

Sullivan's music is typical of his style, with little that could be construed as authentically "Japanese." The opening chorus boasts a pentatonic melody at the beginning, and the "Miya sama" march at the start of the overture and when the Emperor first appears is an actual Japanese war march. Other than these numbers, the sounds are distinctly those of Arthur Sullivan. This is particularly true of "Three Little Maids" and the men's first chorus, "If You Want to Know Who We Are," which feature music that is pure English vaudeville but present a Japanese image through gestures and movement. Sullivan is at his best in the finale to Act One, with its powerful climax.

Performers

Baritone Vocals – Alan Styler, Peter Pratt

Bass Vocals – Donald Adams, Kenneth Sandford, Owen Grundy

Conductor – Isidore Godfrey

Contralto Vocals – Ann Drummond-Grant

Libretto By – William Gilbert

Mezzo-soprano Vocals – Beryl Dixon

Orchestra – The New Symphony Orchestra Of London

Soprano Vocals – Jean Hindmarsh, Jennifer Toye

Tenor Vocals – Thomas Round



After creating eight works for the stage, William Schwenk Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan outdid themselves with a macabre farce set in the Far East. The origins of *The Mikado* have, of course, become clouded by legends, such as the tale that Gilbert had a Japanese sword hanging from the wall in his office and when it fell to the floor one day was inspired to write the libretto (a pivotal scene in the film, *Topsy Turvy*). What is certain is that the British, by the mid-1880s, were obsessed with everything Japanese and collected kitsch ranging from fans, calendars, lacquer jewelry boxes, and screens to stationery. Gilbert did visit the popular mock-Japanese Village set up in Knightsbridge before beginning *The Mikado*. The British familiarity with aspects of Japan, superficial or otherwise, became possible only at the onset of the Meiji Era in Japan in 1867, which made Japanese culture more easily available to Western Europe and increased the West's cultural influence in Japan.

Gilbert began the book for *The Mikado* at a time of crisis for the Gilbert and Sullivan team. Earlier, Sullivan had expressed his desire to compose more interesting music, setting a libretto that addressed deep issues appropriate for more elaborate melodies and musical structures. Gilbert's affinity for the burlesque won out, however, and the result was very good for the duo's bank accounts.

The Mikado, or, *The Town of Titipu* opened on March 14, 1885, in the Savoy Theatre, London, with Sullivan conducting. The first production ran

for 672 performances, the longest first run of any of Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas. International success came quickly and *The Mikado* received more acclaim on the European continent than did any other of their works. This was due, in part, to its "exotic" setting, but also to the universal appeal of the characters. Every culture has a bribe-hungry Pooh-Bah, giggling schoolgirls, and a pathetic, elderly Katisha. The plot, streamlined and perfectly paced, revolves around two major circumstances: the need of the Lord High Executioner to behead someone, and the flight of the Crown Prince from Imperial Palace to avoid marrying Katisha. *The Mikado* contains some of Gilbert's best dialogue and song lyrics.

Thorough to a fault, Gilbert hired a Japanese woman from the village in Knightsbridge to coach the cast in Japanese mannerisms and fan movements, as well as help with makeup. Producer Richard D'Oyly Carte ordered imported silk costumes and hired Hawes Craven to paint the sets.

Sullivan fell behind, and Hamilton Clarke had to orchestrate the overture from Sullivan's draft. Some of the numbers were not finished until right before the first performance. One stirring anecdote that is true concerns the Mikado's "My Object All Sublime," which Gilbert wanted to remove after seeing the dress rehearsal. However, the members of the company convinced him to retain the number, which became a hit.

Gilbert And Sullivan The Mikado

D'Oyly Carte Opera Company

The New Symphony Orchestra Of London, Isidore Godfrey

No. 1 Act I (Pt. 1): Overture; If You Want To Know Who We Are; A Wandering Minstrel I; Our Great Mikado, Virtuous Man; Young Man, Despair; And Have I journeyed For A Month; Behold The Lord High Executioner!; Taken From The Country Jail; As Some Day It May Happen

No. 2 Act I (Pt. 2): Comes A Train Of Little Ladies; Three Little Maids From School Are We; So Please You, Sir; Were You Not To Ko-Ko Plighted; I Am So Proud; With Aspect Stern; Your Revels Cease!

No. 3 Act II (Pt. 1): Braid The Raven Hair; Sit With Downcast Eye; The Sun, Whose Rays; Brightly Dawns Our Wedding Day; Here's A How-de-do!; Miya Same, Miya Same; A More Humane Mikado

No. 4 Act II (Pt. 2): The Criminal Cried; See How The Fates; The Flowers That Bloom In The Spring; Alone, And Yet Alive!; On A Tree By A River A Little Tom-Tit; There Is Beauty In The Bellow Of The Blast; For He's Gone And Married Yum-Yum

Producer: James Walker & Michael Williamson

Engineers: Kenneth Wilkinson & Alan Reeve

Recorded by Decca Nov 1957 at Kingsway Hall