

The GILBERT & SULLIVAN

MAY-JUNE 2013 NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed



Two things about the opening of *Princess Ida* on June 13 are particularly intriguing to me:

- This is an Austin première! For the very first time in history, our community will be treated to a full-scale production of one of the most ambitious and enchanting of all the grand works of Gilbert & Sullivan.
- This event brings together three epochs in history. The medieval period (or, perhaps, a fairy tale version of that time), the Victorian era, and contemporary America will coexist for two hours “and a little bit o-ver,” to quote from *The Pirates of Penzance*, during each performance in the Worley Barton Theater in Austin, Texas.

If you haven't gone on line or picked up your telephone to purchase your tickets, please do that today. Securing tickets on line is easy at www.gilbertsullivan.org; the “best available” tickets will automatically be selected for you. If you prefer to choose specific seats in the house, call (512)474-5664 and a representative will let you select the exact spots you want (as long as they remain!).

In the thirty-six-plus years of our Society's existence, we have presented ten of the eleven commonly-performed G&S comic operas—some of them numerous times. With this production of *Princess Ida*, we are pleased to complete that canon. We waited a little longer for this one, with its grand scope and its challenging stage demands; but we believe you'll agree it was well worth the wait.

Isn't it intriguing to think about combining some of the essence of a fairy tale kind of medievalism and Victorianism in one show—and then presenting it here in Austin, Texas, in 2013? We'll see bits of feudalism, arranged royal marriages, oppression of women, Darwinian thought, militarism, men behaving like Troglodytes, and—an enduring and endearing element in every culture—true love.

So enjoy the confluence of three eras of civilization (and imagination) in the comfort of a modern American theater, and prepare to be delighted!

September Musicale

After our grand production of *Princess Ida* in June, the Society will take its traditional summer holiday, but will return with a Musicale in September (after Labor Day). Watch for information in our September newsletter, and on the website in August.

Princess Ida Comes to Austin

Our Grand Production of *Princess Ida* will have nine performances:

Thursday	June 13	7:30 pm	(Reduced Price Preview Night)
Friday	June 14	7:30 pm	(Opening Night with Free Post-Show Gala)
Saturday	June 15	7:30 pm	
Sunday	June 16	2:00 pm	(Children's Activities at 1 pm)
Thursday	June 20	7:30 pm	
Friday	June 21	7:30 pm	
Saturday	June 22	2:00 pm	
Saturday	June 22	7:30 pm	
Sunday	June 23	2:00 pm	



Group Sales Available for Princess Ida

Organizations or individuals putting together a group of at least 10 persons may apply for a special code to be used for advanced purchases either at the on-line ticketing service or by phone. (See Libby's article on this page for details.) The group discount over normal advanced sale is \$3 for general admission and \$2 for students.

The tickets may be for a single performance or for open dates throughout the run of the show (no open dates available for the final show). Seats may be reserved in a block for the group. For more information, please send an email to michael@gilbertsullivan.org, or call (512)420-0888.



kids prepare to learn a dance at the Musicale

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Happy Mother's Day: *Princess Ida* Preview Musicale by Reba Gillman



People are coming to the Festival. I hear music in the hall where the families are gathering. **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**, the Herald, calls us to attention. He thanks Court Musician **Jeanne Sasaki** at the piano, and welcomes us all to the court of King Hildebrand—played today by **David Fontenot**, who enters escorting his lovely queen **Libby Weed** in her flowing white

gown. They take seats on the right side of the stage area. The Herald introduces dancer **Kate Clark**. She invites all who wish to dance to come forward so she may teach them a dance. Folks gradually volunteer, and Kate especially urges children to join in. Then, very clearly, very patiently, she slowly demonstrates step by step. Finally the volunteers happily perform the whole dance, and everyone rejoices in their accomplishment.

