

The Mikado  
 or, The Town of Titipu  
 An Entirely Original Japanese Opera, in Two Acts

Synopsis by Fredric Woodbridge Wilson

First produced at the Savoy Theatre, London, under the management of R. D'Oyly Carte, on Saturday, March 14, 1885, for 672 performances through January 19, 1887. Sullivan conducted the first performance.

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| THE MIKADO OF JAPAN  | <i>Bass-Baritone</i>  | Richard Temple             |
| NANKI-POO, son of the Mikado, disguised as<br>a wandering minstrel, in love with Yum-Yum | <i>Tenor</i>          | Durward Lely               |
| KO-KO, Lord High Executioner of Titipu   | <i>Light Baritone</i> | George Grossmith           |
| POOH-BAH, Lord High Everything Else  | <i>Baritone</i>       | Rutland Barrington         |
| GO-TO  | <i>Bass</i>           | (not in first performance) |
| PISH-TUSH, a noble Lord  | <i>Baritone</i>       | Frederick Bovill           |
| Sisters, Wards of Ko-Ko  |                       |                            |
| YUM-YUM, Ko-Ko's bride-elect   | <i>Soprano</i>        | Leonora Braham             |
| PITTI-SING   | <i>Mezzo-Soprano</i>  | Jessie Bond                |
| PEEP-BO  | <i>Soprano</i>        | Sybil Grey                 |
| KATISHA, an elderly Lady, in love with<br>Nanki-Poo                                      | <i>Contralto</i>      | Rosina Brandram            |

SCHOOL GIRLS, NOBLES, GUARDS, and COOLIES

First produced in America at the Chicago Museum, under the management of Sydney Rosenfeld, on July 6, 1885. First authorized American production by D'Oyly Carte's Opera Company at the Fifth Avenue Theatre, New York, under the management of John Stetson, on August 19, 1885, later transferred to the Standard Theatre and the Fifth Avenue Theatre, for a total of 250 performances through April 17, 1886. Sullivan conducted a single gala performance on September 24, 1885. First revived at the Savoy Theatre, under the management of R. D'Oyly Carte, on June 7, 1888, for 116 performances through September 29, 1888. Revived at the Savoy Theatre, under the management of R. D'Oyly Carte, on November 6, 1895, for 127 performances through March 4, 1896, for 6 matinée performances during the run of *The Grand Duke*, and for an additional 226 performances from July 11, 1896 through February 17, 1897.

ACT I —THE COURTYARD OF KO-KO'S OFFICIAL RESIDENCE, IN TITIPU

The curtain opens on a group of Japanese nobles in poses suggested by native drawings (Chorus, *If you want to know who we are*). Nanki-Poo enters, carrying a guitar and a handful of ballads (Recitative, *Gentlemen, I pray you tell me*). He asks directions to the dwelling of Yum-Yum, a ward of Ko-Ko; asked to identify himself, he does so (Song, *A wandering minstrel I*). Pish-Tush asks his business with Yum-Yum, and Nanki-Poo replies that he had fallen in love with Yum-Yum the previous year, when he was a member of the Titipu town band. She had been betrothed to her own guardian, Ko-Ko, but as he was reportedly condemned to death for flirting, Nanki-Poo had returned in the hope of finding Yum-Yum in a position to accept his suit. Pish-Tush replies that not only has Ko-Ko been reprieved, but he has been elevated to the post of Lord High Executioner. This was a neat solution to a delicate problem: as the only capital offense is flirting (a weakness widely shared among the townsfolk), the other unmarried men in the town were safe, as the Executioner would have to cut off his own head before executing anyone else (Song, *Our great Mikado, virtuous man*).

