

The GILBERT & SULLIVAN

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

JANUARY 2014 NEWSLETTER

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed

Dear Members and Friends,

I am excited about two important events that await us in early 2014:

- **Sunday, January 5, 3:00 p.m. – Annual Business Meeting and Sing-Along.** We

invite all Society members, as well as people who enjoy being with them, to join us at Westminster for this Sunday afternoon gathering. Maestro **Leonard Johnson**, esteemed faculty emeritus of the University of Texas vocal music department and member of our board, will lead us in a bit of choral singing, accompanied by the incomparable **Jeanne Sasaki**. We will sing choruses from *The Pirates of Penzance* and *The Gondoliers*, two of the most melodious operas in the G&S canon. You don't have to bring a spectacular voice; just bring your love of good music and a spirit of fun. Along with the sing-along, we will have a brief business meeting. This is your opportunity to learn a little—this part of the gathering will be brief—about the membership and financial affairs of the Society and about plans for the coming year. It is also your chance to have a voice in the leadership of our group, as we will elect a board of directors for 2014.



- **Sunday, February 23, 3:00 p.m. – One-time performance of *Trial by Jury*.** This fully-staged chamber production will be at

First Presbyterian Church on Mesa Drive. It is something about which we are feeling particularly ebullient, and we believe you will also. (Don't you love feeling ebullient about something?) *Trial by Jury* is unique among the G&S operas. It is the only one that is written in one act, running about 40 minutes, and the only one that contains no spoken dialogue. Someone has described it as "possibly the most perfectly constructed of the G&S operas." It is truly a little gem of wit, cleverness, and charm. We last produced this show in 2002; because of its brevity, it is not suitable to be a summer grand production. And yet our board decided that it is just too wonderful a show not to be produced from time to time. If you know it, you love it. If you don't, then you must come to hear the prototype of the G&S patter song ("When I, good friends, was called to the Bar") and see what ensues when a bride sues her erstwhile fiancé for breach of promise of marriage—and the cad insists that any damage inflicted is slight, since he is such "a very bad lot." *Trial by Jury* is full of mirth, melody, and high spirits.

Please join us for these two special events!

Libby Weed



Our Society will elect a Board of Directors for the calendar year 2014 at our Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 5, at 3 pm. **Please come** to this important gathering at Harris Bell Hall, Westminster, 4100 Jackson (see map on p. 6). Go to the elevator on the left side of the road entering the parking garage; a Board member will admit you. If the parking garage is full, you may park on the street or in the outdoor lot north of the building.

At our meeting, we will hear a report on activities of the past year and plans for the coming year, then hold elections.

The Nominating Committee, consisting of **Reba Gillman** (Chair), **Diane Radin**, and **Allan Longacre**, has provided the following list of nominees for the 12-member 2014 GSSA Board of Directors:

Reba Gillman	Diane Radin
Leonard Johnson	Robert L. Schneider
David Little	Charles Smaistrla
Roberta Long	David Treadwell
Allan Longacre	Libby Weed
Michael Meigs	Dave Wieckowski

Additional nominations will be accepted from the floor; self-nomination is permitted. (Of course, nominees must be members.) Each paid-up member is entitled to a number of votes equal to the number of Directors to be elected, but is not permitted to vote more than once for a given candidate. The candidates receiving the most votes are elected. In accordance with our by-laws, officers are elected by the Board during their first meeting after the Annual Meeting.

Following the election, **Leonard Johnson** will lead us in singing some great G&S choruses ... and provide some excellent tutelage as he does so. As always, **please** bring munchies to share!

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The Stars of the *Princess Ida* Chorus Take the Children in All of Us to Wonderland by Reba Gillman



Yes, Lewis Carroll goes just fine with Gilbert and Sullivan. Carroll made up words, and strange, childish stories; Gilbert kept a tremendous catalog of real words in his head and used them in wonderful rhyming verses that Sullivan enhanced with his music. Gilbert's stories seem simple and often topsy-turvy, but a great deal of sophisticated thinking about the state of

middle-class Great Britain went into them. Fun every which way! And in the Musicale on Sunday, November 3, in Westminster's Harris Bell Hall, **Janette Jones** made it all frame little fairytales for children. Over a hundred people assembled to enjoy the flights of fancy, gathering pieces of Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* and mixing them up with G&S songs from a variety of Savoy Operas. The audience, half senior citizen denizens of Westminster, plus many G&S members of all ages, including some real children, were initially somewhat doubtful but soon warmed up to the madcap topsyturvydom.

