

The GILBERT & SULLIVAN

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2014 NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed



Our 2014-15 season is off to an auspicious start. First, our Downton Abbey musicale in September drew a large and appreciative crowd, and **Janette Jones** and the stellar cast brought us a charming—and really fun!—show. Whether you were there or not, you surely must not miss the November musicale,

“A Return to Fairyland.” The word is that Mother Goose herself may come to present the story line of the fanciful Gilbert & Sullivan *Iolanthe*, and that almost every principal from our highly acclaimed 2009 production will be on hand to entertain us royally. Don't forget to bring a snack contribution and join us for food and fellowship afterward!

Here is another reason that our season is off to such a good start: We received notice in September that the Austin City Council approved the extension of our contract with the Cultural Arts Division and increased the amount that had been awarded us in the previous year. Though the award we were granted with our renewed contract amounts to only a very small percentage of the cost of mounting a production, and we must still depend heavily on other contributions to produce our shows, this is a huge vote of confidence.

As our B. Iden Payne-recognized music director, **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**, explained: “The cultural contract is not a grant, given freely or with ‘values’ strings attached. It is an actual contract, by which the City of Austin pays us to provide a culturally valuable asset.” The renewing of our contract and increasing of our award is an affirmation of the production values of our shows and an acknowledgment that we have done an excellent job of fulfilling the expectations of past contracts.

To put it in other words, by extending our contract, the City has, in a sense, “hired” us once more to provide an excellent entertainment value to our citizens, to do so in a responsible financial manner, and to add to the cultural value of our fair city. The City Cultural Arts Division recognizes that we have exceeded our contractual obligations every year by drawing bigger audiences, gaining greater visibility, and raising the professional and artistic levels of our productions.

For this recognition, we owe a great debt of gratitude to Maestro Jones-Ragona, our artistic director **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, and the third member of our leadership team, production manager **Bill Hatcher**. Together they have assembled magnificent casts and crews for our shows and created award-winning productions. And we owe immense thanks to board members **Diane Radin** and **Roberta Long**, our capable grant-writing team, for their careful and reliable documentation and writing.

Of course, as noted already, the funds we receive as grants or contracts combined with the money brought in by ticket sales do not supply all the capital we need to produce a truly beautiful and true-to-the-Savoy-tradition show, so we still must ask our friends to help us with donations. But when you receive a request to assist us financially, you can be assured that the City of Austin has deemed our organization one

that is fiscally responsible, faithful to its word, and capable of bringing exceptional entertainment to audiences.

Join us on Sunday, November 9, at the Worley Barton Theater (scene of our past three grand summer productions) for “A Return to Fairyland.” You'll want to see how a highly “influential fairy” can threaten to unleash “All the most terrific thunders / In my armoury of wonders” on a pompous assemblage of men!

A Return to Fairyland

Sunday, November 9, at 3 pm

Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School
11908 North Lamar (see map, page 6)

Remembering our magical production of Gilbert & Sullivan's *Iolanthe* from 2009, we will return to Fairyland for our next musicale.

Here are some marvelous sights and sounds to anticipate: **Russell Gregory** will again delight us as Private Willis; **Lisa Alexander** still reigns supreme as The Fairy Queen; **Patricia Combs** and **Natalie Wilemon** return as the lovely and feisty fairies Leila and Celia; **June Julian** returns as the eternally young and beautiful fairy Iolanthe; **Derek Smootz** causes the ladies to swoon as Iolanthe's handsome son Strephon; **Andy Fleming** and **David Fontenot**, as Lords Tolloller and Mountararat, again lead the Peers into battle with the Fairy Kingdom; and **Arthur DiBianca** will astound us all again with his portrayal of the pompous Lord Chancellor.

With the amazing talents of **Jeanne Sasaki** at the piano and **Janette Jones** as director, this musicale is sure to enchant everyone. So put on your fairy wings and join us on November 9th.

