

The GILBERT & SULLIVAN

JANUARY 2013 NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed

We have all noticed how delightfully nearly every Gilbert & Sullivan opera ends, with all questions answered, all mysteries solved, and everyone (or nearly everyone) paired with a perfect partner for marriage. Despite the cynically humorous views on marriage that often emerge in Gilbert's libretti, he still contrived to have just about everyone on stage happily tying the knot by the final curtain.

Have you ever wondered if Gilbert & Sullivan troupes take on shades of Hollywood movie sets, where leading players carry their romantic activities into their everyday lives? While it may not happen in the manner of Hollywood, it is a fact that during several of our shows over the past 36 years, romance has blossomed. I'd like to tell you about one such amour, and I invite you to contact us at info@gilbertsullivan.org to tell us about others we may not know about.

Stephanie Blackwood and **Michael Borysow** met during the 2006 Austin G&S production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*. Michael, very busy in graduate school at the time, almost didn't audition for this show, but it became clear in time that he was meant to be there. He and Stephanie were both chorus members, and somehow they ended up paired as dance partners. There must be something about ending a show in each other's arms that exerts a sway on the affections!

The couple admits that a bit of flirting went on during rehearsals, but Stephanie wasn't sure Michael was serious. He was serious enough that they began seeing more and more of each other, and by December of 2007 (the year he played Dick Dauntless in *Ruddigore* and danced a peerless hornpipe), they were engaged. Both auditioned for and were cast in *The Pirates of Penzance* in 2008, so that gave them more time to enjoy each other's company at rehearsals and on stage. They married in April of 2009.

Another way that Michael has distinguished himself in our Society is by preparing our playbills for several years and making the transition from black-and-white to color covers. Sue Caldwell used the playbills he had designed for our 2009 and 2010 grand productions as a template for our last two playbills.

Michael and Stephanie were able to get away from his graduate work to enjoy a real honeymoon in Paris, France, in May 2011. He received his Ph.D. in physics in August 2012. Their son Collin was born in October 2012, bringing even more joy into their lives.

Michael has hinted that we may see him at auditions for *Princess Ida*, and we anticipate this keenly. We look forward to seeing Stephanie, Michael, and Collin (and whatever other bundles of joy may come their way) in the G&S community for many years to come!



Our Society will elect a Board of Directors for the calendar year 2013 at our Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 6, at 3 pm. **Please come** to this important gathering in the Fellowship Hall of Genesis Presbyterian Church, 1507 Wilshire Boulevard (see map on p. 6). We will hear a report on activities of the past year and plans for the coming year, then hold elections.

The Nominating Committee, consisting of **Reba Gillman** (Chair), **Larry Shepley**, and **Pat Turpin**, has provided the following list of nominees for the 12-member 2013 GSSA Board of Directors:

- | | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| Chris Buggé | Diane Radin |
| Reba Gillman | Robert L. Schneider |
| Leonard Johnson | Charles Smaistrla |
| David Little | Pat Turpin |
| Roberta Long | Libby Weed |
| Michael Meigs | Dave Wieckowski |

Additional nominations will be accepted from the floor; self-nomination is permitted. (Of course, nominees must be members.) Each paid-up member is entitled to a number of votes equal to the number of Directors to be elected, but is not permitted to vote more than once for a given candidate. The candidates receiving the most votes are elected. In accordance with our by-laws, officers are elected by the Board during their first meeting after the Annual Meeting.

