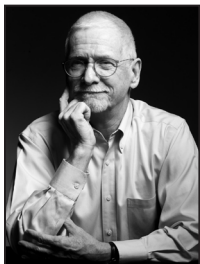


2021 — The Year of Fresh Takes

by Michael Meigs



Entranced by the imagination and creativity of Austin's undercelebrated live theatre culture, I've been publishing theatre reviews at www.ctxlivetheatre.com since 2008. It's a repository of more than a thousand short, thoughtful essays on specific performances, done by me and by perceptive associates.

We've hailed bravura performances, clever scripts, and deft directors. We've been teaching the prospective theatre-going public. And whom did we neglect? **The producers!**

Putting stories on stage requires an extraordinary amount of effort, insight, contact work, and sheer determination. Beneath a theatre program's roster of performers, you'll find a list with director, choreography, technical designers and specialists—and perhaps a mention of an executive producer.

Let me share with you my hard-earned new knowledge: that's an iceberg of a job, for 90% of the work is out of sight.

GSA reorganized responsibilities of our all-volunteer board in 2019, partly because our longtime president **Libby Weed** had quietly and without complaint been doing a huge amount of production work. I volunteered to coordinate the production committee, confident that the company's practiced, familiar routine would deliver our grand summer production of **The McAdo**. You know what happened then.

Our **#DiscoverGSA** series coordinated by **Leann Fryer** streamed earlier productions and kept GSA visible during the pandemic. In January, 2021, we decided to reach out to commission members of the **#ATXTheatre** community to reimagine G&S material with their own distinctive takes.

Here's some of what I've learned while co-chairing the effort with our **McAdo** director **Michelle Haché**:

- The **best are the busiest**. Getting onto their schedules is a major challenge.
- Many contemporary theatre artists **don't know G&S work**, other than perhaps a song or a particularly lively ditty. Some may suppose it's grand opera. Few realize that G&S's stage comedies are direct antecedents of 20th-century musical theatre. The same misconceptions may be held by many in audiences that happily support any of the dozens of other theatre companies in our town.
- The **#ATXTheatre group** established last year has been sharing knowledge and promoting Austin's unique theatre ecosystem. GSA has benefited directly from this alliance that strongly advocates collaboration among its widely diverse membership.



- Putting together **compendium productions** is far more complicated than producing in-house. GSA's annual grand summer production has the juggernaut inertia of a supertanker; participants know their roles and the routines. But putting together the components of the showcase that is our **Fresh Takes on Gilbert & Sullivan** isn't like herding cats—it's more like patiently tracking down a whole zoo of wildly different exotic animals and building a circus with them.
- **Networking** is vital. For example, a talented director in the last stages of finishing a Ph.D. thesis wasn't available but recommended a colleague; that colleague's contribution was so impressive that we asked for another; the colleague suggested several UT contacts, one of whom quickly offered to work with me on a Spanish translation of the opening numbers of **H.M.S. Pinafore** (tentatively rechristened "*el buque Parasol*"!) and to think of Spanish-qualified directors and performers.

GSA's first **Fresh Takes** program is scheduled for a June 15 release, and with several additional intriguing sequences underway, we're estimating mid- to late July for the second helping and early September for the third.

But this is theatre production. Among the lessons I've learned is that it certainly doesn't run on tracks with a timetable, the way a railroad does.

In This Issue

President's Message	p. 2
The Marvelous Ms. Haché	p. 2
#DiscoverGSA Takes a Bow	p. 3
GSA in San Antonio	p. 3
GSA Turns 45 / The Silent Auction	p. 3
Book Report: <i>The Secret Life of the Savoy</i>	p. 4



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Diane Radin

Well, we've done it. Now it is up to you to enjoy it and spread the word.

What is it?

It's our ***Fresh Takes on Gilbert & Sullivan***, of course.

Michael Meigs and **Michelle Haché** have brought together some of the most exciting talent in Austin—directors, singers, musicians, videographers—to produce innovative interpretations of songs and scenes from your favorite composer and librettist.

The first of the 3-part series will launch on June 15th and run for one month. Just go to gilbertsullivan.org to access it, for free. All songs are subtitled, as is true for our live productions. Most scenes are accompanied by our exceptionally talented pianist **Jeanne Sasaki**. **Bill Hatcher** has kept contracts coming as directors join this effort as well as providing green screen, costumes and props from our G&S "treasure" trove.

Discover the wide range of talent in our city that you may not have known before. Perhaps you will see some familiar faces playing new roles. It is always nice to make new friends, especially when they share our love of all things Gilbert & Sullivan.

GSA's grant from the City of Austin's Cultural Arts Division helps support these videos with funds that come from the Hotel Occupancy Tax. As you can imagine, those funds were hit hard by the pandemic, but we are happy to be putting that grant money to work to support so many artists here in Austin. We are also grateful to the Still Water Foundation for their support.

