



Opera in the heights

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**OPERA IN THE HEIGHTS PRESENTS PUCCINI'S *MADAMA BUTTERFLY*
IN A NEW JAPANESE AND ENGLISH ADAPTATION BY EIKI ISOMURA
AND JOSH SHAW – FOUR PERFORMANCES APRIL 26 – MAY 4, 2019**

The cast features Japanese-American singers in the Japanese roles

**OH Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Eiki Isomura conducts
this co-production with Pacific Opera Project, which debuts in Los
Angeles April 6**



Eiki Isomura ([download photo](#)), *Keiko Clark as Cio-Cio san* ([download photo](#))

For its fourth and final production of the season, Opera in the Heights (OH), the opera company that provides a stage for emerging performers and affordable opera to the Greater Houston Area, presents Puccini's enduring classic *Madama Butterfly* – with a difference. This co-production of OH and the Los Angeles-based Pacific Opera Project actualizes the heart of the opera's tragic cross-cultural love story by translating its original Italian libretto into the two languages of the protagonists – Japanese and English – and featuring Japanese-American singers in the Japanese roles.

OH Artistic Director and Principal Conductor Eiki Isomura, who conducts all performances, has adapted the libretto for the Japanese-speaking characters, and Pacific Opera Project Artistic Director Josh Shaw, who originated the concept, has written the English. As with all OH productions, supertitles in English will be projected above the stage. The production is directed by Josh Shaw, and the costumes are by Sueko Oshimoto of Kimono SK of Los Angeles. Pacific Opera Project presents the production's premiere

in Los Angeles April 6, 13, and 14. The production is sponsored in part by an Innovation Grant from Opera America.

Opera in the Heights presents four performances of *Madama Butterfly*: Friday, April 26, at 7:30 pm; Sunday, April 28, at 2:00 pm; Thursday, May 2, at 7:30 pm; and Saturday, May 4, at 7:30 pm, at Lambert Hall, 1703 Heights Boulevard in Houston. The Sunday matinee will be followed by a “Talk Back” with the cast, and the May 2 performance is followed by a “YOLO Cocktail Hour.” For tickets, priced from \$40.50 to \$94.50, visit www.operaintheheights.org/butterfly.

The cast includes Keiko Clark as Cio-Cio-san, Peter Lake as Pinkerton, Kenneth Stavert as Sharpless, Kimberly Sogioka as Suzuki, Eiji Miura as Goro, Hisato Masuyama as Bonze, Steve Moritsugu as Yamadori, Norge Yip as Imperial Commissioner, and Chelsea Obermeier as Kate Pinkerton.

“My hope is that this new interpretation of *Madama Butterfly* will be a stimulating experience for the audience, giving them a greater understanding of what is at stake in the story and allowing them to better empathize with the characters,” said Eiki Isomura. “Opera as an art form continues to thrive because it is an unparalleled generator of empathy. This has always been my greatest motivation for being involved with opera – how it helps us engage more deeply with someone else's experience.”

Madama Butterfly, which premiered in 1904, tells the story of an ill-fated love affair between an American naval officer, Lieutenant Pinkerton, and a teenage Japanese girl, Cio-Cio San (Butterfly). After marrying her, Pinkerton leaves for America, promising to return. Three years later, Cio-Cio San, who has since had Pinkerton's child, learns that he is returning to Japan, but with an American wife. Cio-Cio San agrees to give him the child if he will see her, but then commits suicide before they can meet. *Madama Butterfly* has remained one of the world's most popular operas, and includes the famous soprano aria “Un bel dì” (“One fine day”).

Translating a beloved classic

When Josh Shaw approached Eiki Isomura about working on the libretto translation with him, Isomura realized that it would be an opportunity to bring more nuanced insight into what he considers an unfair portrayal of Japan. Since most opera libretti – or theatrical plays, for that matter – are in a single language, that language represents the entirety of an audience's perception of the characters' interaction, Isomura points out. The use of Japanese and English shows how stark is the cultural divide between Pinkerton and Cio-Cio-san; “when we come to terms with how one-sided their communication must really have been, we sense more profoundly than ever Cio-Cio-san's naivete, Pinkerton's selfishness, and that their undeniably potent attraction is sparked not in spite of, but because of the barriers between them.”

