

The MikKado

Or

The Town of Titipu

A COMIC OPERA IN TWO ACTS

Music by Sir Arthur S. Sullivan
Libretto by Sir William S. Gilbert

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

The Mikado Plot Overview	2
Principal Characters in the Opera	3
Detailed Story Narrative	4
Meet Sir Arthur Seymour Sullivan	9
Meet Sir William Schwenk Gilbert	10
The Partnership of Gilbert and Sullivan	11
Satire in The Mikado	12
The Music of The Mikado	13
A Short History of Opera	14
The Operatic Voice	15
Opera Production	16
The Mikado Essay Questions	17

THE MIKADO PLOT OVERVIEW

Before the opera story begins, Nanki-Poo, the Mikado's son, fled from his father's palace to escape being compelled to marry Katisha, an elderly lady of the court; Nanki-Poo has become an itinerant minstrel who falls in love with Yum-Yum, however, he cannot marry her because Ko-Ko, her guardian, has decided to marry her himself.

Nanki-Poo learns that Ko-Ko has been sentenced to death for violating the Mikado's law against flirting. As Act I opens, Nanki-Poo has arrived in Titipu to determine if Ko-Ko has been executed, and, therefore, if Yum-Yum is free to marry him.

He encounters Pooh-Bah, a corrupt public official, and Pish-Tush, a noble, who inform him that Ko-Ko was reprieved at the last moment by a set of curious chances, and then raised to the exalted rank of Lord High Executioner. Nanki-Poo turns to despair when he learns that Ko-Ko plans to marry Yum-Yum immediately.

There have been no executions in Titipu since Ko-Ko became Lord High Executioner. Ko-Ko receives a letter from the Mikado ordering him to execute someone or else lose his post as Lord High Executioner. As Ko-Ko ponders his dilemma of trying to find someone to execute, Nanki-Poo appears, vowing suicide because he cannot marry Yum-Yum, the woman he loves.

Ko-Ko offers to allow Nanki-Poo to marry Yum-Yum for one month, after which, he will become his execution victim. Suddenly, Katisha appears and discovers Nanki-Poo, the vanished object of her love. After she is driven away, she rushes to inform the Mikado that his son has been found.

As Act II opens, Yum-Yum prepares for her one-month marriage to Nanki-Poo. Ko-Ko arrives with the shocking revelation that he has discovered a law decreeing that when a married man is executed, his widow must be buried alive: under those horrible conditions, the marriage between Yum-Yum and Nanki-Poo is canceled.

Nevertheless, Ko-Ko must find a "substitute" for execution or he will be decapitated by the Mikado. Nanki-Poo contrives a solution to save Ko-Ko's life: a false affidavit confirming his own execution, but in exchange, he must be allowed to marry Yum-Yum and leave the country forever. Ko-Ko agrees.

The Mikado arrives in Titipu. Ko-Ko believes that the purpose of his visit is to confirm that an execution has taken place so he produces the affidavit and proceeds to describe the execution with gusto. However, the Mikado has actually come to Titipu in search of his lost son and learns from the affidavit that Ko-Ko and his ministers executed his son; he declares them guilty of "composing the death of the Heir Apparent"; their only hope to avoid execution is to produce Nanki-Poo alive.

Nanki-Poo hesitates to reveal himself, fearing that if Katisha learns that he has married Yum-Yum she will have him executed. The dilemma is resolved by Ko-Ko, who, at Nanki-Poo's suggestion, woos, wins, and weds Katisha.

All are reconciled as they celebrate Nanki-Poo's marriage to Yum-Yum and Ko-Ko's marriage to Katisha.

PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS IN THE OPERA

Nanki-Poo, the Mikado's son,

disguised as a wandering minstrel in love with Yum-Yum Tenor (Lyric)

Yum-Yum, ward of Ko-Ko Soprano (Lyric)

Ko-Ko, Lord High Executioner of Titipu Buffo Baritone

Pooh-Bah, Lord High Everything Else Baritone

Pish-Tush, a noble lord Baritone

Yum-Yum's sisters, wards of Ko-Ko:

Pitti-Sing Soprano or Mezzo-soprano (Lyric)

Peep-Bo Soprano (Lyric)

The Mikado of Japan Bass

Katisha, an elderly lady of the court pursuing Nanki-Poo Mezzo-soprano or Dramatic soprano

Chorus of schoolgirls, nobles, and guards

DETAILED STORY NARRATIVE

ACT I: Courtyard of Ko-Ko's Palace in Titipu

Japanese nobles praise their culture, correcting Western stereotypes that depict them as bizarre, peculiar, and strange, and affirming that they are far from quaint marionette dolls, but rather, gentlemen of Japan.

Nanki-Poo, the Mikado's renegade son, disguised as a wandering minstrel, enters the palace in great excitement, carrying a guitar and a bundle of ballads. He inquires of the nobles where he can find a gentle maiden named Yum-Yum, the ward of Ko-Ko, the "cheap tailor." When asked his identity, Nanki-Poo describes himself as a poor minstrel who possesses a diverse repertoire of sentimental songs about love and sorrows; lullabies, patriotic ballads, and songs of the sea.

Pish-Tush, a noble lord, asks Nanki-Poo why he seeks Yum-Yum: he explains that a year ago, when he was a member of the Titipu town band, his duty was to take the cap around for contributions; he met Yum-Yum, and they fell in love immediately. However, when he learned that she was betrothed to her guardian, Ko-Ko, the "cheap tailor," he realized that his "suit was hopeless," and in despair, left Titipu.

