

The

GILBERT & SULLIVAN

JUNE 2009 NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed

The opening of *Iolanthe* is upon us!

I hope that you have already purchased tickets and are eagerly anticipating the show. If not, get thee to the website or a telephone now—this is no time for airy persiflage. Be sure to let your friends

know about this great cultural opportunity as well.

While *Iolanthe* is not one of the three most widely known of the comic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan—*The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Mikado*, and *H.M.S. Pinafore*—it has been universally acclaimed as featuring some of the most beautiful of all of Arthur Sullivan's music. And, as is always the case, any audience will be filled with glee at the topsy-turvy plot and rollicking wit of William S. Gilbert's libretto.

Even if *Iolanthe* is completely new to you, you'll hear some tunes and some words that will strike you as quite familiar. For example, everyone has surely heard in some form, "Faint heart never won fair lady" ... "Every journey has an end" ... "Dark the dawn when day is nigh" ... "While the sun shines, make your hay" ... "Nothing venture, nothing win" ... "Blood is thick, but water's thin" ... "In for a penny, in for a pound" ... "It's love that makes the world go round!" Would you believe that one delightful trio in Act II of this opera contains every one of those ancient saws? The words make us chuckle—especially when they are sung by three doddering old gentlemen—but the joyful melody keeps us humming long after the end of the show.

I hope to see you at the Travis High Performing Arts Center, where by the end of the show, we'll all be "Up in the air, sky-high, sky high!"

Libby Weed

NEWS of our MEMBERS

Several of our *Iolanthe* cast members were involved in a successful run in the Austin Lyric Opera's *Dialogues of the Carmelites* in April. Lisa Alexander (Queen of the Fairies), Katherine Wiggins (Fleta), Patricia Combs (Leila), Andy Fleming (Earl Tolloller), Jay Young, Jay Chacon, Cies Charbeneau and Angela Irving all performed while still meeting the rehearsal schedule for our own summer production of *Iolanthe*. The Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Austin greatly appreciates the cross-over use of local talents and as always, support our performers, past and present in all their endeavors. We are excited to have their talents grace our stage from June 11-21st and hope that our members also will be on the look-out for any of their other professional performances. Austin has a small opera community and we need to do all we can to patronize their efforts and keep opera in Austin alive!

Questions for the Cast

Ingrid Yapple, new Board member and our resident blogger, has been interviewing some of our *Iolanthe* cast members about their backgrounds in music in general and Gilbert and Sullivan in particular. Here are a few (edited-for-space) excerpts from the blog:

Question: When did you discover you could sing and/or what got you into Opera music?

Lisa Alexander (Queen of the Fairies): I have been singing since birth, according to my mother. Opera is something I've come to appreciate more as I've gotten older.

June Julian (*Iolanthe*): I've been singing since I was at least five years old. ... I only learned to love opera in college when I sang my first major role as Cherubino in Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*.

Andy Fleming (Lord Tolloller): I've been singing since I was in the 4th grade, and have always loved musical theater. Opera was a natural fit.

Derek Smootz (Strephon): ... I landed a principal role in the first school musical I auditioned for (Motel in *Fiddler on the Roof*). I stayed on that path, and here I am.

Arthur DiBianca (The Lord Chancellor): I listened to some opera recordings in high school, and I played in the pit orchestra for *HMS Pinafore* in college.

Katherine Wiggins (Fleta): I sang "Somewhere Over the Rainbow" to rave reviews when I was five. I started singing opera when I got into college

Question: How many GSSA productions have you been in (including chorus roles)?

Lisa Alexander: 2 (including this one)

June Julian: 2 summer productions, and numerous other musicales...

Andy Fleming: 6 (7 if we count *Trial by Jury*)

Derek Smootz: I believe 7, if you only count our summer productions, 9 if you include concert productions as well.

Arthur DiBianca: 12 including this one.

Katherine Wiggins: 4

To read the full interviews, visit Ingrid's blog at www.thesavoyard.blogspot.com.

Save the Date!

Please watch for news of the Society's season-opening Fall Musicale on September 14.

May Musicale

by Reba Gillman

On Monday, May 11, we met for our usual rousing good time. Over 50 people gathered in the large rehearsal room at Genesis Presbyterian Church for an unusual program. Most of you have heard of the short comic opera called *Cox and Box*, for which Sullivan wrote the music in 1866, but Gilbert did not write the words. **Allan Longacre**, our Executive Vice President, planned and directed an interesting reading and illustriously cast performance of the work from which *Cox and Box* was taken. Our Artistic Director, **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, played the part of Mr. Box; Allan played Mr. Cox; and **Libby Weed**, our President, played Mrs. Bouncer. We were glad to welcome a diverse audience, including many who never come to our Musicales.

