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The Mikado and Madonna! Gilbert and Sullivan Classic Operetta Updated for IWU Stage

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Cent IL***"The Mikado" and Madonna!****Gilbert and Sullivan Classic Operetta Updated for IWU Stage**

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.--A note to those attending Illinois Wesleyan University's production of W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan's "The Mikado": Don't be surprised if pop-music star Madonna shows up in the 110-year-old operetta.

"The Mikado" is set in Japan, but parodies British politics of the time. Director Lori Adams, instructor in theatre arts, is considering updating and Americanizing the IWU version.

"Some of the references are very dated," Adams said. "Some of the material is just not funny to us anymore."

Performances of "The Mikado" are scheduled for Oct. 5-7 and 12-14 at 8 p.m. in McPherson Theatre, 304 E. Graham St., Bloomington.

General admission is \$5, tickets for students are \$1.

The story follows Nanki-Poo, a young man who falls in love with Yum-Yum, who is betrothed to the Lord High Executioner, who is condemned to death for flirting, a capital offense.

"It's a really funny show," said Yvette Cataneo, a senior who plays the role of Yum-Yum. "It's very witty. The audience should go away happy."

Cataneo is performing in her first show on the McPherson stage, but the voice major has been performing since she was eight-years-old.

Last summer, Cataneo performed the role of Adele in the opera "Die Fledermaus," (a role she played at IWU as a sophomore), during a three-week program with the Rome Festival in Italy. To audition for the role, Cataneo taped two contrasting arias, earning the opportunity to work in a professional production.

"There were a lot of people there who are really up-and-coming," she said.

Cataneo said that, musically, "The Mikado" is one of her easier performances.

"The music is really straight forward," Cataneo said. "The challenge is to be up the whole time. You have to have energy going through you all the time."

Cataneo won't be the only one spending a lot of energy on "The Mikado."

(more)

"The Mikado"/2

According to Adams, it is going to be an elaborate production.

"One major challenge is that the production is set in Japan," Adams said. "We have to create Japanese-esque clothing and movement, and capture the beauty shown through the culture."

To capture that beauty, Adams said that there will be at least 100 different costumes, not including hats, wigs, shoes, swords and other accessories.

The stage has been specially designed to fit a 36-piece orchestra behind it.

While Linda Farquharson, associate professor of music, and director of music for "The Mikado," has done the music for the operetta more than 100 times, she has a new challenge this time. Since the orchestra is behind the stage, she will be keeping up with what is happening on stage via television shots taken from a camera behind the audience.

"We'll never practice with an audience before the first show, and there will never be the same audience on any night, so it's kind of a Hail Mary pass every time," Farquharson said. "Some people think I'm crazy."

One person who apparently does not think Farquharson is crazy is Adams, who has seen "The Mikado" only twice.

"When I'm stuck she [Farquharson] may say 'traditionally, it's done this way' or 'once, we did it this way,'" Adams said.

Farquharson said she never tires of "The Mikado," even after all these times.

"I've discovered new things every time I've done it," she said. "One of the thrills of performing this in an academic society is that each person can bring their own perceptions to it."

Twenty-six IWU students appear in the cast of "The Mikado." The scenic designs are by Curtis Trout, assistant professor of scenic design, and lighting designs are by Kenneth P. Johnson, technical director. Costumes are designed by Laura Wetli, assistant professor of theatre. Choreography is by Jean MacFarland Kerr, assistant professor of dance/theatre arts.