

The GILBERT & SULLIVAN

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

SEPTEMBER 2014 NEWSLETTER

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed



This newsletter officially heralds the 2014-15 season for The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin. What a season it will be! Are you a *Downton Abbey* fan? If you are, you must not miss our season-opening musicale at the Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School, scene of our last three major productions. If you're not familiar with *Downton Abbey*, the latest *Masterpiece Classic* on public television, you will still find the music (all G&S) ravishing and the event a great deal of fun. I hope you'll bring some munchies and join us for the music and the time of refreshment afterward.

During and after this past summer's run of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, I reflected on the fascinating people one meets through the G&S community. **Dr. Michael Starbird**, University Distinguished Teaching Professor of Mathematics at The University of Texas at Austin, enjoyed the show with friends and wrote us after the performance. Through our email exchange I learned that he is a long-time friend of our board member, **Reba Gillman**, and was a friend and colleague of her late husband **Leonard** (also a UT professor of mathematics as well as a classical pianist). Likewise, he is a friend of G&S board member **Diane Radin** and her husband **Charles**, both UT mathematicians. It may have been Diane's encouragement that brought Mike Starbird to the show this summer. Like Len Gillman, Dr. Starbird has published numerous books. He provided me with a copy of one of these, *The Five Elements of Effective Thinking*, and it was the best thing I read all summer.

(It has always interested me that so many mathematicians and physicists are drawn to G&S. Some might think that brilliant mathematical minds would not be attracted to the theater. But I have long observed that mathematics and music are frequent partners because of the beautiful precision of both. In addition to that, I think that there is something about the way W. S. Gilbert uses language that is bewitching to minds that enjoy the beauty of mathematics.)

So Mike Starbird became an engaging new acquaintance this summer, all because of our mutual interest in Gilbert & Sullivan. And this reminded me of something once said by another G&S friend, former board member and our ongoing volunteer coordinator **Pat Turpin**. Pat became acquainted with the G&S world through her friend and professional colleague **Byron Arnason**, another former board member and a ceaseless staunch supporter. Pat said, "When Byron introduced me to Gilbert & Sullivan, he opened a whole new world to me. It was behind a veil of which I was only vaguely aware. The only way I can explain it is in a cliché: G&S has added rich

threads to my tapestry of life. It has been my portal to unexpected friendships. If friends reflect who you are, then I am honored to be a part of this amazing group of people."

Pat, Mike, and all of you continue to add rich threads to the tapestry of our Society, to continue Pat's poetic metaphor. We look forward to seeing you Sunday, September 7, and throughout the coming season.

Yours for beautiful music, airy persiflage, and innocent merriment,

Libby Weed

The graphic is a square divided into four quadrants. The top-left quadrant contains the text "Downton Abbey" in a serif font. The top-right quadrant contains the text "2015 SEASON OPENING MUSICAL" in a blue sans-serif font. The bottom-left quadrant contains the text "Sings Gilbert & Sullivan" in a serif font. The bottom-right quadrant contains the text "Sunday Sept 7 3pm" in a white serif font. A silhouette of a castle or building is visible in the background across the top and bottom quadrants.

Sunday, September 7, at 3 pm
Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School
11908 North Lamar

We know Lord and Lady Grantham, their family, and their friends must have been to London to see the D'Oyly Carte productions and even the servants would have heard all the songs as the popular music of the day. Let's find out what some of these folks would have chosen as their favorite songs.

Angela Irving, Wayne Davis, Julia Powers, David Fontenot, Robert Schneider, Andy Fleming, Brittany Trinité, Rosa Harris, and Carol Brown have all signed on to help producer **Janette Jones** and pianist **Jeanne Sasaki** bring this idea to life.

Admission is free. *Please bring munchies to share!*

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RALPH MACPHAIL, JR.
POST OFFICE BOX 14
BRIDGEWATER, VIRGINIA 22812 - 0014

August 2014

Dear Pinaforeans,

Even though we stopped sailing the ocean blue together about two months ago, the tunes from this show continue to lap up against my consciousness often as I reflect on our lovely production. “That ole *Pinafore* magic” surely wove its spell again and spoke so well for our organization as we demonstrated to large audiences just why this 136-year-old musical gem has remained such a firm favorite with performers and audiences alike.