Cast of characters: Red Queen - **Jeanne Sasaki** playing the piano in a red dress and hat (assisted by page turner **Cody Ireland**); Alice's Sister, Cheshire Cat - **Leann Fryer**; Alice - **Katy Fontenot**; White Rabbit - **Sue Ricket Caldwell**; Tweedledee - **Mario Silva**; Tweedledum - **Daniel Brookshire**; Caterpillar - **Ezra Hankin**; Mock Turtle, Pirate King - **David Fontenot**; Mad Hatter - **Janette Jones**; Queen of Hearts - **Errol Tyrone Olson**; all wearing an assortment of colorful costumes and various fancy-to-overwhelming hats.

President **Libby Weed** welcomed us and Janette introduced the program, explaining that she remembered a Walt Disney film made in 1951, based on two stories by Lewis Carroll, the well known British story teller of Gilbert and Sullivan's time. Alice (Katy) was sitting with her sister (Leann) in the sun on the river bank. Her sister was telling her an educational story, but Alice was more interested in playing with her kitten. Leann sang *Princess Ida*, G&S "Minerva! ... Oh Goddess wise That lovest light." But to distract Alice, along came a talking White Rabbit (Sue) with a watch in his vest pocket, reciting "Jabberwocky," "T'was brillig and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe. All mimsy were the borogoves, and the mome raths outgrabe" (*Through the Looking Glass*, Carroll). Alice rushed after him down the rabbit hole, and children were invited to come help Alice (a game). Next Alice encountered Tweedledum and Tweedledee, arguing. First Tweedledee (Mario) sang "Am I alone and unobserved?" (Bunthorne's song from *Patience*, G&S), which seemed to fit Janette's perception of this character. Tweedledum (Daniel) hastened to complete the picture, singing "This helmet, I suppose" (*Princess Ida*, G&S) establishing that "we are not intelligent." Next Alice (Katy) joined hands with Tweedledee and Tweedledum and started singing "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush." Children were invited to come up and join the game. Tweedledee and Tweedledum stopped abruptly when they got tired, and immediately the White Rabbit (Sue) came along to recite Tweedledum's favorite poem, "The Walrus and the Carpenter" (*Through the Looking Glass*, Carroll; it was the longest, he said). "The Walrus and the Carpenter Were walking close

at hand; They wept like anything to see Such quantities of sand: 'If this were only cleared away,' They said, 'it would be grand!'" ... "O Oysters, come and walk with us!" The Walrus did beseech. 'A pleasant walk, a pleasant talk, Along the briny beach: We cannot do with more than four, To give a hand to each!'" ... "Four other Oysters followed them, And yet another four; And thick and fast they came at last, And more, and more, and more—All hopping through the frothy waves, And scrambling to the shore." ... "A loaf of bread,' the Walrus said, 'Is what we chiefly need: Pepper and vinegar besides Are very good indeed—Now, if you're ready, Oysters dear, We can begin to feed.' 'But not on us!' the Oysters cried, Turning a little blue. 'After such kindness, that would be A dismal thing to do!' 'The night is fine,' the Walrus said. 'Do you admire the view?'" ... "O Oysters,' said the Carpenter, 'You've had a pleasant run! Shall we be trotting home again?' But answer came there none—And this was scarcely odd, because They'd eaten every one."

