Next on our stage:

| M. BUTTERFLY | EXIT, PURSUED BY A BEAR | WEST SIDE STORY |
| March 19-April 19 | May 14-June 14 | July 16-Aug. 23 |

**HIGHLIGHTS**

A Companion Guide to *M. Butterfly* by David Henry Hwang

*Highlights* is researched and written by Rebecca Wallace.

More about City Lights: cltc.org
Synopsis

Drawn from real-life events, this modern classic weaves realism, ritual, and vivid theatricality into a haunting tale of a French diplomat’s gradual, inevitable submission to the charms of a Chinese opera star who personifies his fantasy vision of submissive oriental sexuality. The play underscores the irony of that fantasy as it parallels the events of Puccini’s opera *Madama Butterfly* and becomes a powerful exploration of East-West relations and the romanticism that clouds and complicates them to this day.

*Note:* *M. Butterfly* is a powerful, provocative play with full nudity, sexuality, and adult themes. It’s intended for mature audiences ages 17 and up.

![French diplomat Rene Gallimard (Kit Wilder, center) gets swept up in a love affair with a Chinese opera singer in M. Butterfly. Kurogo dancers (Lee-Ron, left, and Jessica Do) help set the scene. Photos by Mike Ko.](image)

Characters

**Gallimard (Kit Wilder):** As a young student, Gallimard was voted “least likely to be invited to a party.” Now he’s the talk of the town, telling his story from a Paris prison cell while the world buzzes about his notorious affair with a Chinese opera singer. An awkward French diplomat, he has always dreamed of the ideal woman, like the ones he sees in operas where characters will sacrifice anything for love.

**Song Liling (N. Louie):** Gallimard becomes intrigued when he sees Song perform the title role in the opera *Madama Butterfly* in 1960. “Here was a Butterfly with little or no voice—but she had the grace, the delicacy. I believed this girl,” he says. After the performance, Song’s spirited, smart conversation adds a new dimension to this delicate flower, and Gallimard cannot resist.

**Helga (April Green):** Also a veteran of the diplomacy world—she grew up in Australia as the daughter of an ambassador—Helga marries Gallimard later in life and travels to China with him. The marriage becomes troubled when her husband develops an interest in Peking Opera.
Marc/Toulon (Keith Marshall): Marc is Gallimard’s friend from high school, when he was the popular guy encouraging Gallimard to live a wilder life. He now appears to Gallimard from time to time to offer his thoughts on the Song affair. Manuel Toulon, the French ambassador to China, is aware of the affair and uses Gallimard as an inside source on the Chinese views on the Vietnam War and other current events.

Comrade Chin/Suzuki (Christina Chu): For her part, the stern Chin uses Song as a source of any Western views and plans that can be gathered from Gallimard. As an alter ego, she doubles as Suzuki, advisor and friend to Butterfly, in modern takes on scenes from the opera Madama Butterfly.

Renee/Girl (Laura Espino): Renee is a gregarious young student in China whose uninhibited modern ways intrigue Gallimard. After all, they do sort of remind him of the sexy girls he once found in magazines...

Kurogo (Jessica Do, Lee-Ron): The graceful kurogo dancers in M. Butterfly play many roles and help set many moods, from the Chinese opera to Gallimard’s prison cell.

About the playwright

David Henry Hwang is a prolific playwright, librettist, and screenwriter who has earned wide acclaim for his insights into Chinese-American experiences and the relationships between East and West. M. Butterfly, his best-known work, netted a host of awards upon its 1988 premiere, including the Tony Award for Best Play and Drama Desk and Outer Critics Circle awards. It was also a Pulitzer Prize finalist.
Hwang’s 30-year playwriting career has included many other storied scripts, including the Pulitzer Prize-nominated *Yellow Face*; the Tony-nominated *Golden Child*; and *Chinglish*, which was named Best New American Play of 2011 by *TIME Magazine*.

It all started back in the ‘70s when Hwang was a Stanford freshman on a dorm field trip to San Francisco to see the Thornton Wilder play *The Matchmaker*, according to the Stanford alumni magazine. “I thought, I can do that,” he told the magazine. So he did.