Certainly shipwrights W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan “buildded better than they knew,” and that opening night reviewer from the *Daily Telegraph* back in 1878 who called it “A frothy concoction destined soon to subside into nothingness” has been proved very, very—well, *wrong*.

But even the most stageworthy of works still need excellent interpreters if they’re to realize their potential, and this is where our very strong cast and crew deserve a hearty cheer (and one cheer more). *Thank you* for your performances, for your talent, and for your consistency as the run of nine performances ran its merry course. The strong performances onstage were supported by equally strong performances in the pit by our newly expanded orchestra, and our audiences were clearly delighted. Thank you, Jeffrey Jones-Ragona, whose contributions were so much in evidence both onstage and in the pit, and those of GLOO who gave such a wonderful accompaniment to our busyness on stage.

Production Manager Bill Hatcher and I were talking recently as I responded to a questionnarire in preparation for the “G&S Summit” I’ll be attending in San Francisco this month, and Bill pointed out an important reason for our constantly rising effectiveness with our productions is the consistent group of support personnel that has evolved over the past five or six years. *Thank you* to all of you who labor in the shadows of the wings or in the technical booth, or in adjacent rooms for your contributions to our production.

Then there are all those members and friends who meet our theatregoers in the lobby, sell them refreshments and mementos, take their tickets, and otherwise show our appreciation for the people attending and make them feel so welcome.

A deep bow of gratitude is also due to the GSSA President Libby Weed and her hard-working Board of Directors who so selflessly give of their time, energy, and broad spectrum of talents in order that we production people have what we need to present another sparkling production of one of the Savoy operas. (And when I write “what we need,” I mean not only physical and financial needs for a performance but also sizeable audiences to appreciate it.)

If I may close very personally, I’d like to thank GSSA for another opportunity to work with this wonderful company, and also all those who make Alice and me feel so welcome in Austin--and finally those who are so generous with their hospitality and automobiles!

It’s but a hop, skip, and a jump from Portsmouth to Ploverleigh, and if *Pinafore* is figuratively filled with magic, ***The Sorcerer*** is filled with magic literally. Onward, now, from the bright blue sea to the dry land of the English countryside!

Very truly yours,

H. M. S. Pinafore — Joyous After-Thoughts by Reba Gillman



Our President, Libby Weed, reflects in her column on page one, on the “fascinating people one meets” through our G&S community. It *is* a very diverse group and we all savor what these friendships add to our lives. But we also enjoy a very special privilege when we consider the varied characters we get to know whenever we see a production of a G&S opera.

Pinafore opens introduced by the overture—Sullivan’s catchy music. The sailors come out singing “We sail the ocean blue, and our saucy ship’s a beauty” as they get right to work on what every seaman always does to keep the ship in good condition. Who’s that energetic young chap with the red hair? He seems to be in charge; he’s directing their work. He’s the Boatswain (pronounced Bo’son). Little Buttercup comes on stage singing. She’s there to sell choice items to the sailors as they get ready to take a break and go visit “home.” They all seem to know her—she’s been doing this for years. Here comes ugly Dick Deadeye; Little Buttercup doesn’t know him, and he explains. “My name’s Dick Deadeye ... they all hate me.” Buttercup (looking down hatchway), “But tell me who’s the youth whose falt’ring feet with difficulty bear him on his course?” Ralph Rackstraw comes on stage singing the madrigal that introduces his ballad, “A maiden fair to see.” Ralph reveals that he loves a lass above his station. Buttercup comments that he loves, “alas, above his station,” and the chorus of sailors support him singing, “Yes, yes, the lass is much above his station.” Many do not notice that this is a Gilbertian pun. Later we meet Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B., whose own career involved a tremendous rise in British Society. He was proud of this rise and seemed to support common seamen in feeling equal to others. The faithful Pinafore crew were encouraged by this; but alas, Sir Joseph declared this did not make them equal to him.

