

THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Libby Weed

In my years on the Gilbert & Sullivan Board of Directors, I've noted that for us there is really no "off season." As soon as one major production ends, we hold a meeting to identify all the ways we can do even better the following year. We immediately set to work on a timeline of tasks to prepare for the coming season and the next major production.

That is, until 2020.

This year the COVID-19 pandemic brought a halt to almost every normal routine for all of us. We postponed our plans for **The McAdo**, which promised to be an historic event and a highlight of the summer. Then, week by week and month by month, we removed event after event from the planned 2020-21 season, as it became clear that the pandemic would not go away soon.

Like other arts groups in Austin, we began to search for ways to reach audiences until we could be on stage again. We formed a committee headed by **Leann Fryer**, and she and our webmaster and social media coordinator worked with that group to contrive a series of exciting livestreamed shows, complete with watch parties, for the interim. The response has been amazing.

As of today, we still don't know how long this interim will be. But you will see in Leann's column that we have plans to continue to bring enjoyable shows for you to watch and provide ways for you to feel connected with Gilbert & Sullivan Austin. Our board will continue to stay in touch with the times and with you, and we look forward to the day when we can be together again safely in the theater.

Speaking of the board, we are a most congenial group, with each member contributing time and talents and finding satisfaction in being part of a cause we think is worthwhile. If you are a Savoyard who believes in what we are doing and is not afraid of a little work, consider whether you might like to stand for election as a board member for 2021. Contact nomination committee chair **Sarah Slaughter** at (806) 557-0306 or volunteer@gilbertsullivan.org to let her know of your interest.



We'll continue to make the best of these times until better ones come!

Libby Weed



Calling All Singers!

Our January Sing-Along Musicale is a long-standing tradition with GSA. Though theater is closed by the pandemic for the foreseeable future, we couldn't miss holding our annual show. So we're joining the digital age and are doing it on **Sunday, January 10**, as a live streaming show! We will still have our "open G&S no-mic" performances, but they will be pre-recorded and presented during the live show. Details on how the business meeting portion will be conducted are forthcoming in the next issue of **The Austin Savoyard**.

If you wish to sing a song for our show, please email **Leann Fryer** at sing@gilbertsullivan.org. Song selections are first come, first served. Scared about making a recording? Don't be! We can help film you (from 6 feet away, of course) and provide accompaniment if you'd like. It's a great chance to have a lot of fun. Be sure to contact Leann as soon as you can—we'll need extra time for editing, so we'll want to get the videos by the end of this year.

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News of Members

University of Texas physics professor **Dr. Steven Weinberg** describes himself as a “faithful Savoyard” and is a regular member of our GSA audiences. Dr. Weinberg, who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1979, received another honor in September: the 2020 Special Breakthrough Prize in Fundamental Physics for his leadership and research in the field over the course of his career.



Dr. Steven Weinberg
(photo courtesy
Matt Valentine)

The prize has been awarded six times since its establishment in 2012 and honors Weinberg for his “continuous leadership in fundamental physics, with broad impact across particle physics, gravity and cosmology, and for communicating science to a wider audience.” Previous recipients include Jocelyn Bell Burnell and Stephen Hawking.

Congratulations, Dr. Weinberg!

Robert Schneider, coordinator of GSA’s Wand’ring Minstrels, became a “Wand’ring Minstrel” and entertained the residents of Westminster in their courtyard on the evening of September 13th. Besides Gilbert & Sullivan sing-alongs, he played many requests from the attentive outside audience who sang along with him and his guitar and enjoyed the evening in song.

Notice of Annual Meeting

Our annual meeting will be held virtually this year, on the Zoom platform. Please mark your calendars for **Sunday, January 10, at 3 pm**, when we will provide a brief report on activities, elect the Board of Directors for 2021, hear some lovely music, and have a new kind of sing-along. Watch your email and social media, or look to our next issue of *The Austin Savoyard*, for more information as the time draws near.



#DiscoverGSA by Leann Fryer



Halloween is nearly here—what better way to enjoy this ghoulish season than by watching an opera with ghosts that emerge from paintings? **#DiscoverGSA**

is currently streaming the 2018 grand production of *Ruddigore*. It’s a show about family curses and haunting ancestors, as well as the usual romance and topsy-turvy plot twists Gilbert is known for. It runs through November 1st, the Day of the Dead, and we will have a watch party that evening at 7:30 pm. A great treat for the family!

In November and December we are taking a little break. We’ve been working hard to provide these productions and original content and we could use a rest. But don’t worry—we won’t leave you completely without G&S for two whole months! In both months, around the holidays, we will provide special limited encore streams of a couple of the shows we’ve featured this year. And we’ll have some holiday wishes from GSA favorites. Keep an eye out for emails and social media posts with details.