The Herald addresses King Hildebrand, announcing that his son Prince Hilarion requests an audience with the Queen. Hilarion (**Holton Johnson**) approaches to present a rose to his mother, saying “For service to king, country, and all humankind—for bearing the pain, worry, sorrow, and joy of being a mother, I your well loved and loving son, wish to honor you, dearest Mother, Queen Libby, with the gift of this rose.”

The Herald announces that King Hildebrand requests that any young person interested in going on a quest come forward. Slowly children begin to come up; they gather confidence as they are welcomed. The King asks them if they want to become knights and go on a quest for the king. The Herald teaches the Knights’ Oath to the children, “Live pure, speak true, right wrong, follow the King.” By now more children are coming up. A girl in a black pirate hat joins the others. Suddenly they all want to be knights on a quest. Queen Libby comes forward with a sword, the children kneel and the Queen knights them all. They rise and get their instructions. The Lady of the Roses (**Rosa Harris**) appears with a host of roses. More children rush up to join the knights. The young knights take roses to give each mother in the hall, and a great bustle ensues. A card goes with each rose: “For service to king, country, and all human kind—for bearing the pain, worry, sorrow, and joy of being a mother, the knights of King Hildebrand wish to honor you with the gift of this rose.”

As the roses are given out and the excitement dies down, the young knights go off to rejoin their families, happy that their mission has been accomplished. The Herald introduces The Court Jester (**Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**) to provide entertainment on this special day. The Jester will tell us the story of *Princess Ida*, using many of William S. Brooke’s words, and will introduce the songs, sung by members of the wonderful cast of the June GSSA production. The Jester says, “Once upon a time there was a kindly King named Hildebrand, who had a little son named Hilarion. In the next kingdom over lived an unpleasant King named Gama, who enjoyed complaining about everything. He had three little bullying sons and a beautiful daughter named Ida. For political reasons (and making as much sense as most political matters), little Hilarion and Ida were officially betrothed when Ida was just a year old. Neither of them was consulted in the matter.”

About 150 persons, including performers, gathered on May 12 at the well designed St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church to enjoy this program produced by **Jan Jones**, who also assembled many costumes and assured all were properly attired. The singers were 21 members of the cast of our June production, a few covers performing roles for others who could not attend. In addition to the listed soloists, the company includes **Amanda Kay Boundy**, **David Treadwell**, **Kate Clark**, **Katy Fontenot**, **Mark Long**, **Rachael Shaw**, **Rosa Harris**, and **Sue Ricket Caldwell**. In “Search throughout the panorama,” the opening chorus with Florian (**Andy Fleming**, cover), await the expected arrival of King Gama and his daughter Ida in the court of King Hildebrand. Hildebrand (David Fontenot, cover), assisted by the chorus, sings “Now hearken to my strict command,” making clear what will happen if Gama does not bring Ida.

Prince Hilarion enters and sings, “Today we meet, My baby bride and I ... Ida was a twelvemonth old, Twenty years ago! I was twice her age, I’m told, Twenty years ago! Husband twice as old as wife Argues ill for married life; Baleful prophecies were rife, Twenty years ago. Still I was a tiny prince Twenty years ago. She has gained upon me since Twenty years ago. Though she’s twenty-one, it’s true, I am barely twenty two....!” Gama’s sons arrive, strong but rather stupid. Arac (**Russell Gregory**), Guron (**Robert L. Schneider**), and Scynthius (**Spencer Reichman**) sing “We are warriors three, Sons of Gama, Rex, Like most sons are we, Masculine in sex!” Enter King Gama (**Arthur DiBianca**) who sings, “If you give me your attention I will tell you what I am: I’m a genuine philanthropist—all other kinds are sham. Each little fault of temper and each social defect In my erring fellow creatures, I endeavour to correct. To all their little weaknesses I open people’s eyes; And little plans to snub the self-sufficient I devise; I love my fellow creatures—I do all the good I can—Yet everybody says I’m such a disagreeable man! And I can’t think why!” Gama reveals that Ida has established a university for women in Castle Adamant, where men are forbidden to enter under penalty of death. Furious, Hildebrand arrests Gama and his sons and declares war on Ida. But Hilarion decides to go with his friends Cyril and Florian to woo his promised bride.

