

# The GILBERT & SULLIVAN

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2016 NEWSLETTER

SOCIETY OF AUSTIN

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed

Our 2016-17 season has begun with a charming musicale and some really splendid news!

The September 11 musicale benefiting The 100 Club of Central Texas was a great success. **June Julian** produced and **Janette Jones** directed a talented cast in a stirring tribute to our country and its heroes as well as a beautiful program of music from *The Yeomen of the Guard*. The 100 Club, which serves first responders and their families in our area, received generous donations from our guests.

Shortly after that big event, we received some truly exciting news. Our June production of *The Gondoliers* was honored with five important nominations for B. Iden Payne awards:

- Outstanding Musical Theater Production – *The Gondoliers*, The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin
- Outstanding Direction of Musical Theater – **Michelle Haché**
- Outstanding Music Direction – **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**
- Outstanding Featured Actor in a Musical Theater Production – **Arthur DiBianca**, Don Alhambra del Bolero
- Outstanding Featured Actress in a Musical Theater Production – **Corinna Browning**, Casilda

On October 24, the winners in each category will be announced in a special ceremony at the Long Center's Rollins Theater. Four of our cast members (**Bob Beare**, **Patricia Combs**, **Jerry Cordova**, and **Corinna Browning**) have been asked to perform "From the sunny Spanish shore" at this celebration. But we are already basking in the joy of knowing that, among the hundreds of productions viewed by the B. Iden Payne committee members, our show was one of the most favorably recognized.

I hope to see you at our gala 40th anniversary celebration, which will feature some of our top performers from recent years—not to mention the wonderful Chez Zee food and the recognition of hall-of-famers **Holton Johnson**, **Monica Kurtz**, **David Little**, and **Dave Wieckowski**.

Yours for innocent merriment,



In 1976, Zachary Scott Theatre Center produced *H.M.S. Pinafore*. After the run, cast members and fans of G&S formed The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin, dedicated to educating the public about and preserving and performing the works of Gilbert & Sullivan.

Forty years later, we continue to thrive. We are celebrating in typical Society style, with songs, food, and fellowship. The program includes music and brief scenes from the G&S library, performed by **Lisa Alexander**, **Arthur DiBianca**, **Russell Gregory**, **Michelle Haché**, **Holton Johnson**, **Janette Jones**, **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** and **June Julian**. We will recognize the remarkable contributions of the newest inductees to our *Hall of Fame*:

- **Monica Kurtz**, the extraordinary, steel-nerved and velvet-gloved stage manager
- **Holton Johnson**, our legendary, award-winning tenor lead for numerous operas
- **David Little**, the publicist who brought us into the public eye as never before
- **Dave Wieckowski**, the financial chief who has steered our fiscal ship into clear waters

***Tickets are going fast***, so get your tickets now! **For your \$40 ticket**, you'll savor a bountiful buffet of hors d'oeuvres, enjoy a cash bar, and relish an assortment of Chez Zee's delicious desserts, while enjoying delightful music. **For a \$100 patron-level ticket**, you get all this plus reserved seating and recognition in the program. ***Don't delay—get your tickets today*** at [www.gilbertsullivan.org](http://www.gilbertsullivan.org).

(see map to Chez Zee on back page)

## In This Issue

The Yeomen's Salute to First Responders .....	pp. 2, 3
<i>The Pirates of Penzance</i> : It's Personal .....	p. 4
Performance Space Wanted! .....	p. 5
Wand'ring Minstrels .....	p. 5
Notice of Elections .....	p. 5

# The Yeomen's Salute to First Responders

by Rosa Mondragon Harris



On the afternoon of Sunday, September 11, at 3 pm, 103 gathered at the Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School to kick off the 40th season of the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin. This year, the first musicale fell on Patriot Day, designated as a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance for the victims of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Donations at the musicale benefitted The 100 Club of Central Texas, a non-profit charitable organization devoted to providing immediate assistance, both financial and emotional, to injured or killed first responders and their families.

President **Libby Weed** welcomed everyone to the musicale and introduced **Etta Moore**, Executive Director of The 100 Club of Central Texas, who spoke about the organization's history and its goals and activities in the Austin community and surrounding areas.

**Janette Jones** began the musical portion of the afternoon by taking the audience back to September 11, 2001. We were reminded of the many acts of heroism that day and in the days that followed. First responders were called to duty that day, risking their lives and giving of themselves during the aftermath of the attacks. September 11, 2001, was the deadliest day for firefighters and law enforcement in the history of the United States. This musicale, Janette continued, would be sung in tribute to all of those lost on September 11, 2001.

