



Blown away by a splendid Butterfly

OPERA

Madama Butterfly
Supreme Court Gardens
Review: Rosalind Appleby

If it wasn't for the wind it would have been the perfect night. More than 15,000 people crowded on to rugs and chairs in the Supreme Court Gardens for WA Opera's most sociable event of the year.

People from all walks of life experienced the intimacy and dramatic power of opera, in a glorious free performance of Giacomo Puccini's tragic romance Madama Butterfly for the annual Opera in the Park.

The roaring easterly created havoc with rubbish, rugs and music equipment, but the singers and orchestra seemed unperturbed.

Tenor Angus Wood as Pinkerton was just the sort of dashing soldier a girl would fall for with his honeyed voice and chiselled features.

Aivale Cole, as the Butterfly enticed by his charm, sang with sweet girlishness.

Her lyric spinto soprano had a rich lower register that extended into a light top end, with throwaway high notes that made top D flat sound

easy. Her voice blended beautifully with Wood's and they created a musical romance that was entrancing as they sung their love duets accompanied by the luxurious sound of the orchestra.

Unfortunately, as Butterfly's family and friends predicted, their love was not to last.

As the easterly picked up, sending flowers scudding across the stage, we watched Butterfly's life get torn apart.

Cole grew increasingly charismatic as Butterfly, her voice stretching out into long voluptuous phrases, her face alternating between stern dignity and ecstatic anticipation of Pinkerton's return. The depth of character she portrayed bodes well for the dramatic role of Aida she will be singing later in the year.

Puccini gave some of his best love songs to the orchestra (some might be familiar because they were borrowed by Claude-Michel Schonberg and Alain Boublil in their musical equivalent, Miss Saigon).

The WA Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Imre Pallo, came sweeping in at all the right moments with luscious melodies. Pallo allowed plenty of space for his singers and provided a steady anchor point for orchestra and chorus.

The WA Opera Chorus were suitably vindictive relatives and serene hummers (in that famous Humming Chorus). Giving support to the two lead singers were Sarah-Janet Dougiamas as the loyal servant Suzuki, Andrew Foote bringing years of experience to the role of Pinkerton's friend Sharpless, Justin Freind as a comically whining Goro and James Clayton impressive as The Bonze.