

The GILBERT & SULLIVAN

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2015 NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed

Dear GSSA Members and Friends,

Just a few years ago, I wrote the following paragraph in my President's Message for this newsletter:



"At a recent meeting of the board of directors, **Reba Gillman** told the rest of us about a book entitled *A Most Ingenious Paradox* by **Gayden Wren**. Hearing her words as we closed our meeting, we all felt a surge of renewed purpose as she encouraged us to remember that we are promoting something well worth preserving and sharing with the world when we spread the good word about the works of William S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan to our community and when we produce our musicales and grand productions."

Soon after I learned about the book from Reba, who was a beloved and stalwart leader of GSSA until her passing last spring, I ordered a copy of the book she recommended and began reading it. In the course of my reading, my regard for Mr. Wren, who is the entertainment editor for The New York Times Syndicate as well as an authority on the works of Gilbert & Sullivan, deepened. I thoroughly enjoyed reading what he wrote about all fourteen operas, which he describes as "the world's most popular body of musical-theater works" and considers as ranking second only to Shakespeare in the history of English-language theater.

What great fortune it is for us that in February we will be presenting one of Mr. Wren's own plays, *Very Truly Yours, Gilbert & Sullivan*. In correspondence with us, the playwright said that he always hoped that his good friend, our artistic director, **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, would direct one of his plays. Now we have the delightful prospect of seeing a play whose author and director are two of the world's foremost authorities on the works of Gilbert & Sullivan—right here in our own city, presented by our own G&S Society!

Please do mark your calendar for that event on Sunday, February 21, at 3 p.m. There will be only one performance of this remarkable play, and seating is limited. Since this is a "suggested donation" event and no reservations can be made, you'll want to arrive in plenty of time.

In the meantime, a wonderful treat awaits us Sunday, November 8, when **Janette Jones** presents our second musicale of the season, *Lady Jane's G&S Salon Concert* (see following article). I hope to see you—and maybe hear you sing!—on that day.

Very truly yours,

LADY JANE'S
G&S Salon Concert

SPECIAL
FALL
MUSICALE

Sunday
Nov 8
3pm

While the Duke is abroad entertaining ambassadors and handling Parliamentary matters, the Duchess of Dunstable, Lady Jane, has decided to throw a Salon Concert in the very large parlor of Dunstable House (a.k.a. the Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood—see map on back page). You remember Lady Jane, don't you? She married The Duke of Dunstable at the end of the opera, *Patience*. She has invited several of her favorite musician friends to perform, and she also invites you to attend and sing as you wish from the G&S repertoire.

Ever since Lady Jane married the Duke and became the Duchess of Dunstable, her dull grey life has blossomed into a most beautiful garden of social gatherings and parties. She is "the hostess with the mostest," holding salons on a regular basis. She has even procured a "salon" of hats and sundries, ready for your perusal and purchase.

Please come listen to, or even volunteer to sing, some of Lady Jane's favorite Gilbert & Sullivan tunes. Perhaps you want to assay Mabel's "Poor wand'ring one" or Captain Corcoran's "Fair moon." Or perhaps you and a couple of friends would like to sing "Three little maids." Lady Jane's esteemed friend, the brilliant pianist Lady Jeanne Sasaki, will be present to accompany those who request it, so please bring along music for the piano. And if you admire the Duchess's taste in hats and want to help the local G&S society raise money -- this is your chance! Lady Jane has offered up several hats from her own wardrobe to be sold for that very purpose.

This performance is free. **Please bring a food or drink contribution for the reception and join us.** Feel free to wear a hat!

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Gilbert & Sullivan presents *A Topsy-Turvy Bard* by Rosa Mondragon Harris



On Sunday, September 13 at 3 pm, 142 people attended the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin's season opening musicale at the Iva Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School.

