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LA Opera Presents the Return of Landmark Robert Wilson Staging of Giacomo Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*

**Music Director James Conlon to Conduct,
with Soprano Liping Zhang Making Company Debut in Title Role**

Wednesday, October 1 – Saturday, October 18

(Los Angeles, CA) September 16, 2008 – LA Opera's 2008/09 Season continues with the return of Robert Wilson's highly theatrical and visually stunning interpretation of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. The celebrated Chinese soprano **Liping Zhang** makes her Company debut as the trusting Japanese bride Cio-Cio-San, with tenor **Franco Farina** returning as her faithless American husband, B.F. Pinkerton. Soprano **Michèle Crider**, who made her 2005 Company debut in the title role of *Aida*, will sing the role of Cio-Cio-San on October 18. The cast also features mezzo-soprano **Catherine Keen** and baritone **Stephen Powell** as Suzuki and Sharpless on October 1, 5 and 8, with **Ning Liang** and **Vladimir Chernov** performing those roles October 10 through 18. LA Opera Music Director **James Conlon** conducts the LA Opera Orchestra and Chorus, and the production is directed and designed by **Robert Wilson**. *Madama Butterfly* features set design by **Stephanie Engeln**, costume design by **Frida Parmeggiani** and lighting design by **A.J. Weissbard**. The associate director is **Jean Yves Courregelongue**.

Madama Butterfly opens on Wednesday, October 1, 2008 at 7:30pm and runs for a total of seven performances. Evening performances take place on October 10, 15 and 18 at 7:30pm. Matinee performances take place on October 5 and 12 at 2:00pm and on October 8 at 1:00pm. Performances take place at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 135 North Grand Avenue, Los Angeles CA 90012.

"LA Opera has become quite well known for its emphasis on dramatic vitality and theatrical presentation," said **Plácido Domingo**, who holds the title of Eli and Edythe Broad General Director of LA Opera. "Nowhere is this more in evidence than in this striking production, which pairs Puccini's incomparably

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beautiful music with some of the most stunning imagery ever seen on the operatic stage. *Madama Butterfly* may be one of the most frequently performed of all operas, but this extraordinary interpretation is one of a kind.”

When LA Opera presented the American premiere of this visionary staging of *Madama Butterfly* in 2004, it became one of the most talked about artistic events of the season. The production, which broke box office records, was successfully revived in 2006. Mr. Wilson’s interpretation of the beloved Puccini opera was first unveiled in a 1993 Paris production and instantly hailed a modern classic. His refined and austere staging, with stunning lighting effects and a set constructed of natural materials – wood and stone – help rediscover the story’s Japanese atmosphere and underscore Puccini’s heart-rending music. This simple, yet powerful account of a trusting young woman who commits herself to a man unworthy of her loyalty finds new life and new meaning in broad, bold strokes.

Robert Wilson’s work integrates a wide variety of artistic media, combining movement, dance, painting, lighting, sculpture, music and text into a unified whole. His opera *Einstein on the Beach*, written with composer Philip Glass, achieved worldwide acclaim and altered conventional perceptions of opera. Other landmark productions include the epic *the CIVIL warS*, *Salome* at La Scala, *Parsifal* in Hamburg and Houston, *The Magic Flute* and *Madama Butterfly* in Paris and *Lohengrin* at the Metropolitan Opera. He staged Wagner’s *Ring* cycle for the Zurich Opera and for the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris. Extensive retrospectives of his drawings, furniture designs and installations have been presented at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. He has also mounted installations for Giorgio Armani at the Guggenheim Museums in New York and Bilbao. His recent work in Los Angeles includes LA Opera productions of *Madama Butterfly* (2004 and 2006) and *Parsifal* (2005) and a 2006 staging of *The Black Rider* presented by Center Theatre Group at the Ahmanson. Each summer, Mr. Wilson develops new work at the Watermill Center, a theater laboratory in Long Island which brings together students and experienced professionals in an environment dedicated to creative collaboration.

A series of outstanding interpretations in both the *bel canto* and lyric repertoire have established Liping Zhang as one of opera’s leading international sopranos, with engagements at Covent Garden, the Metropolitan Opera, the Opéra de Paris, the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona and the Deutsche Oper Berlin. Over the next few seasons she will return to Covent Garden as Micaëla in *Carmen*, to Paris in *Madama Butterfly* and the Metropolitan Opera as Liu in *Turandot*. Liping Zhang came to international attention in the role of Cio-Cio-San (*Madama Butterfly*), which she has sung at Covent Garden, Den Norske Opera, the Metropolitan Opera, the Opéra de Paris, the Gran Teatre del Liceu Barcelona and at the Deutsche Oper Berlin. Future engagements include Cio-Cio-San in Marseille, Munich, Cincinnati, Paris, Bari, Como, Cremona, Pavia and Brescia; and Micaëla in *Carmen* at Covent Garden and the Cincinnati Opera Festival.

Giacomo Puccini first came into contact with the story of *Madama Butterfly* at a performance of David Belasco's play *Madame Butterfly* in 1900. He immediately recognized the musical possibilities of the plot and of the juxtaposition of American and Japanese culture, and his opera premiered at La Scala in Milan on February 17, 1904. Throughout 2008, LA Opera has been celebrating the 150th anniversary of Puccini's birth, with celebrated productions of *Tosca* and *La Rondine* presented during the 2007/08 season, and with a new production of *Il Trittico* staged by filmmakers William Friedkin and Woody Allen to open the current season.

Madama Butterfly opens on Wednesday, October 1 at 7:30pm with additional evening performances on October 10, 15 and 18 at 7:30pm, and matinee performances on October 5 and 12 at 2:00pm and on October 8 at 1:00pm. Performances will be held at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion, 135 North Grand Avenue, Los Angeles, CA 90012. Tickets to *Madama Butterfly* range from \$20 to \$250, and are on sale at the LA Opera Box Office, by phone at (213) 972-8001 or online at www.laopera.com. For disability access, call (213) 972-0777 or e-mail wehelpyou@laopera.com.

**Original production made possible by a generous gift from
Robert V. Adams and Barbara Abercrombie, and by additional support from
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Pre-performance conversation with James Conlon, hosted by Alan Chapman, will take place before each performance. Pre-performance lectures are generously sponsored by the Flora L. Thornton Foundation and the Opera League of Los Angeles.

Madama Butterfly Opera Talks

Members of LA Opera's Speakers' Bureau will be giving free 50-minute talks on *Madama Butterfly* at libraries throughout Los Angeles County. These lively and engaging talks will explore the various aspects of Puccini's beloved opera. *Madama Butterfly* opera talks will be held at Claremont Library at 2:00pm on Saturday, September 27 and at Porter Ranch Branch Library at 6:30pm on Tuesday, October 7.

Artist headshots can be found on the LA Opera Press Gallery:

<http://media.laopera.com/photo/?level=album&id=28>

Synopsis can be found on the LA Opera website:

<http://www.laopera.com/productions/0809/butterfly/index.htm>

Madama Butterfly will be sung in Italian with English supertitles projected above the stage.
This is an LA Opera original production.

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