

The

GILBERT & SULLIVAN

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2009 NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed

One interesting thing I've learned from my years with the Board of Directors of G&S is that there is no such thing as an "off season." Yes, there is a feeling of accomplishment and finality when the summer production ends (and all the bills get paid and accounts settled). But before

this after-business concludes, we are already working on the next year's show—securing a venue, working on the calendar, setting up auditions, and raising funds. Of course, we also have our musicales to plan!

Our board is a working board, as we have no paid employees through most of the year and must handle the routine matters of picking up the mail, paying the bills, writing letters of thanks, and making deposits at the bank. We are greatly blessed to have the volunteer services of **Arthur DiBianca**—the *Iolanthe* Lord Chancellor, no less!—sorting the mail and keeping our database up to date. We hardly know what we would do without Art's work, which "is the true embodiment of everything that's excellent." Thank you, Arthur!

Those of us who have served some years on the board find our group a most congenial one, with each member giving time and talents and all finding satisfaction in contributing to a cause we believe is worthwhile and enriches our area's cultural environment. That's why we find it difficult when a member retires from board service. We have to say farewell to some real gems now.

Byron Arnason greeted you enthusiastically if you attended any G&S show in recent years. He might have been wearing a Victorian bowler or a pair of wings as he masterfully coordinated the work of volunteers for each show. His work responsibilities, which have kept him in Nevada most of the year for some time, have increased to the point that he had to retire from the board this year; but we count on seeing him in the lobby and the theater again in June.

Allan Longacre has surely been the hardest working member of our board during the past year. With a rich history in theater management, Allan (now a commercial real estate agent) used all his off-hours serving as executive vice president, applying for grants, and keeping our business running. When he had to step aside this fall, it took a major reshuffling for the rest of us to cover the myriad tasks Allan been accomplishing. We are pleased that he will continue to serve as a consultant to the board.

June Julian sang the title role in *Iolanthe* this past summer, and she has served as our president in the past. She was the mastermind of and a featured performer in our swanky, swingy September musicale. Her contributions to our Society over the past several years have been phenomenal. June has also decided not to continue on the board after this year for family and

business reasons, but we surely hope to see her at auditions and hear her in future musicales.

Stephen Reynolds has been an enthusiastic board member for this year and will continue to serve out his term. However, his busy work and avocational schedule (including theatrical direction, as you will read elsewhere in this newsletter) have led him to decide not to stand for re-election to the board.

We are happy to report that one of our openings was filled in September when **Michael Meigs** accepted the board's invitation to serve. After a career as a U.S. diplomat abroad and in Washington, D.C., Michael relocated to Austin. A theatre devotee, he created the blog "Austin Live Theatre," which later became www.AustinLiveTheatre.com, where he reviews theatrical productions, posts notices of events to come, and maintains an arts calendar. We first came to know about him when he posted information about G&S events and published a report on *Iolanthe* that showed he had Savoyard inclinations and fine taste in theatre. Welcome aboard, Michael!

Thank you, Byron, Allan, June, and Stephen, for your service. Your contributions to our efforts have been "welcome as flowers that bloom in the spring," and you should know you have made a difference in our community and have brought joy to many people.

DECEMBER MUSICALE

Please join us for evening of merriment as **Arthur DiBianca, Ariel Rios, Meredith Ruduski, Derek Smootz, Rebecca Stokinger, and Katherine Wiggins** perform Gilbert and Sullivan songs, accompanied by **Martha Dudgeon** on piano, including one or two from *Yeomen*, and perhaps a few never performed on stage by our Society!

Genesis Presbyterian Church
1507 Wilshire Blvd.

Sunday, December 6, 7 to 9 pm

Please Bring Munchies!

JANUARY: ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Business Meeting for the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin is scheduled for 7:30 pm on Monday, January 11, at Genesis Presbyterian Church, 1507 Wilshire Blvd. The Board has appointed a Nominating Committee consisting of **Larry Shepley, Chair, Enid Hallock, and Allan Longacre**. The Committee is working to fill the slate of nominees for Board of Directors for the coming year. If you are interested in serving on the Board or wish to nominate someone else, or have any questions about the responsibilities of a Board member, please contact Larry at 327-1511 or by email at shepley@physics.utexas.edu.

