

From Rupert Christiansen's review in 2007

There are few things in my job more exciting than being blown away by something you thought you knew backwards and weren't wildly looking forward to.

But that was my happy experience in Leeds, where Opera North's terrific new *Madama Butterfly* reduced me to jelly and forcefully reminded me that this is a work of consummate theatrical genius – Puccini's masterpiece, and one of the defining artworks of the 20th century.

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As starkly designed by Hildegard Bechtler, with reference to the layout of classical Noh drama, it takes place in a grey and brown world, bleached of Technicolor Japonaiserie, where it's not hard to believe in *Butterfly*'s impoverishment.

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Anne Sophie Duprels' wonderful portrayal of Cio-Cio-San doesn't have the radiance of voice for "Ancora un passo" or the sheer weight for the climax of the duet with Pinkerton.

Nor does she choose to suggest the possibility that *Butterfly* is not just innocently deluded but a psychotic obsessive, whose suicidal violence could as easily have been inflicted on her son or husband as on herself.

But she sings with great sensibility and warmth, colouring the text responsively and shaping the phrases with musicality. Her *Butterfly* isn't so much a geisha locked into submissiveness as a naive teenager who simply can't believe that the man she loves didn't tell her the truth.

For sheer sweetness of personality, for sheer pathos, I have seen few to match her.