Following the election, **Leonard Johnson** will lead us in singing some great G&S choruses ... and provide some excellent tutelage as he does so. As always, **please bring munchies to share!**

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“How to Write Your Own Gilbert & Sullivan Opera”

by Reba Gillman



On Sunday, November 11, at 3 pm, a large and enthusiastic crowd gathered at our newest favorite place: Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School (11908 North Lamar), to attend an unusual program featuring Anna Russell’s “How to Write Your Own Gilbert & Sullivan Opera.” President Libby Weed welcomed us and gave a short introduction describing how we came to have the

necessary material, and the experience that our Artistic Director, **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, had many years ago with the famous Anna Russell. His knowledge of a great deal of G&S information, and his acquaintance with the important people involved, continues to lead to interesting connections and many stimulating ideas. He provided us with the information and obtained the permission to use it, and our creative and energetic producer and Mistress of Ceremonies, **Janette Jones**, got it all together. She was assisted by Dick Deadeye, played by **Russell Gregory**. As I have said before, just to see Russell on the stage adds an indefinable something. He didn’t do much, but as he placed his eye patch, adjusted it, struggled with its location, he commanded our complete attention.

We began with the video of the program for which Anna Russell was famous. Her informal but skilled presentation was delightful and soon had us laughing our heads off. It became clear that her wonderful use of words, and recognition of absurd ideas, was the secret of her ability to parody the very clever Gilbert. His fancy words and sometimes wild notions gave her the material, and she used it all with the same intelligent creativity that Gilbert himself employed. Taking off from the well known and dearly loved *H.M.S. Pinafore*, she explained some basic ideas, using fancy names—the opera’s heroine was a rich tycoon’s daughter, *Pneumonia Vanderfeller*. The scene was set among the social elite of New York City, “The Great 400.” The lowly born *John Smith* was a penniless tenor in love with *Pneumonia*. According to Anna Russell, the tenor is always young, handsome, and not very bright. He often gets to sing an aria pretending to accompany himself on some sort of stringed instrument. *Clodbelly Bunion*, *The Rich Tycoon*, was the important patter singer. *Dandelion*, an older woman and former nursemaid, in the second act reveals an important secret that changes the outcome of the opera. Anna Russell was alone on stage with her pianist, singing all the roles whatever the sex, voice, and class, using a clever assortment of hats to define each role.

It is important to note that Gilbert used the *Pinafore* story to explore themes that are timeless and ever-present in democratic societies—issues of equality and class distinctions. The patter singer *Sir Joseph Porter* explains how he rose from the lower classes to become First Lord of the Admiralty without acquiring any of the knowledge and skills expected in such a post. He expresses the belief that a British seaman is any man’s equal—excepting his. Josephine, the Captain’s daughter, at first feels obliged to deny her love for the lowly seaman in order to preserve her father’s upper middle-class rank. Later, as she acts on that love, she considers what she will lose as a poor man’s wife. These themes show up in many Gilbert operas, and are part

of the underlying message that keeps his stories alive more than a century later.

As the video came to an end, we turned our attention to scenes giving examples of these observations, performed live by some of the singers from our shows. These were **Kate Clark, Patricia Combs, Andy Fleming, David Fontenot, Russell Gregory, Rosa Harris, Daytha Hulion, Angela Irving, Leonard Johnson, Jeffrey Jones-Ragona, June Julian, Robert L. Schneider, and Jennifer Tullis**, with **Jeanne Sasaki** at the piano providing our orchestra. All but one G&S opera opens with a chorus. 1. David, as Usher, and Company sang “Hark the hour” (*Trial by Jury*). 2. Angela as Josephine, sang “The hours creep on apace” (*H.M.S. Pinafore*). She did a fine job presenting the woman’s conflict between her love and her class. 3. June as Julia Jellicoe and Robert as Ludwig sang “Now, Julia, come, Consider it from” (*The Grand Duke*). This not-so-well known opera makes fun of a theater company with grandiose ambitions. 4. Jeffrey as Nanki-Poo sang “A wand’ring minstrel, I” (*The Mikado*). Jeffrey, on the stage instead of in the pit, did a fine, sweet, gentle, and musicianly performance (complete with a rather fake-looking stringed instrument). 5. Robert as The Judge, and Company sang the patter song “All hail great Judge” (*Trial by Jury*). 6. Daytha as Rose Maybud, Rosa (Dame Hannah), Leonard (Richard Dauntless), David (Old Adam Goodheart), and Company sang “When the buds are blossoming” (*Ruddigore*), a sample of a Sullivan madrigal, when action ceases and pure music reigns. 7. Patricia, as Buttercup, and Company, sang “A many years ago” (*H.M.S. Pinafore*, Act II finale). This is the moment—the contralto reveals the truth, all changes, virtually everyone lives happily ever after. 8. Continuing the Finale (*H.M.S. Pinafore*), Kate (Josephine), Jennifer (Cousin Hebe), Andy (Ralph Rackstraw), Russell (Dick Deadeye), Robert (Sir Joseph Porter), David (Captain Corcoran), and Company.