The haughty Pooh-Bah enters and condescends to describe his origins and his many offices to Nanki-Poo, and suggests that any information concerning Yum-Yum would require a bribe — Nanki-Poo complies, and Pooh-Bah tells him that Yum-Yum is to return from school to marry Ko-Ko at seven o'clock that very day (Song, *Young man, despair*). Ko-Ko enters (Chorus, *Behold the Lord High Executioner*), and the assembled nobles regard him with contempt. Ko-Ko cheerfully enumerates a "little list" of society offenders "whose deaths will be a distinct gain to society at large" (Patter-Song, *As someday it may happen*). He discusses the arrangements for the wedding with Pooh-Bah (in his various capacities). A procession of schoolgirls (Chorus, *Comes a train of little ladies*) enters, followed by Yum-Yum and her sisters, Peep-Bo and Pitti-Sing (Trio, *Three little maids from school are we*). Ko-Ko begins to speak with Yum-Yum, but she discovers Nanki-Poo, and the three girls rush to him, speaking at once. He is presented to Ko-Ko, and at once declares his love for Yum-Yum. Ko-Ko is glad to have his own opinion "backed by a competent authority." He then orders Nanki-Poo taken away.

Ko-Ko introduces Pooh-Bah, who grudgingly presents his compliments, and the girls respond teasingly (Quintet, *So please you, sir, we much regret*). Yum-Yum is left alone, and Nanki-Poo returns. He reveals to her that he is the son of the Mikado of Japan. He is in disguise because some years ago he had to flee his father's court to escape the unwanted affections of an elderly lady, Katisha, who claimed him in marriage. The Mikado had commanded him to marry Katisha or die, and Nanki-Poo had fled. Yum-Yum is alarmed at their position, and begs him to stay away. Nanki-Poo cleverly persuades Yum-Yum to consider what they *would* do if it were not for the law, and she falls in with this ingenious way of wooing (*So in spite of all temptation*).

They leave, separately, as Ko-Ko enters. He is about to discourse on matrimony when he is interrupted by Pooh-Bah and Pish-Tush. They deliver a letter from the Mikado, who has observed that no executions have taken place in Titipu, and decrees that unless an execution is held within a month, the town should be reduced to the rank of a village and the post of executioner will be abolished — and so Ko-Ko's life forfeit. They debate who should be executed (Trio, *I am so proud*): the others feel that the honor should fall to Ko-Ko himself; Ko-Ko suggests that it would be Pooh-Bah's crowning honor. Ko-Ko is left to work out the problem, when Nanki-Poo appears with a rope. He intends to "terminate an unendurable existence," that is, life without Yum-Yum. It occurs to Ko-Ko that Nanki-Poo, determined to carry out the "happy despatch," would serve his purposes as a substitute victim. Nanki-Poo is persuaded by Ko-Ko's proposal, providing he can be married to Yum-Yum at once, and be executed after a month of married happiness. Ko-Ko is desperate, and reluctantly he agrees to Nanki-Poo's condition.

The entire company appear to learn how Ko-Ko will comply with the Mikado's decree (Chorus, *With aspect stern*). Ko-Ko introduces his volunteer, Nanki-Poo. The news is received with elation as Nanki-Poo and Yum-Yum embrace (Ensemble, *The threatened cloud has passed away*). But suddenly the gruesome Katisha appears melodramatically. She has come to "claim my perjured lover, Nanki-Poo!" Her threats terrify everyone (Song, *Oh, fool, that fleest My Hallowed joys*), except for Pitti-Sing, who taunts her (*Away, nor prosecute your quest*). Katisha withdraws in self-pity (Solo, *The hour of gladness Is dead and gone*), but she soon returns threatening to "tear the mask from your disguising." An idea occurs to Yum-Yum, and as Katisha is about to reveal Nanki-Poo's true identity the entire company, at Yum-Yum's prompting, raises their voices in a thunderous cacaphony ("O ni! bikkuri shakkuri to!"). Katisha is foiled, and the act closes in a dramatic climax as Katisha menaces the crowd as she departs "Mikado-wards."

## ACT II — KO-KO'S GARDEN, LATER THE SAME DAY

Yum-Yum is discovered seated, looking into a mirror. The other maidens dress her hair and paint her face and lips in preparation for her wedding (Chorus, *Braid the raven hair*). Yum-Yum wonders at the reason for her beauty, and resolves that this is not vanity: "Nature is lovely and rejoices in her loveliness. I am a child of Nature, and take after my mother" (Song, *The sun, whose rays Are all ablaze*). She is supremely happy, until her sisters remind her that her happiness is to be "cut short" at the end of a month.

