Madama Butterfly
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A glimpse into the Archivio Storico Ricordi
1. *Madama Butterfly* 1904: A Perfect Perception of Theatre
   Conversation with Riccardo Chailly
   page 7

2. *Madama Butterfly* in the Archivio Storico Ricordi
   by Maria Pia Ferraris
   page 13

3. Two distinct Butterflies
   by Gabriele Datto
   page 15

4. One-way Trip to Japan
   by Vittoria Crespi Morbio
   page 23
At an international media company like Bertelsmann, the ideas and creativity of our artists, writers and journalists form the heart of our value creation. They are the ones who constantly reinvent our offers by continuing to tell new stories, every day, that inform, entertain and inspire people.

In this brochure, we tell you the story of Puccini’s Madama Butterfly and its connection to the treasure trove of the world-famous Ricordi Archive.

Like Puccini, Ricordi is a name of great resonance – in Italy, throughout the music world, and also at Bertelsmann. The Archivio Storico Ricordi in Milan, which provides near-complete documentation of the rise of the music publisher Casa Ricordi and today gives us unique insights into the world of opera, is regarded as the most important privately-owned collection of Italian opera history. Bertelsmann acquired Casa Ricordi in 1994, but later relinquished most of the company again. However, the associated Archivio Storico Ricordi remained part of Bertelsmann. For us, the extraordinary scope of the collection and its outstanding importance for the history of Italian opera were more than reason enough to safeguard the many thousands of scores, libretti, letters, and photographs and preserve them for posterity. In Verdi Year 2013, we began to present the documents from the Archivio Storico Ricordi in a new form and make them accessible to all; whether in the form of international exhibitions, publications, or by digitally recording the exhibits. What’s more, for several years we have been increasingly involved in other areas of cultural history as well. Bertelsmann was the key sponsor of the digital restoration of the classic silent movies “The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari” (Robert Wiene) and “Destiny” (Fritz Lang), thereby sending a signal for the preservation of cinematic heritage in the digital media age.

We will continue to help shape the future of digital media in the years ahead. Meanwhile, we will also continue our work to preserve the history of media for future generations and make it accessible to as many people as possible.

In this spirit, I am delighted by your interest and wish you an enjoyable read!

Dr. Thomas Rabe
Chairman and CEO of Bertelsmann
We asked Riccardo Chailly, who has conducted Madama Butterfly for more than forty years, how his personal and professional rapport with this score has evolved, and how he came to the decision to revive the first version of the opera.

My American opera debut was at the age of 21 with Butterfly, at the Lyric Opera of Chicago. When around fifteen years ago I proposed recapturing several passages from the original version for a production of Butterfly at La Scala, I met with some difficulty because the stage director, who was working with the theatre’s famous staging by Keita Asari, was unfamiliar with the music to be inserted. Fortunately, the artistic director at the time, Roman Vlad, organized a reading at the piano to analyze the insertions and found that they contributed important dramaturgical value. Since then I have continued to study this opera, even more intensely in recent years to prepare for the “return” of the first version in the theatre in which it was born. When we look at the original profile of the opera in two acts, we can see how the great block of music of the second act had its own internal, inexorable sense of continuity; but above all, the first version involves several hundred additional pages of score, all of them waiting to be rediscovered. I am convinced it is a privilege for us today to be able to compare the original version, in an edition reconstructed by Casa Ricordi, to the opera as we have come to know it. The result is something that can stand alongside the version normally performed, not to replace it but to broaden our knowledge of the composer. I think this enables us to dig even more deeply into the enormous power of Puccini’s theatre.

In what way or ways does the first version have “something more” than the second?

Puccini understood he had created a kind of theatre that was absolutely new for 1904, perhaps too complicated for audiences of the day, so he went back to remove many pages and attenuate a good bit of the more discordant harmonies and strident timbres (suffice it to say that among the more recherché orchestral effects in the first version he even called for a Hungarian cimbalom!), modifying both the overall structure and the contour of many melodic lines. Consider for example Butterfly’s entrance, where in the first version the melody moves downward rather than upward as it does in the second version; or her final monologue, which lies within a more central tessitura in the first version. The immediate impact may not be as dramatic, but it contributes more depth to Butterfly’s humanity, more of her sense of suffering. Then too there is that entire scene of the relatives in the first act, with Yakusidè’s tune to add a particular touch of color; the way that scene is conceived is perfectly theatrical, a choreography of emotions all magnificently managed and steadily intensified up to the entrance of the Bonze and his curse. Even the love duet in the first version has many phrases that cast a shadow around the character of Cio-Cio-San, gloomy references to her painful past, to her solitude, essentially setting the stage for the tragedy that is to come. Then too, in the first version Kate Pinkerton emblematically reflects the meaning of that looming tragedy. This is how I perceived her character when I heard the 1904 version in the theatre several years ago. And the importance of her role makes the last scene of the opera even more dramatic.

Beyond the “couleur locale”, how much of Puccini’s score was influenced by Japanese aesthetics?

Just a few days back I read an interview from 1910 with Puccini in New York, in which he was asked how he had been able to describe the America of La fanciulla del West without ever having seen it. Puccini, with that ironic tone of his, responded (in French!) that before the America of Fanciulla
there was the Japan of Butterfly, the Japan where he had never been but which he studied to the core, drawing material from various folk music sources but also researching the iconography of Japanese types and characters. And interpersonal dramas, Puccini explicitly stated, are always the same the world over. It is also true that every time I visit Japan I find myself in the heart of an absolutely unique culture, the same one that Puccini had quite clearly in mind in his own day: on the one hand, the imprint of an ancient, extremely remote past, of that fading historic memory the world is ever less able to recall; on the other, the desire to be continually up to date, both culturally and technologically. The importance of silence, which in Noh theatre becomes something physical, almost violent, fascinates me very much; the importance of absence, of emptiness, of a way of experiencing time that I have encountered, for example, in the music of Takemitsu, where one is submerged within a kind of "legato" that seems infinite and eternal.

