



Society : Maidenhead Operatic Society
 Production : The Mikado
 Date : Tuesday 25th November 2003
 Venue : Desborough Suite, Maidenhead Town Hall
 Report by : Kim Halliday, Representing Barrie Theobald
 Regional Representative, Region 14

Report

May I start by offering my thanks to Maidenhead Operatic Society for inviting me to this production, and thus enabling me to give my first review for NODA. I have never seen a staged production of “The Mikado”; in fact, I haven’t seen any of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, nor any other “operatic” productions, for that matter – probably because I feared that I wouldn’t be able to understand them or that they were too “highbrow” for me. However, tonight’s performance has proved me wrong as I thoroughly enjoyed myself, and it’s easy to see why this is one of the more popular G&S operas. On with the review...

STEVE McADAM (Nanki-Poo). I acted opposite Steve in *She Loves Me* and I have only seen him portray romantic lead roles, so I had this image of him as the “straight man”. I was therefore pleasantly surprised to see him slip so effortlessly into the part of Nanki-Poo and his deadpan delivery with the pathos required was actually a joy to watch. His singing wasn’t to be faulted, either, and I particularly liked his rendition of *A Wand’ring Minstrel I* and his duet with Yum-Yum in *Were You Not to Ko-Ko Plighted*. I’ll be seeing him in a different light from now on....!

BOB SPOONER (Pish-Tush). A slightly smaller role than the others, nevertheless Bob delivered a faultless performance and his voice blended well with those around him, holding a perfect harmony in the acapella section of *Brightly Dawns Our Wedding Day*, which was one of my favourite songs in the show. A good supporting role.

RAY THACKRAY (Poo-Bah). Ray was perfect in this role, managing to convey both wickedness and comedy, whilst maintaining a pompous air. He had some great asides and one-liners that really made me chuckle, and at times, in fact, reminded me of *Jim Broadbent*, the Oscar-winning actor. Well done!

PAUL SEDDON (Ko-Ko). Well, what can I say about Paul? He was *Kenneth Williams* and *Charles Hawtrey* all rolled in to one and gave a terrific performance of the comic tailor, leaping around the stage with great ease and obvious delight. Paul has a very expressive face and was able to use this to great effect during some of his more comic routines. Singing a song of love, with sincerity in the voice whilst having a look of distaste on the face is quite an achievement! I particularly liked the wreath and headstone gags during *Here’s a How-De-Do!* and, of course, his obligatory up-to-date “little list” in the adapted rendition of *As Someday it Might Happen*. Congratulations, Paul – you made me smile!

DIANA COCKREM (Yum-Yum). Like Paul, Diana has a very expressive face and she was able to convey almost every emotion with just one flutter of her eyelids! She sang very sweetly of her love for Nanki-Poo and, like Steve, was able to portray both the humour and deadpan the role required. She also held well in the harmonies – no mean feat when you are singing against three other strong singers!

CATHY BROOKES (Pitti-Sing). Out of the three girls, Cathy has the voice that I would most associate with being an “operatic” voice, and she had a great sense of comic timing, particularly during her embellishment of the lie in *The Criminal Cried as He Dropped Him Down*.

CLAIRE IMRIE (Peep-Bo). Peep-Bo is the smallest of the three “little maid” parts, but Claire played her role with great gusto, singing sweetly and acting her socks off. Her voice blended well with the other “wards” and her harmonies could not be faulted. Wonderful!

PETER KIDSON (The Mikado). Peter portrayed the title role with great aplomb, coming over as both menacing and sympathetic as he gradually mellowed. He has a fine, booming singing voice and also some great comic timing, which suited the role to a T.

CHRISTINE WELLS (Katisha). I would imagine that the part of Katisha, the frightful old battleaxe, is a marvellous part for any woman to play. Christine has an excellent operatic voice – good power across the range required – and portrayed the role of Katisha with great relish. However, I felt that she could have been a little more forceful and domineering, and thought that, at times, she played the part too “out front” rarely turning her head from the audience. This tended to take away any interaction with other characters on stage with her at the time.

Nevertheless, this was an impressive portrayal of a revered character and Christine should be applauded for coping with such complicated melodies whilst constantly ascending and descending those cumbersome steps!