The initial set of songs focused on patriotism and hope. **Robert Schneider** asked the audience to join him and the rest of the ensemble, which included **Danny Castillo, David Fontenot, Rosa Mondragon Harris, Maurine McLean, Erica Lizette Salinas, Jamieson Taylor, and Patrick Wright**, in proudly singing "The Star Spangled Banner." Erica and Danny proceeded to sing one of my favorite songs, first popularized by Celine Dion and Andrea Bocelli, titled "The Prayer." The audience next joined the ensemble in singing "America the Beautiful." To conclude the patriotic song set, Rosa and Jamieson next led the ensemble in Enya's "Only Time."

It was said, Janette told us, that Gilbert got the idea for *The Yeomen of the Guard*, their most serious-toned opera, from an advertisement he saw in a train station that pictured the Tower of London and a "Beefeater" in the scarlet uniform. The opera took place in the Tower of London in the 16th century where the Yeomen Warders were still part of the King's bodyguard and so called the Yeomen of the Guard.

Rosa began the Yeomen tribute by singing "When maiden loves, she sits and sighs," as Phoebe, daughter of Sergeant Meryll, sat pining at her spinning wheel. But for whom was she pining? Wilfred Shadbolt, the Head Jailer and Assistant Tormentor, was in love with Phoebe, but her attention was on Colonel Fairfax, one of the prisoners who was to be beheaded for sorcery. Phoebe believed him innocent. Colonel Fairfax was brought out on his way to the Cold Harbour Tower to wait his end in solitude. With the help of the Lieutenant, Fairfax was able to greet his old friend Sergeant Meryll and Phoebe, who broke down in tears. Fairfax declared that it would be easier to die well than to live well as Danny next sang "Is life a boon?"

Fairfax, left alone with his friend the Lieutenant, explained that the sorcery charge was brought against him by a wicked cousin who wanted to inherit the Colonel's estate. Colonel Fairfax had decided that he could at least thwart this scheme if the Lieutenant would find someone for Fairfax to marry, offering the woman 100 crowns for

his dishonored name and the assurance that she would be widowed in an hour and freed again. Colonel Fairfax was led off as a couple of traveling players arrived. Jack Point and Elsie Maynard entertained the gathering crowd with a song which told the story of a merryman and the maid he loves. "I have a song to sing, O," a favorite of many Gilbert & Sullivan aficionados, was sung by Erica and Patrick.

David next sang "When jealous torments rack my soul," as Wilfred Shadbolt detailed how the tower's tormentor was himself tormented. Although the song was included in the last GSSA production of *The Yeomen of the Guard*, this song was left out of the original production due to a last-minute casting change.

In an effort to help his friend Fairfax, the Lieutenant made the offer to Jack Point and Elsie to have her marry a man for an hour or two, and thus earn "an hundred crowns." Point and Elsie consented, both indicating that money was needed to help Elsie's old mother who "is a-bed with fever." Erica, Patrick, and Robert told us about the agreement in "How say you, maiden, will you wed?" Elsie was blindfolded, married, and so earned the hundred crowns. Telling us of her quick marriage, Jamieson next offered us, "Tis done! I am a bride." The plot thickened as Phoebe stole the keys from Wilfred just long enough for her father to free the (unknown to either of them) newly married Colonel Fairfax, and they disguised Fairfax as Sergeant Meryll's son, Leonard. All the other Yeomen welcomed the man they believed to be Leonard Meryll, and Phoebe was thrilled when Wilfred asked the man he believed to be her brother to watch over her. The new recruit (Fairfax disguised as Leonard) was sent to bring the prisoner for execution, and the audience enjoyed the joke as Fairfax himself was sent off to discover that the prisoner Fairfax had escaped!

In Act II of the opera, Point and Wilfred conspired together. They decided to tell everyone that they saw Fairfax escaping in the river and were able to shoot him dead. Patrick and David told us of their plot in "Here upon we're both agreed." When Jack Point and Wilfred fired off the gun and executed their plot, Elsie believed she was now a widow and free to love the man she thought was Leonard Meryll. That didn't stop Phoebe from loving the same man and Jamieson, Rosa, and Danny next sang "A man who would woo a fair maid."

The plots soon began to unravel. Phoebe had to marry Wilfred to keep her part in the secret regarding Fairfax. Her father offered marriage to Dame Carruthers, the housekeeper of the tower, and bought her silence in the scheme involving Fairfax. Maurine and Robert ended the Yeomen tribute with the duet "Rapture, rapture!"

