

### Liping Zhang reviews

#### **Madama Butterfly / The Metropolitan Opera**

A compelling Cio-Cio-San, the geisha of the title, is crucial; both Cristina Gallardo-Domâs and Patricia Racette have handled the role memorably in this staging. Liping Zhang, a Chinese-Canadian soprano who has sung the part at the Met and elsewhere around the world, was an arresting presence. She sang vividly and affectingly, and acted with palpable commitment. – **The New York Times**

The opera's libretto...reminds us insistently that Butterfly is a child, and Zhang, a petite woman, was completely credible as the girl Cio-Cio-San...Zhang's Butterfly was never coquettish. She was dignified in her first exchanges with Pinkerton...solemn in her avowals of devotion - and alone, dreadfully alone, whether pursued by her husband or clinging to her maid Suzuki in an embrace that is not returned. One might prefer a touch more tonal heft at the climax of *Che tua madre*, but Zhang sang Puccini's music on her own terms and with wrenching understated mastery. Her reticence in relating her father's end (a shift of the head, a staccato 'Morto') told more than any bit of scenery-chewing. Her *Un bel di* was intimate and conversational; and the *lighe* simply drained away from her voice when Sharpless hinted that Pinkerton might not return. Zhang's engagement with the text was spellbinding throughout, and those early unhappy moments aside, her singing was always musicianly and often meltingly beautiful. – **TheClassicalReview.com**

#### **Madama Butterfly / Los Angeles Opera**

Debating soprano Liping Zhang, already famous in houses here and abroad, is the Butterfly of anyone's dreams: lithe in looks and in voice, utterly moving in joy and anger. – **Variety**

In the second act, with Pinkerton back in the U.S., Zhang found her center and was a wonder. "Un bel di," her aria imagining a new life, was sung without excess. Zhang transported herself to the future through utter stillness, and this stillness

prepared her for her later suicide. Wilson separates voice from gesture. The quieter and more effortless Zhang's poses became, the more luminous her voice. – **Los Angeles Times**

It soars, too, in the person of Chinese soprano Liping Zhang, acclaimed in many international houses, making her L.A. Opera debut. Her silvery soprano seems like one more beam of light in Wilson's visual planning. Her gestures, too, mirror Wilson's obsession with meaningful movement. Near the opera's end, she meets the American woman who has replaced her in B.F. Pinkerton's embrace. Kate Pinkerton extends a hearty American handshake; Butterfly, a confused small movement. Their very contrast epitomizes the East vs. West impossibility. It foretells the dismal future that awaits the small boy who must now accompany his daddy to America. – **Bloomberg.com**

#### **Madama Butterfly / Covent Garden**

Returning to the role of Cio-Cio San, which she sang when the production was new, Liping Zhang is entirely compelling in her every move, and in the perfectly integrated expressive range of her silk-spun soprano. – **The Times**

Already a veteran of the present production, the Cio-Cio-San of Chinese soprano, Liping Zhang remains astonishing. This portrayal is as affecting as any currently before the public, believable even in her death throes when she is required to flutter her kimono sleeves as if trying vainly to fly. – **The Stage**

Chinese-Canadian soprano Liping Zhang is a terrific Butterfly, singing beautifully and convincing us that she is a vulnerable child. – **musicOMH.com**

Liping Zhang (Butterfly) looks frail and vulnerable but her clean, bright voice has the unstoppable power of a supertanker, and even two slips of tuning on opening night didn't dampen the thrilling total impression of passion and innocence. – **Bloomberg.com**

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## For Singers

It is ironic that the Chinese-Canadian soprano Liping Zhang is singing *Butterfly* in it now, as she gave her first performances of the role in Gubbay's rival production. Zhang has moved on since then and deservedly so. She has already appeared in the Royal Opera's *Madama Butterfly* four years ago and her return for the current set of performances finds her sweet virtues largely unchanged – a natural portrayal...and with much limpid, beautiful singing. – **FT.com**

This third revival is further distinguished by the return to the title role of Chinese-Canadian soprano Liping Zhang, who recently made so much of the thankless part of Micaela in *Carmen*. As Cio-Cio-San, tripping about lightly, almost balletically while singing with full-throated ease, she interacts touchingly with Alan Opie's agonised Sharpless – **Anthony Holden, The Observer**

