

GILBERT & SULLIVAN

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

DECEMBER 2000 NEWSLETTER

No Musicale in December!

Because of the heavy November calendar,
there will be no December Musicale

Looking Ahead

Monday January 8, 2001, at 7:30 pm
Our Annual Meeting and Musicale

Business will include election of officers.
Len Gillman will provide a recording of **Jess Walters**
singing in our production of *Trial by Jury*
as well as some photos. Stories about Jess
will be welcome from those present.



Recollections of Jess

Leonard Gillman

Humanity has always been divided into two classes: (1) those who never took their eyes off Jess Walters from the moment he walked on the stage, and (2) those who never saw him on the stage. As for his voice, here is how I described it just after his 90th birthday two years ago: His fortissimo can still sink a battleship, and his pianissimo still seduce a hummingbird.

I met Jess in the early 1970's at a musical get-together. By the end of the decade I had seen and heard him in two UT operatic productions. In one he was the jailer, in the other the jailee. The first was the November 1978 production of *La Périchole* (Offenbach). Jess was a master of timing. The curtain went up for the last act on a large empty room in the jailhouse. After a long wait, the hinged lid to a trap door in the floor opened. After another long wait, Jess's head poked through, deadpan. I saw this show at least twice. One of the performances took place on Jess's 70th birthday, which earned him a cake from the cast.

The second opera, in 1980, was *Die Fledermaus* (Johann Strauss), in which Jess played Frosch the drunken Jailer. The last act showed a large room with a series of coat hooks lining the back wall. At one point, Frosch walked purposefully to the wall and pressed his jacket to a hook, unaware as he walked away that it had fallen to the floor. Later he noticed it, picked it up, and tried again — with the same result. This

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Message from Your President

Larry Shepley • President

The rain came: it was a dark and stormy night. Just the night to hold a gala fundraiser? Not really. But the hardy souls who came to the Dougherty Arts Center Theater a couple of Sundays ago were feasted to an evening of Gilbert & Sullivan (only Brian Gaston dared interject a non G&S song — and he's our General Manager!) followed by a glorious buffet. Many people and corporations contributed to this event (we thank them elsewhere in this Newsletter), and we raised some much-needed funds.

The following Sunday, Pearl Amster's grandson, Matthew Kaplan, organized "A Celebration of Music" in Pearl's memory at the Scottish Rite Theatre. Among the many performances and remembrances were presentations by Frank Delvy, Janette Jones, Matthew Kaplan and Garrett Maddox of songs from *The Mikado* and *Iolanthe*. I found particularly beautiful Caitlin Owen's sign interpretation of "The Sun Whose Rays" from *The Mikado*. Pearl was a delightful and strong-willed character, and among her talents was an ability to persuade people to provide food for soirées (in her honor a donated feast followed the musical program, including, of course, both kugel and meatballs). But first, as we all know, she was a musician, and the program ended with Pearl playing "The Lark" by Glinka, beautiful in spite of fact that her performance was recorded directly on vinyl in the 1950s.

The Memorial Tribute to Jess Walter was postponed due to an accident suffered by his son Emil — we will be participating when it occurs (probably in January) with a fitting, and rousing, chorus.

In our last meeting, the Executive Board spent some time talking about our budget for next year. As usual, we have ambitious plans, not only for an outstanding production of *The Sorcerer* in the summer but also for in-school programs. What is needed, of course is the money for these activities, and between grant writing and future fund raising events, we think we will be able to support our good work. Unfortunately, we may have to raise dues, which have remained at the basic rate of \$10 per year for many years. We'll discuss this issue at our next meeting, and of course any action we take will be subject to approval by the membership at our annual meeting in January. Of more immediate concern is our need for an office to replace the one we are currently in, and Brian Gaston discussed several alternatives. One consideration will be how much rent we can afford, of course, but another will be the possibility of office space in a building shared with other arts organizations, if this is possible. We are also investigating possible sites for our Musicales. Paula Tyler has been so generous (and Pearl Amster before her), that it is tempting simply to continue to accept her house, but we don't want to wear out our welcome. Any ideas you may have on sites would be most welcome. Finally, we are proceeding with plans for a secure web site, secure enough that tickets and merchandise can be ordered on-line. Look for it!

