Abstract: Crossed Stars and Crossed Tonal Areas in Puccini's 'Madama Butterfly'

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Abstract*: Crossed Stars and Crossed Tonal Areas in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*

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Even a casual reading of the libretto of *Madama Butterfly* makes it clear that the marriage of Pinkerton and Butterfly is a match made anywhere but heaven. Throughout the opera, the would-be lovers stagger blindly through their roles, failing to communicate with one another, and always acting at cross purposes.

Puccini's music mirrors this sense of bi-polar opposition and dramatic cross purposes. Specifically, he uses two keys: G-flat major and A major, and assigns to each of them one pair of contradictory semantic associations in connection with Pinkerton, for whom G-flat equals renunciation and A equals affirmation, and another, with keys and meanings now precisely reversed, in conjunction with Butterfly, for whom G-flat equals affirmation while A equals renunciation.

Four other related issues are addressed: (1) the

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transposition of the trio in Act II/Part 2 from G major to G-flat major; (2) the dramatic meaning of the recurring clashes between the pitches G-flat and G natural; (3) the use of G-flat major to articulate a sense of tonal-structural parallelism at similar points in each act; and (4) the two instances in which Butterfly's A major seemingly rubs against my crossed-stars/crossed tonal areas equation.

In all, I propose that Madama Butterfly displays a sense of tonal-dramatic coherence (which is not the same as either tonal unity or tonal hierarchy) that has gone unobserved until now.