Next, Alice met the Caterpillar (Ezra), who sang his favorite G&S song, "A magnet hung in a hardware shop, And all around was a loving crop Of scissors and needles, nails and knives, Offering love for all their lives" (*Patience*, G&S). Cheshire Cat (Leann) is well known from *Alice in Wonderland* as the cat whose grinning face mysteriously appears and disappears. Leann sang "Poor wandering one" (*The Pirates of Penzance*, G&S) and then played the Cheshire Cat Says game with any who wanted to. A sad character in these stories was the Mock Turtle (David), who explained that he was sad because he was not a real turtle. To explain further, he sang, "Oh, why am I moody and sad?" (*Ruddigore*, G&S). The Mad Hatter (Janette) then remarked that since Mock Turtle and Alice (David and Katy) were so closely related (father and daughter) it seemed appropriate to have them recite another famous poem from *Alice and Wonderland*. "You are old, Father William," the young man said, "And your hair has become very white; And yet you incessantly stand on your head—Do you think, at your age, it is right?" "In my youth," Father William replied to his son, "I feared it might injure the brain; But, now that I'm perfectly sure I have none, Why, I do it again and again." "You are old," said the youth, "and your jaws are too weak For anything tougher than suet; Yet you finished the goose, with the bones and the beak—Pray, how did you manage to do it?" "In my youth," said his father. "I took to the law, And argued each case with my wife; And the muscular strength, which it gave to my jaw Has lasted the rest of my life." Mad Hatter (Janette) "Can anyone guess who I am now? I'm mad - daft - crazy! And what song will I sing? "Cheerily carols the lark Over the cot. Merrily whistles the clerk, Scratching a blot" (*Ruddigore*, G&S). "Who wants to pitch a teabag into the Mad Hatter's hat?" (game). Janette tells us: There's one person we haven't met yet. Last of all, the scariest—the Queen of Hearts (Errol). She keeps saying, "Off with their heads!" Is she like the Lord High Executioner? And Errol sings "As someday it may happen that a victim must be found, I've got a little list" (*The Mikado*, G&S). As he finished his song the assembled cast took a bow, and Janette announced: Before we sing our final traditional songs and go off to eat we are happy for all the young folks to pose with us if any parents want to get out their cameras and take pictures. Children gathered happily and photos flashed. Then all joined in singing "Hail, Poetry" and "Now to the banquet we press" before proceeding to the tasty refreshments.

A different entertainment than usual, but delightful. Thanks to Westminster for pleasant surroundings and good company.

Stars of the G&S Chorus: A Gilbert & Sullivan Trip Through the Looking Glass to Lewis Carroll's Wonderland

photos courtesy Steve Schwartzman

see more at gilbertsullivan.austin.smugmug.com



Jeanne Sasaki



Janette Jones



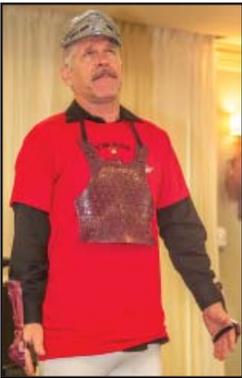
Katy Fontenot



Leann Fryer



Sue Ricket Caldwell



Daniel Brookshire



Mario Silva



Ezra Hankin



Leann Fryer



David Fontenot



Katy and David Fontenot



Errol Tyrone Olson



game: pitch a teabag in the hat



Gilbert & Sullivan Society at the B. Iden Payne Awards Ceremony
photos courtesy Bill Hatcher more at gilbertsullivan.austin.smugmug.com

award winner Michelle Haché (left); GSSA attendees Trey Deason, June Julian, Reba Gillman, and Bill Hatcher (middle); June, Michael Meigs, and Reba (right)



Saluting Sir Joseph by Ralph MacPhail, Jr.



Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B., First Lord of the Admiralty, is arguably the most iconic character in the Gilbert & Sullivan operas: his “fore and aft,” white plumed headgear, embroidered tunic, white satin breeches, white stockings and buckled shoes suggest the essence of Gilbert & Sullivan.

Certainly Sir Joseph has a lot to answer for to *me*, for ‘twas he who drew me into the delights of Gilbert & Sullivan. I first saw him represented on stage when I was about 13 at Swanson Junior High School in Arlington, Virginia. An abridged version of *H.M.S. Pinafore* was presented in April (I still have a program!), with Carter Scruggs playing Sir Joseph, and it was he I saw the following Monday morning with the request to borrow “his music” (I didn’t know to ask for a “vocal score”) because I wanted to read the words about the funny man who “polished up the handle on the big front door.”

We might call it “Gilbertian” that this iconic character is one of the most misunderstood of all of Gilbert’s creations, at least by us Yanks. First of all, he’s often called an “admiral.” But being First Lord of the Admiralty is to be a member of the Prime Minister’s cabinet—it is *not* to be a member of H.R.H.’s Royal Navy. Think Secretary of the Navy in this country, and you will appreciate the distinction. (My friend Bill Hyder cautioned me years ago to beware of Sir Josephs wearing epaulettes on their uniforms, for this indicates that both the costumer *and* the director don’t understand the distinction, for only a military man would wear epaulettes.)

In fact, Sir Joseph’s “Court Dress” is a part of the joke: A “first sea lord” would no more wear his ceremonial finery when boarding a ship than would he have an admiring crowd of sisters, cousins and aunts that attend him wherever he goes!

