

HOT MIKADO

Review – Michael Gray

It really shouldn't work. Sullivan's tunes squeezed into swingtime, Gilbert's plot [and wit] left to fend for itself. But the Hot Mikado manages to appeal to the purists and the populists alike, and the talented young people of WOW, for whom the original must be as alien as Arne's Artaxerxes, had great fun with the song and dance numbers.

Against a strikingly simple oriental setting, the chorus routines were inventive and varied, invoking the Jitterbug and the Lindy Hop, as well as featuring a tap routine backing the Mikado's big number. The Act One finale was especially impressive.

WOW fielded a strong team of principals. Jake Davis, all-American boy-next-door, slender in denim, was an appealing Nanki Poo, with Zoe Rogers as his bobby-soxer Yum Yum: her vocal styling was spot on for The Sun Whose Rays. The other great vocalist was Tilda Bourne, as Katisha. She has a remarkable voice, and I especially liked what she did with her Hour of Gladness in Act One. Faith Rogers' Pitti Sing was very watchable, too. The Madrigal Quartet was very slickly done.

Ben Herman was a silly Koko, physically very expressive, with Chris Adair as the pompous Pooh Bah. The eponymous Mikado – the J Edgar Hoover of Japan – was confidently played by Mark Ellis, arriving in Titipu on a Vespa and commanding the stage as a diminutive Elvis.

This is sophisticated stuff. The three little maids – the right age for once – come on like the Andrews Sisters; the singers have to master jazz, blues and Hot Gospel, as well as Gilbert's tricky lyrics. They were brilliantly supported here by some nicely authentic sounds from the band. Even at Monday's public preview, it was clear this was a great success, a worthy follow-up to last year's Les Mis, and an auspicious omen for next year's West Side Story.

The directors were Nicola Mundell-Poole and David Slater, with Susannah Edom looking after the music. Choreography was by Julie Slater; the Dance Captain was Rachel Ellis.