

Project Butterfly

Boosting environmental
awareness in opera creation

The Project Butterfly Newsletter
May 2025 



Project Butterfly comes to life in Helsinki

Last update: Performances in Helsinki 2 and 3 May

On 2-3 May, *Project Butterfly* brought its opera trilogy—*Lake of Ashes*, *Breathe*, and *Perla di Speranza*—to Opera Box Helsinki for two deeply resonant performances that left lasting impressions on both audiences and artists alike.

Set within the intimate, industrial space of Opera Box, *Breathe* unfolded as a fully immersive opera—not only telling a story, but inviting the audience to experience the fragile relationship between humanity and nature from within. The performance blurred the boundaries between sound, movement, and the environment. Audience members were not merely spectators, but participants in a shared experience that responded to every gesture, every breath.

Over the course of each evening, light, voice, and projection mapped the emotional terrain of the piece. Natural textures, organic visuals, and flowing soundscapes moved in harmony with the performers, drawing attention to the quiet yet urgent rhythms of ecological change. There was no fixed stage—the entire space became a living environment, in constant transformation.

As with all of *Project Butterfly's* work, sustainability was at the heart of the production. Every design element was consciously selected: modular structures, repurposed materials, non-toxic finishes, and minimal-waste construction practices supported a vision of performance as both artistic expression and ecological statement. We extend our deepest thanks to the Opera Box Helsinki team, our creative collaborators, and the engaged, thoughtful audiences who made these performances so special.



More than a performance

Behind the scenes: setting and costumes

Project Butterfly's operatic trilogy has taken flight across Europe, with all three acts performed together as a single, unified opera in each city. From Teatro di Modena in Modena, to Opera Box in Helsinki, and soon in Opera Bałtycka in Gdańsk, each staging offers a complete journey. More than a musical experience, the performances immerse audiences in striking visual worlds

grounded in sustainability, symbolism, and transformation.

Let's explore how the settings and costumes of each act reflect themes of personal metamorphosis, environmental urgency, and spiritual rebirth:

Act I: Lake of Ashes

The opera opens on a stark stage dominated by a monumental, suspended fabric, pierced by a five-metre-wide circular void—the *Lake of Ashes*. This symbolic centrepiece represents moral ambiguity, destruction, and the possibility of rebirth. Made from recycled PVC and controlled by an advanced rigging system, the fabric is transformed through synchronised lighting and projection to create an immersive, underwater-like atmosphere. Blues and greens flow during moments of calm, while ash-like patterns and fiery hues erupt during turmoil.



👤 Costumes are mythic and intense. Characters such as Charon, Follyn, and Salacja appear in sculptural, armour-like garments, evoking ancient rituals and dystopian futures. Rich textures and dramatic silhouettes underscore the act's themes of judgement and regeneration.

Act II: Breathe

In *Breathe*, the stage becomes a meditation on the climate crisis. At its heart hangs a translucent silk cube—both ethereal and foreboding. This geometric form “melts” over the course of the act, symbolising the fragility of ecosystems under industrial pressure. Abstract projections and encroaching black wings evoke pollution and collapse, while dynamic lighting sculpts the emotional and environmental tension.



👤 Costume design blurs the line between symbolism and storytelling. Nature, water, air, and ice are represented through sculptural, flowing forms that evoke fragility, transformation, and elemental force. In contrast, the factory owner and assistant wear structured, corporate silhouettes—pinstripes, greys, and bold accents—signalling dominance, exploitation, and complicity within the opera's visual landscape.

Act III: Perla di Speranza

The final act follows a personal and ecological awakening. The set features a flexible system of modular wooden squares—repurposed from theatre archives—that are reconfigured throughout the act to reflect the protagonist’s internal transformation. The scenography evolves from rigid, cold structures to warm, organic formations, supported by lighting that shifts from artificial glare to natural serenity.



👗 Costumes highlight the journey from innocence to growth. Characters such as Perla and Luca wear layered, hand-crafted garments in soft, natural fibres. In contrast, bolder designs with exaggerated silhouettes and vivid contrasts capture moments of emotional and narrative intensity.

Key dates in opera, music, and sustainability

Interesting facts and Anniversaries to remember

As we progress through May, let's pause to recognize significant dates, milestones, and anniversaries in key areas of Project Butterfly: opera, music and sustainability. These occasions celebrate the rich heritage of the arts while also highlighting the continued growth and dedication to sustainable practices in cultural expression.