Skippping the finale of Act I, Act II opens in the gardens of Castle Adamant, where Ida’s students sing “Towards the empyrean heights of ev’ry kind of lore,” with solos by Melissa (**Angela Irving**), Lady Psyche (**Jan Jones**, cover), and Sacharissa (**Alix Reilman**). After Princess Ida (**Leann Fryer**, cover) lectures the students, all leave. Hilarion, Florian, and Cyril (**Mario Silva**, cover) enter stealthily, singing “Gently, gently, Evidently we are safe so far.” They discover a pile of academic robes and each puts one on, pretending to be a girl. When Princess Ida enters, they tell her that they are well-born young ladies who wish to join Ida’s university. With Ida they sing a quartet, pretending to agree with Ida’s cynical views, “The world is but a broken toy ... Alas! Its pains alone are true.” The Princess leaves and Lady Psyche enters. She is Ida’s right-hand teacher, and just happens to be Florian’s sister. Melissa joins them and is enchanted by the young men. Then her mother, Lady Blanche (**Patricia Combs**), enters and discovers the men present. She serves as a kind of assistant principal, and is very jealous of Princess Ida. Melissa persuades Blanch not to identify the men, in the hope that Ida will leave with Hilarion and Blanche can succeed her. They sing the duet “Now wouldn’t you like to rule the roast, And guide this University?” At lunch, Cyril gets tipsy and reveals who they are. Ida jumps back in

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Mother's Day Musicale: *Princess Ida* Preview

photos throughout this issue courtesy Steve Schwartzman

see more at gilbertsullivanaustin.smugmug.com



Court Minstrel
Jeanne Sasaki



Queen Libby & King Hildebrand



Herald Jeffrey Jones-Ragona and
producer and Lady Blanche, Jan Jones



junior Pirate King Peo Chapman
with (Pirate) King Hildebrand



Princess Ida, Cyril, Hilarion, & Florian



King Gama



Court Jester Ralph MacPhail, Jr.



Guron, Arac, and Scynthius



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horror and falls over the ramparts of the castle. Hilarion immediately jumps after her and pulls her to safety. Even though he saved her life, Ida orders that the three men be arrested. Hilarion sings a passionate plea and Ida wavers, but just then Hildebrand and his soldiers break into the castle and confront her. The act comes to an end with men and women singing their defiance at each other.

In Act III, the girls of the university try to put on a brave front, but they're really frightened at the thought of battle. Ida tries to rally her women, but they all make excuses and Ida is finally left alone to confront the ruin of her dreams. She sings, "I built upon a rock." Gama comes to Ida in a terrible state. Hildebrand has tortured him by having everyone be nice to him. With nothing to grumble about, Gama's life is miserable. "Gama brings Hildebrand's message that, to avoid a battle, the dispute should be settled by a fight between Ida's brothers and Hilarion and his two friends; if Hilarion wins, Ida will be his wife. Ida reluctantly agrees, since she can't fight a whole army

by herself. So the fight begins with strength and stupidity on one side and true love and goodness and ... smaller muscles on the other. Who will win?" You'll have to come to a performance in June to see.

"But Ida learns that her biggest struggle is with herself and only by giving up can she allow herself to win. In the battle of the sexes, the only way to survive is not to fight; and the only victory is when both sides surrender completely. That's called love." And love is the sole topic of the final finale: "With joy abiding" sung by the company.

Queen Libby comes forward to thank the Jester and his pianist for the story, and to call for our traditional ending. David steps forward to sing the Pirate King's lead-in, "Although our dark career Sometimes involves the crime of stealing" and there comes a child knight, Peo Chapman, wearing a black pirate hat and singing all the words. David welcomes her and they stand side by side to help us finish off our Festival.

“Useful Knowledge Everywhere One Finds”

by Ralph MacPhail, Jr.



The Gilbert & Sullivan partnership almost dissolved before *Princess Ida* was written.

