

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

### Portrait of a Noteworthy Member: Jess Walters

by Libby Weed • President

(Note: For information on The Gilbert & Sullivan Society's Gala Tribute to Jess & Emma Walters, please see page 3.)

Young Josuah Wolk, changing the record of opera music on the Victrola, dreamed of the day when he would be an artist like his father, who was a portrait painter. But life was to take a different course for this youngest of seven children (six of them sons) born in 1908 to Latvian parents in New York City.

After enrolling in the Hebrew Art Institute at age 15, young Jess, as he was called, had to move with his family to the Pennsylvania countryside. There he began a three-year course in farming, continuing during his student days the family tradition of entertaining friends by singing at parties. "Why don't you go to Hollywood and have a big career?" asked a friend. Instead, Jess farmed for three years in Pennsylvania and Connecticut.

When the depression hit, Jess returned to New York to work in an uncle's leather shop. A friend who owned a small radio station asked Jess to "sing a few songs" on the air, and this led to several other appearances at restaurants and a turn on the Major Bowes Amateur Hour. "You have to study," urged Jess's radio friend. "You have everything that makes a singer."

At 25, Jess began studying voice, still entering contests and singing in various places. Emma DeFina was a voice student at the same studio. Vocalizing one day, she says, "I heard this voice, and it was the epitome of what a voice should be. And I saw these dark curls all over his head." She was smitten before she even saw Jess's face. Jess, meanwhile, was too shy to approach her directly, so he asked his teacher to make a date for him. What attracted him to Emma? "Oh, she's an Italian — extremely emotional — I liked everything about her!"

Jess began performing more and more operatic roles, and in the late 1930s his performing name became Jess Walters. His "big break" came when he performed the title role in "Macbeth" with the New York City Opera. From that time on, he was consistently in demand and performed with several companies.

Emma and Jess married in 1943, and Arnold Emil Wolk was born in 1944. Arnold and Emma stayed in New York when Jess traveled to London in January of 1947 to perform at Covent Garden. One role led to another, and soon Jess told Emma to pack and move to London. His "brief engagement" became a thirteen-year stay with the Royal Opera. During his London years, Jess performed 25 roles, garnered rave press reviews, and

met twice with Queen Elizabeth II. He was also the voice of Britain's "Tony, the Tiger" in Kellogg's commercials!

From 1960 to 1965, Jess and Emma lived in Amsterdam and Jess sang with the Nederlands Opera. By 1965, they decided they were ready to return to the States. In 1965 Jess came to teach and perform at The University of Texas, and he and Emma moved into the home in Austin where they have lived ever since. In 1972, Jess was named a Professor of The University, and in 1996 he became Professor Emeritus.

It was not many years after their arrival in Austin that Jess sang the role of the judge in our Society's *Trial by Jury*. "I had never been involved with Gilbert and Sullivan before — I just knew certain arias," says Jess. But he so enjoyed this performance, and he and Emma "loved all the people," so they have become permanent fixtures with what they call "this wonderful group."

Meanwhile, Jess and Emma's son Arnold Emil, having grown up in London, decided to make his home there. He now lives in Manchester, where he produces and acts under the name Emil Wolk. Ask Jess or Emma about their talented 9-year-old granddaughter, Gemma. "The last time I was with her, she was singing an aria from *The Magic Flute*, just from listening!" Jess says, beaming with pride.

(continued on page 4)

**A G&S Musical Tribute  
for Jess & Emma Walters  
Friday, October 16, 1998  
Please see page 3 for details**

**Our Next Musicale  
7:30pm, Monday, Nov. 2, 1998  
at Pearl Amster's  
Program by Libby Weed  
with Paula Tyler**

## Last Musicales

Reba Gillman • Secretary

To open the season 47 people gathered at Pearl Amster's on Tuesday September 15, 1998 to enjoy the first Musicales. With President Libby Weed presiding we greeted some new faces, and did a little Society business. Treasurer Ed Kluth has resigned and Dave Wieckowski has been serving as interim Treasurer. Robert Mellin nominated him for Treasurer, and Robert Spiegel seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. Later we had a chance to chat with Dave and his year-old son Brian, who seemed to be taking Gilbert & Sullivan in his stride.