CHORUS (of Attendants, Chaperones, Maids, Nobles and Coolies/Guards/Titipu Town Band). Choruses are usually very under-rated (I know, I've been in them!), but really they are the foundation on which a production is built and hold it all together, so their contribution is both important and necessary. Tonight's chorus were a fine group of individuals who added colour and movement to the show and helped to give the overall impression of a very polished production – not to mention some fine singing. Everyone seemed to know their words and what they were supposed to be doing, and all coped well with the restricted space and awkward staging. The movement, makeup, and helmets of the guards early on in the show put me in mind instantly of the Keystone Cops!

DIRECTION (Ian Cameron). I thought Ian's direction was excellent, as the cast obviously knew what they were doing and every movement had a purpose. I particularly liked the comedy at the end of Scene 1, where the chorus attempted to exit after every utterance of the words "long life" by Poo-Bah. Extremely amusing! Every part was well-cast, so Ian obviously knew the show very well and knew how to get the best out of his performers.

MUSICAL DIRECTION (David Hazeldine). Despite having no radio mics on the performers, the orchestra did not drown them out, as can easily be the case at the Desborough. The cast sang well and coped with the complicated score. I particularly liked the acapella sections, as every harmony was sustained and could be heard. The Orchestra (and I was pleased to note that all of the musicians "have day jobs"!) performed the score with competence and sensitivity, accompanying the singers, rather than leading them. Well done, David, an excellent job of blending voices and instruments into a well-balanced and co-ordinated whole.

CHOREOGRAPHY (David Parsonson). I have been choreographed by David in the past, in "The Good Companions", so was confident he would do a good job tonight. David worked well with the restricted space on stage and the movements were very effective and suited everyone's abilities.

LIGHTING (Andy Nicholson). Several striking lighting effects were used during the performance which worked well to change the mood – a very effective use of the cyc-cloth to create mood and "temperature" on the stage. The only techie glitch I noted was one flickering light on the front-of-house bar which was a little distracting. But apart from that, everyone and everything was lit when they needed to be – a tribute to the co-operation necessary between lighting and choreography.

SOUND (Brian Cox). I was surprised to learn that no principal was mic'ed during the performance as I could hear every word over the orchestra. Levalier mics are usually quite a nuisance for both performers and sound engineers, so it must have been a relief for everyone that these were unnecessary.

STAGING AND SCENERY. Although the simple set was effective and striking, it provided the cast with some difficulties in maneuvering and also looked overcrowded when the chorus were on stage. Much volume was lost when singers went up or down the steps, especially during the large chorus numbers, as it was obvious they were unsure of their footing and had to look down. However, this will improve with time as the cast get used to them. The large plinth and steps also forced the principals forward and restricted the room that they had in front of the footlights, thus limiting their choreography, although they all coped admirably well with the restrictions placed upon them. It was also a little off-putting being able to see into the wings, as I had a particularly ugly fire hose in my line of sight throughout the whole show, but apart from that, a simple but very effective set, used to good effect by the choreographer.

COSTUMES (Teresa Stanton and Jenny Harris). What bright and colourful costumes! Everyone looked perfect and in keeping with the setting and I liked the use of fans to compliment each outfit. I also liked the idea of dressing Ko-Ko in black and silver for each of his costume changes – it did well to make him stand out from the brightly-dressed folk around him. But how hot it must have been under those wigs – I didn't envy any of the cast!

MAKE UP (Joan Thomas and Ros Hazeldine). This was adequate and in line with the setting of the show, although some of the ladies' faces seemed whiter than others (this may have been a trick of the light, though).

PROGRAMME (The Roberts' Family). I found the programme well laid-out and informative, with good, clear pictures of the cast and interesting resumé's. The advertising was discreet and well placed and the idea of having the song list on the middle pages for easy reference was inspired, as this is where the brochure naturally falls open on your lap. Another nice touch was the picture of the chorus with fans. Good work!

And finally (but by no means less important!)....

FRONT OF HOUSE. Despite the fact that I was only representing Barrie on this occasion, I received a very warm welcome from the Front of House staff and was even presented with a token gift, which was a nice gesture. I was well looked-after and everyone was extremely friendly and approachable. A good team!

To sum up, I thoroughly enjoyed this performance and I look forward to (hopefully!) reviewing their forthcoming production of “Chess” next year.

Kim Halliday