

The GILBERT & SULLIVAN

SEPTEMBER 2012 NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed



Behind the scenes ... This little phrase often piques our interest. While absorbed in watching the Olympics this summer, many of us found it fascinating to see glimpses of personal stories, hardships and setbacks, and unusual facts about the athletes competing in the games. Taking a look “behind the scenes” provides human interest and makes a public event even more compelling.

In June, our Gilbert & Sullivan Society presented *Patience*, to the delight and appreciation of thousands of theater-goers. Each of the nine performances was splendid, entertaining from beginning to end. To a typical audience member, the performances probably appeared seamless and perfect, because our cast and crew and directors had planned and rehearsed to create nothing short of exemplary entertainment. I know that I enjoyed every minute of every show I watched!

But if you attended the evening performance on Thursday, June 14, you know that something happened “behind the scenes” that made the show start later than the scheduled time. Audience members were remarkably patient as they waited in the lobby of the theater, visiting with one another and enjoying refreshments and hearing announcements from a tabletop from time to time to this effect: “We are sorry that, due to some technical difficulties, we will have to delay the opening of the theater for a short time.” Maybe they were patient because the lobby was cool, pleasant, and beautiful. Maybe it was because G&S devotees are such genteel people. Maybe it was because they were waiting to see a show named *Patience!*

Behind the scenes, our Stage Manager, **Monica Kurtz**, had made a staggering discovery during her routine checks backstage and in the technical areas. Since the performance on Sunday, June 10, all of the artistically designed and carefully prepared lighting cues had disappeared. As a result of a hardware failure (reason still unknown), the drive on which all the cues had been meticulously entered was not working.

Through the feverish and heroic efforts of Monica, lighting designer **Jennifer Rogers**, master electrician **Eric Johnson**, Brentwood Christian theater manager **Travis Pollard**, and Brentwood student assistant **Steven Bailey**, the cues were manually restored and the theater was opened. The show was as lovely as ever.

Little did the audience know, as they enjoyed conversation and cool drinks, what heroism was taking place in the lighting booth just on the other side of the lobby wall. Thank you, Monica, Jennifer, Eric, Travis, and Steven—unsung heroes!

The next big event ... is our September musicale, “Soprano Songfest.” Don’t miss it—some of the loveliest ladies you ever saw and heard, accompanied by a few admiring men, will sing our socks off. See you there!

Libby Weed

Season Opening Musicale

Soprano Songfest



Sunday • September 9 • 3pm
St. Matthew's Episcopal Church

Join us for an afternoon of musical delight, as producer **Janette Jones** presents some of the loveliest of Gilbert & Sullivan selections sung by a bevy of marvelous sopranos. Performers include **Carol Brown**, **Tamsen Cohagan**, **June Julian**, and **Patricia Combs**—with a select group of male singers providing a musical introduction and a few other musical interludes. You will hear music from many G&S classics including *The Mikado*, *Iolanthe*, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *The Yeomen of the Guard*, *Princess Ida*, and *The Pirates of Penzance*. Don’t miss your first opportunity of our 2012-13 season to hear and enjoy the delights of Gilbert & Sullivan. The performance will be held at St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church, 8134 Mesa Blvd. in northwest Austin. (See map on page 6.)

As always, this musicale is free. Please bring food and drink to share after the performance.

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August 18, 2012

To All in the Production Company of *Patience*,

I've been putting off the writing of this letter until the newsletter deadline pulled me back to the keyboard. Almost exactly two months have passed since the show closed, and it's a pleasure for me to reflect on our theatrical project, for I'm filled with happy memories of beautiful, colorful, tuneful, and seemingly effortless performances in our wonderful new venue at Brentwood Christian School.

