


WEDNESDAY 23RD MAY 2001 (5TH WEEK)

COMING

OU Gilbert and Sullivan Society Presents

The **MIKADO**
by W. S. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan



Saturday 26th - Sunday 27th May
8pm
Holywell Music Room

THEATRICAL NEEDS

AUDITIONS: MICHAELMAS PLAYHOUSE production of Cabaret: act and/or sing. Tues.22nd & Wed.23rd May 2-6pm in Magdalen. 07779023179 or e-mail coco.ferguson@magd.ox.ac.uk

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REVIEW: THEATRE

THE WOMAN IN BLACK BY SUSAN HILL
PLAYHOUSE UNTIL SATURDAY 26TH

I write this review looking over my shoulder. It's late, I'm alone in the house, and I have just sat through a play so terrifying that it moved its audience to scream out loud more than once (and then laugh nervously for being so silly). Buoyed up by the programme and the promised terrors ahead, 50% of said audience jumped and gasped as the pre-performance "Please turn off your mobile phones" boomed out. And I was among them.

Arthur Kipps (Frank Barrie) hires a young Actor (Damian Matthews) to teach him to relate the story of his real-life experiences concerning the malevolent Woman in Black. Before long, the Actor has revamped the tale as a performance piece for two men, with himself playing the young Kipps with a manic over-cafeinated energy. Arthur Kipps plays all the incidental characters in the story, and as the end of the tale slides into view, the aged Kipps can only look on in despair and helplessness at the zeal of youth as tragic history threatens to repeat itself.

The plot of the actual ghost story is not really the point of the play. As with most horror films and ghost flicks, the pathos and dread is produced by the repercussions and impact on the living characters. Headless horsemen, women in black - these are really little but symbols, plot devices. It is the suffering of the living that moves us. And there is little doubt that the audience left moved. Terrified, but moved.

So, does horror work on a stage? The audience is taken through the same range of emotions as it would be while watching any good (or bad) horror film. I sat hunched in my seat, responding in a way any horror director would applaud - "Look behind you!", "You're alone in the house, so don't go back inside!" and definitely "Don't go through the door that opens itself with an ominous creak!".

There are two actors in front of us on a stage, purporting to be actors rehearsing a play in a creepy-looking theatre. There are no special effects. No laser ghosts. No clever flying tricks. Instead, our fear is manipulated through simple sound, lighting and the sheer brilliance of both actors.

My companion said she didn't want the play to end, but during the second half, as I peered through my fingers, I'd got to the stage where my nerves couldn't take much more... I think I'm going to draw the curtains now...

Fiona Bennett, 21 / 05 / 01

CINEMA

Until Thursday 24th May

Odeon Magdalen Street 725305

THE MUMMY RETURNS (12) Daily: 2.00, 5.10, 8.20

More special effects terror in the desert.

BRIDGET JONES'S DIARY (15) Daily: 1.30, 3.50, 6.15, 8.45

The famous singleton on screen.

PAY IT FORWARD (12) Wed 23rd 10.45am

A schoolboy's attempt to change the world. Complimentary refreshments.

Odeon George Street 723911

CLOSED FOR REFURBISHMENT

Ultimate Picture Palace 245288

BRIDGET JONES'S DIARY (15)

Daily: 4.00, 6.00, 11.15pm

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ONCE UPON A TIME IN THE WEST (15) Daily: 8.00

Gunmen out to slaughter a widow.

Phoenix Picture House 512526

CAPTAIN CORELLI'S MANDOLIN (15) Daily 2.00, 4.15, 6.45, 9.15

Famous mediterranean wartime romance.

A HARD DAY'S NIGHT (U) Daily: 1.45, 5.15, 9.10

The Beatles teetering on the brink of superstardom.

BEST IN SHOW (12) Daily: 3.30, 7.00

Canine pageantry. See review at www.dailyinfo.co.uk

CULT CINEMA:FORBIDDEN PLANET (U) Thur 24th 11.30pm

50s Classic boasting an array of special effects.

REQUIEM FOR A DREAM (18) Thur 24th 11.30pm

Powerful drug story.

THEATRE

Worcester College Gardens

THE COUNTRY WIFE Tue 22nd-Sat 26th 7pm; Sun 27th 2pm

William Wycherley's bawdy satire of love and jealousy.

Apollo Theatre 794490

60'S GOLD Thur 24th 7.30

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Old Fire Station 794490

BLITHE SPIRIT Tue 22nd-Sat 26th 7.30; Sat mat 2.30

Noel Coward's most popular comedy.

Playhouse 798600

THE WOMAN IN BLACK Mon 21st - Wed 23rd 7.30; Thur 24th 7.30; Fri 25th 8pm; Sat 26th 7.30, 7.30

Susan Hill's spine-chiller about a cursed lawyer.

