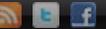


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Opera San Jose Presents – Madama Butterfly

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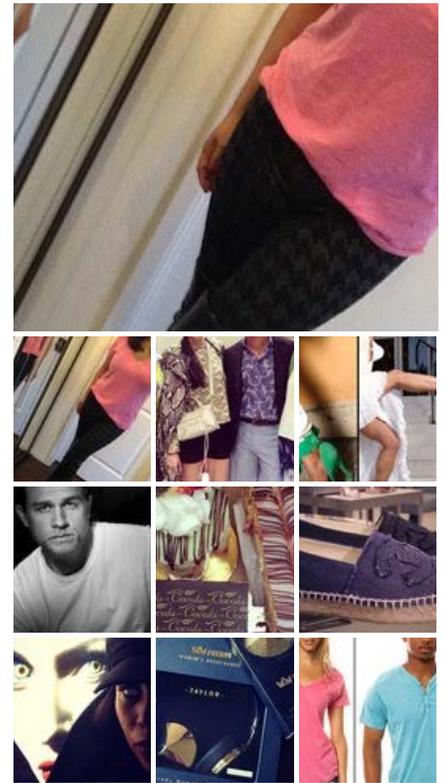
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I have fantasized about seeing the opera since I saw Pretty Woman over 20 years ago. The glamour, the romance, the emotional reaction – it has always held so much appeal. Come to think of it, maybe it was the amazing dress and the beautiful jewels Richard Gere gave to Julia Roberts before they set off for the night that made me want to go so badly. Whatever the reason, I am happy to have finally had the chance to see the opera this past Saturday for the opening night of Puccini's Madama Butterfly presented by Opera San Jose.



Set in 1890's Japan, Madama Butterfly tells the story of an American soldier, B.F. Pinkerton, serving overseas. While stationed in Japan he decides to take a bride, Cio-Cio San(Madama Butterfly) for convenience. With no intention as keeping her as his bride forever, Pinkerton ships off to sea and eventually marries an American wife. Left behind in Japan, dutifully awaiting the return of her husband, Cio-Cio gives birth to a son. Told in three acts, the story develops, ultimately ending in tragedy.

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As a new comer to opera, I was stuck by the sheer beauty of the entire evening. The recently restored California Theater is a fantastic performance venue and transports you back to a time when people relished putting on their nicer clothes to go out for the evening. Under the dramatic ceilings and meticulous décor, hundreds of well-dressed opera patrons stood around in elegant gowns and tuxedos sipping champagne before the performance. Glamour: check. As the lights dimmed and the performers took the stage, I found myself torn. On the one hand, I wanted to see the performances and take in the scenery and costumes. On the other hand, I wanted to know the story and kept watching the supertitles. By the end of the 1st act, I was so enthralled with the beauty of the production, I forgot to look up. The performances were so strong, you didn't need to know what exactly they were saying / singing to know what was happening.



During the second act, Cio-Cio San (played on this night by Jennifer Forni) delivered an amazing aria. Her voice was so powerful and enchantingly beautiful, there was no way to think she was feeling anything but the raw emotion Cio-Cio San was experiencing in that moment. Her performance was truly breath taking. By the end of the final act, I was vacillating between closing my eyes to let the music sweep me away in emotion and leaning forward in my seat to watch what was unfolding. The fact that I already knew the story and the outcome did nothing to detract from the beauty of the performance. Overall, I have to say it was a fantastic production and has made me a lover of opera.

The only thing that could have made the evening more enjoyable was if my husband would have presented me with the gorgeous red gown and jewels before heading out. I suppose there is always next time. Madama Butterfly is playing now through March 2, 2014 at the California Theatre, 345 South First Street. Tickets are on sale at the Opera San Jose box office, online at www.operasj.org or by calling (408) 437-4450.





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