

# The GILBERT & SULLIVAN

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

SEPTEMBER 2015 NEWSLETTER

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed



Welcome to the 2015-16 season, a ten-month interval of grand entertainment and enrichment by The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin! Have you noticed how our activities throughout the year—in addition to the grand summer production—have become richer and more captivating over the years?

Our musicales have been a feature of the Austin scene for a long time. The late **Winston Bode**, a beloved Austin cultural observer, described them as “delightful vestiges of culture and civilization” in our fast-paced and often lusterless modern world. For years our musicales were held in private homes, such as those of **Paula Tyler** or **Nancy Jay** or the late **Pearl Amster**. We might have thirty or so appreciative folks enjoying good music and fellowship.

But today our musicales are held in larger venues, because our numbers have grown considerably. We usually have around 150 people, and so a place like the beautiful Worley-Barton Theater where we hold our summer productions fits us better.

A big reason for the growing crowds is the remarkably creative direction of **Janette Jones**, who assembles a cast of excellent singers and designs a program of wonderful Gilbert & Sullivan music, often around another imaginative conceit. Last year we enjoyed “Downton Abbey” and “Harry Potter” musicales. Our first one this year, “A Topsy-Turvy Bard,” involves the villagers from our recent production of *The Sorcerer* falling under a Shakespearean spell. (See next article.)

*So welcome to our enhanced season!* Please join us Sunday afternoon, September 13, for a delectable musical feast. And please bring some snack-type food or drink to share at the reception after the show. We all have a wonderful time munching, visiting with the singers, and making new friends.

These more elaborate musicales are more expensive to produce, but we believe they are a meaningful gift to the Austin community. We

greatly appreciate donations to defray our costs, but we still offer them without a ticket charge to the public. Everyone is welcome!

Gilbert & Sullivan presents  
SEASON  
OPENING  
MUSICAL  
Sunday  
Sept 13  
3pm  
A Topsy-Turvy Bard

**Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School  
11908 North Lamar (see map on back page)**

Join us for our first musicale of the 2015-16 GSSA season, as we present an entrancing afternoon of poetic verse and music, intertwining the worlds of Gilbert & Sullivan and Shakespeare. Savoyards and Bards share the stage in this hilarious re-interpretation of the Gilbert & Sullivan classic recently produced by GSSA, *The Sorcerer*.

As the story ensues, the villagers of Ploverleigh can all breathe a sigh of relief—John Wellington Wells has broken the spell by yielding his life to Ahrimanes, and all goes back to its usual pace, day by day, to the last syllable of recorded time....

That is, until ... another spell befalls the townspeople when a mysterious stranger spikes the tea at Ploverleigh Globe Theatre's Shakespeare Festival. As usual, all the good citizens of the town imbibe this pernicious potion and fall prey to its soporific effect—they go to sleep.

Upon awakening, our Ploverleighans believe they are characters from Shakespeare's plays, and they can't help but speak in iambic pentameter! Yet they still love to sing in topsy-turvy Gilbert & Sullivan style.

Our wonderful troupe of performers includes: **Patricia Combs, Andy Fleming, Rosa Mondragon Harris, Sam Johnson, Maurine McLean, Susan Meitz, Alexandra Reilman, Robert Schneider, Sarah Steele, Ian Stillwell, Abigail Stokley, Jamieson Taylor, David Treadwell, Brittany Trinité, Michelle Vanecek, and Julius Young.** **Janette Jones** performs and directs, with piano accompaniment by **Jeanne Sasaki**.

Admission is free. *Please bring a food or drink contribution for the reception and join us!*

### In This Issue

<i>The Sorcerer</i> Remembered .....	p. 2
Winners of <i>The Sorcerer</i> DVDs .....	p. 2
Summer 2016 Production: <i>The Gondoliers</i> .....	p. 2
News of Members .....	p. 2
Photos of <i>The Sorcerer</i> .....	p. 3
Letter to <i>The Sorcerer</i> Company .....	p. 4
GSSA Scholarships Announced .....	p. 5
Wand'ring Minstrels .....	p. 5

## *The Sorcerer Remembered*

by Libby Weed

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin concluded a successful production of *The Sorcerer*, one of the earliest and least frequently performed works of William S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, with a brimful house at Worley Barton Theater on June 28, 2015.

A survey form is inserted into each printed program at all of our productions, and we enjoy reading after the shows what our audiences think about the performances. We got some great feedback on *The Sorcerer*. Here is a sampling of the many glowing comments we received:

“The professional quality of singers and orchestra is truly grand.”

“Scenery and costumes were magnificent!”

“I treated my family to a night of artistic talent and laughter.”

“Your productions are always full of light-hearted fun!”

**Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, and **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**, our artistic and music directors, surely treated us to an enchanting show. **Arthur DiBianca** in the title role had audiences gasping at his pyrotechnics, his spells, and (perhaps most of all) his verbal gymnastics in “My name is John Wellington Wells.” Audiences fell in love with the characters of Aline and Alexis (**Alexandra Reilman** and **Holton Johnson**) and doted on the pairing of their respective parents, Lady Sangazure and Sir Marmaduke (**Lisa Alexander** and **David Fontenot**). **Julius Young** as the lonely vicar, Dr. Daly; **Patricia Combs** as Constance, the young maiden who loves him; **Janette Jones** as her mother, Mrs. Partlet; the venerable **Russell Gregory** as the Notary; and our youngest cast member, **Daniel Kregel**, as Hercules — all added spice to the show. All the principal actors, the remarkable choruses, and the orchestra got rave reviews in our survey comments.

This production was confirmation to all who attended that it is a great service to our community for the Society to bring to the stage the wide range of the works of Gilbert & Sullivan. We all love the most popular shows that are frequently performed, and we will continue to produce them often. But we will enjoy and give thanks for gems such as *The Sorcerer* as well!

### Winners of *The Sorcerer* DVDs

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

Timothy N. Gaskell	Kelly Rudig
Vallee Green	Alejandro Sills
Thomas Heitzman	Helen Spencer
Tom Michel	Sarah Steury
Anne-Marie Purcell	John Tate

One of our winners sent us the following note:

I happened to sit next to a lady who is a friend of Brittany Trinité. She had never been to any type of opera before. What she noticed was that each actor on stage was totally immersed in their role ... which is something that I have enjoyed. With the stage full of actors, bright costumes and dancing, you can scan the stage and see each person ‘on stage’ in their own right, whether the focus of the action or in a supporting role. Adds to the fun, overall.

We appreciate our patrons, and are delighted to share the pleasures of Gilbert and Sullivan.

## Summer 2016 Grand Production:

### *The Gondoliers*

June 16-26, 2016

Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School

*The Gondoliers*; or, *The King of Barataria* premiered at the Savoy Theatre in December of 1889 and ran for a very successful 554 performances. The twelfth of the fourteen collaborations by W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, it was their last great success, showcasing them at the height of their talents. Our Society is pleased to present this wonderful opera June 16-26, 2016. **Dr. Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**, music director, will be paired with **Michelle Haché** as stage director for this production.

As the opera begins, the audience is treated to the longest choral opening of any of the Savoy operas, with Venetian gondoliers and maidens setting the scene and playfully inviting us into their colorful world. Shortly, the young bride of the heir to the throne of the kingdom of Barataria arrives in Venice to join her husband. But he cannot be identified, since he was entrusted to the care of a drunken gondolier who mixed up the prince with his own son. As the King of Barataria has just been killed, these two young gondoliers must now jointly rule the kingdom until the nurse of the prince can be brought in to determine which of them is the rightful king. And that is only the beginning of the delightful complexity of the plot.

Of all the G&S operas, *The Gondoliers* features the greatest range of choreography. Sullivan borrowed from France the stately *gavotte*, from Spain the *cachucha*, from Italy the *saltarello* and the *tarantella*, and from Venice the *barcarolle*. The opera is a feast for the eyes, the ears, and the heart!

### NEWS of our MEMBERS

Two GSSA veterans, **Michelle Haché** (Elsie in 2010’s *The Yeomen of the Guard*, Ida in 2013’s *Princess Ida*, and director of the upcoming *The Gondoliers* next summer) and **Derek Smootz** (Strephon in 2009’s *Iolanthe*, Florian in 2013’s *Princess Ida*, and chorus member in many other productions), have collaborated under the group name Zephyrium. On July 15 they released “Voyage,” an album of arias and art song rearranged in an accessible, modern idiom. Guest artists on the album include three more GSSA veterans: **Lisa Alexander**, **Meredith Ruduski**, and **Amelia Love Ciskey**. The result is an album of music that bridges the classical and electronic pop music worlds.

“Voyage” is available at iTunes, Amazon, Spotify, and all the other major online music sites. For more information, please visit: [www.Zephyrium.com](http://www.Zephyrium.com)

**Spencer Reichman** spent six weeks in Crested Butte, Colorado, as an Opera Studio Artist (part of the Crested Butte Summer Music Festival), then crossed the pond four days later to perform as Strephon in a production of *Iolanthe* on August 11. Attending and performing at the 22nd International Gilbert and Sullivan Festival in Harrogate, England, was an honor and pleasure to share in a total immersion of Gilbert and Sullivan productions. Now he’s off to work on his Master’s. Bravo and good luck!