Libby invited us to purchase videos and CDs of our production of *The Mikado* from our Office Manager Art DiBianca who had a few copies with him. Robert Mellin announced that in October the usual musicale would be replaced by a special musical tribute to two very important people in our Society, Jess and Emma Walters. It will take place at Saint Stephen's School at 8 pm on Friday October 16, 1998. There will be proclamations from the Mayor and the Governor, and singing by many people who love Jess, including UT faculty, and members of the cast of our *Mikado*, who will sing the finale. The program will be followed by a Gala buffet and party. Jess is a member of our Advisory Board and is happy that this event will be a fund raiser for the Society's In-School Educational Program. Tickets are \$25 each, half price for children.

Libby introduced Board member Larry Shepley, who said the focus tonight was on *Patience* and that he had planned a wonderful program, "but I didn't take notes, so you singers will have to remind me." He passed out a sheet somewhat in the form of a program with words and pictures and other useful information. He welcomed Lord High Pianist Bob Wall, and invited the ladies in the audience to sing the opening chorus "Twenty love-sick maidens we." He remarked that the maidens were singing to Bunthorne, the fleshly poet, and read a poem recited by Bunthorne, titled "Oh, Hollow! Hollow! Hollow!" which began:

What time the poet hath hymned  
The writhing maid, lithe-limbed  
Quivering on amaranthine asphodel,  
How can he paint her woes,  
Knowing as well he knows,  
That all can be set right with calomel?  
(a laxative)

After two more verses of the poem, Corey Rooney and Stacey Amorous sang a duet, "Long years ago, fourteen may be." Following that Corey sang "I cannot tell what this love may be." Frank Delvy said he had never performed in *Patience*, but he was learning, and he sang Bunthorne's confession "Am I alone, and unobserved? I am! Then let me own I'm an aesthetic sham!" After the recitative Bunthorne launches into a spirited description of what it takes to appear to be a man of culture rare, a sample: "You must lie upon the daisies and discourse in novel phrases of your complicated state of mind, The meaning doesn't matter if it's only idle chatter of a transcendental kind."

Note: The basic story of *Patience* concerns the rivalry among two poets and a group of military men, the heavy Dragoons, for the affections of the Rapturous Maidens. It is a take-off on the pretensions of the aesthetic or Pre-Raphaelite poets and artists popular at the time, including such figures as Swinburne, Whistler, and above all Oscar Wilde, who remains the historic epitome of the period.



To represent the idyllic poet, Grosvenor, Larry read his decalet "Gentle Jane was as good as gold, she always did as she was told." Grosvenor tells the rapturous maidens that it is "a pure and simple thing, a very daisy — a babe might understand it. To appreciate it, it is not necessary to think of anything at all."

Next Allen Lawshae appeared as the Colonel of the heavy Dragoons singing "The soldiers of our Queen" and "When I first put this uniform on" with all the men joining in for a hearty military chorus. Stacey and Art DiBianca sang the duet, "So go to him and say to him with compliment ironical." Enid Hallock was then prevailed upon to sing Lady Jane's plaint, "Silvered is the raven hair." Larry noted that such spontaneous performances from audience members are quite common at our musicales, and invited volunteers to come forward. As none did we all proceeded to sing the finale of Act II "After much debate internal."

Allen gave us the Pirate King's introduction and we all rose to sing "Hail Poetry!" from *The Pirates of Penzance*, followed by "Now to the banquet we press" from *The Sorcerer*. And everyone went out to the dining room to munch and chat.

Those present were: MEMBERS and their guests: Stacey Amorous, Pearl Amster, Byron Arnason with Kaori Yatsu, Chris Buggé, Lucian Chimene, Doug & Yvonne DeLay, Frank Delvy, Art DiBianca, Reba Gillman, Loel Graber with his friend Sue, John & Carolyn Gregory with Judi Carr Morningstar, Bruce & Enid Hallock with son Gary and daughter-in-law Kim who is a new member, Allen Lawshae, John Mast, Nancy McQueen, Robert Mellin, Lucy Shoe Meritt, Maurie Ommerman, Austin & Irene Phelps with friends Jim & Barbara Nabhaus, Joyce Protzman with friend Owen Russell, Corey Rooney, Bob Sharron with friend Tina Daniel, Larry Shepley, Bob Spiegel, Bob Wall, Jess & Emma Walters, Libby Weed, Dave Wieckowski with Brian, Benné Willerman, and Theresa Wilson. GUESTS: Inge Bioseva, Edward King, and Nell Leavell Trimble.



