

# Désir

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## Madame Butterfly



**BALLET**  
Notes

The  
**National  
Ballet of  
Canada**

JAMES KUDELKA, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR  
KEVIN GARLAND, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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## I DÉSIR

Choreography: **James Kudelka**

Music: **Sergei Prokofiev**,

Excerpts from the *Waltz Suite*, Op. 110 and the ballet *Cinderella*.

Costume Design: Conceived and executed by the Wardrobe of  
The National Ballet of Canada under  
**Marjory Smart Fielding**

Lighting Design and Scenic Effects: **Robert Thomson**

*Désir* is a gift from the Chairmen – Joan and Allen Marple,  
Sandra and Jim Pittblado



## II MADAME BUTTERFLY

Choreography: **Stanton Welch**

Staged by: **Steven Woodgate**

Music: **Giacomo Puccini**, adapted from his opera by John Lanchbery.

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Set and Costume Design: **Peter Farmer**

Lighting Design: **Christopher Dennis**

*Madame Butterfly* is a gift from The Volunteer Committee, The National Ballet of Canada

# Désir



# Madame Butterfly

**BALLET**  
*Notes*



## A NOTE ON *DÉSIR*

*Désir* (French) – *Desire* (English)

*Desire* n. unsatisfied longing, feeling that one would derive pleasure or satisfaction from attaining or possessing something; expression of this, request; thing desired; lust.

*Desire* v.t. long for, want earnestly (thing to do, that); ask for (leaves much to be -d, is very imperfect); (arch) pray, entreat, command, (desire him to wait; she desired they would wait).

— Concise Oxford Dictionary

One of James Kudelka's most exquisite pure dance works, *Désir* explores the interplay of relationships. The gorgeous costumes created by Marjory Fielding and the National Ballet Wardrobe and the dramatic lighting of Robert Thomson make this one of the most visually stunning short ballets in the company's repertoire.

For the score James Kudelka chose four waltzes from Sergei Prokofiev's ballet *Cinderella*, as well as two waltzes from the opera *War and Peace*. Prokofiev's score for *Cinderella* has often left choreographers and critics puzzled, wondering how such a sophisticated, cynical and sardonic score could lend itself to the telling of a fairy tale. It is this stirring music that inspires a dance for seven couples who celebrate passion and pleasure under the light of the moon. Combining his remarkable talent in both classical and modern dance idioms, Kudelka again launches his dancers into a series of emotionally charged and spectacular pas de deux.

*Désir* was premiered by Montreal's Les Grands Ballets Canadiens in 1991. It received its National Ballet premiere on April 14, 1998 at the Hancher Auditorium in Iowa City and was first performed in Toronto by the company on May 6, 1998 at the Hummingbird Centre. That fall, as part of the National Ballet's triumphant New York tour, *Désir* dazzled both audiences and critics with its lyricism and musicality. Anna Kisselgoff of *The New York Times* noted: "If there is one ballet not to miss this season it is James Kudelka's *Désir*, a flamboyant but lyrical surge of passionate dancing....visually stunning, it is consistently exciting."

This work has since been performed by the Geneva Grand Theatre Ballet, Ballet Nacional de Mexico and Ohio's Ballet Met. In March, 2000 Kudelka traveled to Germany to set *Désir* for the Stuttgart Ballet.

## A NOTE ON SERGEI PROKOFIEV by Heather Slater

Sergei Prokofiev's contribution to ballet was rivalled only by that of his close colleague Igor Stravinsky, and by Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, whom many considered to be the first to raise Russian ballet to the level of "serious art." Prokofiev devoted over forty years to ballet music, and was, in fact, putting the final touches on his eighth ballet, *The Stone Flower*, on the day of his death. His first ballet, *Ala and Lolly*, was commissioned in 1915 by the impresario of the

Ballets Russes, Sergei Diaghilev, whose Paris productions were at the forefront of creative trends (often to shocking effect). *Ala and Lolly* marked the start of a fifteen-year collaboration between Diaghilev and Prokofiev, which led to three more premieres: *The Buffoon* (1921), *Le Pas d'acier* (1927), and *The Prodigal Son* (1929).