Starting January 2021, we’ll get back to work and continue to bring you past shows each month. We’ve got a great lineup that will keep you entertained until we are able to start work on our 2021 grand production of *The McAdo*.

The McAdo

A NEW BEGINNING JUNE 2021

As you all know by now, our 2020 summer grand production was postponed by the pandemic and is now planned for June 2021. We are rerunning our (only slightly-revised) articles on the show to share our excitement about a show that has been years in the planning.

Addressing Controversy

by Dave Wieckowski



In the last newsletter I reported some basic information on our upcoming June 2021 grand production of **The McAdo**, which will mostly follow the G&S classic **The Mikado**, but with a change of setting to Scotland. In this issue I'll discuss the **Mikado** controversy, and our response at GSA.

We last presented **The Mikado** in 2011. During that run, the Austin City Council forwarded to us a disapproving letter they had received from a group of local Asian-American university professors. The authors strongly objected to **The Mikado** as a "yellow-face" misrepresentation of Japan, and questioned the City's support for the production through Cultural Arts Division grants. The writers also circulated their objections in the media and the internet.

We weathered that storm in 2011, but it really did take us by surprise. We knew very little at that time about the objections to **The Mikado** that were rapidly growing among some in the Asian-American community. In the ensuing years, we watched closely as **Mikado** productions from Seattle to New York, San Francisco, Harvard, Portland, and elsewhere were all subjected to sharp criticism and protest.

Based on our production rotation, we knew we were due to present **The Mikado** again in 2020. We also knew that we couldn't ignore the issue. In August 2018, I formed a **Mikado** committee to explore how to proceed. It consisted of myself as chair, **Charles Smaistrla** as vice-chair, and fellow board members **David Little**, **Michael Meigs**, **Sarah Slaughter**, **David Treadwell**, and **Libby Weed**. In our initial meetings we laid all options on the table, from presenting the show unchanged to dropping it altogether. We knew we needed to be responsive to the concerns of those in the Asian-American community who were upset due to what they felt were hurtful representations of

Japanese characters and culture. But we also knew that the show was just too good to abandon.

Those familiar with **The Mikado** will recognize the characters and dialogue as quite British; but even knowing that, we concluded that it's not wise in our current environment to present those characters in Gilbert's Japanese disguise. We eventually came to the decision to continue the show, but the setting would have to change. We ultimately decided on two guiding principles for our new production:

1. All references to Japan need to be removed, but the new setting and time period should still support the plot of the story. Ideally, the new locale should reflect the true nature of the characters, who are British.
2. We should accomplish #1 with the minimum possible amount of change to the libretto and score.

We believe we were able to stay true to those principles in our creation of **The McAdo**. The show will be set in Britain (Scotland, to be specific), and we achieved that change with minimal edits to the libretto. In the next newsletter, I'll talk more about the new show and our community outreach leading up to it.

Support GSA

You can support Gilbert & Sullivan Austin effortlessly by joining Amazon Smile. Once you sign up on Amazon.com, Amazon will rebate 0.5% of all eligible purchases to the charity of your choice. We hope you choose GSA! Sign up the next time you want to visit [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) by going to smile.amazon.com. Sign in as usual and you will be prompted to select a charitable organization. You will find us listed as "Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Austin Texas Inc."

You can also register on the Amazon app by clicking on the three lines in the lower right corner of the home page. Scroll to "Programs & Features" and click on Amazon Smile. Follow the on-screen instructions and choose "Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin Texas Inc."

Once you become an Amazon Smile member, you will help underwrite **The McAdo** and all future GSA programs and productions with each eligible Amazon purchase. Thank You!

Notice of Elections

The Society will elect members of the board for 2021 at the Annual Meeting, to be held virtually on Sunday, January 10, at 3 pm. If you have an interest in serving on the board, please contact nominations committee chair **Sarah Slaughter** at (806) 557-0306 or volunteer@gilbertsullivan.org. Sarah and committee members **Holton Johnson** and **Mary Hendren** will prepare a nomination slate to be published in the January issue of **The Austin Savoyard**.

#DiscoverGSA



playing through November 1



P.O. Box 684542
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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, starting with basic member at \$30 per year. To join, renew, or donate, please visit www.gilbertsullivan.org/join/.

Send Us Your News!

The next issue of *The Austin Savoyard* should arrive in late December; the deadline for submissions will be about December 1. Please send your news to news@gilbertsullivan.org.

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THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD - NOVEMBER 2020

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

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