As I've stated before in this space, *Patience* has been one of my favorite Savoy operas for about four decades. What captured my heart was a church-basement production in New Jersey Alice read about while I was in basic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey. She secured tickets, and we went while I was on leave one Saturday night from the rigors of learning to fire a rifle, do the low crawl, run-dodge-and-jump, and march through the New Jersey sands. I suppose it's not surprising that this respite from "the green machine" was a memorable one!

But our production showed Austin, I think, why I rank the show so highly: Gilbert was at his comic best, Sullivan was at his musical best, and both men, secure in the knowledge that their partnership was successful, were able to focus less on "operatic parody" and develop a plot quite independent of that, and based (ironically enough) on a popular fad. I've also noted in this space (and elsewhere) that their individual brilliance led to a work that transcends that moment of "aesthetic madness" in English history.

So to all rapturous maidens, dragoon guards, sham poets, and also that naïve dairy-maid, I offer congratulations and thanks for showing Austin what a wonderful romp these old works can still be. And I'm sure each of *you* will join me in my thanks to our musical colleague Jeffrey Jones-Ragona, to our production manager Bill Hatcher, to Monica Kurtz and her backstage colleagues, to Ann Marie and Jennifer and Matt and Pam and their assistants. There is no space to mention the many Society members who made our lobby so attractive and welcoming, but they were part of the beauty of *Patience*, too.

And of course, deepest gratitude to President Libby Weed and her amazing Board; they supported the endeavor in every way possible (and some im-). A person in my position in an organization such as ours is truly blessed when having the support of such a hard-working and devoted board of directors.

Finally, I thank Russell and Kay Gregory for putting us up and putting *up with* my and Alice's need for shelter, electricity, wi-fi, and cosy haven amid the swirl of city life and theatrical production; to Chris Buggé for providing a wonderful vehicle to us during our stay; and to too many to name for their expressions of friendship, generosity, and hospitality, reminding me daily of how grateful and fortunate I am to be a part of the GSSA team.

I hope that your memories of *Patience* and your feelings of satisfaction are as strong as mine.

Now onward "towards the empyrean heights" of Castle Adamant, where a certain Princess Ida has established a university for women. It's going to be quite a climb, but at the end we'll all know that "it were profanity for poor humanity to treat as vanity the sway of Love"!

NEWS of our MEMBERS

Our Concertmaster, **Laurel Lawshae**, was invited to perform in the festival orchestra for the 54th Annual St. Endellion Summer Festival of Music in North Cornwall, England, July 31 to August 10. See more about the festival at www.endellionfestivals.org.uk.

A number of members of the *Patience* cast were involved in the Spotlight on Opera's summer production of *Little Women*. Dragoon Guard **Joshua Miller** directed, and **Daytha Hulion** and **Jasmine Haghghatian** starred as Beth and Amy, respectively.

Michelle Haché (Elsie in our recent production of *The Yeomen of the Guard*) starred as Maria in this summer's Zilker Theatre production of *The Sound of Music*.

Patience Afterthoughts by Reba Gillman

Everyone agrees that our production this year of *Patience* was outstanding and attained a new level of professionalism. But everyone also agrees that it was still a lot of fun to be in the show. It is typical of the Gilbert and Sullivan works which have been performed for so many years by so many enthusiastic G&S organizations, that the cast always has a wonderful time, and learns to love G&S if they didn't already. Our own G&S Society wouldn't exist if some enthusiastic performers hadn't organized it to begin with. Professional performances? Not at all. People sewed their own costumes, the scenery fell over if looked at askance, publicity was non-existent. But people came to the show because they loved G&S, and people pranced around on the stage because they loved to prance and were becoming more and more delighted with Gilbert and Sullivan.

Year by year we learned and put on better shows, and always it was fun. In 1998 by great good fortune we secured **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, and **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** to direct the staging and music, and our shows began to become more and more well prepared, and well presented. And Rafe and Jeffrey made sure that it was still fun, no matter how hard they all had to work. This year a bit part in *Patience* was played with professional excellence by a very well known performer, who has been seen as the Mikado, the Pirate King, and Sergeant Meryll (of the Yeomen of the Guard), adding a level of perfection to our production. **Russell Gregory** played Bunthorne's solicitor, who appeared briefly in the finale to Act One, and loved every second of his moment onstage. Thank you, Russell. The audience loved every second you were on stage!