Come and Honor  
Austin's  
Best Loved Person  
from the  
World of Opera



A  
Gilbert & Sullivan  
Musical Tribute  
for  
**Jess & Emma Walters**

featuring  
Some of Austin's Finest Performers  
including

Rose Taylor  
Leonard Johnson  
Frank Delvy  
Dan Girardot

Russell Gregory  
William Rhodes  
Gilda Cruz-Romo  
Amy Baker Stinson

and  
The Cast from the Recent Hit Production  
of

**THE MIKADO**

and of course, the man himself,

**Jess Walters**

8:00 pm,  
Friday October 16, 1998  
Helm Fine Arts  
Center Theater  
St. Stephen's School

Gala Reception  
After the Program

This Event is a  
Fund Raiser for  
One of Jess & Emma's  
Favorite Causes,  
The G&S Society's  
In-School  
Educational Program

\$25.00

(half-price for students)

Assigned seating  
For reservations, call  
The Box Office

454-TIXS (454-8497)  
Wed.-Sat. 11:30-6:30

10/98

(Jess Walters — continued from page 1)

Looking back over his nearly ninety years, Jess reflected on the question of what had given him the greatest satisfaction. "I've enjoyed my life," he says. "I've been very lucky." He paused a moment, and then added, "It's been wonderful having my wife present for everything in my career. I give her credit for encouraging me all the time, no matter what. She's the foundation for my whole career."

It might surprise someone who knew of Jess Walters's illustrious career that he enjoys doing handy-man chores around his home. Those days on the farm and in the leather shop helped him develop a real knack for fixing things. It won't surprise anyone who has been around him very long to know that he enjoys making people laugh. "I like to make little wise remarks — nothing detrimental, just something to give people a little laugh," Jess says drolly. "And when I'm doing a benefit and they drag me back on stage to do 'Short'nin' Bread,' I really enjoy that very much." We do too, Jess.

## NEWS FLASH

We are pleased to announce our very first LORD HIGH LIFE MEMBER. This distinction goes to **Bob Kusnetz**, long time faithful member, President for seven years, and now member of our Advisory Board. Bob moved to Minneapolis a year ago, but he still keeps in touch and wants to support our endeavors. On a recent business trip to Austin he met with a few old friends at Mother's Cafe and gave us a check for \$2500, to be matched by his employer IBM.

Bob left Austin to marry and begin a new life with wife Debbie, and her two sons. Now they have a daughter, Shoshana, born on December 29, 1997. Congratulations, Best Wishes, and Many Thanks!



**They're here, and they're great!**

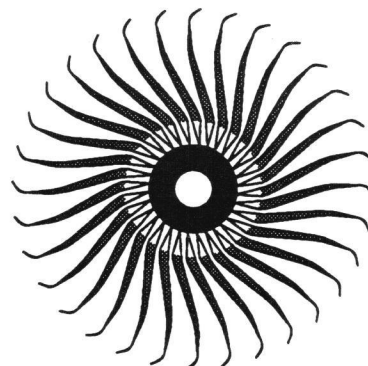
*The Mikado* CDs and Videos are now available in the Society Office @ \$25 each.

Call 472-4772 to order or to check on your order.

Note: Because of some problems in the office, our records are incomplete.  
Please do call to check on your order.



We are sorry to note the death of Bill Hatcher's father-in-law, Omer L. Hix. Our sympathies go to Nan and Bill at this sad time. Many thanks to Carol Schuelke, one of Bill's co-workers, who has sent us a check in memory of Mr. Hix.





## The B. Iden Payne Awards

*The Mikado* won five nominations by the Austin Circle of Theaters for the very highly prestigious B. Iden Payne Awards: For best musical; **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.** for best director of a musical; **Amy Baker Stinson** for best lead actress in a musical; **Dan Girardot** for best lead actor in a musical; and **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** for best musical director. On Monday September 14, 1998, a goodly crowd of local theater people gathered at the Austin Club to learn the results of the final voting. Alas, not one of the *Mikado* nominations won. But it was an honor to be in such very good company.

