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Chautauqua Opera Features A Real Rotter

By ROBERT W. PLYLER

CHAUTAUQUA – This year, Chautauqua Opera has planned a season of productions which are built around “Bad Boys”.

This week, they’re featuring a real rotter: Lt. Benjamin Franklin Pinkerton of the U.S. Navy. The result is one of the most dramatically successful productions of Puccini’s *Madam Butterfly* which I have ever seen.

The opera is one of the most frequently produced. It tells of Cio-Cio-San, a young Japanese girl of age 16, who is known as Madam Butterfly. The ugly American goes through a wedding ceremony with her, and allows her to reject her religion and her family for his sake, when he intends all the time to abandon her, when his assignment in the port of Nagasaki is over.

When he leaves her, he lacks the courage to admit what he is doing, so he tells her he must go away, but will return. When he learns she is waiting in utter poverty for his return with the child they conceived he wants others to tell her the cruel truth,

including that he plans to take away her child.

Much of the production’s success is due to the sensitive acting of Jee Hyun Lim as Butterfly and Jae-Eun Paik as Suzuki. Both women sang well, but their strongest performance was the grace with which they balanced the inner strength and innocence in their characters.

Richard Crawley was excellent as the wretched Pinkerton. He sang well, with a powerful top to his voice, and he didn’t try to soften the lieutenant’s faults, as so many tenors do, which made the plot work so much better than usual.

Todd Thomas was also strong as Sharpless, the American diplomat who tries to prevent this great tragedy.

Conductor Dean Williamson and the Chautauqua Opera Orchestra were strong accompanists. For a while, they overwhelmed the singers, but

Ron Kadri’s set was lovely and captured well the delicacy of the home he was representing. Michael Baumgarten’s lighting was always matched to the mood.

The costumes by Adrienne Webber and Malabar were among the strongest production values. The grace with which the principal women moved within their beautiful clothes was truly beautiful.

Jay Lesenger directed with great sensitivity. When a plot is so familiar it’s easy to allow the cast to walk through it, or try exotic and unsupportable twists. This was really involving and moving.

Madam Butterfly was reviewed in dress rehearsal, at the company’s request. It will be performed Friday and Monday evening, in Norton Hall, on the grounds of the Chautauqua Institution.

they were solid and dynamic throughout and by the beginning of Act II, were in fine sync with the singing on stage.

IN REVIEW
