

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed

Last spring, as we were preparing to present *Ruddigore* in June, I re-read a book given to me by **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, the last time we produced this show. The book is *Ruddy Gore* by Kerry Greenwood (a Phryne Fisher Mystery), and you might like to check it out.



The Phryne Fisher series is set in Australia, where Phryne is a private detective. This particular story takes place in 1928 during a run of *Ruddigore* at His Majesty's Theatre in Melbourne, where murders and attempted murders of cast members and others keep occurring, scaring the company out of their wits. There are also reports of a ghost on the set—a long-ago Rose Maybud who died a mysterious death.

At one point the show's director explains to Phryne, "The secret of G and S is that it has to be played perfectly straight; no winks, no asides, no 'look how funny I am,' no 'see how absurd this is.' It's very comic if it's played as though all the ridiculous conventions are true."

Watching rehearsals and performances amid her sleuthing, Phryne compliments the actor playing Robin/Sir Ruthven, telling him his acting was brilliant, "Partly because you took him entirely seriously."

He replies, "That's the way to play G and S." He goes on to say that an old stagehand who had been around in Gilbert's days "was telling me that he remembers hearing Gilbert rebuking George Grossmith, the famous patter singer, for adding a bit of business to his part. 'The audience laughed,' said Grossmith, and the old man thundered, 'So they would if you sat on a pork pie. Stick to the part, Mr. Grossmith, and no embroidery.'"

Isn't that a terrific insight into what it is we really love about G&S? And here's something else I love. I have written before about a number of couples who met while involved in our productions and subsequently married—one such being **Sam Johnson**, our recent Sir Despard, and his wife **Cecily**—and this summer I

learned about another romantic Austin G&S connection. **Becky** and **Ed Watt** told me after one of this summer's shows that their first date was to a performance of our 1990 *Ruddigore*. When they heard we were doing *Ruddigore* again 28 years later, they had to attend—now married for 27 years and with three grown children. Becky and Ed said that the line "Fallacy somewhere, I fancy" from the Act II gallery scene had stuck with them and had become a catchphrase throughout their marriage.

Congratulations and best wishes to Becky and Ed and to all who continue to accept G&S absurdities with absolute seriousness!

Libby Weed



Sunday, September 16, at 2pm

Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School
11908 North Lamar Blvd., Austin (see map, p. 6)

You may have seen Gilbert & Sullivan Austin's 2012 production of *Patience*. Audiences loved it, and so did the critics. People who loved that show have asked, with good reason, "Why must we wait ten years to see *Patience* again?"

Here is our answer: You need not wait! On September 16, join us at Worley Barton Theater for a one-time-only concert production of *Patience*—directed by the B. Iden Payne nominee **Janette Jones**, who inhabited the role of Lady Jane in that 2012 production.

But Janette and music director **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** and cast member **Garrett Cordes** have a little mischief up their sleeves. Instead of portraying the absurdities of followers of the 1870s aesthetic movement, they asked, why not bring *Patience* into the current day and lampoon the fascination with being hip—cool, counter-culture, and anything but "old school"? Hipsters pride themselves on being authentic, alternative, and far above the common masses—just as the 19th century aesthetes did. Gilbert saw the aesthetes as being a bit too full of themselves and was ready to puncture their inflated egos. Let's take that pin to the self-important hipsters!

Go to www.gilbertsullivan.org now to get your tickets to see how all of the wonderful Gilbert humor and Sullivan music, with only the slightest of tweaks, continues to delight 21st-century theater-goers.

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A Reflection of Rederring by Rosa Mondragon Harris

This summer, GSA brought back one of Gilbert & Sullivan's lesser-known operas, *Ruddigore*. It was last performed here in 2007, and this year's production saw the return of previous cast members **Patricia Combs**, **Arthur DiBianca**, **Andy Fleming**, **Janette Jones**, **Mark Long**, and **Jay Young**, as well as Artistic Director **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, and Music Director **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**.

Ruddigore was the tenth of Gilbert & Sullivan's fourteen operas and premiered in London on January 22 (my husband's birthday!), 1887. Originally called *Ruddygore*, this opera followed Gilbert & Sullivan's highly successful *The Mikado*. Over 130 years later, and after changes such as a respelling of the title and updating the overture, *Ruddigore* continues to bring a "spooky" flair to Gilbert and Sullivan fans worldwide. Given its strong melodies and witty dialogue, it's a surprise that this opera is not as well-known as other G&S works. Our Austin audiences were full of praise:

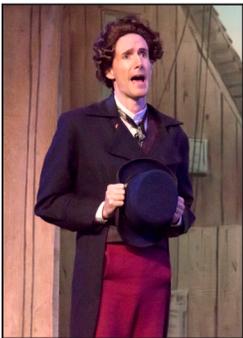
"The fun was infectious. A pure, simple, beautiful performance."

"It's delightful. It keeps the joy one hopes for with one of these shows."

