

The

GILBERT & SULLIVAN

APRIL 2010 NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed

Your board of directors is feeling pleased as punch right now, for many reasons. Here are some of them:

- Preparations for *The Yeomen of the Guard*, to quote from *The Mikado*, "breathe promise of merry sunshine"—or, for certain, of merry entertainment.

Artistic Director **Rafe MacPhail** really should be on a year-round retainer, for all the work he does back in Virginia getting ready for our grand production before he comes to Austin. He is knee-deep in prop lists, staging diagrams, and superscripts, making sure that every detail is just as Gilbert and Sullivan would have it. Music Director **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** has already conducted many music rehearsals, and reports abound that the music in this summer's show will be sublime. Production Manager **Bill Hatcher** has a superb team of professionals preparing sets, costumes, props, and other technical aspects of the show.

- Staunch supporter **Eva Laskaris**, who leads our "Wand'ring Minstrels," has been in a whirlwind of activity with performances in schools and other locations, all extremely well received.
- The board elected officers for 2010:
 - ◊ President - **Libby Weed** (also heading the Production Committee)
 - ◊ Executive Vice President - **Roberta Long** (also serving as Office Manager) and **Ingrid Yaple** (also heading the Fund-Raising Committee)
 - ◊ Secretary - **Kathryn Saar**
 - ◊ Treasurer - **Dave Wieckowski** (also heading the Finance Committee)
 - ◊ Historian - **Reba Gillman**
- Other board members are serving in special roles:
 - ◊ Publicity Committee chair - **David Little**
 - ◊ Membership Committee chair - **Michael Meigs** (also handling group sales)
 - ◊ Volunteer Coordinator - **Pat Hobbs**
 - ◊ Musicale Coordinator - **Leonard Johnson**
 - ◊ Wand'ring Minstrels Coordinator - **Randall McIntyre**
 - ◊ Special Projects with Production Manager - **Chris Buggé**

Each board member serves on at least one committee. We believe we have found ways to make good use of the talents of each board member and, in so doing, have spread the responsibilities of the board more equitably than in the past. In addition to getting a lot done, we enjoy working with one another!

Pat Hobbs will be lining up volunteers for the front of the house during the show. Please call the office (472-4772) to let Pat know if you would like to help with merchandise sales, ushering, or the gala buffet on Friday, June 11.

Leonard Johnson is preparing for the May 9 musicale, to be held at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church at 3:00 p.m. on Sunday, May 9. That is Mother's Day, and we hope you'll make plans now to make a Mother's Day party of this event. Whether you are a mother who tells your family, "That's how I want to spend Mother's Day afternoon," or whether you want to invite your own mother or someone you love to come with you, we know you will enjoy this afternoon.

It is a busy season, and we see all this activity leading to some lovely productions that will be "welcome as flowers that bloom in the spring."

May Musicale

The program for our next Musicale has not been finalized at press time. It will be held at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, with refreshments to follow. There is sure to be music and merriment, with Lady High Accompanist **Marti Dudgeon** assisting with both.

St. Matthew's Episcopal Church
8134 Mesa Drive
(Mesa Drive at Steck Avenue)
Sunday, May 9, 3 pm
Please Bring Munchies!

We mourn the passing of three members of our Society since our last newsletter went to press.

Carolyn Gregory was injured in the accident last fall that also killed her husband, **John**. She succumbed to her injuries on Feb. 11. We celebrated their lives in our January newsletter.

Maria Lou Bohner, long time member of the Gilbert and Sullivan Society, who never missed a show and volunteered in some way at each one, was killed in an auto pedestrian accident on March 4. She had an exotic background, growing up in Mexico City and living in Alaska, Pennsylvania, and Padre Island before coming to Austin eleven years ago. She was a bilingual special ed teacher at Andrews Elementary School, specializing in three year olds. She was one of the most dedicated and hard working teachers that one would ever find, and was a most valuable person who will be greatly missed.

