

Excerpt Terms & Conditions

This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity of scripts.

Family Plays

BUTTERFLY

Kabuki-style drama by **Jerome McDonough**

After Long, Belasco and Puccini



BUTTERFLY

Kabuki-style drama. By Jerome McDonough. Cast: 15+ actors, flexible. Madame Butterfly, one of the world's great love stories—and one of the most tragic—has gone through many transformations. While the other treatments have Westernized the story to some extent (Puccini's opera uses European music), Jerome McDonough focuses on Japanese characteristics and traditions, and he has incorporated one of the most horrible events the world has ever known: the explosion of the atomic bomb over Nagasaki. This version begins in 1938 when an American unites in a Japanese marriage with the geisha, Butterfly. For him the union is merely a pastime; for her it is life itself. When he leaves without her, she waits faithfully for him to keep his promise to return. From her house overlooking the harbor of Nagasaki, she and their son watch for his ship. The date is December 6, 1941—the day before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. He finally does return to the devastated city after World War II has ended, and he finds ... ? *Approximate running time: 35 minutes. Code: BK2.*

McDonough provides extensive production notes, in this case suggestions for giving the performance a kabuki flavor. Western devices and styles are interspersed, giving the play a definite multicultural slant, but one overriding tenet guides everything—portray a “Japanese” feeling. A one-act play in three scenes: Nagasaki, Japan, in 1938, 1941 and 1946. Extensive, detailed production notes in the script include properties, costumes, make-up, lighting, music, character names and setting with a picture of the original production.

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098-3308
Phone: (800) 448-7469 / (815) 338-7170
Fax: (800) 334-5302 / (815) 338-8981

www.FamilyPlays.com

ISBN-10 0-88680-390-X
ISBN-13 978-0-88680-390-2



9 780886 803902 >

Butterfly

BUTTERFLY

Adapted by

Jerome McDonough

After Long, Belasco, and Puccini

Family Plays

311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by FAMILY PLAYS without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website www.FamilyPlays.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: FAMILY PLAYS, 311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

© 1993 by
JEROME MCDONOUGH

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(BUTTERFLY)

ISBN: 978-0-88680-390-2

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author(s) of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author(s) *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author(s), if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

“Produced by special arrangement with
Family Plays of Woodstock, Illinois”

Dedication

**To Rebecca Harrison, a woman of constant vision, faith and trust.
We love you, Becky.**

And to the members of the original cast:

**Claudia Rodriguez, Vernon Evans, Tina Stratton, Jennifer Cordova,
Kristie Elliott, Claire Foulliaron, Jennifer Tamplen, Sean Marra,
Cheyenne Yost, Chris Scheetz, Jeremy Hoffman, Bobby McMillan,
Oliver Taylor, Matt Sherman, and Robby Taylor**

**Special thanks to
Cindy Hoffman, Costume Mistress**

BUTTERFLY

Dramatis Personae (In Order of Appearance)

[Phonetic pronunciation of names appears in brackets]

- GIDAYU [gih-DIE-you]—Narrator/stage director*
TRADER—American military officer
MEIJI [may-EE-gee]—A marriage broker*
SEWAMONO [say-wah-MOE-no]—Butterfly's maid servant
FAUBION—American diplomat*
BUTTERFLY—The geisha
JUSTICE—A civil official
ATTENDANT—The Justice's assistant*
COUSIN—Relative of Butterfly*
TOKUGAWA [toe-koo-GAH-wah]—Butterfly's uncle, a traditional Japanese
ARAGOTO [a-rah-GO-toe]—Japanese military man
LITTLE BOY—Son of Butterfly and Trader (played by adult chorus member in kneeling/seated position)
BOLEYN—Trader's American wife
THE OTTOKE [oh-TOE-kay]—The chorus. (They play several roles, including Butterfly's ancestors. They may be double cast with some characters above. A minimum of three performers is recommended)*

* May be portrayed by male or female performer

Place: Nagasaki, Japan

Time: Scene 1—1938

Scene 2—1941

Scene 3—1946

ABOUT THE PLAY

The variations on the story of Butterfly, the geisha, have been many in her approximately one century of life. The young woman has been the central figure of a John Luther Long novella, a David Belasco turn-of-the-century one-act play, and a (some would say THE) classic Puccini opera, all entitled *Madame Butterfly*. Other variations of the story under various names pop up frequently on stages around the world.

