

The Mikado

When my friends and I entered the school auditorium on the 21st of February, it was already crowded. As it was still quite early we employed the time recalling memories of past productions. We remembered vividly that enchanting fantasy, *Iolanthe*, with its airy fairyland and pompous palaces, its fairies, peers, shepherds and shepherdesses. We looked forward to a good night's enjoyment and we were amply gratified.

The expectation of the spectators was at its height when *Mr. Hsueh*, the conductor, rose to make the bow. He raised his baton and the overture began. We were at once lulled into an acquiescent frame of mind by the dainty oriental music. The curtain rose and we were introduced to the town of Titipu. The scene was a courtyard where we were greeted by the "gentlemen of Japan". Then Nanki-Poo, the son of *the Mikado*, who had fled from the wrath of his father because he refused to marry *Katisha*, an elderly spinster, came in with a guitar, dressed as a wandering minstrel. He sang to the noblemen and told them that he hoped to persuade *Yum-Yum* to marry him since *Koko*, the man to whom *Yum-Yum* was betrothed, was sentenced to death by *the Mikado* for flirting. *Chu Chee Wing* as *Nanki-Poo* had a resonant and mellow voice which enabled him to render his songs with feeling. He also acted with ease and composure. *Pish-Tush*, a noble lord, told *Nanki-Poo* that *Koko* was reprieved and had been made *Lord High Executioner*. *Pooh-Bah*, *Lord High Everything Else*, the epitome of graft and patronage, entered. This character, played by *Julian Pei*, was attired as a tremendous swell and he was as much a source of merriment as *Koko*. This democratic lord sold the "state secret" that *Koko* was going to marry *Yum-Yum* that same day to *Nanki-Poo*.

At this instant, the *Lord High Executioner* came in with his long axe. His very appearance was enough to evoke a storm of laughter from the audience. *Mr. Wong Chin Wah* was an experienced actor and his *Koko* kept the audience in a constant state of merriment. How the audience chuckled merrily when he sang "I've Got a Little List"! *Koko* talked with *Pooh-Bah* of his plans for his marriage. Then a choir of little ladies came tripping in, to be fol-

lowed by three little maids from school, *Yum-Yum*, *Peep-Bo* and *Pitti-Sing*. We could not but be fascinated by their beautiful costumes. The wigs of the chorus looked like real hair. The appearance of these geisha girls was most engaging. Then the three geisha girls recognised *Nanki-Poo* as a musician in the Titipu band and introduced him to *Koko*. *Koko* was not at all angry that *Nanki-Poo* was in love with *Yum-Yum*. He was flattered because he loved *Yum-Yum* himself. When *Nanki-Poo* and *Yum-Yum* were left alone he revealed his love for her. Romance and pathos were blended together in the song sung by *Nanki-Poo* and *Yum-Yum*. Their two voices combined into a sweet harmony. As *Nanki-Poo* and *Yum-Yum* left, *Koko* rushed in with a letter from *the Mikado*, ordering him to execute someone within a month or be discharged. *Pooh-Bah* suggested that *Koko* should execute himself. As they were casting about for someone to execute, *Nanki-Poo* entered, holding a rope in his hand. He intended to commit suicide as a result of his hopeless suit for *Yum-Yum*. *Pooh-Bah* and *Koko* managed to persuade him to be killed publicly but *Nanki-Poo* would consent to this only if he might marry *Yum-Yum* immediately and live with her until his death. The compromise was agreed upon. The song, "He's going to marry *Yum-Yum*", sung by *Pitti-Sing* and the chorus after this, was very impressive with its catching refrain, and the First Act ended on this note of promised marriage.

The Second Act took place in *Koko's* garden, with delightful pink cherry-blossom trees painted in the background. *Yum-Yum*, *Peep-Bo* and *Pitti-Sing* and a bevy of girls were preparing for "The Sun whose Rays are All Ablaze" sung by *Yum-Yum*. This was both pleasing and charming. *Miss Agnes Yue* made a triumphant appearance as *Yum-Yum*. She showed her experience in acting in such free and effortless gestures as made her appear a truly young and gay geisha girl. She was well supported by her two companions, *Miss Lillian Lee* as *Peep-Bo* and *Miss Cecilia Lee* as *Pitti-Sing*. Meanwhile *Nanki-Poo* tried to comfort *Yum-Yum* for she was sad that their happiness would last for only one month. *Koko*, however, added to her distress by giving them the information that the Japanese law de-

manded that when a married man was executed, his wife must die with him. It was a real mess they had got into! *Pooh-Bah* arrived to tell them that *the Mikado* was coming. *Koko* in desperation told *Nanki-Poo* to go away and he drew up a false document, certifying the death of *Nanki-Poo*. The procession heralding *the Mikado* entered and what a formidable and awe-inspiring *Mikado*! He was accompanied by the elderly *Katisha*. (*Mr. Lee Yip Wah*, as *Katisha*, showed the spirit of a past student by taking an interest in this school activity.) *Koko* hastened to inform him that the execution had taken place. The *Mikado* then told him that he was also searching for the heir to the throne. To everyone's horror it was discovered that the man just executed was the son of *the Mikado*. *Koko*, *Pooh-Bah* and *Peep-Bo* were dismayed. The *Mikado* threatened to punish them with something unpleasant. The scene was very amusing and the acting was very fine. *Koko*, *Peep-Bo* and *Pooh-Bah* crouched humbly before the angry and capricious *Mikado*, begging forgiveness. *Alexander Lau* as *the Mikado* was a success. He was confident and his voice was strong and clear. His magnificent, gold-embroidered robe made him an imposing figure on the stage. Meanwhile, *Koko* tried desperately to persuade *Nanki-Poo* to come to life. *Nanki-Poo* agreed on condition that *Koko* married *Katisha* and gave up *Yum-Yum* to him. *Koko* had to comply. He made advances to *Katisha* and told her that he would commit suicide if she rejected him. He cited a case in which even a bird had died of unrequited

love. The song which he sang moved the heart of *Katisha* and she agreed to marry him. Now *the Mikado* ordered the execution of all those concerned in the death of the heir. *Katisha* asked for mercy. *Nanki-Poo* appeared. *Koko* was able to get over a technical point in the law. *The Mikado* was satisfied and the opera ended in a grand finale.

For two and a half hours we were treated to a veritable feast of humour, songs and fantasy. Our attention was held with unflagging attention. The reception was gratifying. We could easily observe the labours of all concerned in the production. The quaint arts of Japan, the beautiful costumes and scenery, the excitement of light, the carefully drilled shuffling walk of the ladies, the spreading and snapping of fans and the make-up of the cast. The cast indeed is to be congratulated on its fine performance. No small measure was also due to the musical direction of Mr. Hsueh who competently conducted the music which was such a vital part of the opera. The accompanists are to be thanked for their contribution to such entertaining music. Finally the credit must also go to the director, Rev. Fr. Egan S.J., and the producer, Mr. O'Flanagan, who were mainly responsible for the production. Personally I was more than just charmed by the play. Such another experience will no doubt enrich that precious memory of a quick-passing school life. So to all those concerned in this production, a heartfelt "thank you"!

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College Prefects: 1963