This leads us to the biggest misunderstanding we Americans have of Sir Joseph, which is central to Gilbert’s plot in *H.M.S. Pinafore* and to his theme. Read his lyric to “When I was a lad” carefully, and you will see that Sir Joseph Porter’s roots are lowly—perhaps as low as Ralph Rackstraw’s. It was through his industry that he rose professionally (office boy to junior clerk to articulated clerk to partnership in a law firm to Member of Parliament). Sounds like the “American Dream,” doesn’t it?

In this country, we accept such upward mobility as a birthright, and just after Sir Joseph explains his rise he closes with a joke that really obscures the bigger joke. The first joke:

Stick close to your desks and never go to sea,
And you all may be Rulers of the Queen’s Navee!*

The bigger joke that we fail to grasp is that Sir Joseph is Captain Corcoran’s superior *professionally*, but very much his inferior *socially*. Remember that Josephine, the Captain’s daughter, sings of her “papa’s luxurious home, hung with ancestral armour and old brasses” when

* This joke is even larger when we realize that Gilbert based Sir Joseph on W. H. Smith, Disraeli’s First Lord of the Admiralty in 1878 who had “never been to sea.” (A discussion of this needs a column of its own—but I’m well out of space!)

debating with herself about whether to give up her accustomed life of luxury to marry a penniless sailor.

And when Sir Joseph condescends to the Captain in Act II, telling him that “love levels all ranks,” the Captain is happy to swallow all this because his daughter is to be the bride of a Cabinet Minister—an “Elysian prospect,” he says.

All this makes the dénouement all the more trenchant. If Buttercup is telling the truth and if she did indeed switch the “patrician” Rackstraw and lowly Corcoran in childhood’s happy hour, we see Sir Joseph’s true stripes when confronted by this inconvenient truth. As he says to the just-fallen Corcoran: “I need not tell you that after this change of your condition, a marriage with your daughter will be out of the question.” Corcoran replies, quoting Sir Joseph’s earlier assertion, “Don’t say that, your honour—love levels all ranks.”

“It does to a considerable extent, but it does not level them as much as that,” replies to Sir Joseph, whose first cousin Hebe quickly steps forward and offers herself as his bride. “Nothing could possibly be more satisfactory,” for the class distinctions are maintained, as they are for Corcoran and Buttercup. The dénouement for Ralph (now captain) and Josephine (soon to be the captain’s wife instead of the captain’s daughter) is also romantically satisfactory (assuming Ralph will take possession of that ancestral home!). In fact, the new social relationship of Josephine and Ralph offers a new definition of topsyturvy: Josephine is marrying “up” and Ralph “down”!

As the sextet of principals sing of their happy ending, Gilbert & Sullivan reprise *five* of the opera’s catchiest tunes, the audience leaves with a feeling of elation at the resolution, and it’s only later (if at all) some may start to ask pesky questions, such as: Do you mean to say that Josephine is in love with a man old enough to be her *father*? And Can Buttercup *really* be in love with a person she nursed when she was young and charming?

But back to Sir Joseph for a moment—and a little homework assignment: on stage and on recordings he frequently makes a little-recognized “mistake” in delivering a famous lyric as Gilbert wrote it. I’ll leave it to *you* to find the frequent misquotation (it’s but a single word), but here are two hints: 1) it’s in the first verse of his most famous song (I’m guessing that many readers can recite it by heart—and perhaps even make the mistake themselves); and 2) the “misquotation” is near at hand.

I am grateful to my friend Gayden Wren for contacting me after the last *Newsletter* appeared to correct my statement that Crips is the name of one of the gangs in the musical *West Side Story*. As Gayden gently reminded me, Crips is the name of an actual gang; the fictional gangs in *WSS* are the Jets and the Sharks.

**Armstrong
Moving & Storage**

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

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)
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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:



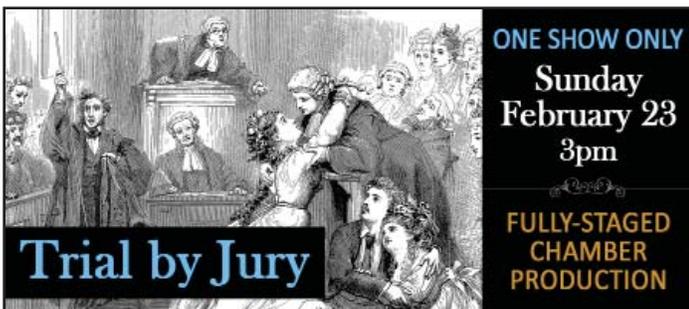
Auditions for *H.M.S. Pinafore*

Auditions for our summer 2014 production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* will take place March 1 and 2 at Genesis Presbyterian Church at 1507 Wilshire Boulevard. Look for more details in the next newsletter.

