

# The GILBERT & SULLIVAN

MAY-JUNE 2015 NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed

In the last newsletter we marked the passing of our beloved friend and board member, **Reba Gillman**. We announced that this summer's production of *The Sorcerer* will be dedicated in honor of the late Reba and **Len Gillman**. We are working hard to make this production something that would make the Gillmans proud and will bring great delight to all of you!



Another of our esteemed board members, **Leonard Johnson**, has stated that it is time for him to step down from the board for now. We have greatly appreciated the service of Leonard, a long-time member of the voice faculty of the University of Texas at Austin. During his board tenure he has planned musicales, has directed sing-alongs at January annual meetings, and has worked with the scholarship committee. We look forward to continuing to see Leonard at our productions and hearing his magnificent tenor voice at our musicales.

The remaining members of the Board of Directors and I are pleased to announce the addition of two exceptional people to serve these terms for the rest of 2015. They are **Rosa Mondragon Harris** and **June Julian**. Both of these new directors are already familiar to many of you.

Rosa was first cast in the chorus of *The Mikado* in 2011 and has been in all of our summer productions and in many musicales since then. You may have seen and heard her elsewhere about town, because she also sings with Tapestry Singers (since 2007) and with the Austin Opera chorus (since 2011). Rosa has been employed in information technology for over 20 years in various capacities, and she currently serves as a business analyst and project manager at the University of Texas at Austin. She and her husband Lorne are beloved and supportive regulars at G&S events. In addition to singing, Rosa loves reading, running, and writing ... and we are delighted that she will use her writing talent in the very important role of reporting on our musicales in forthcoming issues of the newsletter. Look for her account of the September musicale next fall, and enjoy her article in this newsletter on her experience as a GSSA cast member, busily preparing for summer.

June has appeared in many GSSA productions over the past several years. You may remember her as the title character in our 2009 production of *Iolanthe*, or as Pitti-Sing in *The Mikado* in 2005, or as Edith in *The Pirates of Penzance* in 2003. She is active elsewhere in the arts community as an artist for Spotlight on Opera, Austin Chamber Ensemble, and Austin Opera. She played Lady Thiang in last fall's *The King and I* at Zach Scott Theater Center, and she was a B. Iden Payne nominee for Best Featured Actress in Austin Theatre

Project's "Avenue Q." June was a member of the GSSA board from 2006 through 2009, serving as president in 2007-08. She and her husband Matt and stepdaughter Desirée attend many G&S events. She is a Senior Administrator at Advanced Micro Devices and has been a private voice teacher since 2011. June will be working with our musicale producer, Janette Jones, to create engaging and beautiful musicales in the coming season.

All other board members are listed on the back page of this newsletter. We are all quite pleased to add this talented twosome to our number.

Do you have your tickets to *The Sorcerer* yet? Go to [www.gilbertsullivan.org](http://www.gilbertsullivan.org) or call (512) 474-5664 today. Tickets are going quickly, and the show is going to be one of our best ever. See you there!

A handwritten signature of Libby Weed.

## *The Sorcerer Weaves his Spell*

Our Grand Production of *The Sorcerer* will have nine performances:

Thursday	June 18	7:30 pm	Opening Night
Friday	June 19	7:30 pm	Gala Performance—Free Buffet with Cast Follows Performance
Saturday	June 20	7:30 pm	
Sunday	June 21	2:00 pm	Children's Activities at 1 pm
Thursday	June 25	7:30 pm	
Friday	June 26	7:30 pm	
Saturday	June 27	2:00 pm	
Saturday	June 27	7:30 pm	
Sunday	June 28	2:00 pm	Closing Performance

## September Musicale

After our grand production of *The Sorcerer* in June, the Society will take its traditional summer holiday, but will return with a Musicale in mid-September. Watch for information in our September newsletter, and on the website in August.

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## Magic and Muggles: The Sorcerer Preview Musicale by Sue Ricket Caldwell



On Sunday, May 17, nearly 200 of us gathered at the Dell Jewish Community Center, our first time at this venue, to preview music from this summer's Grand Production of *The Sorcerer*. **Janette Jones** (Mrs. Partlet in *The Sorcerer*) reimagined the selected songs to fit with a more recent tale of magic, that of Harry Potter, and transformed the cast appropriately. She appeared as Professor Sprout, complete with mandrake.

