

A Note to Auditionees for *Iolanthe*:

If you are auditioning for any principal roles,
after singing your audition selection
you will be asked to read from the dialogue vocal score
with the Artistic Director.

You may pick the character you wish to read,
and the scene you wish to read.

See the following page for suggestions.

(If you do not pick a scene, one will be assigned to you inside.)

See the following pages for notes on the show, character descriptions,
and suggested scenes for reading.

See the last page for a “flow chart,” which
breaks down the show, showing each
character’s scenes and giving an indication
as to the number of speeches spoken and pages sung.

**Please leave *this* document and vocal scores
outside the auditions room for others to see.**

If you are asked to read,
you may use another copy of the score
inside the auditions room.

TIPS FOR AUDITIONEES:

1. **Project your voice** as if you were on the largest of stages
(even though you will be close to the Artistic and Music Directors).
2. **Use stage diction, or an “English” accent** (as you understand it),
or at least standard American English, with clear (“crispy”) enunciation/articulation.
3. **Feel free to move** (though your reading partner will remain seated downstage of you).
4. **Project your personality**—or the personality of the character as you understand it.
(We realize that you may *not* be well acquainted with the character today.)
5. **Relax and have fun!** We will see you at your best if you do so.
We want to enjoy the auditions, and we want *you* to enjoy your audition, too.



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Audition Notes on *Iolanthe*

By Ralph MacPhail, Jr., Artistic Director

Iolanthe; or, The Peer and the Peri (1882) is almost universally regarded as the most beautiful and fanciful of the Gilbert & Sullivan operas and one of their most popular works with Savoyards who love them all; its première followed the “three P’s”—a string of hits that included *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, and *Patience*. Sullivan’s score is sometimes compared with Mendelssohn, and Gilbert’s libretto is filled with the political satire for which he was becoming famous and irresistible comedy—especially when the fairy world comes into conflict with the mortal one.

Iolanthe was written for the actor-singers at the Savoy (it was the first Gilbert & Sullivan work to première there), most of whom had created roles in earlier Gilbert & Sullivan productions. So there are roles for tenor and soprano, mezzo and baritone, heavy baritone and contralto. But Gilbert, as usual, brought new wrinkles to character types, as I hope will be seen below.

Set in an Arcadian Landscape (Act I) and in Palace Yard, Westminster outside the Houses of Parliament with Big Ben prominent (Act II), the story moves from a sunny rural fairyland to a romantic and iconic urban setting by moonlight as the mortal world and fairy world “mix it up” with irresistibly comic results.

In Act I, we meet the fairies

Tripping hither, tripping thither,
Nobody knows why or whither.

The formidable Fairy Queen appears, and her band request that she pardon their sister-fairy Iolanthe, who had been banished 25 years earlier for the crime of marrying a mortal! The Fairy Queen relents, and Iolanthe appears rising from the bottom of a stream where she has lived (ugh!) among the frogs since her banishment. In short order, Iolanthe is reunited with her son Strephon, an Arcadian shepherd who (because of his parentage) is half-fairy and half-mortal. Strephon, we learn, is in love with a fully mortal shepherdess named Phyllis, but the smitten Lord Chancellor of England is against the union, for he has eyes for Phyllis himself.

The fairies leave, assuring Strephon of their help if needed with his amour, just as Phyllis appears. Strephon learns that the entire House of Lords is in love with Phyllis, but Phyllis assures Strephon that “None shall part us from each other” in a lovely duet.

Enter the entire House of Peers (“Loudly let the trumpet bray! Tantantara!”) in their ceremonial finery, and finally the Lord Chancellor. The entrance of mortals into fairyland leads to complications many and humorous, culminating in Act I with the Fairy Queen declaring vengeance on the Lord Chancellor who insultingly took her “for the proprietor of a Ladies’ Seminary”!