The script you now hold, entitled simply BUTTERFLY, finds the geisha trapped not only in her tragic marriage, but within the very bowels of the most devastating Oriental-Occidental confrontation in history, World War II and its atomic bombs. The physical time frame of this play is 1938 through 1946, but the relationship of Butterfly and the American, Philip Trader, becomes a metaphor for Japanese-American relations from the touching of Japan by Admiral Perry in the mid-nineteenth century to, by extension, our own day. Good and ill, both intentional and unintentional, find equal representation in each camp.

BUTTERFLY is not a lament for a world in which love and caring must inevitably be trampled under the heel of self-interest, but an attempt to hold that world up to a light which will render the repetition of it unthinkable.

Performance Style

The production style of this script was inspired by and owes much to the Japanese Kabuki theatre. Western devices and styles are interspersed, giving the play a definite multi-cultural slant, but one overriding tenet guides everything—portray a “Japanese” feeling.

Even moderate research by you, the producer, into the treasure which is the Japanese classical stage will yield many ideas to incorporate within your production of BUTTERFLY.

The Chorus—OTTOKE

A visible Oriental stage crew is utilized in BUTTERFLY. The members are called “Ottoke,” a Japanese term for small sacred figures which represent the forebears, the ancestors of the family. In addition to playing small parts, performing physical tasks, and representing scenery, the Ottoke chorus serves a function similar to their namesakes—a sort of overhanging, ever-present sense of the culture’s past.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Properties

An old maxim in the Theatre is, "Either mime everything or use ALL props." Actual props are vital in BUTTERFLY. To keep things manageable, however, the script was evolved with an eye to minimizing their number. All are chosen to create a "Japanese" tone. The prop list is as follows:

Large fan for GIDAYU

Fan for BUTTERFLY

Fan for SEWAMONO

Fan for MEIJI

Fans, flowers, and pillows for the OTTOKE

Low reading table and formal "script" for GIDAYU

Two glasses and a tray for MEIJI

Basket for BUTTERFLY, containing her treasures:

A locket

A hand mirror

Two Ottoke (ancestor figures)

Small telescope

Ritual Suicide Knife*

Extra knife blades*

The BOY's crematory urn

Marriage contract and pen for JUSTICE

Large fan or ritual sword for TOKUGAWA

Trader's letter for FAUBION

Fan for ARAGOTO

A red poppy for BUTTERFLY, carried by SEWAMONO

Long red sash for BUTTERFLY

*The original production utilized a small Japanese ritual knife from which the blade could easily be removed. Four thin metal replacement blades were made in two parts each and "spot" welded to hold them together until Butterfly broke the blade at the conclusion of each performance. The two halves were then re-welded for re-use at a later time. Several spare blades were kept in the basket at all times.

Costumes

The gamut of the Oriental and the Western theatre traditions is the spectrum of BUTTERFLY costume choices. Most companies will choose some variation on the Kabuki theme and only research will yield a deep enough knowledge to help with the myriad decisions involved. A full Kabuki approach would yield a truly striking production.

One low-cost option for costuming is based on simple “kimonos.” **Butterfly** and **Sewamono** wear kimonos made with stock fabric store patterns. The wide “obi,” worn about the waist, is made from a strip of the same material. **Butterfly**’s basic kimono is white silky material. She adds a floral kimono as a robe or dressing gown for Scene 2. During the transition from Scene 2 to Scene 3, she removes the robe and ties the bright red sash about her waist, over her obi, knotting it in front in near-martial style. **Sewamono** wears the same floral kimono and obi throughout the play.

The **Ottoko** wear a black tunic—or “karate gi”-length top tied with a long belt of the same material, and black pants. Costume accessories suggest the non-chorus parts which each portrays. **Gidayu** wears the basic **Ottoko** outfit, with the addition of a bright red wide-shouldered overlay top.

All Japanese characters work in white-stockinged feet or appropriate Japanese footwear.

Trader dresses as an American military man of the era and **Faubion** as an American diplomat. **Boleyn** is an American officer’s wife, circa 1946.