With Puccini the visual reference was directly involved in his creative process. How important is the visual dimension for you when you conduct an opera?

Immersing myself in the visual dimension is fundamental for me, and it has to be closely connected to the way I think of the music. Sometimes I find it necessary to experience visual emotions so that they can stimulate an immediate, simultaneous suggestion of how to interpret the music.

(V.C.M.)
Thanks to the treasures preserved in the Archivio Storico Ricordi it is possible to examine and more deeply understand the overall context of Madama Butterfly, and to trace the process of its creation and publication history.

On 15 February 1904, two days before the opera’s historic premiere (and fiasco) at La Scala, the librettists Luigi Illica and Giuseppe Giacosa decide, together with the composer Giacomo Puccini, to change the title from Butterfly to Madama Butterfly. This decision is formalized in a contract now housed in the Archive, along with those regarding the rights to the musical score and the libretto. These documents, formal but nonetheless fundamental, assign to the publisher Ricordi the rights to a work that has become one of the most performed operas throughout the world. Giulio Ricordi and his son Tito II would be closely involved with the preparation of the score, the theatrical production of the world premiere, and the subsequent production of the revised version at Brescia on 28 May of that same year.

The documents preserved in the Archive allow one to follow the creative process beginning with the libretto: from the acquisition of the rights to the story by John Luther Long, to those of David Belasco’s play, through the various versions of the libretto (both manuscript or autograph, by the librettists and the composer), to the printed editions of the vocal scores prepared on occasion of the La Scala premiere (with Rosina Storchio as Cio-Cio-San) and then for the new production at Brescia, where the publisher can finally pen the handwritten comment “Excellent outcome”. Among these pages we can find famous arias like Addio fiorito asil, Un bel dì vedremo or the “humming chorus”, but also a blank page, crossed through, over which the Maestro jokingly wrote “the most beautiful piece of the opera Puccini”.

The cover of the published vocal score reproduces the famous poster for the opera by Leopoldo Metlicovitz, who also created the delicate portrait of Butterfly which was hand painted onto copies of a special limited edition of the score. This is the portrait and the colors we find again in the watercolors prepared as souvenir postcards, alongside the beautiful chromatic palette of the kimonos in Giuseppe Palanti’s original costume designs. There are also the beautifully hand-colored copies of costume designs prepared for theatres that rented the music for performance, and illustrated boards with cloth swatches attached and detailed instructions for the tailoring, makeup, and wigs.

Madama Butterfly in the Archivio Storico Ricordi

by Maria Pia Ferraris

Butterfly, Suzuki, Pinkerton, and Sharpless move among the stage wings and flats we see in the original set designs by Vittorio Rota and Carlo Songa, which were inspired by original photographs of Nagasaki acquired by Ricordi and now part of the Archive’s photographic collection. In these we can admire the singers in their stage costumes, Puccini with a self-satisfied smile sitting on the stage of the theatre of Budapest for the premiere of the Hungarian-language version of Madama Butterfly, and in a boat named Cio-Cio-San sailing toward the island of Gorgona.
To understand the nature of the revisions to *Madama Butterfly*, we need to understand the nature of its composer. Giacomo Puccini was a habitual, sometimes incessant reviser of his operas; with the sole exception of the posthumously performed *Turandot* (left unfinished at his death) he retouched every one of his works for the theatre, to greater or lesser extent, sometimes in multiple phases. His two initial stage works were expanded from one act to two (*Villi*) or reduced from four to three (*Edgar*), arias were cut (*Suor Angelica*) or added (*Tabarro*), or myriad changes, large and small, were made from rehearsals to performance to published score (*Fanciulla*) or from production to production (*Manon Lescaut*), sometimes not even leaving a decisive “final” version (*Rondine*).

Puccini, however, was not the only composer of Italian opera to have done this – the theatre is a volatile proving ground, and more than any other musical form it involves multiple collaborators in its creation and considerable investment in order to be produced and performed. Without box-office success (something repugnant to the musical purists of the Late Romantic era, but an unavoidable reality nonetheless) an opera’s career simply does not exist in any viable sense. Thus, revised (or at times “alternate”) versions of works, whether to appease local demands or to relaunch a stalled performance career, were standard operating procedure. Often, both the composers, and we modern spectators, have regarded such revisions as a sort of evolutionary development toward an ideal, final version of a work. But a case such as *Butterfly* – which has the most complex history of revision among Puccini operas – falls instead among those great works (like, for instance, Verdi’s *Don Carlos*) for which, perhaps, an “optimal” version cannot really be identified.

Two Distinct Butterflies

by Gabriele Dotto

To understand the nature of the revisions to *Madama Butterfly*, we need to understand the nature of its composer. Giacomo Puccini was a habitual, sometimes incessant reviser of his operas; with the sole exception of the posthumously performed *Turandot* (left unfinished at his death) he retouched every one of his works for the theatre, to greater or lesser extent, sometimes in multiple phases. His two initial stage works were expanded from one act to two (*Villi*) or reduced from four to three (*Edgar*), arias were cut (*Suor Angelica*) or added (*Tabarro*), or myriad changes, large and small, were made from rehearsals to performance to published score (*Fanciulla*) or from production to production (*Manon Lescaut*), sometimes not even leaving a decisive “final” version (*Rondine*).

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The fiasco of *Madama Butterfly* at Milan’s La Scala on 17 February 1904 is among the more famous crash-and-burns in the history of opera, all the more so because its composer’s career was by then solidly launched and, frankly, no one expected such a disaster. That a revised version of the opera should then gain a triumphant reception just a few months later, and go on to become an enduring member among the elite club of “most performed operas” for the subsequent one hundred years (and counting...) is equally remarkable – and by reflection, it makes the initial fiasco all the more historic.

