

## MIKADO – Character notes and dialogue audition pieces

### THE MIKADO OF JAPAN

Larger than life in every way. A domineering autocrat, capricious, unpredictable, with a twisted sense of humour. Acting age: 45-60

NANKI-POO (his Son, disguised as a wandering minstrel, and in love with YUM-YUM)

A charming young gentleman who wears his heart on his sleeve. The exact opposite of his father. He is very much in love with Yum Yum. Probably a very bad trombonist, though. Acting age: 20s-early 30s

KO-KO (Lord High Executioner of Titipu)

A “little” man who has been promoted well out of his social sphere and comfort zone. Rather self-centred, his desire for self-preservation outweighs his concerns for the well being of others. He blusters, and there’s a cowardly side to him, but he is also likeable. Acting age: 30s-40s

POOH-BAH (Lord High Everything Else)

An upper class official. Very pompous and with an inflated sense of entitlement. Not averse to a little bribery and corruption. Acting age: Middle aged

PISH-TUSH (a Noble Lord)

One of the nobility. A side-kick to Pooh-Bah. May have a regional accent. Acting age: A little younger than Pooh-Bah.

YUM-YUM (a ward of Ko Ko)

One of the “Three Little Maids from School” (Think finishing school). She is pretty and rather naïve, but beneath her veneer of innocence lies a steely determination. (“I mean to rule the earth...”). Acting age: Late teens-early 20s

PITTI-SING (another ward of Ko Ko)

Yum-Yum’s sister. A mischief maker, smart, though her intelligence sometimes gets her into deep water. (“Nobody’s safe for we care for none.”). Similar age to Yum-Yum

PEEP-BO (a third ward of Ko Ko)

Also Yum-Yum’s sister. The joker and most fun-loving of the three sisters. (“Life is a joke that’s just begun”.) Similar age to Yum-Yum

KATISHA (an elderly Lady, in love with NANKI-POO)

An aristocratic lady of “appalling aspect”. Evil tempered and frighteningly fierce, but with a vulnerable side that reveals itself in the end. Acting age: 40s-50s

## THE MIKADO

MIK. (*looking at paper*). Dear, dear, dear! this is very tiresome. (To KO- KO.) My poor fellow, in your anxiety to carry out my wishes you have beheaded the heir to the throne of Japan!

KO. I beg to offer an unqualified apology.

POOH. I desire to associate myself with that expression of regret.

PITTI. We really hadn't the least notion –

MIK. Of course you hadn't. How could you? Come, come, my good fellow, don't distress yourself – it was no fault of yours. If a man of exalted rank chooses to disguise himself as a Second Trombone, he must take the consequences. It really distresses me to see you take on so. I've no doubt he thoroughly deserved all he got. (They rise.)

KO. We are infinitely obliged to your Majesty –

PITTI: Much obliged, your Majesty.

POOH. Very much obliged your Majesty.

MIK. Obligated? not a bit. Don't mention it. How could you tell?

POOH. No, of course we couldn't tell who the gentleman really was.

PITTI. It wasn't written on his forehead, you know.

KO. It might have been on his pocket-handkerchief, but Japanese don't use pocket-handkerchiefs! Ha! ha! ha!

MIK. Ha! ha! ha! (To KATISHA.) I forget the punishment for compassing the death of the Heir Apparent.

KO., POOH. and PITTI. Punishment. (They drop down on their knees again.)

MIK. Yes. Something lingering, with boiling oil in it, I fancy. Something of that sort. I think boiling oil occurs in it, but I'm not sure. I know it's something humorous, but lingering, with either boiling oil or melted lead. Come, come, don't fret – I'm not a bit angry.

## NANKI-POO

NANK. Yum-Yum, at last we are alone! I have sought you night and day for three weeks, in the belief that your guardian was beheaded, and I find that you are about to be married to him this afternoon!

YUM. Alas, yes!

NANK. But you do not love him?

YUM. Alas, no!

NANK. Modified rapture! But why do you not refuse him?

YUM. What good would that do? He's my guardian, and he wouldn't let me marry you!

