

# GILBERT & SULLIVAN

## SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

FEBRUARY 1999 NEWSLETTER

♥ Next Meeting ♥  
♥ Our Monthly Musicale ♥

Monday February 1, 1999  
7:30 pm at Pearl Amster's  
2304 Hartford Road, 472-7028

Arthur DiBianca and Libby Weed  
are planning the program around the theme

Love Songs from Gilbert & Sullivan

Come join the fun! Please bring munchies



### Message from Your President

Libby Weed ♥ President

February is Valentine month, so it seems like a good occasion for a Valentine musicale. No Gilbert & Sullivan opera is without its love interest--in fact, every plot is driven to at least some degree by the pursuit of love and romance. Almost every opera ends with romantic pairs in rapturous joy swelling the melodic finale.

Just think of the lovely duets, the soulful laments of wistful would-be suitors, and the joyful carols of happy lovers that fill our favorite shows. You will hear many of those on Monday, February 1, at our musicale in the home of Pearl Amster. Prepare to hear from some very familiar friends and a few less familiar ones. Art DiBianca and I have been planning together, and we believe you will truly love this program!



### Portrait of a Noteworthy Member: **Bob Kusnetz**

Reba Gillman ♥ Secretary

Back in 1983 Bob Kusnetz was the Society's very first Lord High Patron, and now in 1998 he became our very first LORD HIGH LIFE MEMBER. I first met Bob when he showed up at the auditions for our 1983 production of *The Gondoliers*. He wasn't a singer, he was trying out to be assistant director and stage manager. He got the job and thus began a long and happy association.

Bob soon proved his worth as he soothed troubled spirits and calmed incipient revolts - feelings ran high when the violinist played out of tune. Len Gillman was Music Director and John MacNeill the Drama Director. Allen Lawshae played the Grand Inquisitor and Enid Hallock was the Duchess. Frank Delvy began his G&S career with a tiny part and Jerry Young (now Music critic for *The Statesman*) appeared in a bit part. I sang in the chorus and was serving my third year as President of the Society. I was looking for a successor and Bob was an obvious candidate. The only problem was that his boss, IBM, was sending him to Boca Raton for six months. Katharine Shields and I persuaded Bob to take on the job of president nonetheless, and lined up Loel Graber as Executive Vice-President to run the shop until Bob's return.

The next year Bob and the Executive Board interviewed prospects and lined up what seemed like good directors of music and drama for a production of *Ruddigore*. After auditions in which no one was notified of selection, these directors suddenly quit. Bob K. and I held many a frenzied telephonic meeting and the final solution was that Bob became the stage Director and Barbara Irvine was persuaded to play the piano and direct the music. Those were hair-raising days but we pulled it off. The show went on as scheduled in January 1985, despite an opening weekend snowstorm that severely reduced the size of our audience. The Society ended up almost broke, and did not put on a full length opera for several years.

Continued on page 5

## Last Musicale & Annual Meeting

Reba Gillman ♥ Secretary

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin officially began the new year on Monday January, 1999, at Pearl Amster's. There were 42 people present: Members Pearl Amster, Byron Arnason, Chris Buggé with son Travis, Sue Ricket Caldwell, Frank Delvy, Arthur DiBianca, Terri Finch-Koinuma, Harold & Eve Gilbert, Reba Gillman, Carolyn & John Gregory; Enid Hallock with her backup crew of Gary & Chris, and grandsons Andrew, Thomas, and Robert Hallock; Joyce & George L. John, Patricia Lane with Carol Mifsud her sister from Houston, Benard Laves, John Mast, Robert Mellin, Lucy Shoe Meritt, Maurie Ommerman, Bee Harris Polomé & Charles Krauss, Owen Russell with daughter Karen King, Larry Shepley, Leland L. Smith, Jess & Emma Walters, Libby Weed, and Dave Wieckowski. Guests were Ed King and performers pianists Charles Mallory and Yilin You, and singer Kay Payton.

President Libby Weed opened the Annual Meeting by introducing Chris Buggé, Chair of the nominating committee, who presented the slate of officers:

President	Libby Weed
Executive V.P.	Larry Shepley
Production V.P.	Benard Laves
Publicity V.P.	Robert Mellin
Secretary	Reba Gillman
Treasurer	Dave Wieckowski
Historian/Parliamentarian	Leland L. Smith

There were no nominations from the floor so Enid Hallock moved that we accept the slate by acclamation. Maurie Ommerman seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. Libby thanked Chris not only for his work as Chair of the committee, but also as an excellent member of the Board, who was now retiring. His responsibilities to his business and his family of three small boys, not to mention his new position as president of the Rugby Club, have made it necessary for him to cut back on his commitments. Chris thanked the Society for its patience and said he had learned a lot from his service on the Board, especially from our excellent president Libby Weed. He added that he had been the provider of Rolls Royce rides and holiday Wassail for the Society. Libby then thanked Bill Hatcher, now retiring from many years of dedicated service on our Board, his last duty was as member of the nominating committee. The third member of the nominating committee, Robert Mellin, then introduced the two new members of our Board.