But a month ago he became ecstatic when he learned that Ko-Ko had been sentenced to death for flirting, the Mikado's decree to punish the roving eyes of young as well as old men. Nanki-Poo, believing that Yum-Yum is now free from Ko-Ko, has hurried back to Titipu to find her, praying that she will heed his solemn vows.

Pish-Tush disappoints Nanki-Poo, informing him that Ko-Ko was reprieved from execution at the last moment, and raised to the exalted rank of Lord High Executioner through the kindness of the Mikado. Consequently, at this very moment, executions are at a standstill, because, according to the Mikado's law, criminals must be executed in order of their conviction; since Ko-Ko was next in line on the block, no one can be executed until Ko-Ko, now the Lord High Executioner, first decapitates himself: "Who's next to be decapitated, cannot cut off another's head until he's cut his own off..."

Pooh-Bah, the esteemed Lord High Everything, praises the Mikado's logic, "seeing no moral difference between the dignified judge who condemns a criminal to die, and the industrious mechanic who carries out the sentence, he has rolled the two offices into one, and every judge is now his own executioner."

Pooh-Bah, who now holds all the state posts in Ko-Ko's new administration, proudly explains how he brilliantly seized the opportunities: "all the great Officers of State resigned in a body because they were too proud to serve under an ex-tailor, did I not unhesitatingly accept all their posts at once?" In Pooh-Bah's collection of high state positions – and conflicts of interests - naturally, he is salaried accordingly.

Pooh-Bah, a man of dubious integrity, immediately offers to sell Nanki-Poo any information about Yum-Yum that falls under his specific responsibility as Head of State. Nanki-Poo takes the hint, hands him money, which prompts Pooh-Bah to advise Nanki-Poo that on this very day, after Yum-Yum returns from school, she will wed Ko-Ko. Together with Pish-Tush, Nanki-Poo is advised to give up all hope of marrying Yum-Yum.

Ko-Ko, the Lord High Executioner arrives, followed by his adoring entourage who praise their austere master. Ko-Ko immediately explains the bizarre circumstances under which he was reprieved from execution, liberated from jail, and miraculously elevated to the highest position of State.

As Lord High Executioner, he possesses a long list of potential victims, and explains that "I am happy to think that there will be no difficulty in finding plenty of people whose loss will be a distinct gain to society at large."

Ko-Ko discusses his forthcoming wedding celebration with Pooh-Bah who assures him that in his various capacities, he will find appropriate public funds to pay for a week of festivities.

A procession of girls return from school followed by Yum-Yum and her two sisters: Pitti-Sing and Peep-Bo. Ko-Ko approaches Yum-Yum to embrace her, but she discourages him, hesitating because of the impropriety of being kissed in front of so many people. Finally, with the approval of her friends, Yum-Yum allows Ko-Ko an embrace.

Yum-Yum becomes overjoyed when she sees Nanki-Poo: she and the girls rush to him, shake his hands, and as speaking at once, ask the itinerant musician to tell them the latest news about Titipu. Ko-Ko interrupts them and asks to be presented to the young man, prompting Yum-Yum to explain that he is a musician, but Nanki-Poo interrupts her to boldly proclaim that, "Sir, I have the misfortune to love your ward, Yum-Yum – oh, I know I deserve your anger!"

Surprisingly, Ko-Ko accepts Nanki-Poo's rather passionate avowal as a compliment, honored that his own high opinion of Yum-Yum is supported by an apparently competent authority.

The girls seemingly offend the haughty Pooh-Bah and are obliged to beg him to pardon their lack of etiquette; they excuse themselves as young, capricious, and in need of discipline.

Yum-Yum and Nanki-Poo are left alone, and Nanki-Poo reveals that he sought her for weeks in the belief that her guardian had been beheaded, but he has become disheartened upon learning that not only is Ko-Ko very much alive, but he plans to marry her this very afternoon.

Nanki-Poo suggests that Yum-Yum wait to marry until she comes of age, but she explains that she cannot refuse her guardian and must accede to his wishes. However, Yum-Yum indignantly rejects Nanki-Poo, telling him that a wandering minstrel "is hardly a fitting husband for the ward of a Lord High Executioner."

Yum-Yum's rejection prompts Nanki-Poo to reveal the secret of his identity: he tells her that he is the son of the Mikado, further explaining that Katisha, an elderly lady of his father's court, misconstrued his courtesy toward her as affection, and claimed him in marriage. His father ordered him to marry Katisha, but he refused; rather than be executed in punishment, he fled the palace and joined a band.

Yum-Yum admits that she loves Nanki-Poo, but cautions him to remain distant, fearing that he will violate the Mikado's extreme laws against flirting. Both lament the law that prevents them from being close to each other; nevertheless, they kiss, acting out what they would do if they were free to love each other.

Ko-Ko appears, followed by Pish-Tush. Pish-Tush bears a letter from the Mikado, informing Ko-Ko that the Emperor is upset because there have been no executions in Titipu for a year; he has decreed that unless someone is beheaded within one month, the post of Lord High Executions shall be abolished, and the city reduced to the rank of a village.

Ko-Ko realizes that he will be ruined unless he finds someone to execute. Pish-Tush, with the support of Pooh-Bah, suggests that Ko-Ko become the victim; after all, he has already been sentenced to death for flirting. Ko-Ko refutes them, reasoning that "self-decapitation is an extremely difficult and dangerous thing to accept, and, it's suicide, and suicide is a capital offence."

Each of the men declines the honor of decapitation: Ko-Ko because of his duty to Titipu; Pooh-Bah because he would humiliate his family pride; and Pish-Tush contrarily states that Ko-Ko's execution would be a most honorable and courageous act.

