

On Stage

Portland Opera Tops Off Season with *The Mikado*

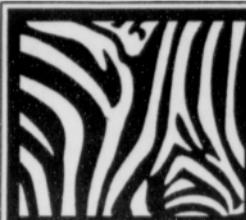


CONTRIBUTED STORY FOR THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Before Monty Python, before the Marx Brothers, there was Gilbert and Sullivan. With witty lyrics, whimsical plots and captivating music, these comic masterminds have kept audiences in stitches for more than 100 years. A topsy-turvy tale of star-crossed sweethearts and petty tyrants, *The Mikado* is a deliciously satiric look at bureaucracy, hypocrisy, and the trials and tribulations of true love. Giddy schoolgirl Yum-Yum is pledged to marry her guardian, a seedy playboy named Ko-Ko, who has just been appointed to the exalted rank of Lord High Executioner. A "wandering minstrel" who calls himself Nanki-Poo arrives in town in search of Yum-Yum, with whom he has fallen madly in love. When the Mikado,

ruler of Japan, decrees that a public execution must take place immediately, Ko-Ko believes he's found the perfect way to get rid of Nanki-Poo. Imagine his shock when he learns that Nanki-Poo is really the Mikado's son in disguise! Although Gilbert and Sullivan's fanciful tale was originally set in Japan—complete with kimonos and made-up Japanese-sounding names—the operetta is a thinly disguised lampoon of English culture. When acclaimed British director Jonathan Miller tackled *The Mikado* for the English National Opera in 1986, he opted to do away with the Japanese setting entirely. For its first venture into the world of Gilbert and Sullivan, Portland Opera will present Miller's highly praised version of *The Mikado*. Inspired by movie musicals of the 1930s as well as classic Marx Brothers' films such as *Duck Soup*,

the action is set in a swank hotel in a British seaside resort town. "It's a stunning design concept that captures perfectly the lighthearted spirit of the work," said Portland Opera's General Director Robert Bailey. "We are also very fortunate to have Nicola Bowie, who worked closely with Miller from the very beginning of the show, as our stage director and choreographer. Although W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan had artistic careers separate from their partnership, their most memorable achievements proved to be the works they created together. Their collaborations have delighted the world since they were first produced on the London stage in the late 19th century. *The Mikado* was created at the height of their popularity and continues to be one of their best-loved works. Gilbert's lively plot is conveyed through lyrics that sparkle with witty rhyme schemes, wickedly clever alliteration and nonsensical vocabulary words. Sullivan's score matches Gilbert's lyrics perfectly yet has captivating and lyrical moments as well. Said Miller during early rehearsals of the production, "At the end of the evening, the audience should feel as if they've overeaten an enormous amount of creamery meringue."



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