Benard Laves, new Production Vice-President, and long head man at Benold's Jewelers, is the longest continuing financial supporter of the Society. After contributing an ad for the playbill of our 1989 production of *Patience*, he asked that we print up the words to our shows, and provided the money to print the libretto for two years in a row. He loves G&S and comes to all our shows. This seemed the right time to get him involved now that he has retired from Benold's.

Leland Smith is Professor Emeritus of Biochemistry at the UT Medical Center in Galveston. He has been an active mem-

ber of the Society for several years, comes to our shows and attends practically all our musicales.

Libby expressed appreciation to the Board members who are continuing on the Board, and there was a round of applause to thank Libby for her work as President. A few announcements concluded the business part of our meeting:

- Winston Bode has a new radio program on KVET, which appears from 6 to 7 am on Sundays. He tapes the program at a more reasonable time on Monday afternoons. Russell Gregory was to be the guest performer on Sunday, January 10th.

- Recordings of Pearl Amster's 80th Birthday Concert are available for purchase: CDs at \$15; Tapes at \$12.

Robert welcomed the familiar faces as well as the new. He told us he had been taken to a performance of *Star Trek* over the holidays and had been thrilled when a character burst into "A British tar is a soaring soul" from *Pinafore*. He then introduced our Lord High Substitute Accompanist for the evening, Charles Mallory, and Frank Delvy who began the musical program with "Oh better far to live and die" from *Pirates*, as all joined in the chorus. Enid sang the clever but little known "A lady fair" from *Princess Ida*, with her own family chorus (Gary, Andrew, Thomas and Robert). Andrew Hallock, who sang in the chorus of our *Mikado*, and is a sophomore studying music at UT, then played his own piano composition, inspired by Debussy's "Doctor Gradus ad Parnassum," and entitled "Doctor Gradus ad Nauseum."

Jess Walters announced that he would sing the syncopated spiritual "Gwine to Heav'n" by Jacques Wolf, "I chose this because it's so difficult." To meet the challenge of the piano accompaniment he introduced the UT piano student Yilin You, who did a fabulous job. Jess then sang the familiar "Serenata Gelato." Next his student Kay Payton sang "Many a new day" from *Oklahoma*, followed by the "Ave Maria" from Verdi's *Otello*, a favorite of Emma's, with Yilin still at the piano. Frank returned us to G&S, singing Private Willis's song "When all night long" from *Iolanthe*, with Charles Mallory back at the piano. Frank then announced that in honor of Lucy Meritt he would sing her favorite "Rising early in the morning" from *The Gondoliers*. Frank noted that he had appeared in the chorus of our 1983 production, and that Enid, Sue Caldwell and Reba Gillman had all been in that production. Gary informed us that the Hallock contingent hadn't realized they would be expected to perform at this Musicale until they read it in the January Newsletter, which they received the day before leaving on a Ski holiday. He said the family musical talent had skipped over him, and that he had never learned to read music. Nonetheless he then sang the Pirate King's opening, followed by all of us singing "Hail Poetry" from *Pirates*. Through all this Charles Mallory bravely splashed his way through the accompaniments, with true dramatic flare. But when it came time for "Now to the banquet we press" no music was available, so he abdicated and the familiar chorus from *Sorcerer* was sung *a capella*. As usual the refreshments and conversation which followed provided a convivial ending to a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

## Jess Walters in a Benefit

by Bee Harris Palomé

Our own wonderful Jess Walters will be giving a recital program on Sunday, February 18, at 4:00 pm at the University Presbyterian Church, 2203 San Antonio. G&S members and friends can never get enough of Jess and his wonderful music, and here's your chance to hear him again — and to support music scholarships for University students.

Jess is offering his wonderful talents and fun personality once again, this time to provide a benefit for the Mu Phi Epsilon International Professional Music Fraternity's Scholarship fund. The Austin Alumni Chapter is sponsoring this benefit, and the scholarships go to students in Central Texas. I am a very active member of this Fraternity and serve as local Treasurer at this time.

