



some of the men seem more comfortable with the musical demands than the spoken. If a line here and there is given a bit more emphasis than needed to punctuate a joke, it is a trifling matter. Stage director, Terry Kiss Frank (who also directed *Patience*) has a good feel for the Gilbert and Sullivan idiom. She does not fill her shows with gratuitous slapstick (that rarely ever works for G&S), lets Gilbert and Sullivan sell themselves, and knows how to stage the chorus intelligently. Thankfully, this is not a *Mikado* with a bevy of fans snapping open and closed as a visual punctuation to every spoken or lyrical point. The production has several clever pieces of business. I particularly like Ko-Ko's lists of society offenders. They are written on several scrolls, each scroll longer than the last; the final one is magnificently long. This is a rare instance of staging the second-act madrigal with visual interest. One passage of dialogue handled with comic aplomb is the exchange between Yum-Yum, Pitti-Sing, and Peep-Bo at the beginning of act II, when Nanki-Poo's impending decapitation is under discussion. One of my favorite lines is oddly missing, however: in act I, when Ko-Ko asks Pooh-Bah to acknowledge Yum-Yum with a characteristic Japanese bow, Pooh-Bah does not say, "No money, no grovel."

Christopher Ocasek makes his debut as Madison's musical director and conductor. The orchestra and chorus are very good; the chorus sounds much larger than their actual numbers. Scenery and costumes likewise deserve praise. The set (Michele M. Fields, scene designer) is colorful and somewhat fanciful, the costumes and wigs (Karen Brown-Larimore) are sumptuous. It is a handsome production, and very well lit by Steven M. Peterson for the camera.

Once again, Madison filmed their production using only one camera, which I like very much. This year it was filmed in high definition, wide screen, although the DVD is released in standard definition. Watching Madison's videos is like sitting in the balcony, slightly off to the left side of the house. This year, the camera did not zoom in and out for close-ups, and was more restrained in panning from one side of the stage to the other; instead, the view was kept wide enough to include the essential action. These were sensible decisions that permit the viewer to concentrate on the performance.

The Madison *Mikado* can hold its own against the professional productions. There are two *Mikados* with the original D'Oyly Carte company; both are filmed without audiences. The 1939 film is considerably rewritten and reordered. If you accept it on its own terms, there's much to enjoy. The color is good, and it

gives a rare opportunity to see legendary Savoyard's Martyn Green and Sydney Granville. Katisha is especially droll, particularly in close-up. The D'Oyly Carte film from 1966 is based on their stage version, although filmed sans audience with much playing to the cameras. It's valuable as a document of D'Oyly Carte's performance standards, but there's something oddly artificial about it. Nevertheless, John Reed as Ko-Ko, Kenneth Sandford as Pooh-Bah, and Donald Adams as the Mikado are worth repeated viewings. The Walker *Mikado*, part of "The Complete Gilbert and Sullivan," was also filmed on a soundstage. Early on, the cast doesn't seem comfortable in such surroundings, but settles in as the show progresses. It is a curious mixture of singing live on set and lip-synching. It's not one of the series' best, but not the worst, either. Anne Collins is quite good as Katisha. Like Kathleen Buttita in *Madison*; she is not made up as a gorgon, but merely, as Gilbert says, a woman whose circulation is the largest in the world. Both ladies bring a sympathetic vulnerability that makes the bloodthirsty aspects all the more amusing.

*The Mikado* from Opera Australia is, like *Madison*'s, filmed before an audience. Australia's has some clever features, and Heather Begg's Katisha is a scene-stealer, but Graeme Ewer (Ko-Ko) finds himself more charming than the audience does. And then there's the Stratford Festival's *Mikado*! It's good, but takes some getting used to. The costumes are typically Japanese, but it's a very sparse set consisting of round platforms rearranged into assorted groupings with a large fan that rises at the rear. A tree makes an occasional appearance to vary the visual palette. The production seems to be totally lip-synched and audience response is artificially inserted. It's a very active production with lots of running around, and features the most extraordinary Pooh-Bah of all time. His every pose says, "Mr. DeMille, I'm ready for my close-up." There is also a video from the English National Opera that I have not seen.

I like and enjoy the entire *Madison* cast. In addition to Buttita's Katisha, the three little maids excel as singing actors. Amanda Compton (Yum-Yum) gets it right. Gilbert's heroines are often naive, direct, and intellectually a little dim. They need to be played with bright-eyed charm, but never come off as stupid. Sara Johnson (Pitti-Sing) and Catherine Schweitzer (Peep-Bo) show they are also adept in playing these roles. James Kryshak is a lyric tenor with the potential for a successful singing career. His voice is one of the standouts in the cast; his delivery of spoken dialogue can be faulted only for

occasionally over-punctuating a line here and there. Governor Harris is a baritone with a lovely voice; he seems more at ease when singing than speaking. I feel the reverse about Bert Adams's Mikado; the vocal part does not seem to lie comfortably for his range, but he gets the Mikado's nonchalant humor right in the dialogue portions. Director Frank distributes the Mikado's famous guffaw in "My object all sublime" throughout the cast, a surprise that works quite well. Donovan Armbruster (Ko-Ko) reminds me a lot of Jack Benny, in both poses and deadpan humor. He's animated without becoming over-bearing, he's up-front without mugging, and has very good comic timing. Anthony Ashley's deep, deep voice adds much comedic gravitas to Pooh-Bah. His timing and droll delivery bring out all of Pooh-Bah's pomposity. Ashley makes certain we get all the humor without beating us over the head. I wish Pooh-Bah had been given a more colorful costume so he would be more visually prominent.

Ko-Ko's little list song is delivered pretty much as Gilbert wrote it; so is the Mikado's "My object all sublime." I think substituting "politically correct" for "particularly" in the Mikado's entrance duet with Katisha is quite funny; unfortunately the audience doesn't catch it. They do catch adding "Secretary of Homeland Security" to Pooh-Bah's expansive resume. This is a *Mikado* that does not offer umpteenth senseless encores of "Here's a how-de-do."

The bonus feature on the DVD is a slide show of performance photos. In the future, I hope Madison considers making cast biographies available, either as a bonus on the DVD or as an insert. The DVD submitted for review had no insert at all, or listing of the cast and production staff on the cover art—unfortunate omissions, since these people deserve to be recognized. The Madison Savoyard's are very proud of this production, and they deserve to be. It can be ordered through their Web site ([www.MadisonSavoyards.org](http://www.MadisonSavoyards.org)) or through [amazon.com](http://amazon.com). If you're curious, a few clips can be seen on YouTube. Fans of Gilbert and Sullivan are encouraged to check out Madison's Web site and read their interesting newsletter, *Savoyardage*. **David L. Kirk**

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