During the run of their preceding work, *Iolanthe*, composer Arthur Sullivan received the honor of knighthood from his most important fan, Queen Victoria. And then the composer's friends and the musical establishment went to work, admonishing

Sullivan that there are some things that Arthur Sullivan could do that Sir Arthur Sullivan *shouldn't*—things such as writing comic operas. His gifts should be employed, they thought and said or wrote, on loftier endeavors: symphonies, cantatas, “grand” operas.

To worsen this situation, librettist William S. Gilbert had proposed a new work based on a magic lozenge—a pill that would turn any character taking it into the kind of person they *pretended* to be. This had no appeal to Sullivan, who saw the characters as mechanical puppets, providing little scope for musical characterization as human beings.

So it looked as if the partnership, which had brought fame and fortune to the two men, was at an end. Their string of successes, which added so much delight to the musical and dramatic worlds of the day, was about to be cut. *Trial by Jury*, *The Sorcerer*, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *Patience*, and *Iolanthe* made Gilbert & Sullivan household names. As Gilbert later said, they had become as much an institution as Westminster Abbey.

We have *Princess Ida* thanks to prescient producer Richard D'Oyly Carte's five-year contract, which required Gilbert & Sullivan to write another comic opera for the Savoy Theatre on six months' notice.

Gilbert saved the day by setting his “lozenge plot” aside and proposing a new subject, a subject that appealed to the composer for its characters and opportunities to compose on a grander scale than before. The new work was to be called *Princess Ida*. But, in truth, the subject was anything but new.

Gilbert had proved himself with his earlier successes a master of—well, if not self-plagiarism, then at least at using ideas from earlier works: his short stories, his “Bab” ballads, and even libretti for his earlier short musical entertainments. The genesis of *Princess Ida* is to be found in his 1870 burlesque of a long poem by the poet laureate, Alfred, Lord Tennyson, which was published in 1847, *The Princess*. Gilbert's “per-version” (as he called it) of Tennyson's poem follows the basic characteristics of burlesque, a popular form of musical theatre of the mid-nineteenth century: their plots were based on well-known stories and plays; the dialogue was in rhymed-couplets and heavily laced with positively *excruciating* puns. The musical numbers were new lyrics set to pre-existing melodies from popular culture and the operatic stage. It was not quite respectable, for one of the greatest features for the males in the audience was the use of breeches (or trouser) roles: handsome young men were played on stage by pretty young women in tights—in an era when a glimpse of stocking was looked on as something more than shocking!

In fact, when Gilbert & Sullivan started writing, they determined to raise the level of musical theatre by *avoiding* such cross dressing,

unrealistic diction, and silly stories. Sullivan would provide *original* music, and Gilbert would provide *coherent* plots and avoid the pun-laden couplets that characterized the diction of burlesque. It is impossible, today, however, to ignore the earlier dramatic form when trying to understand the roots of Savoy opera, and perhaps *Princess Ida* can be productively seen as an acknowledgment of the influence of burlesque on the evolution of Gilbert & Sullivan opera.

Even in 1870 (a year before he first teamed with Sullivan—for *Thespis*), Gilbert was trying to improve on convention and raise the literary quality of burlesque: he wrote *The Princess* in blank verse instead of rhymed couplets, and while puns were still very much in evidence, they were fewer than usual. However, he had no composer: his lyrics were meant to be sung to pre-existing melodies. He retained the five-act structure, and the patrons' expectations at the Olympic Theatre, for which the piece was written, required that Prince Hilarion and his two friends Cyril and Florian, be played by women—in tights!

It was to this 14-year-old burlesque that Gilbert turned when Sullivan demanded something different. Gilbert re-used much of his blank-verse dialogue, but wrote new lyrics for the musical situations. He reduced the five acts to three (still one more than the hitherto customary two).

It is rather Gilbertian, however, that while the librettist updated his dramatic form, and, in his lyrics, benefited from years of experience in writing for Sullivan, his subject matter stayed the same, for one of the main subjects of both plays is the concept of higher education for women.