New Office

We will need a new office soon. If you have a suggestion for a suitable place at a reasonable rent (or—even better—free), please call: 472-4772.

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Gala Fund Raiser • Celebration for Pearl Amster•

Report by Reba Gillman • Secretary

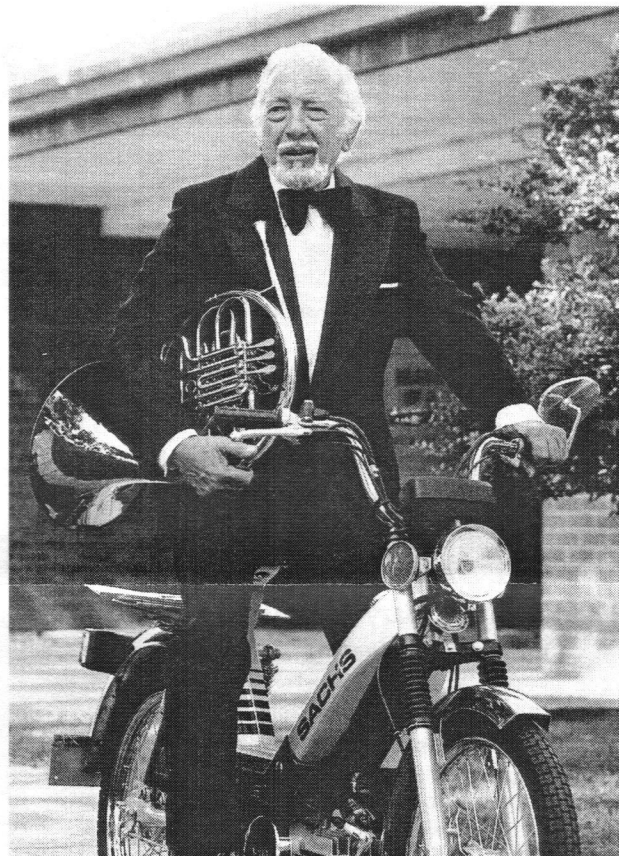
The Gala Fund Raiser was a lovely party on Sunday November 5, 2000, at 7 pm at the Dougherty Art Center. The program was excellent, the food was good, and we all enjoyed the company. Unfortunately, the company was rather small, due perhaps to a combination of inadequate publicity and terrible weather. It wasn't raining when we arrived, but it sure was pouring when we left, and Flood Watches had been issued to frighten the faint of heart.

On Sunday November 12 at 2 pm the weather was somewhat better and a good crowd gathered at the Scottish Rite Theatre for a Celebration of Music In Memory of Pearl Amster. Grandson Matt Kaplan had got together a fine program of music, some by former students and some by friends and admirers, interspersed with short speeches and fond and pithy recollections of Pearl. Gilbert and Sullivan were well represented, as were the Violet Crown Players, and the Austin Civic Orchestra. After the long program we all gathered in the lounge to partake of the delicious refreshments provided by friends in the spirit of Pearl's famous Soirées.

Note: The Pearl Amster Concerto Competition for young musicians, sponsored by the Austin Civic Orchestra, has been renamed the Pearl Amster Memorial Concerto Competition, and donations were invited to allow them to offer scholarship support as well. Contributions may be mailed to the Austin Civic Orchestra Society, Inc., P.O. Box 27132, Austin, Texas 78755. For information call 990-8226.

The Tribute to Jess Walters, originally scheduled for 3 pm on Saturday November 18, has been postponed to sometime in January. Jess's son, actor Emil Wolk, who lives in England, injured his back and could not travel at this time. We hope to be able to provide information about the new date in our January Newsletter.

Note: Due to a computer glitch many people received erroneous notices that their membership had lapsed. We apologize and hope that we have corrected the problem.



Jess Walters

The **Nominating Committee** consists of Bill Hatcher, Chairman, Allan Longacre, and Theresa Wilson. They will present nominations for officers in our next Newsletter for election at our January 8 Musicale. To be eligible to vote, you must have paid your dues! If you have questions, please call Bill at 892-3722.

