

# 'The Mikado' a delightful marriage of old and new talent

By ERIC JOHNSON  
Staff Writer

WOOSTER — Dear OLO:  
Thank you for bringing back Fred Reeder, Ken Kramer and Jim Mismas, and for staging "The Mikado" once again for all of them to star in.

Signed: a fan.

Ohio Light Opera rounded out the opening week of its 26th season at The College of Wooster's Freedlander Theatre on June 16 with the return of a Gilbert and Sullivan classic and three classy gentlemen to portray leading characters in it.

Bass-baritone Kenneth Kramer is "The Mikado," the emperor of Japan, whose object all sublime, to be achieved in time, is "to let the punishment fit the crime — the punishment fit the crime."

In the meantime, there's the matter of this cheap tailor, Ko-Ko (baritone Frederick Reeder), first condemned to death for flirting, then elevated to the rank of Lord High Executioner of Titipu by a humane chorus of nobles who wisely determine:

*"Who's next to be decapitated  
Cannot cut off another's head  
Until he's cut his own off."*

And, of course, if a town has a lord high executioner it must have a lord high everything else.



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Grant Knox (center) sings the role of Nanki-Poo in the Ohio Light Opera's production of "The Mikado."

Matt Dilyard photo

## Mikado

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In Titipu, that's Pooh-Bah (baritone James Mismas), an especially haughty noble, "of pre-Adamite ancestral descent," who nevertheless allows himself to be demeaned (for cash, of course) by serving as a salaried minion in every role from Archbishop of Titipu and lord chief justice to groom of the back stairs.

All three were ably supported in the opener by the sturdy performance of their contemporary, baritone Boyd Mackus as the noble lord Pish-Tush.

Gilbert and Sullivan operettas thrive on complexity, of course, and this one involves two mismatched romantic couples.

Ko-Ko is determined to marry

Yum-Yum (soprano Danielle McCormick in the matinee opener), but she has fallen for the Mikado's wandering son, Nanki-Poo (tenor Grant Knox in the opener), who is disguised as a minstrel to escape the determined affections of Katisha (soprano Julie Wright in the opener), an elderly lady of the Mikado's court and his self-proclaimed "daughter-in-law elect."

McCormick and Knox are members, if you will, of OLO's new generation, in their third and fourth summers, respectively, with the company. Kramer, one of the company's founding members; Reeder, returning after an absence of nearly two decades; and Mismas, also back in the OLO repertory after a long absence, are all members of an earlier era, as is Mackus, who began with OLO in 1983.

Brought together by the hand of stage director Julie Wright, herself a veteran of 14 OLO seasons, this marriage of old and new tal-

ent breathes plenty of life into the 1885 operetta renowned for Gilbert's most popular libretto and Sullivan's most crowd-pleasing score.

Reeder is his old antic self in the role of Ko-Ko, scampering about the stage with the zest of a man half his age. Knox sings with great power and precision, as does Kramer. Mismas is a delightfully haughty and duplicitous Pooh-Bah. McCormick is a most fetching Yum-Yum and Wright is a holy terror as Katisha.

All-in-all, it was a supercharged afternoon delight of beautiful music, with the OLO Orchestra under the baton of associate Music Director Steven Byess; eloquent sets by designer Kirk Dorer; lights by designer Shannon Schweitzer and costumes by designer Jasen J. Smith; and seamless choreography by another OLO veteran, Carol Hageman.

Eric Johnson is a veteran stage and film actor, crew hand and

stage manager, with more than 20 years experience from 1960 to the early 1980s at every level from high school and community theater to professional. He has worked at San Francisco's American Conservatory Theater and its predecessor, The Actors Workshop, where he appeared on stage and in a made-for-TV movie with Marshal Efron and worked backstage with Peter Coyote, among others. In the Cleveland area, he crewed and stage managed for performers such as Vivian Blaine, Tim Tavcar, Dana Snyder and the first public performance of Cleveland Ballet at the Cuyahoga Community College Western Campus Theater.

As a professional reviewer, he has written about community, college and professional productions of classical and popular music, theater and dance in Ashtabula, Kent, Ashland, Gambier, Wooster, Newark, Canton, Akron, Cleveland and Gainesville, Fla., for more than 30 years since 1969. Contact him at (330) 674-1811 or [ejohnson@the-daily-record.com](mailto:ejohnson@the-daily-record.com).