Ko-Ko appoints Pooh-Bah the Lord High Substitute: his duty, to find a surrogate whom they can execute, and therefore, satisfy the Mikado's orders.

Ko-Ko is left alone and soliloquizes, appalled at the possibility that he may be next in line for execution. Curiously, Nanki-Poo suddenly appears, carrying a rope in his hands and announcing to Ko-Ko that he is about to hang himself, his life becoming meaningless because Ko-Ko is about to marry Yum-Yum, the girl he loves. Ko-Ko, a "humane man," commands that he will not permit suicide, but Nanki-Poo remains resolved to die.

Ko-Ko contrives a novel idea: since Nanki-Poo is already determined to die, he could become their “substitute” for execution. Ko-Ko convinces Nanki-Poo that if he agrees to his proposal, he will “be beheaded handsomely at the hands of the Public Executioner,” honored with the distinction of becoming the central figure in a grand ceremonial that includes bands, tolling bells, and a processions of girls in tears.

Nanki-Poo conjures an even more inventive idea: he should marry Yum-Yum for one month, after which Ko-Ko can behead him; after Yum-Yum becomes a widow, Ko-Ko can marry her. Ko-Ko agrees, but cautions Nanki-Poo that during his marriage to Yum-Yum, he must not induce prejudice or disturb her; after all, Ko-Ko has educated Yum-Yum to extol Ko-Ko’s wisdom and goodness.

Excitedly, Ko-Ko officially announces that he has found a “volunteer” for execution: he points to Nanki-Poo, and then directs him to take Yum-Yum as his bride. Yum-Yum and Nanki-Poo rejoice as they inaugurate their brief, one-month marriage: *The threatened cloud has passed away*. All of their friends wish them prosperity and good fortune.

Katisha arrives and melodramatically silences everyone: “Your revels cease,” and claims Nanki-Poo as her lover. Pitti-Sing taunts Katisha, telling her that she has arrived too late, “for he’s going to marry Yum”: *Away, nor prosecute your quest*.

Katisha responds furiously, and then grieves her lost love: “The hour of gladness is dead and gone.” Katisha turns to Nanki-Poo and denounces him: “Oh, faithless one...this insult you shall rue!” As she tries to expose his true identity, “He is the son of you...”, her voice is drowned out by loudly sung words in Japanese: *O ni! Bikkuri shakkuri to!*, one of the many possible translations of which is “So surprised, we hiccup! Bah!”

Katisha has been foiled and mourns her loss. She swears revenge on those who have thwarted her, and storms angrily away, en route to inform the Mikado that his son has been found. All continue to rejoice and celebrate the forthcoming marriage of Nanki-Poo and Yum-Yum.

ACT II: Ko-Ko’s palace

Yum-Yum prepares for her wedding, surrounded by her sisters and friends. She looks into a mirror as they dress her hair and make-up her face and lips.

Yum-Yum admires herself: “Nature is lovely and rejoices in her loveliness. I am a child of Nature, and take after my mother.” Yum-Yum celebrates that she is to be married to the man she truly loves, congratulating herself as the happiest girl in Japan.

Yum-Yum begins to weep after Peep-Bo and Pitti-Sing remind her that her marriage will be brief: Nanki-Poo will be beheaded in one month.

Nanki-Poo arrives and becomes disconsolate when he finds Yum-Yum in tears on her wedding morning. He tries to raise her spirits, and urges everyone to be happy and forget sorrow.

Ko-Ko arrives to inform the couple that their wedding plans are in crisis: “I’ve just ascertained that, by the Mikado’s law, when a married man is beheaded, his wife is buried alive.” Nanki-Poo and Yum-Yum are shocked as they realize their dilemma: If Nanki-Poo marries Yum-Yum, his beheading dooms her to death; if he releases her, she must marry Ko-Ko at once. Yum-Yum admits that she indeed loves Nanki-Poo with all her heart, but her enthusiasm to marry him has suddenly diminished: she does not relish the idea of being buried alive within a month. Yum-Yum explains their dilemma as a “how-we-do,” a pretty mess.

Nanki-Poo offers to spare Yum-Yum a grim fate: he will die by suicide this very afternoon. Ko-Ko resists him, explaining that if he kills himself, he has no substitute to execute in his place.

As Pooh-Bah announces that the Mikado is arriving in Titipu to determine if his execution orders have been carried out, Ko-Ko pleads with Nanki-Poo to keep his part of the bargain: nevertheless, Nanki-Poo insists that he be decapitated immediately. Ko-Ko suddenly becomes panic-stricken, because

he is neither ready nor equal to the task; he does not know how to perform an execution, and more importantly, he cannot kill anyone.

Ko-Ko contrives an alternative plan: he will swear in an affidavit for the Mikado that he has done the deed, provided that Nanki-Poo leaves Titipu at once and never returns. Ko-Ko orders Nanki-Poo to marry Yum-Yum at once, and leave Titipu forever.

The Mikado's procession arrives, accompanied by Katisha, his daughter-in-law elect. All praise their emperor. The Mikado demands obedience to his decrees.

He then explains that he is the most humane and benevolent ruler in Japan's history:

Pooh-Bah – as State Coroner - assures the Mikado that his wishes have been fulfilled and an execution has taken place: Ko-Ko hands him an affidavit to confirm the deed. The Mikado is delighted, eager for Ko-Ko to describe the gory details of the criminal's demise. with further details provided by Pitti-Sing and Pooh-Bah. Nevertheless, the Mikado indicates his disappointment in not having witnessed the execution.

