

Arts reviews

IT NEEDS genius to take a look at a show as well known as **The Mikado** and come up with a production that is both freshly conceived and true to the spirit of the original.

But then Ray Jeffery is a producer of genius, and of the 22 shows he has presented with **Chelmsford Amateur And Operatic Dramatic Society**, none has been more skilfully and imaginatively presented than this version of the best known of all Gilbert and Sullivan operas, at the Civic Theatre all this week.

The **Mikado** has become so much a part of the English theatrical tradition that in many quarters it is venerated.

But it was conceived as a vehicle to poke fun at grand opera, and to send up, in the nicest possible way, the Japanese way of life.

I'm a G. and S. traditionalist, but I loved every minute of this production, which is full of surprises and delights right from the word go when, instead of having to sit in a darkened theatre listening to the overture, we watch a ballet illustrating the music's different rhythms.

Dancing, too, is used to help underline the story line, and Ray's sparkling production goes through the script and situation like a dose of salts, flushing out more laughter from this reviewer than any other production of the **Mikado** he's seen.

Ray is blessed with an exceptionally strong cast, headed with a performance of buffooning brilliance by Patrick Tucker as Ko-Ko.

Patrick's singing voice and acting abilities are well-known to Chelmsford audience. Here he shows he is a superb visual comic as well.

Philip Crapnell's **Mikado** is not just resonantly sung, it is another delightful comic study suggesting the feared ruler of Japan is at home a rather henpecked man.

Robin Sampson is making a corner in character roles these days. His latest addition — a pompous yet self-denigrating Pooh-Bah — is as fine as anything he has done for CAODS.

The **Three Little Maids From School** are both saucy and delicious. Valerie Massey's Yum-Yum suggests she learned more than deportment at her finishing school, Deanna Tucker as Pitti-Sing aids and abets her with a will, while Denise Bragg's Peep-Bo is an uninhibited study of female flirtation.

How lovely to have Nanki-Poo sung by a young virile tenor! Alastair McIlwraith acts as well as sings with a youthful gusto that gives an added zest to the role, and Kevin Abrey's Pish Tush is a nice positive performance of a part that can often fail to make much of an impact.

At first I thought Jill Plumtree's singing voice was too light in colour to bring out the full fury of Katisha's scorned love, but her fine perceptive acting showed it is not necessary to have a Clara Butt-type voice to do full justice to the role.

Chorus and dancers were superb, and the costumes and scenery ditto.

Once or twice the business given to The Three Little Maids' schoolgirl companions seems in danger of getting out of hand, but what a minor flaw in a conception of such wit and originality.