George Reiter, retired shoe designer, passed away Sunday, March 28. George was born in the Bronx, New York, and was a WWII Army veteran. He and his wife, **Marge**, were frequent volunteer ushers with G&S, serving several times each show for many years.

Sum Up Some History—Clear Up Some Mysteries

by Ralph MacPhail, Jr. — and Harry Benford!

In Act II of *The Yeomen of the Guard*, jester Jack Point tells jailor Wilfred Shadbolt (who aspires to jester-hood): “I will teach thee all my original songs, my self-constructed riddles, my own ingenious paradoxes; nay, more, I will reveal to thee the source whence I get them.” That source is Point’s handbook, *The Merrie Jests of Hugh Ambrose*.

Since our show this summer is grounded in English history, I will teach thee all of my esoteric understandings of the history of the Tower of London and its lore, my self-digested learnings based on decades of reading and research, my own ingenious conclusions based on the writings of scholars, ancient and modern; nay, more, I will reveal to thee the source whence I get them. That source is *The Gilbert & Sullivan Lexicon* of Harry Benford*.

The Yeomen of the Guard “is set in the Tower of London during the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547).”

“The Tower of London is a fortress dating back in part to William the Conqueror. Located on the north bank of the Thames, it occupies about eighteen acres and includes more than a dozen individual towers. Rich in history and bloodshed, the Tower is a centerpiece of British history.”

“**Yeomen:** In England a yeoman was originally a man who owned and farmed his own land. The term later came to be applied to archers and cavalry soldiers recruited from among the nation’s farmers and countrymen. The Yeomen of the Guard was originated in 1485 as a bodyguard for the monarch. Until 1548, their duties included service at the Tower of London. Ever since that date a similar group, called the Corps of Yeomen Warders, has had that specific duty. The Tudor uniforms worn by the two corps are almost identical and this causes the two to be confused. . . .”

“**Tower Green:** An open square within the Tower of London. Most public executions took place on Tower Hill, just outside the walls of the Tower. Especially important prisoners, however, were executed in the relative privacy of Tower Green. Anne Boleyn and Catherine Howard were accorded that privilege. Why should Colonel Fairfax be so honored? To simplify staging, I presume.”

“**Little Ease:** A narrow place of confinement; specifically the name of a dungeon cell in the White Tower.” (The white tower is the imposing, free-standing building in the center of the complex, and, I believe, the oldest. It is the one usually visualized by people when hearing “the Tower of London.”)

“**Beauchamp** [pronounced ‘BEE-chum’] **Tower:** One of the main towers in the Tower of London [. . .] it was built around 1300 and remained nameless until 1397, when Thomas Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, was imprisoned there. . . . Rudolph Hess, Hitler’s henchman, spent time there, too.”

“**Cold Harbour:** Another tower in the Tower of London. . . . it was used as the queen’s residence during the time of Henry VII. . . the tower was demolished in about 1670.”

“**Halbert:** A medieval weapon combining an ax blade and spear on a long handle. . . . The word is more commonly spelled ‘halberd.’” (Production Manager **Bill Hatcher** has done a lot of research on halbert/ds, and **Chris Buggé** is making a dozen of them for our show.)

“**St. Peter’s:** . . . the garrison church of St. Peter ad Vincula, which was within the Tower, adjacent to Tower Green. . . the original church was built by Henry II in about 1185 in penance for the murder of Thomas à Becket. It was rebuilt in 1306 and again (after a fire) in 1512.” *This* is the incarnation you can visit today. Or tomorrow.

One character in *The Yeomen of the Guard* and his position are also worthy of note in our limited space:

“**Sir Richard Cholmondeley:** The most important thing to know about Sir Richard is that his family name is pronounced ‘Chumley.’ You may also want to know that there really was such a person in command of the Tower during the time of Henry VIII. Extensive wrangles have developed over Gilbert’s intent in using the name. Was he using the character or just the name? No one knows; nor need we be much concerned. Let us press on.