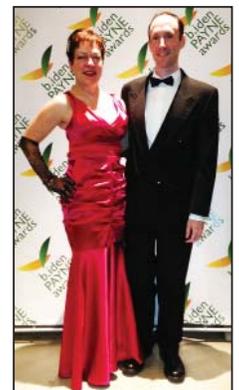
And to end it all: “Hail, Poetry” (*The Pirates of Penzance*), sung by David, Company, and Audience, and “Now to the banquet we press” (*The Sorcerer*), Company and Audience. And then to the welcoming lobby to sample the delicious “munchies” and enjoy the happy conversation.

Thanks to Glen Gordon and the Valley Light Opera of Amherst, Massachusetts, for the use of Gordon’s script, “Parody of Parodies.”

Thanks to Ralph MacPhail, Jr., who allowed us to use his precious video of the Anna Russell show.

GSSA at the B. Iden Payne Awards Ceremony

On October 29, the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin was well-represented at the B. Iden Payne Awards Ceremony, held at the new Topfer Theatre at ZACH. GSSA attendees included award nominees **Janette Jones** and **Arthur DiBianca**; performers representing our *Patience* production: **Kate Clark, Patricia Combs, Wayne Davis, David Fontenot, Daytha Hulion, and Robert L. Schneider**; *Patience* Production Manager **Bill Hatcher**; and Board Member **Reba Gillman**. While we brought home no trophies this year, the nominations were an honor and an opportunity to introduce Gilbert and Sullivan to more of the Austin theatrical community.



“How to Write Your Own Gilbert & Sullivan Opera” Musicale

photos courtesy Steve Schwartzman

see more at gilbertsullivanaustrin.smugmug.com



Gilbert & Sullivan Society at the B. Iden Payne Awards Ceremony

photos courtesy Bill Hatcher

see more at gilbertsullivanaustrin.smugmug.com



Princess Ida: Mighty Maiden with a Mission— and A Mighty Melodic Comic Opera, Too

by **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**



This summer the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin will complete the cycle of the 11 frequently-produced Savoy operas with *Princess Ida; or, Castle Adamant*. True it is that numbers from this most melodic and amusing of shows have frequently graced musicale programs, and while acknowledging that a semi-staged concert production was offered several years ago at Westminster Manor,

this will be the first fully staged production not only by GSSA but, as far as we've been able to determine, the first full production ever to be staged in Austin.

And I couldn't be more excited about it! *Princess Ida* was first produced in London by Richard D'Oyly Carte in 1884, one in the succession of his hits that began in 1875 with *Trial by Jury*. That venerable one-act, of course, makes fun of the British legal system; in succession came Gilbert's tilts at the aristocracy (*The Sorcerer*), Her Majesty's Royal Navy (*H.M.S. Pinafore*), Robert Peel's "bobbies" (*The Pirates of Penzance*), the "aesthetic movement" (*Patience*), and the House of Lords (*Iolanthe*).

What next? Well, women's education for one thing (but as we shall see, that wasn't all). Sullivan had been ranking against Gilbert's topsy-turvy plots and situations, and hankering for a story of "real human interest and probability." That he got, even if Gilbert had to dip into his library of previously written plays for inspiration—and more than a little dialogue as well.

