

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed

In his eloquent letter in this issue, **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, expresses a feeling that many of us on the Gilbert & Sullivan Austin board share.

Iolanthe was such a charming and beautiful show, and audiences were so very thrilled with it, that we are still somewhat under its spell. Such a lovely experience just stays with anyone who was part of it.

But we must not linger long, for a plethora of wonders awaits us in the coming season!

Were you able to be in the audience for a performance of our 2013 production of *Princess Ida*? If so, you surely remember the powerful way **Michelle Haché** inhabited the title role. Michelle went on to win the B. Iden Payne award that year as Austin's Outstanding Lead Actress in Musical Theater, triumphing over all the wonderful actresses in *Ragtime*, *The Secret Garden*, *One Night with Janis Joplin*, and every other musical theater production in Austin that year.

So perhaps you can imagine how exhilarated we are that Michelle will be directing our coming concert performance of *Princess Ida*. As Rafe brought to life this powerful script and its lyrical music six years ago, we know that Michelle's deft touch and deep understanding of the opera will make the concert version just as enchanting. **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** will return as music director, with **Jeanne Sasaki** accompanying on grand piano. The dynamic princess in this production will be played by **Corinna Browning**, whose memorable performances have brought so much delight and who has drawn much attention from B. Iden Payne voters herself. The rest of the cast is filled with many of your favorites and some thrilling new faces and voices. Don't miss it!

This season is full of surprises and new twists that we believe you will enjoy, so stay with us for a wonderful ride.

I look forward to seeing you soon and often in the coming months!

Libby Weed



Saturday, September 14, at 7:30 pm
and Sunday, September 15, at 2 pm

Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School
11908 North Lamar Blvd., Austin (see map, pg. 8)

Advance purchase tickets: \$20 for adults, \$15 for students over 18, \$8 for 18 & under; VIP tickets \$50

from www.gilbertsullivan.org

or call 512-474-5664, or buy at the door (higher price)

Who can resist the story of this young woman? Betrothed in babyhood to a prince, she instead forsakes the company of men and sets up an all-female university. When three young men dressed as women try to gain entrance to the school, war between the sexes ensues. The combination of witty dialogue and charming music makes this abridged concert version of one of Gilbert & Sullivan's most comical operas a must-see.

Michelle Haché is stage director and **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** is music director. Grand-piano accompaniment will be provided by **Jeanne Sasaki**.

Featured in the production are some of your favorite GSA Savoyards: **Corinna Browning** is Princess Ida and **Reagan Murdock** is her father, King Gama; **Holton Johnson** is Ida's suitor, Prince Hilarion, and **Sam Johnson** is his father, King Hildebrand.

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Iolanthe Remembered

by Mary Hendren



The GSA summer production of *Iolanthe* was spirited from beginning to end. As the curtain parted, a sylvan scene came alive with gorgeous fairies tripping hither and thither and waving impressive wands! In the opening chorus, the lovely damsels left no doubt that mayhem and merriment would ensue when mortals meet fairies. As a starter, Celia (**Corinna Browning**) cheerfully confessed, that fairies didn't live a purpose-driven life. In fact they hadn't "any notion" of a "special function." Leila (**Janette Jones**) added that love, however, was a big part of their endless existence, "When you know us, you'll discover that we almost live on lover!" Fleta (**Leann Fryer**) set the stage by asking, "Oh! Is it injudicious to marry a mortal?"



Celia (Corinna Browning) hasn't any notion



the Queen (Bethany Ammon) pardons penitent Iolanthe (Shelby Schisler)

For just that injudicious infraction, Iolanthe (**Shelby Schisler**) was banished from the sisterhood of fairies. When recalled to full-functioning fairyhood, she touched our hearts with a humbled admission of "hopes laid low." Later, she tenderly importuned the Lord Chancellor with memories of "her hallowed bridal dress, her little dainty gloves."



the Queen advises the Fairies of the power of love, admitting her attraction to Private Willis (Russell Gregory)

Whenever the Fairy Queen (**Bethany Ammon**) appeared on stage, she took charge. With rich voice and imperious manner, Bethany personified power, playing both the relentless enforcer-of-law and the artful self-interested female—marble and clay.

Holton Johnson played a buoyant Strephon, complementing **Angela Irving's** Phyllis. With clarity and forcefulness Holton made the best of the ridiculous—being half mortal, half fairy. Angela's remarkable vocal range and comic sense made Phyllis just the wife Strephon would find appealing. Their duets were beautifully balanced, especially "all in all to one another—I to thee and thou to me."