This performance is free.

Please bring munchies to share!

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Downton Abbey Sings Gilbert & Sullivan by Reba Gillman



At 3 pm on Sunday, September 7, 140 people happily gathered in the lovely Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School to enjoy the opening event of the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin season. Neatly seated on stage, starting from the right in order of appearance, were **Libby Weed** as Lady Cora; **Angela Irving** - Lady Mary; **Rosa Harris** - Lady Edith;

Julia Powers - Lady Sybil; **David Fontenot** - Mr. Carson; **Carol Brown** - Anna; **Robert L. Schneider** - Thomas; **Janette Jones** - Mrs. Hughes; **Wayne Davis** - Tom Branson; **Andy Fleming** - Bates; and **Brittany Trinité** - Isobel Crawley. At the far left **Jeanne Sasaki** sat at the piano with **Cody Ireland** to turn pages. All were nicely dressed in appropriate clothing. Perhaps not the World War I era, but close enough. That Janette, she did it all—she's amazing!

Libby as President of the G&S Society of Austin welcomed us, and explained and introduced the program. By now we all recognize Janette's creative energy and interesting ideas in planning our musicale programs. Libby told us that during the June run of our magnificent production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, it suddenly occurred to Janette how similar the scene she had just performed on stage was to part of the story of the British TV show *Downton Abbey*. As she pursued this idea, chatting with the singers in the ladies' dressing room, everyone was delighted. What would the characters of Downton Abbey have thought of the operas of Gilbert & Sullivan? Which of the characters and songs would have touched their hearts, and with whom would they have identified? This became our program, and Libby became Lady Cora, serving as the Narrator.

Lady Cora (Libby), refers to her three daughters, Lady Mary, Lady Edith, and Lady Sybil and Angela, Rosa, and Julia come forward to sing "Three little maids" from *The Mikado*. Next, Lady Cora introduces Mr. Carson, the butler, remarking that he said he would always have to run everything to make sure it was done correctly, and David steps forward to sing "Rising early in the morning" from *The Gondoliers*. Lady Cora then introduces a new employee, Bates, who has turned out to have a pronounced limp. This causes doubts of his ability to do the job, but one staff member sees his potential and Carol sings "Poor wand'ring one" from *The Pirates of Penzance*. Mr. Carson complains that meanwhile he has to deal with the first footman, Thomas, who always seems to be up to something to improve his position, and Robert as Thomas, sings "My name is John Wellington Wells" from *The Sorcerer*. Mrs. Hughes (Janette) tells us that the chauffeur, Tom Branson, is in love with someone upstairs, and Wayne sings "The nightingale" and "A maiden fair to see" from *H.M.S. Pinafore*—he loves, alas, above his station. Is he in love with the beautiful and clever Lady Mary? Angela sings "The sun, whose rays" from *The Mikado*. No, it turns out he is in love with Lady Sybil, the youngest daughter, beautiful in spirit and the family rebel. When World War I breaks out, she supports the efforts of Isobel Crawley to convert Downton into a much-needed convalescent home. Julia (Lady Sybil) and Brittany (Isobel Crawley) sing "Now wouldn't you like to rule the roast" from *Princess Ida*. They have grand ideas and wish to change the world. Mr. Bates wishes only to make one woman