"The attention to detail. The principals were great, but what makes the show stand out compared with other G&S shows were the costumes, sets, and chorus."

"Wonderful! Darryll Fancourt, Richard Watson, and Martyn Green of the Savoy would be proud of you all!"

Live theatre is exciting in that every show is a unique experience. One could attend a performance each weekend, and see variances depending on the energy of the cast, sound of the orchestra, or vibe of



Robin Oakapple (*Arthur DiBianca*) loves
Rose Maybud (*Corinna Brown*)

the audience. As a cast member, it's always fun to watch and listen from the wings to gauge an audience before setting foot on the stage. A punchline that receives a large audience response one

night might get a different reaction another night. Some moments of a show consistently received a positive reaction. The most memorable moment for audiences of *Ruddigore* was undoubtedly in Act II, when the portrait gallery came to life as Robin Oakapple (now Sir Ruthven Murgatroyd) contemplated his crimes as a bad baronet. The men of the chorus stepped out of their portraits and presented themselves as his ancestral ghosts as they sang, "Painted emblems of a race." Another standout moment was when the audience was introduced to Mad Margaret with "Cheerily carols the lark," skillfully played by GSA newcomer, **Shelby Schisler**. Her dialogue with Rose Maybud (**Corinna Browning**) was a highlight of the show for me, and has crowned Mad Margaret as my most-liked G&S character. My personal favorite musical moment was when the ensemble sang the beautiful madrigal, "When the buds are blossoming," in the Act I finale. The audience consistently applauded



ghosts of his ancestors threaten
Robin Oakapple, a.k.a. Sir Ruthven



Mad Margaret
(*Shelby Schisler*)

at the end of the madrigal, which forced the orchestra to hold before continuing to play the next measure. During the final show on the afternoon of June 24th, the audience not only applauded heartily, but also gifted the ensemble with a standing ovation. The cast and orchestra were beaming with pride.

Everyone involved in a show spends months rehearsing and preparing for the production run. It is always difficult to say goodbye and close the book on another performance chapter. But the next chapter is already being written, and excitement is building for next year's production of *Iolanthe!*



Gilbert & Sullivan Austin presented *Ruddigore* in June 2018

photos here and on p. 2 courtesy Alex Labry

see more at gilbertsullivanaustrin.smugmug.com



Richard Dauntless
(Danny Castillo)



Old Adam Goodheart
(Reagan Murdock)



Sir Despard Murgatroyd
(Sam Johnson)



Dame Hannah (Patricia Combs) is reunited with Sir Roderic (Julius Young)



children's activities before the first matinee



Artistic Director
Ralph MacPhail, Jr.,
gives a pre-performance talk



GSA Hall of Fame members (l-r) Janette Jones, Bill Hatcher, Ralph MacPhail, Jr., Jeffrey Jones-Ragona, Libby Weed, Arthur DiBianca, Holton Johnson, and David Little at the first-Friday gala reception for *Ruddigore*



GSA 2018-19 Season

Sunday, September 16, 2 pm – Concert performance of *Patience*. See page 1 for details.

Sunday, January 6, 2 pm – **Annual Meeting with Sing-Along**. We can join in or just listen and enjoy. We'll also elect our board for 2019. Location: Genesis Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall, 1507 Wilshire Blvd.

Saturday and Sunday, February 23-24 – **Auditions for *Iolanthe***. Watch our website and newsletter for details.

Saturday and Sunday, March 2-3 – **Concert performance of *H.M.S. Pinafore***, directed by Ralph MacPhail, Jr., and Jeffrey Jones-Ragona. Time: Saturday 7:30 pm; Sunday 2 pm. Location: Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School.

Sunday, May 19, 2 pm – **"*Iolanthe's Fractured Fairy Tales*" Musicale**. Get a taste of the joys to come in June as members of the cast present some solos, ensembles, choruses, and scenes from our summer grand production. Location: Jewish Community Center, 7300 Hart Lane.

Thursday, June 13, through Sunday, June 23 – **Summer Grand Production: *Iolanthe***, Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School.



We are pleased to announce that what has often been called the most beautiful of all the comic operas of William S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan, *Iolanthe*, will be the grand summer production of Gilbert & Sullivan Austin in June 2019.

The soaring music and the extravagantly gorgeous costumes and scenery—how could you improve on fairy glades and the House of Lords?—make this show a delectable theater experience. And the central confrontation in the story, between a bevy of fairies and Britain's redoubtable peers, brings out one of Gilbert's favorite themes by contrasting the harsh rules and bravado of "civilization" with the joys of human love and beauty.

Mark your calendars now for June 13-23, when nine performances of this wonderful G&S opera will be staged. Auditions will be held in late February; check the website for continuing news. If *Iolanthe* is unfamiliar to you, be sure to read Professor **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**'s informative and charming articles in the coming issues of this newsletter. This opera may become your new favorite!