In the early years of his career, Prokofiev was not especially drawn to the ballet; he had come to consider it too "frivolous" and commercial to warrant his attention. At the St. Petersburg Conservatory, he had studied composition with Nikolai Tcherepnin (1874-1945), a prolific and successful ballet composer who was nevertheless criticized for music that was "lacking in substance," and "pretty" at best. But creative currents were stirring within the genre, thanks mainly to Diaghilev's work; Prokofiev arrived in Paris in July 1913, narrowly missing the riotous premiere of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*, and the enormously successful debuts of *The Firebird* and *Petrouchka* a few years earlier. Prokofiev feigned disinterest: "I've heard something of Stravinsky's ballets," he wrote, "but for the moment the idea of writing my own doesn't interest me."

Prokofiev's first attempt at ballet was far from successful; *Ala and Lolly* never made it to stage, although the music would later find redemption as an orchestral suite (*The Scythian Suite*, Op. 20). But the ballet was dismissed by Diaghilev, who, upon glimpsing the score for the first time, wrote a worried letter to Stravinsky, concerned about this young man they had earmarked as the next important voice in music for the stage:

"The libretto is merely a typical Petersburg concoction that might have been suitable for the Mariinsky Theatre ten years ago, but is unacceptable for us. In Prokofiev's own words, he is not looking for Russian effects in his music. For him, it's just music in the widest sense. It is just music all right -- and very bad music at that. So we'll have to start all over again...either he must change totally, or we'll lose him forever."

While the Diaghilev partnership helped to solidify Prokofiev's reputation, both at home and in the West, it was his later ballets that made him a master of the genre, particularly *Romeo and Juliet*. Although first proposed to him in 1934, *Romeo and Juliet* was not premiered by the Kirov until January 11, 1940, and was a tremendous audience and critical success.

But the path to success was a difficult one; a bitter artistic struggle between Prokofiev and the choreographer, Leonid Lavrovsky, threatened to derail the project on several occasions. The dancers found the score unsympathetic, its complex rhythms impossible to dance; they attempted to boycott the premiere, and adopted a mantra that would later become a source of much amusement to Prokofiev – "for never was a story of more woe, than Prokofiev's music for *Romeo*."

*Romeo and Juliet* led to a new commission from the Kirov, this time on the story of *Cinderella*, to a scenario by Nikolai Volkov. Prokofiev began work on the ballet in the summer of 1941, at a time when his personal life was in turmoil; he had just left his wife Lina, leaving her and his sons in Moscow, and was living with his long-time mistress (and co-librettist) Mira Mendelson. The decision had left him torn between guilt and resolve, and he seemed to find

some comfort in the new ballet, based on a fairytale of hard-fought love. He intended to write music portraying "the love of *Cinderella* and the Prince, the birth and development of this feeling, the obstacles in the way, and the realization of the dream at last." He also intended – this time – to write the most "danceable" music possible, in the classical tradition, with waltzes, *pas de deux* and variations.

Turmoil of another sort interfered with his progress a few months later, when German forces invaded Soviet Russia; he abandoned *Cinderella* and returned to an earlier project, an opera based on Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. He saw a stark parallel between Napoleon's 1812 invasion and his current reality, and the work took on a new sense of urgency and patriotism. The opera was premiered in April 1942 in Leningrad, and Prokofiev soon returned to *Cinderella*; he completed the ballet in 1944, and the premiere was given the following year by the Bolshoi Ballet.

As was the case with much of Prokofiev's theatrical music, he extracted sections of *War and Peace* and *Cinderella* for performance on their own. There are three separate Suites from *Cinderella* (Op. 107, 108 & 109), and two of the dances from the score are also part of the *Waltz Suite*, Op. 110. The latter work dates from 1946, and comprises six waltzes: three from *Cinderella*, one from the film *Lermontov*, and two from *War and Peace*.