happy. Andy as Mr. Bates sings "Take a pair of sparkling eyes" from *The Gondoliers*. Mrs. Hughes says that while love swirls all around upstairs and down, one poor soul seems to be constantly left out of all the romance. Lady Edith, the middle daughter, falls in love with the first young man the family wants Lady Mary to marry. Then she falls for Matthew who has eyes only for Lady Mary. Rosa, as Lady Edith, sings "Alone, and yet alive" from *The Mikado*. Lady Cora murmurs that poor Edith seems to think she is the only person who has not found love. But perhaps Mrs. Hughes and Mr. Carson have felt the same way. Janette and David sing "Welcome joy, adieu to sadness" from *The Sorcerer*. Lady Cora says that even when romance blooms there are often complications. Anna finds that in spite of her love for Mr. Bates she cannot keep him safe from those who wish him ill. Carol sings, "Sorry her lot" from *H.M.S. Pinafore*. Lady Cora says that speaking of those who wish Mr. Bates ill, we find one person constantly scheming and getting into fights, Thomas, the first footman. Robert sings "This helmet, I suppose" from *Princess Ida*. Lady Cora tells us that war comes to Downton and many of the men go off to fight. We are relieved when Matthew makes it home and eventually proposes and is accepted by Lady Mary. We are delighted to see her becoming softer and warmer with his love. But Matthew is killed in an accident and Mary sinks into the depths of despair. Angela, as Lady Mary sings, "I built upon a rock" this aria from *Princess Ida* expresses her hopelessness. Lady Cora tells us that the loss of Matthew is hard on all of them, and Lady Mary is not the only one who struggles with despair. Matthew's mother, Isobel, suffers the loss of her son, her only child. But she is not a woman to spend her days mourning for herself. She finds purpose in helping others. She will gladly give anyone in need a hand up. She believes that hard work is a big help in healing. She admires those who work for a living. Brittany, as Isobel, sings this song from *H.M.S. Pinafore*, sung by a woman who works hard, "I'm called Little Buttercup."

Lady Cora says, "Now, as we near the end of our program, we come to the number from *H.M.S. Pinafore* that inspired this whole idea. Let's listen as the characters recall Mr. Bates being taken off to prison for a crime he did not commit, much as Gilbert & Sullivan's young sailor Ralph Rackstraw was sent to a dungeon." Cast, as various characters, sing "Farewell, my own" from *H.M.S. Pinafore*. "But, we cannot end on a sad note, for we know that injustice will be righted and that love will reign supreme. Let's listen as Andy (Bates) and Carol (Anna) sing of the triumph of true love, using songs from *The Pirates of Penzance*, 'Ah, leave me not to pine alone' through 'Oh, here is love, and here is truth.' "

Libby gave thanks to the singers and pianist, and asked the audience to join us in our traditional musicale conclusion. David sang the Pirate King's lead into "Hail, Poetry," from *Pirates* and "Now to the banquet we press," from *The Sorcerer*. The audience, practically shouting its approval, rose to their feet in a standing ovation, the first ever received at a musicale. Happily we adjourned to the lobby for delicious munchies and pleasant conversation. Wonderful show!



pianist Jeanne Sasaki

Downton Abbey Sings Gilbert & Sullivan

photos courtesy Steve Schwartzmann

see more at gilbertsullivanaustrin.smugmug.com



the cast (l-r): Brittany Trinité (Isobel Crawley), Rosa Harris (Lady Edith), Angela Irving (Lady Mary), Julia Powers (Lady Sybil), Wayne Davis (Tom Branson), Robert L. Schneider (Thomas), David Fontenot (Mr. Carson), Janette Jones (Mrs. Hughes), Carol Brown (Anna), and Andy Fleming (Bates)



Libby Weed
(Lady Cora)



"Ah, leave me not to pine"



"Three little maids from school are we"



"Welcome Joy, adieu to sadness"

A Gilbert & Sullivan Summit!

by Ralph MacPhail, Jr.

The invitation came from that venerable 62-year-old San Francisco G&S producing organization, The Lamplighters, while I was in Austin staging *H.M.S. Pinafore*. It was both intriguing and compelling: an attempt to draw together representatives from organizations that produce the Savoy operas to discuss matters of universal (and sometimes urgent) interest, such as:

- How does an organization continue to thrive when it has only a limited repertory?
- How can younger theatre-goers be attracted to Gilbert & Sullivan?
- How can resources (props, costumes, orchestrations) be shared?
- How do companies deal with succession of board members and other personnel?