Hwang’s work hasn’t stopped with the theater. He also penned the screenplay when *M. Butterfly* was turned into a 1993 Jeremy Irons movie, and has done many other writing projects for film and television.

He is also an extremely prolific opera librettist, teaming up four times with the composer Philip Glass, and has been busy in the world of Broadway musicals as well. His work has included writing a new book for Rodgers & Hammerstein’s *Flower Drum Song*, and co-writing the book for *Aida*, which had music and lyrics by Elton John and Tim Rice.

A Q&A with the director

Jeffrey Bracco has worked in many capacities at City Lights during his 20-year professional theater career in the U.S. and France. He is a frequent director, with credits including last summer’s hit production of Monty Python’s *SPAMALOT*. As an actor, he has been seen recently at City Lights as Serge in *Art* and as George in *The Language Archive*. In addition, he co-wrote this season’s *Truce: A Christmas Wish from the Great War* with Kit Wilder, and has authored several other plays that have been professionally produced in Europe and the U.S. By day, he teaches directing, acting, and theater history at Santa Clara University.

Q: How were you first introduced to *M. Butterfly*, and what were your impressions? Why did it seem like a play you’d want to direct?

A: I read the play soon after it came out because there was obviously a lot of buzz about it. I didn’t really come back to it until a few years ago when I decided to teach it in one of my courses at Santa Clara University. That’s when I dug a little deeper into it. I loved the play immediately, but then even more when I found out it was based on a true story. The truth really is stranger than fiction — and yet David Henry Hwang has creatively embellished an already fascinating story and brought even more complexity and humor to it. The play entertainingly marries theatricality with humanity.

Q: Tell us about your vision for the show. What makes City Lights’ production distinctive?

A: First of all, Ron Gasparinetti’s set design not only helps us to tell a complex story, it is quite beautiful. We are using the interplay between reality and fantasy in concrete and creative ways, not only through the use of the set, but throughout the staging of the production. The choreography and movement — especially in the work of our talented kurogo — is quite
unique. They are integral to the storytelling at key moments, not just functioning as stagehands. And of course our actors, who bring so much depth to their roles, are very exciting to watch.

Q: *M. Butterfly* is a political show in many ways, set against the background of the Cultural Revolution and the Vietnam War. As you and your team have explored the script, what issues have you found that still resonate today?

A: The larger issues in the play, such as how the West views the East, are extremely relevant. Besides the rise of China as a superpower in the Far East, the way we treat countries in the Middle East today and all the geo-political assumptions and presumptions that some political leaders make about these countries gives the play an extremely strong resonance today. Even going beyond international politics, the interplay between femininity and masculinity (which is also a big part of international politics—as the play makes clear) is something we all wrestle with every day of our lives.

Q: What are three words you'd use to describe the play?

A: Intriguing, powerful, and passionate.

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Rene Gallimard (Kit Wilder): a man caught up in the dream of a perfect woman.

**Glossary**

*A few terms and references from M. Butterfly:*

*Madama Butterfly*: An opera by Italian composer Giacomo Puccini that premiered in 1904. This tragic love story filled with sweeping melodies is about an American naval officer who marries a young beauty in Japan,
then abandons her for his "real" life back in the U.S. Young Cio-Cio San (also known as Butterfly) waits patiently for her lover's return, but this is opera, so it's probably not a spoiler to say that this doesn't end well.

In *M. Butterfly*, Gallimard loves the opera, sighing over Cio-Cio San's "pure sacrifice." However, Song scoffs at him. "It's one of your favorite fantasies, isn't it? The submissive Oriental woman and the cruel white man."

**The Cultural Revolution**: In 1966, Communist leader Mao Zedong started a movement to gain more control over the government by inciting revolutionary sentiments and calling for purges of many elements of society, including intellectuals and bourgeoisie. Books were burned, schools were shuttered, and it is estimated that millions were persecuted or killed.

Gallimard describes this time: "The doctrine of the Cultural Revolution implied continuous anarchy. Contact between Chinese and foreigners became impossible." He adds of Song and himself: "Our flat was confiscated. Her fame and my money now counted against us."

The revolution would not end until Mao's death ten years later.