One wonders if, had circumstances been different, Puccini would have simply insisted that the opera be given a second chance, as it stood, rather than undertaking revisions. After all, immediately after the debacle of the premiere Puccini wrote to a friend, with indignation and fierce artistic pride, “With a heavy heart but with the strength of my convictions I tell you that the reception was nothing short of a lynching [...] But my Butterfly remains what it is: the most deeply felt and expressive opera I have ever written.” So, for instance, what if there had been a more fiercely command- ing personality wielding the baton on the podium that night? There is no small irony in the fact that, had history taken a slightly different turn, the conductor for the premiere of *Butterfly* certainly would have been Arturo Toscanini. It is unimaginable that a man of Toscanini’s famously fiery temperament would have suffered even the slightest part of the howls and interruptions that accompanied the reception of that first night, without severely chiding the audience to stop (he had been known to have done much worse, such as snapping his baton in pieces, then turning and flinging it into the first rows of a “shouting mob” of an audience), or even storming off the podium if they did not – thus perhaps ending the performance so that it might be tried anew a later night. But Toscanini, who had been music director at the Milanese theater since 1898, quit abruptly at the end of the 1903 season after refusing to acquiesce to demands for encores. Another factor to consider: Puccini may have been in a particularly vulnerable state of
mind. In 1903 he was involved in a dramatic automobile accident that left him with a broken leg requiring a long convalescence, during which doc- tors also discovered a form of diabetes. He fell into depression for a time, writing to his librettist Illica: “Goodbye to everything, goodbye to Butterfly, goodbye to life itself!” In addition, we must recall that Puccini, at the impressionable beginnings of his illustrious career, had been involved with sig- nificant revisions of his first two operas after their initial failures — the aforementioned Illya and Edgar. Even after the career-launching success of Manon (1893), and the consolidated fame gained by Bohème (1896) and Tosca (1900), he would nonetheless be susceptible to audience reaction.

So revise he did, and although the various stages of modification were numerous and spread out over nearly three years, two of the changes he made straight away for the Brescia production were the most significant: splitting the long sec- ond act into two, and adding an aria di congedo for the tenor Pinkerton, “Addio, fiorito asil.” But why did he focus on these two elements?

Among the many opinions about the causes of the opening-night failure were: A claque orga- nized by friends of the composer Franchetti who felt he was snubbed by Ricordi in favor of Puccini; or a claque organized by music critics, furious at the extremely long second act, with its exten- sive “scene of the vigil” and which, in its original form, ran nearly an hour and a half. According to one author, Arturo Toscanini (of whom Puccini had asked an opinion about the score before the premiere) played the score through at the piano and privately felt that the two-act structure was a serious error, that the length of the second act was just “impossible.” “That’s fine for Wagner, but not for Puccini,” he was reported to have said years later; nonetheless Toscanini said nothing at the time, so as not to upset the composer. Not all critics would have agreed, however, with the ad- visability of breaking up the “scene of the vigil.” In a booklet published an occasion of the premiere (and reissued after the revised score was per- formed at Brescia) Alfred Brüggemann — a com- poser and friend to Puccini, who would later trans- late Madame Butterfly for the German-language vocal score — admirably described the “scene of the vigil” as follows:

“The spectral sense of wake expectancy returns as the three abandoned persons — Butterfly, Suzuki, and the small child “Dolore” (Trouble) — store in- tently toward the city and the harbor through three little holes especially cut into the thick cur- tains of the three windows at the back of the room, which has been filled with scattered irises and ver- bens. Once He returns, Dalore will be renamed “Joy.” They store, because his ship returned at sunset and they now expect him to ascend the hill and come to them... He should come at any mo- ment; surely, he will not delay, he must be close... and yet... the night grows darker, the hours creep past one after another, the deepening gloom ad- vances, then shows a hint of the rays of the com- ing dawn, and following these rays, comes the sun- light in its full splendor. Yet He... does not appear! And here again the orchestra returns to fill us with the infinite anxiety of this endless, almost spas- modic vigil, after the three long years of waiting that have already passed. Butterfly, alone, keeps the watch and stays awake, straight-backed, throughout the night, and the orchestra transmits to us the feeling that everything agitation her childlike soul has now transformed into bride and mother; marvelously, the orchestra reveals, ever so slowly and haltingly, her exhaustion and yearning, through a heavy sense of her oncoming drawness. These broad, slowly evolving orchestral thoughts make us understand what she is going through, the musical expression almost growing at our soul, so that when at last a cheery fuga to underscores the awakening of all of nature at dawn, our spirits are uplifted as though we our- selves had awakened through a long night, not just a few actual minutes of imagined vigil but indeed the sensation of an actual long night almost expe- rienced, felt, lived.

When Brüggemann’s booklet was reprinted, he added the wistful footnote “In the new edition, which separates this act into two parts, this ef- fect is now lost.” One feels he might have been tempted to add the phrase “said to say.” Clearly, Brüggemann would seem to have preferred the earlier version. Indeed, the idea of the extensive on-stage representation of the “long vigil” was not an invention of Puccini and his librettists, but rather a key feature of David Belasco’s play (one of the sources for the opera’s libretto), where the scene (lasting more than ten minutes) was ac- companied by a state-of-the-art set-lighting ef- fect is now lost.” One feels he might have been tempted to add the phrase “said to say.” Clearly, Brüggemann would seem to have preferred the earlier version. Indeed, the idea of the extensive on-stage representation of the “long vigil” was not an invention of Puccini and his librettists, but rather a key feature of David Belasco’s play (one of the sources for the opera’s libretto), where the scene (lasting more than ten minutes) was ac- companied by a state-of-the-art set-lighting ef- fect of transition from evening, to dusk, to dawn that drew admiration and applause. But on the other hand Belasco’s play covers only that part of the story that would appear in act 2 (now acts 2 and 3) of Puccini’s opera; in the original version of the opera, the effect arrives after having heard a long first act as well. In any event, the division of this second act would be Puccini’s principal sac- rifice in his first-level revisions for Brescia. After the end of the Humming Chorus a handful of bars were excised, and the remainder of the instrumen- tal interlude became a Prelude to the next act.