Some 14 groups were able to send representatives. Organizer Keith Doerge polled the groups to set the agenda of topics for discussion (four sessions over two days, August 15-16).

The Lamplighters hosted the first two sessions in the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, where their production of *The Pirates of Penzance* was playing. The second day of discussions was held at the "Lamplighters World Headquarters," a combination office/archive/scenery storage/costume shop, where the acoustics for discussion were better. Also, the warehouse ambience was "backstage" and very congenial for theatre folk!

It is impossible in a brief article such as this to summarize our wide-ranging discussions, but I might mention here a few of the subjects

to which I contributed. There was great interest in our "Children's Matinees" (as a means of attracting younger theatregoers to Gilbert & Sullivan); I also noted our on-going success at keeping prices low for students under 19. Related to this important matter there was discussion of sharing scripts for in-school programs; I spoke briefly about our "Wand'ring Minstrels." I also described Ted Spencer's GSOpera.com website, which has as a goal to open up sharing opportunities between groups.

On the subject of audience development, I spoke about our free musicales, their format, content, and goals of fellowship and, ultimately, increasing memberships and selling tickets to productions. There was interest in our audience questionnaire, the inducement we have for getting audience members to fill it out, and I was pleased and proud to pass around an *H.M.S. Pinafore* program with a questionnaire.

The concept of the "Global G&S Day" (on or around May 3, Richard D'Oyly Carte's birthday), put forth by the G&S Festival Founder Ian Smith, was news to most and of great interest as a way to bring the public's attention to the Savoy operas.

Before we left, there was enthusiasm for an on-going discussion through a Facebook page and meetings in the future. With more lead-time, it's very likely that many other groups will be able to attend and contribute.

I was proud to represent our Society in San Francisco. I am grateful to GSSA, which provided my airfare; to Scott and Kitty Hayes, who provided hospitality before and after the Summit; and to the Lamplighters, who provided such a wonderful exchange of ideas.

Looking Ahead to *The Sorcerer*

by Ralph MacPhail, Jr.



My title expresses the purpose for this article, but it could also be phrased “Looking Ahead with *The Sorcerer*,” for this early Gilbert & Sullivan collaboration might be considered what’s sometimes called these days a “seminal” work: one that contains the seeds of something even more creative to come.

The Sorcerer was written for and produced by Richard D’Oyly Carte at the Opéra Comique in London in 1877. It was the third collaboration of William Schwenck Gilbert (who, of course, wrote the words) and Arthur Seymour Sullivan (who composed the music). And as suggested above, *The Sorcerer* was in many ways to provide the foundation on which the subsequent works would be built. Gilbert & Sullivan first collaborated in December 1871 on what was assumed to be an ephemeral post-Christmas entertainment, the two-act *Thespis; or, The Gods Grown Old*. The man who brought the two together was John Hollingshead, the manager of the Gaiety Theatre, which he had opened almost exactly three years earlier with Gilbert’s burlesque of Meyerbeer’s opera *Robert le Diable*; Gilbert called it, *Robert the Devil; or The Nun, The Dun, and the Son of a Gun*. *Thespis* was not, as is so often stated, a failure; following a decent run, it closed with the rest of the post-Christmas “pantomime season,” and all but forgotten; most of the score was subsequently lost. When Gilbert & Sullivan resumed collaboration, they wanted to do more than write burlesque or pantomime.

But *Thespis* was not forgotten by Richard D’Oyly Carte, who brought the two collaborators together again three and a quarter years later at the Royalty Theatre for *Trial by Jury*, that 40-minute “dramatic cantata” we presented last February. It was not a logical successor of *Thespis: Trial by Jury* was through-composed (truly an opera), presented in one act, and its comedy was several cuts above what passed for humor with the Gaiety audience.

