

Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin
30th Anniversary Celebration
November 5, 2006

What makes an organization great is people. Today we will pay special recognition to ten people who have played significant roles in the first 30 years of this organization. It would be impossible to recognize all of those who have been instrumental in making the Austin G&S Society one of the paramount organizations of its kind.

- We owe great debts to Jess Walters, bass-baritone extraordinaire; Pearl Amster, legendary hostess; and we'll never forget Lucy Shoe Meritt, who graced every single production and musicale well into her nineties—all of whom have passed away.
- Bob Kusnetz was a most influential early president, now our only Lifetime Member in recognition of his many contributions.
- Linalice Carey initiated the formation of the Society with several others, earned us early credibility with our first production of *Ruddigore* at her Creek Theatre, and gave important support in the first years.
- The Coltman family (Felicity, Ann, Heather) has been important to Austin G&S from the very beginning, serving as piano accompanists, cast members, and board members.
- Allen Lawshae was a phenomenal performer, beginning with his role as Dick Deadeye in the 1976 *H.M.S. Pinafore* and continuing through more than 15 principal roles over most of our thirty years.
- Bob Wall was given the title Lord High Pianist because of his astonishing sight-reading and graceful accompaniment at many a musicale. (Bob wanted to be here today, but he could not arrange a flight from San Francisco around his teaching responsibilities.)
- Numerous others have become very important to us in the second half of our history and will surely earn their own places in the Austin G&S Hall of Fame—

including many of tonight's performers and our music director and artistic director, and also such performers and board members and supporters as Larry Shepley, Bill Hatcher, Leland Smith, Paula Tyler and now Nancy and Benny Jay, who have picked up Pearl's mantle as hosts.

Now we will honor two of the founding members of our Society: Rosemary Russell-Vines and Sue Ricket Caldwell.

Rosemary Russell-Vines helped found our Society, serving on the Board of Directors for many years between 1977 and 1988, holding the positions of President, Executive Vice President, Publicity Vice President, Secretary, and Historian/Parliamentarian over the years. She also performed in ten productions during those years, singing in many choruses and playing principal roles in *The Sorcerer* and *Iolanthe*. (Rosemary's certificate: "In for a penny, in for a pound," as the trio of lords sing in *Iolanthe*—once committed, she gives her all, whether as an organizer, a performer, a house manager, or a board member. We depended on her, and she helped us establish ourselves during our first decade.)

Sue Ricket Caldwell was another of our original members, a founder and organizer. Sue was the first secretary of the board, and she returned to serve on the board as Vice President for Production in 2000 and 2001. She performed in three shows in the early years, after having enjoyed performing in seven different G&S shows with the Los Angeles Savoy-Artes. Her first date with husband-to-be Jim was the first day of rehearsal for the 1976 *Pinafore*, so her relationship with him and with Austin G&S coincide completely. In recent years, Sue and Jim have shown great hospitality to our artistic director, Rafe MacPhail, providing lodging for him during his Texas stays. (Sue's certificate: Pooh-Bah, speaking as Ko-Ko's Private Secretary in *The Mikado*: "Don't stint yourself, do it well!" Sue never does anything halfway or halfheartedly; she always does it well.)

Enid Hallock is another of our founders, performing as Buttercup in the first *H.M.S. Pinafore*, playing principal roles in numerous others shows over the next fourteen years, and serving as Executive Vice President on the board for four years. Enid has also served as prop mistress and musicale hostess, and she has involved numerous members of her supremely talented family in various ways (although it was really her son Gary who got *her* involved in the first place, calling her as she returned to town from a trip about *Pinafore* auditions; both of them were cast). (Enid's certificate: "Pert as a schoolgirl well can be, filled to the brim with girlish glee"—though she has not played one of the three little maids in *The Mikado*, she has remained as pert as those schoolgirls throughout our history.

Katharine Shields was a star in our early years, beginning as a lovely Aline in *The Sorcerer* in 1977 and also playing Phyllis, Lady Ella, Casilda, Rose Maybud, and Pitti-Sing over the next several years. At holiday specials and musicales she has also sung Mabel and Josephine and several other roles. For many years, whenever a pulchritudinous and melodious leading lady was needed, Katharine Shields was there to set a high bar for soprano leads for the rest of our history. (Katharine's certificate: "A maiden fair to see, the pearl of minstrelsy, a bud of blushing beauty"—fair praise for Josephine in *H.M.S. Pinafore* and for our beautiful Katharine.)

Russell Gregory was surely created to play the title role in *The Mikado*. His appearance, his voice, his laugh, and his "entertaining snigger" have delighted many an audience. Russell has also amused and captured audiences over the years with his portrayals of Dick Deadeye, the Pirate King, Don Alhambra, and Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B., from the 1980s to the present, but the *Mikado* is the role he has stamped in such a profound way. He has been a featured performer in

many a holiday special and musicale as well. (Russell's certificate: "Come, come, don't fret—I'm not a bit angry," one of my favorites of his lines as the Mikado.)