In Act II, Strephon has been sent to Parliament by the Fairy Queen. We meet Private Willis, a contemplative sentry, outside the Houses of Parliament. And we learn that Iolanthe’s husband was The Lord Chancellor, and so Strephon is his son! Iolanthe begs his mercy, and the Fairy Queen is astounded to learn that her fairies have fallen in love with the Peers! She threatens death to them all, which is in accordance with Fairy Law, but the Lord Chancellor suggests that a slight alteration in the wording of the law would solve the problem—and it does!

This bare-bones synopsis doesn’t even address the comic wooing of Phyllis by Lords Mountararat and Tolloller, the Lord Chancellor’s famous patter-song, Private Willis’s musings on life’s ironies, and so many other delights such as the magnificent choruses, beautiful solos, lovely duets and trios, and funny ensembles with sometimes quirky little dances that are hallmarks of Gilbert & Sullivan productions. The Act I finale is regarded by many—myself included—as the best of these extended musical delights in the series.

My purpose below is to provide information for performers concerning the auditions and the characters in *Iolanthe*.

Auditions will be held on Saturday and Sunday, February 23rd and 24th. Music Director and Conductor **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** and I request that auditionees memorize a song from Gilbert & Sullivan or something similar that will show their voice and range to best advantage. *It is also mandatory to provide a copy of the music for the auditions accompanist. No a cappella auditions will be heard and the song must be in English. An accompanist will be provided, but singers will be welcome to bring their own accompanist if they wish.*

If *Iolanthe* is not in your library, you can read or download the libretto from Gilbert & Sullivan Austin’s website (www.gilbertsullivan.org; click on “Summer Production”). The Gilbert & Sullivan Archive has additional material; call on <http://math.boisestate.edu/gas/>, where you will be able to read a plot synopsis, see vintage images, or download audio files. Go to GSOpera (www.gsopera.com/opera/54/lexicon) for other good information on the work.

Iolanthe is filled with roles that are fun to play and sing; much of the delight of the work is in the basic conflict of the fairy world meeting mortals—in this case, members of the House of Lords. Confusion results from the fact that fairies “never age” (lucky them!). In addition, the male chorus of Peers has one of the most famous and memorable of all entrances, and the female chorus gets to flit about with their fairy wings and wands, ultimately setting the House of Lords on its ear.

The Chorus of *Iolanthe* is composed of the **Chorus of Peers** (the gentlemen) and the **Chorus of Fairies** (the ladies). **The Men** can be of assorted ages and body-types and must be able to march; however **the women** should be—well, they describe themselves as “dainty little fairies”—and should be able to move balletically.

***Iolanthe* offers ten principal singing/speaking roles and one female chorus role with a short speaking part. The chorus will be composed of 12 men and 12 women.**

About thirty years ago, my friend Jim Ellis (the editor of the definitive edition of Gilbert’s *Bab Ballads*) put together some helpful if general “character sketches” for the Valley Light Opera (of Amherst, Massachusetts) *Newsletter*, and he and the editor Bill Venman have given me permission to reproduce it. Jim notes that none of these descriptions are absolute prerequisites (and I agree, of course). He had recently seen, for instance, a Pooh-Bah who was tall, limp, fey, who was “exceedingly good.” *Quote*:

Iolanthe (mezzo-soprano) – a figure of pathos or tragedy who has wandered into a G&S opera; elegant of movement; capable of sustained emotional highs and lows; poses like the figures on a Greek grave stele.

Phyllis (soprano) – clear, flute-like voice; picturesque; Dresden china doll; naturally temperamental (like spring days of sun and showers); perfectly matched with Strephon; delicately determined.

Fairy Queen (contralto) – commanding presence; powerful voice and gestures; fearful yet lovable; a cross between Margaret Dumont and Brunhilde, but far more attractive and amorous.

Celia (soprano) – perhaps small and quick; airy and flitty; delicate gestures; staccato (but not shrill) in voice and manner.

Fleta ([chorister with a] speaking part) – should be fleeter, no doubt, than her fellow fairies; all three of the principal fairies should be good dancers.

Strephon (high baritone) – resonant, clear voice; broadly graceful; “inclined to be stout”; confident; unabashed; your all-round Arcadian shepherd, good on the pipes.