The second important change made for Brescia was the beginning of a distinctive transfor- mation of the character of Lieutenant Pinkerton. Pinkerton, as depicted in John Luther Long’s Madame Butterfly of 1898 through David Belasco’s homonymous play of 1900 and ultimately by Puccini’s librettists Illica and Giacosa in the opera’s first version, is a selfish, arrogant and even some- what unthinkingly cruel figure, a character who does not, as one modern critic has pointed out, “suggest the conventional heroic role that Italian operatic tenors are expected, and expect, to fill.” 7 It is an unforgiving portrait, possibly intended as a metaphor for the cultural arrogance of dominance of the Western colonial powers of that era.8 In the first version of the opera, Pinkerton is not only in- sensitive but also cowardly, avoiding a face-to- face encounter with Butterfly and instead giving the gentlemanly consuls, Sharpless, some money to pass along to her, declaring he cannot bear to see her and then quickly departing. In the Brescia revision, with the addition of the now-famous aria “Addio, fiorito asil”, Puccini and his librettists be- gan a process of amelioration of Pinkerton’s char- acter, albeit with the compromise of adding a somewhat sentimental aria. And as more revi- sions followed, leading to the “established” version familiar to audiences today — in which Pinkerton’s insulting remarks about the servants, the food and Japanese culture were also removed — he was ulti- mately depicted (to quote Smith) “as much more winning character, a less unworthy representative of the US Navy, and a more conventional type of leading operatic tenor.” These revisions toward the more conventional, even the sentimental, should not be taken to imply that the changes are not, in some cases, actual improvements. As the scholar William Ashbrook observed, “If [Pinkerton] is made totally cassy, completely selfish, then Butterfly’s...
devotion to him) becomes incomprehensible. The splitting of the original second act — effectively curtailing the full effect of the “scene of the vigil” — and the shift in characterization of the lead tenor role make of these revisions a profound alteration; but how necessary were they? Were they more audience-driven than composer-driven? To be sure, some purely practical matters needed to be addressed — in the opera’s first form, for instance, the small child playing Butterfly’s son had to remain on stage for nearly an hour; changes Puccini made for Brescia readjusted the entrances and exits, considerably improving the stage action. But one is led to speculate whether the composer, with respect to his “original artistic intent,” treated the original version too severely. Indeed, a comparison of the two approaches to the opera. Thus, the opportunity to see the first version staged, to experience it as a full spectacle — not with the idea of replacing the current version but (as Riccardo Chailly says elsewhere in this publication) to broaden our knowledge of Puccini’s art — is an exciting opportunity to compare two distinctly different stages of the composer’s concept.

Notes

2 See, among others, Harvey Sachs, Toscanini (New York, 1978), pp. 84-85. Sachs also points out that, while the lengthy diatribe over encores was often cited as a principal reason for his rupture with the La Scala management, a disagreement over an increase in his salary may also have been at the heart of it: see Sachs, p. 84.
5 Asdorin, cit., p. 107.
8 When Lang published reprints of his story he “mentioned in his Preface that he had received savage letters from American sailors objecting to his portrayal of the naval officer.” (Smith, cit., p. 106). But in the original source that served as the base model for Long’s 1898 story — Madame Chrysanthème by Pierre Loti, 1887 — the reprehensible naval officer was, in fact, French. The sailor’s country of origin here is irrelevant; the officer could have been English, French, Dutch or any representative of any of the other countries that were vying for an economic and strategic foothold in the Far East in those decades. What matters is the individual character’s depiction, and Pinkerton was “positively offensive in his arrogance” (Masso Carnet, Puccini: A Critical Biography (2nd ed., London, 1974), p. 398).
10 Smith, cit., p. 113.
One-way Trip to Japan

by Vittoria Crespi Morbio

“Grumbles, grourses, grawls, gibes, bellows, sneers” would not bury poor Cio-Cio-San, as a matter of fact gloriously reborn after the disaster of the first performance at La Scala on 17 February 1904. However, it did put an end to a certain opera production system created and organised by Casa Ricordi, perfected by Signor Giulio and become extinct in the hands of Tito II, his son, who was directly responsible for the visual, organisational, and promotional machinery backing up Madama Butterfly.

No one in Casa Ricordi was prepared for the dramatic outcome of the premiere, after which the score was withdrawn. Neither Puccini, “at peace” in his own “artist’s conscience”, nor Giulio Ricordi, who had always believed in Butterfly: “It is a masterpiece”. Signor Giulio had done everything to make sure that rehearsals would proceed with the greatest tranquillity and privacy. In the letter in which he announced to the Scala management that “Maestro Puccini has completed the opera Madama Butterfly”, he recommended that the Theatre be more vigilant than ever: “We cannot refrain from saying that we are extremely struck by what happened at the general rehearsals and the ones preceding the last dress rehearsal, having observed that persons not belonging to the theatre were present.”

One of the strengths that Ricordi counted on was the opera’s set design, to which endless care had been devoted during the gestation of the score and that contributed to its publicity. In the letter in which he announced to the Scala management that “Maestro Puccini has completed the opera Madama Butterfly”, he recommended that the Theatre be more vigilant than ever: “We cannot refrain from saying that we are extremely struck by what happened at the general rehearsals and the ones preceding the last dress rehearsal, having observed that persons not belonging to the theatre were present.”

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To understand this failure, we should take a step backwards and return to the time when Tito II took in hand the production of Butterfly, which had begun to exist in Puccini’s mind on the evening of 21 June 1900 when, at the Duke of York’s Theatre in London, the composer saw the performance of David Belasco’s play Madama Butterfly: A Tragedy of Japan.

At the time Casa Ricordi’s paint brush was Adolf Hohenstein, the great scenographer, costume designer, poster designer, author of book covers and postcards, whose fresh and attractive...
line, free of intellectual excesses, had established the characters of the operas in the popular imagination, conferring a uniform style on the Casa productions. Hohenstein, born in St Petersburg in 1854 of German parents, trained in Vienna, was not only endowed with the imaginative versatility of his creative temperament, backed up by an extraordinary skill in dosing lights and organising spaces, but also an unfailingly spirited line. And he was again the artist who, in drawing several spaces, but also an unfailingly spirited line. And he was again the artist who, in drawing several spaces, but also an unfailingly spirited line.

