

Virginia
Opera

Presents

THE MIKADO

A COMIC OPERA IN TWO ACTS

Music by Sir Arthur S. Sullivan
Libretto by Sir William S. Gilbert



Study Guide
2011-2012 Season

2010-2011 SEASON

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Preface

Purpose

This study guide is intended to aid you, the teacher, in increasing your students' understanding and appreciation of THE MIKADO. This will not only add to knowledge about opera, but should develop awareness of other related subjects, making the performance they attend much more enjoyable.

Most Important

If you only have a limited amount of time, concentrate on the cast of characters, the plot and some of the musical and dramatic highlights of the opera. Recognition produces familiarity, which in turn produces a positive experience.

The Language

The Mikado was written in English. The Virginia Opera will perform in English. In addition, English supertitles will be projected on a screen above the stage. With these **Supertitles**, audiences can easily understand all that is being sung.

Objectives

1. To understand how opera, as an art form, reflects and comments on society and the world in which we live.
2. To develop an awareness of how the study of certain art forms such as opera can communicate ideas of the past and present.
3. To develop a basic understanding of what opera is. Students should be able to identify the many elements (musical, visual, and dramatic) of an opera and understand how they work together to produce a unified, exciting, and emotional work.
4. To understand the process of adapting a story for the stage; what changes need to be made and why. Incorporated in this objective is a basic understanding of what makes a good opera.
5. To know the basic plot/story line of THE MIKADO.
6. To understand how music serves as a mode of communication in opera and the effect music has on characteristics and mood.
7. To develop some sense of appreciation for opera as a timeless art form that brings real characters, emotions, and situations to life.
8. To understand the working relationship between words and music in an opera. Students should understand how a composer and librettist work together to create significant, dramatic, and unified meaning.

What is Opera?

Opera is a unique type of entertainment—a play that is sung throughout. Because it combines music and theater, opera can be the most moving of all the arts, and can tell a story in a way quite unlike any other. It does so by means of words, actions, and music.

The words of an opera are called a **libretto** (the Italian word for “little book”), much like the words of a play are called a **script**. There are important differences between a libretto and a script, however. For one thing, a libretto usually contains far fewer words than a script. The reason for this is the music. It can take more time to sing a line of text than to say it; also, words are often repeated in operatic music for reasons of musical form. Therefore, there are fewer words in an opera than in a play of the same length.

While the spoken word can clearly show what people are thinking, singing is much better at showing emotions. For this reason, the plot of an opera is likely to be filled with dramatic situations in which highly emotional characters perform bold actions.

The way **librettists** (the people who write the words) use words is also different. Opera librettos are commonly made up of poetry, while this is not often true of the scripts for plays. Many of the musical passages can be considered a type of sung poetry, complete with meter, accents, and rhyme. If you were to say the words that the characters sing, this would become very clear.

A librettist can also do something that a playwright cannot—he or she can write an **ensemble**. An ensemble is a passage in the libretto in which more than one person sings; often, several characters sing different vocal lines simultaneously. In a play, if all the actors spoke at once, the audience could not understand the words. In an opera, the music helps the audience to sort out the thoughts and feelings of each singer. Frequently, each individual character has a distinct musical or vocal style which distinguishes him/her from the other characters.

If the libretto of an opera is a special language, the score (or musical portion of an opera) is a special use of music. It is music that is meant to be sung, of course, but it has characteristics that many songs do not. **Operatic music is dramatic music, written for the theater.** For this reason, it must also be capable of describing strong feelings that invite the audience’s involvement with the story and their identification with people on stage. In addition, a good operatic composer can use music as a tool to define character and personality traits of his characters.

One way in which a **composer** (the person who writes the music) can use music is through the voices of the singers themselves. A human voice, especially when singing, can express all sorts of feelings. Composers know this and use this knowledge to the fullest. First, they consider the personality of a character and then choose a voice type (either high or low) that best suits this type of person. For example, younger characters are often sung by the higher voice types. There are five different voice categories (perhaps some students are familiar with these from singing in a choir):

SOPRANO: the highest female voice

MEZZO-SOPRANO: (also called ALTO) the lower female voice

TENOR: the highest male voice (like Pavarotti or Caruso)

BARITONE: the middle male voice

BASS: the lowest male voice

Each of these voice categories can be subdivided into more specialized types, such as “dramatic soprano”, “lyric soprano”, “coloratura soprano”, “basso-buffo”, depending on the specific type of music being sung. These distinctions are known as **vocal fachs**, from a German word meaning “mode”.

After a composer has chosen the characters’ voice types, he then tries to interpret the libretto in musical terms. A character may sing very high notes when agitated or excited, or low notes when depressed or calm. He or she may sing many rapid notes or a few long held notes, depending upon the mood at the time.

In an opera production, the ideas of the composer and librettist are expressed by the singers as directed by a **conductor** and **stage director**. The conductor is responsible for the musical aspects of the performance, leading the orchestra and the singers and determining the musical pace. The stage director is responsible for the dramatic movement and characterizations of the singers. He works with a **design team**—a set designer, costume designer, and a lighting designer – to determine the visual interpretation of the work. Just as the composer and librettist must work in close communion in the writing of an opera, the conductor and stage director must have a close collaboration to produce a unified interpretation of an opera. Both must collaborate with the singers and the design team (and sometimes a **choreographer**, if dancing is involved). For this reason opera is perhaps the form demanding the greatest degree of collaboration.

An opera then, is a partnership of words and music with the purpose of telling a dramatic story. While the story itself may be about everyday situations or historical figures, it usually has a moral or idea that the entire audience understands. This is one of the great features of opera—it unites a variety of people with different backgrounds by giving them a common experience to relate to.