Strephon (Holton Johnson) and Phyllis (Angela Irving) sing of their love

Russell Gregory, a long time favorite of GSA audiences, delighted us as the steadfast, obliging Private Willis. In the end he caused a flutter of excitement with his "wing thing."



the Queen grants Private Willis (Russell Gregory) his wings



Mountaratat (Sam Johnson) recalls when Britain ruled



Tolloller (Dalton Flake) defends the nobly born

The Earl of Mountaratat (**Sam Johnson**) and Earl Tolloller (**Dalton Flake**) were hilariously self-important and pompous. Sam's enthusiastic "When Wellington thrashed Bonaparte, as every child can tell..." drew me into toe tapping a melody hard to forget.



[left] the Lord Chancellor (Arthur DiBianca) recounts his nightmare, thankfully over [below] Mountaratat, the Lord Chancellor, and Tolloller cavort, but refuse a third encore due to time



Arthur DiBianca (how many patter songs has he mastered over the years?) must have drawn on an inner reserve to sing the Lord Chancellor's nightmare song and follow up with three encores-worth of dancing with the Earls.



The billowing capes and martial moves of the men's chorus, the baton drills of the women's chorus, and the scurrying around of the Train Bearer (**Royanne Kelly**) added amusement, color, and excitement to the performances.

Overall, a short recap can't do justice to the excellence of this summer's production of *Iolanthe*. Scenery: excellent. Choreography: rollicking. Orchestra and their director, **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**: wonderful. Cast: amazingly talented folks.

Audience comments were encouraging. One GSA regular mentioned, "I think this is the best show the group has done." As artistic director **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, said in a letter to the company, "I think we've all discovered what a sturdy and delightful show *Iolanthe* was and is, and our audiences have well rewarded us with their appreciation for our production of it."

GSA presented *Iolanthe* in June 2019

photos here and on pp. 2, 7 courtesy Alex Labry, Bette Reichman, and David Little

see more at gilbertsullivanaustrin.smugmug.com



the Fairies, led by Celia (Corinna Browning), Leila (Janette Jones), and Fleta (Leann Fryer), prepare to do battle with the Lords



Iolanthe (Shelby Schisler) pleads with the Lord Chancellor (Arthur DiBianca) to allow her son Strephon to marry Phyllis



the Lord Chancellor's Train Bearer (Royanne Kelly) must duplicate his moves as the Lord Chancellor dances



Leila (Janette Jones) stops the Queen (Bethany Ammon) from killing Iolanthe, pointing out that she must then kill all the Fairies, for all have wed mortals



Strephon (Holton Johnson) and Phyllis (Angela Irving) sing and play flageolets together



Strephon complains of life as half a fairy - only down to the waist



Meet Director Michelle Haché

by Mary Hendren

Gilbert and Sullivan fans will be delighted to know that **Michelle Haché** will direct the September 14-15 concert production of **Princess Ida**, and the coming summer grand production of **The McAdo**. In 2016 Michelle won the B. Iden Payne award for her outstanding direction of GSA's **The Gondoliers**. G&S audiences can expect the same quality, skillful plans and amazing on-stage results that Michelle brought to the award-winning production of **The Gondoliers**.



She made her debut with GSA in 2010 when she auditioned for a role in **The Yeomen of the Guard**. As Libby Weed comments, "she knocked the socks off our directors and was immediately cast as Elsie in that show." For her performance as Elsie, Michelle won the B. Iden Payne award for Outstanding Lead Actress in Musical Theatre.

In 2013 Michelle won the Outstanding Lead Actress award for her role in **Princess Ida**. In a video interview she gave at the time, Michelle stated that playing Ida was a "challenge both vocally and dramatically." She remembers the operetta as a "most rewarding experience," in balancing the themes of the 1880s and "peeling back the layers" of this wonderful character piece.

Several items from Michelle's remarkable biography connect with Austin music aficionados. She earned a graduate degree from Juilliard School of Music and continues to perform lead roles in both opera and music theatre. She has directed opera and musical productions in Texas, Florida, Oklahoma, and Oregon. Her voice students consistently win top places in vocal competitions, some going on to Broadway roles. Since moving to Austin, Michelle has been nominated for the B. Iden Payne Award seven times as a leading actor and as a director—winning the award in 2010, 2013, and 2016. She also manages to find time to do reviews for **The Austin Chronicle**. Again quoting Libby, "Her awards are wonderful and are certainly well deserved, but these accomplishments are almost dwarfed by the joy it is to work with Michelle."

Additional happy news for Michelle: she has accepted the position of Artistic Director of Opera and Musical Theatre at the University of Mary Hardin at Baylor where she will also serve as an assistant professor of voice. Congratulations, Michelle.

So let the shows begin! Our anticipation builds for the concert version of **Princess Ida** taking shape under Michelle's direction, and just imagine the excitement of summer's **The McAdo**.

NEWS of our MEMBERS

Our society lost a dear friend in the passing on August 9 of **Chikako Nichols**, beloved companion of **R. B. Rudy**. Rudy and Chikako had become dear friends of our artistic director, as they provided him with one of their vehicles each time he came to Austin for rehearsals and performances. They enjoyed G&S performances and social gatherings with members of the board and the artistic team.