For Ricordi the blow was not an easy one to absorb. Hohenstein had been “Puccini’s” painter and scenographer. He had started with Le Villi (Turin, Teatro Regia, 1884), then had given a cowntenance to Edgar (Teatro alla Scala, 1889). Over the years he had followed the composer at every step. In a dazzling vortex of colour, variety, and vitality, he had given dramatic intensity to the 18th century of Manon Lescaut (Turin, Teatro Regia, 1893), enlivened the Paris of La Bohème (Turin, Teatro Regia, 1896), admirably recreated the Papal Rome of Tosca (Rome, Teatro Costanzi, 1900). Now, at the age of fifty, he decided to leave the frenzied Milanese world, the amusing hysteria of publicity operations, the unknown factor of performances to launch. He settled down in Germany, reducing his production for new and certainly less demanding commissions on the other side of the Alps.

Before departing he left for Puccini an immensely striking poster in his typical style, with Cio-Cio-San in her death throes, outstretched towards the child lit by a sharp ray of light (1903). 6 Hohenstein was Giulio Ricordi’s creation, he had discovered and launched him, appointing him the company’s first artistic director. Faced with the vacuum he left, Tito II made the only possible choice: he decided to divide up the work, selecting a team of personalities chosen for their specific competencies. In doing so he became in charge of leading the group, coordinating it, becoming the head, the director, the inspirer of the entire work, and instigator of a change in the Casa’s editorial line with the publishing firm and forced them to respect him. Verdi was even afraid that his costumes had too much personality and would end up by distracting the public. 7 Last, Edel had yielded to his true nature, exuberant and dispersive, with a series of stunning designs not for opera but for the great ballets put to music by Romualdo Marencio at La Scala, Excelsior (1881), Amor (1886), Sport (1897): the charming ballerinas he dressed and above all undressed were too strong a temptation for him. He was not the right man for Cia-Cia-San’s tragedy.

The other name that Tito II eliminated was Caramba (alias Luigi Sapelli), who would reign over La Scala in the next decades. In 1903 Caramba had already proved to be a strong, energetic personality, endowed with an instinctive, infallible sense of the theatre; he was also a lively artist, used to opera companies but unknown to the Scala stage. He had been successfully tried out by Ricordi to draw the costume plates for budding authors like Nicola Spinelli (A basso porto, 1894) or Edoardo Masccheroni (Lorenzo, 1902). Tito II did not deem him worthy of a Puccini premiere at La Scala.

Adolf Hohenstein and his wife Katharina in his studio in Bonn, 1905

The soprano Silvia Gordini Marchetti in the operetta La Geisha, photograph by Alfredo Pesce, Naples, 1904
the essence of the two stars 14 (Teatro alla Scala, 14 January 1904). And Caramba enchanted the Milanese audience with the staging of a Japanese subject, obtaining “a grandiose success for the lavishness, to which we are not accustomed, of the sets and costumes, 26 with Sidney Jones’ delightful operetta The Geisha (Teatro Olimpia, 26 October 1904).

It is true though that the geniuses of ballet and opera left a greater creative freedom than the standard chosen by Tito II (backed by his father) for the staging of Butterfly. The opera was supposed to adopt a criterion of absolute verisimilitude of the place and the time when the action took place. If the libretto bore the mention “At Nagasaki - Present time”, the Nagasaki of the present time had to be seen on the stage. For Caramba such an intention would have been Procrustean: his imagination was too lively, too fanciful, too free of the need to reproduce reality down to the slightest detail. In this respect Tito II was exactly a son of his time. He may have sinned out of too much caution, failing to discern in Caramba the man of the future he would become. In the air there was a “flavour” of Japan in Caramba the man of the future he would be - and operetta left a greater creative freedom than ballet & C, studio. 27 It would still be Rosina Storchio that would forever be the one to give a face to the seductive and abandoned geisha, even when she was not on the stage singing. Casa Ricordi had her conducted by Arturo Toscanini (Teatro de la Opera, 2 July 1904). And it was precisely with Madama Butterfly in December 1922 that Storchio said to the stage 28 with an unforgettable performance in Barcelona.

Let us go back a few steps. With Metlicovitz the authors of the staging of Butterfly had become eight. A ninth was needed to do the costumes, and Tito II Ricordi was once again responsible for the choice. The first costume plate designer he thought of was Attilio Comelli, a sound, trustworthy artist, quick, curious investigator of historic periods, as he had already shown at La Scala (1 March 1903) for the ballet Nel Giappone with choreography by Carlo Coppi and music by Louis-Gustave Ganne. His amazing costumes had been admired. But maybe he was called on too late, in December 1903, only two months before going on stage. Comelli, who lived in London, was too busy to produce fifty designs in record time and did not accept the burden of coming to Milan immediately to be put up to date on the project and work with the wardrobe department, the technical staff, the ones responsible for hair styles and shoes. 29 A youth, another of the Ricordi’s finds, on hand: Giuseppe Palanti. Palanti was the perfect problem solver: available, sociable, instinctively bound to satisfy the patron. He had risen from the ranks as a textile designer for the Scatti firm, and won Casa Ricordi’s trust with the costume plates for Verdi’s Luisa Miller, performed at La Scala in 1903, then for Franchetti’s Israël, and Un ballo in maschera again by Verdi. In Butterfly Palanti proved himself entirely up to the challenge. His costumes, inspired by Japanese prints or the photographs taken in Japan by Felice Beato, offered a refined colour harmony, sophisticated and varied: they lavished harmony, sophisticated and varied: they lavished

es and characteristic gracious line to capture in a poster, later become a legend, the dramatic centre of the opera: the sense of expectancy. Butterfly’s face is concealed, her pose unknown; the work comes directly from a Japanese source, an engraving provided by Ricordi, 26 but it is the use of colour and light that confers on this moment, where nothing happens because everything that happens is in the future, an aura of grief. Grief at being abandoned, hope, the illusion of a renewed life can all be read therein.