**Armstrong
Moving & Storage**

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

G&S Austin 2012-2013 Season

We have another great year planned! Many wonderful musical events await us. Here are the details we have so far:

September Season-Opening Musicale – Sunday, September 9, 3 pm, St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, 8134 Mesa Blvd. Our Soprano Songfest will be a blast. Expect some fun interplay between our sopranos—representing several G&S shows—and some fellows just standin' on the corner watching them go by. **Please bring munchies** to share – and plan to stay and visit for a while.

Anna Russell's "How to Write Your Own Gilbert & Sullivan Opera" (November TBD) – Janette Jones and several of our leading singers will have you laughing with this delightful send-up. Watch the next newsletter and our website for more details.

Annual Business Meeting and Sing-Along (early January, Genesis Presbyterian Fellowship Hall) – Our membership will meet to elect a slate of officers for 2013. G&S board member, UT voice professor, and long-time choral director Leonard Johnson will lead us in some sing-along choruses from the G&S canon. This is always one of the most enjoyable of our gatherings.

Sir Arthur Sullivan: The California Connection (Sunday, March 10) – We have an amazing entertainment in store for us in March, when Mr. Scott Hayes and his wife Kitty visit us from California. Mr. Hayes, great-great-nephew of Sir Arthur Sullivan, will deliver a presentation he has made to the New York, San Francisco, and Buxton, England, societies, providing fascinating information about a relatively unknown portion of Sullivan's life. There will also be music, of course!

May Princess Ida Preview (Sunday, early May) – Members of the cast of next summer's grand production will regale us with a few short scenes and several arias and ensembles from the summer's funny, tuneful, and beautiful production.

June Grand Production (June 13-23), as mentioned, will be *Princess Ida*. This is our society's first fully staged version of this wonderful show, and we believe it is the Austin premiere. You will be hearing much more about it in the issues to come, as Artistic Director Ralph MacPhail, Jr., fills us in on lots of tantalizing details.

Winners of *Patience* DVDs

These ten lucky people completed a survey at the theater after viewing a production of *Patience* in June, and their names were drawn to receive a DVD of the production. We extend our hearty congratulations to these fortunate audience members:

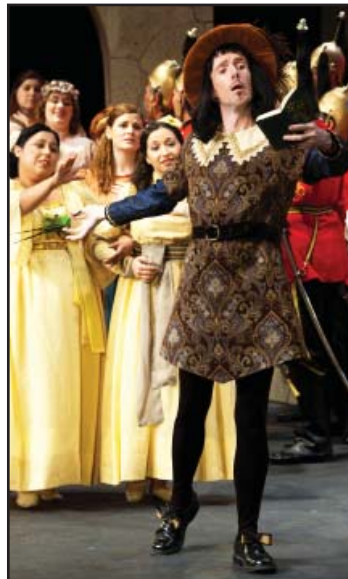
Wil Bamberg	Sandy Patterson
Marvin & Dianne Beck	Joan Pearsall
Rich Cohen	Lynda Rogers
Lauren Manske	Mark Rogers
A. P. D. Mourelatos	Isabella Slaughter

Wand'ring Minstrels

The Wand'ring Minstrels of the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin are ready to perform for your enjoyment! They will make your concerts, school events or private parties entertaining and fun. Guaranteed to get the audience laughing and singing along to favorite Gilbert and Sullivan and Broadway musical numbers.

Contact **Robert L. Schneider** (bigdaddymusic1@gmail.com), or see our website (www.gilbertsullivan.org) for further details.

