

Carolina!

On Butterfly's Wings

'Madama Butterfly' weaves intricate web of desire, suicide

By NIGEL RAVENHILL
Staff Writer

Last week on Assembly Street, I saw a woman take her own life. Scorned by an adulterous husband and faced with giving away her only child, she stabbed herself to death.

I couldn't see much blood or gore because her back was to me, but I knew she was dead. The tragedy followed a two-hour prelude in which the tension rose amid the failed, promised and unrequited love of two people whose lives really didn't add up to more than a hill of beans.

Butterfly had to kill herself to end the pain of abandonment at the hands of a cad, the unfeeling, selfish, immature rogue-of-a-Navy sailor, Lieutenant Pinkerton. This has gone on for years as audiences continue to flock to Puccini's "Madama Butterfly."

The New York City Opera brought its touring company to the Koger Center last week for a single sold-out performance of Puccini's masterpiece. Complete with the backing orchestra, they presented a solid, though unspectacular, performance to a very appreciative audience of finely dressed South Carolinians.

"Madama Butterfly" is a simple tale of a 15-year-old girl who falls for the slick romance of a sailor, Pinkerton, who is temporarily stationed at Nagasaki. Feeling bored and seeking to fill his time in a somewhat pleasurable way, he retains the services of a marriage broker to secure a Japanese wife.

In so doing, he admits to the American Consul that his Japanese marriage is only a temporary respite from the heat and humidity. Upon his return to the United States, he promises to enter into a real marriage with an American woman.

And so the die is cast for the unfolding of a tragedy that would surely inspire the lyrics of some country-western song. Ample fodder for Patsy Cline, the deceit is mournfully expressed in an operatic equivalent of "Your Cheatin' Heart."

After an expectedly romantic celebration and carnal escape, Pinkerton bids adieu to his Asian conquest and leaves Butterfly alone, amid vain promises to return for an eternal embrace of conjugal bliss. Not surprisingly, the wait becomes an interminable period of introspection and innocence with Butterfly naively clinging to her hopes and fantasies. They weren't in the cards.

Refusing to accept a marriage offered from the marriage broker, Butterfly struggles onward facing threatening poverty and the responsibility of raising a little boy, the result of an errant sperm finding direction during a night of passion with Pinkerton.

Things are not very cool and matters are pressing when Pinkerton's ship anchors in the harbor at the end of the second act. With new wife in tow, the philandering showman arrives at Butterfly's house to claim his child.

Suddenly, the grief of his treachery overcomes him, and he dissolves into a pool of guilt, carrying on like Jim-



The New York City Opera National Company performed 'Madama Butterfly' at the Koger Center.

my Swaggart at a confessional. It's actually a very funny moment as he rails against the cowardice that caused all of this in the first place.

Butterfly finds all of this personal remonstrance too much to bear and kills herself in the bedroom that she once shared with a sailor who promised her a rose garden.

For \$17 with a student ID, this was a good deal. While it wasn't Placido Domingo and Kathleen Battle, it was a solid return on your money and a great opportunity to impress a date with a cultural event other than "Naked Gun 33 1/3."

The economics of dating are an important consideration, and this would have been a strong choice. If you went to the Carolina Cup and spent \$10 for a ticket and \$5 for parking, it would be like just getting drunk in Five Points. But this is drama, pathos, catharsis, denouement (words we once understood in high school) and classical music all rolled into one succinct package.

To paraphrase Nike, "just do it," and you will have little regret.

The next bargain cultural event is a performance of Verdi's "Un Ballo in Maschera," playing at the Koger Center April 29 and May 1.

Ace of Base ABBA for '90s

By BRIAN GARLAND
Assistant Carolina Editor

Ace of Base is the decade's answer to ABBA. Keep reading because the music, however, is cool.

No offense, ABBA fans. I probably say the above because both groups come from Scandinavia and ABBA has experienced a revival recently, especially in Europe. But Ace of Base's first American album, "The Sign," combines techno and reggae to make a tremendously unique sound that has already given them much success here.

