
The GILBERT & SULLIVAN

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2013 NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed

One of the many things I love about Gilbert & Sullivan is its family-friendliness. It is such a joy to see children accompanying parents and grandparents to our performances, and it is even more thrilling to see the children emerge dancing and humming at the end of the performances, clearly having enjoyed the experience.



It is very important to our Society to include youngsters in our events and to encourage their participation. This is why, at every summer grand production, we set aside an hour before one Sunday matinée for children's activities. Gary Hallock and Janet Forman prepare special activities and crafts that relate to elements in the show. After enjoying these, the children are invited to the stage to meet the directors and some of the performers and instrumentalists, discover something about the show they are about to see, and perhaps learn a little dance or song.

At our children's activities matinée last June, we put out a sign-up sheet to see if families present might be interested in some additional activities specifically for children. Nearly a dozen families signed up, indicating that they would be interested in things such as playdates, day camp, or acting camp. We have not yet acted on these possibilities, but we are certainly considering such activities for the future. **If you would like children in your family to be included in some children's G&S activities such as these**, please write us at info@gilbertsullivan.org and let us know.

After a Sunday matinée of *Princess Ida* last summer, I visited with a father and daughter who had enjoyed the show together. They told me that this was their *seventh* year in a row to have a father-daughter date for a Gilbert & Sullivan show. The daughter is now in high school, singing in her school choir, and she is considering auditioning for next summer's production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*. What a great family tradition—and what a lovely prospect for the future!

Hoping to see you soon,

Wand'ring Minstrels

The Wand'ring Minstrels of the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin will be performing a holiday show on the outdoor stage of the Hill Country Galleria on December 14 at 5 pm. Come see who's vacationing on the H.M.S. Pinafore!

To hire the Wand'ring Minstrels for your concert, school event, or private party, contact **Robert L. Schneider** (bigdaddymusic1@gmail.com), or see our website (www.gilbertsullivan.org).

STARS OF THE G&S CHORUS

Sunday, November 3, at 3 pm
Harris Bell Hall

Westminster, 4100 Jackson (see map, page 6)

The Stars of *Princess Ida's* chorus take the children in all of us to Wonderland.

Join Alice (**Katy Fontenot**) as the White Rabbit (**Sue Ricket Caldwell**) takes her on a trip *Through the Looking Glass* to Wonderland where she just might meet some of your favorite characters—Tweedledee and Tweedledum (**Mario Silva** and **Daniel Brookshire**), the Mock Turtle (**David Fontenot**), the Cheshire Cat (**Leann Fryer**), the Caterpillar (**Ezra Hankin**), and the Mad Hatter (**Janette Jones**). But hold on to your heads, for you may also meet The Queen of Hearts (**Errol Tyrone Olson**). Musical accompaniment by The Red Queen (**Jeanne Sasaki**). Join us for a good time in Wonderland and hear each character's favorite Gilbert & Sullivan aria! You may even get to join in a Mad Tea Party!

Please bring munchies to share!

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Stars of G&S Go Italian by Reba Gillman



At 3 pm on Sunday, September 8, an estimated 130 people gathered in Harris Bell Hall at the newly enlarged and revamped Westminster Manor, for a delightful musical trip to Italy, organized by the wonderful **Janette Jones**, and supported by the orchestral accompaniment provided by skilled pianist **Jeanne Sasaki**. About half the audience were Westminster residents;

the rest were G&S members and friends who were drifting in as they finally found their way to the hall. President **Libby Weed** welcomed us and suggested a preshow sing-along to allow more time for lost and wandering audience members to find the hall. **Robert L. Schneider** took over, demonstrating his Wand'ring Minstrels skills as he sang several well known tunes and interacted enthusiastically with audience members, encouraging them to join in the singing.

The program proceeded easily, with constant refreshing remarks from emcee Janette. Everything flowed smoothly and securely, although later information suggested many on-the-spot changes, adaptations, and simple substitutions to illustrate the imagined honeymoon of Princess Ida and Prince Hilarion in Italy. Our G&S singers are well trained and seem well able to navigate uncertain conditions and spontaneous inspiration. The Show Must Go On!