NANK. But I would wait until you were of age!

YUM. You forget that in Japan girls do not arrive at years of discretion until they are fifty.

NANK. True; from seventeen to forty-nine are considered years of indiscretion.

YUM. Besides – a wandering minstrel, who plays a wind instrument outside tea-houses, is hardly a fitting husband for the ward of a Lord High Executioner.

NANK. But – (Aside.) Shall I tell her? Yes! She will not betray me! (Aloud.) What if it should prove that, after all, I am no musician?

YUM. There! I was certain of it, directly I heard you play!

NANK. What if it should prove that I am no other than the son of his Majesty the Mikado?

YUM. The son of the Mikado! But why is your Highness disguised? And what has your Highness done? And will your Highness promise never to do it again?

NANK. Some years ago I had the misfortune to captivate Katisha, an elderly lady of my father's Court. She misconstrued my customary affability into expressions of affection, and claimed me in marriage, under my father's law. My father, the Lucius Junius Brutus of his race, ordered me to marry her within a week, or perish ignominiously on the scaffold. That night I fled his Court, and, assuming the disguise of a Second Trombone, I joined the band in which you found me when I had the happiness of seeing you!  
(Approaching her.)

KO-KO

KO. This is simply appalling! I, who allowed myself to be respited at the last moment, simply in order to benefit my native town, am now required to die within a month, and that by a man whom I have loaded with honours! Is this public gratitude? Is this – (*Enter NANKI-POO, with a rope in his hands.*) Go away, sir! How dare you? Am I never to be permitted to soliloquize?

NANK.. Oh, go on – don't mind me. –

KO. What is the meaning of this? With that –

KO. What are you going to do with that rope?

NANK. I am about to terminate an unendurable existence.

KO. Terminate your existence? Oh, nonsense! What for?

NANK. Because you are going to marry the girl I adore.

KO. Nonsense, sir. I won't permit it. I am a humane man, and if you attempt anything of the kind I shall order your instant arrest. Come, sir, desist at once, or I summon my guard.

NANK. That's absurd. If you attempt to raise an alarm, I instantly perform the Happy Despatch with this dagger.

KO. No, no, don't do that. This is horrible! (Suddenly.) Why, you cold-blooded scoundrel, are you aware that, in taking your life, you are committing, a crime which – which – which – is – Oh! (Struck by an idea.) Substitute!

NANK. What's the matter?

KO. Is it absolutely certain that you are resolved to die?

NANK. Absolutely!

KO. Will nothing shake your resolution?

NANK. Nothing.

KO. Threats, entreaties, prayers – all useless?

NANK. All! My mind is made up.

Ko . Then, if you really mean what you say, and if you are absolutely resolved to die, and if nothing whatever will shake your determination – don't spoil yourself by committing suicide, but be beheaded handsomely at the hands of the Public Executioner!

NANK. I don't see how that would benefit me.

KO. You don't? Observe: you'll have a month to live, and you'll live like a fighting-cock at my expense. When the day comes there'll be a grand public ceremonial – you'll be the central figure – no one will attempt to deprive you of that distinction. There'll be a procession – bands – dead march – bells tolling – all the girls in tears – Yum-Yum distracted – then, when it's all over, general rejoicings, and a display of fireworks in the evening. You won't see them, but they'll be there all the same.

POOH-BAH

NANK. Ko-Ko, the cheap tailor, Lord High Executioner of Titipu! Why, that's the highest rank a citizen can attain!

POOH. It is. Our logical Mikado, seeing no moral difference between the dignified judge who condemns a criminal to die, and the industrious mechanic who carries out the sentence, has rolled the two offices into one, and every judge is now his own executioner.

NANK. But how good of you (for I see that you are a nobleman of the highest rank) to condescend to tell all this to me, a mere strolling minstrel!

POOH. Don't mention it. I am, in point of fact, a particularly haughty and exclusive person, of pre-Adamite ancestral descent. You will understand this when I tell you that I can trace my ancestry back to a protoplasmal primordial atomic globule. Consequently, my family pride is something inconceivable. I can't help it. I was born sneering. But I struggle hard to overcome this defect. I mortify my pride continually. When all the great officers of State resigned in a body, because they were too proud to serve under an ex-tailor, did I not unhesitatingly accept all their posts at once?

