

GILBERT & SULLIVAN

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

SEPTEMBER 2000 NEWSLETTER

• Our Next Musicale •

• 3:00 pm, Sunday September 10, 2000 •

Note the change in date & time: We found that many of our members appreciate a Sunday afternoon time for the Musicale, and so we will be trying this schedule for a while.

At Paula Tyler's • 4400 Balcones Drive • 459-4639
At the corner of Shinoak & Balcones
Between 35th St. & Perry Lane (45th St.)

Brian Gaston is planning the program.

Please Bring Munchies



Looking ahead:

Our annual Gala Fundraiser will take place in
October this year (if not early November).

Watch for date, time, and place!

Goodbye to Bob Wall

Lord High Pianist Bob Wall is leaving Austin to take up residence in San Francisco, where his daughter lives. We hope his talents will be recognized and used by the excellent San Francisco G&S producers The Lamplighters. We will sorely miss him!

I first met Bob back in the 1970's when he served on the Board of Directors of the Austin Community Nursery School, the day care center for low income families where I worked as Educational Director for 19 years. His day job was Professor of Linguistics at UT. Soon after that he and Len Gillman served together on a UT Junior Fellows program, planning musical evenings for the student participants, but I had no inkling that he liked to play the piano himself. Then one night at a show at the Hyde Park Theater I found Bob listed as "Musical Director" and playing the piano behind a curtain. I asked him if he liked Gilbert & Sullivan. He turned out to be a fantastic sight reader, and there followed many happy years for G&S. He has played for us for many a Musicale, as well as auditions and shows. No matter what was put before him on the music rack he played it. And the best part was that he always seemed to be having such a good time!

Reba Gillman

Message from Your President

Larry Shepley • President

This month I start a regular feature: a report on actions taken at Board Meetings. I would greatly appreciate your ideas and comments.

On June 13, we elected Chris Buggé Director at Large. Chris, a former Vice-President, brings experience, ideas, and an English accent.

At that meeting and the next one, we decided that our In-School Program should be scheduled at two per month and should be scripted (based on *The Pirates of Penzance*), with a Stage Director to be found by Brian Gaston. Jeffrey Jones-Ragona would make an excellent Music Director for this program. Support will be requested from the schools, but the show will be free for those schools who cannot support us.

Our Musicale/Lecture on Sunday June 4 was such a success that we decided to try Sunday afternoons for future Musicales. We also began deliberation on an Employee's Manual, continued consideration on an appropriate way to honor our most generous donors, and took steps to simplify the payment of minor expenses.

Our July meeting came just after our enormously successful run of Pinafore. However, less successful aspects included the postcards and posters; how the front of the house was handled; and unreserved seating. An out-of-town group had unfortunately arrived quite late for one show, and on the spot, I offered them complimentary wine; but the Board decided that a refund was not called for. We settled details of our prize drawing (winners to be announced in September). A full post-mortem was conducted in a private session with Brian in August.

We continued discussion of possible venues and directors for our 2001 Sorcerer and our 2002 Pirates; and we decided that our need for fundraising was so great that we need a special, high-dollar event sometime in the future — and the Board should devote more time to attracting support. However, the October Gala should be a return to the relaxed, self-catered gatherings so welcomed by our members.

We also discussed Brian Gaston's work as General Manager.

As you can tell, a common theme is that we need money to continue our ever-better annual productions and to sponsor an effective In-School Program. Another theme is the need to coordinate our many members who have said they'd like to volunteer. Your ideas and suggestions concerning these themes would be especially welcome.

Last Musicale

Reba Gillman • Secretary

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin moved into a new mode with its last Musicale of the Season, held at 4:30 pm on Sunday June 4, 2000, in the pleasant recital hall of the building recently opened by the Austin Lyric Opera for its new Armstrong Community Music School. There were 58 people gathered to enjoy a program billed as "Gilbert & Sullivan and H.M.S. Pinafore • An afternoon of Airy Persiflage with Ralph MacPhail, Jr."

