

THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Libby Weed



As the pandemic remains a reality and quarantining has extended for months, we are keenly aware of many sad things. Widespread illness and death, loss of jobs and income, closed businesses, and isolation from others are all unhappy results of COVID-19.

Most of us have had the time to realize that, despite these sorrowful realities, there are some silver linings to the clouds of this pandemic. Traffic is more manageable. Technology has provided possibilities for gathering in different ways. Climate change has slowed slightly. Disabled citizens are able to take part in things the rest of us have taken for granted for years—touring museums, attending concerts and plays, and meeting with others for worship, even if only virtually. Healthcare heroes are getting well-deserved recognition. Generous donations have been made by landlords, governmental bodies, employers, and common folk.

I have to admit that my slowed-down (and sometimes boring) life these days has also brought some reasons to smile. I have more time for playing the piano, reading, honing my crossword and Sudoku skills, and relaxing in the pool or hammock. I'm trying new recipes in the kitchen. Regular daily walks have provided good exercise and have acquainted me with more of my neighbors. As I walk, I take more notice of birds, trees, flowers, and signs of kindness in my neighborhood. I have time to write notes and letters and to call or email people who may be lonely. It seems that we are all a little more open to listening and sharing and less driven to hectic activity.

I read somewhere that someone felt like the "mute button" had been pressed on our lives. It's true we can't do many things we wish we could, but we may have some opportunities now that were absent before. Perhaps this period when we are more alone with our thoughts can be a time of self-reflection that makes us better people. We can look for ways that we can serve, show compassion, and heal divisions. Goodness knows those things are needed in our land today!

We at Gilbert & Sullivan Austin sincerely hope you have enjoyed our attempts to bring some joy and "togetherness" through livestreaming some of our grand productions from past years. If you joined us for *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *Patience*, I know you'll be with us for *The Pirates of Penzance* this month. And if you haven't joined us before, please go to our website and be a part of the fun this month and in the future.

We need each other, you know!

#DiscoverGSA by Leann Fryer



With the postponement of our planned precedent-breaking production of *The McAdo*, the board of Gilbert & Sullivan Austin sought new ways to connect with our audience. I chaired a committee that included **Holton Johnson, David Little, Diane Radin, Sarah Slaughter, Libby Weed, and Dave Wieckowski**. We began a series of virtual meetings on Zoom. We invited **Matt Marks**, our webmaster, and **Bonnie Bogovich**, a treasured performer, to join us.

We decided to stream, for free, one of our past grand productions each month for the next several months. The video would be available for the latter half of the month, alongside brand-new content from people involved in the production. We also decided to add "watch parties," with the video starting at a designated time, and with an option for the audience to chat with members of the cast and crew from the production.

#DiscoverGSA, as we designated the campaign, kicked off in May with the 2014 production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*. This beloved classic was the perfect choice to begin the series—not only is it one of the most popular of Gilbert & Sullivan's operas, but the 142nd anniversary of the premiere of *H.M.S. Pinafore* was on May 25th! We hosted a YouTube watch party that night to help celebrate the event. Throughout the month we posted photos from the production on our social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram), and also shared videos from Artistic Director **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, and "Little Buttercup," the fabulous **Janette Jones**. Situated in the "Gilbert & Sullivan room" at his home in Virginia, with *Iolanthe* wings atop a bookshelf, Rafe shared his background with various productions of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, including our own. Janette regaled us with an exciting tale of a stormy night performance when the theater was under a tornado warning.

Our production was received with warm adulation, both from our existing patrons and from those who had never seen a GSA production before. New fans from out of town have pledged to come to Austin the next time we are able to put on another production. This was wonderful to hear, because one goal of **#DiscoverGSA** is to help people get to know GSA and the quality of our productions.

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Watching the Watch

by Mary Hendren



Thanks to all of the Gilbert & Sullivan Austin folks who came up with the watch party idea, who facilitated it, and who participated in the running commentary. The watch party was a delightful addition to an outstanding production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*.

As **Sue Caldwell** remarked, "I was delighted to join the watch party for *H.M.S. Pinafore*. I felt that I was part of the audience, not as though I were watching a video, and that I had a front-row seat. I was so proud of the entire cast -- it was a spectacular production!"

Ralph MacPhail, Jr., commented, "It was such a pleasure to watch *H.M.S. Pinafore* with many of the company the other evening. **Matt Marks** was kind enough to tell me how to pump it through our large-screen TV, and it was almost like sitting in the Worley-Barton Theater, with an iPad on my lap to read your comments (instead of a clipboard for notes!)"

My assignment for this article was to cover the *Pinafore* and *Patience* watch party experiences. Did they serve the existing community of loyal Gilbert & Sullivan fans? Did they demonstrate to a wider audience the quality of our productions here in Austin—the singing, acting, dancing, staging? **Leann Fryer** and **Matt Marks** provided the following data for the Board: 79 peak viewers; 71 watching at end of credits, 40:23 average watch time; 8 new subscribers to our YouTube channel. Speaking on behalf of the Board, **Leann** said, "we were all delighted." **Bill Hatcher** added, "I really enjoyed the watch party and thought it was very engaging. The show was delightful and strong and so beautiful visually."