The Mikado announces that he has come to Titipu to seek his son's whereabouts, having learned that he masquerades in the town as a "Second Trombone": "A year ago my son, the heir to the throne of Japan, bolted from our Imperial Court." The Emperor orders that they immediately produce Nanki-Poo, but Ko-Ko advises him that he has gone abroad.

Katisha, reading the certificate of death, notices that it was none other than Nanki-Poo who was beheaded this morning: she laments that she will never find another. The Mikado advises Ko-Ko that in his anxiety to carry out his orders, he executed the heir to the throne of Japan: Ko-Ko apologizes; Pooh-Bah expresses his regret.

The Mikado excuses them, admitting that they were faultless: "If a man of exalted rank chooses to disguise himself as a 'Second Trombone,' he must take the consequences." Nevertheless, executing the Heir Apparent deserves punishment: the Mikado declares Ko-Ko and his accomplices guilty, and their execution to take place this very afternoon after luncheon; "something humorous, but lingering, with either boiling oil or melted lead."

The Mikado expresses his sorrow for them, but concludes that the world is unjust, and virtue triumphs only in theatrical performances. Their only hope for salvation is to produce Nanki-Poo alive and well.

As Ko-Ko, Pooh-Bah, and Pish-Tush argue about their dilemma, Nanki-Poo and Yum-Yum arrive before starting their honeymoon. Ko-Ko announces that he has just learned that Nanki-Poo is the son of the Mikado, and advises him that his father and Katisha are present in Titipu. The condemned trio try to persuade Nanki-Poo to "come back to life," but he refuses, desperately wishing to be free from Katisha: "Katisha claims me in marriage, but I can't marry her because I'm married already - consequently, she will insist on my execution; if I'm executed, my wife will have to be buried alive."

Nanki-Poo proposes a solution, advising Ko-Ko that "There's one chance for you. If you could persuade Katisha to marry you, she would have no further claim on me, and in that case I could come to life without any fear of being put to death."

To save his life, Ko-Ko has no other choice but to woo, win, and wed Katisha. Ko-Ko agrees to Nanki-Poo's plan. Katisha is upset over her loss of Nanki-Poo: *Alone, and yet alive!* In her remorse, she welcomes death rather than the punishment of living in agony, hopelessness, and a broken heart.

Ko-Ko arrives to beg Katisha for mercy. But Katisha wants vengeance and condemns him for slaying the young man she trained and educated to love her: "Oh, where shall I find another?" Ko-Ko, with intense passion, reveals to Katisha that for years he has been consumed by his love for her: "I have endeavored to conceal a passion whose inner fires are broiling the soul within me. But the fire will not be smothered --it defies all attempts at extinction, and, breaking forth, all the more eagerly for its long restraint, it declares itself in words that will not be weighed --that cannot be schooled - that should not

be too severely criticized. Katisha, I dare not hope for your love – but I will not live without it! Darling!”

Ko-Ko continues his plea for Katisha’s love in a ballad, *On a tree by a river a little tom-tit*, the “tit-willow,” a metaphor for an unrequited lover who dies because love has failed.

Katisha is moved to tears by Ko-Ko’s ballad. She decides to prevent the despairing lover from suicide, and promises him her love: they decide to marry. Ko-Ko, warned by Katisha, admits that he even finds beauty in her bloodthirstiness.

With a fanfare, the Mikado arrives from his luncheon, now ready to witness the execution of “the unfortunate gentleman and his two well-meaning but misguided accomplices.”

Katisha intervenes and pleads for mercy, pointing to Ko-Ko and announcing that they have just married. As the Mikado explains that justice must be served because the Heir Apparent had been slain, Nanki-Poo appears, returned to life and excitedly presenting his new bride to his father. Katisha, seeing Nanki-Poo alive, explodes into rage, and condemns Ko-Ko as a traitor.

Ko-Ko saves the day by explaining the “logic” of the events to the Mikado: “It’s like this: when your Majesty says, Let a thing be done, it’s as good as done – practically, it *is* done – because your Majesty’s will is law. Your Majesty says, ‘Kill a gentleman,’ and a gentleman is told off to be killed. Consequently, that gentleman is as good as dead – practically, he *is* dead – and if he is dead, why not say so?”

The Mikado accepts Ko-Ko’s ingenious explanation, “Nothing could possibly be more satisfactory!”: in appreciation, he commutes Ko-Ko’s death sentence to life with Katisha. All are reconciled and celebrate the return of Nanki-Poo and his marriage to Yum-Yum.

MEET SIR ARTHUR SEYMOUR SULLIVAN

Sir Arthur Seymour Sullivan, 1842 -1900, was the composer, who, with Gilbert, established a distinctive British operetta style: Gilbert's verbal ingenuity blended magnificently with Sullivan's surefire melodiousness and resourceful musicianship; their operas were brilliantly integrated, both musically and textually.

Sullivan, was the son of an Irish bandmaster whose career culminated in a professorship at the Royal Military College. By the age of 10, the young Sullivan had mastered all the wind instruments in his father's band. It has been suggested that he inherited his astute ability for melodic invention from his mother who was of Italian descent; she apparently met his father while accompanying an organ grinder and his monkey through the streets of London.