In a beautiful ending of a well-lived life, Chikako had just told her story as a survivor of Hiroshima to fellow parishioners at All Saints Episcopal Church during a commemoration of that fateful bombing. Following her talk, she distributed origami "peace cranes" and said the Lord's Prayer in Japanese before being felled by a sudden stroke.



The McAdo Arrives June 2020

by Dave Wieckowski

If you attended **Iolanthe** recently, you probably saw posters in our lobby for **The McAdo** in June 2020. Fans of **The Mikado** no doubt noticed the unusual name, and may have even wondered if we had misspelled one of the all-time favorite G&S collaborations. Well, McAdo (pronounced the same as Mikado) is accurate, because we'll be taking the show to the highlands of Scotland next year! I'll explain in future newsletter articles why we feel we need to make this change, but for now I wanted to make a couple of important points about our next grand production. It will be the show you've always loved as **The Mikado**, just with a new setting, which means new costumes and sets. It will not be a major revision, re-write, or re-imagining of the show. The musical score will be virtually intact, and some minor edits to the libretto will only be to reflect the new setting. We're very excited about this production, and I look forward to telling you more about it. More to come!



GSA 2019-20 Season

Saturday and Sunday, September 14-15 – Concert performance of **Princess Ida**. See page 1 for details.

Sunday, November 10, 2 pm – **Name That G&S Character**. This hilarious musicale spoofs a game show which quizzes contestants about lost stories (OK – we made them up!) of popular G&S characters. Try to guess the correct character along with our contestant, and hear some of your favorite G&S songs performed as "clues." Location: Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School.

Sunday, January 5, 2 pm – **Annual Meeting with Sing-Along**. We can join in or just listen and enjoy. We'll also elect our board for 2020. Location: Genesis Presbyterian Church Fellowship Hall, 1507 Wilshire Blvd.

Saturday and Sunday, March 7-8 – **A Day at the Savoy Theatre**, with stage direction by **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, and music direction by **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**, will share the history and fascinating stories behind the legendary Savoy Theatre, built to showcase the works of G&S. The show will include many favorite G&S songs, and also the Austin debut of the one-act musical comedy, **Mr. Jericho**. Time: Saturday 7:30 pm; Sunday 2 pm. Location: Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School.

Thursday, June 11, through Sunday, June 22 – **Summer Grand Production: The McAdo**, Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School. See article above for details.



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

August 11, 2019

To All Austin *Iolantheans* of 2019,

As I write, it's been nearly two months since *Iolanthe* opened at the Worley-Barton Theater, and I'm afraid I'm still rather under the fairy-dusted spell of this lovely show. It was clear to me as we rehearsed at the Austin Opera facility that Gilbert & Sullivan would once again work their magic through their century-and-a-quarter-old words and music, and this is exactly what happened at each of the nine enchanting performances—*thanks to you*.

I couldn't have been more delighted with *Iolanthe* and want to thank each of you who worked on it for your contributions to this wonderful production.

And I mean *each* of you—from the cast of principals to their colleagues in the chorus and in the pit. I also acknowledge with pleasure and delight those working in the booth, backstage, and in the dressing rooms, and the wonderful corps of volunteers serving at the front-of-house. I feel that *Iolanthe* started at a high level of perfection and maintained this standard as the run progressed.

It's impossible to name each of you, but I do want to single out several persons who in leadership really represent each of you: **Libby Weed**, GSA President of our hard-working Board of Directors; **Bill Hatcher**, GSA Production Manager with oversight of virtually every aspect of production; **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**, Music Director and Conductor, my valued collaborator and recruiter of our orchestra; **Ann Marie Gordon**, Set Designer of elegant scenery; **Pam Fowler**, creator of fairy wands, makeup designer and coordinator of the lovely costumes; **Adam Gunderson**, Stage Manager, whose title suggests the many excellent artisans under his wing; and **Sarah Slaughter**, Volunteer Coordinator, for recruiting another band of personable and charming people who did so much to make our audiences feel so welcome.

My earnest hope is that each of you share in the satisfaction and gratification I've been feeling.

Jeffrey tells me that *Princess Ida* starts rehearsals in just two weeks under the stage direction of Princess Ida Herself, **Michelle Haché**. Another couple musicales, and I get to return to direct **Mr. Jericho**, a part of "A Day at the Savoy Theatre." Then before we all know it it will be time for **The McAdo**, Gilbert & Sullivan Austin's new take on an old favorite relocated from Titipu, Japan, to the Scottish Highlands, again under the direction of Michelle. I can't wait to see it!

In the meantime, until we meet again, warmest regards and grateful thanks to you each.