The Operatic Voice

To present a true (and brief) definition of the “operatic” voice is a difficult proposition. Many believe the voice is “born,” while just as many hold to the belief that the voice is “trained.” The truth lies somewhere between the two. Voices that can sustain the demands required by the operatic repertoire do have many things in common. First and foremost is a strong physical technique that allows the singer to sustain long phrases through the control of both the inhalation and exhalation of breath. Secondly, the voice (regardless of its size) must maintain a resonance in both the head (mouth, sinuses) and chest cavities. The Italian word “*squillo*” (squeal) is used to describe the brilliant tone required to penetrate the full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singers. Finally, all voices are defined by both the actual voice “type” and the selection of repertoire for which the voice is ideally suited.

Within the five major voice types (*Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, Bass*) there is a further delineation into categories (*Coloratura, Lyric, Spinto, and Dramatic*) which help to define each particular instrument. The *Coloratura* is the highest within each voice type whose extended upper range is complimented by extreme flexibility. The *Lyric* is the most common of the “types.” This instrument is recognized more for the exceptional beauty of its tone rather than its power or range. The *Spinto* is a voice which combines the beauty of a lyric with the weight and power of a *Dramatic*, which is the most “powerful” of the voices. The *Dramatic* instrument is characterized by the combination of both incredible volume and “steely” intensity.

While the definition presented in the preceding paragraph may seem clearly outlined, many voices combine qualities from each category, thus carving a unique niche in operatic history. Just as each person is different from the next, so is each voice. Throughout her career Maria Callas defied categorization as she performed and recorded roles associated with each category in the soprano voice type. Joan Sutherland as well can be heard in recordings of soprano roles as diverse as the coloratura Gilda in *Rigoletto* to the dramatic Turandot in *Turandot*. Below is a very brief outline of voice types and categories with roles usually associated with the individual voice type.

	<i>Coloratura</i>	<i>Lyric</i>	<i>Spinto</i>	<i>Dramatic</i>
<i>Soprano</i>	Norina (Don Pasquale) Gilda (Rigoletto) Lucia (Lucia di Lammermoor)	Liu (Turandot) Mimi (La Bohème) Pamina (Magic Flute)	Tosca (Tosca) Amelia (A Masked Ball) Leonora (Il Trovatore)	Turandot (Turandot) Norma (Norma) Elektra (Elektra)
<i>Mezzo-Soprano</i>	Rosina (Barber of Seville) Angelina (La Cenerentola) Dorabella (Così fan tutte)	Carmen (Carmen) Charlotte (Werther) Giulietta (Hoffmann)	Santuzza (Cavalleria) Adalgisa (Norma) The Composer (Ariadne auf Naxos)	Azucena (Il Trovatore) Ulrica (A Masked Ball) Herodias (Salome)
<i>Tenor</i>	Count Almaviva (Barber of Seville) Don Ottavio (Don Giovanni) Ferrando (Così fan tutte)	Alfredo (La Traviata) Rodolfo (La Bohème) Tamino (Magic Flute)	Calaf (Turandot) Pollione (Norma) Cavaradossi (Tosca)	Dick Johnson (Fanciulla) Don Jose (Carmen) Otello (Otello)
<i>Baritone</i>	Figaro (Barber of Seville) Count Almavira (Marriage of Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Don Pasquale)	Marcello (La Bohème) Don Giovanni (Don Giovanni) Sharpless (Madama Butterfly)	<i>Verdi Baritone</i> Germont (La Traviata) Di Luna (Il Trovatore) Rigoletto (Rigoletto)	Scarpia (Tosca) Jochanaan (Salome) Jack Rance (Fanciulla)
<i>Bass</i>	Bartolo (Barber of Seville) Don Magnifico (Cenerentola) Dr. Dulcamara (Elixir of Love)	Leporello (Don Giovanni) Colline (La Bohème) Figaro (Marriage of Figaro)	<i>Buffo Bass</i> Don Pasquale (Don Pasquale) Don Alfonso (Così fan tutte)	<i>Basso Cantate</i> Oroveso (Norma) Timur (Turandot) Sarastro (Magic Flute)

Opera Production

Opera is created by the combination of a myriad of art forms. First and foremost are the actors who portray characters by revealing their thoughts and emotions through the singing voice. The next very important component is a full symphony orchestra that accompanies the singing actors and actresses, helping them to portray the full range of emotions possible in the operatic format. The orchestra performs in an area in front of the singers called the orchestra pit while the singers perform on the open area called the stage. Wigs, costumes, sets and specialized lighting further enhance these performances, all of which are designed, created, and executed by a team of highly trained artisans.

The creation of an opera begins with a dramatic scenario crafted by a playwright or dramaturg who alone or with a librettist fashions the script or libretto that contains the words the artists will sing. Working in tandem, the composer and librettist team up to create a cohesive musical drama in which the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the composer and librettist entrust their new work to a conductor who with a team of assistants (repetiteurs) assumes responsibility for the musical preparation of the work. The conductor collaborates with a stage director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The stage director and conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a design team which will take charge of the actual physical production.

Set designers, lighting designers, costume designers, wig and makeup designers and even choreographers must all be brought “on board” to participate in the creation of the new production. The set designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using “blueprint” plans to design the actual physical set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the storyline. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are specially trained in the art of stage carpentry. Following the actual building of the set, painters following instructions from the set designers’ original plans paint the set. As the set is assembled on the stage, the lighting designer works with a team of electricians to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric as well as practical way. Using specialized lighting instruments, colored gels and a state of the art computer, the designer along with the stage director create a “lighting plot” by writing “lighting cues” which are stored in the computer and used during the actual performance of the opera.

During this production period, the costume designer in consultation with the stage director has designed appropriate clothing for the singing actors and actresses to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of highly skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and sewers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using his/her individual measurements. The wig and makeup designer, working with the costume designer, designs and creates wigs which will complement both the costume and the singer as well as represent historically accurate “period” fashions.