Please let your friends and family, your book group, your walking buddies, your social networks, your neighbors know about these free productions. We want all these talented folks to be appreciated by a wide and varied audience.

This is not your grandma's Gilbert & Sullivan. Don't miss it!

And let us know what you think of our ***Fresh Takes***.

P.S. We plan to be back in person by Fall 2021 with ***Best of Gilbert & Sullivan***, featuring some of your favorite performers. The grand production of our innovative Scottish version of ***The Mikado***, named ***The McAdo*** (different spelling, same pronunciation), will close out our 2021-2022 season June 10-19, 2022.



The Marvelous Ms. Haché by Mary Hendren

A great teacher once said that to live harmoniously in this life, one must learn to be empathetic, as he said, "to rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." At Gilbert & Sullivan Austin, we rejoice with our friend

Michelle Haché. She has a new job at the University of South Carolina, an opportunity that immerses her in theater, classical voice, crossover, fusion, and teaching.

Ms. Haché explains, "I have accepted a faculty position with the School of Music at the University of South Carolina, where I will be teaching/directing in a new musical theater program that I get to help build. Because of the extraordinary opportunity for growth and development, I felt that this was truly a once-in-a-lifetime offer that I could not pass up. On the team at UofSC are a few of my dear Juilliard colleagues; the School of Music is truly led by some wonderful, world-renowned artists. Because there is already such a strong foundation in classical voice at UofSC, the program was a perfect fit for me. They were seeking a crossover teaching artist/director that loves both classical voice and contemporary musical theatre equally. Very exciting times lie ahead!"



Exciting, yet she will be missed by friends, fellow artists, students, and Gilbert & Sullivan fans. Michelle has been associated with G&S Austin since she and her family arrived in 2010. That year, at the suggestion of **Holton Johnson**, Michelle auditioned for the role of Elsie in ***The Yeomen of the Guard***. How does she feel about her involvement with Gilbert & Sullivan? "I love it. I'm addicted. They do great work." (Interview CTXLiveTheatre.com)

In 2013 Michelle was cast in the title role in ***Princess Ida***, for which she won a B. Iden Payne award for leading actress. "It is perhaps one of the most difficult leading female roles in the G&S canon," **Libby Weed** stated. Michelle agreed. "The role of Ida is a wonderful character piece ... that challenged me not just dramatically but vocally." For a dramatic soprano to sing the "nice hard metallic sounds, then find the delicate balance... she blossoms, is fragile, not just a heart of ice." Michelle said although the role of Ida is as difficult as that of Turandot, "I think it is one of the most rewarding experiences I've had in any show I've done." (CTXLiveTheatre.com)

Ms. Haché is also a skillful director, known for innovation and surprise. In the fall of 2019 she directed the GSA production of ***Princess Ida in Concert***, with **Corinna Browning** performing the role of the princess. In 2016 Michelle directed ***The Gondoliers***, a beautiful production that received five B. Iden Payne nominations. The commendations for Outstanding Production of Musical Theatre and Outstanding Director of Musical Theatre were awarded to GSA and to Ms. Haché.

Michelle has performed with other groups in Austin and maintained a busy voice studio, in addition to her work with GSA. **Bill Hatcher** commented, "She has taken great joy in the success of her students as they compete in singing competitions and apply for college scholarships. She has described to me and others the personal satisfaction she feels as she sees them improve and succeed." Libby said, "She is able to instruct others in a way that creates rapport, provides insight, and cultivates talent. She is an extremely pleasant and agreeable person to work with. She seeks to bring out the best in others, and she succeeds in that admirably."

Our wish is that Michelle and family have joy in their relocation. Plus, she'll be back to direct our summer 2022 adaption of ***The McAdo***—and that's very exciting!

#DiscoverGSA Takes a Bow by Leann Fryer

When the pandemic first started and everything shut down, GSA postponed our grand production of *The McAdo*. However, we still wanted to provide our audiences with something to help entertain them during lockdown. That's how #DiscoverGSA came to be. We decided to temporarily stream our past productions, most of which had previously been available only on DVD. It was a way for families to enjoy G&S in the comfort of their own home, and for us to expand our audience outside the Austin area.



We kicked it off with the 2014 production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*, a perennial favorite for all. We continued for nearly a year, showcasing a different production each month. We also included some of our smaller shows, such as 2018's *Trial by Jury* and *Patience in Concert*, the latter of which had a special Austin twist. Production crew and cast members submitted short videos, sharing many memories they had while making these unforgettable shows. We also had some special holiday greetings in November and December.

