

A Note to Auditionees for *The Pirates of Penzance:*

If you are auditioning for any principal roles,
after singing your audition selection
you will be asked to read from the dialogue vocal score
with the Artistic Director.

You may pick the character you wish to read,
and the scene you wish to read.

See the following page for suggestions.

(If you do not pick a scene, one will be assigned to you inside.)

See the following pages for notes on the show, character descriptions,
and suggested scenes for reading.

See the last page for a “flow chart,” which
breaks down the show, showing each
character’s scenes and giving an indication
as to the number of speeches spoken and pages sung.

**Please leave *this* document and vocal scores
outside the auditions room for others to see.**

If you are asked to read,
you may use another copy of the score
inside the auditions room.

TIPS FOR AUDITIONEES:

1. **Project your voice** as if you were on the largest of stages
(even though you will be close to the Artistic and Music Directors).
2. **Use stage diction, or an “English” accent** (as you understand it),
or at least standard American English, with clear (“crispy”) enunciation/articulation.
3. **Feel free to move** (though your reading partner will remain seated downstage of you).
4. **Project your personality**—or the personality of the character as you understand it.
(We realize that you may *not* be well acquainted with the character today.)
5. **Relax and have fun!** We will see you at your best if you do so.
We want to enjoy the auditions, and we want *you* to enjoy your audition, too.



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Audition Notes on *The Pirates of Penzance*

The Pirates of Penzance (1879) is one of the early Gilbert & Sullivan operas and one of their most consistently popular works; it was composed following the international success of *H.M.S. Pinafore* in 1878.

Set on the coast of Cornwall and at the ruins of a nearby chapel, it's a hilarious tale of tender-hearted pirates, timorous policemen, and a bevy of beautiful Victorian maidens and their father, "the very model of a modern Major-General."

"Tender-hearted" pirates and "timorous" policemen suggests Gilbert's sense of topsy-turvydom, and this notably Gilbertian point-of-view is carried further into his main theme, which is suggested by the subtitle for the piece, "The Slave of Duty." Only in Gilbert would we meet a conscientious pirate apprentice (*pirates* taking *apprentices*?) who puts duty above all, even if it means he must exterminate his tutors once released from his indentures on his twenty-first birthday.

My purpose below is to provide information for performers planning to audition concerning the characters in *The Pirates of Penzance*.

The Pirates of Penzance is filled with roles that are fun to play and sing, and several of them have serious sides—and challenges—too; much of the delight of the work is in its frequent send-ups of "grand" operatics. In addition, the lower voices in the male chorus have the additional fun of being Pirates in Act I and Policemen in Act II.

THE CHORUS is composed of the men collectively known as **The Pirates of Penzance** (14 gentlemen, of various ages, dressed as their calling suggests). At the end we learn are of noble birth, which may explain why they prefer sherry to rum in the opening chorus and have such tender hearts toward orphans; in Act II, those with lower voices don British policeman's uniforms to become rather reluctant "**Bobbies**" whose lot is not a happy one—especially at the end, when they become the only males onstage (except for the Major-General) to end up without a lady. The ladies of the chorus are **The Daughters of Major-General Stanley** (14 females, idealized Victorian maidens in lovely hooped skirts, augmented with shawls in Act II and changing into dressing-gowns at the end). They know how to enjoy themselves on an outing, are sympathetic to Mabel and her new love, are loyal to their father—and end up happily ever after, for they're about to be "parsonified," a Gilbertian term for "conjugally matrimonified"!

THE PRINCIPALS: Here are brief character sketches, with a nod of gratitude to the writings of William Cox-Ife, W. S. Gilbert, and Peter Kline*:

Major-General Stanley) (Light Baritone): Traditionally a short, wiry military man, with a military like-precision in a number of challenging “patter” lyrics, including one of G’n’S’s signature songs. He has a chance for more lyricism in “Sighing softly to the river” at the end of Act II (and to perform some mock-ballet steps). He can tell a “terrible story” to save his life (and his daughters from a fate *worse* than death), but experience remorse. Like Sir Joseph Porter in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, the Major-General is a character who seems for many to personify Gilbert & Sullivan Opera. He is “somewhat a phenomenon as a family man, with his large brood of daughters, all more or less of the same age.”¹

The Pirate King (Heavy Baritone): This larger-than-life buccaneer seems to have stepped directly from a Victorian “penny-plain/tuppenny-colored” toy theatre. A bloodthirsty pirate and an orphan, he is a tough character to deal with, until he comes face-to-face with another orphan, and his contrast with Major-General Stanley couldn’t be stronger. As with a number of Gilbert’s “villains,” he’s topsy-turvily likeable, one reason being, perhaps, that he is of noble birth, something we don’t learn until the end.

Samuel, his Lieutenant (Baritone) is the Pirate King’s right-hand man whose success onstage is dependent on creating a memorable personality, one infused with good-will. He occasionally leads the chorus with solos, has some early dialogue, gets to distribute burglarious tools while singing about it in Act II, and often has his own vocal line in ensembles.