Pinafore was only the fourth show that Gilbert and Sullivan wrote together. Popular from the beginning, they were still learning their way together, introducing new ways to present their story. And *Pinafore* was their first really big hit. The show took off in America like an express train. People all over the US were happily singing “I’m never, never sick at sea.” “What never?” “Well, hardly ever.” Suddenly G&S were the Team of the Day — popular in London, they became known worldwide. They made lots of money; Richard D’Oyly Carte got rich producing their shows.

What made *Pinafore* so welcome to the US? Gilbert was exploring the changes in British society—the growing middle class, the strict rules about rank in society. Matters of interest to the British—viewed perhaps more flexibly by the strange new western country that started when people left England to forge their own way in life, purposely leaving behind the restrictions of their old life. We do share a certain history, and our reactions are freer.

Interesting ideas. But back to the basics—it’s all just magic—it’s fun! Come meet the characters in *The Sorcerer* next June!

NEWS of our MEMBERS

In August, **GSSA Artistic Director Ralph MacPhail, Jr.** attended the “Gilbert & Sullivan Summit” in San Francisco, sponsored by The Lamplighters, thanks to financial help from the GSSA Board of Directors.

The Summit was a meeting of representatives from over a dozen production organizations specializing in Gilbert & Sullivan. Topics discussed included audience development, the challenges of a limited repertory, artistic succession, sharing resources, rising budgets, and other matters of mutual interest.

Rafe plans to report on the Summit not only to the Board but also to readers of our newsletter in the next issue.

Our Production Manager **Bill Hatcher** took a long bike ride in upstate New York in July. It was an organized ride along the Erie Canal from Buffalo to Albany and he had a very good time. After the ride, he spent a couple of days in New York City, and our Artistic Director also happened to be in NYC. Bill and his brother and sister-in-law met Rafe for dinner at an Irish pub just off Broadway.

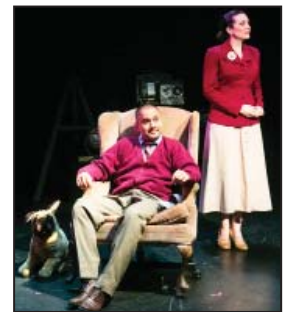
Our delightful little pirate, **Peo Chapman**, will be missing from the audience for our Musicales and Grand Production this year, but she has a great excuse—she and her family are spending a year in the United Kingdom for thorough British exposure!

GSSA performer **Spencer Reichman** performed the roles of Guglielmo in Mozart’s “Così fan Tutte” and the Narrator/Mysterious Man in Sondheim’s “Into the Woods” at the Opera in the Ozarks program in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. After that he went to Cincinnati, Ohio to perform Belcore in Donizetti’s “Elixir of Love” at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. Bravo!

Christiana Little, daughter of **Peggy** and GSSA Board Member **David** and GSSA performer (including as Yum-Yum in our 2005 production of *The Mikado*), lives and performs in New York City. In July, she was included in a *New York Times* review of the World’s Fair Play Festival, a collection of twelve short works:

“Carousel of Progress” by Lauren Yee is the standout. It opens with a hilarious animatronic man (Rajesh Bose) from the attraction of that name at the 1964 fair; you can’t take your eyes off Mr. Bose, who in moments conjures the strange combination of wonder and clunkiness so integral to that time. But that’s just a sideshow. This delicate work is really about the space between the world’s fairs and two people (Christiana Little and Imran Sheikh) who in 1939 thought they had a future together, re-encounter each other in 1964 and briefly contemplate what might have been.

(Review by Neil Genzlinger. Photo credit Kevin Thomas Garcia.)



Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive by early November; the deadline for submissions is October 10. Please send your news to news@gilbertsullivan.org. Thanks!