“**Lieutenant** [‘Lef-TEN-ant’] **of the Tower:** The lieutenant served under the constable of the Tower. The constable was Henry VIII’s chief security officer throughout the greater London area. The lieutenant of the Tower was in charge of day-to-day operation of the Tower itself, the most important stronghold in the nation. As a royal appointment, it was an exceedingly important prestigious post.”

The above represent only a small percentage of lore, rich and rare, to be found in Harry Benford’s *The Gilbert & Sullivan Lexicon*. I encourage you to learn more about the Tower of London, which remains one of the top tourist attractions in the city, by reading further, by visiting the Tower itself when next in London—and of course by seeing this summer’s production in June!

* Third Edition. Houston: The Queensbury Press, 1999, available at our sales desk at performances in June or (at a cheaper price!) from UMGASS, c/o Kark Zinn, 11451 Fairlane Drive, South Lyon MI 48178. Send \$8.45 + \$3.99 shipping. karlzinn@umich.edu or 248/437-4183. (As I write, Amazon.com has cheaper copies, but *be sure to order the Third Edition*.)

Tickets Available for *The Yeomen of the Guard*

Tickets can now be purchased for our summer production of *The Yeomen of the Guard*, either online at www.gilbertsullivan.org or by calling 1-800-494-TIXS. For group sales of 10 or more, contact Michael Meigs at michael@gilbertsullivan.org or (512) 472-4772.

Playbill Advertising Space Available

Do you own your own business? Do you work for a business who might be interested in advertising in the playbill for *The Yeomen of the Guard*? Please contact ingrid@gilbertsullivan.org. Each summer, our audience reaches between 2000 and 2500 people, members and non-members alike. As our annual shows include at least one children’s matinee, The Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Austin attracts many families. With a wide demographic group of ages and location, your advertising dollars will be sure to reach a great number of people from the Greater Austin area. *The Yeomen of the Guard* runs June 10-20, with 9 shows, including a matinee. The deadline for advertising is Friday, May 21. Prices are:

Full-page ad – \$300	Business card ad – \$50
Half-page ad – \$175	Mini-ad – \$25
Quarter-page ad – \$75	

For more information, see www.gilbertsullivan.org or contact ingrid@gilbertsullivan.org.

NEWS of our MEMBERS

Our Artistic Director, **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, has been invited to deliver the first Jay Newman Memorial Lecture on Gilbert & Sullivan at 6:30 pm on May 7 at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York City. Co-sponsored by the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of New York and the library, the annual lecture is funded by an endowment left by Professor Newman. The next day Rafe will fly to Austin to be here for the Musicales on Sunday, May 9, and to start staging *The Yeomen of the Guard* on Monday.

Gilbert's play, *Sweethearts*, directed by Ralph MacPhail, Jr., will be performed at the Gettysburg Festival by the G & S Society of Northwest Louisiana, on June 26. This is the production that Rafe went to Louisiana last spring to stage. He will return to Shreveport in early June to rehearse and refresh the production.

Bruce K. Hallock, late husband of our member **Enid Hallock**, is the subject of a biography by their son "Austin" Bruce with the assistance of Austin's brother, member **Gary**. Entitled *Sky Full of Dreams: The Aviation Exploits, Creations, and Visions of Bruce K. Hallock*, it is available through Amazon.com and at elevenbooks.com.

When young, Bruce was an aero-model builder and aspiring aeronautical engineer who became a Navy flier. After WWII he operated a flying service, did some pretty wild bush piloting, and then became an executive pilot with an interesting passenger list. In parallel with these exploits, he designed and built three tailless airplanes. Each of his concepts offered innovative approaches to specific aeronautical challenges. The highlights of his life as husband and father are covered and very interesting. This is truly an adventurous family as you already know if you know Enid well. However, the airplanes Bruce created and the dreams that animated his life are the primary topic.

