

# GILBERT & SULLIVAN

SEPTEMBER 2001 NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

## First Musicale of the New Season Start with a BANG!

September 10, 2001, at 7:30 pm

At Paula Tyler's: 4400 Balcones Drive — 459-4639

• Please bring Munchies •

Libby Weed has put together a choice program of old favorites to be sung by stalwarts Frank Delvy, Cynthia Hill, Holton Johnson, Janette Jones, and Leslie Salas. Pianist Faith DeBow, a friend and associate of Leslie's, is a rare find.

Note that this season we have returned to Monday evenings, usually the first Monday of the month, for our meetings. September always presents a variation since the first Monday is Labor Day.

**Save the date:** Our October Musicale will occur on Monday October 1, at 7:30 pm. Place to be announced.

## Pirates in School

Our short version of *The Pirates of Penzance* is ready to go. If you know of any school that would like to book a performance please call the office at 472-4772 and leave a message. The cast is made up of Lara Britton, Craig Feser, Janette Jones, Allen Lawshae, and Russell Prickett, with Jeanne Stillman at the piano. Derek Smootz has done a fine job while he's been in charge. Now that he is going back to college Larry Shepley will take over (but he's looking for help).

## Volunteers Run the Office

The heroic labors of volunteers Arthur Dibianca, Derek Smootz, and Jean Smootz have kept our Society going this summer. Updating and reorganizing our data base is an ongoing task — someday we hope to discover no more errors on those mailing labels! Inventorying and organizing the contents of the many boxes was another long needed accomplishment. And most important was clenaing up the computer programs. Various Board members have also attended to The Society's business, especially President Larry Shepley and Executive V.P. Libby Weed. There is still much work to be done, but thanks to the hard-working volunteers we'll do it.

## Message from Your President

• Larry Shepley

*The Sorcerer* was great! As Leland Smith has shown in his *History* (which I'll talk about at the Musicale), this was its third appearance in our 25 years, in contrast to the Houston G&S Society's sole performance in their 50 years. Why is *The Sorcerer* neglected? Probably because it doesn't have quite the bite that later operas have, but certainly not because of Sullivan's music. At the intermission and after the show, I could hear many people humming, though not, I confess, singing. G'ann Boyd did a great job making the story come alive. Reba Gillman says she objects that Constance was portrayed as too forward, but I liked the interpretation; we both agree that Christine Walsh sang beautifully. There were many other standouts, some of whom were recognized in the super reviews, and I could list them all, but I'd be simply repeating the entire cast list. And of course, Frank Delvy starred, even when the pyrotechniques occasionally fizzled.

There are four upcoming programs I'd like to discuss. The first is our in-school production of *Pirates in School*. Derek Smootz did a great job this summer helping it along. He has now started full time at Southwest Texas. Would someone like to volunteer to help with this program?

The second is our annual fundraiser. It will be on January 12, 2002, organized by Frank Delvy with Jeffrey Jones-Ragona. Look forward to it. We need volunteers to help with this and other fundraising activities, for our coffers are low and sinking.

Third is our 2002 production of *The Pirates of Penzance*. The opening gala is slated for Friday June 14, 2002, at the Helm Fine Arts Theater at St. Stephen's School. Rafe MacPhail will be the stage director, Jeffrey Jones-Ragona the music director, and it promises to be a block-buster! Did I mention that our coffers are low? That means that we will need you-all to help with such matters as costumes, scenery, publicity, fundraising,

(Continued on Page 2)

## Society Wish List

The following items are sorely needed in the office. does anyone have a spare, or know of a likely source?

**Printer: Color Ink-jet Printer, Pentium IBM**

**Copier**

**External Zip Drive**

Please call the office at 472-4772, and leave a message.

6/10

## June 2001, Back Stage at *The Sorcerer*

Contributed by Gary Hallock

[In case you're wondering what they do back there]

Last week in the men's dressing room someone used the phrase, "Life imitates art." Without hesitation, I was compelled to inquire of the nearby Mr. DiBianca "So Art, do you ever imitate life?" My glib pun was greeted, as usual, with a hesitant groan of appreciation by everyone within earshot, with the exception of Art himself. Obviously this wasn't the first time he had been the victim of wordplay based upon his all-too-accommodating name.

Art responded by paraphrasing a bit of sage advice from W.S. Gilbert himself that seems to have been directed toward persons suffering from my peculiar penchant for punning. I'm certain that I can't begin to do the quote justice, but the essence of it was this... "No matter how clever you may think it is, or how tempting the opportunity, one should always avoid offering to any individual, a pun based upon his own name. There is little chance that he hasn't already heard it many times over."

Art's invocation of our patron saint, Gilbert, caused me to recall a bit of verse I'd read many years ago in O. Henry's humorous newspaper, the *Rolling Stone*. O. Henry published this verse in 1895 and claimed it was excerpted from "W. S. Gilbert's new opera." Recent inquiry on the internet has brought the information that this "new opera" was *His Excellency*, An Original Comic Opera in Two Acts; written by W. S. Gilbert; Music by F. Osmond Carr; first produced at the Lyric Theatre, London, October 27, 1894, under the management of George Edwardes.