KEY DATES TO KEEP IN MIND

- 3 May: Anniversary - First performance of *Carmen* by Georges Bizet
- 10 May: Anniversary of Giuseppe Verdi's birth
- 11 May: Anniversary of Richard Strauss' birth
- 22 May: Anniversary of Claude Debussy's birth
- 25 May: Anniversary - Premiere of *Turandot* by Giacomo Puccini

- **3 May: Anniversary - First Performance of *Carmen* by Georges Bizet**

The first performance of Georges Bizet's *Carmen* on 3 May 1875 marked the beginning of its legacy as one of the most beloved operas in the world. With its captivating melodies, such as the famous *Habanera* and *Toreador Song*, *Carmen* broke away from traditional operatic conventions by presenting a bold, passionate, and morally complex heroine. Bizet's innovative use of music and character development revolutionised opera, and the work's themes of love, jealousy, and fate continue to resonate with audiences today, securing its place as a timeless masterpiece.

- **10 May: Anniversary of Giuseppe Verdi's birth**

Giuseppe Verdi, one of Italy's most renowned composers, is celebrated for his profound impact on opera. His works, including *La Traviata*, *Aida*, and *Rigoletto*, remain among the most frequently performed worldwide. Verdi's music, with its rich emotional depth and unforgettable melodies, revolutionised the operatic world, making it more relatable and powerful. His operas often explore themes of love, sacrifice, and social justice, resonating deeply with audiences. Today, Verdi's legacy continues to inspire opera companies and musicians across the globe, ensuring his music remains a cornerstone of the classical repertoire.

- **11 May: Anniversary of Richard Strauss's birth**

Richard Strauss, born 160 years ago, is celebrated for his groundbreaking contributions to opera and orchestral music. Known for works such as *Salome* and *Der Rosenkavalier*, Strauss transformed the operatic landscape with his rich orchestration and dramatic intensity. His operas often explore complex characters and psychological depth, pushing the boundaries of traditional opera. Strauss's influence can still be felt today, as his compositions remain central to opera repertoires worldwide. His legacy stands as a testament to the power of music in conveying emotional and dramatic nuance.

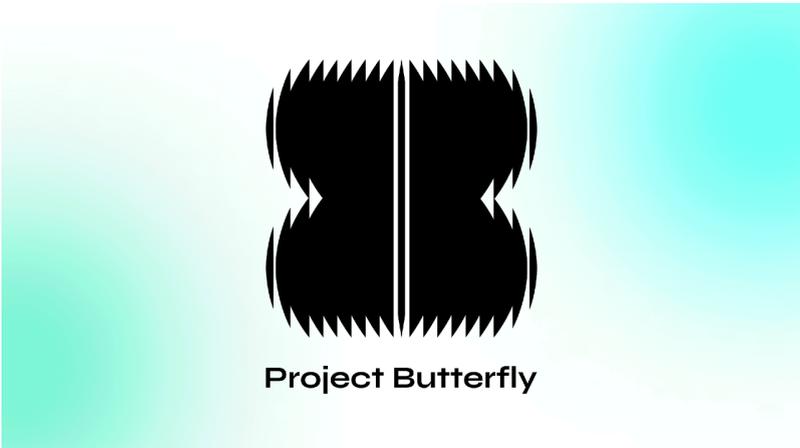
- **22 May: Anniversary of Claude Debussy's birth**

Claude Debussy, born 163 years ago, is celebrated for his revolutionary impact on music, particularly in the realms of impressionism and orchestral composition. His works, such as *Clair de Lune* and *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, broke away from traditional structures, introducing new harmonic textures and atmospheric qualities. Debussy's ability to evoke emotion through innovative use of tone and colour in music has influenced countless composers and continues to shape modern classical music. His legacy endures as a symbol of musical innovation and artistic freedom.

• 25 May: Anniversary - Premiere of *Turandot* by Giacomo Puccini

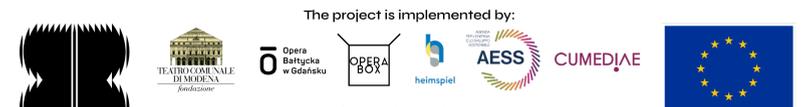
The premiere of Giacomo Puccini's *Turandot* on 25 May 1926 marked the debut of one of the most dramatic and emotionally charged operas in the classical repertoire. With its powerful themes of fate, love, and the struggle for power, *Turandot* continues to captivate audiences to this day. Puccini's lush orchestration and memorable arias, including the iconic *Nessun Dorma*, have made the opera a staple in opera houses worldwide. Its exploration of human emotions and epic storytelling ensure its enduring appeal across generations.

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Project Butterfly Team

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