The September Musicale: *The Soaring Soul Soirée* or *The Savoyard Radio Hour* by Reba Gillman

On Sunday, September 20, a goodly number of G&S members and non-members gathered at 7 PM, packing Westminster Manor's newly decorated Harris Bell Hall to the gills for our season-opening Musicale. President **Libby Weed** welcomed us and thanked Abby Gorton and Westminster Manor for their generous hospitality, and the Bachus Conservatory for providing rehearsal space. **June Julian** wrote the script and planned and organized the program in the form of an old-time radio show, "a fun evening of popular Gilbert & Sullivan tunes imbued with traditional style, swing, and a jazzy twist" – "a light-hearted parody." **David Fontenot** stepped up to the microphone as the radio host. Others featured were **Lisa Alexander**, composer and vocalist; La Vie en Rose band with **Diana VandeWater**; and **Martha Dudgeon**, accompanist. Also starring were **Katherine Altobello**, **Jay Chacon**, **June Julian**, **Paul Nixon**, **Louis Ontko** and **Meredith Ruduski**. As the evening progressed actors went to the microphone to sing, and David provided dialogue imitating radio announcements. **Katy Fontenot** was in charge of some handsome signs exhorting the "studio audience" to LAUGHTER, APPLAUSE, and other appropriate behavior. Toward the end of the evening, David remarked that Katy had done a good job, and asked if that warranted a raise in her allowance, upon which Katy hastily produced the sign SAY YES.

The program began with an instrumental interlude, a jazzy arrangement of "Now to the banquet we press" from *The Sorcerer*, performed by Martha Dudgeon, piano, and members of La Vie en Rose band: **Diana VandeWater**, violin; **Greg Jones**, guitar; **Larry Warner**, bass; and **Dan "The Groove Man" Vela**, percussion. Then Lisa Alexander sang and led the ensemble in the premiere performance of her composition, "Come to me," a chamber choral work. There followed nine Gilbert & Sullivan songs in various stages of rearrangement, and two songs from *The Yeomen of the Guard* in presumably straight condition. The outstanding effect was the joy of the performers. It was as if the children got out behind the barn and did a take-off on the serious world of their elders. They performed a sometimes rowdy, always clever show. Some traditionalists object to such treatment, but it was evident from the enthusiastic response of the audience that

most of them loved the show and were having great fun. Meredith Ruduski's version of Patience's "Love is a plaintive song" seemed to acknowledge that Patience is a silly girl. Katherine Altobello did her own version of "I'm called little Buttercup," which was really quite funny. Louis Ontko did a truly classy "Wand'ring Minstrel" from *The Hot Mikado*. Nanki-Poo's ballad really lends itself to such satiric treatment.

Tremendous creative energy went into producing this program. There was clever humor and some delightful bits. Those who most enjoy such parodies are those who best know the original works. For the performers, such tom-foolery can be relaxing, uproariously funny, and a welcome variation on the usual. I was especially impressed that the singers in our casts have such varied talents. Every singer performing in this Musicale was in the cast of *Iolanthe*, except Katherine Altobello, who had performed in one of our earlier productions. Diana VandeWater was a new singer in the chorus this year. Who knew she sang in a band and played the violin? (Visit www.jazzblooz.com.) Lisa Alexander (the Fairy Queen in our June *Iolanthe*) has a beautiful voice. She also writes music, directs groups of singers, and who knows what else.

The program ended with the traditional singing of "Hail, Poetry" and "Now to the banquet we press," and all then joined in friendly conversation while sampling the delicious refreshments provided by our talented members. It was a joyous start for the new season!

Congratulations!

We are very proud of these B. Iden Payne award nominations for *Iolanthe*: **Arthur DiBianca** was nominated for Outstanding Actor in a Musical, and **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.** was nominated for Outstanding Choreography. Thank you for your excellent work, Art and Rafe!

Wand'ring Minstrels

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin's Wand'ring Minstrels are the ambassadors for the Society to the Central Texas community. Their programs provide an introduction to the genre that is distinctively Gilbert & Sullivan. Programs range from a lively recital of Gilbert & Sullivan's most popular tunes to interactive, mini-productions of the Society's full summer productions. For bookings or additional information, please contact **Eva Laskaris** by email at minstrels@gilbertsullivan.org, or at (512) 350-4935.



