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VLOC's Provocative *Mikado* at F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre

ROCKVILLE, Maryland – On June 9-18th, at the F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre, The Victorian Lyric Opera Company (VLOC) presents W.S. Gilbert & Arthur Sullivan's *The Mikado*, a most beloved and currently culturally controversial opera classic. It will be fully staged and accompanied by full orchestra.

This comic two-act opera follows the son of the Mikado (the emperor of Japan), disguised as a wandering minstrel as he woos his beloved and attempts to evade both of their would-be spouses. The convoluted plot and delightfully clever score make for a hilarious criticism of the 19th century British elite.

Gilbert & Sullivan wrote *The Mikado* in 1885 when England was experiencing a craze for all things Japanese as a result of the opening of trade with Japan. Gilbert & Sullivan looked to the East in writing this trenchant critique of Victorian England and used Japanese characters to represent the British Monarchy's scions of society. Although the opera takes place in Japan, it is not an accurate portrayal of the country, and is a current point of controversy due to its traditional use of yellowface. Yellowface can refer not only to makeup, but to broader attempts at racial impersonation or caricature.

Opera companies across the United States have responded with a variety of approaches to address the issue of cultural insensitivity, and VLOC is among them. *Mikado* director Helen Aberger has chosen to re-conceptualize the piece, changing its locale and time and refitting its biting satire. After much research, reading, and outreach to scholars and performers on the issue, Aberger adapted the work similar to Jonathan Miller's 1986 English National Opera production. VLOC's *Mikado* takes place in 1920s London at the *Hotel Titipu Japan*.

"A hotel setting offers a number of opportunities to pay homage to *Mikado* without being racially offensive," says Aberger. "We've amended the script and score appropriately to omit demeaning caricatures and language, while retaining the dramatists' irreverent humor.

"I recognize G&S purists will buck at the changes, and others might think that it hasn't been altered enough," continues Aberger. "But as a regional light opera company, we must embrace and reflect the diversity of our own community in the 21st century, while striving to preserve the integrity of the original Gilbert & Sullivan."



For inquiries or more information, please contact VLOC at victorianlyricopera@gmail.com.

Who: The Victorian Lyric Opera Company (VLOC)

What: *The Mikado*, by Gilbert & Sullivan, Directed by Helen Aberger, Music

Directed by Joseph Sorge

Where: The F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre at the Rockville Civic Center, 603 Edmonston Drive, Rockville MD 20851

When: Evening performances: June 9, 10*, 16, & 17 at 8pm. Matinee performances: June 11** & 18 at 2pm.

*A FREE pre-show roundtable and discussion on the topic of *The Mikado* in the 21st Century at 7:00PM in the Social Hall of the Fitzgerald Theatre.

**FREE special community outreach event for families at 12:45pm including backstage tours and a post-show talk-back.

Tickets: \$28 for adults, \$24 for seniors, and \$20 for students with valid student ID.

All opening night performance tickets are \$14 (June 9). Call the F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre box office at 240-314-8690 or go to www.vloc.org to purchase tickets online.

The Victorian Lyric Opera Company is a non-profit organization founded in 1978 to perform musical works of the Victorian era. The company has performed every operetta in the Gilbert & Sullivan canon, most of them many times over. More recently, VLOC has branched out into other European operettas and even grand opera. The mission of the company is to provide high quality performances of light operatic works, offering educational and performance opportunities for our community. In 2011, The Victorian Lyric Opera Company merged with The Forgotten Opera Company. VLOC is a resident company at the F. Scott Fitzgerald Theatre at the Rockville Civic Center.

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