Wand'ring Minstrels

The Wand'ring Minstrels of the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin are looking forward to 2014 and entertaining the public in Gilbert and Sullivan style.

Contact **Robert L. Schneider** (bigdaddymusic1@gmail.com), or see our website (www.gilbertsullivan.org) for further details or to schedule the Wand'ring Minstrels for your organization.



First Presbyterian Church, 8001 Mesa Drive
Visit www.gilbertsullivan.org or call (512) 472-4772
TICKETS: "Pay What You Will"
See next newsletter for more details.

NEWS of our MEMBERS

Spencer Reichman has had quite a fall semester. He won first place in the senior men's division at the Texoma NATS (National Association of Teachers of Singing) competition. He also was a co-winner of the Texas State University Aria Competition, earning a position singing Mozart with the orchestra in the spring. In mid-November, he played a lead role in the world premiere of Henry Mollicone's *Children of the Sun*, in a joint production of Texas State Opera Theatre and the McCallum Fine Arts Academy. He capped it off with his Junior Recital on December 3. Way to go, Spencer!

Rose Taylor Concert

A concert honoring Rose Taylor will be held at UT's Bates Recital Hall at 2 pm on Sunday, January 26, 2014. It is expected to include performances by members of the Gilbert & Sullivan Society. Please look for further details in our e-newsletter.

GSSA at the B. Iden Payne Awards Ceremony

The State Theatre was crowded and noisy on November 5 for Austin's annual B. Iden Payne awards for outstanding theatre performance, and the G&S Society of Austin was on the scene. Two G&S stars were nominated, both for *Princess Ida*: **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** for outstanding musical direction and **Michelle Haché** for outstanding actress in a musical. Board members **Reba Gillman** and **Michael Meigs** were there, along with G&S Production Manager **Bill Hatcher** and G&S regulars **June Julian**, **Jay Young** and **Trey Deason**. June appeared onstage, entertaining with the rest of the cast from *Avenue Q* by the Austin Theatre Project; *Avenue Q* received the award for outstanding production in music theatre. G&S set designer **Ann Marie Gordon** received an award for outstanding set design for *Qualities of Starlight* at the Vortex Repertory. The night grew late and ever more raucous. In the last round, when the committee announced that Michelle had won—her second B. Iden Payne for a Gilbert and Sullivan musical!—the G&S folks thought they might have to accept it for her, but Michelle suddenly appeared, having raced to Austin after directing a rehearsal of the play *Peter Pan* in Georgetown. Accepting the award, she very graciously recognized Bill, Reba and GSSA. (See photos on page 3.)

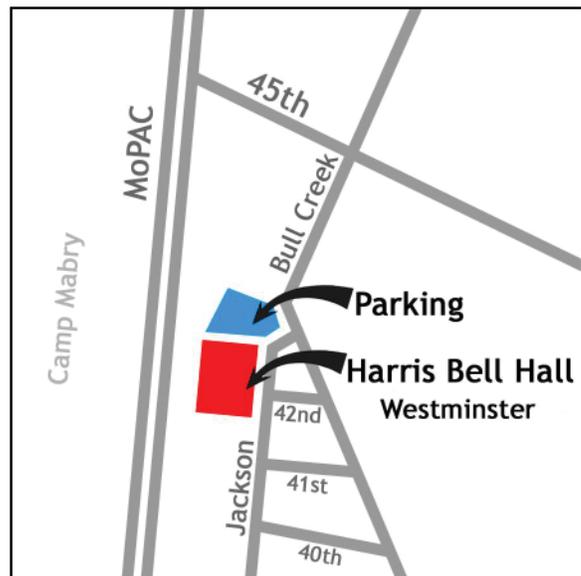


JANUARY 2014

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



See details on page 1!



Coming Events

- Jan. 5 Annual Meeting and Musicale (see p. 1)
- Feb. 23 *Trial by Jury* Musicale
- March 1-2 *H.M.S. Pinafore* Auditions
- May 18 *H.M.S. Pinafore* Preview Musicale
- June 12-22 *H.M.S. Pinafore* summer production

Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive in early February; the deadline for submissions is January 20. 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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 Visit Austin at NowPlayingAustin.com



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

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