As the actual performance date approaches, rehearsals are held on the newly crafted set, combined with costumes, lights, and orchestra in order to ensure a cohesive performance that will be both dramatically and musically satisfying to the assembled audience.



THE MIKADO

Premiere

London, Savoy Theatre, March 14, 1885

Cast of Characters

Nanki-Poo.....	Tenor
Yum-Yum.....	Soprano
Ko-Ko	Buffo Baritone
Pooh-Bah.....	Baritone
Pish-Tush.....	Baritone
Pitti-Sing.....	Mezzo-soprano
Peep-Bo.....	Soprano
The Mikado.....	Bass
Katisha.....	Mezzo-soprano

BRIEF SUMMARY

Before the opera story begins, Nanki-Poo, the Mikado's son, fled from his father's palace to escape being compelled to marry Katisha, an elderly lady of the court; Nanki-Poo has become an itinerant minstrel who falls in love with Yum-Yum, however, he cannot marry her because Ko-Ko, her guardian, has decided to marry her himself.

Nanki-Poo learns that Ko-Ko has been sentenced to death for violating the Mikado's law against flirting. As Act I opens, Nanki-Poo has arrived in Titipu to determine if Ko-Ko has been executed, and, therefore, if Yum-Yum is free to marry him.

He encounters Pooh-Bah, a corrupt public official, and Pish-Tush, a noble, who inform him that Ko-Ko was reprieved at the last moment by a set of curious chances, and then raised to the exalted rank of Lord High Executioner. Nanki-Poo turns to despair when he learns that Ko-Ko plans to marry Yum-Yum immediately.

There have been no executions in Titipu since Ko-Ko became Lord High Executioner. Ko-Ko receives a letter from the Mikado ordering him to execute someone or else lose his post as Lord High Executioner. As Ko-Ko ponders his dilemma of trying to find someone to execute, Nanki-Poo appears, vowing suicide because he cannot marry Yum-Yum, the woman he loves.

Ko-Ko offers to allow Nanki-Poo to marry Yum-Yum for one month, after which, he will become his execution victim. Suddenly, Katisha appears and discovers Nanki-Poo, the vanished object of her love. After she is driven away, she rushes to inform the Mikado that his son has been found.

As Act II opens, Yum-Yum prepares for her one-month marriage to Nanki-Poo. Ko-Ko arrives with the shocking revelation that he has discovered a law decreeing that when a married man is executed, his widow must be buried alive: under those horrible conditions, the marriage between Yum-Yum and Nanki-Poo is canceled.

Nevertheless, Ko-Ko must find a “substitute” for execution or he will be decapitated by the Mikado. Nanki-Poo contrives a solution to save Ko-Ko’s life: a false affidavit confirming his own execution, but in exchange, he must be allowed to marry Yum-Yum and leave the country forever. Ko-Ko agrees.

The Mikado arrives in Titipu. Ko-Ko believes that the purpose of his visit is to confirm that an execution has taken place so he produces the affidavit and proceeds to describe the execution with gusto. However, the Mikado has actually come to Titipu in search of his lost son and learns from the affidavit that Ko-Ko and his ministers executed his son; he declares them guilty of “composing the death of the Heir Apparent”; their only hope to avoid execution is to produce Nanki-Poo alive.

Nanki-Poo hesitates to reveal himself, fearing that if Katisha learns that he has married Yum-Yum she will have him executed. The dilemma is resolved by Ko-Ko, who, at Nanki-Poo’s suggestion, woos, wins, and weds Katisha.

All are reconciled as they celebrate Nanki-Poo’s marriage to Yum-Yum and Ko-Ko’s marriage to Katisha.

THE MIKADO

Full Plot Synopsis

ACT I: Courtyard of Ko-Ko's Palace in Titipu

Japanese nobles praise their culture, correcting Western stereotypes that depict them as bizarre, peculiar, and strange, and affirming that they are far from quaint marionette dolls, but rather, gentlemen of Japan.

Nanki-Poo, the Mikado's renegade son, disguised as a wandering minstrel, enters the palace in great excitement, carrying a guitar and a bundle of ballads. He inquires of the nobles where he can find a gentle maiden named Yum-Yum, the ward of Ko-Ko, the "cheap tailor." When asked his identity, Nanki-Poo describes himself as a poor minstrel who possesses a diverse repertoire of sentimental songs about love and sorrows; lullabies, patriotic ballads, and songs of the sea.

Pish-Tush, a noble lord, asks Nanki-Poo why he seeks Yum-Yum: he explains that a year ago, when he was a member of the Titipu town band, his duty was to take the cap around for contributions; he met Yum-Yum, and they fell in love immediately. However, when he learned that she was betrothed to her guardian, Ko-Ko, the "cheap tailor," he realized that his "suit was hopeless," and in despair, left Titipu.

But a month ago he became ecstatic when he learned that Ko-Ko had been sentenced to death for flirting, the Mikado's decree to punish the roving eyes of young as well as old men. Nanki-Poo, believing that Yum-Yum is now free from Ko-Ko, has hurried back to Titipu to find her, praying that she will heed his solemn vows.

Pish-Tush disappoints Nanki-Poo, informing him that Ko-Ko was reprieved from execution at the last moment, and raised to the exalted rank of Lord High Executioner through the kindness of the Mikado. Consequently, at this very moment, executions are at a standstill, because, according to the Mikado's law, criminals must be executed in order of their conviction; since Ko-Ko was next in line on the block, no one can be executed until Ko-Ko, now the Lord High Executioner, first decapitates himself: "Who's next to be decapitated, cannot cut off another's head until he's cut his own off..."

Pooh-Bah, the esteemed Lord High Everything, praises the Mikado's logic, "seeing no moral difference between the dignified judge who condemns a criminal to die, and the industrious mechanic who carries out the sentence, he has rolled the two offices into one, and every judge is now his own executioner."