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin presented *Patience* in June 2012
photos courtesy Cecily Johnson see more at gilbertsullivan.austin.smugmug.com



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:



Summer 2013 Grand Production: *Princess Ida*

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin is excited to announce that our Summer 2013 Grand Production will be *Princess Ida, or Castle Adamant*. We are performing a fully staged production of this classic, which was Arthur Sullivan & W. S. Gilbert's eighth comic opera of fourteen, for the first time in our history. Sullivan's score is majestic, and a sequence of songs in Act II is so renowned for its beauty that it is sometimes called "the string of pearls." Some consider Gilbert's libretto one of his funniest.

Nine performances will be produced at the Brentwood Christian School Performing Arts Center, June 13-23, 2013. Artistic Director **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, and Music Director **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** return, along with Production Manager **Bill Hatcher**. Auditions will be held March 2-3, 2013.

This melodic and hilarious comic opera features proto-feminist Princess Ida, the daughter of King Gama. The princess founds a women's university from which all men are barred, and she and her faculty teach that women are superior to men and should rule in their stead. Romantic Prince Hilarion, to whom Ida had been engaged in infancy, sneaks into the university along with two friends with the aim of claiming Hilarion's bride. They disguise themselves as women students but are soon discovered, their male invasion instigating a hilarious war between the sexes.

Princess Ida satirizes feminism, women's education, masculine pugnacity and militarism, grand opera, G. F. Handel, and Darwinian evolution, some of which were controversial topics in conservative Victorian England. It is based on a narrative poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson called "The Princess" (1847). Gilbert had written a farcical musical play based on the poem in 1870. In 1884, he lifted much of the dialogue of *Princess Ida* directly from his 1870 farce.

This is the only three-act Gilbert & Sullivan opera, as well as the only one with dialogue in blank verse. *Princess Ida* opened at the Savoy Theatre on January 5, 1884, for a run of 246 performances, and since that time it has never been out of the standard repertory of Gilbert & Sullivan (or Savoy) operas throughout the English-speaking world.

A Brief Review of a Short Book by Ralph MacPhail, Jr.

My friend Marc Shepherd has written a right little, tight little book: *Gilbert & Sullivan in an Hour*. Its "tight little" 92 pages include extensive quotations, bibliography, and index, but the "right little" initial 44 pages tell, with skillful and accurate condensation, the story of the Gilbert & Sullivan partnership. I write "right little" because the author has told the familiar story with the fewest possible words, and has also avoided the legends and misconceptions of the partnership that have been repeated for decades from chronicle to chronicle (no, a falling sword did *not* inspire *The Mikado*; no, Gilbert and Sullivan did *not* hate each other).

Marc has a reputation in circles of students of Savoy opera as an excellent scholar/researcher/writer and a demanding reviewer of others' books. His meticulous nature is evident here. Clearly, his format was dictated by his publisher's "boiler plate" for its "in an hour" series; for instance, as something of a prologue there is an interesting three-page listing of "Colleagues and Contemporaries of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan" containing eight entries each under Arts, Politics/Military, Religion/Philosophy, and other areas of human endeavor to help the reader "understand the intellectual, cultural, and historical times" in which Gilbert and Sullivan wrote. There is also an Introduction by theatre critic Robert Brustein.

As the title suggests, this little paperback is designed to be read in about an hour. So read it—and then let Marc's right little, tight little bibliography guide you to other books to expand on what you've learned.

Gilbert & Sullivan in an Hour is a part of Smith and Kraus's "Playwrights in an Hour" series, and is available through Amazon.com for \$9.99 + shipping.



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

SEPTEMBER 2012

Season Opening Musicale

*Soprano
 Songfest*



Sunday • September 9 • 3pm
St. Matthew's Episcopal Church



See details on page 1!

Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive in early November; the deadline for submissions is October 11. Please send your news to news@gilbertsullivan.org. Thanks!

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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 E-mail: info@gilbertsullivan.org

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

Artistic Director **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**
 Music Director **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**

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