In addition to stats, we can look at the effectiveness of the watch parties by letting the remarks speak for themselves. **Matt** kept an archive of comments that reveal some of the best humor, memories, back-stage facts, goofs, and perspectives. **Rafe** said, "As the comments scrolled up, I felt back in my Austin home and was reminded of how grateful I am to have been a part of Gilbert & Sullivan Austin—for the last two decades plus."

Watching this after six years, I'm really impressed by the togetherness on the stomping/parade rest/etc. choreography—like the Rockettes.

Watching Holton's face is great.

I don't remember Dick Dead Eye slinking like that.

One of the great things about watching the production is that I catch things I never saw as a chorus member. I can see the leads' faces; I only ever see their backs!

Ah, the St. Steven's days—with wine at intermission.

It goes without saying that Russell Gregory is a true gem.

Holton is desperately changing outfits at this moment.

On a good night he had about 10 seconds from dressing room to going on stage.

I first saw Pinafore when 14, I am now 82 and it is still my favorite.

Can anyone spot Janette's microphone?

The kids all love Russell.

During an early read, Gil pronounced "oh, fie" as "oh fee." He did it

with such conviction; we all laughed uproariously.

You managed to hit me nearly every time until I learned to duck.

Carol is nothing short of superb—both singing and acting. She is enthralling. I can hear the bravos now.

Libby Weed cites both the stats and the encouraging reports from viewers around the country, attesting to the quality of Gilbert & Sullivan Austin's production of *Pinafore*.

"Board members enjoyed watching *Pinafore* along with large numbers of others, and we were pleased to find how many views the show had during that two-week period. Our webmaster, **Matt Marks**, who deals with such metrics for a living, said that the figures we got for clicks on emails and for sustained watching of the show were quite remarkable. Especially gratifying were the glowing emails we received from folks all over the country who watched the performance and compared it favorably with productions of *Pinafore* in many cities.

"Our *Pinafore* experience showed us that there are people who are hungry for good theater experiences, and we knew that *Patience* would be a suitable follow-up. We believe that audiences at home will thrill at the hilarity and beauty of this great comic opera in the same way audiences did in the theater in 2012."

I equally enjoyed the *Patience* watch party, Friday, June 12. The performance, staging, costuming were superb, well captured on the DVD. Thanks to the viewers who added their own humor to operetta's already witty lines. Without the projected lyrics we've become accustomed to in live performances at Brentwood, we viewers depended on clearly hearing the lyrics—and we did. What remarkable enunciation by everyone.

Some of the high points: **Robert Schneider's** performance as Colonel Calverly and the clear projection of **Patricia Combs** and **Janette Jones**. **Holton Johnson** and **Meredith Ruduski's** "Prithee, pretty maiden" was beautifully performed with just the light touch of the inanity. **Arthur DiBianca's** traipsing Bunthorne—definitely distinctive as was his recitation of "Oh Hollow! Hollow! Hollow!" A poem? A hunting song?

Matt reported that for *Patience* there were 91 peak concurrent viewers, 63 at the end credits, and 331 chats. **Bill** gave a spot-on overview, "I enjoyed both shows and the social aspects of the watch parties. I think that we, meaning the creative people that are making this happen, are doing a great job."

#DiscoverGSA continued from page 1

The fun continued with the 2012 production of *Patience* during the month of June. We kicked it off with a watch-party "premiere" on June 12 and held another one for its "closing" on June 28. As with *Pinafore*, we ran videos from various people involved with the production, giving the audience insight into what makes our productions so special. In July, we will feature the 2017 production of *The Pirates of Penzance*, and we will continue with our campaign through at least September.

Sharing these productions with our audience has been a delightful experience for all. YouTube viewing is not the same as watching a live performance, we know; but we are glad we can continue to provide our audience with fun, family-friendly entertainment while we are all tucked away in our homes. Once we are able to, we will be back on stage. For now, we hope you will enjoy our wonderful past productions!

Members

We are proud of all our members and we invite all to join us in bringing the joys of Gilbert & Sullivan to Central Texas. We normally recognize our members in the playbill for our summer grand production, but in this extraordinary year that was not possible. This list includes memberships and donations for the last twelve months. The Society holds non-profit status under 501(c)(3) of the IRS code.

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Join Us!

We encourage you to join our Society to help GSA keep the joys of Gilbert & Sullivan alive. We offer many levels of membership, as listed above. To join, renew, or donate, please visit www.gilbertsullivan.org/join/.

Send Us Your News!

The next issue of *The Austin Savoyard* is planned for late summer. Please send your news to news@gilbertsullivan.org.

July 2020

The Austin Savoyard



GSA Scholarships Announced

Each spring, Gilbert & Sullivan Austin awards one or more scholarships 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. Please join us in congratulating our two scholarship recipients, each of whom will receive a \$1,000 scholarship for the 2020-21 academic year:

Abbie Brown has been singing and dancing all of her young life, and was in the chorus of GSA's production of *Iolanthe* last year. She will use this

scholarship in beginning studies towards a degree in musical theatre at Long Island University—Post.

Molly Snodgrass has been singing since she was five, with many accolades including winner of the Music Teachers National Association Senior Voice Competition. She will use this scholarship towards a degree in vocal performance at The Juilliard School.



We congratulate our scholarship recipients, and wish them the very best in their future endeavors. We thank our members, who make these scholarships possible!



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THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD - JULY 2020

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The Society holds nonprofit status under 501(c)(3) of the IRS code.
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Music Director **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**

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