES IN SAN LUIS OBISPO OCTOBER 14TH AND 15TH

By Liz Dodder Hansen



Internationally acclaimed soprano Rena Harms as Madama Butterfly.



The Madama Butterfly production team (L-R), Justine Prado, Ryan Beck, Randon Pool, Lisa Deyo, Andrew Silvaggio, Brian Asher Alhadeff, Melody Svenningsen, Rick Adamson, Kimberly Gutierrez, Sharon Dobson and Edna Garabedian.

HOPE. DEVOTION. BETRAYAL. HONOR. ONE OF THE most beloved operas of all time, this October 14 and 15 Japan's red sun rises in San Luis Obispo with a new Grand Opera production of Giacomo Puccini's masterpiece, *Madama Butterfly*!

Madama Butterfly immediately captures audiences with the mystery and exoticism of the orient. Set in the Port of Nagasaki, among cherry blossoms and the looming snow-covered Mount Fuji, a little hut overlooks the Sea of Japan. Alhadeff says "Madama Butterfly is a story linked to a very specific time and place in history. It's the dawn of the 20th century and Japan's borders are newly opened to colonialism with America eager to begin trade. That's an exciting time that audiences can conjure a clear picture from Hollywood blockbusters like *The Last Samurai* (2003) and *Memoirs of a Geisha* (2005). Similarly, this is how *Butterfly* premiered in 1904 and a good part of the reason why it has remained in the top five most popular operas ever since."

The young, beautiful geisha named Cio-Cio San (*Madama Butterfly*) has renounced her family religion, adopted Christianity, and is about to be married to Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton, an American naval officer. While the impressionable *Butterfly* takes the marriage very seriously, Pinkerton is not sure whether his feelings for her are love or whim.



Rena Harms as Butterfly
Photo by Tom Bowles

Nevertheless they marry, and soon thereafter Pinkerton and his ship sail away. Abandoned by her friends and family, three long years pass and Butterfly is virtually destitute. She and her 3-year-old son believe in Pinkerton's promise of return, and finally one morning, they spot his ship! As fate docks, Butterfly, her son, and faithful servant Suzuki joyously prepare for their reunion. Will Pinkerton and Butterfly find love again? Will their family finally be complete? Or will she be forgotten?

An internationally acclaimed cast of leading artists will settle in San Luis Obispo for this production, beginning with soprano Rena Harms as Madama Butterfly. Harms has recently performed the title role with English National Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, and Arizona Opera. Praised by the San Francisco Chronicle for a "winningly liquid" voice as well as for her "dramatic vividness and vocal flourish," Rena Harms is a Santa Fe native who brings an incredible body of opera experience to this production.

OperaSLO is also excited to welcome back another singer of international acclaim in the role of Suzuki, Karin Mushegain. Ms. Mushegain played the title role in OperaSLO's 2013 production of *Carmen*. She also performed with Maestro Alhadeff and the OperaSLO

Grand Orchestra last August in *Symphony at Sunset: Pops Under the Stars* at the Vina Robles Amphitheatre. "She is definitely one of my favorite living mezzos" says Alhadeff. Ms. Mushegain, called "superb" by *The New York Times*, and possessing "a rich voice and infectious theatricality" by *Colorado Gazette*, brings dynamic electricity to the role of Suzuki.

Tenor Christopher Bengochea performs the role of Butterfly's husband, Benjamin Franklyn Pinkerton. *The Chicago Tribune* described his voice as "flawless....He has command of Italianate style along with ringing top notes and a smooth legato—a fine, even dramatic, tenor...." Bengochea has enjoyed a very rich singing career performing leading roles in opera companies throughout the US and abroad including Opera San Jose, Atlanta Opera, Teatro Felice, and Opera Canada to name a few. "Mr. Bengochea sang with OperaSLO 15 years ago when he was early in his career, so it's really exciting to bring him back and experience his talent come full circle," says Maestro Alhadeff.