Lord Chancellor (baritone) – flawless, effortless diction; stamina; perfect timing; “a clean old [gentle]man”; gouty but agile; deliberate yet ebullient; irascible yet benign.

Lord Mountarat (baritone) – rich, full voice; perhaps a bit of the walrus or Colonel Blimp about him; slightly ponderous; possibly drawly; discreetly arrogant.

Lord Tolloller (tenor) – aristocratic to the point of effeteness; supercilious; possibly stiff-necked and myopic; one of these two lords should, ideally, have the classic equine physiognomy (horse face) of the English aristocracy.

Private Willis (bass) – *not* like the Lords; low-born, possibly cockney; imperturbable; matter-of-fact; perhaps lacking a marble or two; good, but stiff, bearing; not necessarily tall. *Close Quote*.

The Lord Chancellor’s Train Bearer (non-speaking/singing) – A male (but could be female) child, 9-10 years of age, who appears once in the middle of Act I and once at the end of Act II. Follows the Lord Chancellor, holding his train, and performs a little dance with him.

Now you can see why I remembered this after all these years. And you can also now realize why I'm looking forward to auditions *and* the rehearsal cycle and performances with such keen anticipation.

If you have questions, please send email to RafeMacPhail@Yahoo.com.

Iolanthe is truly a musical, visual, and comedic delight, and I eagerly anticipate working on the show in this new year.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rafe MacPhail". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

IOLANTHE Flow Chart

	<Character	Mus. # / Dialogue V
Lord Chan.		1 Tripping Hither (9 pp)
Mountararat		1D (20 speeches)
Tolloller		2 Iolanthe! (6.3 pp)
PVT Willis		2D (17 speeches)
Strephon		3 Good morrow, good mother (2 pp)
Fairy Queen		3D (17 speeches)
Iolanthe		4 Fare thee well (3pp)
Cellia		4a Good morrow, good lover (2pp)
Lelia		4aD (13 speeches)
Fleta		5 None shall part us from eachother (3.5 pp)
Phyllis		6 Loudly let the trumpet bray (14 pp)
Cho Peers		7 The Law is the true embodiment (7 pp)
Cho Fairies		7D (7 pp)
LC's Train Bearer		8 My well-loved lord and guardian dear (9.5 pp)
		9 Nay, tempt me not (1 p)
		10 Spurn not the nobly born (4 pp)
		11 My Lords, it may not be (7.5pp)
		11D (7 speeches)
		12 When I went to the Bar as a very young man (3.5 pp)
		12D (9 speeches)
		13 FINALE TO ACT I: When darkly looms the day (55 pp)
		14 When all night a long a chap remains (3 pp)
		15 Strephon's a Member of Parliament (5.5 pp)
		15D (13 speeches)
		16 When Britain really ruled the waves (1.75 pp)
		16D (4 speeches)
		17 In vain to us you plead (2.5 pp)
		17D (11 speeches)
		18 Oh, foolish fay (2.5 pp)
		18D (33 speeches)
		19 Though p'raps I may incur your blame (4 pp)
		20 Love, unrequited, robs me of my rest (14.5 pp)
		20D (10 speeches)
		21 If you go in you're sure to win (7 pp) ENCORES
		21D (29 speeches)
		22 If we're week enough to tarry (5.5 pp)
		22D (14 speeches)
		23 My lord, a suppliant at your feet (3 pp)
		24 It may not be (4.5 pp)
		24D (14 speeches)
		25 FINALE TO ACT II: Soon as we may, off and away (6 pp)

S = Solo Singing ~ E = Ensemble Singing ~ [#] = # of Speeches ~ M = On stage but Mute
 * MOUNTARARAT AND TOLLoller WILL ALWAYS ENTER WITH THE CHORUS OF PEERS AND SING WITH THEM
 Numbers refer to designations in the G. Schirmer Vocal Score ~ "D" after a number refers to the dialogue sequence following the musical number