

MADISON SAVOYARDS VISITS SCOTLAND OR *THE MIKADO* IN BALLYDEW

Don "Orfeo" Rechtman, 31 July 2026

"Nothing could possibly be more satisfactory!"

These famous words of the *Mikado* fail to describe the outstanding rendition of his story as presented by the Madison Savoyards' performance of *The McAdo*, a new interpretation of the famed operetta by the 19th Century team of Gilbert & Sullivan.

Having participated in and seen multiple performances of Gilbert & Sullivan's comic operetta *The Mikado*, I can confidently say this is the finest rendition ever staged! This version was "pirated" (oops; wrong operetta!) with permission from the one developed by Gilbert & Sullivan Austin (GSA), which graciously allows its public use.



Scottish dances in *The McAdo*

Unusual features abound throughout, beginning with the first notes of the overture. Two bodhrán drummers accompany a bagpipe player in full Scottish attire as he plays the opening theme and the cast enters the stage decked

out in colorful costumes brilliantly designed by Rebecca Sites. Throughout the overture there are mimed comedic Scottish Games antics, all in time to the overture's music.

The orchestra itself consists of a string quartet, a clarinet, flute, oboe and piano; although the original score calls for a full orchestra, under the direction of Alessio Tranchell this minimalist orchestra of professional musicians successfully and powerfully provides the same experience one would expect from a larger ensemble. Evan Jensen's brief performance on euphonium during his entrance as Coco (Ko-Ko) rounds out the heraldic sound.

In addition to the new interpretation that more or less eliminates the racism and sexism of the original 1885 operetta, the power of this performance is in the acting and musical performance. Subtitles are provided for the songs but are not needed for the spoken portions. Stacy Smith-Eginton's stage design for the imaginary Scottish town of Ballydew is deceptively simple yet brilliantly constructed to serve the entire show, and is complemented by Joe Barnard's lighting, especially noticeable during Wynn Somme's (Yum-Yum) opening Act II where the purple haze establishes the song's mood.

Choreography by Heidi Hakseth is also worth noting: dance steps and potentially dangerous actions transpire smoothly and naturally. Throughout there is a Scottish flair to all movement.

Among other highlights is the wonderful text written by Madison Savoyards' president Bradley J. Carter for the song "I've Got a Little List," in which he somehow manages to provide

roasts that likely satisfy all audience members regardless of their current beliefs and preferences.



Brendin Larson as Katishagh

his sopranistic portrayal of evil renders Diana Damrau's role as Queen of the Night meek by comparison!

Sam D. White outdid himself in piecing together this performance. Having a little over one month for rehearsals, with his guidance and inspiration, everyone in the cast and all supporting staff worked hard and with intense joy in preparing this show for us.

When you go, do take the time to read some of the features in the program. I especially suggest you review the glossary in the back, which helps provide background of some of the terms. (For the first time, I learned what is meant by "Parliamentary trains"!)

There is also a discussion regarding the transformation of a racist and misogynist story into one that more or less shifts its focus to what is happening in the real world today.

If you're already a G&S fan, this is a must see! If you are new to G&S, and even new to opera and musicals in general—hey, this is a must see! The Madison Savoyards is yet another good reason Madison, Wisconsin is a musical haven in the States.

Shows are at the Bartell Theatre in Madison, Friday July 31 at 7:30 p.m., Saturday August 1 and Sunday August 2 at 3:00 p.m., Thursday August 6 and Friday August 7 at 7:30 p.m., and Saturday August 8 and Sunday August 9 at 3:00 p.m.



The McAdo ensemble, all photos by J Miner Photography

Don "Orfeo" Rechtman has recently returned to Madison, WI after teaching drama and ESL at private colleges in Nanchang and Shenzhen, China. He has been involved with music for theater with the Southeastern Savoyards in Atlanta, GA, Dunwood Stage Door Players, and Horizon Theatre, among others. He provides performance arts consulting services for schools, training centers, and organizations. www.orfeomusic.org