**Brett Bachus** was Professor Flitwick (who knew Flitwick could play piano?). **Andy Fleming**, who conducted the chorus, was Neville Longbottom.

The Master of Ceremonies for the program was guest magician **Chris Walden** as Professor Ravencraft. The professor began by "testing" the audience members to assure that they were ready to begin a year at Hogwarts. The Professor found his students able indeed, as they selected a card that matched what he held, or read from a page that was locked in a box held by another "student." He amazed us with his quest to learn a trick involving 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 cards....

Then Professor Ravencraft set the stage for the musical selections. He introduced the Hogwarts students gathering for the feast on the first day of school, and all sang, "Now to the banquet we press" from Act I. Then he described the problems of Harry Potter, which Harry (**Julius Young**, who is Dr. Daly in *The Sorcerer*) bemoans in, "Time was when love and I were well acquainted." Of course, we know Harry is loved by Ginny Weasley (**Patricia Combs**, Constance); her feelings are perfectly captured in "When he is here." The Professor reminded us of the danger in a wizarding school that someone might make use of a love potion, and all sang, "Why, where be oi?"

The Yule Ball became the setting for "Welcome joy" bringing together pink-umbrella-toting Rubeas Hagrid (**David Fontenot**, Sir Marmaduke Pointdextre) and Madame Maxime (**Lisa Alexander**, Lady Sangazure). Harry Potter, disappointed at not taking Cho Chang to the ball, sang, "Oh, my voice is sad and low." Hermione Granger (**Alexandra Reilman**, Aline) rejoiced in her date with Viktor Krum in, "Oh, happy young heart." Ron Weasley (**Holton Johnson**, Alexis) is afflicted by a love potion intended for Harry; the feeling of love is aimed at a young woman ... or maybe Scabbers the rat.

One song we enjoyed will not be in the summer production. It is known as the lost aria of Lady Sangazure; frequent GSSA pianist Jeanne Sasaki arranged a melody for "In days gone by," Madame Maxime's words of wisdom to Fleur. Then came the wedding of Bill Weasley (**Danny Castillo**) and Fleur Delacour (**Leann Fryer**), officiated by Gilderoy Lockhart (**Jay Young**), as all sang, "All is prepared." But the wedding was interrupted by the news of terrible events in the wizarding world. Lord Voldemort (**Arthur DiBianca**, John Wellington Wells, family sorcerer) calls upon dark magic in "Sprites of earth and air." During the final battle against Voldemort, Ron and Hermione must journey to the Chamber of Secrets. They express their hope for a future together in "Oh love, true love." At last, Voldemort is vanquished and the survivors celebrate with another feast in "Now to the banquet we press" from Act II.

I must mention that the chorus members all assumed Harry Potter characters: **Maurine McLean** was Professor McGonagall. **Evan Kelley** was Professor Snape. **Rosa Mondragon Harris** was Professor Trelawney. **Glenn Russell** and **David Treadwell** were twins Fred and George Weasley, while **Michelle Vanecek** and **Patrick Wright** were their parents, Molly and Arthur. **Susan Meitz** was Dolores Umbridge. **Natalya Shelburne** was Lavender Brown. **Sarah Steele** was Luna Lovegood. **Abigail Stokley** was Nymphadora Tonks. **Ian Stilwell** was Mad Eye Moody. **Jamieson Taylor** was Moaning

Myrtle. **Brittany Trinité** was Bellatrix Lestrange. **Daniel Kregel** (Hercules, a speaking part in *The Sorcerer*) came as Colin Creevey, and took pictures from every vantage point.

At the conclusion, GSSA President **Libby Weed** thanked all the performers. She invited us all to come to *The Sorcerer* in June. Then the audience joined the cast in the third singing of "Now to the banquet we press," and we all moved to the next room for our banquet. That room featured four tables, each decorated for one of the houses at Hogwarts, all filled with delicious treats. It was wonderful to mingle with old friends and new. We saw **Enid** and **Gary Hallock** (Lady Sangazure and the Notary) and **Rosemary Russell-Vines** (Constance), all from the 1977 GSSA production of *The Sorcerer* in which I was a chorus girl. We also saw friends **Will Mannis**, an amateur magician, and his wife **Heather Poggi-Mannis**, who says she "does not magish;" it was their first visit to a GSSA musicale, and they said they loved the way the musicale was adapted for Harry Potter folks. A delightful end to a highly entertaining afternoon!