Make-Up

At least some nod to the formalized Kabuki make-up should be included in the BUTTERFLY make-up plot. Full white faces would probably be too much, but flashes of color, particularly in the **Ottoko** and the characters of **Butterfly** and **Sewamono** will help to convey the ambiance of the play. Standard make-up texts and pictorials on the Kabuki theatre will have many suggestions.

Hair styles and hair considerations are another area in which classical sources should be consulted. For example, there are no blonde Japanese. Full traditional wigs or hair styles are not necessary, but ignoring the issue of hair is sure to diminish the play’s effectiveness.

Lighting

BUTTERFLY's lighting, like that of much of the Oriental stage, is simple. A backlight, rich in reds and blues, provides the opening and closing environment. A small area light keys Gidayu at Down Right. A general full stage setting covers all other action. The "Hanamichi" area may be dark, or lighted by house lights.

Music

Something very unusual in the history of the Butterfly epics is called for in this script—Japanese music. All of the music which is associated with previous incarnations found its basis in the Western, which is to say European, tradition.

Employing a live kotoist or other Japanese traditional instrumentalist is an obvious first choice, but most communities find these musicians in short supply. The rise of the compact disc recording medium has made a great deal of authentic "world" and "international" and "cultural" music available. Most larger music stores should have something which will work.

Selections should be basically slow and pastoral. At some points in the play such songs set the tone. At other times, their gentleness seems incongruous and ironic. Both effects are intentional.

There may be a temptation to use music from previous variations on the Butterfly theme. This is not a viable option. BUTTERFLY does not take place in a Europeanized Japan. BUTTERFLY's Japan is the one which experienced the earth's first epidemic of radiation poisoning.

Character Names

Here's a challenge. I am not going to reveal what the Japanese or American character names mean or represent. I will provide a few hints, however. All are related to:

1. The Japanese Theatre (Kabuki, Noh, other) or
2. Japanese-American history and relations or
3. Anglo-American history (one name only)

Anyone who can name all of the sources and the reason for the choice and use of each name will receive—absolutely free—the sincere congratulations of the author.

"Arigato"—that is, "thanks," once again, to all of you.

—Jerome McDonough

Setting

The traditional choice for the setting is the so-called “little house,” a Japanese dwelling with sliding paper walls. This type of realistic setting will certainly work for BUTTERFLY.

The original production, on the other hand, took a “unit set” approach, suggesting and paying homage to the Kabuki theatre. The main set was entirely symmetrical and faced the audience squarely. (See photos of the set model below.) Two ramps formed a low peak in front of a large rectangular platform. Two smaller square platforms were balanced on the left and right edges of the large platform and on two-step units at Stage Left and Stage Right. Another large rectangular platform upstage was raised one foot above the other. Small two-step units were placed Up Center on each large platform. Upstage of this principal unit were several tall pylons arranged to suggest an Oriental arch. This unit was diagonal to the main unit. The Stage Right (audience’s left) theatre aisle served as the “Hanamichi”—the traditional entryway of the Kabuki stage.

BUTTERFLY

Scene One Nagasaki—Summer, 1938

[MUSIC begins—traditional Japanese music played on koto, shakuhachi flute, shamisen, or some combination of these. (If music is performed live, musicians are seated at Down Left or on a sidestage Down Left.)

AT RISE, the interior of the little house can be seen, illuminated at first by a pleasant backlight, perhaps a pale pink formed by reds and blues. (The house may be accurate or suggested by an arrangement of platforms, steps, ramps, and pylons. See photographs in the Production Notes following the script.)

If a modified traditional Japanese Classical approach is employed, the OTTOKE (Chorus) and GIDAYU (Narrator) now enter down the Stage Right aisle from the back of the theatre, suggesting the traditional "Hanamichi" entrance position to the audience's left. (Full traditional style brings all characters in from the Hanamichi—but this script utilizes standard Western proscenium-arch stage directions and devices from now until just before the final exit.)