Isomura adapted a 1930 Japanese translation of the libretto, working to bring it closer to the meaning of the original Italian while using syllables that might be more singer-friendly. Because of the strict social codes built into Japanese grammar, Isomura says, “you often end up with quite a few more syllables to say something in Japanese than you would in Italian.” One recurring example: because of the often indirect nature of address and the expected use of honorifics in Japanese, every time the libretto said, 'tu' (informal 'you'), it presented a linguistic and musical dilemma. Any approximate equivalent takes at least three syllables rather than one, presenting a musical issue that compounds the inherent problem, said Isomura – “which is that it wouldn't be an appropriate way to address a Japanese person in the first

place! Every line of text presented such a dilemma, leaving me to either defer to the extant translation, or to make terribly tough choices: prioritize the literal meaning, or the culture, the singability, or fidelity to Puccini's rhythms. It was a humbling exercise!"

Eiki Isomura (OH Artistic Director and Conductor) joined Opera in the Heights in 2015 as Interim Conductor, was named Principal Conductor in 2016, and appointed Artistic Director in 2017 for an initial term of three years. Previously, he served on the music staff at HGOco from 2013-15. His appointment as Director of Orchestral Activities at Lone Star College-Montgomery in 2012 brought him to Houston from Ann Arbor, MI, where he completed his doctorate in orchestral conducting at the University of Michigan. He also holds a master's degree in orchestral and opera conducting from the University of Arizona. He has been a conducting fellow at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa and the CCM Spoleto Festival in Italy. He has studied with some of the foremost conducting teachers in the profession, including Kenneth Kiesler, Thomas Cockrell, Mark Gibson, Colin Metters, and Gustav Meier. He also spends summers on the music staff at the Opera in the Ozarks Festival. www.eikiisomura.com

Keiko Clark, soprano (Cio-Cio san) Ms. Clark's repertoire includes the title roles of Juliette in *Roméo et Juliette*, and Lucia in *Lucia di Lammermoor*. She has performed the lead roles of Constanza and Blonde in *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, Norina in *Don Pasquale*, and Madame Goldentrill in *The Impresario*. She has performed multiple renditions of the Queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute* with Riverside Lyric Opera, Repertory Opera, Pasadena Lyric Opera, Bakersfield Symphony, Pacific Palisade Symphony and USC Thornton Opera. A native of Tokyo, Japan, Ms. Clark trained under a scholarship with legendary tenor Carlo Bergonzi. She holds a Master's of Music degree in Vocal Arts from the University of Southern California, and a Bachelor's degree in Vocal Performance from New England Conservatory in Boston. www.keikoclark.com

Peter Lake, tenor (Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton) In the summer of 2018 Peter Lake made his role debut in the title role in Natchez Festival of Music's production of *Faust*, and sang Pang in Mississippi Opera's *Turandot*. In March of 2018, he was invited to perform as a soloist on the Sherrill Milnes Gala Honoring Denyce Graves, and in February he performed the role of Don José in a condensed *Carmen* for the Mobile Opera Gala. In 2017 as a Resident Artist for Opera North Peter made his role debut as Paris in *La belle Hélène*. In December 2017 Peter was invited to China to perform American art song recitals, selections by Samuel Barber, Rorem, Ives, and Foster at prestigious universities including Central Conservatory of Music and Shandong University. Later this year, Peter will return to Natchez to sing Rodolfo in *La bohème*, and to Savannah Opera to perform in *Forever Plaid*. www.peter-lake.com

Kenneth Stavert, baritone (Sharpless) Praised for his strong "sense of theatricality," Kenneth Stavert has performed on operatic, concert and recital stages throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia. Recent career highlights include Silvio in *Pagliacci*, Papageno in *Die Zauberflöte*, and Ping in *Turandot* (Dayton Opera), Harlekin in *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Palm Beach Opera), Yamadori in *Madama Butterfly* (Santa Fe Opera) and Renato in *Un ballo in maschera* (Opera in the Heights). Kenneth's orchestral credits include Berlioz's *Lélio*, Fauré's Requiem, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Handel's *Messiah* and Mozart's *Vesperae solennes de confessore*. He has also been a featured recitalist throughout the United States specializing in less-performed English art song. Upcoming engagements for Kenneth include a return to Dayton Opera where he will perform Marcello in *La bohème*. www.kennethstavert.com

Kimberly Sogioka, mezzo-soprano (Suzuki) This season, Kim performs Nicklausse in *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* with Opera Orlando, and as a soloist in concerts in St. John's of Lattingtown and with the Whatcom Chorale. Last season, Ms. Sogioka sang in Symphony Silicon Valley's *Misa Tango* concert,

which explored the style of the Argentine tango in the form of large-scale orchestral compositions, and as a soloist in Beethoven's Symphony No. 9. Additional recent engagements include Carmen in scenes from *Carmen* with the Metropolitan Opera Guild, workshops of Bruce Wolosoff's *The Great Good Thing* and Sarah Mattox's *Heart Mountain*, Berta in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* with Opera Grand Rapids, and productions with Michigan Opera Theater as Siébel in *Faust* and Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly*, which she also performed with Northern Lights Music Festival. www.kimberlysogioka.com

