

Note from the editor

Last May I was delighted to read the article which I print below. At the time our Austin Society was busy preparing a big production of *The Mikado*. We were not geared up to join Gilbert & Sullivan lovers the world over who were celebrating the 150th anniversary of the birth of Sir Arthur Sullivan. However, better late than never, so here it is.

The Palace Peeper is published monthly by the G&S Society of NY. I am an out-of-town member for the price of \$16, payable in September. I believe you could send \$8 now and get a 6-month membership. So, if anyone is interested write to The Gilbert and Sullivan Society of New York, c/o Ms. Frances Yasprica, Corresponding Sec'y. 1351 65th Street #3R, Brooklyn, New York 11219.

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"Somebody's birthday, I suppose?"

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY, SIR ARTHUR A TRIBUTE BY DAN KRAVETZ

ON MAY 13, THE DAY BEFORE OUR MEETING, we should stop what we are doing and pay tribute to Sir Arthur Sullivan's 150th birthday.

The music world saw the bicentennial of Mozart's death celebrated last year, and that of Rossini's birth (that is, if you don't go by birthdays) this February 29th. Those milestones were marked by copious performances of their compositions in most European and American cities.

Sullivan will not be getting the same treatment; music historians are virtually unanimous in pointing out that Sullivan was not as important a composer as those whose works have been routinely enshrined in concert halls and opera houses over the last century or so.

Since Sullivan is best known as half of the Gilbert and Sullivan collaboration, the celebration will not pass without notice in G&S appreciation groups. The old D'Oyly Carte went all out in 1975 for the G&S Centenary, but there is a danger in ignoring Sullivan the individual. It is not that Sullivan produced any

greater compositions than the Savoy operas, but he was a remarkable musician whose creativity did not switch on and off depending on whether he had a piece of Gilbert's verse on his desk at any given moment.

Arthur Sullivan was Britain's greatest composer during Britain's greatest century, the nineteenth. Germany, Italy, Russia and France had their acknowledged musical masters; Victorian England needed her own musical giant, and Sullivan had the field to himself.

A century and a half later, almost nothing of Sullivan is heard in our great musical institutions. But how can the composer of the greatest works of lyric theater in the English language not be considered a great all-around composer? Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and a few others can never be approached, but why has Sullivan not at least commanded the attention such great contemporaries as Bruckner, Dvorak, Grieg and Rimsky-Korsakov have enjoyed continuously over the past century? And why did England's twentieth-century music-loving public leap into the

Continued on Page 4

Continued from Page 2

arms of Elgar, Holst, Vaughan-Williams and Britten, while forgetting the man who almost single-handedly invented their school of composition?

The simple answer might be that Sullivan just couldn't compose as well as these others; it would also be the wrong answer. The music of the Savoy operas exhibits all that can be desired in the way of melody, rhythm, harmony, humor, passion and pathos. These gifts were put to use in every bar of music Sullivan ever wrote; the results range from the memorable to the merely routine, but there is never a lack of craftsmanship, spirit or aural beauty.

It took a very special human being to create the scores of *Patience* and *The Yeomen of the Guard*; composers can't help putting their thoughts and feelings into their work, no matter what sort of work they are doing. For this reason alone, the best possible birthday present for Sir Arthur would be to give more of his output a fair hearing.

Not all devotees of the G&S operas are lovers of symphony, grand opera, chamber music or art song. Those who can take or leave classical music will not change their minds upon listening to the classical Sullivan, although the Savoy operas have helped introduce countless popular music lovers into such classical conventions as the unamplified voice and the orchestra of strings, winds and brasses.

It cannot be reasonably expected that concertgoers will, when exposed to more of Sullivan, abandon their enthusiasm for Brahms and Tchaikovsky. The point is that our musical institutions are dedicated to preserving the music of the past; the treasures exhibited in our museums of sound are there to teach listeners about the history of musical composition and, if possible, to give them something enjoyable to listen to. To dismiss Sullivan as a "serious" composer because he was particularly adept at comic

opera, ignores the example of another man whose skill at comic opera can be said to equal or even exceed Sullivan's: Mozart, whose time away from the lyric stage was never wasted.

Mozart did not seem to have the same trouble searching for his identity as Sullivan had. To be a Victorian Englishman was to struggle between giving in to one's impulses and following the conventional expectations of propriety. W. S. Gilbert wrote about this struggle constantly. Sullivan lived the struggle both as a Victorian Englishman and as a Victorian English composer. Mozart, that singular genius, managed to make his own rules much more of the time. Sullivan, with all his musical gifts, seemed to be moving through the various forms of musical composition like a young man trying on several not-quite-comfortable suits of clothing under a stern parent's eye. None of the suits fit him badly, but the comic opera suit undoubtedly fit much better than the others.