**The Drunken Beauty**: In *M. Butterfly*, Song performs this work from the Peking Opera. It tells the historical tale of Yang Yu Huan, an emperor's concubine who tries to drink away her grief and rage when the emperor chooses to call on another concubine that night. Like Cio-Cio San in *Madama Butterfly*, Yang pines in vain for a man.

**Ngo Dinh Diem**: The subject of one of Gallimard's and Toulon's many political discussions, Diem served as prime minister of Vietnam, heading a government backed by the United States starting in 1954. However, he parted with the West and set up a dictatorial regime with a heavy-handed military. After the U.S. withdrew its support, Diem was killed by his generals during a coup.

**Cheongsam**: This sleek, tight-fitting Chinese dress worn by Song in one scene with Gallimard is a fashionable and decidedly Eastern choice.

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The selection is a fascinating read, but there are definitely spoilers. We recommend seeing the play before you click.
Ready for more gripping drama, smart comedy, and theater that rocks? Our new six-show season starts this fall. Get details at cltc.org.

**Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde**  
Adapted by Jeffrey Hatcher  
*from the novella The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson*  
**Sept. 17-Oct. 18, 2015**  
On the fog-bound streets of Victorian London, Dr. Jekyll’s experiments unleash his other self – and the two sides are locked in a deadly game of cat-and-mouse in this classic tale of depravity, lust, horror, and love.

**Handle with Care**  
By Jason Odell Williams  
*Bay Area Premiere*  
**Nov. 19-Dec. 20, 2015**  
A young Israeli woman and a young American man are brought together on Christmas Eve under the most bizarre circumstances. Is it change, or is it destiny? Or is it the perfect Jewish Christmas story?

**Tigers Be Still**  
By Kim Rosenstock  
*South Bay Premiere*  
**Jan. 21-Feb. 21, 2016**  
In this quirky comedy, Sherry Wickman retreats to her bed until an unexpected job opportunity gives her hope. Now if only someone would catch the tiger that escaped from the local zoo, everything would be just perfect!

**The Elephant Man**  
By Bernard Pomerance  
*1979 Tony Award for Best Play*  
**March 17-April 17, 2016**  
Based on the true story of John Merrick, a young man trapped within a hideously deformed body and who longs, more than anything, to be “normal,” *The Elephant Man* is a glorious testament to the human spirit.

**I and You**  
By Lauren Gunderson  
*South Bay Premiere*  
**May 19-June 19, 2016**  
Two high school homework partners who could not be more different discover just how much they have in common – leading to a revelation that is as startling as it is unexpected.

**Green Day’s AMERICAN IDIOT**  
Music & lyrics by Green Day  
*Book by Billie Joe Armstrong and Michael Mayer*  
**July 14-Aug. 21, 2016**  
Based on Green Day’s Grammy Award-winning multi-platinum album, this Tony Award-winning rock extravaganza tells the story of three lifelong friends on a quest for true meaning in a post-9/11 world.
City Lights Theater Company presents *M. Butterfly* from March 19 through April 19, 2015. Shows are Thursday-Saturday at 8 p.m., Sundays at 2 p.m., and Wednesday, April 15, at 8 p.m., at 529 S. Second St., San Jose. Details: cltc.org, 408-295-4200

**M. Butterfly credits**

Director: Jeffrey Bracco  
Assistant Director/Choreographer: Kristin Kusanovich  
Dramaturg: Regina Fields  
Stage Manager: Lauren Howry  
Assistant Stage Manager: Alexandra Zvargulis  
Scenic Design/Production Manager: Ron Gasparinetti  
Lighting Design: Nick Kumamoto  
Costume Design: Anna Chase  
Props Designer: Christina Sturken  
Sound Design: George Psarras

**Cast**

Rene Gallimard: Kit Wilder*  
Song Liling: N. Louie  
Marc, Toulon, Judge: Keith C. Marshall  
Renee, Girl in Magazine: Laura Espino  
Comrade Chin/Suzuki/Shu-Fang: Christina Chu  
Helga: April Green  
Kurogo Dancers: Jessica Do, Lee-Ron  
Partygoers, etc.: Christina Chu, Laura Espino, April Green, Keith C. Marshall

*Member, Actors' Equity Association*