As we began the program Jeanette introduced the excellent pianist, Jeanne Sasaki, and the page turner, Cody Ireland. Jeanne played everything with orchestral grandeur, supporting the singers whatever they sang, whether well planned ahead or hastily substituted within the last two hours. The program listed **Amelia Ciskey** and **Leonard Johnson** who had to drop out at the last minute, and the actual performers **Patricia Combs**, **Wayne J. Davis**, **David Fontenet**, **Rosa Harris**, **Angela Irving**, **June Julian**, **Robert L. Schneider**, and **Brittany Trinité**. All had sung in this year's *Princess Ida*, except Wayne, who sang in our 2012 *Patience*, and familiar performer June, who last sang the title role in our 2009 *Iolanthe*.

Robert sang "That's Amore" (by Warren & Brooks), Rosa sang "When a Merry Maiden Marries" (Tessa in *The Gondoliers* by G&S), Angela sang "Deh Vieni, Non Tardar" (Susanna, *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Mozart), David sang "Rising early in the morning" (Giuseppe, *The Gondoliers*), in which he sings of the kingly chores the two Republican gondoliers enjoy performing every day. Then, instead of Leonard singing the beautiful Donizetti love aria "Una furtiva lagrima," Janette stepped in to sing "On the day that I was wedded To your admirable sire" (Duchess, *The Gondoliers*) which Jeanne had helped Janette dig out of her memories (she performed the part of the Duchess many years ago). Janette does not usually sing in performances she has programmed and directed. Then June took on adapted parts of the entire *Gondoliers* first act finale, singing "Kind sir, you cannot have the heart" (Gianetta, *The Gondoliers*), Brittany sang "Smani implacabili" (Dorabella, *Così fan tutte*, Mozart), Robert sang "I stole the prince" (Don Alhambra, *The Gondoliers*) in which he makes clear that "... there is no manner of doubt, No probable, possible shadow of doubt, no possible doubt whatever" that one of the gondoliers is the Prince, but it is impossible to say which. At this point Amelia was to have sung Susanna's aria from

Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* in which she dresses the flirtatious boy Cherubino as a girl with instructions on what to do to fool the Count, his boss. Since Cherubino's well-known aria "Voi che sapete" is studied by many a female student singer, the cast thought it a good joke to have four Cherubinos sing it, and Patricia, June, Angela and Janette did it very well. Next we had the pleasure of hearing Wayne sing the lovely tenor aria, "Take a pair of sparkling eyes" (Marco, *The Gondoliers*). Patricia sang the dramatic "Stella del marinar" (*La Gioconda*, Ponchiello). Rosa and Angela sang "After sailing to this island" (Tessa and Gianetta, *The Gondoliers*)—the two young new brides got tired of waiting for the return of their gondolier husbands and sailed over the hazardous sea to join them. Robert sang the famous aria "Madamina, il catalogo e questo" (Leporello, *Don Giovanni*, Mozart) in which he lists all the ways, menial, heroic, useful, he serves his demanding master. Patricia and David sang the charming duet "To help unhappy commoners and add to their enjoyment" (Duke and Duchess, *The Gondoliers*), which immediately follows the song the Duchess sang much earlier, "On the day that I was wedded." Next June substituted for Amelia singing with Robert "La ci darem la mano" (Zerlina and Don Giovanni, *Don Giovanni*, Mozart). The Don aims to seduce the lovely young servant girl but she finally comes to her senses and escapes his blandishments. Swooping back to the third song in *Gondoliers*, David as the Duke sang, leaving out the choral responses of his suite, "In enterprise of martial kind, When there was any fighting, He led his regiment from behind—He found it less exciting." June closed the prepared program by singing the beautiful grand aria "Stridono lassu" (*I Pagliacci*, Leoncavallo). Then David moved forward to sing the familiar lead-in to our traditional closing, and all rose to sing "Hail, Poetry" (*The Pirates of Penzance*) followed by "Now to the banquet we press" (*The Sorcerer*). Janette stepped forward to invite all to partake of the delicious morsels on the table at the back of the room, and to announce that the cast wished to dedicate this performance to **Rose Taylor**, beloved teacher, performer, and friend.

