

# Double

Some liberties, but still true to the original

Continued from Page E1

It had been years since some of them had performed there when they were invited back for a 25th-anniversary gala. The performance went so well that it seemed like a good idea to bring them to Freedlander Theatre again, artistic director Steven Daigle said earlier this season.

So, for half the performances, the geezers (oops, veterans) head the cast, along with young professionals Grant Knox as Nanki-Poo, the disguised son of the Mikado, and Danielle McCormick as Yum-Yum, the ward of Ko-Ko who wishes to marry Nanki-Poo.

With the setting of a Japanese-style bridge, attractive kimono costumes and the crisply choreographed snapping of fans, this show's as good to look at as to hear.

The woman next to me at Tuesday's show exclaimed to her companion, "But that's modern!" when Reeder went down his patter song list of people who would not be missed. ("That girl Madonna kissed. The Survivor finalist.") The company does take some liberties, updating to include a few topical references.

But as the new singers quickly learn, the OLO is all about being true to the original. In a recent chat, cast members agreed that artistic director emeritus James (Doc) Stuart's mandate is still valued.

Other companies aren't as purist. "This show has been updated unmercifully, to Nanki-Poo being a rock star," Wright said. "And it doesn't help!" Reeder added.

More than some of Gilbert & Sullivan's other shows, which satirize specifically British targets, this show is easy for Americans to understand, Wright said.

Speaking of understanding, how about getting through the patter, the classic G&S invention of packing as many rapid-fire syllables and word plays as possible into a song? In this company, everyone looks to Reeder as an example of how to deliver lyrics with clarity and style.

"In terms of getting the meaning across in fast lyrics . . . more than any kind of artificial diction, if you have a clear idea of what you're going to communicate, it's going to be understood. You're going to communicate the idea," Reeder said.

It also helps to have well-boned comic timing, as he does.

"There's so much comedy written in there, it's hard to know where to kind of take a minute. You can stop after any number of lines to let something sink in, but it's hard to know where the beats are, where the moments are," said Alta Boover, who alternates as Katisha.

"When we were staging the end of *Mikado*, it was fun working with you, Fred, because you know what will work and what will not work," Boover said to Reeder. "It was great to have that perspective of, here are the gags that will work here."

Reeder is an impish Ko-Ko

whose tight, mischievous smile hints that he has a secret. On-stage, he's not afraid of physical comedy, surprising the audience by seemingly scampering up the side of the wall like a squirrel to escape the cold-blooded Katisha (Wright/Boover). But Reeder knows where to stop, and so do the rest of the performers in both casts of this production.

"A lot of directors don't see the charm in these shows. All they see is the sort of broad comedy," Reeder said. In the Katisha/Ko-Ko scene at the end, directors at other companies have suggested that he do all kinds of stage business while Katisha is singing. He prefers not to steal her thunder, he said. Doing it is at the expense of letting her show a sensitive side for the first time.

Wright, who performed in many shows that James Stuart directed, said, "Doc always taught us to trust the true nature of the characters and the text. If you look at these characters, Katisha is a sad, lonely woman. Ko-Ko is a normal, everyday guy, trying to figure out how to make everything work."

"A lot of acting is not acting, it's reacting to what's going on," said Kenneth Kramer, who plays the Mikado. That takes time to learn.

And while Julie Wright may say with some real regret that her ingenue days are behind her, there's magic in the interplay between her and Reeder that doesn't always happen between less experienced performers. We care about Ko-Ko and Katisha. Their actions seem inevitable, not overblown.

That quality of knowing where to stop is something he has learned from the older performers, said Grant Knox, who plays Nanki-Poo. "I don't think anybody's trying to overdo anybody else . . . That's what I've learned. That you don't have to be over the top to make this style work."

In the words of Nanki-Poo when he realizes his beloved Yum-Yum is still unmarried: "Modified rapture!"

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Matt Dwyer

Nathan Brian gets expressive as one of the actors playing the Mikado in the Ohio Light Opera production of *The Mikado*.

## 'Mikado' 'geezers' still pretty spry

Ohio Light Opera making good use of cagey veterans in double-cast show

By Elaine Guregian  
Beacon Journal music critic

Gilbert & Sullivan shows have been the scones and clotted cream of the Ohio Light Opera for 26 seasons. But this year is a little different.

The Wooster company is doing *The Mikado*, but pumping up its young-professional cast with the experience of OLO veterans Boyd Mackus, Kenneth Kramer, James Mismas, Frederick Reed-

er and Julie Wright. Actually, Reeder is pulling double duty, breaking up audiences up with his acting as Ko-Ko, Lord High Executioner of Titipu, in both casts of this double-cast show.

Julie Wright, who is not only acting as Katisha (pronounced CAT-i-shah) but also directing the production, says they call themselves the Geezer Cast. They're not really that old, just dancing around AARP eligibility. What counts is the experience they amassed when they were in their 20s, some of them as members of Ohio Light Opera when it first started.

Please see Double, E3

### DETAILS

Operetta: Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Mikado*

Where: Freedlander Theatre of the College of Wooster, 329 University St., between Bever Street and College Avenue, Wooster

When: In repertory through Aug. 4

Cost: \$36 adults, \$16 students ages 5-18

Information: 330-263-2345

Onstage: The Mikado of Japan, Kenneth Kramer/Nathan Brian; Nanki-Poo, Drake Dantzier/Grant Knox; Ko-Ko, Frederick Reeder; Poo-Bah, Gregory Brookes/James

Mismas; Pish-Tush, Patrick Howe/Boyd Mackus; Yum-Yum, Penny Hanser/Danielle McCormick; Pitti-Sing, Betha Christopher, Sahara Glasener, Peep-Bo, Erin Jackson;

Katisha, Alta Boover/Julie Wright. Backstage: Conductor, Steven

Byess; stage director, Julie Wright; choreographer, Carol Hageman; set

designer, Kirk Domer; costume designer, Jason J. Smith; lighting designer, Shannon Schwertzer.