Even though James Kudelka's *Désir* does not follow a narrative, the music is from the following selections of Prokofiev's *Waltz Suite* and *Cinderella*:

#### EXCERPTS FROM WALTZ SUITE, OP. 110

No. 2: **"In the Palace" from *Cinderella***: *Cinderella has just arrived at the ball; the glittering opening music, with trembling strings and celeste, announces her arrival as if from afar. An expansive string theme appears, representing Cinderella's dreams of happiness, and she and the Prince dance a "Grand Waltz".*

No. 5: **"New Year's Eve Ball" from *War and Peace***: *At a fashionable ball in St. Petersburg, Prince Andrei and Natasha dance an elegant waltz that becomes their love theme throughout the opera; the militaristic opening passage hints at impending doom.*

No. 1: **"Since We Met" from *War and Peace***: *Prince Andrei's bitter rival, Prince Anatol, declares his love for Natasha, and attempts to woo her with a waltz; the slinking, chromatic melody of the waltz's central section reflects her sly suitor.*

#### EXCERPTS FROM CINDERELLA, OP. 87

I. **"Duet of the Prince and *Cinderella*"**: *The couple, reunited in memory, dances an elegant pas de deux; extravagant flourishes in winds and harp lend a dreamlike quality to the music.*

II. **"*Cinderella's* Departure for the Ball"**: *A flurry of activity as Cinderella prepares for the ball; the music is frantic and festive, with snippets of waltz music and undercurrents of foreboding: the fairy godmother warning of what will happen at midnight.*

III. **"Slow Waltz"**: *In the beginning of the final scene of the ballet, the couple expresses their love for one another in a gentle dance.*

# A NOTE ON MADAME BUTTERFLY

*Madame Butterfly seems to have been destined for dance ever since Mr. Puccini's conception of the operatic Madame Butterfly in 1903. Its luscious and romantic score has attracted many famous and gifted choreographers, and through fate alone I have been lucky enough to have received this opportunity.*

*When I first became interested in choreography I was working as an extra with The Australian Opera. While my father drove me home I would quiz him on various opera stories, searching for the one most suited to ballet. The one he spoke about most passionately, and in the most detail, was later to become my passion: it is the story of Cio-Cio-San and her fatal love for Pinkerton.*

*I have tried to follow closely the opera's storyline, changing only what I thought necessary to achieve the same dramatic impact through movement. I hope my contribution, together with Mr. Farmer's artistry which decorates the stage and Mr. Lanchbery's genius in sculpting the music he loves, will be worthy of this wonderful story which has finally made it to the medium of dance.*

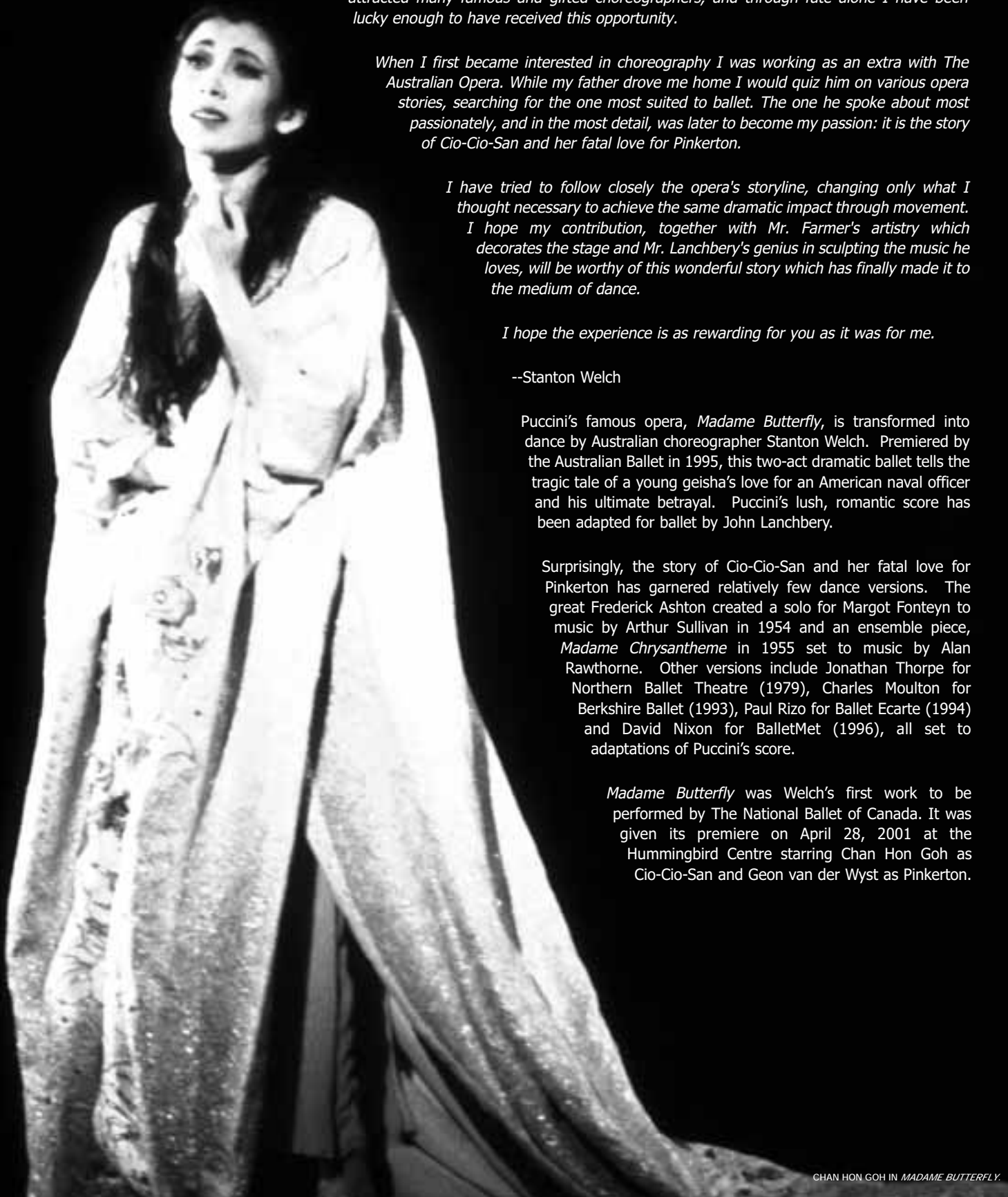
*I hope the experience is as rewarding for you as it was for me.*