Gilbert's main source was his own "Respectful Per-Version" of Alfred, Lord Tennyson's long poem, *The Princess, A Medley* (1847); his burlesque was produced at the Olympic Theatre in 1870. *The Princess* was presented in five acts, written in blank verse with new lyrics for well-known musical numbers added, and laced with excruciating puns—all typical of the burlesque tradition out of which grew the Gilbert & Sullivan operas during the first decade of the collaboration.

In 1870, women had few opportunities for higher education in England. Between 1870 and 1884, however, the picture changed: Girton and Newnham Colleges opened in Cambridge, and Oxford boasted Somerville and Lady Margaret Hall. The University of London was not far behind; two years before *Princess Ida* opened, Westfield College, the U. of L.'s first women's college, was established. (In my library I have a book entitled *Castle Adamant in Hampstead: A History of Westfield College 1882-1982*.)

In *Princess Ida*—and both Tennyson's poem and Gilbert's 1870 burlesque—the title character has established a women's university from which all men are barred—even chessmen (well, in Gilbert's!). "Man," they are taught, "is Nature's sole mistake!" Princess Ida and her small faculty, along with a hundred female students, sequester themselves at Castle Adamant, one of her father's country houses, and ambitiously soar "towards the Empyrean heights/ Of every kind of lore" "in search of wisdom's pure delight."

Enter Prince Hilarion and his two pals. Hilarion had been betrothed to Ida at the early age of one (when he was twice her age: two!),

and he's determined to breach the battlements of Castle Adamant to claim his bride by storming "their bowers/ With scented showers/ Of fairest flowers/ That we can buy."

They do—in Act II—but without flowers; instead they disguise themselves as female students—and homely ones at that! But along the way Hilarion & Co. and the academics of Castle Adamant delight the audience with an incredibly lovely sequence of musical numbers that is frequently called "The String of Pearls."

In addition to women's education, *Princess Ida* also aims its shaft at mindless macho militarism, the oratorios of Handel, grand opera—and even Darwin and his controversial *Origin of Species* (1859)! I've no space to discuss the intricacies of the plot (a luncheon on-stage, an heroic rescue of Ida from drowning, a fight or two, and a Victorian male strip-tease—of suits of armor!), the clever characterizations, the *three* colorful sets, the multiple costumes. You can certainly read more by going to the Gilbert & Sullivan Archive on-line—and listen to some of the music as well. More detail in my next column.

In the meantime, both of Gilbert's plays are available on-line (at the Gilbert & Sullivan Archive). Project Gutenberg will yield Tennyson's *The Princess*. Lulu Books sells (for \$9.00 + postage) a volume with both of Gilbert's plays *and* an abbreviated version of the Tennyson poem; search on "*The Princess and Princess Ida*" at Lulu.com.

A large cast of principals and a chorus of 12 ladies and 12 gentlemen will be our goal at auditions March 2 and 3. Questions? Please send e-mail: RafeMacPhail@Yahoo.com.

Which character in *Princess Ida* is often considered to be a Gilbertian self-portrait? Which number occasionally prompted the D'Oyly Carte to hire a "grand opera guest artiste" when performing the work in London? Which number sounds like the music was written by the composer of *Messiah*? Which two speeches show Gilbert's familiarity with *Hamlet* and "the Scottish play" (even *if* the librettist professed to disdain Shakespeare)?

Delights lie ahead as we progress towards those empyrean heights. Do plan to join us on the climb!

Wand'ring Minstrels

The Wand'ring Minstrels of the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin are busy rehearsing for their big concert at Villa Antonia (villaantonia.com) on Jan. 8, 2013, as part of their Twilight Concert Series. They will be singing G&S favorites as well as adding some opera to their program.

Contact **Robert L. Schneider** (bigdaddymusic1@gmail.com), or see our website (www.gilbertsullivan.org) for further details or to schedule the Wand'ring Minstrels for your organization.