Sullivan's early musical promise earned him admission to the Royal Academy of Music, London; he would later continue his music studies at the Leipzig Conservatory. In 1861 he became organist of St. Michaels in London, and in the following year, achieved great success and recognition with his incidental music to *The Tempest*. He followed with the *Kenilworth* cantata (1864); a ballet, *L'Île enchantée*; a symphony and cello concerto; the overtures, *In Memoriam* and *Overtura di Ballo*; and numerous songs. Sullivan's first comic operas appeared in 1867: *Cox and Box*, and *Contrabandista*.

During periods when his relationship with Gilbert were strained, Sullivan wrote the opera, *Haddon Hall* (1892), *The Chieftain* (1895), *The Beauty Stone* (1898), and *The Rose of Persia* (1889). His more serious, non-Gilbert operettas, are rarely heard in the contemporary repertory, but were acclaimed in their day: *The Prodigal Son* (1869), *The Light of the World* (1873), *The Martyr of Antioch* (1880), *The Golden Legend* (1886), and the "romantic opera," *Ivanhoe*, composed at the urging of Queen Victoria for the opening of the Royal English Opera House in 1891. Sullivan wrote several religious choral works, and many of his hymn tunes have attained great popularity: *Onward! Christian Soldiers*, and *The Lost Chord*.

In 1876 Sullivan became principal of the National Training School for Music (later the Royal College of Music), a post he held for five years; he was active as a conductor, particularly at the Leeds Festivals from 1880 to 1898, and was knighted in 1883.

MEET SIR WILLIAM SCHWENK SULLIVAN

Sir William Schwenk Gilbert, 1836-1911, an English playwright and humorist, was best known for his collaboration with Sir Arthur Sullivan in producing comic operas. Gilbert was born in London, the son of a retired naval surgeon: the most notorious event of his youth was his kidnapping at the age of two by Italian brigands in Italy; he was later released by ransom. After military training, he yearned to participate in the Crimean War, but after he graduated, the war was over, and for the next 20 years his military career constituted service in the militia.

After receiving a substantial inheritance from an aunt, Gilbert indulged his early ambition to become a lawyer, but his legal career was brief and mediocre. In 1861, at the age of 25, he became a journalist, contributing dramatic criticism with a combination of humorous verse, caustic wit, satire, and sarcasm, to the popular British magazine *FUN*, all of which were illustrated with his own cartoons and sketches, and signed "Bab." The pieces became collectively known as *The Bab Ballads* (1869), and were followed by *More Bab Ballads* (1873): the characters in these works became the models for many of his later operas.

Gilbert's theatrical career began in 1866 when he was recommended to write a comic Christmas piece; within only two weeks, he wrote *Dulcamara, or the Little Duck and the Great Quack*, a topical extravaganza clothed in the underlying farce of Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore* that achieved immediate commercial success, and nurtured other writing commissions.

In 1871, Gilbert met Sullivan, and they began their historic collaboration, a partnership that ended in 1896 but spanned 25 years and resulted in 14 comic operas. After their collaboration ended, Gilbert continued to write librettos for other composers with moderate success: Edward German's *Fallen Fairies, or the Wicked World* (1909), and his last play, *The Hooligan* (1911). Gilbert was knighted by Edward VII in 1907, and died of a heart attack in 1911 at the age of 74 while attempting to rescue a drowning woman from a lake on his country estate.

Gilbert possessed exceptional talents and developed an extraordinarily unique style of world-play in his writing: he excelled in writing rhymed couplets, puns, parody, and farce that brilliantly satirized contemporary morality and human behavior; much of his writing possessed those unique idiosyncrasies so typical in late-Victorian humor.

Many of his contemporary targets that he parodied in his melodramas are no longer topical but still retain their satirical humor: aestheticism in *Patience*, women's education in *Princess Ida*, the police in *The Pirates of Penzance*, the navy in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, and the profit motive in *Ruddigore*. Nevertheless, Gilbert's ingenious wit possessed an underlying truth, and his outstanding legacy was that he provided Sir Arthur Sullivan, his musical dramatist, with a wealth of inspiration for ebullient and effervescent theatrical development.

THE PARTNERSHIP OF GILBERT AND SULLIVAN

In 1871, Gilbert met Sullivan; their historic collaboration began with *Thespis, or the Gods Grown Old*, a work that achieved little success. Richard D'Oyly Carte, the manager of the Royal Theatre, reunited them in 1875 for the one-act operetta, *Trial by Jury*, written in the spirit of an Offenbach operetta that became instantly popular and ran for more than a year.

Carte formed the Comedy Opera Company for the specific purpose of using the venue to present full-length Gilbert and Sullivan operettas: the first fruits of this venture were *The Sorcerer* (1877), *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878), and *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879).

During the run of *Patience* (1881), Carte transferred the productions to his newly built Savoy Theatre, where all of the later Gilbert and Sullivan operettas were presented: their works were now collectively known as the "Savoy Operas"; *Patience, or Bunthorne's Bride* (1881); *Iolanthe or the Peer and the Peri* (1882); *Princess Ida or Castle Adamant* (1884); *The Mikado or the Town of Titipu* (1885); *Ruddigore or the Witch's Curse* (1887); *The Yeomen of the Guard* (1888); and *The Gondoliers* (1889).

Sullivan had loftier theatrical goals than comic opera, and was ambivalent about the lighter music he composed with Gilbert: at times he considered himself subservient to the writer, and at times, protested against the artificial nature of Gilbert's plots; what he considered contrived in a topsy-turvy world of disorder and confusion. Disagreements between them came to a head in 1890, and the partnership dissolved, Sullivan supporting Carte in a dispute supposedly involving the installation of a new carpet at the Savoy that was ultimately resolved in the courts. They reunited in 1893 with the lavish, omni-satirical *Utopia Limited* (1893), and in 1896, with *The Grand Duke*, but neither of these works achieved their former standards nor acclaim with the critics or public.

