

The

GILBERT & SULLIVAN

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2010 NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed

Sometimes when I attend an Austin Gilbert & Sullivan musicale, meeting, or major production, I find myself thinking, "What a lot of interesting people are here!" Have you ever had that thought? I have ... often. (Now don't think I'm going to launch into a dialogue from *The Pirates of Penzance*! I said it only once. Or maybe twice.)



Some years ago, in an earlier term as your president, I wrote a series of articles for our newsletter under the heading "Portrait of a Noteworthy Member." I took upon myself the delightful duty of interviewing several of our outstanding members and creating brief word portraits about them for the newsletter. Some of those featured were the late **Jess Walters**; the late **Lucy Shoe Meritt**; our former Executive Director **Robert Mellin**; and the late **Pearl Amster**, piano teacher and champion of young musical artists, who hosted our musicales in her home for many years. I thoroughly enjoyed getting to know each subject a little better, and numerous people remarked to me that they enjoyed learning more about their fellow Savoyards.

In the last couple of years, several people have asked me if we might ever run any more such portraits in our newsletters. We certainly have a great many fascinating folks in the G&S membership and at our gatherings, so we are considering reviving this series.

What interesting person would you like to get to know a little better? It might be a frequent musicale attendee, a singer, a local luminary who happens to love G&S, or any member at all. We would love to hear suggestions of some folks you would enjoy seeing as subjects of such articles. Please e-mail us at info@gilbertsullivan.org and give us some good suggestions.

Don't miss the *Mikado* sing-along at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church on Sunday, November 21. Come in your kimono if you have one; come with a little list if you can create one; but by all means come!

Libby Weed

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SING-ALONG MIKADO

Come in costume or wig, if you like.

Bring a "little list" of your own composing to enter our contest.

It is possible that your ideas could become part of next June's *Mikado* libretto!

Sit in sections (SATB) with section leaders, if you wish to sing, and prepare to sing backup for:

Russell Gregory as The Mikado

Holton Johnson as Nanki-Poo

Arthur DiBianca as Ko-Ko

David Fontenot as Pooh-Bah

Michelle Haché as Yum-Yum

Angela Irving as Pitti-Sing

Diana VandeWater as Peep-Bo

Janette Jones as Katisha

as they perform several memorable arias and ensembles in a reduced *Mikado* script.

Bring your own score if you have one; music will be available if needed.

Don't miss this first-time-ever-in-Austin (that we know of) event – it is sure to be a hit! Please bring munchies and join us for refreshments and conversation after the musicale.



The September G&S Musicale

by Reba Gillman

We opened our 2010-2011 season in grand style. Over 100 people gathered at 3 pm on Sunday, Sept. 12, in the Fellowship Hall at Genesis Presbyterian Church. The program's high quality and informal friendliness set a tone that we hope will always be our benchmark. Our Society is in high gear these days, with very active members on our board of directors, and very high quality annual productions. We have moved our office to the Genesis building and are embarking on a new, more professional level. **Leonard Johnson**, Associate Professor of Voice at UT, and new to our board this year, was in charge of the program and demonstrated his delightful light-hearted touch, humorous and professional at the same time.

After some introductory thank-yous and remarks, President **Libby Weed** turned the proceedings over to Leonard, who immediately asked for a hand for our Collaborative Pianist, **Martha Dudgeon**. We've happily been calling her our Lady High Pianist, not realizing that there is a new term for accompanists in vogue these days. Leonard had a surprise for us. **Russell Gregory** had thought he could not appear on the program. But lo, there he was, to everyone's delight. He said he had been promoted from Private in *Iolanthe*, to Sergeant in *The Yeomen of the Guard*, and proceeded to sing Private Willis's song, "When all night long."

Next, **June Julian** sang "The sun, whose rays" from *The Mikado*. As she began the ritual preparing for her wedding to Nanki-Poo, Yum-Yum wondered why she was 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." June then moved into a different view of life in Japan, singing "Un bel di vedremo," from the opera *Madama Butterfly* by Puccini. The lovely young Japanese woman is waiting patiently for her American "husband" to return for her. She now has a son, and is running out of money. She remains confident, but her handmaiden, Suzuki, is more realistic.

David Fontenot came forward to sing "When jealous torments rack my soul" from *The Yeomen of the Guard*. David commented that it was good to include this song, which had been cut from the original production. He said, "It gives the Head Jailer and Assistant Tormentor a human side." His second choice was "If I were a rich man" from the popular Broadway show, *Fiddler on the Roof*. David explained that this song demonstrates Tevya's relationship with God. It is not a monologue—he ventures to disagree with God now and then.