Robert Mellin has come all the way from Philadelphia to be with us today, and we are truly honored by this. Robert first joined our Society in 1988 after seeing Jess Walters in *Trial by Jury*, and he soon became a vital part of our organization. He was cast as the Notary in the 1989 *Sorcerer*, and beginning in 1992 he played many roles on the board and in our leadership, from at-large member to President and then Executive Director and Producer. Under Robert's leadership, our Society moved toward more and more professional productions with stronger and stronger production values. He insisted that we must have an orchestra, and a good one. He called forth talents and put them to use—for example, Larry Shepley preparing playbills. It was Robert who first formed a friendship with the estimable Rafe MacPhail and prevailed upon Rafe to leave his home in Virginia for a slice of the summer of 1998 to come and direct our *Mikado*. This smash success left us wishing for more and, after several more great shows, led to the appointment of Rafe as our artistic director. (Robert's certificate: "His energetic fist should be ready to resist a dictatorial word," along with a Bab drawing of a British tar, symbols of Robert's pride and spirit.)

We have had many remarkable performers in our 30-year history, but no one has played as many roles or has come to "own" as many roles as the incomparable Frank Delvy and Janette Jones.

Frank Delvy first performed with us in 1983, as Giorgio in *The Gondoliers*. Since that time he has performed nearly every show in the G&S repertoire, playing different principal parts in several and making some of them "his own" in a profound way. A master patter-singer, he has a gift of precise diction that combines with his rich baritone, his phenomenal memory, and his comedic skills to make him the perfect actor

for the George Grossmith roles. He has played Captain Corcoran four times—three of them to Janette's Buttercup—and has set a standard that will make it difficult for anyone else to assay that role in central Texas. (Frank's certificate: "I've jibe and joke and quip and crank for lowly folk and men of rank," from his moving portrayal of Jack Point in *Yeomen of the Guard*—surely true of Frank as of Jack.)

Janette Jones began appearing with us shortly after Frank did, and with her stirring mezzo she has masterfully played roles including bridesmaid, Cousin Hebe, Lady Angela, Mad Margaret, Katisha, the Duchess of Plaza-Toro, Ruth (the maid of all work), Phoebe, and of course Buttercup—many of these roles two or more times. She is, indeed, a maid-of-all-work, but one who performs her work with consummate artistry. Like Frank, Janette has singing, acting, and projection talents that would have thrilled Messrs. Gilbert and Sullivan. (Janette's certificate: "Things are seldom what they seem," from her haunting duet as Buttercup with the Captain in *H.M.S. Pinafore*.)

Leonard and Reba Gillman were not among the founders of our Society, but they had been Savoyards long before coming to Austin, and they attended the very first production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* in 1976, becoming members in 1978. Since that time, no two people have come to symbolize the wonders of Gilbert & Sullivan as much as these two have. It would be difficult for any of us to imagine our Society without them.

Len was present for the auditions for *Iolanthe* in 1978, where he volunteered his services as a pianist. At one point, the director looked at him and said, "You look like the Lord Chancellor; I want you to audition." And so it happened that mathematician and Juilliard-trained pianist Leonard Gillman, who thought of himself as a non-singer, played that part in the production. Len was music director for *Trial by Jury* in 1982 and *The Gondoliers* in 1983. Over the years, he enter-

tained us often at musicales with piano numbers ranging from Tom Lehrer to Bach, Schubert, and Rachmaninoff.

Reba was Celia in the *Iolanthe* production where Len was the Lord Chancellor, and she continued to be in the cast of every show over the next seven years. She has served on the Board of Directors continuously for over a quarter of a century; she was secretary in 1980, president in 81-82, and secretary again from 1984 to 2009, taking the major role in creating our delightful, informative, and literate newsletter. Reba has continued on the board after others took over the secretary role, still as newsletter editor.

Anyone who has attended a musicale remembers Reba with her roll, and anyone at one of our productions over the past thirty years has seen both at virtually every performance. Reba has been a fixture in the lobby, selling merchandise and signing up new members. Always believers in having strong orchestral accompaniment to our shows, in recent years the Gillmans have underwritten the Gillman Light Opera Orchestra, greatly enhancing this aspect of our performances.

The two are such an institution in the Austin G&S Society, that surely they must have earned a pair of titles. Shall it be:

- Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert & Sullivan
- Lord and Lady Austin G&S
- The Duke and Duchess of Topsy-Turvydom

Regardless, we know that Sir William S. Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan would have been proud of the way our own Len and Reba have carried the torch for their works here in central Texas and have been instrumental in the continuance and steady growth and development of our Society.

Len's certificate: "Of beauty I'm a judge, and a good judge too," from *Trial by Jury*. Reba's certificate: "When a merry maiden marries, sorrow goes and pleasure tarries," from *The Gondoliers*. In the next two months, these lovebirds celebrate two 90th birthdays and a 68th wedding anniversary!