Spencer (left) as Strephon



The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin presented *The Sorcerer* in June 2015

photos courtesy Cecily Johnson

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



Sir Marmaduke & Lady Sangazure  
(David Fontenot, Lisa Alexander)



John Wellington Wells, Family Sorcerer  
(Arthur DiBianca)



J. W. Wells with Alexis and Aline  
(Holton Johnson, Alexandra Reilman)



the Notary and Mrs. Partlet  
(Russell Gregory, Janette Jones)



"Oh, happy young heart"  
Aline and villagers



Dr. Daly  
(Julius Young)



Hercules (Daniel Kregel) and J.W.W.



the Villagers of Ploverleigh



"die thou"



"Dear friends, take pity on my lot"  
(front) Constance and the Notary  
(Patricia Combs, Russell Gregory)



The Sorcerer production team: (front, l-r) Callie Stribling, Pam Fowler, Libby Weed, Charlie Vazquez; (middle, l-r) Monica Kurtz, Jeffrey Jones-Ragona, Ralph MacPhail, Jr.; (back, l-r) Bill Hatcher, Adam Gunderson, Andy Heilveil, Chandler Alberda, Pixie Aven



RALPH MACPHAIL, JR.  
POST OFFICE BOX 14  
BRIDGEWATER, VIRGINIA 22812 - 0014

August 2015

## To All the Sorcerers who Helped Make the Magic in June,

I've got a secret!

Well, I have *lots* of them, really. And as a practicing magician (among other things), I have more secrets than most. The first rule of magic is well known: A magician *never* reveals his secrets. But if I take off my top hat and substitute my Savoyard one, perhaps I can break that first rule of magic. That's what I intend to do.

You see, *The Sorcerer* closed in Austin about seven weeks ago as I write, and I've had a lot of time to think about the secrets of what made the show so successful. Here's my little list of them—the complex secrets behind our memorable production, and *none* have anything to do with trap doors, mirrors, or wires: they're all about *people*, and very special people at that:

1. **Be a part of a strong organization**, one with a foundation of effective and self-sacrificing Board of Directors leadership, with also an effective leader of that entity at the helm. Libby and her Board provided this foundation in many various ways, and I'm grateful for their hard work and selfless dedication. The GSSA Board is composed of many people doing many things incredibly well.
2. **Have a collegial relationship with one's music director**—one with high standards and who admires and loves Gilbert & Sullivan, bringing both to the direction of singers and who assembles an orchestra that will effectively support the musical sequences onstage. Thank you, Jeffrey; I treasure our ongoing collaboration.
3. **With the M.D., assemble a talented and dedicated cast.** I'm grateful to have had such a wonderful and hard-working cast in which each member entered into the magical world of "traditonal" Gilbert & Sullivan to help bring *The Sorcerer* to vibrant life.
4. **Give the Production Manager his lead** to assemble first-rate backstage teams. Thank you, Bill, for doing just that, and for the countless other details you managed that led to our production's effectiveness. Thanks, too, to all members of your various teams for what they brought to the show. I'm always optimistic, but this production exceeded my expectations in every way.
5. **Appreciate the dozens of members and friends who worked in the front-of-house** to make our audiences feel welcome, provide guidance, and run concessions. I did—and do—and am always pleased to see such a large group enthusiastically supporting our productions.

Now that I think about it, it's clear to me that these aren't really secrets at all, and I'm sure that those involved with *The Sorcerer*, whether in the audience or helping with the production, join me in expressing gratitude for each individual's contributions to our show.

Sometimes I think of theatrical production as a kind of magic, and in a way Ploverleigh was rather like Brigadoon, disappearing on June 28 and leaving behind only memories of sights and sounds shared by so many. Such memories are sweet as we remember our times together, and they lead to anticipation of the future when many of us will be working together again to produce another delightful example of theatrical magic.

Sincerely,



## GSSA Scholarships Announced

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin is pleased to announce the recipients of \$500 scholarships for the 2015-16 school year: **Bruno Barbosa** and **Spencer Reichman**. Bruno is a student at UT Austin, with a double major of vocal performance and English. He appeared in the chorus of our 2014 production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* and as Thomas Brown in this year's mini-production of *The Zoo*. Spencer is now studying for his Master's in vocal performance at Loyola in New Orleans. He has appeared in the chorus of our 2010 *The Yeomen of the Guard* and 2012 *Patience*, as Go-To in our 2011 *The Mikado*, and as Scynthius in our 2013 *Princess Ida*. He also starred as The Mikado in *The Mikado* at the International G&S Festival in Gettysburg and as Strephon in *Iolanthe* at the International G&S Festival in Harrogate, England. Congratulations, Bruno and Spencer!