Nanki-Poo and Pish-Tush enter to find the girls in tears, and the bridegroom does his best to lift their spirits (Quartet, *Brightly dawns our wedding day*). Ko-Ko enters with the distressing news that "by the Mikado's law, when a married man is beheaded his wife is buried alive." Much as Yum-Yum loves Nanki-Poo, the prospect of "such a stuffy death" places her in a difficult position (Trio, *Here's a how-de-do!*). Despondently, Nanki-Poo

resolves to “perform the Happy Despatch” then and there. Pooh-Bah enters to inform Ko-Ko that the Mikado approaches the city; Nanki-Poo consents to be beheaded if Ko-Ko will do it at once; but Ko-Ko is unable to carry out the execution: “I’m not ready yet. I don’t know how it’s done.” But an idea occurs to Ko-Ko: “Why should I kill you when making an affidavit that you’ve been executed will do just as well?” With the help of Pooh-Bah (a “ready-money” insult) Nanki-Poo and Yum-Yum are sent on their way.

A grand procession (Chorus, *Miya sama, miya sama*) heralds the entrance of the Mikado. He is accompanied by Katisha, who alone dares to defy him. He greets the populace (Duet, *From every kind of man Obedience I expect*) and assures them that his “object all sublime” is “To let the punishment fit the crime” (Song, *A more humane Mikado never Did in Japan exist*). Ko-Ko pays his respects, and hands him the certificate of death. In the interest of “artistic verisimilitude,” Ko-Ko, Pooh-Bah, and Pitti-Sing offer inventive accounts of the execution (Trio, *The criminal cried as he dropped him down*). However, the Mikado informs them that he has come about another matter: he is looking for his son Nanki-Poo, who has fled from the Mikado’s court, and has been traced to Titipu. Ko-Ko is panic-stricken, and replies that Nanki-Poo has “gone abroad.” Katisha, however, reads the certificate of death and sees Nanki-Poo’s name on it, and her wrath is terrible. Ko-Ko and his accomplices claim they had no idea of his identity, and the Mikado assures them that it was no fault of theirs — that Nanki-Poo surely “deserved all he got.” However, the law being what it is, they will have to be executed all the same. The punishment for compassing the death of the Heir Apparent — “something humorous, but lingering, with either boiling oil or melted lead” — is to be applied after luncheon. The Mikado and Katisha lead a philosophical inquiry into the inequity of fortune (Glee, *See how the Fates their gifts allot*), and the three culprits are left alone. They blame one another until Nanki-Poo and Yum-Yum pass by, prepared for a journey. Ko-Ko tells them of the present state of affairs, but Nanki-Poo declines to materialize so long as Katisha remains unmarried. He suggests that the only course is for Ko-Ko himself to marry Katisha. Ko-Ko is repulsed by this notion (“Have you seen her? She’s something appalling!”), but he is resigned in the face of Nanki-Poo’s resolution (Duet, *The flowers that bloom in the spring*).

Katisha enters. Distraught over her loss (Recitative, *Alone, and yet alive! Oh sepulchre!*), she reflects on her unhappy condition (Song, *Hearts do not break!*). Ko-Ko approaches her timidly, and she gloats over his impending punishment. Ko-Ko proposes passionately to Katisha, but to no avail. Ko-Ko threatens to die on the spot if she refuses him; and to prove his point, he relates a tragic love story (Song, *On a tree by a river a little tom-tit*) which greatly affects Katisha. She accepts Ko-Ko’s proposal, and they rejoice (Duet, *There is beauty in the bellow of the blast*) and exit together.

The Mikado again enters, attended by the Court, ready to witness the execution. Katisha, having married Ko-ko, pleads for mercy on his behalf. But Nanki-Poo and Yum-Yum take this opportunity to present themselves to the Mikado, whereupon Katisha, realizing she has

been deceived, seizes Ko-Ko furiously. The Mikado intervenes, and requests an explanation. Ko-Ko explains that “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.” And when his Majesty commands an execution, it is as good as done, so why not say so? The Mikado finds this a plausible explanation: “Nothing could possibly be more satisfactory,” and the opera closes with general rejoicing (Finale, *The threatened cloud has passed away*).

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