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Giacomo Puccini

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Giacomo Puccini : Madama Butterfly (Ricordi Opera Full Score) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Madama Butterfly (Ricordi Opera Full Score):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. 4 1/2 stars -- the best "Butterfly" on record?By Stanley Crowelf
Puccini is taken to be a veristic composer, then "Butterfly" is surely his most veristic opera -- at least it strikes us as such today, in an age of sexual tourism in East Asia and the sexual exploitation of children. It's less an exploitive opera than an opera about exploitation, and Puccini and his librettists seem to have understood that very well. Very skillfully composed, with its lyrical elements cunningly integrated into an almost conversational vocal texture, "Butterfly" for me is simply harrowing -- the Act 2 conversations and the lead up to the revelations in Act 3 are so matter-of-fact and yet very emotionally engaging, to an extent that, looking back, one sees the emptiness of the rapturous lyricism of Act 1, as deeply and ironically expressive of Pinkerton's carelessness and Butterfly's credulity. The musical texture looks forward to "La Fanciulla del West," and it bespeaks Puccini's developing control of his musico-dramatic means. However one judges Puccini as a composer, one can't help but acknowledge his skill and his growth, and in my judgment, he's at least as worthy of regard as Richard Strauss and Britten. This recording, from 1957, does the opera justice in all but sound -- it does show its age a bit, and orchestral color and choral presence are more muted than would be the case in a more recent recording, but the voices are well-caught, and Erich Leinsdorf moves things along with appropriate efficiency. Anna Moffo, at about 25, gives here her finest performance on record -- credibly naive in the early going, emotionally on the edge throughout, and with a range of expressive inflection that always seems right in the moment. Cesare Valletti, her Pinkerton, is superb -- while lacking the vocal glamor of a Bergonzi or a Pavarotti, he reveals the character's shallowness and cowardice in the final scenes with great power. It's probably his best

recorded performance too. Renato Cesari, a singer hitherto unknown to me, is just right as Sharpless. This is a role where vocal resplendence isn't the point, and Cesari gets at the decent helplessness of the man. Rosalind Elias is excellent as Suzuki -- in some ways the handsomest voice in the cast, but dramatically on point at all times. When one considers that Tebaldi, Price, de los Angeles, and Freni have all taken this role, it might seem that this is the glamorless "Butterfly," the poor relation, so to speak. But it's as good as any of them, and for my taste, better than most.