But if *Trial by Jury* was not a logical outgrowth of *Thespis*, it solidified Richard D’Oyly Carte’s determination to present “true English” light opera in London instead of the usual burlesque or extravaganza—or, worse, French operetta imports bowdlerized beyond intelligibility for prim and proper Victorian English audiences.

So Richard D’Oyly Carte raised some money and formed with other investors “The Comedy Opera Company.” (Gilbert & Sullivan had insisted they be paid guarantees before starting to work.) The new company’s first production was *The Sorcerer*.

In what ways does *The Sorcerer* anticipate subsequent early works? First, it was based on earlier work by Gilbert (in this case, a short-story called “An Elixir of Love” published the previous Christmas; Gilbert had earlier in his career—in 1866—also treated the ages-old “magic love potion” story in another operatic burlesque, *Dulcamara; or The Little Duck and the Great Quack*. This title will bring to opera lovers’ minds Donizetti’s *L’Elisir d’Amore*, the basis for Gilbert’s burlesque).

Gilbert & Sullivan also structured their story around character types that would shortly become prototypes of their subsequent *dramatis personæ*: the soprano-tenor romantic couple (hardly revolutionary), the heavy and light baritones, the bass, the perky soubrette, the aging contralto.

They also engaged for *The Sorcerer*, instead of established opera singers with big names and bigger voices, relatively unknown actor-singers with projectable personalities who could be trained in the Gilbertian style of understated humor.

A glance at the original cast of *The Sorcerer* of 1877 reveals names that would before long become so closely associated with the characters they created that the parts are sometimes even today named after them: George Grossmith (the sorcerer John Wellington Wells), Rutland Barrington (the lovelorn Dr. Daly), and Richard Temple (the aristocratic Sir Marmaduke Poindextre). (*H.M.S. Pinafore*, which followed *The Sorcerer*, further refined the “formula”—and its English-speaking-world-wide popularity made the collaborators’ names household words.)

Sullivan provided a score that is almost universally praised by my music-knowledgeable Savoyard friends, and as I’ve started listening to the score with more attention in anticipation of next summer’s show, I’ve come to understand why. If Gilbert was still feeling his way in terms of what he could provide his collaborator in terms of lyrics, Sullivan provided a *lovely* score. Following the première, both collaborators came in for their share of praise. Reginald Allen, in his *First-Night Gilbert & Sullivan*, quotes a number of press reports reflecting the delight of the scribes and the anticipation that had greeted the opening:

“Messrs. W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan have once again combined their efforts with happiest result,” was the opinion of the *Times*. “*The Sorcerer*, produced at the Opéra Comique on Saturday night before an audience that crowded the theatre in every part, achieved a genuine success, and moreover, a success in every respect deserved.” “The production of the new opera,” added the *Daily News*, “has been for some time looked forward to with much interest. . . . The new work . . . was brought out . . . with a result that fulfilled the most sanguine anticipations.”

So we have a lot to look forward to. Yes, it’s a “seminal” work, and while we’ll be able to appreciate it for its music, humor, pageantry, and more, we’ll also be able to appreciate it as the very model of the Gilbert & Sullivan operas to come.

H.M.S. Pinafore Garners B. Iden Payne Award Nominations for Carol Brown, Russell Gregory, and Jeffrey Jones-Ragona

The B. Iden Payne Awards Council has announced nominations for the 2013-2014 Season Awards. Our 2014 Grand Summer Production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* received 3 nominations: **Carol Brown** for Outstanding Lead Actress in Musical Theatre; **Russell Gregory** for Outstanding Featured Actor in Musical Theater; and **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** for Outstanding Music Direction. Congratulations to all! Winners of the awards will be announced on Monday, November 3, at The Long Center’s Rollins Studio Theatre.

Wand’ring Minstrels

The Wand’ring Minstrels have been approved by AISD as contractors for public school performances. They will be performing next at the St. Mark United Methodist Church’s “St. Market Day Festival” at noon on October 25. They will also perform a Christmas Show at Westminster at 7 pm on Dec. 9.