Our Mistress of Ceremonies and G&S President **Libby Weed** welcomed the afternoon's attendees back to the village of Ploverleigh. Three months have passed since the nuptials of our lovely Aline and Alexis the brave, and the villagers have gathered to celebrate with the happy couple. Alexis has planned a romantic celebration of poetry and theatre—a mini Shakespearean festival—and almost everyone in the village has joined in on the fun, from helping to build a replica of the Globe on the grounds of his family estate to sewing costumes. In fact, the villagers have also taken on the challenge of learning a few lines of Shakespeare that they are excited to recite at the celebration. We come upon them as they are entering their final dress rehearsal, and we are told that it appears that an extra person in the cast and extra monologue seem to have been added to the line-up. To try to sort out the problem, Alexis has called for tea to be brought out while everyone takes a short break. Instead of helping to determine who the extra cast member is, everyone who drinks the tea begins to believe they *are* their assigned Shakespearean character, and each bursts into song in the middle of their scenes!

The four servants in charge of serving tea to the guests are the first to succumb to the effects of this mystical brew. They begin the evening's affair by offering us excerpts from Shakespeare's Scottish Play. Lady Macbeth (**Jamieson Taylor**) steps out and tells us of her ambitions for power. She then sings "The sun, whose rays" from *The Mikado*. The Three Witches (**Susan Meitz, Maurine McLean, Michelle Vanecek**) appear and reminisce about their days in sorcery school, offering us "Three little maids" from *The Mikado*.

With a sinister mood being set by our first performers, the audience is pleased to see Lady Sangazure and Constance Partlett approach to deliver their monologues. And who is that with them? Could this be that Sorcerer? The next three performers approach to offer us excerpts from *Hamlet*. Our Lady Sangazure has awakened as Hamlet (**Brittany Trinité**) and she tells us of the importance of telling the story so that its lessons are not forgotten, singing "Sir Rupert Murgatroyd" from *Ruddigore*. Upon Hamlet's exit, we see the next performer appear on the stage and wonder if perhaps this is the uninvited performer. The Ghost of Hamlet's Father (**Robert L. Schneider**) sings "When the night wind" from *Ruddigore*. This must be the one who spiked the tea!

The villagers continue to enjoy the celebration as our Constance portrays Ophelia (**Patricia Combs**). Said to have inspired Gilbert and Sullivan's Mad Margaret from *Ruddigore*, Ophelia sings "Cheerily carols the lark." Next, the Vicar, Dr. Daly as Duke Orsino (**Julius Young**) recalls the days when love was lost to him. Yet even then, he felt attraction for Constance as much as Orsino felt for Olivia. He so longed for the days when he was loved by all the ladies, offering us "When I first put this uniform on" from *Patience*.

Ah, the complexities of love! Sometimes it just takes some effort on the gentleman's part and the proper hints from the lady. The Notary as Bassanio (**David Treadwell**) gets some helpful hints from Mrs. Partlett as Portia (**Janette Jones**). Characters whose lines "all that glitters is not gold" do find their way into the G&S canon, as

Bassanio and Portia sing "Things are seldom what they seem" from *H.M.S. Pinafore*. And once love is found, happiness abounds! One of Aline's dearest friends will also soon be married and sings "When a merry maiden marries" from *The Gondoliers* as she portrays Hero (**Rosa Mondragon Harris**), preparing for her wedding day.

While celebrating love is the day's theme, Alexis knows that, while men love their ladies, they also love their tales of bravery and battles for their beloved country. Perhaps that is why he has asked his father to give the famous St. Crispin's Day speech. After his rousing words, Alexis' father, portraying Henry V (**Sam Johnson**) sings "This helmet, I suppose" from *Princess Ida*. Our wedded couple follows by giving us a bit of Shakespeare's greatest love story. On the tails of their lines, Romeo and Juliet (**Andy Fleming** and **Alexandra Reilman**) break out into "O rapture, when alone together" from *The Gondoliers*.

As our lovely evening continues to unfold, wishes for many years of happiness are given to the happy couple. This brings us to the wedding celebration of the Duke of Athens, Theseus, and the Queen of the Amazons, Hippolyta. Much like our celebration, this one also had participation from all walks of life—a theatrical presentation by the mechanicals, magical intervention by fairies, and the blessings of friends, relations, and servants.