Eiji Miura, tenor (Goro) Japanese-American tenor Eiji Miura, a San Francisco native, is an active and sought-after Boston-based singer and educator. As a performer, Miura regularly appears in concerts, operas, musicals, and in the sacred music scene in and around the Boston area, and also records vocals for video game soundtracks. In addition to maintaining an active performing career, he holds faculty positions at the Boston Conservatory at Berklee College of Music, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and has previously taught at the New England Conservatory Preparatory School and Clark University (Worcester, MA). Miura earned his M.M. in Vocal Performance and Pedagogy from the Boston Conservatory.

Hisato Masuyama, tenor (Bonze) Originally raised in Tokyo, Japan, Hisato Masuyama came to the U.S. at age 18 and earned his BM in vocal arts and music education from USC. His opera debut was as Ping in *Turandot*. His other credits include: a tour of a *42nd Street* production starring Mariette Hartley, *Mame* starring Juliet Prowse, and *Pacific Overtures* starring Mako; Japanese productions of *Chicago* (Mary Sunshine), *Phantom of the Opera*, and *Tommy*; other credits include *Dreamgirls*, *Anything Goes*, *The Student Prince*, *Rumors*, *The Music Man*, and *The Producers*. He has worked as translator and voice-over artist for Tokyo Disneyland and Tokyo Sesame Place. Also a countertenor, he has toured all over Japan in concert.

Amanda Levy, soprano (Kate Pinkerton) Amanda Levy is Opera in the Heights' inaugural resident young artist for the company's 2018-19 season, covering the roles of Marie (*La Fille du Régiment*) and Fiordiligi (*Così fan tutte*), performing the soprano roles in John Davies's *Pinocchio* and *Jack and the Beanstalk* and making her mainstage debut with the role of Kate Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly*. She recently graduated from University of Houston, receiving her Master's in Vocal Performance. In 2017 Amanda participated as an apprentice artist at Opera in the Ozarks, where she sang the roles of la Contessa (*Le Nozze di Figaro*) and Mrs. Gleaton (Susannah). Ms. Levy, a Long Island native, graduated from the New England Conservatory of Music with her Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance. Ms. Levy is also an advocate for new works, premiering the role of Willow in Sonnet Swire's *The Summer's Case* at the New England Conservatory, as well as other premieres. This summer, Amanda has been selected to participate as a Studio Artist in the Young Professional Artist Program at Pittsburgh Festival Opera, where she will perform as Ortlinde in Jonathan Dove's adaptation of Wagner's *Die Walküre* and understudy the role of Nella in *Gianni Schicchi*.

OPERA IN THE HEIGHTS exists to provide a stage for emerging opera performers and to bring affordable opera to the Greater Houston Area. Founded in 1996, Opera in the Heights began as an intimate neighborhood opera company. Today, it is nationally recognized as a presenter of outstanding emerging talent, and for making opera accessible to a wide range of audiences. In addition to producing high-quality opera, the organization dedicates significant resources to educational outreach and presentations of operas adapted for a younger audience. Opera in the Heights plays a role in sustaining the future of opera by investing in the next generation of opera professionals and audiences alike.

Opera in the Heights presents
A co-production with Pacific Opera Project

***MADAMA BUTTERFLY* by Giacomo Puccini**

New bilingual libretto by Eiki Isomura (Japanese) and Josh Shaw (English) after the original Italian libretto by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica

Eiki Isomura, conductor

Josh Shaw, director

Cast:

Keiko Clark, soprano (Cio-Cio san)

Peter Lake, tenor (Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton)

Kenneth Stavert, baritone (Sharpless)

Kimberly Sogioka, mezzo-soprano (Suzuki)

Eiji Miura, tenor (Goro)

Hisato Masuyama, tenor (Bonze)

Amanda Levy, soprano (Kate Pinkerton)

Friday, April 26, at 7:30 pm

Sunday, April 28, at 2:00 pm (followed by a *Talk Back* with the cast)

Thursday, May 2, at 7:30 pm (followed by a *YOLO Cocktail Hour*)

Saturday, May 4, at 7:30 pm

Lambert Hall, 1703 Heights Boulevard, Houston, TX

For tickets, priced from \$40.50 to \$94.50, visit www.operaintheheights.org/butterfly.

Opera in the Heights

1703 Heights Boulevard

Houston, TX 77008

Eiki Isomura, Artistic Director & Principal Conductor

Paige Myrick, Executive Director

www.operaintheheights.org

March 14, 2019