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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

Madama Butterfly

Burg Gars, 01.08.2026 [ENA]

The new *Madama Butterfly* at Oper Burg Gars is a production that understands Puccini's opera not simply as a sentimental tragedy, but as a finely balanced study of hope, illusion and cultural collision—and it realises this understanding with striking musical and theatrical coherence. Set against the atmospheric backdrop of Burg Gars, the staging gains an almost cinematic depth.

The open-air environment amplifies the opera's sense of exposure and vulnerability, turning *Butterfly*'s house on the hill into a place that feels both sheltered and precariously exposed to the world. Musically, the evening is anchored by Karsten Januschke's conducting, which shapes Puccini's score with notable clarity and emotional intelligence. Tempi are flexible without becoming indulgent; orchestral colours are allowed to bloom, yet the balance with the singers remains largely transparent. The famous love duet of Act I unfolds in a single, long arc of accumulating warmth, while the vigil scene in Act II is paced with an almost unbearable slowness that honours Puccini's daring use of time as expressive material.

Under Januschke's direction, the orchestra never merely accompanies; it comments, underlines and occasionally contradicts what happens on stage, mirroring *Butterfly*'s gradual awakening from dream to disillusion. At the centre of the production stands Eugenia Dushina's *Cio-Cio-San*, a portrayal that has already been singled out as "großartig" in early responses—and with reason. Vocally, she offers a radiant, finely focused soprano, capable of floating the long lines of "Un bel dì vedremo" with both youthful brightness and a hint of steel that prefigures the character's final act of self-determination.

Dramatically, Dushina charts *Butterfly*'s trajectory with impressive nuance: her Act I is genuinely girlish, impulsive and full of faith; by Act II she carries a quiet, almost ritualised dignity, and in the final scene she achieves a concentrated intensity that makes the ending feel inevitable yet still profoundly shocking. Matthias von Stegmann's staging avoids exoticism in favour of a cleaner, psychologically oriented visual language. The "two worlds" that the theatre's own description emphasises—Japan and America, tradition and modernity—are rendered through contrasts of space and costume rather than through heavy scenic symbolism.

The Japanese setting by David Gamel, Laura Madge Hörmann and Miriam Hygen is suggested with economy: sliding panels, subtle references to garden architecture, and a disciplined use of colour in the kimonos. Pinkerton's world performed by Gabriel Arce, by contrast, manifests in uniforms, objects and

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gestures that cut into the delicacy of Butterfly's environment. This visual strategy reinforces the dramaturgy: the intrusion of the foreign is seen as a disruption of texture rather than a picturesque addition, echoing Puccini's own use of pentatonic themes and "foreign" harmonies as destabilising forces within his late-romantic idiom.

The supporting cast contributes strongly to the sense of a living social fabric. Clemens Unterreiner is fantastic. His Sharpless is shaped as a genuinely conflicted figure, his interventions weighted by a warm baritone and a restrained physical presence that suggests long-standing diplomatic fatigue. Daria Sushkova as Suzuki emerges not merely as a servant but as Butterfly's emotional barometer, her darker timbre and grounded stage deportment providing a counterpoint to Cio-Cio-San's soaring lines and forward-leaning hope. Christian Drescher as Goro and the relatives are drawn with attention to detail, ensuring that the wedding and renunciation scenes register as complex social events rather than mere plot machinery.

One of the production's most compelling achievements lies in how it handles the opera's problematic aspects—orientalism, gendered power dynamics—without didactic overlays or heavy-handed updates. By emphasising Butterfly's inner life and the structural imbalance between her fragile universe and Pinkerton's casual entitlement, Stegmann and Januschke make the critique emerge from within the original score and libretto. Pinkerton is not caricatured, but his charm is shown to be hollow, his "American" optimism indistinguishable from irresponsibility.

In this context, Butterfly's faith reads less as naïveté and more as an act of radical trust in a world that has not earned it—a choice whose tragic consequences the production makes painfully clear. Overall, Oper Burg Gars' Madama Butterfly is an example of how a canonical work can feel freshly urgent without conspicuous conceptual rebranding. The combination of a superb central performance, sensitive conducting and an intelligent, uncluttered staging brings Puccini's opera into sharp contemporary focus, allowing its emotional and ethical questions to resonate strongly in the open air of Burg Gars.

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