President Larry Shepley opened the program welcoming all. He spoke with regret about the imminent departure of our faithful Lord High Pianist Bob Wall, who is moving to San Francisco. He then intro-

(continued on page 3)

66 6110



RALPH MacPHAIL, Jr.

Box 114 Bridgewater College
Bridgewater, Virginia 22812-1599

July 9, 2000

To Everyone who Served aboard *H.M.S. Pinafore* during the Summer of 2000:

Dear Friends,

I'm in my little apartment in Rockledge Cove, taking a break from packing for the trip back to Virginia, stuffed from the wonderful food and drink at Reba and Len's lovely home—and filled metaphorically with feelings of pleasure as I think back on our time together working on this wonderful show.

These three summers in Austin have been characterized by memorable productions performed by lovely companies of friendly people, and I am so pleased to have had the opportunities to work with the Society and the wonderful companies it's brought together.

We've learned from a variety of sources that *H.M.S. Pinafore* delighted our audiences at the Helm, and nobody was more delighted than I. It is a pleasure to work with people who are so talented, hard-working, and just plain *nice*. Mix those three characteristics together and it's no wonder the show succeeded as well as it did.

The success of *H.M.S. Pinafore* was due to *everyone's* contributions to this production, so I hope you will forgive me if I don't name all of your names. But please let me mention three: Society President Larry Shepley and Company Manager and Producer Brian Gaston deserve all our gratitude for creating a situation that allowed this production to flourish. And of course Jeffrey Jones-Ragona has our thanks, respect, and love for the musical values he brought to Sullivan's score through his masterful interpretative skills—and the musicians he brought together in the pit.

With thanks for the many courtesies you extended to Alice and me, and with very best wishes to you all as you plan toward the Fall Gala and toward next summer's production of *The Sorcerer*, from which I'll conclude with a quote:

May fortune bless you! may the middle distance
Of your [lives] be as pleasant as the foreground—
The joyous foreground! and, when you have reached it,
My that which is now the far-off horizon
(But which will then become the middle distance),
In fruitful promise be exceeded only
By that which will have opened, in the meantime,
Into a new and glorious horizon!

Yours faithfully and sincerely,

(continued from page 1)

duced our *Pinafore* Director. Rafe led us through a delightfully light-hearted afternoon composed of a mixture of informative remarks and recorded samples of take-offs on the Gilbert & Sullivan works, done by an assortment of performers.

Rafe's lifelong love of Gilbert & Sullivan, and his scholarly research in the subject, make him a knowledgeable and entertaining speaker about all matters G&S. He told us that he was born on July 31, on the 64th anniversary of the "Pinafore Riot" at the Opera Comique in London. This occurred in 1879 when the contract ran out, during the highly successful first run of *Pinafore*. A bunch of rough-necks arrived at the theater to break up the show, and make off with the scenery. This was prevented only by determined resistance from the cast and crew and audience. Rafe told us that his father, who had come to the US from Scotland at the age of 12, always sang Gilbert & Sullivan when they went anywhere in the car. In 1962 the D'Oyly Carte Company came to Washington, D.C., where Rafe saw three G&S operas in a week, and hasn't been the same since. (The tickets were very expensive: \$5.95 each.)

From Rafe's extensive collection he played us recordings of Danny Kaye singing G&S tunes, with lyrics probably written by Sylvia Fine (his wife). A sample:

Once, long ago, before Lerner and Lowe,
Before Porter, or Gershwin, or Rogers,
Most of the tunes with the "moons" and the "Junes"
Were composed by two old English codgers.

Other recordings introduced us to Allen Sherman singing "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit," a takeoff on "When I was a lad," and "I'm called Little Butterball," both from *Pinafore*, and Fred Allen in the 1940's singing *The Brooklyn Pinafore* with Leo Durocher, followed by video samples of the Yiddish G&S, as produced by the Long Island, NY, Gilbert & Sullivan Society. These all served to illustrate Rafe's contention that the G&S material is good enough to survive any form of adaptation.