For instance, the album is now No. 1 on the Billboard Top Albums Chart, and the title cut is currently No. 1 on the Top 40 Singles chart. Face it. The band is hot.

"The Sign" has been out since last year when its first single, "All That She Wants," a monster hit all over Europe, crossed the Atlantic and hit U.S. airwaves, quickly reaching the top five on the charts.

"All That She Wants" opens up the album with a catchy reggae beat and a simple tune that will have you singing along, if you haven't been singing it already. But if you didn't get enough of it, the last track is the "Bangra Version." Imagine hearing this song walking through the streets of Calcutta, and this is what you get.

Incidentally, is "Wants" a song about a woman who cannot be trusted or welfare reform ("All that she wants is another baby.")? Movin' right along...

The second track, "Don't Turn Around," is a well-written song with a light reggae beat that is about a girl who frees her boyfriend from their relationship.

Knowing the light reggae rhythms of "The Sign" come later on, one wonders by the third track if all Ace of Base does is just one style. Well, "Young and Proud" dispels the notion with a hard techno beat and hard lyrics. "Waiting for Magic" and "Dancer in a Daydream" are other examples of Ace of Base's techno sound, filled with drum programs (that sometimes change during the song) and keyboards galore.

Someone with a good ear might



recognize "Voulez-Vous Danser" from the movie preview of "Monkey Business" played on television. Though the keyboard sequences on this and other songs seem elementary and childish at times, they show the all-out fun the album wants to convey a feeling of. "My Mind," a mostly instrumental dance track, for instance, jumps out at you literally at one spot with a single gutting bass sound that vibrates around you and makes you wonder if you dropped something.

Four more songs on the project are in the light reggae style: "The Sign" (which you've probably heard. If not, it's a nice song.), "Living in Danger," "Wheel of Fortune" and "Happy Nation." The last is the most impressive. It starts off with an ethereal solo keyboard. A bassline and drum track join in, followed by a Gregorian chant, like Enigma, but with females and more lyrics. English lyrics follow the Latin verse and finish out the song. It's almost gripping.

Ace of Base's "The Sign" is a fun album with techno, reggae and dance rock all in one. People may classify their reggae sounds with Inner Circle's mainstream dance reggae, but don't expect a Jamaican accent. Expect Swedish, or is it Danish? And don't expect hard techno because the fastest song is probably 120 beats per minute. And Ace of Base is not like C & C Music Factory or Snap's synthpop either.

This album is a "sign" of how Ace of Base's unique sound can be well-made and fun at the same time. "All that you want" is more of it.



File Photo

Julliard's Battersby to perform at USC

From staff reports

Pianist Edmund Battersby will play Rachmaninoff's "Piano Concerto No. 2 in C Minor," and Gordon Goodwin's "Palmetto Symphony" will be re-introduced to a local audience when the USC Symphony plays its final concert of the season at 7:30 p.m. April 14 in the Koger Center.

Battersby, a graduate of The Julliard School, has an extensive repertory and appears in concert with orchestras and in recital in the United States, Europe and South America. He has recorded works by Rachmaninoff and Enrique Granados on the Koch International label.

Battersby has recorded the works of Schumann and Chopin on a replica of Conrad Graf's 1825 Viennese Pianoforte for the Musical Heritage label. His interest in the history of the piano also led him to

play the 1854 French Erard piano belonging to Prince Albert and Queen Victoria in recital at The Smithsonian in Washington.

"Palmetto Symphony" was first played in Columbia in 1988 by the S.C. Philharmonic. Composer Goodwin, a long-time faculty member of the School of Music, is active in regional pops, jazz and classical music activities. He is also on the faculty of the Conductors Institute of South Carolina.

The USC Symphony, directed by Donald Portnoy, will open the April 14 program with Beethoven's "Egmont Overture."

Tickets are \$11 for general admission seats and \$6 for students and senior citizens. Tickets are available in advance at the Coliseum box office and will be available in the Koger Center lobby the day of the performance.

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