

THEATER

MOT's 'Madame Butterfly' delicate and heart-rending

"Madame Butterfly" continues at the Detroit Opera House 8 p.m. April 23-24 and May 1, 2 p.m. April 25 and May 2. For ticket information, call (313) 237-SING (7464), all Ticketmaster locations or by calling Ticketmaster at (248) 645-6666.

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER
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Puccini's "Madame Butterfly" has long been one of the most popular works in the operatic repertoire for its heart-rending portrayal of love and trust brutally betrayed.

The Michigan Opera Theatre's current production is so lush, delicate, precise and believable that it would draw a rush of tears from the most hardened heart.

"Butterfly" is the source for the hit musical "Miss Saigon" and tells a simple but gripping story. The year is 1904 and a callous but charming American naval lieutenant marries a beautiful, naive 15-year-old Japanese geisha Cio-Cio-San in a ceremony that he mocks. After he has



False love: Francesco Grollo as Lt. Pinkerton takes the hand of bride Cio-Cio-San, Sun Xiu Wei in the MOT's "Madame Butterfly."

abandoned her to return to the United States, she bears his son, knowing in her heart that her Lt. B.F. Pinkerton will return.

But when he does, it is with his American wife and plans to take his son, driving Butterfly to her last desperate act of ceremonial

suicide.

At the heart of this fine production on Saturday's opening night was Chinese soprano Sun Xiu Wei, who is not only a magnificent singer capable of soaring and beautifully controlled high notes but also an actress of fine both joy and anxiety in a few facial and hand gestures. Her *Un Bel di Veremo* is incredibly moving.

Francesco Grollo drew a hearty round of boos as he took his bows, a tribute to his perfect Pinkerton, all swag, arrogance and, ultimately, cowardice in facing his deceit. Grollo's huge tenor embraces the rich romantic charm that makes Pinkerton's deception so real. He also took the part of a young naval lieutenant and acts with the easy "we rule the world" attitude that was just beginning to make "ugly Americans" a common phrase.

The love duet here is a complex well of conflicting emotions that are vividly conveyed by these two outstanding performers.

Victor Ledbetter brings

warmth, rectitude and a deep sense of maturity to the role of the American consul Sharples, using his voice to brilliant effect. Kathleen Segar handles the emotional role of Suzuki with admirable restraint and then finally succumbing to a voice that pierces.

"Madame Butterfly" is Puccini's most melodious, sweeping and emotional opera. The music is rich, inventive, playful as it incorporates Japanese folk music and American marches. The orchestra, under Steven Mercuro, is in top form, drawing all the many nuances and warmly

supporting the leads. The choral work is excellent.

Mario Corradi's direction is as delicate, suggestive and beautiful as a Japanese painting. The end of Act II is especially effective.

Zack Brown's simple set of Cio-Cio-San's house and the lighting of Kendall Smith add to the perfection of this production.

Sun Xiu Wei and Francesco Grollo sing the leads April 24 and May 1. On April 23, 25 and May 2, the roles of Cio-Cio-San and Pinkerton will be sung by Natalia Dercho and Carlo Ventre.



GALLAGHER II

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'Rocky Horror' full of haunting surprises

Meadow Brook Theatre presents "The Rocky Horror Show" through Sunday, May 9. A special late-night performance will take place 10:30 p.m. Saturday, May 1. A costume contest will precede the show. Tickets \$24 to \$36, call (248) 377-3300. Student and group discounts available.

MARY JANE DOERF

SPECIAL WRITER

If there are any Rocky virgins still lurking around, Meadow Brook Theatre is spreading its luring fishnet to catch them with a terror treat — the stage version of "The Rocky Horror Picture Show."

This rock musical, which is still touring after 25 years, is full of fiendishly funky good fun on the normally respectable Meadow Brook Theatre stage.

For his swan song, artistic director Geoffrey Sherman has come up with a "faster your seat

belts" horror spoof about the 1950s passion for RKO midnight "B" rated double features.

There are some wonderful surprises in this production of the "Rocky Horror Show." Meadow Brook Theatre regular Paul Hopper dons spiffy red bell bottoms as he brings out an Elvis voice that he's been hiding in the Coke Cola cooler all this time. John Michael Manfredi, another familiar face, may be embarking on a new career playing Drag Queens. So inciting is he as transvestite Frank-N-Furter, the alien spy from the Transylvanian galaxy, Manfredi stimulates the audience into a rousing "Time Warp" dance.

If you don't know the dance, neither does the straight couple Janet Weiss and Brad Majors at first. Actors Janet Caine and Scott Crowner do know all of the right moves as these two Denton High School delinquents

on their way to see their high school science teacher, Mr. Scott, when a flat tire on a stormy night diverts to Dr. Frank-N-Furter's unfriendly castle.

Something should have told them all was not right when the hunchback Riff-Raff (John Michael Norman) answers door, and doesn't show them to the phone. Freddy helps Columbia and Magenta take the couple's clothes not just their wet coats.

As the narrator, David Regal's dark and powerful voice warns the audience of foul play, but Janet and Brad don't want to get the message and are beguiled by Frank and Frankenstein Place where lingerie is the raging fashion.

Science fantasy has helped Dr. Frank create Rocky, played by gym enthusiast Jeff Applegate, as his perfect playmate. But, Frank hasn't heard of cloning, and Rocky is more interested in Janet.

The Fishnettes Band lead by Tim Link on the keyboards including Mike Dungan, Tim Baum, and Dave Legacy, make the music a listenable experience.

The tunes are very humble though some might refrain from singing the lyrics.

Caine ("Touch A Touch Me"), Crowner ("Once in a While"), and Applegate are especially good singers. Although he claims he is not a singer, Manfredi sings the show for applause with "Going Home." Susan Taran-Kobler and Jodie Kuhn Ellison are strong as Frank's helpers Magenta and Columbia.

Taran-Kahler does a wonderful opener with the song "Science Fiction" and has fun bringing this thrillerless thriller to its final conclusion.

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