GIDAYU takes a seated position behind a low reading table far Down Right or on a Down Right stage. The OTTOKE may perform a brief ritualistic dance, in perfect unison, before moving to kneeling/seated positions Down Left and Down Right of the principal performance area or they may move directly to these places. Brightly colored opened paper fans, sprays of spring flowers, and small pillows mark each Chorus Member's location. The OTTOKE wait, hands in laps, motionless. GIDAYU's AREA LIGHT comes up. MUSIC under]

GIDAYU. The Tragedy of Butterfly. Summer, 1938, by Western reckoning. The harbor city, Nagasaki.

[Main stage LIGHTS up as TRADER approaches led by MEIJI, the marriage broker]

MEIJI. *[Indicating the little house]* Choose this arrangement or adapt it as you wish.

TRADER. And the bridal chamber?

MEIJI. [*Indicating locales, perhaps shifting a wall*] Here or here.

TRADER. Ah, the walls shift. A home of smoke.

MEIJI. As granite—ground to beam.

TRADER. A painting of granite, perhaps.

MEIJI. [*Gesturing for servants, changing the subject*] Sewamono, the servant.

SEWAMONO. A smile, your honor? It is said, "A smile banishes all sadness. It cracks the shell to free the pearl." [*MEIJI dismisses her*]

MEIJI. All is in readiness for the bride's approach. [*Seeing the procession*] They all come—the Justice, Consul Faubion, the family. A minor contract signing and you are wed.

TRADER. Do I join a large family?

MEIJI. Only a mother, a grandmother, assorted cousins, plus her uncle, the powerful Tokugawa—but we will not be bothered by him this day. As to descendants—you and Butterfly determine that.

FAUBION. [*Entering, winded*] What a devilish climb!

TRADER. Meiji, some refreshment for the Consul. [*MEIJI exits*]

FAUBION. Nagasaki—the beauty of your harbor!

TRADER. And look—a magic house. Mine for a thousand years, less one, and the contract is burnable at any time. Japanese homes *and* legal agreements yield to the slightest pressure.

FAUBION. A system you could easily profit by—or use to unfair advantage.

TRADER. I roam the earth for business, like any American—and for touches of pleasure, no matter the risks. Life is empty if you ignore any flower, any type of flower—in any place.

FAUBION. A carefree philosophy, my friend. But it could be dangerous to your heart.

TRADER. An American heart is more hearty than that. But celebrate my Japanese marriage—contracted for a millennium, less a year. With freedom as near as my whim!

FAUBION. This Butterfly—is she pretty?

MEIJI. [*Re-entering, presenting cups*] As a flowered wreath or the heavens. So are all of my clients. [*Aside to Faubion*] And, dear consul, another such loveliness could be yours for a most modest fee. [*NOTE: Cut this last sentence if FAUBION is played by a woman*]

TRADER. Enough commerce, Meiji. Convey my Butterfly to me.
[MEIJI exits]

FAUBION. So, have you found love?

TRADER. Love? Fantasy? Who is to say? Perhaps the flame is her innocence. She is like a delicate crystal or a brushstroke. Yet, the painting moves—a butterfly's motion. She must be mine.

FAUBION. And if you crush her?

TRADER. No one takes greater care of the butterfly than the fancier.

FAUBION. She visited my office this morning. We didn't meet, but her speech bled through the walls. Only true love speaks that way. Take care with her.

TRADER. Don't worry, Faubion.

FAUBION. *[Toasting]* A toast to your family, far away.

TRADER. And to a genuine wedding with a genuine Yankee bride—may that day come soon. *[FAUBION looks troubled, but before he can speak, MEIJI re-enters, speaking]*

MEIJI. *[Ushering BUTTERFLY on]* Butterfly.

BUTTERFLY. *[Carrying flowers and a small box which contains her treasures]* Spring kisses the sea and land. And the most fortunate woman in Japan and the earth. I approach the door of love—where happiness resides—in life. Even in death.

TRADER. I hope the climb was not too difficult.

BUTTERFLY. *[As SEWAMONO takes the box from her]* Much easier than a moment spent away from Mr. Philip Trader.

TRADER. I thank you.

FAUBION. Butterfly—a charming name. It fits you perfectly. Are you from Nagasaki?

BUTTERFLY. I am. From a once-wealthy family. Yet tempests may bring any household low. To support ourselves, we turned to the world of geisha. It does not shame me. Life often moves in such ways.