RALPH MACPHAIL, JR.
POST OFFICE BOX 14
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Dear Ruddigoreans,

Our show closed two months ago as I write, and since then I've often reflected on our production with a great deal of satisfaction, delight, and especially gratitude for everyone who contributed to its success: our first-rate cast and orchestra, supporters backstage and at the front-of-house, colleagues Music Director Jeffrey, Production Manager Bill, and Stage Manager Monica, and President Libby and her hard-serving and enthusiastic Board of Directors.

Ruddigore has, as I've written before, a bunch of challenges in terms of sets, special effects, and costumes, but perhaps one of its biggest challenges is facing its reputation among many as a black sheep of the Savoy family.

I think our audiences' reactions to the show affirmed what I've felt since I first saw the work on stage in 1966, performed by the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company: it is a charming, catchy, funny, colorful, and highly entertaining comic opera that transcends the theatrical form it satirizes and can stand on its own when compared to most of its companions in the Savoy *oeuvre*.

So let me thank everyone once again for making our **Ruddigore** possible; and while it's gratifying to think back on our show of the summer of 2018, we've delightful prospects in store for the new season, including concert productions of **Patience** and **H.M.S. Pinafore** in a busy season to be capped by our grand production of one of the most beautiful of all of the Savoy operas, **Iolanthe**.

So, soon as we may, off and away, we'll commence our musical journey from Cornwall to rural England to Portsmouth, back to the countryside and finally to London and, ultimately, Fairyland. Please join us for the adventure!

Yours faithfully,

GSA Scholarships Announced

Gilbert & Sullivan Austin annually awards a \$500 scholarship to individuals who are pursuing a professional career in music, preferably vocal performance. Applicants must be enrolled or planning to enroll in a course of study through a college music degree program, apprenticeship program, etc.

In recent years, we have provided two scholarships per year. This year's pool of applicants included so many diverse and talented individuals that the Scholarship Committee decided to award four scholarships! Please join us in congratulating the following scholarship recipients for the 2018-19 academic year:



Suzanne Lis sang as Mabel in our 2017 production of *The Pirates of Penzance*, receiving a B. Iden Payne Award nomination for Outstanding Actress in a Musical. This year, she received her Master of Music Degree in Vocal Performance from The University of Texas at Austin. She attended the Middlebury Language School - German for Singers program this summer, and will be moving to Berlin in September.

Julia Powers was in the chorus of GSA's 2014 production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*. This past spring, she received her Master of Music degree in Voice Performance from Baylor University. She spent her summer participating in not one, but two young artist programs: Chicago Summer Opera, and Red River Lyric Opera in Wichita Falls, Texas.



Tristan Tierney is a 2018 graduate of McCallum High School. He sang in the chorus of the GSA production of *The Gondoliers* in 2016. He will be attending Ithaca College in New York this fall as a part of their musical theatre program.

Hannah Young is a 2018 graduate of McCallum High School. She sang the role of Mabel in the 2014 production of *The Pirates of Penzance* with The Austin Jewish Repertory Theater. She will attend Boston University in the fall, where she will continue to study musical theatre.



Again, congratulations to this year's scholarship recipients, and thank you to our members who make these scholarships possible.

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 "GSA," or call to join (512) 472-4772 (GSSA).

Please check a membership category:

- Member** (\$30-\$49)
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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:

Wand'ring Minstrels

The Wand'ring Minstrels are busy preparing their shows for the coming 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 our web site, www.gilbertsullivan.org, for information.



The Wand'ring Minstrels (l-r) Katie Schneider, Janette Jones, Robert L. Schneider, and Marti Mortensen Ahern performed at Steiner Ranch in July

Winners of *Ruddigore* DVDs

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

- Stephen Bird** of Oklahoma City
- Carolyn Croom** of Austin
- Bradley Jackson** of Austin
- Priscilla Jarvis** of Elgin
- David Marquardt** of Round Rock
- Mark Nodine** of Austin
- Greg Passty** of San Marcos
- Mary Rose** of Dripping Springs
- Sabrina Slaughter** of Austin
- Zoe Trieff** of Sunset Valley

We appreciate our patrons and are delighted to share the pleasures of Gilbert & Sullivan.



Our opening program, a concert performance of *Patience*, will be presented at the Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School.

Coming Events

- Sept. 16 Concert performance of *Patience* (see p. 1)
- Jan. 6 Annual Meeting and Sing-Along
- Feb. 23-24 *Iolanthe* Auditions
- Mar. 2-3 Mid-season production: Concert performance of *H.M.S. Pinafore*
- May 19 *Iolanthe's Fractured Fairy Tales* Preview Musicale
- June 13-23 *Iolanthe* summer production (see p. 3)

Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive in mid-October; the deadline for submissions is October 1. Please send your news to news@gilbertsullivan.org. Thanks!



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SEPTEMBER 2018

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Entertaining and educating Texas audiences since 1976, Gilbert & Sullivan Austin is dedicated to spreading the topsy-turvy humor and joyful music of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan.

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

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Music Director

Ralph MacPhail, Jr.
Jeffrey Jones-Ragona

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