I joined the happy crowd gathering round to chat and munch and caught the ear of one of the singers. She explained to me that Rose had suffered a massive heart attack a few days earlier and was now in hospice, a fact that few persons present knew. In the rehearsal just preceding the performance necessary changes had been made to the program, and the cast had sung with all their hearts. Rose died a week later.

Princess Ida's Michelle Haché and Jeffrey Jones-Ragona Nominated for B. Iden Payne Awards

The B. Iden Payne Awards Council has announced nominations for the 2012-2013 Season Awards. Our 2013 Grand Summer Production of *Princess Ida* received 2 nominations: **Michelle Haché** for Outstanding Lead Actress in the Musical Theatre category, and **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** for Outstanding Music Direction. Our set designer, **Ann Marie Gordon**, received nominations for two other productions: *Qualities of Starlight* and *WATER*. Congratulations to Michelle, Jeffrey, and Ann Marie! Winners of the awards will be announced on Tuesday, November 5, at Stateside at the Paramount.

Stars of G&S Go Italian

photos courtesy Sue Ricket Caldwell

see more at gilbertsullivan.austin.smugmug.com



What's in a Name? (Sometimes, a lot, actually . . .)

by **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**



When Little Buttercup inquires about the identity of a lovesick sailor aboard H.M.S. *Pinafore*, the Boatswain answers:

That is the smartest lad in all the fleet—
Ralph Rackstraw!

The bumboat woman replies:

Ralph! That name! Remorse! Remorse!

I hope you'll experience no remorse in deciding to read this column, which will concern itself with the names of the various characters in Gilbert & Sullivan's first international hit and still a firm favorite with Savoyards everywhere, *H.M.S. Pinafore*.

And while the name of the opera is so familiar to many that they don't even notice its irony, I want to focus on the names of the *characters* rather than on their ship.

Let's start with Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B. After all, Gilbert did, listing him first in his *Dramatis Personae* because Sir Joseph is 1) a male and 2) of highest professional rank among the characters (though not the highest in social rank; this topsy-turvy state of things needs a column devoted to it alone).

What does Sir Joseph's name tell us? He's a knight of the realm, a Knight Commander of the Bath (K.C.B.) in fact. Harry Benford tells us in his *Gilbert & Sullivan Lexicon* (www.GSOpera.com/lexicon) that K.C.B. is "one of the highest orders of knighthood" and notes that literal knightly bathing as ritualistic purification dates from as early as the 11th century. I think Gilbert was making a sly joke in bestowing this order on Sir Joseph, First Lord of the Admiralty, "the lord who rules the water."

But there's more! Sir Joseph's knighthood throws his family name into eclipse. But surely Gilbert's selection of "Porter" (a doorkeeper, a luggage carrier, a cheap beer) was not an accidental choice for a world-class parvenu such as Sir Joseph!

Hebe, "Sir Joseph's First Cousin," has a name defined in the *OED* as "youthful, prime," and as Martyn Green also points out in his *Treasury of Gilbert & Sullivan*, "she usually is"! (In fact, Hebe in Greek mythology was the Goddess of Youth, the daughter of Zeus and Hera.)

"Little Buttercup" is one of the most famous characters in all Gilbert & Sullivan (and has one of the most famous songs), but only careful program readers know that Gilbert gave this peddler woman and former nurse a "real" name as well: Mrs. Cripps. While working on this column, I did an online search on "cripps"—and found this definition: "A large error. A mistake with large consequences." If you know what I know of what Mrs. Cripps knows, this is a surprisingly apt appellation for the lady, which Gilbert makes clear in Little Buttercup's revelation at the end of *H.M.S. Pinafore*. (This online source [www.urbandictionary.com] says this definition is "Derived from Dave Cripps - chief disasteror [*sic*] extraordinaire. 'Oh no, I've done a right Cripps here.'" Scholarly integrity leads me reluctantly to admit that this definition probably evolved a century after *H.M.S. Pinafore* was launched and that "cripps" does *not* appear in the *OED*. Let's decide to call it topsy-turvy irony. [And the *West Side Story* gang is called the Crips—with but one p.]