*Butterfly* herself is rightly at the centre of this production, and Liping Zhang returns with unforgettable presence to the role...Anyone wanting a grand diva interpretation may be disappointed. But in every other way, Zhang is *Butterfly* - by turns a fragile, determined, shy, steely girl/lover/mother/victim, whose fluttering, exotic little dance in the first act becomes a womanly dance of death amid the shattering discord with which Puccini ends his tragedy – **Martin Kettle, The Guardian**

The Chinese-Canadian soprano Liping Zhang returns to the role of Cio-Cio-San, bringing to it a winning combination of creamy tone and touching fragility. – **Evening Standard**

From the tentative girl of the first act, she develops into the tragic heroine who believes her “husband” will come back to her in the soaring aria *One Fine Day*. It is a powerful performance, deservedly applauded. – **Sunday Express**

As the doomed heroine, Liping Zhang has the advantage of looking convincingly young. Supposedly only 15 when she takes the fatal step of marrying Pinkerton and naïvely believing in their exchange of vows, Zhang was

able to convey youthful vulnerability without affectation. She moves gracefully and comports herself graciously. Her gradual realisation of the reality of her situation towards the end of the opera was heartbreaking, as were the scenes with 'Sorrow', her son, excellently acted by Alex Roberts. For one comparatively slight in build, she has surprisingly powerful reserves of volume, which she deployed at the appropriate moments. She avoided the optional – though arguably necessary – top D flat at the end of her entrance scene, but provided a powerful top C at the climax of the love duet. – **Classical Source**

### **Carmen / Covent Garden**

The most satisfying member of this cast, Liping Zhang, makes Micaela into a figure we respect and are moved by, quite a feat considering how insipid she can so easily become. – **The Spectator**

Liping Zhang was exceptional as Micaela: sweet-toned and a self-possessed actress, her aria was the evening highlight – **musciOMH.com**

Liping Zhang is excellent as Micaela. – **Bloomberg.com**

The Micaela of Liping Zhang was beautifully sung. – **FT.com**

Liping Zhang is a gentle and beguiling Micaela. – **The Lady**

The Chinese-Canadian soprano Liping Zhang's Micaela makes much more of this tricky role than did Norah Amsellem. – **The Guardian**

Two other [singers] were a bonus: Chinese soprano Liping Zhang, as Micaela, and Laurent Naouri as an equestrian Escamillo. – **The Evening Standard**

Another casting improvement is Chinese soprano Liping Zhang as a sweet-voiced, appealing Micaela. – **The Sunday Express**

### **La Boheme / Covent Garden**

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I was delighted to encounter her lovely, stylishly sung Mimi here: she has clearly been listening to Freni - no better model - to judge by her subtle and idiomatic use of portamento, but this was no carbon copy and she had plenty of vocal swell for *Il Primo bacio del aprile e mio* from her Act 1 narration and emotional depth in her Act 3 farewell. – **Hugh Canning, Opera Magazine**

### **La Boheme / Michigan Opera Theater**

Vocally, Saturday belonged to soprano Liping Zhang, as Mimi. She brought a beautifully-controlled legato, delicate strength and sweetness to the love duets and her final act, sung mostly from bed, grabbed the heart-strings. – **Mark Stryker, Detroit Free Press**

### **Lucia di Lammermoor / Covent Garden**

Above all, Liping Zhang gave us a heroine of exceptional eloquence and intensity, no drooping lily but a vital, suffering, deeply touching creature whose élans and agonies raised the work momentarily to a higher plane. Her Lucia can be heard again on Wednesday (10 December) and should not be missed. – **David Cairns, the Times**

Liping Zhang, sharing the role with Andrea Rost, sings her last performance on Wednesday 10 December. Catch it. The voice is lyrical rather than legiero, full, warmly covered, agile in the coloratura and triumphantly devoid of shrillness in the highest reaches. An actress who gives her all, she seems - to judge by the first-night reviews - to have galvanised the cast. Catch Liping Zhang as Donizetti's fragile heroine on Wednesday before Andrea Rost returns. – **Martin Hoyle, Time Out**

### **Madama Butterfly / Opera de Paris**

Liping Zhang (Cio-cio san) chante avec une finesse et une grâce envoûtantes. Techniquement, on imagine la difficulté de chanter cette musique passionnée en gardant des poses figées. Il est difficile pour un chanteur de ne pas accompagner son chant avec le corps et l'on sent par moment la tigresse qui se retient ! Quoiqu'il en soit, elle est une brillante Butterfly. – **musicrelax.com**