Rafe also introduced us to several of Gilbert's "Bab Ballads," in particular "Joe Golightly" and "The Bumboat Woman's Story," which Gilbert used in creating the plot of *Pinafore*.

Rafe said that beginning in the 1960's there has been a renaissance of Gilbert and Sullivan, which is still going strong. As evidence he noted that a full Sullivan orchestral score is now available for the first time, and *H.M.S. Pinafore* has appeared in Dutch.

Finally Rafe played two ancient recordings, using the invention of

Thomas Edison. First, we heard the voice of Sir Arthur Sullivan, recorded on October 5, 1888; then the voice reputed to be that of W.S. Gilbert.

Rafe urged us all to attend our production of *Pinafore*; then we gathered around the table to sample the traditional goodies, as some sought out Rafe for questions or comments. It was agreed that a Sunday afternoon Musicale was a delightful idea.

Present were General Manager Brian Gaston, who planned the event, and members (an asterisk * denotes members attending a Musicale for the first time, or newly joined) Byron Arnason, Lucian Chimene, *Frank & Vilma Falck, Harold Gilbert, Len & Reba Gillman, Bill & Nan Hatcher, *Dave & Diane Howard, Jim & Patrice Hunter, Allen Lawshae, Allan & Barbara Longacre, *Robbie Luke, John Mast, Nancy McQueen, Robert Mellin, Lucy Shoe Meritt, Maurie Ommerman, Austin & Irene Phelps, *George & Marge Reiter, Marjorie Saad, *Martha Schumacher, Steve & Eve Schwartzman, Bob Sharron, Larry Shepley, Leland L. Smith, Ed & Jean Smootz with son Derek, Robert & Martha Spiegel, David Tampke, Bob Wall, Libby Weed, Ernie Welch (taking pictures), and Theresa Wilson.

Guests were Jonathan Bard, Cindy Brandt, Carolyn Crozier, Kay Hill, Suzanne Jenkins, Juan R. Lujan, Dale & Sandra Norton, Errol Olson, Stewart & Lisa Pickard, Robert & Dotty Rutishauser, and Dan Schwartz.

Many Thanks to the following corporate sponsors of our production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*:

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We encourage you to join our Society. If you are a member, please check your membership renewal date 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 at:

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The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin

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Our web site: members.aol.com/mahitabel/gassa
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Fun at a G&S Elderhostel with Rafe MacPhail

Report by Reba Gillman

Every July I go north to Connecticut to visit my son and brother and old friends. This July 21 I made my way over to the Incarnation Center, in nearby Ivoryton, to attend the wrap-up evening performance of the G&S Elderhostel, focused on *Princess Ida*, and conducted by Rafe MacPhail. It was a delightful evening, with the various-aged elderly performers singing excerpts from *Princess Ida*, as well as other old favorites. I was charmed to observe how well the music came across and how skillfully the singers managed their aging abilities. "O Goddess Wise," the high soprano aria from *Princess Ida*, was sung by a 93 year old woman! In the performing group were Stanton and Eleanor Taylor, our members from Shreveport, LA. And Rafe, his instructional duties done, was singing lustily in the chorus, while the Music Director Deborah Lyon accompanied at the piano.

FLASH

Brian Gaston, our General Manager, was nominated for a B. Iden Payne award as Outstanding Director under the category Plays for Children for *Liu, the Dragon King* (which he also wrote), produced by **Second Youth**. Congratulations! Awards will be made by ACOT on September 18, at 7:30 pm, at the Scottish Rite Theater.

Remnants of D'Oyly Carte on the Road

We have a chance to see *The Best of Gilbert & Sullivan*, featuring stars of the old D'Oyly Carte company: On Saturday September 30, 2000, at 7:30 pm, at the Wynne Chapel in Sherman, Texas. Tickets are \$15 and may be ordered from Community Series, Inc., 900 N. Grand Ave., Suite 61602, Sherman, TX 75090, or call (903) 813-2251.

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