Pooh-Bah, who now holds all the state posts in Ko-Ko's new administration, proudly explains how he brilliantly seized the opportunities: "all the great Officers of State resigned in a body because they were too proud to serve under an ex-tailor, did I not unhesitatingly accept all their posts at once?" In Pooh-Bah's collection of high state positions – and conflicts of interests – naturally, he is salaried accordingly.

Pooh-Bah, a man of dubious integrity, immediately offers to sell Nanki-Poo any information about Yum-Yum that falls under his specific responsibility as Head of State. Nanki-Poo takes the hint, hands him money, which prompts Pooh-Bah to advise Nanki-Poo that on this very day, after Yum-Yum

returns from school, she will wed Ko-Ko. Together with Pish-Tush, Nanki-Poo is advised to give up all hope of marrying Yum-Yum.

Ko-Ko, the Lord High Executioner arrives, followed by his adoring entourage who praise their austere master. Ko-Ko immediately explains the bizarre circumstances under which he was reprieved from execution, liberated from jail, and miraculously elevated to the highest position of State.

As Lord High Executioner, he possesses a long list of potential victims, and explains that “I am happy to think that there will be no difficulty in finding plenty of people whose loss will be a distinct gain to society at large.”

Ko-Ko discusses his forthcoming wedding celebration with Pooh-Bah who assures him that in his various capacities, he will find appropriate public funds to pay for a week of festivities.

A procession of girls return from school followed by Yum-Yum and her two sisters: Pitti-Sing and Peep-Bo. Ko-Ko approaches Yum-Yum to embrace her, but she discourages him, hesitating because of the impropriety of being kissed in front of so many people. Finally, with the approval of her friends, Yum-Yum allows Ko-Ko an embrace.

Yum-Yum becomes overjoyed when she sees Nanki-Poo: she and the girls rush to him, shake his hands, and as speaking at once, ask the itinerant musician to tell them the latest news about Titipu. Ko-Ko interrupts them and asks to be presented to the young man, prompting Yum-Yum to explain that he is a musician, but Nanki-Poo interrupts her to boldly proclaim that, “Sir, I have the misfortune to love your ward, Yum-Yum – oh, I know I deserve your anger!”

Surprisingly, Ko-Ko accepts Nanki-Poo’s rather passionate avowal as a compliment, honored that his own high opinion of Yum-Yum is supported by an apparently competent authority.

The girls seemingly offend the haughty Pooh-Bah and are obliged to beg him to pardon their lack of etiquette; they excuse themselves as young, capricious, and in need of discipline.

Yum-Yum and Nanki-Poo are left alone, and Nanki-Poo reveals that he sought her for weeks in the belief that her guardian had been beheaded, but he has become disheartened upon learning that not only is Ko-Ko very much alive, but he plans to marry her this very afternoon.

Nanki-Poo suggests that Yum-Yum wait to marry until she comes of age, but she explains that she cannot refuse her guardian and must accede to his wishes. However, Yum-Yum indignantly rejects Nanki-Poo, telling him that a wandering minstrel “is hardly a fitting husband for the ward of a Lord High Executioner.”

Yum-Yum’s rejection prompts Nanki-Poo to reveal the secret of his identity: he tells her that he is the son of the Mikado, further explaining that Katisha, an elderly lady of his father’s court, misconstrued his courtesy toward her as affection, and claimed him in marriage. His father ordered him to marry Katisha, but he refused; rather than be executed in punishment, he fled the palace and joined a band.

Yum-Yum admits that she loves Nanki-Poo, but cautions him to remain distant, fearing that he will violate the Mikado’s extreme laws against flirting. Both lament the law that prevents them from being

close to each other; nevertheless, they kiss, acting out what they would do if they were free to love each other.

Ko-Ko appears, followed by Pish-Tush. Pish-Tush bears a letter from the Mikado, informing Ko-Ko that the Emperor is upset because there have been no executions in Titipu for a year; he has decreed that unless someone is beheaded within one month, the post of Lord High Executions shall be abolished, and the city reduced to the rank of a village.

Ko-Ko realizes that he will be ruined unless he finds someone to execute. Pish-Tush, with the support of Pooh-Bah, suggests that Ko-Ko become the victim; after all, he has already been sentenced to death for flirting. Ko-Ko refutes them, reasoning that “self-decapitation is an extremely difficult and dangerous thing to accept, and, it’s suicide, and suicide is a capital offence.”

Each of the men declines the honor of decapitation: Ko-Ko because of his duty to Titipu; Pooh-Bah because he would humiliate his family pride; and Pish-Tush contrarily states that Ko-Ko’s execution would be a most honorable and courageous act.

Ko-Ko appoints Pooh-Bah the Lord High Substitute: his duty, to find a surrogate whom they can execute, and therefore, satisfy the Mikado’s orders.

Ko-Ko is left alone and soliloquizes, appalled at the possibility that he may be next in line for execution. Curiously, Nanki-Poo suddenly appears, carrying a rope in his hands and announcing to Ko-Ko that he is about to hang himself, his life becoming meaningless because Ko-Ko is about to marry Yum-Yum, the girl he loves. Ko-Ko, a “humane man,” commands that he will not permit suicide, but Nanki-Poo remains resolved to die.

Ko-Ko contrives a novel idea: since Nanki-Poo is already determined to die, he could become their “substitute” for execution. Ko-Ko convinces Nanki-Poo that if he agrees to his proposal, he will “be beheaded handsomely at the hands of the Public Executioner,” honored with the distinction of becoming the central figure in a grand ceremonial that includes bands, tolling bells, and a processions of girls in tears.

Nanki-Poo conjures an even more inventive idea: he should marry Yum-Yum for one month, after which Ko-Ko can behead him; after Yum-Yum becomes a widow, Ko-Ko can marry her. Ko-Ko agrees, but cautions Nanki-Poo that during his marriage to Yum-Yum, he must not induce prejudice or disturb her; after all, Ko-Ko has educated Yum-Yum to extol Ko-Ko’s wisdom and goodness.

