

By Jeanné McCartin for Seacoast Online

Opera is not about knowing Italian or German, and not about a certain education - though that's a common misconception. It's art that, when done right, bypasses the intellectual and goes directly to the soul. Case in point, the Granite State Opera's "Madama Butterfly."

The language barrier is of little importance. "Madama Butterfly" is a simple tale after all; easily told in a few sentences. And it's performed in the universal language of melodic voice and musical instrument, which speaks the tale's feelings. That language, in the case of beautifully executed opera, means power vocals, the art form's greatest gift.

Granted, it's not just any voice that performs it. To be truly effective, the performer's instrument must reach places with a strength and assuredness that pulls in the listeners and holds them no matter the words. Once again, mission accomplished by GSO.

The tale is set in Nagasaki, Japan, circa 1904. A U.S. Navy lieutenant marries a Japanese woman, which provokes her family to cut her off. He leaves on duty. She waits. He returns three years later with an American wife, to find he has a son with the Japanese wife, who he was sure would have forgotten him by now. He asks for the child. The boy's mother complies, then commits suicide. Ahh the stories operas are made of.

If for some reason you wanted to know the words sentence by sentence as you listened, all you needed to do was look above the stage where a screen ran the story in English.

"Madama Butterfly's" popularity isn't due to the simple tale but to its bounty of moving arias. I do not claim to be able to critique opera singers, but to say they were successful at moving the audience with clear, powerful, beautiful notes - that I can.

Theresa Cincione as Cio-Cio-San, the young bride, was a large part of this memorable production's success. The emotional intent is unmistakable. Her fear, happiness and pain were deeply touching. The vocals, simply spectacular, and soaring. Her acting performance followed suit.

Arnold Rawls did an equally impeccable job as the military man Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton. Beautiful vocals, perfect performance.

Steven Carpenter as Goro, the marriage broker, was the only comedic character in the cast. Again it was a great all around performance, vocally and physically. Philip Lima as Sharpless, the U.S. Consul in Nagasaki, left a deep mark. Not only does he have impeccable vocals, but his portrayal of this sincere character was very touching. The same can be said for Janice Edwards, Cio-Cio-San's loyal maid; a masterful performance. The remainder of the performances, through to the ensemble, support the production perfectly.

Artistic Director Philip Lauriat stands at the head of it all. He conducted the production and its 31-member orchestra. What a wonder. Note for note they moved through the piece, an enthralling voice that spoke poetically and directly to the gamut of feelings.

Granite State Opera's "Madama Butterfly" has finished its two-night Portsmouth/Concord run, but it leaves great promise for "Carmen," rumored to be the next production. Whether you have ever imagined yourself in a seat at the opera or not, you may want to give it a try. Chances are, like the cast and orchestra of "Madama Butterfly," they'll win you over. If you are already a fan, this will truly delight.