Gilbert loved the sea, and his financial success led to the purchase of yachts which he enjoyed sailing. It shouldn't be surprising then to find that many of his sailors aboard H.M.S. *Pinafore* have names that are also names of various parts of a ship's rigging: Dick *Deadeye*, Bill *Bobstay*, Bob *Becket*. (Hie thee to www.GSOpera.com/lexicon for corroborative detail.)

But what of Ralph *Rackstraw's* family name? It doesn't appear to have the same legitimate etymological pedigree of those of his fellow sailors. The indefatigable Harry Benford notes, however, that "rack" appeared in a 1921 seaman's manual as "slang for a berth." It's not too large a leap to assume that straw made such a berth more comfortable.

As for Ralph's first name, we know that Gilbert meant for it to be pronounced "Rafe" for Buttercup rhymes "Ralph" with "waif" in her revelation at the end. I have a small file (somewhere!) on various theories of how "Ralph" came to be pronounced "Rafe" in England, but none are entirely satisfactory. (I *do* know, however, that I became "Rafe" while directing a production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* near Richmond, Virginia in 1981—"a many years ago," as Mrs. Cripps sings.)

Finally, let's look at that name of the eponymous ship. Legend has it that W. S. Gilbert originally called his work *H.M.S. Semaphore* (which rhymes, of course, with "one cheer more"). This legend also has it that the change was suggested by Arthur Sullivan, the librettist's composer. In my nearly fifty years of reading the literature on Gilbert & Sullivan, I don't remember seeing a *primary* source that confirms this.

However, it was a most apt substitution. Life aboard H.M.S. *Pinafore* was as topsy-turvy as anything Gilbert ever created (a kind captain, a polite crew, immaculate cleanliness, no profanity with civility to all, etc.). How delightful that instead of naming his ship after a mode of naval communication, Gilbert (and Sullivan?) named it after a Victorian child's smock!

NEWS of our MEMBERS

Our President, **Libby Weed**, was on the radio from noon to 1 pm on Thursday, October 1. Did you hear her? She was helping with the KMFA fund-raiser and was interviewed by Dianne Donovan. Dianne is always very supportive of our work and was very interested in what Libby had to say about our recent *Princess Ida* and the upcoming *H.M.S. Pinafore*. **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, our Artistic Director, called in with a pledge while she was on the air.

Our Princess Ida, **Michelle Haché**, is the Musical Director for *Peter Pan*, which is now in rehearsal and opens on November 15 at the Palace Theater in Georgetown.

Spencer Reichmann's Junior Recital will be at the Texas State University Music Building on Dec. 3 from 8 to 9 pm. The program includes pieces by Franz Schubert and Ambrose Thomas.

The Texas Early Music Project (TEMP) presented "TEMP Goes to the Opera" on September 21 and 22. Their performers included several singers that have performed with our Society including **Meredith Ruduski**, **Lisa Alexander** and **Brett Bachus**. **Allison Welch**, our GLOO Oboist, performed in the orchestra. Allison is also the Managing Director of TEMP. TEMP has an ambitious series of concerts scheduled this season, the next one being on December 13-15. More information is available at www.early-music.org.

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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I'd like to volunteer. I'm interested in:

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:

Notice of Elections

The Society will elect members of the board for 2014 at the Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 5, 3 pm, at Westminster Harris Bell Hall. If you have an interest in serving on the board, please contact nominations committee chair, **Reba Gillman**, at (512) 327-2277 or rgillman@austin.rr.com. Reba and committee members **Diane Radin** and **Allan Longacre** will prepare a nomination slate to be published in the January newsletter. Our board is an excellent group of men and women, each of whom has specific roles and works throughout the year to conduct business and bring the joys of G&S to our community.

Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive near the end of the year; the deadline for submissions is December 4. Please send your news to news@gilbertsullivan.org. Thanks!



Auditions for *H.M.S. Pinafore*

Auditions for our summer 2014 production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* will take place on March 1 and 2 at Genesis Presbyterian Church at 1507 Wilshire Boulevard. Look for more details in future newsletters.

Rose Taylor Remembered

by Bill Hatcher

The life and music of **Rose Taylor** were honored at a memorial service on Tuesday, October 1, at University Methodist Church. Strong attendance conveyed the affection that so many had for her. Family and close friends were seated just before the service started, and then the choir and clergy entered in a procession. The choir included several singers who have performed on stage for our Society. Cindy Sadler, who has also performed with us, was seated in the chancel with the choir and sang a beautiful solo. Adrienne Inglis, also seated in the chancel, played a flute solo and accompanied some of the singing. Adrienne has occasionally played flute for our productions as a member of the Gillman Light Opera Orchestra. Several of Rose's relatives spoke, as did her husband Russ Prickett. All spoke well and with poise despite the difficulty and emotion of the situation. The tales and recollections told more about her than I knew, but I could recognize in them the Rose that I knew from talking to her in the theater. She was always so cheerful and encouraging. She was enthusiastic about our shows and interested in our talented performers, many of whom she knew well and some of whom had studied with her. These same qualities made her beloved in her family and among her students. How she will be missed!

In addition to the singing of the soloist and the choir there was congregational singing, and I don't know when if ever I have heard better. I felt that the beauty of the singing was a tribute to her memory, and how could it be any different? The church was undoubtedly filled with her musical friends and colleagues. Looking around I saw so many people from our Society's past productions and from our Board of Directors.

Rose performed onstage for our Society as Lady Jane in *Patience* in 1999 and as Katisha in *The Mikado* in 2005. She also sang in various musicale programs, including a fundraising event at St. Stephen's held in honor of Jess Walters. She is remembered lovingly by her students and was a faithful mentor. She meant a great deal to our Society. The attendance of so many of our members was a moving reminder of her importance to The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin.

NOTE

A concert honoring Rose Taylor will be held at 2 pm at UT's Bates Recital Hall on Sunday, January 26, 2014. Jeffrey Jones-Ragona is organizing a portion of the program that will feature numbers from the Gilbert & Sullivan canon.

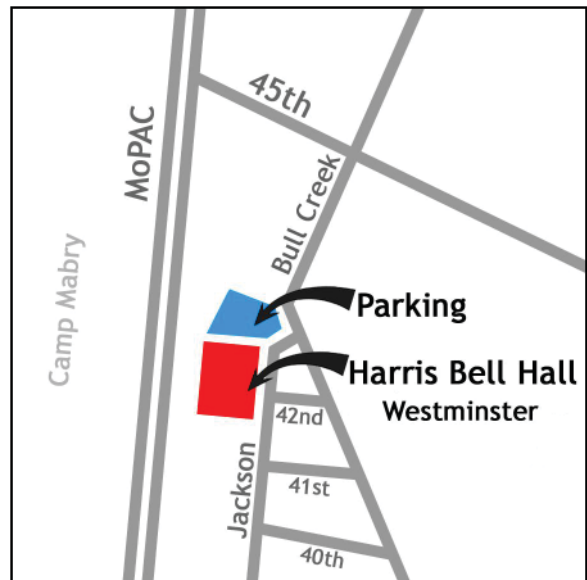


Top line of mailing label is date when your membership expires.

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2013

Coming Events

- Nov. 3 "Stars of the G&S Chorus" Musicale
- Jan. 5 Annual Meeting and Musicale
- Feb. 23 *Trial by Jury* (Concert Version) Musicale
- March 1-2 *H.M.S. Pinafore* Auditions
- May 18 *H.M.S. Pinafore* Preview Musicale
- June 12-22 *H.M.S. Pinafore* summer production



*Map to November Musicale
 See details on page 1!*

**Armstrong
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The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin

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

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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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