Excitedly, Ko-Ko officially announces that he has found a “volunteer” for execution: he points to Nanki-Poo, and then directs him to take Yum-Yum as his bride. Yum-Yum and Nanki-Poo rejoice as they inaugurate their brief, one-month marriage: *The threatened cloud has passed away*. All of their friends wish them prosperity and good fortune.

Katisha arrives and melodramatically silences everyone: “Your revels cease,” and claims Nanki-Poo as her lover. Pitti-Sing taunts Katisha, telling her that she has arrived too late, “for he’s going to marry Yum”: *Away, nor prosecute your quest*.

Katisha responds furiously, and then grieves her lost love: “The hour of gladness is dead and gone.” Katisha turns to Nanki-Poo and denounces him: “Oh, faithless one...this insult you shall rue!” As she

tries to expose his true identity, “He is the son of you...”, her voice is drowned out by loudly sung words in Japanese: *O ni! Bikkuri shakkuri to!*, one of the many possible translations of which is “So surprised, we hiccup! Bah!”

Katisha has been foiled and mourns her loss. She swears revenge on those who have thwarted her, and storms angrily away, en route to inform the Mikado that his son has been found. All continue to rejoice and celebrate the forthcoming marriage of Nanki-Poo and Yum-Yum.

ACT II: Ko-Ko's palace

Yum-Yum prepares for her wedding, surrounded by her sisters and friends. She looks into a mirror as they dress her hair and make-up her face and lips.

Yum-Yum admires herself: “Nature is lovely and rejoices in her loveliness. I am a child of Nature, and take after my mother.” Yum-Yum celebrates that she is to be married to the man she truly loves, congratulating herself as the happiest girl in Japan.

Yum-Yum begins to weep after Peep-Bo and Pitti-Sing remind her that her marriage will be brief: Nanki-Poo will be beheaded in one month.

Nanki-Poo arrives and becomes disconsolate when he finds Yum-Yum in tears on her wedding morning. He tries to raise her spirits, and urges everyone to be happy and forget sorrow.

Ko-Ko arrives to inform the couple that their wedding plans are in crisis: “I’ve just ascertained that, by the Mikado’s law, when a married man is beheaded, his wife is buried alive.” Nanki-Poo and Yum-Yum are shocked as they realize their dilemma: If Nanki-Poo marries Yum-Yum, his beheading dooms her to death; if he releases her, she must marry Ko-Ko at once. Yum-Yum admits that she indeed loves Nanki-Poo with all her heart, but her enthusiasm to marry him has suddenly diminished: she does not relish the idea of being buried alive within a month. Yum-Yum explains their dilemma as a “how-we-do,” a pretty mess.

Nanki-Poo offers to spare Yum-Yum a grim fate: he will die by suicide this very afternoon. Ko-Ko resists him, explaining that if he kills himself, he has no substitute to execute in his place.

As Pooh-Bah announces that the Mikado is arriving in Titipu to determine if his execution orders have been carried out, Ko-Ko pleads with Nanki-Poo to keep his part of the bargain: nevertheless, Nanki-Poo insists that he be decapitated immediately. Ko-Ko suddenly becomes panic-stricken, because he is neither ready nor equal to the task; he does not know how to perform an execution, and more importantly, he cannot kill anyone.

Ko-Ko contrives an alternative plan: he will swear in an affidavit for the Mikado that he has done the deed, provided that Nanki-Poo leaves Titipu at once and never returns. Ko-Ko orders Nanki-Poo to marry Yum-Yum at once, and leave Titipu forever.

The Mikado’s procession arrives, accompanied by Katisha, his daughter-in-law elect. All praise their emperor. The Mikado demands obedience to his decrees.

He then explains that he is the most humane and benevolent ruler in Japan’s history:

Pooh-Bah – as State Coroner - assures the Mikado that his wishes have been fulfilled and an execution has taken place: Ko-Ko hands him an affidavit to confirm the deed. The Mikado is delighted, eager for Ko-Ko to describe the gory details of the criminal's demise. with further details provided by Pitti-Sing and Pooh-Bah. Nevertheless, the Mikado indicates his disappointment in not having witnessed the execution.

The Mikado announces that he has come to Titipu to seek his son's whereabouts, having learned that he masquerades in the town as a "Second Trombone": "A year ago my son, the heir to the throne of Japan, bolted from our Imperial Court." The Emperor orders that they immediately produce Nanki-Poo, but Ko-Ko advises him that he has gone abroad.

Katisha, reading the certificate of death, notices that it was none other than Nanki-Poo who was beheaded this morning: she laments that she will never find another. The Mikado advises Ko-Ko that in his anxiety to carry out his orders, he executed the heir to the throne of Japan: Ko-Ko apologizes; Pooh-Bah expresses his regret.

The Mikado excuses them, admitting that they were faultless: "If a man of exalted rank chooses to disguise himself as a 'Second Trombone,' he must take the consequences." Nevertheless, executing the Heir Apparent deserves punishment: the Mikado declares Ko-Ko and his accomplices guilty, and their execution to take place this very afternoon after luncheon; "something humorous, but lingering, with either boiling oil or melted lead."

The Mikado expresses his sorrow for them, but concludes that the world is unjust, and virtue triumphs only in theatrical performances. Their only hope for salvation is to produce Nanki-Poo alive and well.

As Ko-Ko, Pooh-Bah, and Pish-Tush argue about their dilemma, Nanki-Poo and Yum-Yum arrive before starting their honeymoon. Ko-Ko announces that he has just learned that Nanki-Poo is the son of the Mikado, and advises him that his father and Katisha are present in Titipu. The condemned trio try to persuade Nanki-Poo to "come back to life," but he refuses, desperately wishing to be free from Katisha: "Katisha claims me in marriage, but I can't marry her because I'm married already - consequently, she will insist on my execution; if I'm executed, my wife will have to be buried alive."

