Madama Butterfly

An opera in three acts
Sung in italian with English supertitles
Music by Giacamo Puccini

Libretto by Luigi Illica (prose text) and Giuseppe Giacosa (verses) Based on the play Madame Butterfly by David Belasco, after a story by John Luther Long

Giacomo Puccini experience recurrent difficulty in choosing opera subjects. In his mid-forties, at the height of his success after *Manon Lescaut*, *La Boheme*, *and Tosca*, he settled at length on a play he had seen in London – American playwright David Belasco's adaptation of *Madame Butterfly*. Though he understood almost no English, he instinctively felt the appeal and sentiment of the story. It took time to secure rights to the play, and for his librettist, Illica and Giacosa, to fashion a text.

Belscosa's play capitalized on the turn-of-the-century vogue for picture-postcard views of Japan. Taking the *Butterfly* story from the magazine novella by John Luther Long. Belacosa had transformed it with virtuoso stagecraft.

Perhaps because of its fragile atmosphere and intimate lyricism, *Butterfly* offered a perfect excuse for demonstrators jealous of Puccini to turn its premiere at La Scala on Feb. 17, 1904, into a fiasco. Neither a fine cast – Rosina Storchio, Giovanni Zenatello, Giuseppe De Luca – nor the authority of Maestro Cleofonte Campanini availed. The composer made revisions, redeeming his favorite piece with a second "premiere" at Brescia on May 28, 1904. The first American performance was in Washington D.C., in English in 1906. *Butterfly* bowed in Italian at the Met (supervised by Puccini) on Feb. 11, 1907, with Farrar, Homer, Caruso, and Scotti, under Arturo Vigna.