

The Mikado

The Stage, 14 July 2010

Kevin Berry

Chris Monks revives and refreshes his career-defining set on a cricket pitch adaptation of *The Mikado*, and the Scarborough audience is ecstatic.

The wandering minstrel Nanki-Poo, played by Dominic Brewer, is a dinkum Aussie straight out of a lager commercial. Claude Close, as the multi-tasking official Pooh-Bah, is giving a masterclass in comic timing. The Three Little Maids are shimmeringly sexy hockey players. All looks distinctly promising.

Then a possible flat spot, in which there are rather too many camp postures, is suddenly and gloriously enlivened by the entrance of Ko-Ko, the Lord High Executioner, played by Kieran Buckeridge. What a charismatic and wholehearted performance this is. Angular, ever agile and slightly Dickensian in manner, his reluctant pursuit of Julie Jupp's Katisha is pure comic joy. Jupp herself stands out in a thoroughly fine cast.

The cricket motif holds up well in the choreography, costume and set design. There are wonderfully inventive chorus lines with bats and even MCC ties for Ko-Ko and Kraig Thornber's Mikado.

A delicious moment has Yum-Yum, played by Florence Andrews, speaking with a pronounced Brookside accent and constantly referring to living in Japan. This irony is the comic heart of the adaptation.

Added to all that, the familiar Gilbert and Sullivan songs are sung with joy, polish and obvious respect. Opportunities to update some of them, with references to pop culture characters and cricket heroes, are seized with mischievous relish. The rehearsals must have been a giggle.