## All Is Prepared for *The Sorcerer* by Rosa Mondragon Harris

The cast of *The Sorcerer* convened for their first rehearsal on March 8, soon after auditions were held. This eagerly awaited gathering, the first full read-through of the upcoming show, is always filled with newness and excitement. Familiar and fresh faces alike greet each other, and enthusiasm fills the air as the cast delves into the score. As a fairly new Savoyard myself, I know I can always trust that a work by Gilbert and Sullivan will bring me into a world of humor and interest. Time and again, Gilbert's libretto fused with Sullivan's melodies do not disappoint! In just a few musical rehearsals, the chorus solidifies its sound and the principal actors bring nuances to their roles.



During the May 5 music rehearsal at Genesis Presbyterian Church, the cast had quite an experience during a heavy Texas thunderstorm. About a half-hour into the rehearsal, **Patricia Combs**, our Constance, had just begun singing the recitative to her aria when the rehearsal hall lit up with a lightning flash followed by the shake of what felt like a strike close by. The hall went dark. After taking just a couple of minutes to compose themselves, members of the resourceful cast, **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**, our music director, and **Karl Logue**, our rehearsal pianist, took out their mobile phones, flipped on their flashlight apps, and continued singing through the first act as planned. What dedication! To ensure the safety of the cast, the rehearsal was abbreviated to allow members to get home before the storm worsened. It was later confirmed that lightning had struck a nearby transformer, causing the power outage. However, one had to wonder: could this have been the work of John Wellington Wells, giving us a preview of what's to come this summer in *The Sorcerer*?

At press time, the cast of *The Sorcerer* has just completed musical rehearsals with Jeffery and we anticipate the arrival of **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.** in Austin to begin our staging of the show May 21. During staging, the cast and director put the pieces of the puzzle together—music with movements, dialogue with expressions. Thus, the anticipation of performing the show in front of an audience grows stronger with each rehearsal. In just a few weeks, our hard work will be shared with the Austin community. The cast is looking forward to bringing you on a delightful journey through Ploverleigh this June!



Professor McGonagal sorts Hermione into Gryffindor

## "Magic and Muggles: *The Sorcerer Preview Muscale*"

photos courtesy Steve Schwartzman

see more at [gilbertsullivanaustin.smugmug.com](http://gilbertsullivanaustin.smugmug.com)



*Professor Ravencraft (Chris Walden) was Master of Ceremonies*



*Professors Flitwick (Brett Bachus) and Sprout (Janette Jones)*



*Hermione Granger (Alexandra Reilman, left) fights Lavender Brown (Natalya Shelburne) for Ron Weasley (Holton Johnson)*



*Lord Voldemort (Arthur DiBianca) frightens all*



*Harry's greatest fan, Colin Creevey (Daniel Kregel)*



*Neville Longbottom (Andy Fleming) is destined to become a Herbologist*



*Hagrid (David Fontenot) courts Madame Maxime (Lisa Alexander)*



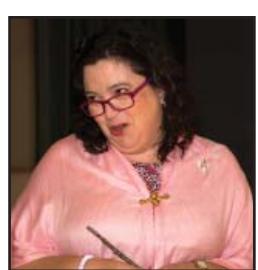
*death eater Bellatrix Lestrange (Brittany Trinité) has the dark mark tattooed on her arm*



*Arthur Weasley (Patrick Wright) and the elegant Gilderoy Lockhart (Jay Young)*



*Harry's nemesis at Hogwarts is Professor Snape (Evan Kelley)*



*evil Ministry witch Dolores Umbridge (Susan Meitz)*



*Harry Potter (Julius Young) is unaware of the adoration from Ginny Weasley (Patricia Combs)*



*retired Auror Mad-Eye Moody (Ian Stilwell)*



*Luna Lovegood (Sarah Steele) sports radish earrings; Nymphadora Tonks (Abigail Stokeley) today has purple hair*



*Fleur Delacour (Leann Fryer) and Bill Weasley (Danny Castillo) sign their marriage contract*



*identical twins (l-r) George and Fred Weasley (Glenn Russell and David Treadwell) have swapped shirts to add to the confusion*



*Hogwarts ghost Moaning Myrtle (Jamieson Taylor)*



*(l-r) Professors Trelawney (Rosa Mondragon Harris) and McGonagall (Maurine McLean) and Molly Weasley (Michelle Vanecek)*

## Communicating through *The Sorcerer*

by Ralph MacPhail, Jr.