Trial by Jury • Audio Cassette

Copies can be made from Len Gillman's high quality original of our 1982 production with **Jess Walters** as The Learned Judge

Price will depend on number ordered. For instance,
6 copies will cost \$10 each and
12 or more copies will cost \$5 each.

Len will take orders at the January 8 Musicale,
or you can call Len at 327-2277.

H.M.S. Pinafore Video

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For our **Gala Fund Raiser**, thanks to:

Chris Buggé for turkeys and a ham
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bit of business was repeated a few more times. Jess's expression on each occasion was, well, expressionless, the reincarnation of Buster Keaton. Eventually when he pressed the jacket to the hook it stayed; this time he permitted himself a barely perceptible celebratory twitch of the shoulders. The performance I saw came early in the run, and I returned twice for the last act. At one point during the run, Reba phoned Jess about an unrelated matter; she was alarmed that he appeared to be drunk, but quickly realized that he was just living his role.

La Périchole is also significant for its historical relation to Gilbert and Sullivan's *Trial by Jury*. In 1875, Richard D'Oyly Carte was looking for an afterpiece for his production of *La Périchole*. He thought of Gilbert, who hauled out a libretto he had written. Carte suggested Sullivan as the composer. But while Gilbert was reading Sullivan the script, he grew increasingly dissatisfied and was ready to tear it up. Fortunately for humanity, Sullivan was doubled up in laughter. Gilbert relented. Sullivan composed the music in three weeks, and *Trial by Jury* was born and took its place in Carte's production. It was such a success that it soon eclipsed *La Périchole* and became the main work. I performed in the Society's 1978 production of *Iolanthe*, with the help of some coaching from Jess. He and Emma attended one of the performances, and I believe that was their introduction to the Austin G&S Society.

As Musical Director and pianist for the Society's production of *Trial by Jury* in 1982, I easily persuaded Jess to accept the role of The Learned Judge. I have an excellent cassette recording of one of the performances as well as several photos of Jess in his magnificent costume, which I'll bring to a meeting. At my instigation, KMFA used one of them for the cover of their monthly program guide. Following the run of *Trial by Jury*, Jess became an ardent supporter of The Society, never turning down a request to sing at a musicale or fundraiser, de-

spite a full teaching schedule at UT. He also served as director of the opera program that Michel Jaroschy organized at his Capitol City Playhouse, producing such masterpieces as *Figaro*, *La Bohème*, *La Traviata*, and *Rigoletto*.

Remarks about Jess and Emma Walters always bring to mind their close friends Gus and Pearl Amster. Gus died 14 years ago, and, as we all know, Pearl died a few weeks ago. Gus and Pearl were dealers for Yamaha pianos, and Nancy and Lee Owen, their daughter and son-in-law, were the owners of Moped Market. They roped in their friend Jess to pose for advertising photos, notably for publication in *The Daily Texan*. I have two hilarious poses of Jess on a moped, courtesy of Nancy Owen, which I will bring to a meeting. I was also Musical Director for our 1983 production of *The Gondoliers*. The McDonald's down the block happened to have a serviceable piano, and the theater staff arranged for a few of us to perform some excerpts there. I picked Bruce Douglas (Marco) and Keith Feldhacker (Giuseppe). The event was publicized among the G&S-ers, but to my great disappointment only four showed up. We began with the spirited duet, "We Are Called Gondolieri", followed by Giuseppe's solo "Rising Early in the Morning" and Marco's famous solo "Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes". We made no announcement but just started singing; this startled the regular customers a bit, but they rewarded us with a warm response. Oh, yes, those four loyal G&S-ers: Jess and Emma Walters and Gus and Pearl Amster.



Many thanks to IBM for a generous donation.

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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 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
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E-mail: gilbsulv@altavista.com



Susan Boswell as Angelina with
Jess Walters as The Learned Judge
in our 1982 production of *Trial by Jury*

THE
**GILBERT
&
SULLIVAN**

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

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