La distribution de cette reprise, en revanche, n'apporte pas de surprise excessive. Ce qui étonne

dans la voix de la jeune Chinoise Liping Zhang, qui aborde ici le rôle de Cio-Cio San, c'est qu'elle n'a strictement rien d'exotique. C'est au contraire une voix taillée pour les grands rôles verdiens ou véristes du répertoire, aux graves profonds de toute beauté, aux aigus efficaces. Tout juste lui reprochera-t-on une certaine irrégularité du souffle, qui semble par moments accuser la fatigue d'un rôle énorme. Que ce soit le duo du premier acte, le fameux *Un bel di vedremo*, mais surtout l'adieu de Butterfly à l'enfant et à la vie, la soprano tient le fil du rôle-titre avec une émotion constante. – **altamusic.com**

Liping Zhang est une Butterfly de grande classe! Elle assume la partition avec une solidité vocale confondante, parvenant à nuancer de mille couleurs sa voix et son interprétation. Dès son entrée en scène elle aborde fièrement la musique avec une voix franche et légèrement vibrante, donc vivante. Son approche du personnage est très recherchée et elle parvient à peindre une jeune fille forte, résolue dans ses actes (le dernier air "tu, tu, piccolo Iddio" est d'une incroyable émotion) mais également fragile quand il s'agit de donner tout son amour à Pinkerton: le duo du premier acte est d'une magnifique pureté. Scéniquement la fin est surprenante et on approche de très près le drame: Butterfly n'a pas d'arme tranchante pour se tuer donc elle simule le geste et s'effondre avec des soubresauts de douleur concordant avec les "Butterfly" de Pinkerton. Tour à tour jeune fille, femme, victime sacrificielle, etc...Liping Zhang peint toutes les Butterfly qui se trouvent en un même corps. – **concertonet.com**

### **Madama Butterfly / Michigan Opera Theater**

Like few other operas, Puccini's "Madame Butterfly" depends on the vocal and dramatic prowess of its title character. And in soprano Liping Zhang, the Michigan Opera Theatre production that opened Saturday night at the Detroit Opera House boasts a Butterfly who does more than carry the show; she represents the world standard. This is a singer, indeed a theatrical experience, not to be missed.

The Chinese-born Zhang is a petite woman with a huge voice that she applies with consummate

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understanding, elegance and technical means. She commands the stage every moment she's on it, and Puccini doesn't give Butterfly much time off. It's hard to know which to admire more, the purity and majesty of Zhang's singing or the subtlety and discipline with which she traces Butterfly's course -- from a breathless 15-year-old geisha on the day of her wedding to an American naval officer, next to an abandoned young mother resolute in her confidence that her husband will return, and finally to a disillusioned woman who has lost everything and sees an honorable death as her only option. – **Detroit News**

Yet with Chinese soprano Liping Zhang making her MOT debut as Cio-Cio-San on Saturday, the generic qualities floated away on the wings of her extraordinary performance.

Zhang has a light to medium-weight voice with an alluring, velvety texture, an effortless legato, limpid beauty and a full range of modulated colors. In the long love duet with Pinkerton in the first act and the signature "Un bel di" in the second act, her phrasing intensified the climaxes in thrilling but tasteful fashion. Her voice lost none of its suppleness or clarity at soft dynamic levels.

A wisp of a woman, Zhang is that rare Butterfly who actually suggests the teenager described in the libretto. And she found a quiet, dignified way of expanding her body language to transform herself from a trusting girl into the stoic adult who chooses death with honor over life with dishonor. – **Detroit Free Press**

### **Turandot / Covent Garden**

With Li Ping Zhang's lovelorn Liu, though, sweet drama and music came rolled into one. Her part's vocal perils left her unscathed; each word struck home in the heart in a way no one else's ever did. At the curtain calls, she enjoyed all the fervent applause. - **Geoff Brown, The Times**

Li Ping Zhang as the slave girl Liu, who provides the evening's most rewarding vocal performance with her beautifully spun lines and soft high notes - **Erica Jeal, The Guardian**

The show is stolen, as so often, by its pure-voiced winsome Liu, the Chinese soprano Li Ping Zhang - **Anthony Holden, The Observer**

The biggest round of applause went to the Liu of Li Ping Zhang, whose sumptuous soprano had us hanging on her every note - **Malcolm Hayes, The Sunday Telegraph**

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