Metlicovitz also signed a series of postcards to be distributed in theatres, 13 and the reference image is the serene face of Rosina Storchio, who then heroically played Cio-Cio-San at La Scala, succeeding in reaching the end of the performance in one piece after an agony of insults “for a slightly striptease” 34 and jokes about the accidental bulge in her clothing (“Butterfly is pregnant!” 35). The press was on her side, as well as Ricordi and Puccini himself (“I think that Butterfly without Rosina Storchio becomes a thing without a soul”). 36 Metlicovitz turned her into an icon, made her coincide with the Japanese heroine. She would forever be the one to give a face to the seductive and abandoned geisha, even when she was not on the stage singing. Casa Ricordi had her photographed for publicity by the Varischi, Artico & C. studio. 37 It would still be Rosina Storchio who introduced Cio-Cio-San abroad for the first time in the course of a tour in Buenos Aires conducted by Arturo Toscaini (Teatro de la Opera, 2 July 1904). 38 And it was precisely with Madama Butterfly in December 1922 that Storchio said to the stage 28 with an unforgettable performance in Barcelona.

We all know how it ended. What perhaps played a role in the failure that befell Butterfly may have been the sum of influences and contaminations that drowned Tito II’s original idea, based on the authors of the staging of Butterfly had become eight. A ninth was needed to do the costumes, and Tito II Ricordi was once again responsible for the choice. The first costume plate designer he thought of was Attilio Comelli, a sound, trustworthy artist, quick, curious investigator of historic periods, as he had already shown at La Scala (1 March 1903) for the ballet Nel Giappone with choreography by Carlo Coppi and music by Louis-Gustave Ganne. His amazing costumes had been admired. But maybe he was called on too late, in December 1903, only two months before going on stage. Comelli, who lived in London, was too busy to produce fifty designs in record time and did not accept the burden of coming to Milan immediately to be put up to date on the project and work with the wardrobe department, the technical staff, the ones responsible for hair styles and shoes. 29 A youth, another of the Ricordi’s finds, on hand: Giuseppe Palanti. Palanti was the perfect problem solver: available, sociable, instinctively bound to satisfy the patron. He had risen from the ranks as a textile designer for the Scatti firm, and won Casa Ricordi’s trust with the costume plates for Verdi’s Luisa Miller, performed at La Scala in 1903, then for Franchetti’s Israël, and Un ballo in maschera again by Verdi. In Butterfly Palanti proved himself entirely up to the challenge. His costumes, inspired by Japanese prints or the photographs taken in Japan by Felice Beato, offered a refined colour harmony, sophisticated and varied: they lavished harmony, sophisticated and varied: they lavished
a Japan “in style”, the outcome of too many compromises: and yet it was the same Japan that the Brescia public saw in the new, three-act version with the same sets by Rota and Sogna and costumes by Palanti, that marked the beginning of the opera’s triumphal course. It may be true that works, once set on their course, lead their own life, part chance and part fate, which over the years shapes their physiognomy in unexpected ways. Abroad, chance and fate would lead Butterfly through many passages in the popular imagination, even the most paradoxical. In Buenos Aires in 1905, in the presence of Puccini, Antonio Rovescalli supervised the production signed by two Scala colleagues. Puccini appreciated Rovescalli’s work and had him stage Il Tabarro. In London, again in 1905, Camelli was forgiven for not having been available for the world premiere, and signed brilliant costumes for the sets by Rota and Sogna. From Milan the scale model for the set of the Second Act, paid in advance sixty pounds, arrived at Covent Garden. And even the first performance in English at the Lyric Theatre of London in 1907 would again use the sets by Rota and Sogna.

It was actually from London that the real success of Butterfly gathered momentum. It was there that an incomparable international popularisation began, involving everyone having to do with the show world, impresarios and experimenters. Two personalities, that could not be more opposed in training, character and taste, became especially enamoured of Cio-Cio-San. On the one hand the American Henry W. Savage, a former army colonel, businessman, owner of a dozen opera, operetta, ballet, and comedy companies; on the other Albert Carré, the powerful director of the Paris Opéra-Comique. They both recognised the greatness of the score, but above all they both wanted to appropriate it so as to reinterpret it in their own way.

Savage scented the business deal, obtained Puccini’s agreement and that of Casa Ricordi, and in 1906 organised an American tour that on paper looks like sheer madness. Six months of performances devoted solely to Butterfly, in English, “eight times a week”. All transported by special train, with the artists and the sets adaptable to every possible type of stage: from Washington (in October) to Baltimore, from New York (November) up to the Canadian border and beyond. All with the guarantee of a staging based on the original Japanese sources: more realist than the king (Tito II), Savage discarded the contribution of the “Columbia University professors as impure”. On the other hand Carré focused on the essence of the drama, and in Paris (1906) intervened in the Scala production for an independent revisiting observed by Puccini who, during the two months he spent in France to attend rehearsals, was first sceptical and bored, then depressed because he missed his Tuscan marshes, and finally enthusiastic. This time Tito II was unable to control Carré’s initiatives (for the Parisian premiere of Tosca he had sent him a memoir with detailed indications on the directing). And Carré changed a few stage elements, not to satisfy a decorator’s whim but to grasp the dramatic substance of the score with greater depth. He focused on the character and had her no longer appear from the holow of a path but on an arched bridge, as if it were her initiation rite.

In the Second Act Cio-Cio-San’s cottage was raised forty centimetres above the ground. It became a nest, sheltered and at the same time apart from the outside world: the elect place of a private tragedy. At the time of the conception of the libretto, Illica had sketched a few Indian ink designs, imagining Butterfly’s home surmounted by a vast opening onto a moonless sky. Now, the same home was closed upon itself, like a laboratory for producing dreams, a theatre within the theatre of Japanese or Western masks framing the character’s tragedy.
The park at Boulogne-Billancourt that belonged to the philanthropist banker Albert Kahn, packed with japonaiseries - the wooden bridge, the bamboo house with rush mats and sliding paper windows, the lanterns - became a convenient source of inspiration. The theatre scenographers, Marcel Jambon and Marcel Bailly, used them to make their sketches. The Parisian production looked ahead and opened a new path in the stage representation, leaving behind the criterion of historical verisimilitude that for Tito II was the only possible horizon. The final judgement was given by the critics who explained: “Il suffit de dire que M. Albert Carré a passé par là”, while Illica defined the Parisian version “logical, practical, and poetic.” And what about Puccini? In his words: “Carré changed almost everything, and it’s fine.”

