
THE MIKADO
The Adelaide Festival Centre and Opera Australia
Festival Theatre
Until 29 January

Review by Simon Slade

When Gilbert and Sullivan wrote this piece, everything Japanese was fashionable in London, and therefore what better way to parody the more pompous and pretentious aspects of English society, than to do so in a Japanese setting.

The original production was therefore at great pains to be very "Japanese" in its attention to costumes, sets and movement.

All too often, productions tend to slavishly follow the D'Oyly Carte style, but happily that is not the case here.

This production goes further in that it parodies the combination of English ideas and Japanese style. The set features Union Jacks and Queen Victoria along with Japanese tea sets and vases. Equally the costumes at times combine aspects of both cultures. The "Gentlemen of Japan" are hilarious in the costumes that borrow from both cultures.

The local performers in this production are exceptional. Jessica Dean's Yum Yum is a delight supported beautifully by Johanna Allen as Pitti Sing and Eleanor Blythman as Peep Bo.

Timothy Sexton's Adelaide Art Orchestra was excellent, and the pace was never allowed to flag. The orchestra was nicely balanced with the singers, but sometimes that was being achieved with a strained sound mix, particularly at the start of the show.

The show has been sold on the strength of its big name stars, and they did not disappoint. Anthony Warlow shows off not just his voice but his comic abilities as Ko Ko. Judi Connelli as Katisha is frightening in her romantic pursuit of the young Nanky Poo, played to a tee by David Hobson. Douglas McNicol's Poo Bah is a real highlight, conveying all the silly pomp and circumstance of the English aristocracy.

It is a tradition, since the works of Gilbert and Sullivan went out of copyright, to play with the lyrics of Ko Ko's "List Song" and the lyrics here are wonderfully local. From Nick Xenophon to "The Ring Cycle", nothing is safe!

And the cast were enjoying themselves as much as the audience.