A number of our members were featured in a concert entitled *Spellbound: Wizards, Witches and Tricksters* on April 9 and 10. **Martha Dudgeon** accompanied soprano **Eva Laskaris** and tenor (and our Music Director) **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**. Music featured in this concert included Broadway, film score, art song, and jazz standards either about or sung by villains and macabre affairs.

Spotlight on Opera will present their spring production of *Suor Angelica* by Giacomo Puccini, starring **Leah Knight** as Suor Angelica, and last year's "Queen of the Fairies" **Lisa Alexander** as the Principessa. This production will also include a vocal showcase, "Let's Hear It For the Boys" -- aptly titled for the first segment of the program that will include excerpts of music from *La Boheme*, *The Student Prince*, *The Pearlfishers* and a lovely duet from *The Ballad of Baby Doe*. Other G&S performers include: **Jay Chacon**, **Patricia Combs**, **Andy Fleming**, **Kate Harrod**, **June Julian**, **Ariel Rios**, **Katherine Wiggins**, and **Hilary Young**. Show dates are April 24-25, 2 pm at the Mary Moody Northern Theatre on the St. Edward's campus. Tickets may be purchased at the door: \$20/public; \$10 students/faculty/staff.

Member **Dave Gutman** has sold his pottery at several recent shows, including one at Sunshine Gardens in February and a show sponsored by the Austin Cactus and Succulent Society in April. He has also been asked to prepare a piece for the Austin Chamber Music silent auction.

Marcus Merrell, son of member **Nanci Jay**, was a silver medalist in The Chopin Society of Houston's Fourth Adult Amateur Competition on Feb. 27 at Rice University.

Former Member **Glary Marie Posch** will be directing *The Mikado* at Cy-Fair College (Lone Star College System, CyFair Campus) in the fall. She will also be returning to their Voice Faculty.

The Yeomen of the Guard Cast

Principals

Lieutenant, Sir Richard Cholmondeley —

Robert L. Schneider

Colonel Fairfax — **Holton Johnson**

Sergeant Meryll — **Russell Gregory**

Leonard Meryll — **Billy Alexander**

Jack Point — **Arthur DiBianca**

Wilfred Shadbolt — **David Fontenot**

Elsie — **Michelle Hache**

Phoebe Meryll — **Patricia Combs**

Dame Carruthers — **Janette Jones**

Kate — **Kate Clark**

Yeomen, Male Citizens, Headsmen, etc.:

Billy Alexander, Chris Buggé, Andy

Fleming, Sam Heaton, Jake Jacobsen,

Chris Karaguleff, Mark Long, John

Lopez, Spencer Reichman, Ariel Rios,

Adam Sales, Derek Smootz, Daniel

Stone, Tom Westrup, Dirk Yapple, Jay

Young

Female Citizens: **Elizabeth Cooper,**

Alisar Eido, Katy Fontenot, Angela

Irving, Christina Leidel, Karlyn

McCutchan, Rain Nox, Kim Saltarelli,

Rebecca Stokinger, Jennifer Tullis,

Diana VanDeWater, Madison White

Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive around May 20; the deadline for submissions is May 3. Please send your news to news@gilbertsullivan.org. Thanks!

Wand'ring Minstrels

On March 25, the Wand'ring Minstrels presented "Pirates in the Schools" for Lake Travis Middle School. This program, co-written by Janette Jones and Eva Laskaris, is a mini-production of *The Pirates of Penzance*. The school's students volunteer for roles in the cast including Frederick and the band of pirates, Major-General Stanley and his daughters, and the policemen. Accompanied by **Martha Dudgeon**, **Russell Gregory** plays both the Pirate King and the Sergeant, while **Janette Jones** plays Ruth as well as the voice of Frederick for the student "actor." **Eva Laskaris** sings the role of Mabel.