--Stanton Welch

Puccini's famous opera, *Madame Butterfly*, is transformed into dance by Australian choreographer Stanton Welch. Premiered by the Australian Ballet in 1995, this two-act dramatic ballet tells the tragic tale of a young geisha's love for an American naval officer and his ultimate betrayal. Puccini's lush, romantic score has been adapted for ballet by John Lanchbery.

Surprisingly, the story of Cio-Cio-San and her fatal love for Pinkerton has garnered relatively few dance versions. The great Frederick Ashton created a solo for Margot Fonteyn to music by Arthur Sullivan in 1954 and an ensemble piece, *Madame Chrysantheme* in 1955 set to music by Alan Rawthorne. Other versions include Jonathan Thorpe for Northern Ballet Theatre (1979), Charles Moulton for Berkshire Ballet (1993), Paul Rizo for Ballet Ecarte (1994) and David Nixon for BalletMet (1996), all set to adaptations of Puccini's score.

*Madame Butterfly* was Welch's first work to be performed by The National Ballet of Canada. It was given its premiere on April 28, 2001 at the Hummingbird Centre starring Chan Hon Goh as Cio-Cio-San and Geon van der Wyst as Pinkerton.



# MADAME BUTTERFLY - SYNOPSIS

The story takes place in Nagasaki at the end of the 19th century.

## PROLOGUE

Cio-Cio-San, a Geisha known as Madame Butterfly, dreams of her future.

## ACT 1

On a hill overlooking the harbour, a wedding is about to take place between Lieutenant Pinkerton, an officer in the U.S. Navy, and Butterfly, with whom he has contracted a Japanese marriage. Goro, the obsequious marriage broker and general factotum, shows Pinkerton over the house in which he will live with Butterfly. Pinkerton is much intrigued by its strange but practical arrangements. He is introduced to the servants, including Suzuki, Butterfly's personal maid.

The first visitor to arrive is Sharpless, the United States Consul at Nagasaki. Together with Goro they drink a toast. Sharpless, however, is deeply disturbed by the frivolous levity with which Pinkerton regards this marriage and utters a grave warning not to break a trusting and devoted heart. He hands him a letter from Kate, Pinkerton's betrothed who waits for him to come back home.

While Pinkerton must travel overseas to fulfill his career, he vows that one day he will marry his American girl.

