

Freshness in revival of Mikado

ALL the glorious misconceptions that W. S. Gilbert gave the past five generations of Englishmen about pre-transistor Japan were enjoyably revived by Burton Operatic Society in "The Mikado" at Horninglow Secondary School last night, writes D.S.

The society, which has not staged the Gilbert and Sullivan favourite for 16 years, brought to it a freshness that made Gilbert's gentle lampooning of human nature in Victoria's time seem even more relevant to our own day.

Outstanding performances were Alan Thompson's Ko-Ko and Joy Appleby's Yum-Yum—her singing of "The Sun, whose rays are all ablaze" was in itself more than sufficient reason for a night away from the box.

And it would have been fun to have seen the show in an earlier era when we could have hissed Katisha and booed the Mikado — made superbly unlovable by Mollie Kidger and Jim Gould.

17-PIECE ORCHESTRA

Other principal roles were admirably performed by Len Lowe, John Gould, John Halsall, Betty Booth and Valerie Keeling, with a well-drilled chorus.

Michael Thorne's production, and the magnificent 17-piece orchestra conducted by Arthur Ormerod (assisted by Coral Gould) with Evelyn Woodhouse, accompanist, were worthy of the months of backstage work—including the design, construction and painting of scenery by an inspired and industrious team.

"THE MIKADO"—A POLISHED

PERFORMANCE

Burton Operatic Society respond well to challenge

In Victorian times Japanese art influenced much of the decor in English homes. It is a fashion that could well be revived after last night's polished performance at Horninglow Secondary School by the Burton and District Operatic Society of Gilbert and Sullivan's melodious "The Mikado."

The local production is worth seeing for the spectacle and colour alone which thread their way through this imaginative story set in the mythical palace of Ko-Ko, in Titipu, somewhere in Japan.

The principals and chorus rose splendidly to the challenge posed by the traditional wit which punctuates every scene, and the demands of the tuneful songs which further the story line.

Considerable credit for the show's success must go to producer Michael Thorne. He began his research into "The Mikado" at Easter, armed with the knowledge that the idea for the story came to Gilbert when a Japanese sword fell from the wall at his home. From this simple act, plus the fact of the prevailing Japanese influence in England at the time, "The Mikado" was born.

Michael Thorne's main aim was to keep the Victorian sentiment while contrasting it with Victorian ideas, and to remain faithful to the Japanese setting.

He studied wood cuts and prints at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, to ensure that the correct and traditional attitudes were conveyed throughout the production.

He has succeeded admirably, for his ideas have been brilliantly interpreted by artistic director Mrs. Jimmie Harvey, who designed all the sets, and Francis Bates, who is responsible for the lighting.

IMPRESSIVE PERFORMANCES

The cast pay tribute to the full production team by their impressive performances at all levels.

There are no weak links. Even so, John Halsall (Poo-bah) steals the show. He has a natural stage presence and manages to get inside the character so well that his own identity is forgotten.

Jim Gould (Mikado of Japan) is only very narrowly edged into second place. This is all the more commendable when it is appreciated that he does not make his entrance until midway through the second act. He remains a dominating figure from that moment on.

A second contribution to the show by Jim Gould also earns him credit. For he is make-up supervisor and has obviously done a masterful job.

Strong performances come from Ken Lowe, a pillar of the Burton Operatic Society, who takes the exacting part of Nanki-Poo; from Alan Thompson (Ko-Ko); and from Valerie Keeling (Pitti-Sing).

But always threatening to run off with the honours is Mollie Kidger, who, as Katisha, has a role which demands vocal as well as dramatic ability. She brought a professional quality to the part last night which went a long way to ensuring the overall success of a first-class production.

Joy Appleby (Yum-Yum) and Betty Booth (Peep-Bo), add

warmly to the musical expertise, while injecting the necessary amount of humour into their roles. And elegantly striding through the show is a talented and enthusiastic chorus.

They make their entrance in the opening scene when, instead of lining the stage in the traditional way, they are seen in silhouette against an ebony screen. It is a dramatic and eye-catching curtain-raiser—and the standard is never allowed to fall.

For that fact, a bouquet must go to musical director Arthur Ormerod, his assistant Coral Gould, and accompanist Evelyn Woodhouse, and the orchestra.

A memorable first night for what is surely going to be an equally memorable week in the life of Burton and District Operatic Society.