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin presented *H.M.S. Pinafore* in June 2014
 photos courtesy Cecily Johnson

see more at gilbertsullivan.austin.smugmug.com



"Refrain, audacious tar"
 (Carol Brown, Holton Johnson)



"We sail the ocean blue"



"Fair moon, to thee I sing"
 (Gil Zilkha)



Cousin Hebe
 (Megan Sherrod)



"A many years ago"
 (Janette Jones)



"Sorry her lot"
 (Carol Brown)



Dick Deadeye
 (David Fontenot)



"Never mind the why and wherefore"
 (Russell Gregory, Carol Brown, Gil Zilkha)



"Things are seldom what they seem"
 (Janette Jones, Gil Zilkha)



"Gaily tripping"



Sir Jos. Porter & Midshipmite
 (Russell Gregory, Rebecca Yapple)



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:

- Individual** (\$20-\$29)
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- Pooh-Bah** (\$500-\$999)
- Pirate King** (\$1000-\$2499)
- Savoyard** (\$2500 & up)

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I'd like to volunteer. I'm interested in:

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:

Winners of *H.M.S. Pinafore* DVDs

These ten lucky people completed a survey at the theater after viewing a production of *H.M.S. Pinafore* in June, and their names were drawn to receive a DVD of the production. We extend our hearty congratulations to these fortunate audience members:

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| Raegan Brown | Janice Ivanoff |
| Jeff and Jane Farmer | Simon Karaguleff |
| Susan Finkelman | Dawn McLachlen |
| Amy Flinn | Rodney Pirtle |
| Larry Guess | Michael Tom |



our 2001 production of The Sorcerer

Summer 2015 Grand Production:

The Sorcerer

June 18-28, 2015

Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School

Originally presented in 1877, *The Sorcerer* is based on a Christmas story that W. S. Gilbert wrote for magazine publication the previous year. It concerns a young man, Alexis, who is so head-over-ears in love with his fiancée, Aline, that he is determined to find a way for all of his fellow citizens to be just as smitten as he is. He believes, as Sir Joseph Porter proclaimed, that "love levels all ranks," and he wants to see love on every village corner.

He invites the proprietor of J. W. Wells & Co., Family Sorcerers, to brew a love potion that will cause all the other villagers to fall in love with the first person they see. You can imagine the comical scenes that ensue.

The Sorcerer was the very first G&S opera to use all the major character types and typical range of songs that would appear in their later collaborations, such as comic duets, patter songs, contrapuntal double choruses, a soaring soprano showpiece, and so forth. *The Sorcerer* has it all!

Wand'ring Minstrels

The Wand'ring Minstrels of the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin will make your concerts, school events or private parties entertaining and fun. Guaranteed to get the audience laughing and singing along to favorite Gilbert and Sullivan and Broadway musical numbers.

Contact **Robert L. Schneider** (bigdaddymusic1@gmail.com), or see our website (www.gilbertsullivan.org) for further details.



behind the scenes of H.M.S. Pinafore: (front, l-r) Bill Hatcher, Libby Weed, Pam Fowler, Ralph MacPhail, Jr., Jeffrey Jones-Ragona, Pixie Avent, Monica Kurtz, Adam Gunderson, Steven Bailey (on stairs) Callie Stribling

Armstrong Moving & Storage

is the official moving and storage company of The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin. Many thanks, Armstrong!



Children's activities before the first H.M.S. Pinafore matinée allow kids to meet the performers on stage

Coming Events

- Sept. 7 *Downton Abbey* Sings G&S (see p. 1)
- Nov. 9 Fall Musicale (see next newsletter)
- Jan. 11 Annual Meeting and Musicale
- Feb. 15 Mid-season one-act production: *The Zoo*
- Feb. 21-22 *The Sorcerer* Auditions
- May 17 *The Sorcerer* Preview Musicale
- June 18-28 *The Sorcerer* summer production

Newsletters Online

Want to see this (or previous, going back more than a decade) newsletter in color? Then visit the newsletter archive on our website:

www.gilbertsullivan.org/NewsletterArchive

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SEPTEMBER 2014

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin

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

- Annual Grand Productions**
- Educational/Community Outreach**
- Musicales**
- Musical Scholarships**
- Newsletters**
- Holiday Season Shows**

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Visit Austin at NowPlayingAustin.com



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

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