We first hear from one of the workmen, or mechanicals, as Shakespeare called them. Bottom (**Ian Stillwell**) is certainly confident of his abilities, and he reminds us of one of our favorite G&S characters who also exuded more confidence than perhaps was warranted. He concludes his recitation with "I shipped, d'ya see" from *Ruddigore*.

Our next duo causes havoc in the forest that recalls the havoc created in Ploverleigh just a few months ago. But the reason for the use of magic, at least in Shakespeare's tale, originates from the desire to rule the roast, which recalls a battle for control at a woman's college in another G&S show. Oberon (**Sarah Steele**) and Puck (**Abigail Stokley**) step forward to offer us "Now wouldn't you like" from *Princess Ida*.

As we wrap up our Shakespeare festival and three-month wedding anniversary celebration for our lovely couple, the cast gives a blessing to Aline and Alexis with everyone assembled, much as in the ending of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. All join in and sing "As before you we defile" from *The Grand Duke*.

The enchanting evening comes to an end and with Puck's final words from the ending of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the festival concludes. The magic begins to wear off, and all in Ploverleigh return to being friends and family of the happy couple, wishing them the best as they continue their new lives together.

Libby gave thanks to the singers, our wonderfully talented pianist **Jeanne Sasaki**, and Janette for producing yet another delightful musicale presentation for the G&S community. Keeping in tradition with the conclusion of G&S musicales, Sam sang the Pirate King's lead into "Hail, Poetry" from *The Pirates of Penzance*, with the cast and audience joining in, and then closing with "Now to the banquet we press" from *The Sorcerer*.

The audience and cast members adjourned to the lobby for refreshments and continued the afternoon's merriment. The day's charming program was the first creative collaboration of Janette and **June Julian**, who recently joined the G&S board. We look forward to Janette and June's future productions as we head forth into the new season!

A Topsy-Turvy Bard

photos courtesy Steve Schwartzman

see more at gilbertsullivan.austin.smugmug.com



"The sun, whose rays"



"Three little maids"



"I shipped, d'ya see"



"Sir Rupert Murgatroyd"



"When the night wind"



"Cheerily carols the lark"



"When a merry maiden marries"



"When I first put this uniform on"



"O rapture, when alone together"



"Now wouldn't you like"



"Things are seldom what they seem"



"This helmet, I suppose"



pianist Jeanne Sasaki



*President (and narrator)
Libby Weed*

List and Learn: A Sneak Peek into *The Gondoliers*

by Michelle Haché



As the guest director for GSSA's exciting 40th season, it is my pleasure to present a sneak peek into our summer grand production of *The Gondoliers; or, The King of Barataria*. The twelfth comic opera collaboration of fourteen between Gilbert and Sullivan, this delightful libretto has been described as having a "bubbling, champagne quality" by the critics of its time. Set in Venice, *The Gondoliers* possesses perhaps the most sparkling and tuneful music of any composed by Sullivan. And because he borrowed from France the stately gavotte, from Spain the cachucha, from Italy the saltarello and tarantella, and from Venice the barcarolle, this Savoy jewel provides the most intricate choreography of the canon.



Rutland Barrington as Giuseppe and Courtice Pounds as Marco from the original Savoy Theatre production of The Gondoliers, 1889

photo from the Gilbert & Sullivan Archive, math.boisestate.edu/gas/

Gilbert and Sullivan's last great success, *The Gondoliers* was preceded by the most serious of their collaborations, *The Yeomen of the Guard* (a personal favorite of mine). At the time, Sullivan wished to compose something grander and more serious, while Gilbert was more than happy pursuing whimsical tales laced with social satire. Alas, the partnership was not destined to last much longer because of these deep-rooted artistic differences. But despite this fact, *The Gondoliers* was an immense success, and ran for an impressive 554 performances (at that time the fifth longest-running piece of musical theatre in history) after premiering at the Savoy Theatre on December 7, 1889. Earning more money than any other Savoy opera in its original run, *The Gondoliers* placed fourth longest of the series (after *The Mikado*, *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *Patience*). Queen Victoria was so entranced by the show's infectious melodies that she requested a command performance for the royal family at Windsor Castle on March 6, 1891. This was quite an honor, because not only was this the first performance of a Gilbert and Sullivan opera ever requested by the English monarchy, but it was also the first theatrical entertainment to take place at Windsor since the tragic death of Prince Albert thirty years earlier.