As per the name, we wanted new people to be able to "discover" GSA, especially those who aren't able to make it to Austin to see our beautiful shows in person. We hosted watch parties for the premieres each month, allowing viewers new and old the chance to chat with cast and crew from the show while watching the production. We gained new followers from Texas who are within driving distance and now plan to come see our shows when we are back on stage. And we gained fans from across the US, as well as the world, including Australia and, of course, the UK. People were delighted to discover how wonderful our productions are.

As GSA moves on to other digital offerings, and soon to live productions, #DiscoverGSA took its final bow in April. It's been an absolute delight to work on this project and entertain thousands of people during the pandemic. G&S has the ability to touch the hearts of many, even if we are farther away than we'd like.

Join Us!

We encourage you to join GSA to help 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, visit www.gilbertsullivan.org/join/.

You can also support GSA 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! You will find us listed as "Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Austin Texas Inc."

Gilbert & Sullivan Austin in San Antonio by Janette Jones

GSA's School Outreach Mission is, not surprisingly, to spread the joy of Gilbert & Sullivan to students far and wide. And thus, in mid-September, our own **Dr. Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** will foray to San Antonio, Texas, to evangelize on our behalf.

Kelly Leary, Assistant Choir Director of the Atonement Catholic Academy in San Antonio, and sister of our own **Matthew Leary** (Chorus, *Iolanthe* and *Princess Ida in Concert*, both in 2019), will be teaching a musical theatre course to all of her 8th graders. And, after being impressed by our productions in which her brother performed, she has decided logically and brilliantly (I must say) to begin that course by teaching her students about Gilbert & Sullivan.

She will also direct them all in learning "When I was a lad" from *H. M. S. Pinafore*, so that when Dr. Jones-Ragona goes to San Antonio in mid-September, he will not only instruct and impress them with his vast knowledge of Gilbert & Sullivan, but will also teach them the "official" **Rafe MacPhail** choreography for that number.

In another brilliant move on our part, and in the spirit of *Fresh Takes*, we have requested that Kelly Leary, who is a mezzo, learn and sing the role of Sir Joseph Porter for this number.

We look forward to hearing of the success of our evangelist with this School Outreach venture in our neighbor city of San Antonio.



Gilbert & Sullivan Austin is Turning 45

If we include The Year of Covid (as we must), GSA will celebrate 45 years of Gilbert & Sullivan in Austin next year. Our 45th Anniversary Gala will be held on February 24, 2022, at Chez Zee. The Anniversary Committee is already hard at work. Please look for more details in coming issues of *The Austin Savoyard*. One detail follows.

The Silent Auction by Sandra Ragona

As chair of the committee to organize the silent auction for our 45th Anniversary Gala, I am asking for donations to stock our table. These can be things like a basket of non-perishable goodies such as wine and cheeses; a certificate to a restaurant; a local gym membership; a book of movie passes; or a special item you may own and want to donate—an original art work, or a classic of some kind.

We want a minimum of \$25 value, but there is no limit on the high side. We are a 501(c)(3) organization, and will provide a receipt for your donation.

I thank you now for your generosity. We will start collecting these items in January of 2022.

You have plenty of time to think about what you want to donate. If you need further information, feel free to contact me at ssragona@gmail.com.

The Secret Life of the Savoy by Olivia Williams

Reviewed by Ralph MacPhail, Jr.

Olivia Williams has written the book I've wanted to read for years: an historical biography of the three-generation D'Oyly Carte dynasty (Richard, his second wife Helen, his son Rupert, and Rupert's daughter Dame Bridget). Their contributions to the lasting popularity of the Gilbert & Sullivan operas have been acknowledged for generations, and their success as business people (particularly as hoteliers) is well known.

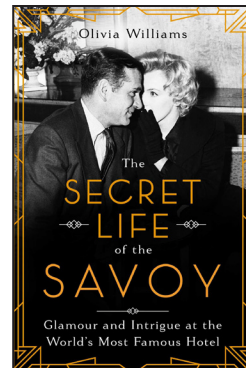
Ms. Williams' breezy narrative makes clear the reason for the refusal of the D'Oyly Cartes to support any writer wishing to tell their personal stories. Unlike many of today's highly successful entrepreneurs, the D'Oyly Cartes preferred the public to focus on their enterprises and shied away from the limelight



themselves—often with good reason. This book, occasionally dishy, makes clear just why.

The dynasty ended with Dame Bridget's death in 1985, shortly after celebrating the centenary of *The Mikado* at the Savoy. ("I was there," as Pooh-Bah might say.) She evidently burned or attempted to destroy most of her personal papers. But the story is of great interest to Savoyards, and it was only a matter of time before the secrets would become uncloseted. In fact, *another* recent book explains the disappearance of Dame Bridget's mama from England when her daughter was a young woman—and just why she was *Lady* Dorothy D'Oyly Carte. Look for **Sixty-Second Book Review #7** in a subsequent issue of *The Austin Savoyard*!

The Secret Life of the Savoy (London: Headline, 2020) is available from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).



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