To conclude the musicale, Maurine led the ensemble and audience members in the final patriotic song, "God Bless America." Janette and Libby thanked the cast members who sang for us as well as our wonderfully talented pianist, **Jeanne Sasaki**. In keeping with tradition, David sang the Pirate King's lead-in to "Hail, Poetry" from *The Pirates of Penzance*. The audience joined in and then sang "Now to the banquet we press" from *The Sorcerer*.

Our Patriot Day musicale, produced by Janette and **June Julian**, was now in the books, and attendees left with musical and historical memories from the afternoon. In closing, I would like to share my favorite passage from "The Prayer" and its translation as we head into the new season:

*Sognamo un mondo senza più violenza* (I dream of a world without violence)

*Un mondo di giustizia e di speranza* (A world with justice and hope)

## The Yeomen's Salute to First Responders

photos courtesy Steve Schwartzman

see more at [gilbertsullivan.austin.smugmug.com](http://gilbertsullivan.austin.smugmug.com)



*"God Bless America" was sung by the ensemble (l-r): Robert Schneider, David Fontenot, Patrick Wright, Danny Castillo, Jamieson Taylor, Erica Lizette Salinas, Rosa Mondragon, Maurine McLean, and Janette Jones, joined by the audience*



*The concert raised funds for  
The 100 Club of Central Texas  
(see [100ClubCentex.com](http://100ClubCentex.com))*



*Rosa, Jamieson, and Danny sing "A man who would woo a fair maid"*



*Patrick, Erica, and Robert sing "How say you, maiden, will you wed?"*



*David complains "When jealous torments rack my soul"*



*Maurine and Janette with President Libby Weed*



*Jamieson laments "Tis done!  
I am a bride!"*



*Jamieson and Rosa perform "Only Time"*



*Robert and Maurine  
celebrate "Rapture, rapture!"*



*Our intrepid pianist,  
Jeanne Sasaki*

## Why I Love *The Pirates of Penzance*: It's Personal!

by Ralph MacPhail, Jr.



I'm often asked, "Which is your favorite Gilbert & Sullivan opera?" I sometimes paraphrase the great Savoyard Martyn Green and say, "The one I'm working on now—unless it's the one I'll be working on next."

But truth-to-tell, when I started directing in Austin in 1998, I had four favorites, and even though I'd spent a lot of time researching *The Mikado*, if anyone really pinned me down, I'd have admitted that *The Pirates of Penzance* was at (or near!) the top of my list.

Since then, I've had the opportunities to direct, in Austin, quite a few of the other operas for the first time, and now the question becomes even harder to answer truthfully.

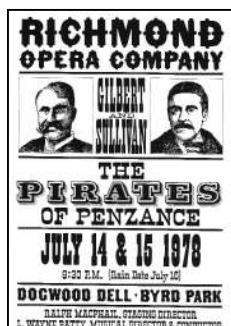
But equally truthfully, I think that *The Pirates of Penzance* is still at (or near!) the top of my list. Here's why:

The first music I ever heard from Gilbert & Sullivan was, as I recall, "A policeman's lot is not a happy one," sung by my father. As a young émigré from Glasgow, he sang in *The Pirates of Penzance* at Flint (Michigan) High School. (He was also booted out of a production of *Ruddigore* for giggling in his Act II picture frame, but that's another story.)

In 1966, the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company came to the National Theatre in Washington, D.C., and that week I saw three of the five operas they were touring. (Alice and I subsequently saw the other two in New York.) The very first was *The Pirates of Penzance* on the Monday night of the week's run, and I bought my dad a ticket and thus have the happy memory of sharing this life-changing experience with him. (And it was life-changing. That week was to set the direction for a significant part of my life.)



*The Pirates of Penzance* was the first Savoy opera I directed with professional singers—for the Richmond (Virginia) Opera Company in 1978. In preparing for this production I discovered that there are only seven dialogue sequences in this show—and one of those is very short. And the music! Much as I loved its predecessor, *H.M.S. Pinafore*, I discovered what Sullivan meant when he wrote to his mother from New York in 1879, "... it is exquisitely funny, and the music is strikingly tuneful and catching. It's more



humorous and operatic, too." Elsewhere the composer noted that the musical situations were more highly developed than in *H.M.S. Pinafore*.

Subsequently, I've directed seven additional productions of the opera—more than any other—and have never tired of it. And I've often pictured my father seated in a celestial loge seat taking them all in, Tarantara-ing away.

My son Alexander appeared as Major-General Stanley at Bridgewater College (wearing his new optician-ground-to-his-prescription monocle!), and one of my happiest Gilbert and Sullivan memories is of the dress-rehearsal when he appeared on the rocks in Act I, resplendent in his red tunic and plumed headgear, snapped off a salute, and sang, "Yes, yes, I am a Major-General!"