Box and Cox, a hysterical farce written in 1847 by John Maddison Morton, tells the story of two gentlemen who are renting the same room but don't know it. Mr. Cox, a hatter, works all day, coming back to eat supper and sleep at night. Mr. Box is a printer who works at night, coming home sleepy to eat a meal and sleep all day. As the scene opens, this clever arrangement is beginning to unravel. Mr. Cox is getting ready to go to work, complaining that his coals are disappearing and his sacred lucifers (matches) are not being respected and that his room smells of smoke. He calls in his landlady, Mrs. Bouncer, to discuss the problem. She is worried that her clever money-making arrangement will be discovered, but boldly explains that a (mythical) upstairs tenant is probably causing the problem. Mr. Cox leaves and Mr. Box arrives after a night's work. Mrs. Bouncer stops by to say that the upstairs tenant requests he not smoke so much, and he takes umbrage at this. After she leaves, Box lights his fire and puts a rasher of bacon on to cook. He also is upset by the rapid disappearance of his coal and matches. But he is tired, and lies down for a short nap. Mr. Cox returns, unexpectedly given a day off from work, and is really annoyed to discover the rasher of bacon cooking. He tosses the bacon out the window and places his own chop on the fire. When he leaves the room for a moment, Mr. Box gets up, is angry to discover the loss of his bacon, and firmly picks up the chop and throws it out the window. Mr. Cox returns and a heated argument ensues. "Who are you, Sir?" "If it comes to that, who are you?" and they struggle with each other.

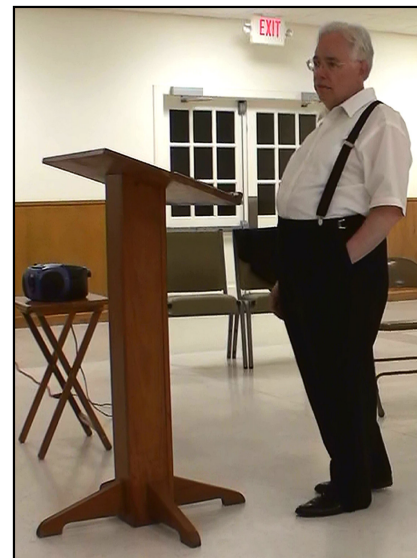
One thing leads to another and they soon discover that they have been engaged to the same woman. Mr. Box was originally about to marry Penelope Ann Wiggins, but faked his own death to get out of the agreement. Mr. Cox is beginning to have the same doubts and tries to persuade Mr. Box to return to life and reclaim Penelope Ann. Box refuses and the two are about to have a duel to decide who has to marry the lady, when a letter arrives from Penelope Ann saying she has married a third man, Mr. Knox. As Cox and Box rejoice over their narrow escape, Box suddenly proclaims, "You'll excuse the apparent insanity of the remark, but the more I gaze on your features, the more I'm convinced that you're my long lost brother!" Cox: "The very observation I was going to make to you!" Box: "Ah – tell me – in mercy tell me – have you such a thing as a strawberry mark on your left arm?" Cox: "No!" Box: "Then it is he!"

As the laughing audience applauded, Libby asked for a volunteer to play our traditional music, "Now to the banquet we press." **Russell Gregory** came forward to the piano, so we could sing and take a refreshment break, enjoying the usual goodies.



Mr. Box (Ralph MacPhail, Jr.) asks Mr. Cox (Allan Longacre) about a birthmark, as Mrs. Bouncer (Libby Weed) looks on.

After this intermission we gathered again to hear our G&S expert, Rafe MacPhail, describe the theatrical scene in Britain in the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the light-hearted dramas that D'Oyly Carte kept playing in his Savoy Theatre. There was always a need for more material. When F. C. Burnand concocted the fanciful story, *Cox and Box*, based on Morton's original play, Sullivan composed the music. This was the first comic opera Sullivan ever wrote. It was very popular, and its success probably influenced Sullivan to agree when he was invited to work with Gilbert on *Thespis* in 1871. Rafe played recordings of much of the music, and we could hear Morton's original words repeated in the Burnand version. Rafe told us that the most significant difference in plot was that Mrs. Bouncer became Sergeant Bouncer, a military man. And of course, the addition of Sullivan's delightful music was a big attraction. Thus we were able to go home singing or humming music as usual, and no one could complain (as I heard at the beginning), "There's no music. What kind of Musicale is that?"