Gilbert and Sullivan comic operettas possess a brilliant textual and musical unity. Gilbert perfected his librettos with themes, characters, plot devices, polysyllabic rhythms, and lyrics, all of which were metrical tours de forces.

The hallmark of Sullivan's music was humor, gaiety, and frivolity, generally avoiding emotional extremes, pathos, or melancholy: at times his music was profoundly original, and at times it was eclectic, incorporating elements of Offenbach's sentimental comedy styles, as well as English traditions such as Victorian church music, and drawing-room ballads. For Sullivan, rhythm was generally the starting point for his vocal writing, his comic numbers musically dramatizing Gilbert's verbal wit through simple melodies and sharply delineated rhythms; as *The Mikado* proved, Sullivan was certainly a genius at musical characterization and capturing local color.

The Gilbert and Sullivan partnership was unique in the history of the musical-theater: Sullivan, a respected and serious composer of symphonic and choral music channeled his talents into a field generally the province of more limited musicians; Gilbert, an innovative and inventive writer, elevated his texts to a new level of sophistication for musical theater, his literary achievements earning him that rare tribute of equal prominence on the billboards with the composer.

Their artistic relationship achieved a renaissance for British musical theater, and an enduring legacy of 14 acclaimed works, that, more than a century after their creation, continue to be performed with frequency in the repertory of the contemporary lyric theater.

SATIRE IN *THE MIKADO*

Gilbert and Sullivan were writing during the latter part of England's Victorian Age, the 19th century period named for the reigning monarch, Queen Victoria, 1819-1901.

The Victorian Age was represented by a multitude of restraining moral values that addressed character, propriety, duty, will, earnestness, hard work, respectable comportment and behavior, and thrift; virtues that were supposed to be embraced by all class divisions of society. By the end of the 19th century, those essential "Victorian values" surrendered to hypocrisies and, therefore, became the object of criticism and lampooning. In particular, resolute Victorians were ridiculed because of their smugness and unwillingness to face unpleasant realities: Gilbert and Sullivan became the artistic vanguard in exposing Victorian era hypocrisies, shortcomings, and weaknesses.

Government and politics were most often Gilbert's targets. As an example, in 1885, *The Mikado's* premiere year, Bishops in the House of Lords expressed their grave concern about the decline in the standards in public life: there were both sexual and fiscal scandals involving members of government and the Royal Household, and the outgoing Prime Minister was reputed to have roamed the streets of Soho, returning with ladies of the night to 10 Downing Street for prayer meetings.

As such, *The Mikado* represents a satirical portrait of late Victorian society; its English people were thinly disguised in the refreshing and exotic Japanese ambience. But Gilbert took dead aim at his contemporary society: in the character of Pooh-Bah, his libretto satirizes snobbery and opportunism; in Ko-Ko and the Mikado, the bores and burdens of life; in Katisha, feminine skittishness; and in the development of the opera's conclusion, the fallibility of "logic." Gilbert, the master of satire, unhesitatingly launched his acid pen at his contemporary society's follies and foibles; among his many targets, its Victorian arrogance, vanity, duplicity, perjury, and opportunism.

THE MUSIC OF THE MIKADO

The Mikado's music is energetic and humorous, a series of subtle and extremely catchy songs; Sullivan provides an entire musical landscape of patter songs, love duets, trios, and even an irresistible Madrigal.

Nanki-Poo's *A wandering minstrel I*, is a bravura tenor number that parodies several English ballad styles, such as those of the seas and patriotism, and is certainly one of the score's most popular numbers.

Yum-Yum's aria, *The sun whose rays are all ablaze*, is a tour de force possessing subtle vocal expression and rhythms, and one of the few Mikado songs successfully sung out of its context in concert.

Katisha's aria, *Alone and yet alive*, possesses real pain and moving pathos: it is an emotional outpouring requiring a first-rate singing actress to arouse its inherent sympathy; a number certainly not out of place in 19th century grand opera. Similarly, *There is Beauty in the bellow of the blast*, ultimately a duet with Ko-Ko, is impeccable and striking.

The Mikado's *A More humane Mikado* provides an opportunity for dramatic characterization: it contains Sullivan's humorous quotation from Bach's G minor organ fugue.

To save his life, Ko-Ko must woo, win, and wed Katisha, which he begins with *The flowers that bloom in the spring*: its words have become classic; "The flowers that bloom in the spring, Tra la. Have nothing to do with the case. I've got to take under my wing, Tra la. A most unattractive old thing, With a caricature of a face."

Ko-Ko's *Tit willow* causes Katisha to break down and accept him; the tough-as-a-bone harridan becomes overwhelmed by sentimental tears from his affecting tale. Ko-Ko's ballad is far from nonsense, but rather, a desperate attempt to survive from a man threatened with imminent death. Ironically, Katisha, the most ruthless, murderous character in the entire opera, surrenders to his ingenious fabrication.

Gilbert and Sullivan excelled in their portrayal of girlish innocence, and their inspiration is at its best in the choruses and sparkling ensembles for the schoolgirls. Nevertheless, the trio, which introduces Yum-Yum, Peep-Bo, and Pitti-Sing, *Three little maids from school*, is one of the most beloved numbers in the score, perhaps because the girls are portrayed as saucy and carefree, and suggests that they are on that borderline of transformation from innocent youth to young womanhood.