The Soaring Soul Soirée singers included (l-r): June Julian, Katherine Altobello, Meredith Ruduski, Diana VandeWater, Lisa Alexander, Louis Ontko, Paul Nixon, Jay Chacon, and David Fontenot, with "Mistress of Signs" Katy Fontenot. *photo courtesy Nanci Jay*

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) _____
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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:



Introducing *The Yeomen of the Guard*

by Ralph MacPhail, Jr.

Our summer production for 2010 was originally produced in London by Richard D'Oyly Carte in 1888, near the end of the quarter-century-long Gilbert & Sullivan partnership. *The Yeomen of the Guard* is

more serious in tone than the usual Savoy opera, for Sullivan had for years been begging Gilbert for plots of "real human interest and probability" where music (according to the composer) would have a more important part in communicating emotion to the audience. (No magic talismans or lozenges, please!)

Gilbert gave Sullivan what he craved – and included plenty of humor in it, too. The librettist admitted that the inspiration for *The Yeomen of the Guard* came from seeing a poster for the Tower Furnishing Company while standing in Uxbridge Station awaiting a train into the City. Here, he thought, would be a location for an opera that would meet Sullivan's requirements: quintessentially English, "The Tower" was a centuries-old palace and fortress and prison (with, actually, a number of towers), and with many a tale "grim and gory" of real-life imprisonments, intrigues, and executions.

Opportunities for pageantry abounded, with a male chorus composed of the Tower Warders in their scarlet uniforms. But not all of the citizens of the tower were military. Since the Tower of London was also a garrison, the warders' families were also in residence, along with support personnel – *perfect* for a mixed chorus.

But what to call it? An early idea was *The Tower of London*. Other possibilities were *The Beefeaters* and *The Tower Warders* – these last two perhaps more accurate than the final title. Why? Well, that's a subject for a future column.

We know that Gilbert visited the Tower of London while working on his libretto, for the Tower, then as now, was one of London's most popular tourist attractions. He probably also re-read William Harrison Ainsworth's popular and oft' reprinted 1840 novel *The Tower of London* (I'm reading it now), and perhaps thought back on a couple of his "Bab" Ballads. Contemporary reviewers of the original production noted that Gilbert was also familiar with Edward Fitzball's libretto for

William Vincent Wallace's opera *Maritana* (1845). These sources of inspiration will also be discussed in a future article.

For now, let us say that both Gilbert and Sullivan considered *The Yeomen of the Guard* their finest joint work. Why? The answer to that will be the subject of yet another column! In the meantime, read the libretto and listen to a recording. You can start by Googling the title Gilbert & Sullivan finally selected for what became next summer's show.

COMING IN JUNE 2010



NEWS of our MEMBERS

The Gaslight Baker Theatre in downtown Lockhart Texas will treat the community to a festive comedic twist on a holiday classic: *The Trial of Ebenezer Scrooge*. This family-friendly holiday play by American playwright Mark Brown will run on Friday and Saturday nights from Dec. 4 to 19, with matinees on Dec. 12 and 19.

A year after his miraculous transformation, Ebenezer Scrooge is back to his old ways, suing Jacob Marley and the Ghosts of Christmas for breaking and entering, kidnapping, slander, pain and suffering, attempted murder, and the intentional infliction of emotional distress. As the trial of the century progresses, hilarity ensues.

The Trial of Ebenezer Scrooge includes the great acting talents of Arthur DiBianca, Angela Irving, Derek Smootz, Katherine Wiggins, and Jay Young, all of whom appeared in our June production of *Iolanthe*. G&S board member Stephen Reynolds directs the production. Please consult the group's web site www.gaslightbakertheatre.org for more details.



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

NOVEMBER / DECEMBER 2009



Coming Events

- December Musicale
 Sunday, December 6, 7 pm
- Annual Meeting
 Monday, January 11, 7:30 pm
- Auditions for *The Yeomen of the Guard*
 Sat. & Sun., Feb. 27-28
- March Musicale
 Sunday, March 7
- The Yeomen of the Guard*
 June

Please see article on page 1 for details!

Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive in late December; the deadline for submissions is December 7. 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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The Society holds nonprofit status under 501(c)(3) of the IRS code.

Artistic Director
 Music Director

Ralph MacPhail, Jr.
Jeffrey Jones-Ragona

Board of Directors

- Libby Weed**
(vacant)
- Kathryn Saar**
- Dave Wieckowski**
- Reba Gillman**
- June Julian**
- David Little**
- Chris Buggé**
- Michael Meigs**
- Stephen Reynolds**
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