Burton Taylor Theatre 793797

MADAME DE SADE Tue 22nd - Sat 26th 7.30

The long-suffering wife of the 'Divine Marquis'

LATINI! OR TOBACCO AND BOYS Tue 22nd - Sat 26th 9.30

Stephen Fry's tasteless boarding school comedy.

Pegasus Theatre 722851

OUR COUNTRY'S GOOD Wed 23rd - Sat 26th 8pm

Penal colonists in Australia put on a play.

Holywell Music Room

THE MIKADO Sat 26th - Sun 27th 8pm

Gilbert & Sullivan's Japanese comic masterpiece.

University College Gardens

ARABIAN NIGHTS Tue 22nd-Sat 26th 7.30

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Town & Gown

BLADES

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PREVIEW

THE MIKADO, by Gilbert and Sullivan

Holywell Music Room, Saturday 26th-Sunday 27th May, 8pm

This month sees the opening of the Japan 2001 Festival. Running until March 2002, and involving events in venues the length and breadth of Britain, the festival seeks to give English audiences an opportunity to appreciate the art and culture of a country which still, even in this jet-propelled age, seems fascinatingly remote. What more appropriate time, then, to perform Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Mikado* for it was a Japanese Festival in London in 1885 which provided the inspiration for this most popular of all the G & S operettas, and, in the process, saved probably the most successful partnership in British Musical History.

After composing *Princess Ida*, Sullivan decided that it was about time to end his lucrative partnership with Gilbert. This may have been because receipts for *Ida*, in the long hot summer of 1884, were not good; more probably it was because he felt he should devote more time to "serious" composition. Either way, Gilbert was unable to tempt him with a new libretto. Until that is, he visited the Japanese exhibition at Knightsbridge, and purchased a ceremonial sword. Having hung it on the wall of his study, he thought no more about it until, when the

author was working late one night, the sword fell in front of him with a crash. The idea for a Japanese opera took root in Gilbert's mind; Sullivan was carried away by the notion; and the partnership went on to produce seven more masterpieces of musical theatre.

Ironically, though *The Mikado* is supposedly set in Japan, it is almost as if both librettist and composer found their own national voices more fully in the contemplation of another culture. Sullivan, who less than a year before had claimed that his ingenuity for comic opera was exhausted, produced his most ebulliently, melodiously English score. The few bars of quasi-oriental music that he did write seem only to have spring-boarded him into fresh heights of Victorian gaiety. Gilbert, in placing the action in what must have seemed the most foreign of countries, Japan, and attributing its characters in fantastically exotic garb, contrived to create his most English libretto to date. *The Mikado*'s characters are even larger than life, and even more unmistakably English than usual; and in no other Savoy Opera does Gilbert produce a "little list" of English types who could be profitably exterminated.

This new production from Oxford University's Gilbert and Sullivan Society aims to capture

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the exotic flavour of the original, while updating the already biting political satire to hilariously topical effect: politicians campaigning this week will have to watch their step if they want to avoid being included on the Lord High Executioner's Little List when it is unveiled this Saturday. Performed in the perfect acoustics of the Holywell Music Room, the emphasis of this production is on Sullivan's sparkling music: some of it being among the most famous music ever composed. The cast contains many fine voices - the large ensemble numbers are uplifting by their sheer volume - and a good mix of G & S veterans (you may recognize both the Pirate King and the Sergeant of Police from January's *Pirates of Penzance*) and fresh new talent. Altogether, an hilarious, melodious and thoroughly English evening's entertainment.

MIR, 22 / 5 / 01

The Japan 2001 festival comes to Oxford on June. Living Japan: Arts in Practice is an exhibition of a huge variety of Japanese arts with a Butoh performance at 6pm. It takes place at Oxford Brookes Headington Hill Hall on Saturday 9th June, from 12noon-8pm.

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MEETINGS

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MALCOLM VENVILLE - 'LAYERS' / A discussion of photography. / 6.30pm / Borders bookshop, 9, Magdalen St, Oxford OX1 3AD; Tel: 203901
STRUCTURES AND TRANSFORMATIONS: PATTERNS OF REJECTION AND RECEPTION - PATRONS AND MAKERS. / Prof M Alison Stones / 5pm / Magdalen College Auditorium, Longwall St
CLASS VOTING / With Robert Andersen and Neil Gavin / 2pm / Maison Francaise, Norham Rd, Oxford, OX2 6SE; Tel: 274220, Fax: 274225, Email: maison@sable.ox.ac.uk
CHRISTIANS, JEWS AND PAGANS AT APHRODISIAS IN LATE ANTIQUITY. / Prof A Chaniotis / 5pm / St. John's Auditorium, St. John's College, St. Giles; Tel: 277307
FRANZ BOAS AS GERMAN, AMERICAN, JEW. / With Professor Mitchell Hart. All welcome / 8pm, light buffet from 7pm / Yarnlot Manor, Yarnlot, Oxford OX5 1PY; Tel: 377946, Fax: 375079, Email: ochjs@sable.oxford.ac.uk