Nanki-Poo proposes a solution, advising Ko-Ko that "There's one chance for you. If you could persuade Katisha to marry you, she would have no further claim on me, and in that case I could come to life without any fear of being put to death."

To save his life, Ko-Ko has no other choice but to woo, win, and wed Katisha. Ko-Ko agrees to Nanki-Poo's plan. Katisha is upset over her loss of Nanki-Poo: *Alone, and yet alive!* In her remorse, she welcomes death rather than the punishment of living in agony, hopelessness, and a broken heart.

Ko-Ko arrives to beg Katisha for mercy. But Katisha wants vengeance and condemns him for slaying the young man she trained and educated to love her: "Oh, where shall I find another?" Ko-Ko, with intense passion, reveals to Katisha that for years he has been consumed by his love for her: "I have endeavored to conceal a passion whose inner fires are broiling the soul within me. But the fire will not be smothered —it defies all attempts at extinction, and, breaking forth, all the more eagerly for its long restraint, it declares itself in words that will not be weighed —that cannot be schooled — that should not

be too severely criticized. Katisha, I dare not hope for your love – but I will not live without it! Darling!”

Ko-Ko continues his plea for Katisha’s love in a ballad, *On a tree by a river a little tom-tit*, the “tit-willow,” a metaphor for an unrequited lover who dies because love has failed.

Katisha is moved to tears by Ko-Ko’s ballad. She decides to prevent the despairing lover from suicide, and promises him her love: they decide to marry. Ko-Ko, warned by Katisha, admits that he even finds beauty in her bloodthirstiness.

With a fanfare, the Mikado arrives from his luncheon, now ready to witness the execution of “the unfortunate gentleman and his two well-meaning but misguided accomplices.”

Katisha intervenes and pleads for mercy, pointing to Ko-Ko and announcing that they have just married. As the Mikado explains that justice must be served because the Heir Apparent had been slain, Nanki-Poo appears, returned to life and excitedly presenting his new bride to his father. Katisha, seeing Nanki-Poo alive, explodes into rage, and condemns Ko-Ko as a traitor.

Ko-Ko saves the day by explaining the “logic” of the events to the Mikado: “It’s like this: when your Majesty says, Let a thing be done, it’s as good as done – practically, it *is* done – because your Majesty’s will is law. Your Majesty says, ‘Kill a gentleman,’ and a gentleman is told off to be killed. Consequently, that gentleman is as good as dead – practically, he *is* dead – and if he is dead, why not say so?”

The Mikado accepts Ko-Ko’s ingenious explanation, “Nothing could possibly be more satisfactory!”: in appreciation, he commutes Ko-Ko’s death sentence to life with Katisha. All are reconciled and celebrate the return of Nanki-Poo and his marriage to Yum-Yum.

MEET SIR ARTHUR SEYMOUR SULLIVAN

Sir Arthur Seymour Sullivan, 1842 -1900, was the composer, who, with Gilbert, established a distinctive British operetta style: Gilbert's verbal ingenuity blended magnificently with Sullivan's surefire melodiousness and resourceful musicianship; their operas were brilliantly integrated, both musically and textually.



Sullivan, was the son of an Irish bandmaster whose career culminated in a professorship at the Royal Military College. By the age of 10, the young Sullivan had mastered all the wind instruments in his father's band. It has been suggested that he inherited his astute ability for melodic invention from his mother who was of Italian descent; she apparently met his father while accompanying an organ grinder and his monkey through the streets of London.

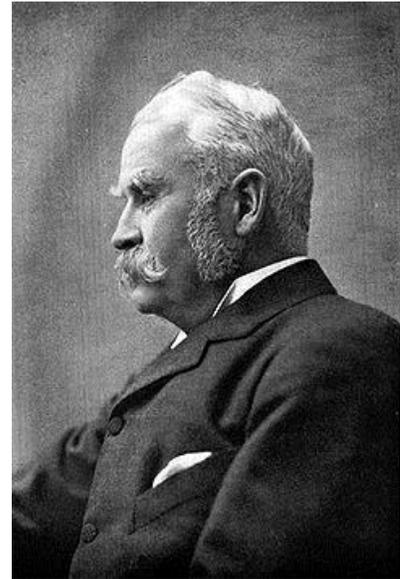
Sullivan's early musical promise earned him admission to the Royal Academy of Music, London; he would later continue his music studies at the Leipzig Conservatory. In 1861 he became organist of St. Michaels in London, and in the following year, achieved great success and recognition with his incidental music to *The Tempest*. He followed with the *Kenilworth* cantata (1864); a ballet, *L'Île enchantée*; a symphony and cello concerto; the overtures, *In Memoriam* and *Overtura di Ballo*; and numerous songs. Sullivan's first comic operas appeared in 1867: *Cox and Box*, and *Contrabandista*.

During periods when his relationship with Gilbert were strained, Sullivan wrote the opera, *Haddon Hall* (1892), *The Chieftain* (1895), *The Beauty Stone* (1898), and *The Rose of Persia* (1889). His more serious, non-Gilbert operettas, are rarely heard in the contemporary repertory, but were acclaimed in their day: *The Prodigal Son* (1869), *The Light of the World* (1873), *The Martyr of Antioch* (1880), *The Golden Legend* (1886), and the "romantic opera," *Ivanhoe*, composed at the urging of Queen Victoria for the opening of the Royal English Opera House in 1891. Sullivan wrote several religious choral works, and many of his hymn tunes have attained great popularity: *Onward! Christian Soldiers*, and *The Lost Chord*.