Yours faithfully,

Name That Newsletter Contest

For years, members have questioned why GSA doesn't have a clever name for our newsletter, as so many of our fellow G&S societies do for theirs. Our artistic director, **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, has compiled a list of over 80 such newsletter titles. To be sure, we are not alone in being merely *Newsletter*. But the list also includes *Corroborative Detail*, Rafe's favorite, as well as *The Trumpet Bray*, *The Happy Dispatch*, and *The Palace Peeper*. We hope not to copy these but to find a name that reflects both Austin and GSA.

If you have an idea (or two or three) for that name, please email it to contest@gilbertsullivan.org by September 21. One member will serve as the gatekeeper, recording all suggestions along with submitter's names, but forwarding only the suggestions to the judging committee. In our next newsletter, we will offer the best of those suggestions for a general vote. The winning name will appear on our 2020 masthead, with credit duly noted for the person submitting the name.

Winners of *Iolanthe* DVDs

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

David Barny of Austin
Polly-Dee Burrowes of San Antonio
Wanona W. Ceisel of Winslow, IL
David Edwards of Austin
Ty Garley of LaVernia
Shannon George of Cedar Park
Nancy Hadsell of Pflugerville
John Jackson of Austin
Jacque Stinson of Austin
Adrick Tolliver of New Braunfels

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

Wand'ring Minstrels

Gilbert & Sullivan Austin's Wand'ring Minstrels are planning their fall schedule! 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.



Wand'ring Minstrels: Robert L. Schneider, Marti Mortensen Ahern, Janette Jones, and Katie Schneider

The Genius of Gilbert and Sullivan

The public is welcome to attend any or all of a series of lectures on "The Genius of Gilbert and Sullivan." They are given by **Paul R. Lehman**, a professor emeritus and formerly the Senior Associate Dean of the School of Music at the University of Michigan, ably assisted by his wife, **Ruth Lehman**, acting as sound engineer. He and Ruth have been fans of Gilbert & Sullivan since they were in high school. They participated in the Gilbert & Sullivan society as students at the University of Michigan, and their daughter met her future husband in that group. Paul has taught G&S courses for Senior University Georgetown and for SAGE at UT. The current sessions, limited to 60 minutes each, will consist of commentary and recorded excerpts, supplemented by handouts.



The first lecture, on *Trial by Jury* and *The Sorcerer*, was given during the summer. Five GSA members were in the delighted audience: Bill and Nan Hatcher, Byron Arnason, Dave Wieckowski, and Sue Caldwell. The tentative schedule for the remainder of the 12-part series is:

October 10, 2019:	<i>H.M.S. Pinafore</i>
December 3, 2019:	<i>The Pirates of Penzance</i>
February, 2020:	<i>Patience</i>
April, 2020:	<i>Iolanthe</i>
June, 2020:	<i>Princess Ida</i>
August, 2020:	<i>The Mikado</i>
October, 2020:	<i>Ruddigore</i>
December, 2020:	<i>The Yeomen of the Guard</i>
February, 2021:	<i>The Gondoliers</i>
April, 2021:	<i>Utopia Limited</i>
June, 2021:	<i>The Grand Duke</i>

The lectures are given in the Harris Bell Hall at Westminster, on the second floor of the south building. There is limited covered parking between the two buildings at 4100 / 4200 Jackson Avenue, and a larger, uncovered parking area north of the north building.



Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive in late October; the deadline for submissions is October 7. Please send your news to news@gilbertsullivan.org. Thanks!

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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- ☐ **Grand Duke or Duchess** (\$100-\$249)
- ☐ **Major General** (\$250-\$499)
- ☐ **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: ☐

More Scenes from GSA's *Iolanthe* in June 2019



Fleta (Leann Fryer, also dance captain and choreographic assistant) teaches dance moves to guests during Children's Activity matinee



*Artistic Director Ralph MacPhail, Jr., gave interesting and informative talks about *Iolanthe* before the first Saturday and second Friday performances*



the Fairies delight



the Lords order all to "Bow, ye lower middle classes"



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SEPTEMBER 2019



Our opening program, a concert performance of *Princess Ida*, will be presented at the Worley Barton Theater at Brentwood Christian School (see page 1).

Coming Events

- Sept. 14-15 *Princess Ida in Concert* (see p. 1)
Nov. 10 *Name That G&S Character* Musicale
Jan. 6 Annual Meeting and Sing-Along
Mar. 7-8 Mid-season production: *A Day at the Savoy Theatre*
June 11-21 *The McAdo* summer production (see p. 4)

Gilbert & Sullivan Austin

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This project is funded and supported in part by a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts and in part by the Cultural Arts Division of the City of Austin Economic Development Department. Visit Austin at NowPlayingAustin.com



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Artistic Director
Music Director

Ralph MacPhail, Jr.
Jeffrey Jones-Ragona

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