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin's Wand'ring Minstrels are the ambassadors for the Society to the Central Texas community. Their programs provide an introduction to the genre that is distinctively Gilbert & Sullivan. Programs range from a lively recital of Gilbert & Sullivan's most popular tunes to interactive, mini-productions of the Society's full summer productions. For bookings or additional information, please contact **Eva Laskaris** by email at minstrels@gilbertsullivan.org, or at (512) 350-4935.

March Musicale

by Reba Gillman

On Sunday, March 7, at 3 pm, about 60 people gathered in the sanctuary of Genesis Presbyterian Church to enjoy the refreshing morsels of enlightenment that our Artistic Director, **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, dispenses with a twinkle of enjoyment. First, Rafe informed us that auditions for *The Yeomen of the Guard* had proceeded well, and we had a good cast for our June production; music rehearsals were to start that week, and "It's going to be a wonderful show!" Lady High Pianist **Martha Dudgeon** opened the program playing an unidentified piece. Rafe asked if anyone knew what it was. No one responded and Rafe said he would tell us later, and proceeded to fill us in on background material leading up to the original production of *The Yeomen of the Guard*. He told us of Sullivan's growing need to write a "grand opera" and to compose music for stories of "real human interest and probability" -- certainly not based on the magic lozenge plot Gilbert kept suggesting. Gilbert did his part, coming up with a story more serious than usual, inspired by a poster advertising the Tower Furnishing Company, featuring a "Beefeater" or Yeoman of the Guard as a logo. Writing about real people allowed Gilbert to ground his humor in reality. Sullivan responded to the setting and tragic overtones of the plot by writing one of his most beautiful scores. Both men said this was their best opera.

Rafe then shifted his focus to the musical rarities from *The Yeomen of the Guard*, selections never or rarely heard since the original production in 1888. The first example was a song for Wilfred Shadbolt, the "Head Jailer and Assistant Tormentor" of the Tower, performed by **David Fontenot**. "When jealous torments rack my soul" -- why was it cut? Perhaps some of its imagery was too risqué for Savoy audiences, perhaps it simply did nothing to move the plot along. Next, **Russell Gregory** sang Sgt. Meryll's "lost" song, "A laughing boy but yesterday." Sung in the very first performance of the opera, and never again -- a cheerful song about a father's love and admiration for his son, it did nothing to advance the plot.

Then one of the famous and well loved solos from the opera: "Is life a boon?" Rafe said there were three versions of this aria and only two survive. Sullivan's first setting is listed in our program as sung by Nobody! Because in fact, this setting did not survive, so Nobody will sing it. The second setting does survive, in Sullivan's orchestration, but not in a piano-vocal score, and thereby hangs a tale. Rafe wanted to show the difference between that version, and the final one. A British G&S aficionado, Richard Stockton, volunteered to write a piano reduction of the orchestral score. Rafe inquired frequently about it, and Stockton finally promised that a piano score would arrive in Austin the first week of March. Rehearsal on March 2nd, but no score. **Dan Girardot** was prepared to learn the song whenever it arrived, and willing to sing it on short notice. Pianist Marti said she could sight read it and accompany Dan. Finally on March 7, that very morning, the piano score arrived by email. But alas, Dan could not sing it -- there was no vocal part. The piano piece Marti played at the beginning of the program was the piano version received that morning from England -- no wonder no one in the audience had ever heard it. Rafe then played the New D'Oyly Carte Opera Company recording of this second setting, as sung by David Fieldsend, and told us Dan would give his musician's opinion of the two versions, and then sing the familiar one that Gilbert finally accepted. The recording presented a rather florid aria with many operatic vocal tricks and repetitions. Dan delivered a

delightful talk about what tenors love to sing, but pointed out how much more effective dramatically, the simple, straightforward final version was, which he then sang. Rafe reminded us that "Is life a boon?" is universally regarded as one of the finest tenor solos in Gilbert & Sullivan.

Then came the music for the Third and Fourth Yeomen, cut because it slowed down the action, and did not contribute to the story. Russell sang second bass, David sang baritone and Dan sang tenor, but who sang 2nd tenor? **Janette Jones**, of course: Mezzo, Alto, Contralto, Soprano, Tenor -- if it's Sullivan, Janette will sing it!