Janette Jones sang "When a merry maiden marries," Tessa's song from *The Gondoliers*, followed by "I could have danced all night," from *My Fair Lady* by Lerner and Loewe. Janette, the experienced performer, said, "You can't always just go to bed..."

Robert L. Schneider came up to sing from *Trial by Jury*, "When I, good friends, was called to the bar," complete with chorus, which he asked the audience to supply. He rehearsed the audience a bit, and cued in each entrance. He had a bag full of props, which he produced at appropriate moments: a ring, a white wig, a wine glass (to use celebrating good fortune, "At length I became as rich as the Gurneys"). He told us that he had played the Judge when he was in high school, and pulled out a tattered score to prove it. He also told us that later he had taught music in high schools, and put on *Trial by Jury* and other G&S operas with his students. Then he sang "Ol' Man River," from *Showboat* by Jerome Kern and Oscar Hammerstein II, and explained that during another period in his life he had spent several years

touring Germany in a production of the American hit *Showboat*. He noted the show isn't done any more because the plot involves a girl who was forced to leave the showboat when it was discovered that she had Black blood, and that doesn't go these days. This man is an amazing addition to our ranks. He has performed in many G&S operas in many parts of the country. He has sung Broadway shows and classic opera, and even does an occasional band gig here in Austin. Moreover, he's very good at getting groups to sing along and do the choruses – they'd be dancing in the aisles if that's what he wanted.

A hard act to follow, but **Patricia Combs** did it well. First she sang "Were I thy bride," a hit from our June production of *The Yeomen of the Guard*. Then she sang in Russian, "Padrug milie," from the Tchaikovsky opera, *Pikovaya Dama* (*Pique Dame* or *The Queen of Spades*). She explained that Pauline was trying to cheer up her friend, Lisa, but became so depressed herself that she ended up singing, "Love promised me a good life, but now all I have is the grave." I have to confess that the wonders of modern technology have spoiled me, and I longed for supertitles so I could understand everything she was singing.

The very enthusiastic audience gave resounding applause to the performances. Next, Leonard asked the singers to come up and reply to his question, "What was your first experience with music?" Not surprisingly, singing came up in every answer. 1) Patricia said she grew up the child of two singers, with lots of singing in her home. 2) June said she grew up in Hawaii, where everyone sings all the time, and she used to harmonize every chance she got. 3) Janette said her mother didn't sing, but she whistled very well. Janette loved to listen to a recording of *The Sound of Music*. Her mother put it on for her, and then one day Janette realized she had grown tall enough to turn on the player herself. "I could listen to it whenever I wanted to!" 4) Robert said his family sang all the time; his mother had majored in music. 5) David said he came from a family where everyone performed and sang all the time. 6) Russell said when you were born into the Gregory family "you better sing!" 7) Leonard had not included himself in this question, but when asked, he remembered that at the age of four he was taken to a Billy Rose production in Los Angeles: Esther Williams in the *Aquacade*. He loved it and astonished his mother by singing an entire song from the show at home in his bath.

Leonard's second question brought more varied responses: "What outstanding experience have you had performing Gilbert and Sullivan?" Several recalled mishaps—torn pants, eye patch not restored to correct position, too much water (no explanation for this). But 1) Robert said he had enjoyed teaching G&S in high schools, and specifically mentioned *Trial by Jury*, *Patience*, and *The Mikado*. 2) June said she had enjoyed flirting with Russell on stage in two different roles. And 3) Patricia said she had enjoyed performing in the El Paso G&S productions with David, and also their director who didn't mind occasionally changing words to local vernacular. Example: in *Pirates*, when Frederic hears the young ladies singing, he asks who it could be – "Is it La Migra? (Customs?)" This got a hearty laugh.

Libby brought the program to a close. She asked all to join in the singing of "Hail, Poetry" and "Now to the banquet we press," asking Russell to sing the Pirate King in the lead-in. Music for the second chorus was missing, so we all chimed in the best we could, following the lead of the experienced singers. The afternoon ended as we all sampled the delicious munchies, and chatted with friends old and new.



Master of Ceremonies Leonard Johnson and Collaborative Pianist Martha Dudgeon with performers Janette Jones, David Fontenot, June Julian, Russell Gregory, Patricia Combs, and Robert L. Schneider.