In 1876 Sullivan became principal of the National Training School for Music (later the Royal College of Music), a post he held for five years; he was active as a conductor, particularly at the Leeds Festivals from 1880 to 1898, and was knighted in 1883.

MEET SIR WILLIAM SCHWENK GILBERT

Sir William Schwenk Gilbert, 1836-1911, an English playwright and humorist, was best known for his collaboration with Sir Arthur Sullivan in producing comic operas. Gilbert was born in London, the son of a retired naval surgeon: the most notorious event of his youth was his kidnapping at the age of two by Italian brigands in Italy; he was later released by ransom. After military training, he yearned to participate in the Crimean War, but after he graduated, the war was over, and for the next 20 years his military career constituted service in the militia.



After receiving a substantial inheritance from an aunt, Gilbert indulged his early ambition to become a lawyer, but his legal career was brief and mediocre. In 1861, at the age of 25, he became a journalist, contributing dramatic criticism with a combination of humorous verse, caustic wit, satire, and sarcasm, to the popular British magazine *FUN*, all of which were illustrated with his own cartoons and sketches, and signed “Bab.” The pieces became collectively known as *The Bab Ballads* (1869), and were followed by *More Bab Ballads* (1873): the characters in these works became the models for many of his later operas.

Gilbert’s theatrical career began in 1866 when he was recommended to write a comic Christmas piece; within only two weeks, he wrote *Dulcamara, or the Little Duck and the Great Quack*, a topical extravaganza clothed in the underlying farce of Donizetti’s *L’Elisir d’Amore* that achieved immediate commercial success, and nurtured other writing commissions.

In 1871, Gilbert met Sullivan, and they began their historic collaboration, a partnership that ended in 1896 but spanned 25 years and resulted in 14 comic operas. After their collaboration ended, Gilbert continued to write librettos for other composers with moderate success: Edward German’s *Fallen Fairies, or the Wicked World* (1909), and his last play, *The Hooligan* (1911). Gilbert was knighted by Edward VII in 1907, and died of a heart attack in 1911 at the age of 74 while attempting to rescue a drowning woman from a lake on his country estate.

Gilbert possessed exceptional talents and developed an extraordinarily unique style of world-play in his writing: he excelled in writing rhymed couplets, puns, parody, and farce that brilliantly satirized contemporary morality and human behavior; much of his writing possessed those unique idiosyncrasies so typical in late-Victorian humor.

Many of his contemporary targets that he parodied in his melodramas are no longer topical but still retain their satirical humor: aestheticism in *Patience*, women’s education in *Princess Ida*, the police in *The Pirates of Penzance*, the navy in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, and the profit motive in *Ruddigore*. Nevertheless, Gilbert’s ingenious wit possessed an underlying truth, and his outstanding legacy was that he provided Sir Arthur Sullivan, his musical dramatist, with a wealth of inspiration for ebullient and effervescent theatrical development.

THE PARTNERSHIP OF GILBERT AND SULLIVAN

In 1871, Gilbert met Sullivan; their historic collaboration began with *Thespis, or the Gods Grown Old*, a work that achieved little success. Richard D'Oyly Carte, the manager of the Royal Theatre, reunited them in 1875 for the one-act operetta, *Trial by Jury*, written in the spirit of an Offenbach operetta that became instantly popular and ran for more than a year.

Carte formed the Comedy Opera Company for the specific purpose of using the venue to present full-length Gilbert and Sullivan operettas: the first fruits of this venture were *The Sorcerer* (1877), *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878), and *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879).

During the run of *Patience* (1881), Carte transferred the productions to his newly built Savoy Theatre, where all of the later Gilbert and Sullivan operettas were presented: their works were now collectively known as the “Savoy Operas”; *Patience, or Bunthorne's Bride* (1881); *Iolanthe or the Peer and the Peri* (1882); *Princess Ida or Castle Adamant* (1884); *The Mikado or the Town of Titipu* (1885); *Ruddigore or the Witch's Curse* (1887); *The Yeomen of the Guard* (1888); and *The Gondoliers* (1889).

Sullivan had loftier theatrical goals than comic opera, and was ambivalent about the lighter music he composed with Gilbert: at times he considered himself subservient to the writer, and at times, protested against the artificial nature of Gilbert's plots; what he considered contrived in a topsy-turvy world of disorder and confusion. Disagreements between them came to a head in 1890, and the partnership dissolved, Sullivan supporting Carte in a dispute supposedly involving the installation of a new carpet at the Savoy that was ultimately resolved in the courts. They reunited in 1893 with the lavish, omni-satirical *Utopia Limited* (1893), and in 1896, with *The Grand Duke*, but neither of these works achieved their former standards nor acclaim with the critics or public.

Gilbert and Sullivan comic operettas possess a brilliant textual and musical unity. Gilbert perfected his librettos with themes, characters, plot devices, polysyllabic rhythms, and lyrics, all of which were metrical tours de forces.

The hallmark of Sullivan's music was humor, gaiety, and frivolity, generally avoiding emotional extremes, pathos, or melancholy: at times his music was profoundly original, and at times it was eclectic, incorporating elements of Offenbach's sentimental comedy styles, as well as English traditions such as Victorian church music, and drawing-room ballads. For Sullivan, rhythm was generally the starting point for his vocal writing, his comic numbers musically dramatizing Gilbert's verbal wit through simple melodies and sharply delineated rhythms; as *The Mikado* proved, Sullivan was certainly a genius at musical characterization and capturing local color.

The Gilbert and Sullivan partnership was unique in the history of the musical-theater: Sullivan, a respected and serious composer of symphonic and choral music channeled his talents into a field generally the province of more limited musicians; Gilbert, an innovative and inventive writer, elevated his texts to a new level of sophistication for musical theater, his literary achievements earning him that rare tribute of equal prominence on the billboards with the composer.



Their artistic relationship achieved a renaissance for British musical theater, and an enduring legacy of 14 acclaimed works, that, more than a century after their creation, continue to be performed with frequency in the repertory of the contemporary lyric theater.