The Parisian success of Butterfly was paradoxically a blow for the great productive machine coordinated by Tito II, while it satisfied Puccini’s deepest aspirations, as expressed in a letter in the same 1906 to D’Annunzio: “I do not want a realism […] but something in between that takes possession of the audience through the painful love story.”

Only a few years had gone by, and the intentions of Tito II, who wished to control every slightest detail in the visual aspect of the work, were entirely erased. The costume plates, copied in hand-coloured prints diffused in the leading theatres, were neglected, while the singers’ demands, the wardrobes, the budgets had to be satisfied. The project of Casa Ricordi’s heir actually ended up by being the privilege of those few who had had “the honour of a single performance.” Already in Brescia (28 May 1904) the colour harmony of Palanti’s costumes was ruined by the decision of the prima donna, the Ukrainian Salomea Kruscenski, to reject the outfit previously worn by Renata Storchio (who could not sing because on tour in South America). The new singer was appreciated, softened a slight stiffness (“she is excellent […] I see she is gradually becoming mellower”, commented Puccini), and triumphed, giving many encores. But the costume was no longer what Tito II had decided it should be. He was aggrieved, and in the pages of Musica e Musicisti published a picture of the diva wrapped in the “costume that we cannot truly praise as we happily do the performer.”

From that evening on the image of Butterfly became a contest of divas. At Covent Garden (1905) the singer from Prague Emmy Destinn was applauded for the fluidity of her voice and acting talent, unlike Angelica Pandolfini who at the Teatro Verme in Milan (1905) seemed to overdo it: “Too artificial, too affected in expressing joy and naiveté, too studied in her gestures. The simple and shy musmé should be given simplicity and shyness.” Marguerite Carré Glaud, the wife of the Opéra-Comique director, performed in the family theatre after having studied “attitudes, the way to walk, greetings, genuflexions, fan movements” with the Japanese actress Sada-Yoko. Her commitment did not make up for the weakness of her voice: “She struggles with obvious difficulties in technique and voice”, according to Illica. At the Metropolitan Opera House of New York (1907) Puccini was not pleased with Geraldine Farrar (“She sings flat and overdoes it, and her voice does not carry well in the huge receptacle”), but by then the opera had become distinct from its author and lived its own life: Farrar took over Cio-Cio-San, that “that impossible little thing, outside of lacquer and paint” as she was defined by John Luther Long in the story Madame Butterfly, Puccini’s source of inspiration, and made her a person aware of her own film star charisma. And what about the men? Around the heroine the men represent the obscure side of the opera, associated with the West. They are unable to bear with dignity Cio-Cio-San’s fecund and suicidal passion; they live on futilities and empty decorum. And in Madame Butterfly the West is scenically afflicted from the very start, as we shall
see, with a Freudian “bungled act” on which the mechanism imagined by Tito II stumbled. The first to decide to remove the scene set in the American consulate, present in Long’s story, was Puccini himself. It was there that Butterfly was a crucial moment, the passatempo of Tito II’s baton fell to the ground. Tito II was so obsessed by giving a credible aspect to Kate, Butterfly’s lover Corinna was over. Besides, the sentimental attachment between him and his former lover Corinna was over. In the night between the 25th and 26th of February 1903 he wrote to Illica on 13 March 1903: “While I am asleep I move about and the pain of the wound of the right hand that I sustained in a car accident on the night of 25 February 1904 is very strong. The maquettes di Jusseaume’s models are on their way to the Archivio Storico Ricordi. They were going to be made into a set design had been taken by the Archivio Storico Ricordi. The colour photograph of the Nagasaki Bay and approved work of art, and has made a great impression – Only the long format makes it very difficult to find the right place to affix it”, ASR, CLET000969.

19. Letter from Tito II Ricordi to Puccini, Milan, 27 November 1903: “With peppe we are putting the stage indications on the 2nd Act – as soon as they are ready we shall send them to you if they turn out as we imagined them”, ASR, CLET001069.

20. The colour photograph of the Nagasaki Bay and approved by Puccini to be made into a set design had been taken by the personnel of the costume “Vettor Pisani”. The original is held at the Archivio Storico Ricordi.

17. Ibid.

18. Letter from Tito II Ricordi to Puccini, Milan, 27 November 1903: “The maquettes di Jusseaume’s models are on their way and next week I meet with the Scala painters and Illica to set up the plans on the stage”, ASR, CLET000969.

19. In the night between the 25th and 26th of February 1903 Puccini, after a serious automobile accident requiring a long convalescence and bringing on moments of misery that slowed down the production of Butterfly, wrote to Illica on 13 March 1903: “While I am asleep I move about and the pain wakes me up. In short my life is terrible” in Eugenio Garin, Carteggi pucciniani, Ricordi, Milan 1958, letter 304, p. 215.

22. Besides, the sentimental attachment between him and his lover Corinna was over.

21. Puccini in an interview with Carlo Paladini published in the
he longed to return to South America. The opera was performed at the Teatro Colón on 4 June 1905, conductor Arturo Vigna. Starring Maria Ferrari (Madama Butterfly), Amadeo Basei (Pinkerton), Manuel Sarmiento (Sharpless).

3. London, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, 10 July 1905. (Italian version, in the absence of Puccini), conductor Cleofante Campanini; Starring Emilio Destefani (Madama Butterfly), Enrico Caruso (Pinkerton), Antonio Scotti (Sharpless), Garibay Lezun (Suzuki). Puccini will attend the London revival on 24 October 1905.