Besides, Sullivan didn't have the talent of a Mozart. Or did he? George Bernard Shaw had some interesting things to say in his review of the score of *Utopia (Limited)*, citing "such caressing wind parts . . . as those in the trio for the King and the two Judges" and "the chorus of the Christy Minstrel song." To Shaw, "in these examples we are on the plane . . . of Mozart's *Così fan tutte* and . . . in *Le Nozze di Figaro*." But Shaw also knew that such talent was not enough to make a composer respectable in the eyes of the musical establishment. In Sullivan's time, there was a veritable explosion of popular demand for goods and services, including literature and music. He was Victorian England's best hope to serve as the musical genius of the century, with so much expected of him in conventional musical circles that he was bound to disappoint those who sat in judgment. He could be accepted as a social butterfly and a womanizer as long as he accomplished what the era's

preeminent composer was expected to accomplish, but his insistence on setting comic verses to music had its price, no matter how much fame and fortune came to him in the process. It wasn't in his job description, and the reaction to that sort of musical philandering is the reason Sullivan's plaster bust does not sit in the classical composers' hall of fame.

Shaw understood this in projecting what Sullivan's composition teachers must have thought of their famous pupil: "They trained him to make Europe yawn; and he took advantage of their teaching to make London and New York laugh and whistle." For his 150th birthday, may the music world forgive Sullivan his apparent ingratitude to the time and place which gave birth to his musicianship, and restore him to his rightful place in the league of 19th century classical composers we cannot do without. The gift we owe Sir Arthur Sullivan, in exchange for the laughter and whistling, is to open our ears to all that his brilliance produced, and to keep his name alive in its own right, not just as half of Gilbert and Sullivan.

DAN KRAVETZ presents



Sir Arthur Sullivan

Annual Business Meeting, cont. from p.1
Slate of Officers

President	Robert Mellin
Executive Vice President	Bob Kusnetz
V.P. for Production	Patrick Bennett
V.P. for Publicity	Donna Delvy
Secretary	Reba Gillman
Co-Treasurers	Kate Hendriks Diane Simpson
Historian	Anne Collins Smith

After a brief report from Robert Mellin on the progress of plans for *Iolanthe*, the music began in earnest. Kristina Havenhill sang "The hours creep on apace" from *Pinafore*; Frank Delvy and Janette Jones sang their duet from *Ruddigore*, "I once was a very abandoned person", complete with "blameless dances"; Allen Lawshae sang "There lived a king" from *Gondoliers*. The music returned then to *Ruddigore*, with Janette singing Mad Margaret's "Cheerily carols the lark" and Frank changing characters to sing Sullivan's operatic aria "When the night wind howls". This ended the planned entertainment, but everyone was in full swing, so the singing continued. Frank gave us the latest version of Anne Collins Smith's words to Ko-ko's song "I've got a little list"; visitor Julia Spencer tried her hand at "When a maiden loves" from *Gondoliers*, and "Sorry her lot" from *Pinafore*; Frank, Janette and Loel Graber sang the rapid-fire trio from *Ruddigore* "My eyes are fully open"; and Allen, Kristina and Loel sang "Here's a howdy-do" from *Mikado*. To round things off in proper style everyone joined in an enthusiastic, mostly a capella (no piano score), rendition of "Now to the banquet we press" from *The Sorcerer* before we all went in to munch and chat.

Present were members Pearl Amster, Frank & Donna Delvy, Reba Gillman, Loel Graber, Kristina Havenhill, Bill

Hatcher, Kate Hendricks, Janette Jones, Bob Kusnetz, Allen Lawshae, Robert Mellin, Joan Pearsall, Anne Collins Smith, Bob Wall, and Deborah Zallen. Guests were Linalice Carey, Jeanie Roberts, and Julia Spencer.

• News of Members •

- Best Wishes to Harold Gilbert who is recovering well from his January 5th hip surgery.
- Former member Judy Forbes is the Administrative Assistant to the Medical Director of MHMR in Houston.
- With sorrow we report the death from a heart attack of former member Brian Sceley. He was a loyal G&S fan, and only 40 years old. Our sympathies go to his wife Patti.

Auditions for *Iolanthe*

In the UT Music Building East
Corner of East Campus Drive and E.25 St

Saturday, February 13	2:45 - 7 pm
Room 2.614	
Monday, February 15	7:15 - 9:30 pm
Room 2.116	
Call Backs	
Tuesday, February 16	7:15 - 9:30 pm
Room 2.614	

Be prepared to sing something from an opera or a Broadway Show. For information call Robert Mellin 345-5950

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin
Reba Gillman, Secretary
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