Then, last of all, the rollicking duet for Dame Carruthers, the Housekeeper of the Tower, and the contentedly widowed Sergeant Meryll, whom the Dame would like to entice into matrimony. It comes just before the finale of Act II, and was originally written to allow time for Elsie and Fairfax to change into their wedding clothes. It turned out there was plenty of time for the costume change, and the duet was dropped. The Old D'Oyly Carte Company reinstated it in a new production in 1981. Rafe said he and Music Director **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** are still asking, "To cut or not to cut?" about this duet and the first two solos as well. Janette Jones and Russell Gregory came forward to sing the final piece, "Rapture, Rapture!" It was my impression that this duet would add a typically joyous G&S touch to this more serious opera, but that those first two solos are better left out.

Finally, Rafe listed the references he used in preparing his remarks: Ian Bradley, *The Complete Annotated Gilbert & Sullivan*; Reginald Allen, *The First-Night Gilbert & Sullivan*; Harry Benford, *The Gilbert & Sullivan Lexicon*; and Derek Hudson's Notes in the Oxford University Press edition of *The Savoy Operas*. Useful information for anyone who wants to know more about G&S.

As a fitting close to this interesting afternoon, President **Libby Weed** came forward to ask that all join in singing "Hail, Poetry" and "Now to the banquet we press" before we adjourned to the Fellowship Hall for conversation and delicious munchies.



Musicale performers (l-r): Dan Girardot, Martha Dudgeon, Janette Jones, Ralph MacPhail, Jr., David Fontenot, and Russell Gregory

photo courtesy Nanci Jay

MEMBERSHIP FORM

We encourage you to join our Society. If you are a member, please check your membership renewal 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 with your check, payable to "GSSA", or call to join (512) 472-4772 (GSSA).

Please check a membership category:

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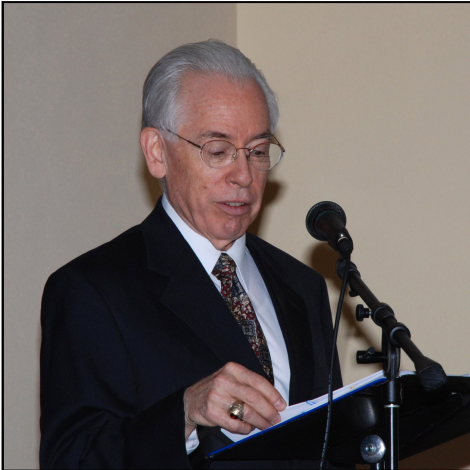
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We are proud to list our members in our programs, but if you would prefer NOT to be listed in our programs, please check here: ☐

Scenes from the March Musicales

all photos courtesy Nanci Jay



Artistic Director and Professor Emeritus **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, describes what we will **not** find in *The Yeomen of the Guard* in June. **David Fontenot** performs a deleted song as jailer Wilfred Shadbolt. President **Libby Weed** leads the traditional closing of the meeting.



Dan Girardot wonders "Is life a boon?" (and if he would have the deleted version of the melody to sing). **Russell Gregory** and **Janette Jones** perform a duet between Sergeant Meryll and Dame Carruthers that was, alas, not included in the final version of the show.

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society

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APRIL 2010

Summer 2010 Grand Production

The Yeomen of the Guard
or "The Merryman and his Maid"

Tickets On Sale Now!

The Yeomen of the Guard

www.gilbertsullivan.org
Entertaining Austin Audiences Since 1976

Coming Events

May Musicale

Sunday, May 9, 3 pm
please see page 1 for details

The Yeomen of the Guard

June 10 through 20, Thursdays through Sundays

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin

Since 1976, we have been spreading the joys of G&S through

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The Society holds nonprofit status under 501(c)(3) of the IRS code.

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Jeffrey Jones-Ragona

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