The Society was well represented at the Ceremony. We had two tables with a total of ten people: Libby Weed, Larry Shepley, Chris Buggé and his wife Jean, Robert Mellin, Dan Girardot, Amy and John Stinson, Reba Gillman, and Andrew Hallock. Jeffrey Jones-Ragona was busy rehearsing and couldn't make it. Pearl Amster also wanted to attend but was unable to rearrange her teaching schedule. We missed Rafe's cheerful presence, but we understand that Bridgewater Virginia is far, far away. The entertainment was clever although very loud, but we all seemed to enjoy ourselves. There was plenty of good food — a truly festive occasion!

## Executive Director or Producer of Our Next Opera

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society is accepting applications for an Executive Director or Producer. Please send application and resume to

**President Libby Weed**  
**11822 Eubank Drive**  
**Austin, Texas 78758**

or call our office for information

**472-4772.**

We thank the following corporate sponsors of our production of  
**THE MIKADO**

**Amoco**

**BankOne**

**Draught Horse Pub & Brewery**

**Stephen E. Davis**

**Mollberg & Associates Piano Restoration**

**Scenic Land Development**

**Southwestern Bell**

**William Gammon Insurance**

**Armstrong Moving & Storage**

**Benold's Jewelers**

**Fidelity Investments**

**LCRA Employees' United Charities**

**Motorola**

**Southwest Airlines**

**United Airlines**

**Wilson & Goldrick Realtors**

## New or renewal membership form

Please check your membership level on the top of the mailing label. If you are in the "Development" category, you will receive three complimentary newsletters. We encourage you to join our society. If you are a member, please check your membership renewal date on the top right corner 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 at:

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin  
2026 Guadalupe, #309  
Austin, Texas 78705 Phone: 472-4772

Name (as you want it to appear) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (Day) \_\_\_\_\_ (Night) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

What company do you work for? \_\_\_\_\_

### Please check one:

- ☐ Member \$10
- ☐ Patron \$25-\$40
- ☐ Lord High Patron \$50-\$99
- ☐ Grand Duke \$100-\$249
- ☐ Major General \$250-\$499
- ☐ Pooh-Bah \$500-\$999
- ☐ Savoyard \$1,000 and over
- ☐ I'm interested in becoming a business sponsor. Please call me.

## The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin

SINCE 1976, WE HAVE BEEN DEDICATED  
TO SPREADING THE JOYS OF GILBERT & SULLIVAN  
THROUGH PERFORMANCES AND IN-SCHOOL PROGRAMS.

### WHAT WE DO

**Annual Grand Production  
School Outreach Concerts  
Free Monthly Musicales  
Musical Scholarships  
Monthly Newsletter  
Holiday Season Show**

### Executive Board

PRESIDENT	LIBBY WEED	837-5441
EXECUTIVE V.P.	BILL HATCHER	892-3722
PRODUCTION V.P.	CHRIS BUGGÉ	834-7766
PUBLICITY V.P.	ROBERT MELLIN	345-5950
SECRETARY	REBA GILLMAN	327-2277
TREASURER	DAVE WIECKOWSKI	477-5566
HIST. & PARL.	LARRY SHEPLEY	327-1511
DIR. AT LARGE	PAULA TYLER	459-4639

**Newsletter Editor**  
LAYOUT

REBA GILLMAN  
LARRY SHEPLEY

**Office Manager**

ARTHUR DIBIANCA

2026 GUADALUPE STREET, SUITE 309  
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78705  
(512) 472-4772

<http://members.aol.com/mahitabel/gassa/home.html>

## A Gilbert & Sullivan Musical Tribute for Jess & Emma Walters

8:00 pm, Friday, October 16, 1998  
Helm Fine Arts Center Theater  
St. Stephen's School

\$25.00 (half-price for students)  
Call The Box Office 454-TIXS (454-8497)  
Wednesday - Saturday 11:30-6:30

**Gala Reception & Fund Raiser**  
Please see inside for more details

THE  
**GILBERT  
&  
SULLIVAN**  
SOCIETY OF AUSTIN  
2026 GUADALUPE ST, #309  
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78705



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

22812/1593