The Gondoliers brings us to the heart of Gilbert and Sullivan in their peak form; the writer bubbling with nonsensical ideas and the composer producing some of his most charming, touching,

intoxicating music. Complete with a chorus of fawning contadine, dashing gondolieri and fast-paced, tuneful dances, our tale begins with the young Lady Casilda, who suddenly learns that she is the true bride to the heir to the throne of the fictional kingdom of Barataria. But as it turns out, the heir cannot be identified, since he was apparently stolen by a scheming Grand Inquisitor who entrusted him to the care of a drunken Venetian gondolier... who promptly dies after mixing up the identities of the prince with his own son. A mistake anyone could make, no? Adding to this madcap adventure, our gondoliers, Marco and Giuseppe (now all grown up), have decided that they aren't particularly picky when it comes to choosing a life mate. Leaving it up to fate, the boys select their brides by blindfolding themselves and getting hitched to the first girl they bump into. Lucky ladies Gianetta and Tessa immediately marry the carefree gondoliers in an all-too-romantic quickie double ceremony, only to learn on their wedding day that one of their boys is in fact the King of Barataria. But which man is the King (and unintentional bigamist) and which is the son of the drunken gondolier? Who is the true love of the poor young bride, Lady Casilda? And by the way, who is The Grand Inquisitor, and why would he give a royal baby to a drunk? These mysteries and so many more will all be revealed in our fresh new production of *The Gondoliers* this summer!

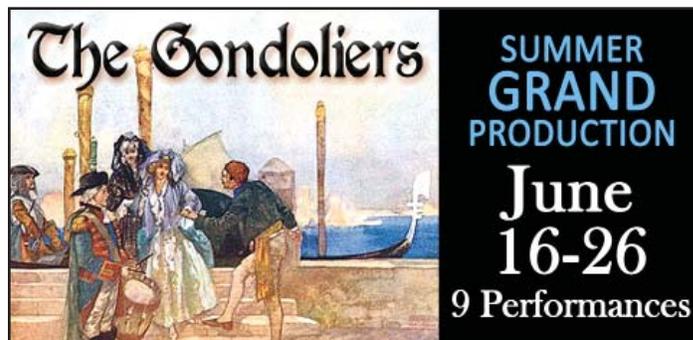
Rowena Ronald as Casilda and John Dean as Luis from the D'Oyly Carte Tour 1932

photo from the Gilbert & Sullivan Archive, math.boisestate.edu/gas/



Auditions will be held February 27-28, 2016. An honorarium will be paid to all performers. If you wish to receive timely audition information in early 2016, please confirm that we have your contact information by visiting our website and joining our mailing list: www.gilbertsullivan.org/SummerProduction.htm

We truly look forward to seeing you all next June!



NEWS of our MEMBERS

Jeffrey Jones-Ragona, GSSA's Music Director, will lead the Capital City Men's Chorus in a concert of holiday music on December 5 and 6. The concert will feature a number of familiar and well loved seasonal songs, and some rarer offerings by composers from the British Isles. The concert is accompanied by an outstanding string orchestra made up of many players from the Gillman Light Opera Orchestra, headed up by GLOO's concert master, **Laurel Lawshae**. Visit www.ccmcaustin.org for tickets and more information.

Austin Opera's *Aida* opens November 7 at the Long Center. The cast includes a number of GSSA performers: **Carol Brown, Patricia Combs, Megan Sherrod LaFour, Rosa Mondragon Harris, Jamie Taylor, Danny Castillo, Paul Halstead, Holton Johnson, Jake Jacobson, Patrick Wright, and Jay Young.**

The Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee Theatre Research Institute of the Ohio State University recently announced the acquisition of The **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, Gilbert & Sullivan Collection. Material now on deposit includes The Mikado's costume from the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, manuscript orchestral material from the Western Music Library and Tracy Music Library, hundreds of

programs, posters, and musical scores with more (from sheet music to toys, autograph material to recordings) to be sent to Columbus from Bridgewater in the coming years. "It is very gratifying to know that my collection will have a permanent home, and that it will be made available to students, faculty and researchers in the future," Rafe noted. "I am also pleased that my Austin promptbooks and production files will eventually have a permanent home in this important archive."