Baritone Gregorio Gonzales returns to OperaSLO in the role of Sharpless, Pinkerton's Japanese consul. Gonzalez was also featured in last August's *Symphony at Sunset: Pops Under the Stars* at the Vina Robles Amphitheatre. He has been hailed by the great tenor Plácido Domingo as "possessing a beautiful and musical voice," and has wowed audiences in major opera companies including Opera Virginia, San Diego Opera and Nederlandse Opera. Gonzalez was also a member of the original cast of LA Opera's production of Daniel Catan's *Il Postino* and went on to tour the work in Mexico's Palacio de Bellas Artes, and at Vienna's Theater an der Wien.

This production is directed by world famous mezzo-soprano Edna Garabedian, who has performed leading roles to critical acclaim with the San Francisco Opera, Los Angeles Opera, Seattle Opera, Houston Opera, San Diego Opera, Arizona Opera, Baltimore Opera, Spoleto Festival, Virginia Opera, Stuttgart Opera, Frankfurt Opera, Karlsruhe Opera, Nurnburg Opera, Staatsoper Bonn, and Munich Opera to name just a few. Ms. Garabedian was Deputy Stage Director for Raffa Productions "cast-of-a-thousand" European touring production of *Aida* that featured noted opera stars Leontyne Price, Grace Bumbry, and Raina Kabaivanska. She has directed over 100 different productions



Karin Mushegain as Carmen in the 2013 OperaSLO production.
Photo by Luis Escobar

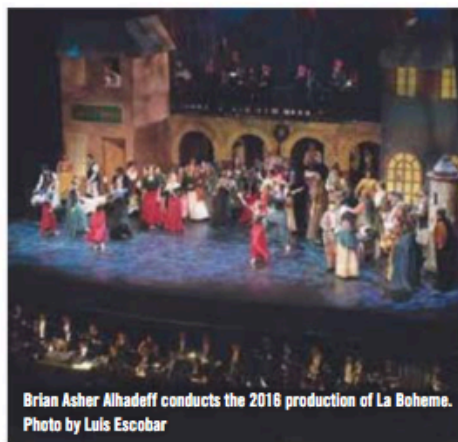
throughout the United States and Asia.

Andrew Silvaggio celebrates his sixth consecutive production with OperaSLO as Lead Choreographer. Alhadeff affectionately touted "Drew is an amazing talented collaborator with a keen ability to brilliantly choreograph across a variety of genres." And Maestro Alhadeff has again amassed a veritable army of artists behind this Citywide Arts Collaboration. "Opera is the Olympics of classical music," says Alhadeff, "and our patrons thrill in seeing their artistic community harmoniously together on one stage." This production will include the collaborative talents of the Central Coast Children's Choir, Civic Ballet San Luis Obispo, Deyo Dances, and Studio @-Ryan's American Dance.

OperaSLO is proud to feature a Children's Arts Showcase: a new educational initiative directly connected to this production. Both performances will give 2,200 patrons the opportunity of seeing the lobby of the Performing Arts Center San Luis Obispo adorned with art inspired by *Madama Butterfly*, as created by young artists from public schools throughout San Luis Obispo County. This initiative is part of a growing partnership between OperaSLO, County Superintendent Dr. James Brescia, and the San Luis Obispo Offices of Education, demonstrating that music education is positively linked to the intellectual and emotional development of our youth.

In continuous operation since 1985, Opera San Luis Obispo is the region's only professional opera company, and one of four Grand Opera producing companies in the state. OperaSLO productions feature full orchestras, choruses, ballet, lavish sets and costumes, and nationally and internationally acclaimed artists in leading roles.

Tickets for *Madam Butterfly* Oct 14 and 15 are available at PACSLO.org or at (806) 756-4849. Join us for a pre-opera talk led by John Frey one hour before curtain at each performance.



Brian Asher Alhadeff conducts the 2016 production of *La Bohème*.
Photo by Luis Escobar