Season Opening Musicale

Sunday - September 12th - 3pm

Genesis Presbyterian Church
1507 Wilshire Blvd.

photos courtesy Benny Jay



President Libby Weed

B. Iden Payne Nominations for *Yeomen*

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin's production of *The Yeomen of the Guard* received seven nominations for the prestigious B. Iden Payne Awards:

- ♦ Outstanding Production of Music Theatre: *The Yeomen of the Guard*
- ♦ Outstanding Director of Music Theatre: **Ralph MacPhail Jr.**
- ♦ Outstanding Music Director: **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**
- ♦ Outstanding Lead Actor in Music Theatre: **Holton Johnson**
- ♦ Outstanding Lead Actress in Music Theatre: **Patricia Combs**
- ♦ Outstanding Lead Actress in Music Theatre: **Michelle Haché**
- ♦ Outstanding Featured Actor in Music Theatre: **David Fontenot**

Congratulations to all involved with the production!

In addition, *Yeomen* costume coordinator **Pam Fletcher-Friday** received a nomination for Outstanding Costume Design, and *Yeomen* set designer **Ann Marie Gordon** received a nomination for Outstanding Set Design, both for a VORTEX Repertory Company production of *Sleeping Beauty*.

This just in: Michelle Haché has received the B. Iden Payne Award for Outstanding Lead Actress in Music Theatre. Well done, Michelle!

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and connect today!**

The Austin G&S Society is technologically up-to-date. Most of you probably receive the timely and informative e-newsletters sent out by Board member **David Little** (if not, go to our website and click on "Join The Mailing List"). We now have a Facebook Fan Page, a Twitter Page, and a YouTube Channel. You can access these from the home page of our website, or go to:

www.facebook.com/gandsofaustin

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is the official moving and storage company of The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin. Many thanks, Armstrong!

Annual Meeting and Elections

Our Society will elect a Board of Directors for the calendar year 2011 at our Annual Meeting on Monday, January 17. Please come to this important gathering at 7:30 pm in the Fellowship Hall of Genesis Presbyterian Church, 1507 Wilshire Boulevard.

The following members are serving as a nominating committee this year: **Byron Arnason** (chairman), **Enid Hallock**, and **Larry Shepley**. Please contact Byron (byronta@juno.com) if you wish to make a nomination or volunteer to have your name put forward. All nominations should be received by the committee no later than December 1.

Following the election on January 17, we will join in singing some of the great G&S choruses. You may also suggest a chorus to be sung, and you may volunteer to lead a chorus. Let Byron know if you have ideas along these lines as well.

Auditions for *The Mikado*

Auditions for next summer's production of *The Mikado* will be held on Saturday and Sunday, March 5 and 6. (Note that this is a change from our September newsletter.) Watch for more details in the February-March issue. For further information, please contact RafeMacPhail@yahoo.com.

NEWS of our MEMBERS

Austin G&S's own and delightful **Angela Irving** was the female lead (in the Jane Powell role of Millie) in *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*, which ran September 24 – October 17 at the Wimberley Playhouse in Wimberley. Several members of our Society went to see her. As expected, she did a wonderful job with lots of solo and ensemble singing. She also did a great job with the acting as the strong and sensible Millie surrounded by a foolish and flirtatious cast. She and the rest of the cast were very gracious in meeting the audience in the lobby after the show.

In September, our Artistic Director, **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Connecticut Gilbert & Sullivan Society "in Recognition of Decades of Outstanding Service in Behalf of the Art Form of The Savoy in the State of Connecticut and the Entire World of the Savoy." Robert Cumming, Artistic Director of the Society, in presenting the award, referred to Rafe's years of teaching conferences devoted to the Savoy operas in Ivoryton, Connecticut; his long service as Listmaster to SavoyNet, the on-line G&S discussion group; and his service as Artistic and Stage Director for the Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Austin. The presentation was made at the East Haddam Historical Society at the conclusion of a fund-raising concert of Gilbert & Sullivan favorites.

Rafe will fly to Los Angeles on November 9 to record an on-camera interview for The Criterion Collection. The project in preparation is a video release of the 1939 English film of *The Mikado*, and extracts from the interview will be incorporated into a DVD track "supplement" featuring information on the making and the reception of the film. The interview will focus on Rafe's knowledge of the film and its performers, of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, of the reasons for the cuts made in the film when it was released in this country, and of a novel projection technique employed in its release. The new release is set for early 2011—well before our production of *The Mikado* opens in June.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

We encourage you to join our Society. If you are a member, please check your membership renewal on the top of the mailing label. If expired or near expiration, your membership needs to be updated! To correct your address, renew your membership, or become a member, complete this form, and mail it to us with your check, payable to "GSSA", or call to join (512) 472-4772 (GSSA).

