

## **The Mikado**

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The concept for Chris Monks's anglicised Mikado was born of necessity. Originally developed over a decade ago as a drama school project, there was no money in the kitty for costumes. There was, however, a kit bag full of cricketing whites; hence the transference of Titipu to a typical village green.

It is a little odd when a team of chaps in caps and sweaters come trotting out of the pavilion singing "we are gentleman of Japan". But Monks's conceit taps into the irony that Gilbert and Sullivan's most exotic creation is really one of their closest to home. As GK Chesterton noted: "I doubt if there is a single joke that fits the Japanese. But all of the jokes fit the English." In most cases, Monks's ideas make a perfect fit. The Mikado depicts a rarefied world run by pompous officials where summary executions are handed out for the most arbitrary of reasons. What better metaphor could there be than the laws of the game, in which a batsman's fate frequently hangs on the upraised finger of a retired headmaster?

A successful team needs a good stock of all-rounders, and Monks's revival fields a strong cast who can all act, sing and bat a bit. Claude Close makes a marvellously self-serving umpire out of Pooh-Bah, and Kraig Thornber's Panama-hatted Mikado is fluent in the highly regionalised Yorkshire dialect spoken only by Geoffrey Boycott.

There's great work throughout from Kieran Buckeridge's highly flappable Lord Executioner, whose office involves him losing his head while all around him are keeping theirs. Though it may seem an incongruous combination, Monks's show proves there is no more satisfying soundtrack to the summer than the crack of leather on willow, tit-willow, tit-willow.