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**Manitoba Opera to present a  
Reimagined Masterpiece & An Enduring Favourite  
In the 2026/27 Season**

Manitoba Opera announced programming for the 2026/27 season (its 54th) today at a launch event at the Centennial Concert Hall in Winnipeg. The Western Canadian premiere of Volcano Theatre's production of **Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*** (pronounced TREE-muh-NEESH-uh): ***A Musical Reimagining*** will open the season with three performances November 21, 25, and 27. One of opera's most powerful and unforgettable stories, Puccini's ***Madama Butterfly***, will close the season April 17, 21, and 23. All performances will take place at the Centennial Concert Hall.

*Scott Joplin's Treemonisha: A Musical Reimagining* received its world premiere in 2023 in Toronto as part of the city's Luminato Festival, co-presented with TO Live. It opened to ecstatic roars, cheering, and rave reviews. The *Toronto Star* wrote: "Joplin's long-forgotten masterpiece has been ravishingly reborn for the 21st century in a triumphant production."

Legendary ragtime composer Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha* was published in 1911. This opera about a young woman was unlike anything that had come before. It fused Western classical music with popular Black music from the era: blues, barbershop (before it was called that), gospel, and ragtime. Both musically and narratively, it was revolutionary. However, no backer would touch it, and it was not produced in Joplin's lifetime.

This new *Treemonisha* was built over seven years of dedicated work with an international team of leading Black women artists who reimagined the piece. While preserving its setting and characters, they crafted a new story and a richly hybrid orchestration that expands on Joplin's original music fusion.

"As I prepared to conclude my time with Manitoba Opera after 25 years, I wanted this final season to reflect both where we've been as well as possibilities for the future," said Interim Artistic Director, Larry Desrochers. "*Treemonisha: A Musical Reimagining* represents bold, necessary storytelling and a thrilling expansion of the operatic canon, while *Madama Butterfly* reminds us of the enduring emotional power that first draws audiences to this art form. Together, they capture the spirit of a company that honours tradition while embracing change."

## 2. MO 2026/27 Season Announcement

The story adaptation of the reimagined *Treemonisha* is framed around two communities: the Freedmen and the Maroons and places a young woman named Treemonisha into the centre of their long-standing conflict. It begins with a flashback to a young mother who is on the run and desperate to save her newborn child from enslavement. She hides her baby in an old tree moments before her pursuers close in. The baby girl – Treemonisha - will be found and raised by a new mother, and the future she will bring about will be revolutionary.

The libretto and story for this groundbreaking work were reimagined by Canadian playwright **Leah-Simone Bowen**, with co-librettist **Cheryl L. Davis**. Orchestration and arrangement are by Grammy Award-winning American violinist/composer **Jessie Montgomery** and **Jannina Norpoth**, a Grammy-nominated violinist and arranger. Stage direction is by multiple award-winning Canadian stage director **Weyni Mengesha**. Award-winning Canadian dancer/choreographer **Esie Mensah** is the choreographic director and international award-winning American conductor **Jeri Lynne Johnson** will conduct. The lead character, Treemonisha, will be sung by **Neema Bickersteth**, the award-winning, internationally acclaimed Canadian soprano.

*Scott Joplin's Treemonisha: A Musical Reimagining* was produced by **Volcano Theatre**, one of Canada's most acclaimed independent theatre companies, known for innovative, boundary-pushing, and globally collaborative work. Based in Toronto, Volcano has been producing award-winning interdisciplinary performance for three decades.

The production features nine singers, 11 singer/dancers, and a 10-musician onstage orchestra. It will be performed in English with English translations projected above the stage.

Last presented by Manitoba Opera in 2017, the intensely moving *Madama Butterfly* tells the story of an American officer who marries a young geisha who gives up everything for love. Puccini's soaring music follows her as she waits three long years, dreaming of the day her American husband will meet their child. But his return to Japan brings a devastating twist in this story of love, betrayal, and strength.

The composer's sumptuously lyrical score embodies all the passion and heartbreak of this timeless story. Set in Japan at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, East meets West in this clash of values and tradition.

*Madama Butterfly* will star the Korean-born soprano **Karah Son** in the title role and in her Manitoba Opera debut. Renowned for her performances as Cio-Cio-San, her career has taken her to Europe, North America, and Australia. Of her performance in this role for Opera Australia, Son was called "captivating" and a "must see" (*The CEO Magazine*).

**Dominick Chenes** makes his company debut as Pinkerton. Described by *The Huffington Post* as a "breakout star" and "powerhouse lyric tenor," Chenes continues to garner critical acclaim for his commanding performances across some of the world's most prestigious opera houses.

### 3. MO 2026/27 Season Announcement

Mezzo-soprano **Nina Yoshida Nelsen** will sing Suzuki, Butterfly's servant. She made her Manitoba Opera debut in this role in our 2017 production. Yoshida Nelsen has performed throughout the U.S. and Europe and is also currently the artistic director of Boston Lyric Opera.

Acclaimed Canadian baritone **James Westman** will join the cast as Sharpless. Mr. Westman last performed with the company as Giorgio Germont in 2018's *La Traviata*. Canadian baritone **Gene Wu** will appear as The Bonze.

Conductor **Judith Yan** will be making her MO debut as well. Yan is a Canadian conductor, born in Hong Kong. Equally adept at conducting opera, ballet, and symphony, her career has taken her internationally, conducting for major companies in Europe, Asia, and North America.

Puccini's incomparably gorgeous melodies soar through the opera. Every act is full of unforgettable music, from Pinkerton's star-spangled American creed, "Dovunque al mondo," to the gently hypnotic Humming Chorus at the end of Act II. Butterfly's steadfast declaration of love - "Un bel di, vedremo" - is one of opera's most famous arias, and her final "Con onor muore" will bring you to tears.

*Madama Butterfly* will be sung in Italian with English translations projected above the stage.

**Tickets:** Season subscriptions will be on sale this month; single tickets will be available in June. For more information, call 204-944-8824 or go to [mbopera.ca](http://mbopera.ca)

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*Scott Joplin's Treemonisha: A Musical Reimagining* was co-commissioned by Amplified Opera; Apollo Theater, Harlem; BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music); Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity; Luminato Festival Toronto; Minnesota Opera; the National Arts Centre, Canada, through the National Creation Fund; the Southbank Centre, London; Stanford Live, California; TO Live, Toronto; and Washington Performing Arts in Washington, DC.