Here's a how-d'ye do, the trio begun by Yum-Yum, and joined by Nanki-Poo and Ko-Ko, is an absolutely brilliant number, compact and original. Likewise, the trio, *I am so proud*, provides three different tunes and classic patter as each of the men declines the honor of decapitation.

The Madrigal, *Brightly dawns our wedding day*, is perhaps the centerpiece of the music score: in its interplay of four voices, its words are beautiful, tender, genuine, and delicate, and there is a sense of rejoicing mingled with sadness and regret.

The choral work in *The Mikado* is magnificent with the brilliant opening, *If you want to know who we are*; the Act I finale with its interplay of Katisha's melodramatic outpourings; and, of course, the Act II finale which contains a reprise of previously heard choral numbers.

Sullivan injected many specific musical jokes: the wind interpolations in *The criminal cried*; his quotation from Bach in *A more humane Mikado*; and the *Miya Sama* song introducing the Mikado and his troops, the latter, Sullivan's appropriation of an authentic pentatonic melody sung by the Imperial army after it quashed a rebellion.

A SHORT HISTORY OF OPERA

The word *opera* is the plural form of the Latin word *opus* which translates quite literally as *work*. The use of the plural form alludes to the plurality of art forms that combine to create an operatic performance. Today we accept the word *opera* as a reference to a theatrically based musical art form in which the drama is propelled by the sung declamation of text accompanied by a full symphony orchestra.

Opera as an art form can claim its origin with the inclusion of incidental music that was performed during the tragedies and comedies popular during ancient Greek times. The tradition of including music as an integral part of theatrical activities expanded in Roman times and continued throughout the Middle Ages. Surviving examples of liturgical dramas and vernacular plays from Medieval times show the use of music as an “insignificant” part of the action as do the vast mystery and morality plays of the 15th and 16th centuries. Traditional view holds that the first completely sung musical drama (or opera) developed as a result of discussions held in Florence in the 1570s by an informal academy known as the *Camerata* which led to the musical setting of Rinuccini’s drama, *Dafne*, by composer, Jacopo Peri in 1597.

The work of such early Italian masters as Giulio Caccini and Claudio Monteverdi led to the development of a through-composed musical entertainment comprised of *recitative* sections (*secco* and *accompagnato*) which revealed the plot of the drama; followed by *da capo arias* which provided the soloist an opportunity for personal reflection. The function of the *chorus* in these early works mirrored that of the character of the same name found in Greek drama. The new “form” was greeted favorably by the public and quickly became a popular entertainment.

Opera has flourished throughout the world as a vehicle for the expression of the full range of human emotions. Italians claim the art form as their own, retaining dominance in the field through the death of Giacomo Puccini in 1924. Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Leoncavallo developed the art form through clearly defined periods of development which produced *opera buffa*, *opera seria*, *bel canto*, and *verismo*. The Austrian Mozart championed the *singspiel* (sing play), which combined the spoken word with music, a form also used by Beethoven in his only opera, *Fidelio*. Bizet (*Carmen*), Offenbach (*Hoffmann*), Gounod (*Faust*), and Meyerbeer (*Huguenots*) led the adaption by the French which ranged from *the opera comique* to the grand full scale *tragedie lyrique*. The Germans von Weber (*Freischutz*), Richard Strauss (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), and Wagner (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*) developed diverse forms such as *singspiel* to through-composed tone poems. The English (*ballad opera*), Spanish (*zarzuela*) and Viennese (*operetta*) helped to establish opera as a form of entertainment which continues to enjoy great popularity throughout the world.

With the beginning of the 20th century, composers in America diverged from European traditions in order to focus on their own roots while exploring and developing the vast body of the country’s folk music and legends. Composers such as Aaron Copland, Douglas Moore, Samuel Barber, Howard Hanson, and Robert Ward have all crafted operas which have been presented throughout the world to great success. Today, composers John Adams, Philip Glass, and John Corigliano enjoy success both at home and abroad and are credited with the infusion of new life into an art form which continues to evolve even as it approaches its fifth century.

THE OPERATIC VOICE

A true (and brief) definition of the “operatic” voice is a difficult proposition. Many believe the voice is “born,” while just as many hold to the belief that the voice is “trained.” The truth lies somewhere between the two. Voices which can sustain the demands required by the operatic repertoire do have many things in common. First and foremost is a strong physical technique which allows the singer to sustain long phrases through the control of both the inhalation and exhalation of breath. Secondly, the voice (regardless of its size) must maintain a resonance in both the head (mouth, sinuses) and chest cavities. The Italian word “*squillo*” (squeal) is used to describe the brilliant tone required to penetrate the full symphony orchestra which accompanies the singers. Finally, all voices are defined by both the actual voice “type” and the selection of repertoire for which the voice is ideally suited.

Within the five major voice types (*Soprano, Mezzo Soprano, Tenor, Baritone, Bass*) there is a further delineation into categories (*Coloratura, Lyric, Spinto, Dramatic*) which help to define each particular instrument. The *Coloratura* is the highest within each voice type whose extended upper range is complimented by extreme flexibility. The *Lyric* is the most common of the “types.” This instrument is recognized more for the exceptional beauty of its tone rather than its power or range. The *Spinto* is a voice which combines the beauty of a lyric with the weight and power of a *Dramatic*, which is the most “powerful” of the voices. The *Dramatic* instrument is characterized by the combination of both incredible volume and “steely” intensity.

While the definition presented in the preceding paragraph may seem clearly outlined, many voices combine qualities from each category, thus carving an unique niche in operatic history. Just as each person is different from the next, so is each voice. Throughout her career Maria Callas defied categorization as she performed and recorded roles associated with each category in the soprano voice type. Joan Sutherland as well can be heard in recordings of roles as diverse as Gilda in *Rigoletto* to *Turandot*. Below is a very brief outline of voice types and categories with roles usually associated with the individual voice type.