Rafe gives "some airy persiflage" on the topic of "Box and "Cox" and Box"

Answers to April's Quiz on *Iolanthe*

by Ralph MacPhail, Jr.

1. What does the name *Perola* have to do with the history of *Iolanthe*? Gilbert called the opera *Perola* in rehearsal, ostensibly to fool the theatrical pirates hoping to steal the work, but probably because another play entitled *Iolanthe* had been on the London stage several years earlier, and WSG wasn't on good terms with the manager who produced it. (It is sometimes thought that *Perola* was superstitiously used for the successor to *Pinafore*, *Pirates*, and *Patience*, which *Perola—Iolanthe!*—followed.)
2. Two of the operas begin second acts with male solos. *Iolanthe* is one. What are the first words of this solo? Who sings it? Which *other* opera begins Act II with a male solo? Who sings it? What is the lyric's first line? They are, of course, "When all night long a chap remains," sung by Private Willis to banish the monotony of sentry-go (and to delight us). Aboard *H.M.S. Pinafore*, her commander, Captain Corcoran, sings "Fair moon, to thee I sing."
3. *Iolanthe* has at least two nods to Richard Wagner: one in costuming (the original production, anyway) and the other in music. What are they? The Fairy Queen was dressed in garb reminiscent of *Brünnhilde*, and the Lord Chancellor is introduced musically several times by an orchestral leitmotif.
4. *Iolanthe* contains at least one sung stage direction. What is it? "Enter all the little fairies/ To their usual tripping measure" (in the Act I Finale). (*Is there another?*)
5. An ebullient trio in *Iolanthe* reads as if Gilbert plundered Brewer's *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, for in his lyric, he strings together a number well known expressions. List at least three of these expressions, worded as you've heard them stated. "Faint heart never won fair lady," "Every journey has an end," "Make hay while the sun shines," "None but the brave deserve the fair," "Nothing ventured, nothing gained," "Blood is thicker than water," "Love makes the world go 'round" (and others!).
6. Gilbert did the same in a duet from another opera. What are the first words of the lyric? In which opera does it appear? Who sings it? List at least five of the expressions from this duet, worded as you've heard them stated. "Things are seldom what they seem" is sung aboard *H.M.S. Pinafore* by Mrs. Cripps (better known as "Little Buttercup") and Captain Corcoran:

"Black sheep dwell in every fold," "All that glitters isn't gold," "Only brave deserve the fair," "Spare the rod and spoil the child," "Don't count your chickens before they're hatched" (and others!).

7. In the Lord Chancellor's famous "nightmare song" we learn details of the singer's stockings (at least those he was wearing in his dream). Of what material are they made and how are they decorated? They're made of black silk and decorated with gold clocks (and this information may be the most tongue-twisting phrase to articulate in the devilishly difficult Nightmare Song).

8. Although many actual persons are referred to in passing in the libretti for the Savoy operas, one real person is actually apostrophized at some length in *Iolanthe*. Who is this person? What was his profession? And where was he, usually, on the nights of Gilbert & Sullivan premières? Captain Eyre Massey Shaw was the leader of London's Fire Brigade, and a regular first-nighter at Gilbert & Sullivan premières. Recent research has suggested that the Fairy Queen's reference to Shaw as a "type of true love kept under" may have been Gilbert's sly dig at a rumor that Captain Shaw . . . well, see Ian Bradley's *Annotated Gilbert & Sullivan* for the juicy details!

9. In the Act I finale of *Iolanthe* the Fairy Queen threatens the Peers with "dire revenge." How does she threaten to reform the hereditary Peerage? By throwing it open to—gasp!—competitive examination!

10. The doyenne of Gilbert studies, the late Jane W. Stedman, wrote about what she called Gilbert's "invasion motif," where a realistic setting is established, only to have it "invaded" by personages one would hardly expect to find present in such a setting. Discuss at length (or at least ruminate on!) how *Iolanthe* might be regarded as a more-than-usually skillful use of this motif—different in each act. Corroborative detail required! Peers of the Realm in Court regalia visit "an Arcadian landscape" and supernatural fairies visit Westminster in Central London. (Brevity is the soul of wit!)

P.S. I have been rehearsing with this marvelous company for one delightful week as I write. Jeffrey Jones-Ragona has done an incredible job at preparing a remarkable cast vocally, and we're having a wonderful time with the dialogue, business, dances, and other delights that *Iolanthe* offers. See you at Travis High School in June! And please help to spread the word.

Faithfully yours, *Rafe*

MEMBERSHIP FORM

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