Please check a membership category:

- ☐ **Individual** (\$20-\$29)
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We are proud to list our members in our programs, but if you would prefer NOT to be listed in our programs, please check here: ☐



The Mikado: The Masterpiece

by Ralph MacPhail, Jr.

"Masterpiece" is one of those words like "awesome": it's thrown around frequently, sometimes without a lot of thought. It's an important word in our language, it seems to me, and consequently it should be used with care. It should not be wasted in describing anything less than a work that fits one of

these three definitions from the Second College Edition of *The American Heritage Dictionary*:

1. An outstanding work of art or craft.
2. The greatest work of an artist or craftsman.
3. Something superlative.

We all have our favorite Gilbert & Sullivan operas. I will tell anyone who asks that *The Mikado* is not one of my three favorites. I will also admit that *The Mikado* has brought more delight to more people than perhaps any other work written for the lyric stage. It is the most frequently performed and adapted of the Savoy operas. It has no doubt been performed numerous times every day of every year over the past century.

I will also admit (argue, even) that *The Mikado* is the *masterpiece* (all three definitions) of the Gilbert and Sullivan collaboration.

What makes The Mikado the Gilbert & Sullivan masterpiece?

I think that one can analyze *The Mikado* from any direction and find that Gilbert & Sullivan were at the top of their form. It is a mature work, written in the middle of their collaboration, at a time of relative good-will and trust. Here are some brief observations from one who has probably spent too much of his life studying the opera—and who's directed six productions of it since 1977:

The Mikado is brilliantly plotted, with every entrance and exit motivated and carrying the story forward.

The Mikado is filled with masterful Gilbertian lyrics, ranging from patter to lyrical, nonsensical to philosophical, topical to universal.

The Mikado has a magnificent Sullivanian score of musical "hits"—a score characterized by a rhythmic brilliancy, tuneful ebullience, and orchestral felicity.

The Mikado is populated with memorable characters. If some have names that sound like English "baby-talk," the characters more than do their names justice!

The Mikado is colorfully exotic in costume and set, but at the same time the opera is grounded not far from Big Ben.

The Mikado is brilliantly satirical—with satire that reads and plays as if it were "written today to entertain us today."

And *The Mikado* is wildly funny!

The great twentieth-century Savoyard Martyn Green had a wonderful answer when asked which of his parts he enjoyed playing the most. He always said, "the one I'm playing now—unless it's the one I'll be playing next."

I loved working on *Iolanthe* a year ago and *The Yeomen of the Guard* this past summer. I eagerly anticipate directing *Patience* again in 2012, but for now, I can't wait to get started on *The Mikado*, for it really *is* the masterpiece of Gilbert and Sullivan.



35th Anniversary Gala on March 3, 2011

Mark your calendar for Thursday, March 3, 2011, when our Society will celebrate its 35th anniversary at a gala occasion at Chez Zee, 5406 Balcones Drive. Watch for further information about this exciting event coordinated by Eva Laskaris and featuring many of our G&S all-time greats.



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NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2010

Wand'ring Minstrels

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin's Wand'ring Minstrels are the ambassadors for the Society to the Central Texas community. Their presentations provide an introduction to the genre that is distinctively Gilbert & Sullivan. Programs range from a lively recital of Gilbert & Sullivan's most popular tunes to interactive, mini-productions of the Society's full summer productions. Costume elements, props and choreography provide the visual pop which turns each event into a celebration, with the camaraderie and spontaneous banter of the Wand'ring Minstrels adding an extra measure of froth to the proceedings!

For bookings or additional information, please contact Eva Laskaris by email at minstrels@gilbertsullivan.org, or by calling (512) 350-4935.

Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive in late December; the deadline for submissions is December 6. Please send your news to news@gilbertsullivan.org. Thanks!

Coming Events

November 21	<i>The Mikado</i> Sing-Along (see p. 1)
January 17	Annual Meeting (see p. 4)
March 3	Gala 35 th Anniversary Celebration (see p. 5)
March 5-6	<i>The Mikado</i> auditions (see p. 4)
May 1	May Day Musicales
June 9-19	<i>The Mikado</i> summer production



*What are all these people eagerly awaiting?
See pages 2 and 3!*

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin

Since 1976, we have been spreading the joys of G&S through

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This project is funded and supported in part by the City of Austin through the Cultural Arts Division and by a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts and an award from the National Endowment for the Arts which believes that a great nation deserves great art.



The Society holds nonprofit status under 501(c)(3) of the IRS code.

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