The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin is in the business of entertaining audiences. This is perhaps a self-evident truth, along with another that says that entertainment may be but one of the goals of a theatrical production; others might include teaching, persuading, or even provoking an audience into action.

But rather than explore these various goals, it occurred to me that whatever is accomplished through theatrical performance can only happen through *communication*, and that virtually all of the decisions Jeffrey, Bill, and I and our friends and colleagues on the artistic staff have been and will be making in preparation for *The Sorcerer* relate to that “C word.”

Gilbert’s primary vehicle of communicating is of course the written word. Through his lyrics and dialogue, skillful actors, under reasonable direction, communicate much: emotions, thoughts and ideas, and relationships to name but several. In his libretto for *The Sorcerer*, diction (in terms of not only clarity but also effectiveness of the spoken word) tells us much about the characters, and allows us (for instance) to distinguish between the social levels of the lord of the manor Sir Marmaduke Pointdextre, the lowly Mrs. Partlet, and the tradesman-sorcerer John Wellington Wells. In Act II, Gilbert even writes a chorus lyric in dialect, a rarity in his libretti. Generational differences are amusingly sketched when Alexis and Aline’s rapturous greeting of one another is contrasted with their parents’ Victorian reserve.

In addition to dialogue and lyrics, Gilbert uses stage directions to communicate with those who would interpret his ideas. The fact is that there are remarkably *few* stage directions in the Savoy operas, which leaves many choices to those who would bring their stories to life. Some directors, myself included, like to recreate Gilbert’s world of over a century ago, but with a contemporary sensibility for pacing, stage pictures and movement, and technology. (The miracle is, of course, that Gilbert’s words need *not* be changed to communicate a highly entertaining show, and the operas can be presented as written and then sparkle and delight as they did over one hundred years ago. And I don’t deny that imaginative directors have successfully adapted these classic works in “many various ways,” such as gender-switched *Trials by Jury*, *Star Trek Pinafores*, all-male *Iolanthes*, and English-seaside-resort or contemporary-Japanese *Mikados*, often without changing words.)

The stage directions in *The Sorcerer* specify a “Country Dance” in Act II, which tells us something about the Villagers of Ploverleigh, their status, and their relationship to Sir Marmaduke who is hosting the wedding celebrations on his lawn for his son and soon-to-be daughter-in-law.

Gilbert’s stage directions also are valuable to scenic, lighting, and costume designers, all of whom are also in the communication business. We have production meetings in order that we all understand just *what it is* that we seek to communicate through the production. (One of the delights of working with this group is the cooperative nature of the entire production staff in realizing shared visions for the final shows.) Gilbert specifies that Sir Marmaduke lives in an *Elizabethan* Mansion, that “Twelve hours are supposed

to elapse between Acts I and II,” and that Act II takes place at Midnight; these specifications are valued guidance for setting and lighting designers.

The plot itself is a primary inspiration for costumers, for Gilbert is remarkably silent regarding costumes; however, costumers are also researchers, and with the given that the action takes place at the time of the first performance (1877) in rural England, the plot makes clear the social differences of the various characters—from rustic villagers to a middle-class London tradesman to the quartet of aristocrats. These relationships, especially when the principals become “mixed-up” because of the love philtre in Act II, are most clearly communicated by costume (and reinforced, of course, by what is said and done by those wearing them).

Music is also a great communicator, of course, and can sometimes communicate more quickly than words or what is seen. Sullivan more than “knew his stuff” and was always looking for opportunities in the operas for music to step to the forefront in communicating to audiences. The composer was more than adept at using music to characterize: compare the “two sides” of the Marmaduke/Sangazure duet, for instance; and note the differences between the sorcerer’s “spiel,” the romantic soli of Alexis and Aline, and the chorus at the end of Act I as the love philtre starts to take effect and the denizens of Ploverleigh are about to fall senseless.

I reflect on all of this as I sit in my study in Bridgewater, staging notebook “completed,” and anticipating returning to Austin to meet the cast, which will already “know the score” and are as anxious as I am to put the show on its feet. Putting it on its feet is good, but what we’ll all be striving to do is to put it in the heads and hearts of our audiences.

And we’ll all do it by communicating.