SATIRE IN *THE MIKADO*

Gilbert and Sullivan were writing during the latter part of England's Victorian Age, the 19th century period named for the reigning monarch, Queen Victoria, 1819-1901.

The Victorian Age was represented by a multitude of restraining moral values that addressed character, propriety, duty, will, earnestness, hard work, respectable comportment and behavior, and thrift; virtues that were supposed to be embraced by all class divisions of society. By the end of the 19th century, those essential "Victorian values" surrendered to hypocrisies and, therefore, became the object of criticism and lampooning. In particular, resolute Victorians were ridiculed because of their smugness and unwillingness to face unpleasant realities: Gilbert and Sullivan became the artistic vanguard in exposing Victorian era hypocrisies, shortcomings, and weaknesses.

Government and politics were most often Gilbert's targets. As an example, in 1885, *The Mikado's* premiere year, Bishops in the House of Lords expressed their grave concern about the decline in the standards in public life: there were both sexual and fiscal scandals involving members of government and the Royal Household, and the outgoing Prime Minister was reputed to have roamed the streets of Soho, returning with ladies of the night to 10 Downing Street for prayer meetings.

As such, *The Mikado* represents a satirical portrait of late Victorian society; its English people were thinly disguised in the refreshing and exotic Japanese ambience. But Gilbert took dead aim at his contemporary society: in the character of Pooh-Bah, his libretto satirizes snobbery and opportunism; in Ko-Ko and the Mikado, the bores and burdens of life; in Katisha, feminine skittishness; and in the development of the opera's conclusion, the fallibility of "logic." Gilbert, the master of satire, unhesitatingly launched his acid pen at his contemporary society's follies and foibles; among his many targets, its Victorian arrogance, vanity, duplicity, perjury, and opportunism.



THE MUSIC OF THE MIKADO

The Mikado's music is energetic and humorous, a series of subtle and extremely catchy songs; Sullivan provides an entire musical landscape of patter songs, love duets, trios, and even an irresistible Madrigal.

Nanki-Poo's *A wandering minstrel I*, is a bravura tenor number that parodies several English ballad styles, such as those of the seas and patriotism, and is certainly one of the score's most popular numbers.

Yum-Yum's aria, *The sun whose rays are all ablaze*, is a tour de force possessing subtle vocal expression and rhythms, and one of the few Mikado songs successfully sung out of its context in concert.

Katisha's aria, *Alone and yet alive*, possesses real pain and moving pathos: it is an emotional outpouring requiring a first-rate singing actress to arouse its inherent sympathy; a number certainly not out of place in 19th century grand opera. Similarly, *There is Beauty in the bellow of the blast*, ultimately a duet with Ko-Ko, is impeccable and striking.

The Mikado's *A More humane Mikado* provides an opportunity for dramatic characterization: it contains Sullivan's humorous quotation from Bach's G minor organ fugue.

To save his life, Ko-Ko must woo, win, and wed Katisha, which he begins with *The flowers that bloom in the spring*: its words have become classic; "The flowers that bloom in the spring, Tra la. Have nothing to do with the case. I've got to take under my wing, Tra la. A most unattractive old thing, With a caricature of a face."

Ko-Ko's *Tit willow* causes Katisha to break down and accept him; the tough-as-a-bone harridan becomes overwhelmed by sentimental tears from his affecting tale. Ko-Ko's ballad is far from nonsense, but rather, a desperate attempt to survive from a man threatened with imminent death. Ironically, Katisha, the most ruthless, murderous character in the entire opera, surrenders to his ingenious fabrication.

Gilbert and Sullivan excelled in their portrayal of girlish innocence, and their inspiration is at its best in the choruses and sparkling ensembles for the schoolgirls. Nevertheless, the trio, which introduces Yum-Yum, Peep-Bo, and Pitti-Sing, *Three little maids from school*, is one of the most beloved numbers in the score, perhaps because the girls are portrayed as saucy and carefree, and suggests that they are on that borderline of transformation from innocent youth to young womanhood.

Here's a how-d'ye do, the trio begun by Yum-Yum, and joined by Nanki-Poo and Ko-Ko, is an absolutely brilliant number, compact and original. Likewise, the trio, *I am so proud*, provides three different tunes and classic patter as each of the men declines the honor of decapitation.

The Madrigal, *Brightly dawns our wedding day*, is perhaps the centerpiece of the music score: in its interplay of four voices, its words are beautiful, tender, genuine, and delicate, and there is a sense of rejoicing mingled with sadness and regret.

The choral work in *The Mikado* is magnificent with the brilliant opening, *If you want to know who we are*; the Act I finale with its interplay of Katisha's melodramatic outpourings; and, of course, the Act II finale which contains a reprise of previously heard choral numbers.

Sullivan injected many specific musical jokes: the wind interpolations in *The criminal cried*; his quotation from Bach in *A more humane Mikado*; and the *Miya Sama* song introducing the Mikado and his troops, the latter, Sullivan's appropriation of an authentic pentatonic melody sung by the Imperial army after it quashed a rebellion.

***THE MIKADO* ESSAY QUESTIONS**

1. *The Mikado* is a satire on Victorian society. What is satire? What makes something satire? What other literature, film and plays are satires?
2. *The Mikado* is an English operetta set in Japan. What elements of Japanese culture are present in the operetta? Are any of these elements stereotypes?
3. How does the Mikado deal with the Japanese culture? Does it treat the culture fairly or unfairly?
4. *The Mikado* is set during the time when Japan was a monarchy. Discuss the changing role of the monarchy in Japan from the 1800's till today.
5. One of the most important incidents in World War II was the atomic bombing of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States. What incidents led up to the bombing? How did the bombing impact the outcome of the war? What was the lasting impact of the bombing on Japan?