### Ballad: The Played-Out Humorist

Quixotic is his enterprise, and hopeless his adventure is,  
     Who seeks for jocularities that haven't yet been said.  
 The world has joked incessantly for over fifty centuries,  
     And every joke that's possible has long ago been made.  
 I started as a humorist with lots of mental dizziness,  
     But humor is a drug which it's the fashion to abuse,  
 For my stock in trade, my fixtures and the good will of the business  
     No reasonable offer I am likely to refuse.  
     And if anybody choose  
     He may circulate the news  
     That no reasonable offer I am likely to refuse.

Oh, happy was that humorist - the first that made a pun at all -  
     Who, when a joke occurred to him, however poor and mean,  
 Was absolutely certain that it never had been done at all -  
     How popular at dinners must that humorist have been!  
 Oh, the days when some stepfather for the query held a handle out!  
     The doormat from the scraper, is it distant very far?  
 And when no one knew where Moses was when Aaron put the candle out,  
     And no one had discovered that a door could be a-jar!  
     But your modern hearers are  
     In their tastes particular,  
 And they sneer if you inform them that a door can be a-jar!

(Continued from Page 1)

and lots more. Our *Pirates* will be in the traditional style — no interpolations of *Ruddigore* or the Keystone Kops — complete with beach, romantic castle, pretty girls, and swashbucklers.

Also, look for a special Saturday matinee performance next June aimed at families, with special prices for children (below our usual half-price for the kiddies). Bring your sons, your daughters, your grandchildren, your greatgrandchildren.

Finally, I have volunteered to organize the Musicales for October, and I have a difficult but fun project in mind: *Princess Ida*. This is one of the few G&S operas we have never done (the others are *Thespis*, though that is lost, *Utopia Limited*, and *The Grand Duke*). *Ida* is long (three acts), difficult (it is in iambic pentameter), and somewhat controversial (spoofing sexism, racism, and even evolution — but I don't propose doing a Bowdlerized version!). What I would like to do is prepare a home-grown, but shortened production for presentation at a special *Night at the Operetta* (thank you, **Jean Smootz** for the title) next March.

At the October Musicales, we'll review the opera, and sing a few choruses. I'll call on volunteers for solo parts. We'll set up detailed plans for a semi-staged presentation in March, including some costumes, a bit of scenery, a few extra instruments to help the piano, etc. Succeeding Musicales will be devoted to rehearsals and ironing out problems, so that we can put on our own concert version of what really is an unjustly neglected opera. *The Night at the Operetta* will be free to all, and will be a chance for all you to sing, act, produce, direct, etc. Don't be shy.

## News of Members

Peripatetic President **Larry Shepley** reports a June expedition to Africa to view a solar eclipse and other interesting local attractions, including animals, as well as an August trip to Norway for the wedding of one of his nephews. While in Norway he enjoyed a sea voyage down the coast of the land of the midnight sun.

Secretary **Reba Gillman** made her annual visit to Connecticut, where she stopped in at the Incarnation Center for lunch with **Rafe MacPhail** and his Elderhostlers. Rafe sends warmest greetings to all. Reba also went to Houston to see *The Pirates of Penzance* as the Houston G&S Society's celebration of their 50<sup>th</sup> year of existence.

**Libby Weed** and **Derek, Jean, and Ed Smootz** are other Austin members who saw this production.

A picture of **Lucy Shoe Meritt** appeared on page B1 of the *Austin American-Statesman* on Sunday, July 28, 2001. Protected from the sun by an old-fashioned parasol, she had turned out to support a neighborhood protest against a proposed parking garage. [Note: The City Council subsequently turned down this proposal.] On August 7, Lucy celebrated her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday.



Picture by Ernie Welch

### The Gala Fund Raiser

**Frank Delvy** is in charge; the event is scheduled for Saturday January 12, 2002; **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** will be the Musical Director.

### *The Sorcerer*

**Janet Coker** as Aline and **Holton Johnson** as Alexis

## 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  
P.O. Box 684542  
Austin, Texas 78768-4542 Phone: 472-4772 (472-GSSA)

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

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

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

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

Please check membership category:

- ☐ Individual: \$20
- ☐ Family/Group: \$30
- ☐ Youth (18 & under): \$10
- ☐ Senior (65 & over): \$10

Membership benefits include our Newsletter & 10% discount on tickets.

- ☐ My donation of \_\_\_\_\_ is enclosed. (For levels & privileges, see below.)
- ☐ I'm interested in becoming a business sponsor. Please call me.
- ☐ I'm interested in volunteering.

Please consider contributing to The Society at one of the following **Donor Levels**: **Grand Duke or Duchess** (\$100-\$249); **Major General** (\$250-\$499); **Pooh-Bah** (\$500-\$999); **Pirate King** (\$1000-\$2499); **Savoyard** (\$2500 & up). Donors receive various benefits, including membership, listing in programs, and other benefits. Please call our office for further information.

## The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin

Since 1976, we have been spreading the joys of  
Gilbert & Sullivan through

**Annual Grand Productions**

**School Outreach Concerts**

**Free Monthly Musicales**

**Musical Scholarships**

**Monthly Newsletters**

**Holiday Season Shows**

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### Executive Board

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