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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:

Source for Gilbert & Sullivan Treasures

The Gilbert & Sullivan Music Treasury (www.gandsmusictreasury.com) is a new online store selling gifts and collectibles that celebrate the comic operas of Gilbert & Sullivan. Their wares include DVDs, books and collectibles. They also have a link to the recently published *Papers, Presentations and Patter* edited by our esteemed Artistic Director, Ralph MacPhail, Jr.

NEWS of our MEMBERS

Spencer Reichman, who has often performed with us (most recently in the chorus of *Patience*), won first place, 2012 NATS (National Association of Teachers of Singing) - division VIII (College Junior) Texoma Region, held this year at UNT in Denton, TX. There were over 650 initial contestants at various levels. As winner, he was awarded a partial scholarship to AIMS, the American Institute of Musical Studies, summer vocal program in Graz, Austria. Bravo, Spencer!



Auditions for *Princess Ida*

Auditions for our summer 2013 production of *Princess Ida* will take place from 10 am to 6 pm on March 2, and 3 pm to 6 pm on March 3 at Genesis Presbyterian Church at 1507 Wilshire Boulevard. Look for more details in the next newsletter.

Vocal Scores for *Princess Ida*

Thinking of auditioning for *Princess Ida*? There is a public domain vocal score on our website (www.gilbertsullivan.org/SummerProduction.htm), and look on the right for a link to the vocal score). Auditioners do not have to use music from *Princess Ida*, but this provides easy access for those who wish to use it. This is not the score that will be used for the production; the official score will be provided free to members of the cast at the first rehearsal. If you have any questions, email our Production Manager, **Bill Hatcher**: bill.hatcher@hotmail.com. Our thanks go to James Cooper, President of Troupers Light Opera, for the public domain score.

Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive in early February; the deadline for submissions is January 21. Please send your news to news@gilbertsullivan.org. Thanks!



*Janette Jones and Arthur DiBianca, both Nominees for their memorable performances in **Patience**, at the B. Iden Payne Awards Ceremony*

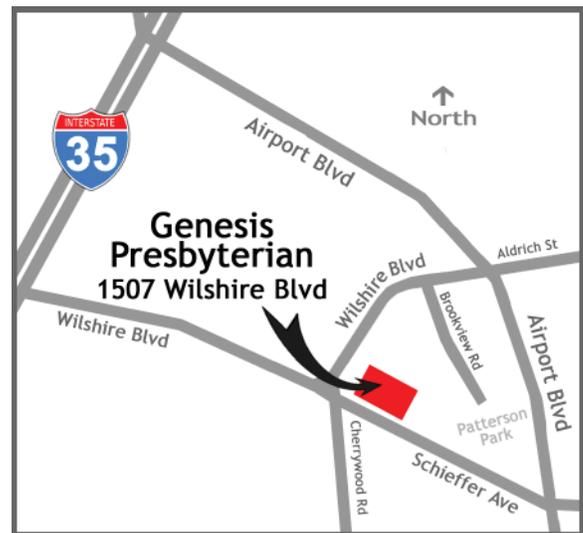


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JANUARY 2013



See details on page 1!



Coming Events

- Jan. 6 Annual Meeting and Musicales
- March 2-3 *Princess Ida* Auditions (see p. 5)
- March 10 "Sir Arthur Sullivan: The California Connection" Musicales
- May 12 *Princess Ida* Preview Musicales
- June 13-23 *Princess Ida* summer production

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin

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

- Annual Grand Productions**
- Educational/Community Outreach**
- Musicales**
- Musical Scholarships**
- Newsletters**
- Holiday Season Shows**

G&S Office: 1507 Wilshire Boulevard, Austin, TX 78722
 Mailing Address: P. O. Box 684542, Austin, TX 78768-4542
 Phone: (512) 472-4772 (GSA-GSSA)
 Our web site: www.gilbertsullivan.org
 E-mail: info@gilbertsullivan.org



This project is funded and supported in part by the City of Austin through the Cultural Arts Division, believing that an investment in the Arts is an investment in Austin's future.
 Visit Austin at NowPlayingAustin.com

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

Artistic Director **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**
 Music Director **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**

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