Jess will provide the major part of the program and will be assisted by his pianist accompanist and one or two of his own students. It will be a great program and a fun time for all. Please come and invite as many people as you can. We need a nice big turnout.

There will be a reception following the concert provided by the Phi Epsilon members. Mark your calendars now: Sunday, February 28, 1999, at 4:00 pm at University Presbyterian Church. There will be no tickets, but donations to the Scholarship Fund are encouraged and will be accepted at the door. This year alone, five fine musicians will be awarded a total of \$1150 in scholarships by the fraternity.



### ANNOUNCING

*The birth of Hudson Charles Havenhill*

on

*December 19, 1998*

to

*Tim and Kristina Havenhill*

*Some will remember Kristina as Josephine  
in our 1994 production of H.M.S. Pinafore*



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## More Recognition for *THE MUKADO*

At year's end, *XLent*, the weekly magazine of the *Austin American-Statesman*, listed the 10 top events in several different categories. Our production last summer of *THE MUKADO* was listed as eighth in the Classical Music section. Watch for our production of *Patience* this summer; it surely will also be outstanding and will also garner praise.



## THANK YOU

Many of you have renewed your memberships,  
and we want to say, and say again:

## THANK YOU



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## Oscar's American Tour

Larry Shepley ♥ Executive VP

The æsthetes, of which Oscar Wilde was a notorious exponent — at least when he was young — were often subjects of comic plays, operas, and cartoons. In 1877, *The Grasshopper* featured a dance in which three characters, Oscar Wilde, James McNeill Whistler, and Frank Miles were satirized. Several other satires followed, but the best of them all by far, *Patience*, opened on 23 April 1881.

Gilbert based his rival poets on several æsthetes. The fleshly Reginald Bunthorne and the spritual Archibald Grosvenor both had aspects of Wilde. George Grossmith, the first Bunthorne, played him as Whistler, however, complete with Whistler's dress, hair color, and mannerisms. Nevertheless, Bunthorne's hair was long, like Wilde's. And who but Wilde could walk down Picadilly holding a lily? (Wilde later said, "To have done it was nothing, but to make people think one had done it was a triumph.") Bunthorne even is described as a judge of blue-and-white pottery, recalling Wilde's famous and outrageous remark, "I find it harder and harder every day to live up to my blue china." Wilde, much later, had the last laugh in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, where Jack and Algernon are directed to "whistle some dreadful popular air from a British opera" — or did he? We still love *Patience*!

Later that year came an unexpected cablegram from Richard D'Oyly Carte in New York. D'Oyly Carte had very successfully put on *Patience* in New York, and seized on Sarah Bernhardt's suggestion that Americans should be given a chance to see and hear Wilde. After all, Americans didn't have their own native æsthetes, and so Wilde would boost *Patience* as much as *Patience* would boost Wilde. It took Wilde one day to consider: "Yes, if offer good."

The offer was good, and the tour was successful, especially financially so. Oscar's career as a lecturer was on its way.

Source: **Oscar Wilde** by Richard Ellmann  
(Vintage Books, New York, 1988)

## G&S is STILL LOOKING for an EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Or, a Producer for our annual show!

This year it's *Patience* — June 10 – 20, 1999

Stage Director: Ralph MacPhail, Jr.

Music Director: Jeffrey Jones-Ragona  
at St. Stephen's School, Helm Fine Arts Center

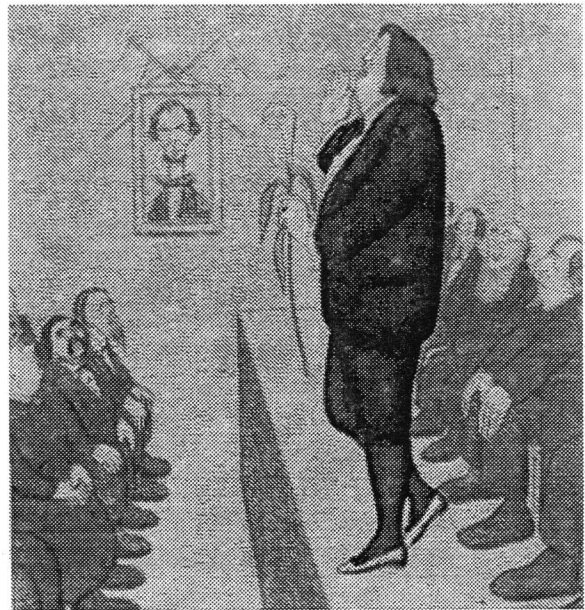
Please send suggestions and applications to

President Libby Weed

11822 Eubank Drive

Austin, Texas 78758

or call our office for information: 472-4772



The name of Dante Gabriel Rossetti is heard for the first time in the United States of America. Time: 1881. Lecturer: Mr. Oscar Wilde.