Frederic, the Pirate Apprentice (Tenor): One of the most challenging and gratifying tenor roles in G’n’S, Frederic is on stage a huge percentage of the time with many singing and acting opportunities ranging from mock-operatic to tender-romantic. He is “the slave of duty” of the subtitle of the piece, and is buffeted between loyalty to the pirates and his abhorrence to their calling. Reared by the middle-aged Ruth among the pirates, he feels an affectionate loyalty toward her until he encounters “a bevy of beautiful maidens,” and suddenly learns the truth of the expression that “a lad of twenty-one usually looks for a wife of seventeen.”²

Sergeant of Police (Bass): As Peter Kline notes, “Although he is onstage for only seventeen minutes, the Sergeant is truly unforgettable.”³ He is the center of two highlights in the second act: the memorable “When the foeman bares his steel” (with encores!) and his famous big solo lamenting that “a policeman’s lot is not a happy one.” Perhaps his appeal is universal, for he understands that “work that must be done” and acknowledges that loyalty to the hierarchy transcends workplace malaise. He puts on a brave front: “Though in body and in mind, we are timidly inclined. . . . Yet when the danger’s near, we manage to appear as insensible to fear as anybody here.”²

Mabel, General Stanley’s Daughter (Coloratura Soprano): Again from Peter Kline: “Mabel has little chance to establish her character in the spoken dialogue, and consequently must do most of it in the singing. Here she has an

excellent opportunity, provided she has a voice that combines coloratura agility with dramatic bravado."³ Her signature aria is, of course, "Poor wandering one," but there are also opportunities for romantic duets with Frederic (to whom she is attracted at least as much as he is to her) and various other mock-operatic solos.

Edith, *General Stanley's Daughter* (Soprano): "Down-to-earth and somewhat hedonistic,"³ Edith has important solos in the opening number for the girls and in "When the foeman bares his steel." As for her "hedonism," she suggests that she and her sisters "Make the most of fleeting leisure" and then offers the shocking suggestion that they all "take off [their] shoes and stockings and paddle!"² (This is before the men show up, of *course*.)

Kate, *General Stanley's Daughter* (Mezzo-Soprano): "Kate is more the romantic. She admires the countryside and idealizes it. She has only one short solo"³ (it's in the girls' opening chorus). If the solos are short, she has dominant positions in the traditional staging and frequently has her own vocal line in ensembles.

Isabel, *General Stanley's Daughter*: Isabel has no solo singing and two lines of dialogue. The traditional staging gives her more prominence than the solo opportunities of the part suggest, so she must be a good actress. Her lines suggest that she is empathetic and has a good imagination.

Ruth, *a Piratical Maid of all Work* (Contralto): Ruth is 47 years of age, ancient compared to the other women in the cast. She loves her "pirate apprentice," but realizes as soon Frederic catches sight of the Major-General's daughters, that all is "Lost! lost! lost!"² Her Act I duet with Frederic has real tragic proportions, and her appeal to him at the end of the act is unacknowledged. By Act II, she has reestablished her status with the pirates, proves to be "a good sport," and even helps the pirates in their attempt to bring Frederic back to the band and subsequently attack the castle. And while there is no place in the libretto or score to indicate it, she ends up with a husband after all! (He is *not* the Major-General!)

I've said perhaps too often in these pages that there's only one G'n'S activity more fun than seeing one of their operas—and that's actually *working* on one.

Do plan to be a part of the fun.



*Bibliography

¹William Cox-Ife, *How to Sing Both Gilbert and Sullivan* (London: Chappell & Co. Ltd., 1961).

²W. S. Gilbert, *The Savoy Operas: I* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962).

³Peter Kline, *Gilbert & Sullivan Production* (The Theatre Student Series) (New York: Richards Rosen Press, Inc., 1972).

Important Information for Auditionees regarding music
rehearsals
and the staging rehearsal schedule.

THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE Music and Staging Rehearsals

by Artistic Director Ralph MacPhail, Jr.

Music Rehearsals are set (they will begin on March 28th) and shown in a schedule which you may take with you—make sure these dates are clear in your calendar. Singers are only excused from a musical rehearsal with prior approval of the Music Director.

Staging rehearsals will begin on May 17th and continue as run-throughs and dress rehearsals until the opening on June 15th. Artistic Director Ralph MacPhail, Jr., divides each show into rehearsal segments so the full cast is not called to every rehearsal and that each individual's time-investment is well spent. "Rafe" also tries to keep the rehearsals productive and fun for all, and end on time, realizing that all participants have other responsibilities in their lives outside the theatre.

Staging rehearsals will be held in three hour blocks, Monday-Friday 7-10 PM; Saturdays mornings and afternoons, and Sundays afternoons and evenings. All will be held (*new this year*) at Crestview United Methodist Church at 1300 Morrow Street, Austin.

Auditionees are asked to list conflicts with the above dates and times on their audition forms; these conflicts will be taken into consideration at auditions, and will be used for structuring the staging rehearsal schedule, which will be distributed ASAP after auditions.

Once a role is accepted, the Society expects that each individual will consider the show to be of primary importance and not accept other obligations that will interfere with the above rehearsal times. Once the rehearsal schedule is posted and distributed, cast members will know the dates and times they will definitely be called (and the ones for which they are not), and will not accept obligations interfering with their calls.