## CCMC’s “River City” Concert

The Capital City Men’s Chorus, under the direction of GSSA’s music director **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**, will perform its final concert of the season on Saturday evening, June 6, in Bates Recital hall in the Music Building on the UT Campus. Several current and former GSSA cast members will also perform, including **Glenn Russell**, **Evan Kelley**, **Scott Poppaw**, and **Daniel Brookshire**.

The concert pays tribute to “River City,” with music about the important waterways that connect, nurture, and inspire us. Austin’s own Roderick Sanford will be joining the CCMC for selections from the musical *Big River* and other favorites. Tickets are available at <http://ccmcaustin.org/get-tickets>



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

## An Open Letter from Reba Gillman's Daughter

Dear GSSA Community:

Deep and profound thanks to all of you for your affection, love, caring and support for my mother, Reba Gillman, over the years and most especially in her last few weeks.

Special thanks to Sue Caldwell and Libby Weed for your beautiful tributes in the April 2015 Newsletter. We have always admired Sue for having the vision and commitment to co-found GSSA in the first place and for helping to sustain it. I enjoyed reading Libby's description of her relationship with Reba: it perfectly mirrors Reba's description of their relationship. Together they made an awesome and formidable team!

Reba enjoyed all the wonderful friendships, all the music, all the creativity. In the past 10 years she told me more than once, "This is my life's blood," "This is what's keeping me alive." (Of course, she also told me that climbing stairs daily was keeping her alive.)

Please know she took a personal interest in all of your musical careers. She wanted each of you to succeed!

Fairly early in GSSA history—late 1970s or early 1980s—Len decided GSSA needed an orchestra, or at least some key instruments, for the

grand productions. Clarinetist Martha MacDonald was the original "orchestra" all by herself. For the 1982 production of *Trial by Jury* she also played triangle for "Hark, the hour of 10 is sounding." Look for her in today's GLOO.

Sometime after that, Reba realized that it's not enough to simply talk about an orchestra: financial backing is necessary also. So she started supporting the orchestra financially. The orchestra has been growing both in numbers and in richness over the years and today it sounds so very good!

Now here's a story about Reba: When she played Phyllis in the Lafayette Opera Guild's production of *Iolanthe*, the show was such a great success that several performances were added, including one in a small venue in another town. There was no time for the director to change anything. As the curtain opened, she expressed dismay that one of the standing microphones was in the wrong place. I (a mere child) slipped backstage and told Reba. As Reba skipped onto the stage playing flageolet and singing, she reached out her right arm, picked up the microphone and moved it the desired 3 feet without missing a beat!

Whatever it takes! The show must go on!

*Thank You, GSSA!*

*Miki Gillman*

### 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:

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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:

### Wand'ring Minstrels

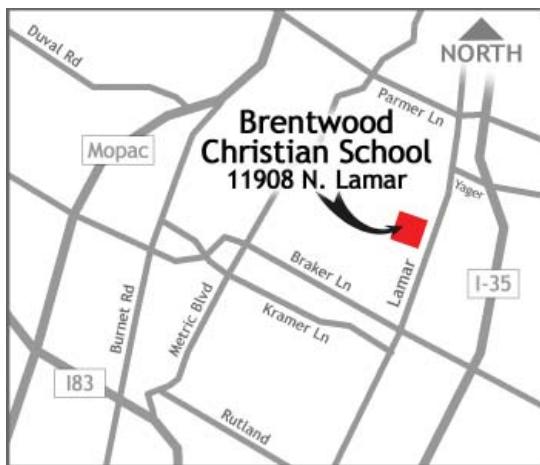
The Minstrels performed three shows at Lake Pointe Elementary School on Friday, May 15, and is preparing for their Austin Lions Club Concert on June 4. If you would like to have the Wand'ring Minstrels perform at your school, please see the web site, [www.gilbertsullivan.org](http://www.gilbertsullivan.org), for information.



*Wand'ring Minstrels  
Robert L. Schneider,  
Katie Schneider,  
Martha Mortensen Ahern,  
and Janette Jones  
performed at  
Lake Pointe Elementary*

### 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](mailto:news@gilbertsullivan.org). Thanks!



Our venue this year is again the Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School. *All seats reserved.*



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MAY-JUNE 2015

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 Our web site: [www.gilbertsullivan.org](http://www.gilbertsullivan.org)  
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The Society holds nonprofit status under 501(c)(3) of the IRS code.

Artistic Director  
Music Director

Ralph MacPhail, Jr.  
Jeffrey Jones-Ragona

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