Notice of Elections

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin will elect members of the board for the coming year at the Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 10, 3 pm, in the Fellowship Hall of Genesis Presbyterian Church, 1507 Wilshire Blvd. The nominating committee includes **Andy Heilveil**, Chair; **Allan Longacre**; and **Sue Caldwell**.

Please contact Andy at Austin.GilbertandSullivan@gmail.com if you wish to volunteer to serve on the board or to nominate someone else. Definitely mark the date for this important gathering on your calendar, when we will hear a brief report on the year's activities, will elect the board, and will enjoy a rollicking *Pirates of Penzance* revue. It will be a wonderful way to brighten a January afternoon.

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)
- Family/Group** (\$30-\$49)
- Patron** (\$50-\$99)
- Grand Duke or Duchess** (\$100-\$249)
- Major General** (\$250-\$499)
- Pooh-Bah** (\$500-\$999)
- Pirate King** (\$1000-\$2499)
- Savoyard** (\$2500 & up)

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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:

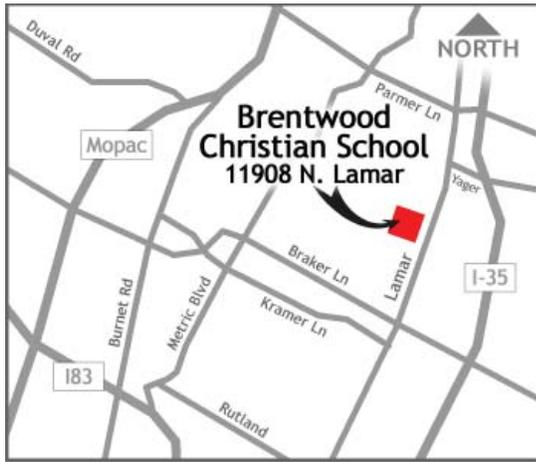
Wand'ring Minstrels

The GSSA's Wand'ring Minstrels are busy rehearsing for their upcoming concerts. They will be entertaining the Bright Horizons Group at Emmaus Catholic Parish on October 19, then have a double performance at Forest Trail Elementary School on October 22.

If you would like to have the Wand'ring Minstrels perform at your school, retirement center, civic club, business meeting, or private party, please see the web site, www.gilbertsullivan.org, for information, or contact Robert Schneider at minstrels@gilbertsullivan.org.

The Sorcerer Receives B. Iden Payne Award Nomination for Jeffrey Jones-Ragona

The B. Iden Payne Awards Council has announced nominations for the 2014-2015 Season Awards. Our 2015 summer grand production of *The Sorcerer* received a nomination: **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** for Outstanding Music Direction (third year in a row for him!). Our set designer, **Ann Marie Gordon**, received a nomination for her work on the Vortex production of *When the Rain Stops Falling*. Winners of the awards will be announced on Monday, October 26, at The Long Center's Rollins Studio Theatre.



Our fall musicale, *Lady Jane's G&S Salon Concert*, will be presented at the Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School on November 8 at 3 pm.

Coming Events

- Nov. 8 *Lady Jane's G&S Salon Concert Musicale* (see page 1)
- Jan. 10 Annual Meeting and *Pirates of Penzance* Revue
- Feb. 21 Mid-season production: *Very Truly Yours, Gilbert & Sullivan*
- Feb. 27-28 *The Gondoliers* Auditions
- May 15 *The Gondoliers* Preview Musicale
- June 16-26 *The Gondoliers* summer production

Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive around Christmas; the deadline for submissions is December 2. Please send your news to news@gilbertsullivan.org. Thanks!



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NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2015

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

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Visit Austin at NowPlayingAustin.com



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

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