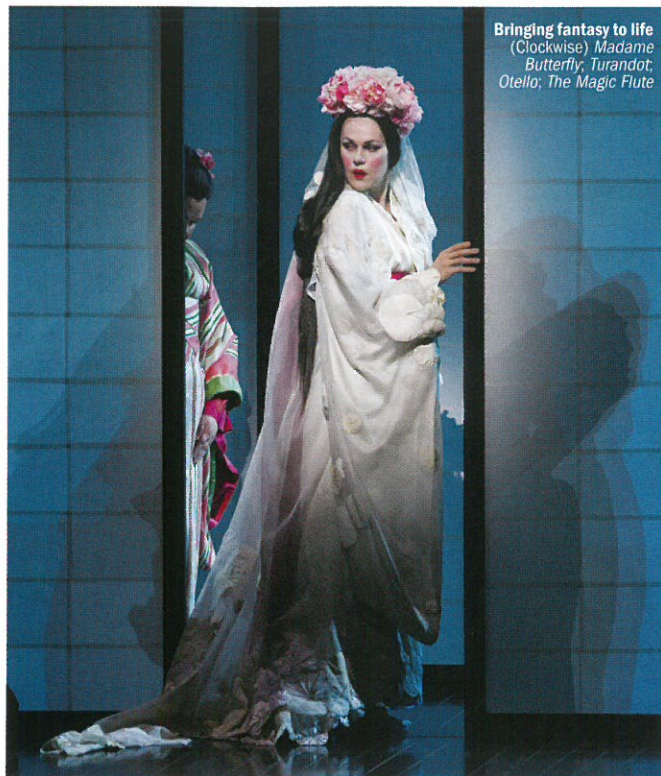


Stage From the stage to the screen

Eunice Tsang previews **The Met Live in HD's** 10th anniversary and selects the best operatic offerings

Art & Culture



Bringing fantasy to life
(Clockwise) *Madame Butterfly*, *Turandot*, *Otello*, *The Magic Flute*



Lacking a dedicated performance space like La Scala or the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, it's rare we get to watch quality Western opera in Hong Kong. The most expensive of all the performing arts, a single opera can cost \$15 to \$30 million to stage. It's just about the last thing to get into if you're keen on making a profit.

In 2006, Peter Gelb, the manager of the Metropolitan Opera of New York, made the controversial decision to film the institution's productions and transmit them live in high definition to cinemas around the world. This revolutionary merging of opera and cinema provides a refreshing twist to how opera is seen, literally. With the aid of 14 high-resolution cameras, viewers can see every detail, from the dazzling jewels on Princess Turandot's crown, to the magnificent puppets dancing to the magic flute. What's lost in terms of the in-the-flesh-ness and the unsurpassable sound quality of being there live is offset by cinematic shots of each expression, and details unobservable back in the stalls of the theatre.

A tantalising bonus is the behind-the-scenes aired during intermissions. For these, a performer acts as a guide, TV host-style, to reveal how backdrops are assembled and props are made. As if that wasn't enough, the guide talks to the performers you've just

witnessed in their roles, as they dab away their sweat and discuss their roles, careers and colleagues. The details are too juicy to miss!

The Foundation for the Arts and Music in Asia Ltd has been bringing *The MET Live in HD* to local cinemas for more than seven years, from *The Grand* to *Bethanie*, an old cowshed converted into a cinema.

In preparation for the new 2016 season, we round up a few of the most extravagant and exhilarating operas on offer, and provide some fun facts to boot!



A refreshing twist to how opera is seen, literally

Otello

Jan 31, Feb 20, Mar 13, Apr 24, May 8. Viewed as Italian opera's greatest tragedy, *Otello* is based on Shakespeare's masterpiece with music by Verdi. Chaos ensues and blood flows when the eponymous general's jealous ensign Iago reveals his hidden hatred by spinning a web of fatal lies.

Famous song: The tenor aria *Credo*, in which Iago reveals his evil nature, singing, "I am a son of evil because I am a man..."

Trivia: Plácido Domingo, who played *Otello* in Vienna in 1991,

received 101 curtain calls (the audience clapped for one hour and 20 minutes).

The Magic Flute

Apr 30, May 21, 29, Jun 26. One of Mozart's most famous masterpieces, this final opera by the genius composer is a comedic fairytale. Prince Tamino must rescue the Queen of the Night's daughter, with only the help of his jovial sidekick, Papageno. Expect flutes, bells, colourful puppets and lots of laughs.

Famous song: The chirpy duet by Papageno and Papagena – *papapa papapa papagena papapa papagena* – such fun!

Trivia: Mozart once snuck backstage to play the glockenspiel during one of Papageno's speeches – purposefully to the wrong beat – to tease Emanuel Schikaneder, who was playing the role.

Turandot

Jun 5 and 6, Jul 16, 21, Sep 25. Puccini's final opera, unfinished at his death, is set in Beijing's Forbidden City. In order to marry Princess Turandot, suitors must be able to answer three riddles set by her, or die trying. Along comes Prince Calaf, who correctly answers her riddles, though Turandot still refuses to marry him. Calaf, being the cool prince he is, returns her a riddle of his own – What is his name? If she answers correctly, she must marry him; if she answers

incorrectly, he dies. (Don't ask why, who cares about logic in opera?)

Famous song: The tenor aria *Nessun dorma* (*None shall sleep*), which Calaf sings in the final act as Turandot commands that no one sleep until she guesses his name.

Trivia: See if you can solve Princess Turandot's riddles:

What is born each night and dies each dawn?

What flickers red and warm like a flame, but is not fire?

What is like ice, but burns like fire?

Madame Butterfly

Aug 27, Sep 4, 18, 24, Oct 30. This classic by Puccini is set in 1890s Nagasaki, Japan. Pinkerton, an American naval officer, falls for Cio Cio-san, a geisha and they get married, against the advice of everyone else. Three years pass and Pinkerton returns home, but Cio Cio believes he will come back to her. He does, with a tragic surprise...

Famous song: *Un bel di* (*One beautiful day*), the aria that Cio Cio sings in anticipation of her husband's return.

Trivia: In order to make his score authentic, Puccini made great effort to research Japanese music, infusing *Madame Butterfly* with at least 10 traditional melodies.

The Met Live in HD Until Nov 27, various locations. Tickets: \$210. hkticketing.com.