Several years ago Alice and I stopped by New York City on the way to Ivoryton, Connecticut, to teach an elderhostel course on *The Pirates of Penzance*. "This is a perfect time to cross something off my bucket-list," thought I. So we hopped in a cab and headed to East 20th Street, very near Teddy Roosevelt's birthplace. It didn't take us long to find the plaque on a building that reads, "On this site, Sir Arthur Sullivan composed 'The Pirates of Penzance' during 1879." (More about the circumstances of writing the show in The Big Apple in a future column.)

Just two days before I'm writing this, I was invited to Eastern Mennonite (High) School to talk with the participants in a production of *The Pirates of Penzance* to be presented in October. The Mennonites have a reputation for strong choral singing, and I can't wait to see (and hear) their show.

And finally, and on a very personal note, my father died just days after Alice and I moved to Bridgewater in 1972 so that I could



begin teaching and directing at our alma mater. Subsequently, while going through my father's papers, I found two small photographs: one of a skirted pirate and another of an English Bobby.

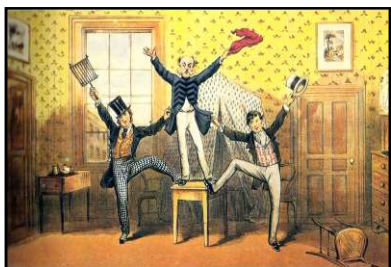


They're clearly of my father, and were probably taken in his school-yard about 1930.

They are on the first page of the first volume of my Gilbert & Sullivan scrapbooks.

## Performance Space Wanted!

We need a venue for *Cox and Box*, our mid-season production, on March 5, 2017. The locations used for previous presentations are either unavailable or too expensive. Dates needed are Saturday, March 4, for set load-in and rehearsal, and Sunday, March 5, for performance. Anyone knowing of a location with a small performance area and seating for 250 to 400 should send information to **Allan Longacre** (512-276-8334) or any other board member.



*Playbill for the 1869 production of **Cox and Box**  
at the Royal Gallery of Illustration*

## Wand'ring Minstrels

The Wand'ring Minstrels are preparing their school shows for the 2016-17 school year.

If you would like to have the Wand'ring Minstrels perform at your school, retirement center, civic club, business meeting, or private party, please see the web site, [www.gilbertsullivan.org](http://www.gilbertsullivan.org), for information.



*The Wand'ring Minstrels (l-r): Robert K. Schneider, Janette Jones,  
Katie Schneider, and Martha Mortensen Ahern*

### 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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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: ☐



## Notice of Elections

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin will elect members of the board for the coming year at the Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 8, 3 pm, in the Fellowship Hall of Genesis Presbyterian Church, 1507 Wilshire Blvd. The nominating committee includes **Patricia Combs**, Chair; **Charles Smaistrila**; and **Sue Caldwell**.

Please contact Patricia at [Austin.GilbertandSullivan@gmail.com](mailto:Austin.GilbertandSullivan@gmail.com) if you wish to volunteer to serve on the board or to nominate someone else. Definitely mark the date on your calendar for this important gathering, when we will hear a brief report on the year's activities, elect the board, and enjoy beautiful music. It will be a wonderful way to brighten a January afternoon.



Our 40th Anniversary Gala will be held at  
Chez Zee, 5406 Balcones Drive.

*The*  
**GILBERT**  
*SULLIVAN* Society  
OF AUSTIN  
The Gilbert and Sullivan  
Society of Austin, Inc.  
P.O. Box 684542  
Austin, Texas 78768-4542

## Coming Events

- Oct. 20 40th Anniversary Gala (see p. 1)  
Jan. 8 Annual Meeting and Musicale  
Feb. 25-26 *The Pirates of Penzance* Auditions  
Mar. 5 Mid-season production: *Cox & Box*  
May 21 *The Pirates of Penzance* Preview Musicale  
June 15-25 *The Pirates of Penzance* summer  
production

## Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive in late December; the deadline for submissions will be December 5. Please send your news to [news@gilbertsullivan.org](mailto:news@gilbertsullivan.org). Thanks!

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OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2016

## The Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin

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

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Our web site: [www.gilbertsullivan.org](http://www.gilbertsullivan.org)  
E-mail: [info@gilbertsullivan.org](mailto:info@gilbertsullivan.org)



This project is funded and supported in part by a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts and in part by the City of Austin Economic Development Department/Cultural Arts Division, believing that an investment in the Arts is an investment in Austin's future.  
Visit Austin at [NowPlayingAustin.com](http://NowPlayingAustin.com)



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

Artistic Director  
Music Director

**Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**  
**Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**

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