We received the following letter from Andy Fleming, who received our scholarship for the 2014-15 school year:

Dear Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Austin,

I recently completed my Master's degree in vocal performance at UT, with the assistance of a scholarship from the Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Austin. I look back on the last two years, and

am amazed at how quickly the time passed, and how much I learned. I performed roles in *Le nozze di Figaro*, *The Crucible*, and *The Zoo*. I gave a master's recital with music of Barber, Britten, and Beethoven. I took as many classes as I could...

I used to work as a computer engineer, but I've long had a love for singing that was only lightly explored. The Society's scholarship helped me further explore this love, but it needs to be said that the GSSA's role in my growth as a musician goes far beyond financial assistance. My first show with GSSA was *The Gondoliers* in 2004. The music was more challenging than other productions I had been in, and that challenge was met with more professionalism than I had previously experienced. The experience forced me to grow, and catalyzed my love for opera.

It is through the summer productions of Gilbert and Sullivan's operas that I have gained the experience and appreciation of opera which led me to participate in the Austin (formerly Lyric) Opera chorus, and Spotlight on Opera. Through the Society, I have met many great colleagues who have also become dear friends. The Society has become a central nexus of my musical and social life. For that, as well as for the scholarship, I am truly grateful.

Sincerely, Andy Fleming

### 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)

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address \_\_\_\_\_  
 State \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone number(s) \_\_\_\_\_  
 E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_  
 Employer \_\_\_\_\_  
 Does your company match donations? \_\_\_\_\_

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 Minstrels performed at the Cathedral of St. Mary's on March 26, and received fan mail:

We loved having the amazing show that was done for the school where I teach (Cathedral School of Saint Mary) last year. This was so inspiring and the students of all ages were enthralled! Your outreach is such a wonderful offering in our arts community and very much appreciated. Thank you again!

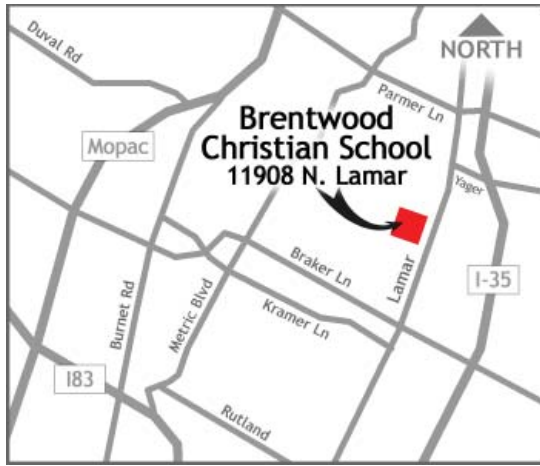
Sheree Naquin

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.



Staff and students from the Cathedral of St. Mary's enjoyed the visit by the GSSA's Wand'ring Minstrels (back row, in black shirts, l-r):

Martha Mortensen Ahern, Janette Jones,  
 Robert L. Schneider, and Katie Schneider



Our opening musicale, *A Topsy-Turvy Bard*, will be presented at the Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School.

### Coming Events

- Sept. 13 *A Topsy-Turvy Bard* (see p. 1)
- Nov. 8 G&S Piano Bar Musicale
- 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 Halloween; the deadline for submissions will be October 9. Please send your news to [news@gilbertsullivan.org](mailto:news@gilbertsullivan.org). Thanks!



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Nonprofit  
Organization  
US Postage Paid  
Permit No. 2054  
Austin, Texas



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

SEPTEMBER 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**

G&S Office: 310 West 43rd Street, Austin, TX 78751  
 Mailing Address: P. O. Box 684542, Austin, TX 78768-4542  
 Phone: (512) 472-4772 (GSA-GSSA)  
 Our web site: [www.gilbertsullivan.org](http://www.gilbertsullivan.org)  
 E-mail: [info@gilbertsullivan.org](mailto:info@gilbertsullivan.org)



This project is funded and supported in part by a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts and in part by the City of Austin Economic Development Department/Cultural Arts Division, believing that an investment in the Arts is an investment in Austin's future.  
 Visit Austin at [NowPlayingAustin.com](http://NowPlayingAustin.com)



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

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

### Board of Directors

- Libby Weed** President
- Roberta Long** Executive Vice President
- Dave Wiecekowski** Treasurer and CFO
- Michael Meigs** Secretary and Bursar
- David Little** Publicist and Webmaster
- Rosa Mondragon Harris** Musicale Reporter
- June Julian** Musicale Coordinator
- Allan Longacre** Community Relations
- Diane Radin** Grants Coordinator
- Robert L. Schneider** Wand'ring Minstrels Coordinator
- Charles Smaistrla** Legal Counsel
- David Treadwell** Historian

Database Manager **Arthur DiBianca**  
 Newsletter Editor **Sue Ricket Caldwell**