PISH. And the salaries attached to them? You did.

POOH. It is consequently my degrading duty to serve this upstart as First Lord of the Treasury, Lord Chief justice, Commander-in-Chief, Lord High Admiral, Master of the Buckhounds, Groom of the Back Stairs, Archbishop of Titipu, and Lord Mayor, both acting and elect, all rolled into one. And at a salary! A Pooh-Bah paid for his services! I a salaried minion! But I do it! It revolts me, but I do it!

PISH-TUSH

PISH. It is true that Ko-Ko was condemned to death for flirting, but he was reprieved at the last moment, and raised to the exalted rank of Lord High Executioner under the following remarkable circumstances: (*into SONG*)

YUM-YUM

NANK. Yum-Yum, at last we are alone! I have sought you night and day for three weeks, in the belief that your guardian was beheaded, and I find that you are about to be married to him this afternoon!

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YUM. Besides – a wandering minstrel, who plays a wind instrument outside tea-houses, is hardly a fitting husband for the ward of a Lord High Executioner.

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YUM. Yes, I am indeed beautiful! Sometimes I sit and wonder, in my artless Japanese way, why it is that I am so much more attractive than anybody else in the whole world. Can this be vanity? No! Nature is lovely and rejoices in her loveliness. I am a child of Nature, and take after my Mother. (*Into Song*)

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PITTI-SING and PEEP-BO

YUM. Yes, everything seems to smile upon me. I am to be married today to the man I love best, and I believe I am the very happiest girl in Japan!

PEEP. The happiest girl indeed, for she is indeed to be envied who has attained happiness in all but perfection.

YUM. In 'all but' perfection?

PEEP. Well, dear, it can't be denied that the fact that your husband is to be beheaded in a month is, in its way, a drawback. It does seem to take the top off it, you know.

PITTI. I don't know about that. It all depends!

PEEP. At all events, he will find it a drawback!

PITTI. Not necessarily. Bless you, it all depends!

YUM. (in tears). I think it very indelicate of you to refer to such a subject on such a day. If my married happiness is to be – to be –

PEEP. Cut short.

YUM. Well, cut short – in a month, can't you let me forget it? (Weeping.)

NANK. (Entering with PISH-TUSH) Yum-Yum in tears – and on her wedding morn!

YUM. (sobbing). They've been reminding me that in a month you're to be beheaded! (Bursts into tears.)

PITTI. Yes, we've been reminding her that you're to be beheaded. (Bursts into tears.)

PEEP. It's quite true, you know, you are to be beheaded! (Bursts into tears.)

NANK. (aside). Humph! Now, some bridegrooms would be depressed by this sort of



thing! (Aloud.) A month? Well, what's a month? Bah! These divisions of time are purely arbitrary. Who says twenty-four hours make a day?

PITTI. There's a popular impression to that effect.

NANK. Then we'll efface it. We'll call each second a minute – each minute an hour – each hour a day – and each day a year. At that rate we've about thirty years of married happiness before us!

PEEP. And, at that rate, this interview has already lasted four hours and three-quarters!

KATISHA

KO. (entering and approaching her timidly). Katisha!

KAT. The miscreant who robbed me of my love! But vengeance pursues – they are heating the cauldron!

KO. Katisha – behold a suppliant at your feet! Katisha – mercy!

KAT. Mercy? Had you mercy on him? See here, you! You have slain my love. He did not love me, but he would have loved me in time. I am an acquired taste – only the educated palate can appreciate me. I was educating his palate when he left me. Well, he is dead, and where shall I find another? It takes years to train a man to love me. Am I to go through the weary round again, and, at the same time, implore mercy for you who robbed me of my prey – I mean my pupil – just as his education was on the point of completion? Oh, where shall I find another?

KO. (suddenly, and with great vehemence). Here! – Here!

KAT. What!!!