In 1870, women had few opportunities for higher education in England. Between *The Princess* of 1870 and *Princess Ida* of 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 *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 their 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.” Clearly, with *Princess Ida*, Sullivan had the story and the characters he craved, and he gave them some of his finest music.

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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).

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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:

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In addition to women's education, *Princess Ida* also aims its shaft at mindless macho militarism, misanthropy, the oratorios of Handel, the conventions of grand opera—and even the studies of Darwin and his controversial *Origin of Species* (1859)! Listen carefully, and you'll also hear allusions to Shakespeare, a Gilbertian predecessor whom the librettist professed to detest.

While working on this lovely show, we've discovered many delights for both eye and ear: the music and the humor, of course, are there as always in Gilbert & Sullivan, but *Princess Ida* is perhaps closer to being both opera and fairy tale than any of their other works. There are multiple choruses with multiple costumes, three sets, and many opportunities for movement and interesting groupings.

We should be grateful that, nearly 130 years ago, Sullivan found a lozenge too distasteful to swallow and forced Gilbert to turn his attention elsewhere and write a different libretto—one that pokes fun at both men and women but in the end affirms that universal influence, "the sway of love," in a final finale that is unique in the Savoy operas.

At its heart, perhaps, *Princess Ida* is a fanciful (and at times quite literal) battle of the sexes. Who will win? No "spoiler-alert" is necessary here. All will be revealed in good time.

But here's a hint: When my friend William J. Brooke wrote the story of *Princess Ida* for children, he ended it this way: ". . . Ida learns that her biggest struggle is with herself and only by giving up can she allow herself to win. In the Battle of the Sexes, the only way to survive is not to fight; and the only victory is when both sides surrender completely. That's called love."

So who will win? Since we have *Princess Ida* to see and hear, we all will!

Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive in early September; the deadline for submissions will be in mid-August. Please send your news to news@gilbertsullivan.org. Thanks!



Queen Libby knights children at the Musicale

NEWS of our MEMBERS

GSSA Artistic Director **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, will teach a course called "Gilbert & Sullivan and The Big Three" August 25-20 at the Warwick Center in Warwick, New York, under the auspices of Road Scholar (Elderhostel). The course will focus on *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Mikado*, and *H.M.S. Pinafore*, and will fill the entire program for the week. More information: www.roadsscholar.org (search on "Gilbert & Sullivan") or RafeMacPhail@Yahoo.com.

Wand'ring Minstrels

The Wand'ring Minstrels have changed their performance date at McGonigel's Mucky Duck in Houston to Sunday, August 11, at 6 pm. Tickets are available on their website, mcgonigels.com.

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin's Wand'ring Minstrels are ready to entertain for your next event. Have Gilbert and Sullivan tunes performed at your home, party, school, or activity. See our website (www.gilbertsullivan.org) for further details.

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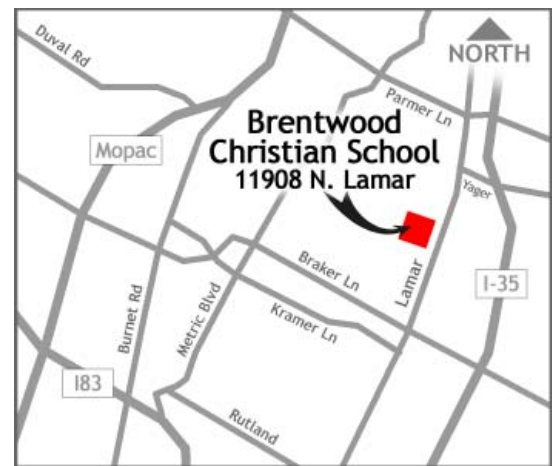
MAY-JUNE 2013

**Princess
 Ida**

**JUNE
 13-23**

**Thursdays
 thru
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 Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood
 Christian School. *All seats reserved.*

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This project is funded and supported in part by the City of Austin
 through the Economic Growth & Redevelopment Services Office /
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