By Max Beerbohm



As you may know, Chief Justice William Rehnquist designed his robe after that worn by The Lord Chancellor in *Iolanthe*. Sparing no expense, we bring you Gilbert's portrayal of the Chancellor (notice the stripes on the sleeves of the robe), and we see how suitable Justice Rehnquist is to preside over the impeachment trial of the president!



Bob Kusnitz, continued from page 1

During this difficult period the Society continued to meet monthly under the leadership of President Bob. His energy and optimism kept us going and finally got us back into production in May, 1987. With his guidance we put on *A Gilbert & Sullivan Sampler* at what was then called Hyde Park Showplace. This was a modest and inexpensive presentation of scenes from the operas. Bob was the producer, Bill Girard served as music director, and the show was a critical success. As John Bustin put it, "While previous shows have looked like the efforts of well-intentioned hobbyists, this show is first rate in every respect." The low budget enabled the Society to realize a profit from the production, and put us back on the road to community visibility. Before each performance, Bob welcomed the audience and made a few brief announcements about the Society. This practice became known as "the Kusnetz" and has been adopted by several other Austin producers, notably Don Toner. At this show we also hosted our first opening night gala.

In February 1988, at Concordia Lutheran College, again with Bob producing and Bill Girard as music director, the Society presented our second production of *Trial by Jury* with Jess Walters repeating his role as Learned Judge. We rounded out the evening with more *Scenes from Gilbert & Sullivan*. This show, too, was very well received and made enough money for the Society that Bob, who had personally fronted the budget for these two shows, could pay his bills and let the Society pay their own way.

In 1989 and 1990 with Bob continuing as producer, the Society actually put on two shows a year: *H.M.S. Pinafore* at Hyde Park, *The Sorcerer* at Live Oak, *Patience* at Hyde Park, and *Ruddigore* in the Reagan High School Theater. Bob got the Society more involved in the community with small productions for events such as the opening of the Children's Museum (the only show in which Bob actually appeared on stage). More working members were recruited, the shows got bigger, and the reputation grew.

Bob had long said that he would continue to serve until the Society was active enough that someone else actually wanted to run for president. After seven years this finally happened at the end of 1990, when two opposing factions expressed interest in running Society affairs. In January 1991 Bob stepped down to become Executive Vice-Pres-

ident, and Karen Collier was elected President. When President Robert Mellin initiated the honorary Advisory Board in January 1994, Bob Kusnetz was invited to be the very first member. Bob's job took him out of town frequently during these last few years, but he continued to attend shows and musicales whenever he was here, until he finally left Austin for good in 1996.

Bob tells us he was born in Salt Lake City and grew up in Cincinnati, Silver Spring, and Houston. When he was in the third grade his father bought him a record with selections from *Pinafore*, *Pirates*, and *Mikado*. Bob wore it out and badgered his folks until they took him to see those shows live. He went to college at Duke University in Durham, NC, where he majored in Biomedical Engineering and Electrical Engineering. In his spare time he joined the Durham Savoyards and worked in three shows as assistant stage manager, road manager, and special effects assistant (for *The Sorcerer*). In all he did 32 shows in his four years at Duke, including co-producing the world premier of *G-d* by Woody Allen. He was the first Biomedical Engineering student to be President of the Duke Players.

Bob went on to graduate studies at Texas A & M where he was appointed to the faculty in 1979, and taught Electrical Engineering for three years. In 1982 he took a job with IBM and moved to Austin. It took him only a few months to find and join our Gilbert & Sullivan Society. Bob lived in Austin for 14 years until he married and moved to Minneapolis. His wife, Debbie, had two sons (Rami and Aryeh) from a previous marriage. Their daughter, Shoshana, was born in December 1997. For the last ten years Bob has been developing courses for IBM and traveling around the country teaching them. Before he married he traveled extensively for both business and pleasure and spent time in Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, and other beautiful places. He likes to seek out Jewish communities wherever he goes and has prayed at every synagogue in five countries. In Minneapolis he is Vice-President of his synagogue, and serves on the board of the local Jewish Day School.

It was a lucky day for the Austin Gilbert & Sullivan Society when Bob Kusnetz came to town. Without his efforts it is not clear that the Society would have survived its lean period. Although Bob is seldom seen in Austin now, his support continues and it is a great pleasure to welcome him as Very First Lord High Life Member.

## New or renewal membership form

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

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