Sharpless and Pinkerton let their minds wander: Sharpless's towards the fate of the Butterfly, and Pinkerton's to his love for Kate.

The bridal party arrives and with much formality Butterfly is introduced to the two Americans. They discover that she has been forced to become a geisha because of the dire poverty into which her once wealthy family fell after her father committed ritual suicide. She is fifteen years old.

Butterfly sets up a shrine placing her valuables gently upon it – including the sacred sword her father had used to kill himself – and shyly shows them to Pinkerton. She confides to him that she has visited the US Mission and has become a Christian so that she may worship the same god as her husband. The brief marriage ceremony is carried out and as they descend the hill, Sharpless delivers Pinkerton with a warning to be sensible.

The wedding celebrations are in full flight as Pinkerton encourages Butterfly's aunts and uncles to eat and drink, hoping this will hasten their departure. Suddenly, Butterfly's uncle, the Bonze, bursts into the midst of the happy scene. He has learned of her visits to the US Mission and in a raging fury now denounces her for her rejection of the faith of her fathers. A general uproar follows and the relations depart cursing. Butterfly weeps bitterly but is comforted by Pinkerton's tenderness. Slowly she abandons her innocence and they lie down beneath the stars.



CHAN HON GOH AND REBEKAH RIMSAY IN *MADAME BUTTERFLY*.



## ACT 2

Several years have passed since Pinkerton left Nagasaki. Butterfly is desperately poor and only Suzuki will stay with her. She is convinced that one day her husband will return and brushes aside others' doubts.

Sharpless and Goro arrive at the house. Goro is anxious to profit from a new match between Butterfly and the wealthy Prince Yamadori (who makes his pompous entrance), now that her marriage to Pinkerton can be annulled. Sharpless produces a letter he has received from Pinkerton. Butterfly teases Yamadori mercilessly over his passion for her and turns down his marriage proposal. Ignoring Japanese tradition, she maintains her vow to Pinkerton. Prince Yamadori leaves, followed by a furious Goro who finally wipes his hands of Butterfly.

Sharpless hands the letter to Butterfly, but she is too excited and begs him to read it to her. Knowing the letter's factual contents, he hesitates to inquire what Butterfly's future would hold if Pinkerton were never to return. Horrified at the suggestion, she fetches the child she has had by Pinkerton and triumphantly shows him to the Consul.

Instead of the truth, Sharpless tells her the letter has no sad news and promises to tell Pinkerton about the young boy.

Goro has been spying on the household and upon Sharpless's exit attacks the family saying that in Japan a fatherless half-breed child is an outcast. Butterfly is outraged and chases him away.

A cannon shot is heard from the harbour announcing the arrival of a ship. Butterfly and Suzuki, watching from the terrace, recognize that it is Pinkerton's ship; he has come back to her. She sends Suzuki to pluck flowers from the garden and they set about adorning themselves and the house. As evening falls she makes several holes in the paper wall through which the three watch for Pinkerton. She dreams of his return, of her and her son's acceptance, wealth, and happiness in America – their new home.

As dawn breaks the dream is shattered. Suzuki wakes up and urges her weary mistress to retire. Pinkerton, Sharpless and Kate arrive at the door. They have come early in the morning in the hope of finding Suzuki alone and enlisting her support to persuade Butterfly to accept Kate's offer to adopt the child. For Pinkerton, the house is full of poignant memories and, overcome by remorse, he decides to leave without seeing Butterfly. Butterfly awakes and glimpses his departure; alarmed, she questions Suzuki. Suzuki's sobbing, Sharpless's silence, together with the presence of Kate, make her gradually realize the awful truth. With her heart broken, Butterfly agrees to relinquish her son to Pinkerton and his new wife.

Sharpless, Kate and the boy leave, and Butterfly collapses in desperation. She orders Suzuki away, who seeing the state that she is in, rushes after Sharpless for help. Butterfly lifts her father's sword, reading its inscription "to die with honour when one can no longer live with honour."

PHOTOS BY: CYLLA VON TIEDEMANN  
COVER PHOTO: GRETA HODGKINSON AND ALEKSANDAR ANTONIJEVIC IN *DESIR*.

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