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Butterfly
(Kelly Cae
Hogan)
makes a
decision

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Eugene Opera stages *Madama Butterfly*

Mark Beudert, artistic director of the Eugene Opera, isn't quite living in the moment.

Perhaps that's because the man has so much to do before the Opera's second production, Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*, opens on Friday at the Hult. Beudert calls this opera, the second in this year's season and the third since the Eugene Opera rose from the ashes in 2006, "the end of the cycle we began with [2006's production of] *Pirates of Penzance*."

Madama Butterfly (that's its title in Italian; you might know it from the English-language play *Madame Butterfly*) tells the tale of a clash of cultures, of the U.S. military and its imperial desires, of a white man and a woman of color and their doomed relationship.

Though it's set in early 1890s Nagasaki, not too many decades after the forceful "opening" of Japan by the American Navy under the command of Matthew Perry, some parallels will doubtless suggest themselves to audiences.

Butterfly is a commonly produced opera — as a matter of fact, the most often produced opera in the U.S. "What makes that more shocking is that it takes an ambiguous view of the U.S.," Beudert says.

More than a century after its U.S. premiere in 1907, Beudert says, "We're still dealing with the same issues that we were then — issues of cultural imperialism, issues of a mixture of civilizations, and that's played out against a story of two people who have their own individual needs."

The story tells the tale of American Lieutenant Pinkerton marrying and abandoning a Japanese woman, Cio Cio San (Butterfly), so that he can have a "real" American wife. Cultural brokers like American consul Sharpless are helpless to stop the dismal tale of a woman who must decide what to do in an impossible situation. "I have no problem as seeing that as absolutely contemporary, both on

a political scale and on a personal scale," Beudert says.

In this production, the role of Cio Cio San will be sung by Metropolitan Opera principal Kelly Cae Hogan. Though Hogan hasn't performed the role before, Beudert says that the time she's spent over the past months preparing should reap rewards. That's because Hogan worked with Renata Scotto, one of the most famous Butterfly performers of the 20th century (you can hear Scotto sing the aria "Un bel di vedremo" on YouTube). If you want more of Hogan's voice before the opera, head to kellycaehogan.com for clips from Strauss' *Salome* and Verdi's *Nabucco*.

Though things don't work out between Pinkerton and Butterfly — to put it mildly — life has turned out a bit better for Hogan and the man playing Pinkerton — Hogan's husband (and experienced Eugene Opera performer) Joel Andrew Weiss. Beudert and Weiss have performed together in Eugene before. Because of their friendship, Beudert jokes that his "personal charm" snagged Hogan and Weiss for *Butterfly*.

Seattle provides other talent; mezzo-soprano Sarah Mattox, who won the Eugene Opera's second Belle Voci competition last year and who has sung with the Seattle Opera to rave reviews, performs as Butterfly's maid, Suzuki, and tenor Karl Reyes, also a Seattle Opera regular, will sing the role of marriage broker Goro. Baritone Eric Greene sings Sharpless, the American consul who attempts to intercede for Cio Cio San's benefit.

Eugene-area artists sing the rest of the roles and perform as the chorus. The orchestra, the largest ever assembled for a Eugene Opera production, will play under the baton of Hermiston native and UO alum Kelly Kuo. Drama; Italian grand opera by Puccini; beautiful sets; a story of devotion met with insensitivity — what's not to love? "This is a sophisticated town," says Beudert. To see the most popular opera in the U.S., snag a ticket soon, for there are only two performances of this *Butterfly*. **EW**



Artistic and
Executive Director
Diane Retallack

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