	<i>Coloratura</i>	<i>Lyric</i>	<i>Spinto</i>	<i>Dramatic</i>
Soprano	Norina (Pasquale) Gilda (Rigoletto) Lucia (di Lammermoor)	Liu (Turandot) Mimi (Boheme) Pamina (Magic Flute)	Tosca Amelia (Ballo) Leonora (Trovatore)	Turandot Norma Donna Anna
Mezzo Soprano	Rosina (Barber) Don Ottavio (Giovanni) Ferrando (Cosi)	Carmen Charlotte (Werther) Giulietta (Hoffmann)	Santuzza (Cavalleria) Adalgisa (Norma) The Composer (Ariadne)	Azucena (Trovatore) Ulrica (Ballo) Herodias (Salome)
Tenor	Count Almaviva (Barber) Don Ottavio (Giovanni) Ferrando (Cosi)	Pang (Turandot) Rodolfo (Boheme) Tamino (Magic Flute)	Calaf (Turandot) Pollione (Norma) Cavaradossi (Tosca)	Dick Johnson (Fanciulla) Don Jose (Carmen) Otello
Baritone	Figaro (Barber) Count Almavira (Marriage of Figaro) Dr. Malatesta (Pasquale)	Ping (Turandot) Don Giovanni Sharpless (Butterfly)	<u>VERDI BARITONE</u> Germont (Traviata) Di Luna (Trovatore) Rigoletto	Scarpia (Tosca) Jochanaan (Salome) Jack Rance (Fanciulla)
Bass	Bartolo (Barber) Don Magnifico (Cenerentola) Dr. Dulcamara (Elixir)	Leporello (Giovanni) Colline (Boheme) Figaro (Marriage of Figaro)	<u>BUFFO BASS</u> Don Pasquale Don Alfonso (Cosi) Sacristan (Tosca)	<u>BASSO CANTATE</u> Oroveso (Norma) Timur (Turandot) Sarastro (Magic Flute)

OPERA PRODUCTION

Opera is created by the combination of a myriad of art forms. First and foremost are the actors who portray characters by revealing their thoughts and emotions through the singing voice. The next very important component is a full symphony orchestra which accompanies the singing actors and actresses, helping them to portray the full range of emotions possible in the operatic format. The orchestra performs in an area in front of the singers called the orchestra pit while the singers perform on the open area called the stage. These performances are further enhanced by wigs, costumes, sets, and specialized lighting all of which are designed, created, and executed by a team of highly trained artisans.

The creation of an opera begins with a dramatic scenario crafted by a playwright or dramaturg who alone or with a librettist fashions the script or libretto which contains the words the artists will sing. Working in tandem, the composer and librettist team up to create a cohesive musical drama in which the music and words work together to express the emotions revealed in the story. Following the completion of their work, the Composer and Librettist entrust their new work to a Conductor who with a team of assistants (repetiteurs) assume responsibility for the musical preparation of the work. The Conductor collaborates with a Stage Director (responsible for the visual component) in order to bring a performance of the new piece to life on the stage. The Stage Director and Conductor form the creative spearhead for the new composition while assembling a Design Team which will take charge of the actual physical production.

Set Designers, Lighting Designers, Costume Designers, Wig and Makeup Designers and even Choreographers must all be brought “on board” to participate in the creation of the new production. The Set Designer combines the skills of both an artist and an architect using “blueprint” plans in order to design the actual physical set which will reside on the stage, recreating the physical setting required by the storyline. These blueprints are turned over to a team of carpenters who are specially trained in the art of stage carpentry. Following the actual building of the set, painters following instructions from the Set Designers’ original plans paint the set. As the set is assembled on the stage the Lighting Designer works with a team of electricians in order to throw light onto both the stage and the set in an atmospheric as well as practical way. Using specialized lighting instruments, colored gels and a state of the art computer, the Designer along with the Stage Director create a “lighting plot” by writing “lighting cues” which are stored in the computer and used during the actual performance of the opera.

During this production period, the Costume Designer in consultation with the Stage Director has designed appropriate clothing for the singing actors and actresses to wear. These designs are fashioned into patterns and crafted by a team of highly skilled artisans called cutters, stitchers, and sewers. Each costume is specially made for each singer using his/her individual measurements. The Wig and Makeup Designer working with the Costume Designer designs and creates wigs which will complement both the costume and the singer as well as represent historically accurate “period” fashions.

As the actual performance date approaches, rehearsals are held on the newly crafted set, combined with costumes, lights, and orchestra in order to ensure a cohesive performance, which will be both dramatically and musically satisfying to the assembled audience.

***THE MIKADO* ESSAY QUESTIONS**

English

1. *The Mikado* is a satire on Victorian society. What is satire? What makes something satire? What other literature, film and plays are satires?

Social Studies

2. *The Mikado* is an English operetta set in Japan. What elements of Japanese culture are present in the operetta? Are any of these elements stereotypes?
3. How does the Mikado deal with the Japanese culture? Does it treat the culture fairly or unfairly?

History

4. *The Mikado* is set during the time when Japan was a monarchy. Discuss the changing role of the monarchy in Japan from the 1800's till today.
5. One of the most important incidents in World War II was the atomic bombing of the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States. What incidents led up to the bombing? How did the bombing impact the outcome of the war? What was the lasting impact of the bombing on Japan?