4. A unsigned letter to Ricordi’s branch office in London that acts as a go-between with Mr. Higgins of Covent Garden, 22 March 1905, ASR, CLET003197.


7. Ibid.

8. Paris, Opéra-Comique, 28 December 1906: (in the presence of Puccini), conductor François Rühmann, director Albert Carré, sets Marcel Jambon, Alexandre Bailly, costumes Marcel Mâle; Starring Marguerite Carrié Giraud (Madama Butterfly), Edmond Clément (Pinkerton), Jean Pierard (Sharpless), Berthe Lomare (Suzuki).


10. Letter from Puccini to Conte Giuseppe della Gherardesca, 8 December 1906, in Groos, cit., pp. 410-411.

11. Letter from Puccini to Alfredo Vani, Milan, 7 February 1906, and in New York with a British company directed by the impresario Savorgna”, in Cari, letter 444, p. 317.

12. Letter from Puccini to Tito I Ricordi, New York, 16 February 1907, ASR, LLET003148.


14. Letter from Puccini to Luigi Illica, 16 November 1902, in Cari, cit., p. 159.

15. Luigi Illica made three studies for Madame Butterfly’s house, the design for the scene at the Consulate, two studies of lanterns: “I join an “authentic” copy of a Japanese lantern”, letter from Illica to Giulio Ricordi, np., nd., ASR, LLET003192. The works belong to the Archivio Storico Ricordi.


17. Arthur Pougin, Le Ménestrel, 5 January 1907, pp. 3-5. (“We need only mention that M. Albert Carré had his son in it.”)

The soprano Rosina Storchio, who created the role of Butterfly, world premiere, La Scala, 17 February 1904

Butterfly, Act 1, costume design by Giuseppe Palanti, world premiere, La Scala, 17 February 1904

The soprano Salomea Krusceniski in the role of Butterfly, photograph by C. Capitanio, new version, Brescia, Teatro Grande, 28 May 1904

Butterfly with friends and kin, watercolor by Leopoldo Metlicovitz, 1904

Pinkerton, Act 1, costume design by Giuseppe Palanti, world premiere, La Scala, 17 February 1904.

The tenor Giovanni Zenatello, who created the role of Pinkerton, photograph by C. Capitanio, Brescia, 1904.

The tenor Enrico Caruso, the first Pinkerton at the Royal Opera House of London (1905) and at the Metropolitan Opera of New York (1907) during an ocean crossing, photograph by Studio Atlantic.

The soprano Emmy Destinn in the role of Butterfly, photograph by Johnston & Hoffmann, London, 1905.

Coiffures, prop designs by Giuseppe Palanti, world premiere, La Scala, 17 February 1904.
A page of Puccini’s autograph
full score with a stage indication
at Butterfly’s entrance with
the child, folio 228v.

Trouble, Act 2, costume
design by Giuseppe Palanti,
world premiere, La Scala,
17 February 1904.

The soprano Geraldine Farrar,
the first Butterfly at the
Metropolitan Opera of
New York, 1907.
Women's Chorus, Act 1,
costume design by Giuseppe Palanti, world premiere, La Scala,
17 February 1904
The Aunt with the little one, Act 1, costume design by Giuseppe Palanti, world premiere, La Scala, 17 February 1904

Details for Suzuki and the little one, prop designs by Giuseppe Palanti, world premiere, La Scala, 17 February 1904

Men’s Chorus, Act 1, costume design by Giuseppe Palanti, world premiere, La Scala, 17 February 1904

Kimono, prop design by Giuseppe Palanti, world premiere, La Scala, 17 February 1904
Butterfly, Act 1, costume design by Giuseppe Palanti, world premiere, La Scala, 17 February 1904

Litter and wicker palanquin, prop design by Giuseppe Palanti, world premiere, La Scala, 17 February 1904

Butterfly and Pinkerton, watercolor by Leopoldo Metlicovitz, 1904
In 1808, Giovanni Ricordi founded a music publishing firm in Milan that would significantly shape the cultural history of Italy and Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries: Casa Ricordi. It published the works of the “big five” composers of Italian opera – Gioachino Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti, Vincenzo Bellini, Giuseppe Verdi and Giacomo Puccini. From the beginning, all of the company’s documents were meticulously archived. The former business archives of the Casa Ricordi publishing company, which was acquired by Bertelsmann in 1994, have since become a historical archive: the Archivio Storico Ricordi, one of the world’s foremost privately held music collections, which is now housed in the Biblioteca Braidense in Milan.

The original scores of many operas of the 19th and early 20th century stored here, along with those of many other compositions, are highlights of European music history. In 2006, Bertelsmann sold its former music rights business to Universal, but retained the rights to the Ricordi brand and the publisher’s famous archives. The Archivio Storico Ricordi is under the special protection of the Italian Ministry of Culture. As a national heritage, the Archivio must remain in Italy.

After having been an integral part of Casa Ricordi for decades and being used primarily for commercial purposes such as the publication of “critical editions,” the archive has recently been undergoing an accelerated transformation into a historical research archive.

Since February 2011, a project group at Bertelsmann and the Ricordi team in Milan have been developing a sustainable concept for indexing the archival material and preserving it for posterity. Together, they are working on the continuous restoration and digitization of the archive. The idea is to develop the Archivio Storico Ricordi into a best-practice case in the field of communicating cultural and historical archive materials in the digital era, and to make its resources accessible to a wider audience besides the academic community.

Bertelsmann is a media, services and education company that operates in about 50 countries around the world. It includes the broadcaster RTL Group, the trade book publisher Penguin Random House, the magazine publisher Gruner + Jahr, the music company BMG, the service provider Arvato, the Bertelsmann Printing Group, the Bertelsmann Education Group, and Bertelsmann Investments, an international network of funds. The company has 117,000 employees and generated revenues of €17.1 billion in the 2015 financial year. Bertelsmann stands for creativity and entrepreneurship. This combination promotes first-class media content and innovative service solutions that inspire customers around the world.

The Archivio Storico Ricordi: a Bertelsmann project