TRADER. *[Aside, to Faubion]* She speaks like a porcelain child. My desire races.

FAUBION. Do you have sisters?

BUTTERFLY. My mother only.

FAUBION. And your father?

BUTTERFLY. With his ancestors.

FAUBION. You seem so young.

BUTTERFLY. I am fifteen. Already old.

TRADER. Fifteen.

FAUBION. The age of playthings and tarantellas. *[The marriage OFFICIALS and the rest of the RELATIVES approach—played by the OTTOKE]*

MEIJI. The Justice, and the family of Butterfly.

TRADER. *[Impatiently]* A gaggle of newfound relatives.

FAUBION. You are fortunate in your marriage.

TRADER. No doubt. She is the petal of Nagasaki.

FAUBION. Treat her with care. Her faith in you, her trust, is boundless.

TRADER. Does the house please you, Butterfly?

BUTTERFLY. Mr. Trader, your pardon, please. I bring a smattering of personal things—within this small box. *[SEWAMONO hands the box to her]* Have you an objection?

TRADER. I could deny you nothing.

BUTTERFLY. *[Pulling things from a bundle]* A locket, a sash, my fan, this mirror to prepare myself for you “

TRADER. *[Touching a small knife which she holds]* What is this?

BUTTERFLY. *[Placing it gently among the other treasures]* A sacred belonging.

TRADER. I cannot see it?

BUTTERFLY. Too many people are here. *[Fades upstage with SEWAMONO]*

MEIJI. *[Confidentially]* A ritual knife presented by the Mikado to the father of Butterfly. A gesture suggesting ... *[gestures ritual suicide with his fan]*

TRADER. And he ...?

MEIJI. Complied, of course.

BUTTERFLY. *[Returning to Trader, holding up small figures]* Otoko.

TRADER. Dolls. They are called what?

BUTTERFLY. Not dolls—souls. Those of my forebears, the spirits of my ancestors.

TRADER. My respect to them all.

BUTTERFLY. *[Returns figures to box, then speaks of another subject]* Secretly and unaccompanied, I visited the Christian chapel yesterday. As my life is transformed, my faith should follow. Tokugawa, my uncle, knows nothing of this. Nor my relatives. The God of Mr. Trader

becomes mine. For your devotion, it may be that my own people can be forgotten.

[The ceremony is about to begin. JUSTICE moves into position]

JUSTICE. All attention. *[BUTTERFLY and TRADER kneel, facing each other, downstage of the JUSTICE, who stands on the highest platform of the set]* License is bestowed upon Philip Trader of America and Butterfly of Nagasaki to conjoin in marriage— *[gesturing to Trader]* by his free will and *[gesturing to Butterfly]* by the consent of her relations, witnessing here. *[Both sign the contract and rise, married]*

ATTENDANT. The Madame Butterfly ...

BUTTERFLY. The Madame Trader.

JUSTICE. Blessings upon you both.

TRADER. Thank you.

ATTENDANT. The Consul must depart now.

JUSTICE. *[To Faubion]* May I accompany you?

FAUBION. Certainly. *[To Trader]* Tomorrow?

TRADER. *[A bit of a gleam in his eye and voice]* Time permitting.

JUSTICE. A generous posterity to you both.

TRADER. We shall do our best.

FAUBION. Be certain that you remember—her trusting soul.
[FAUBION and JUSTICE exit]

TRADER. *[Aside, referring to new relations]* These cursed relations. Perhaps I can dispose of them rapidly. *[Addressing the relatives]* My deepest respects to all of you—and especially to Butterfly—the bridge which joins each of us to one another. *[They begin to respond in kind when TOKUGAWA storms on]*

COUSIN. Tokugawa! Uncle of Butterfly.

TOKUGAWA. *[To Butterfly]* You were seen at the Christian mission. What did you seek there? Tell us! Your dry eyes only add to the lie. You have renounced us all. Admit that it is so. *[FAMILY MEMBERS vocally react with horror]* Butterfly renounces the faith of our ancestors. You have chosen the doom of your own soul.

TRADER. Enough!

TOKUGAWA. Butterfly renounces her family. Her family—her ancestors—renounce Butterfly. *[FAMILY murmurs]*

TRADER. Leave my property at once! This is nonsense.