To hire the Wand’ring Minstrels for your concert, school event, or private party, contact **Robert L. Schneider** (bigdaddymusic1@gmail.com), or see our website (www.gilbertsullivan.org).

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).

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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:

NEWS of our MEMBERS

GSSA's Music Director and GLOO conductor, **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**, will be performing in several concerts this Holiday season that may be of interest to Savoyards: On Friday, December 5, he will conduct a performance of the *Requiem in E-Flat* by Niccolo Jommelli, a piece that at one time was the most famous Requiem in Europe, until Mozart's became known in the early 19th century. The concert features the Austin Baroque Festival Chorus and Orchestra with soprano **Meredith Ruduski** (most recently seen as Patience in our 2012 grand production) at the Cathedral of St. Mary, 203 E 10th St.; parking is available in the Capital Towers garage. On Saturday, Dec. 6, at 7:30 pm, and Sunday, Dec. 7 at 4 pm, he will lead The Capital City Men's Chorus in its annual Holiday Concert, complete with carol sing-along, accompanied by string orchestra and harp! The event will be at St. Martin's Lutheran Church, 606 West 15th St. And on Saturday, Jan. 3 at 8 pm and Sunday, Jan. 4 at 3 pm, he will perform as one of the featured harpsichordists in La Follia Austin Baroque's annual Herd of Harpsichords concert. It includes a concerto for two harpsichords, written by Jeffrey!

Member **Edward Kimball** is also a member of the Austin Classical Guitar community guitarists. They will be performing Christmas music and other classical-guitar-only music about noon on Saturday, Dec. 6, in the Texas Capitol Rotunda. Acoustics are great and the event is free (not counting parking). They will perform a similar repertoire on Sunday, Dec. 14, at 5 pm at Trinity Methodist Church, 4001 Speedway; the event is also free, including parking. Interesting side note: Mr. Kimball first met our esteemed Artistic Director **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, in 1969, when they served in the same unit in Vietnam. "Lt. MacPhail would write G2 Intelligence docs and I would type them. I received a better education from Rafe than any school!"

Janet Forman sang in Chorus Austin's 50th Anniversary Season Gala, an all-Beethoven concert at The Long Center on Oct. 12.

Frequent GSSA performer and former President **June Julian** delighted audiences as Lady Thiang in the recent month-long run of *The King and I* at Zach Theatre's Topfer stage.

Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive near the end of the year; the deadline for submissions is December 3. Please send your news to news@gilbertsullivan.org. Thanks!



Auditions for *The Sorcerer*

Auditions for our summer 2015 production of *The Sorcerer* will take place on February 21 and 22 at Brentwood Christian School. Look for more details in future newsletters and on the website.

Notice of Elections

The Society will elect members of the board for 2015 at the Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 11, 3 pm, at Genesis Presbyterian Church. If you have an interest in serving on the board, please contact nominations committee chair, **Reba Gillman**, at (512) 327-2277 or rgillman@austin.rr.com. Reba and committee member **Sue Caldwell** will prepare a nomination slate to be published in the January newsletter. Our board is an excellent group of men and women, each of whom has specific roles and works throughout the year to conduct business and bring the joys of G&S to our community.

Armstrong Moving & Storage

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



**NOVEMBER
MUSICALE**

**A Return to
Fairyland**

**Sunday
Nov 9
3pm**

Coming Events

- Nov. 9 A Return to Fairyland (see p. 1)
- Jan. 11 Annual Meeting and Musicale
- Feb. 15 Mid-season one-act production: *The Zoo*
- Feb. 21-22 *The Sorcerer* Auditions
- May 17 *The Sorcerer* Preview Musicale
- June 18-28 *The Sorcerer* summer production



*Map to November Musicale
See details on page 1!*



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NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2014

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin

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- 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.

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 Music Director

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Jeffrey Jones-Ragona

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