

OCTOBER 2021

THE AUSTIN SAVOYARE



Fresh Takes Episode 4 by Michael Meigs

Once we got started, we just couldn't stop!

The GSA production committee had never attempted anything like this before. Obliged to count on unfamiliar technologies and to recruit talent beyond our circle of known

aficionados, we half-expected to fall flat on our faces. A couple of admired theatre directors delayed their responses and eventually turned us down. And one after another, so did three terrific performers whom we'd asked to take on the "Little List."

But helped by Robert Faires's insightful Austin Chronicle review of Episode 1, a trickle turned into a stream— and that, in turn, turned almost into a torrent!

Episode 4's two major pieces are culminations of our earliest efforts. Theatre director Liz **Fisher**, one of the Austin artists who inspired me to take up theatre reviewing, extracted numbers from The Yeomen of the Guard and recruited two artists whom I'd earlier courted unsuccessfully – master puppeteer Caroline Reck and performer/improviser/ teacher Sarah-Marie Curry. For Princess Ida's famous Act II"string of pearls" sequence,



I was guided by not one but two talented and gracious

directors to the delightful, inspired, and meticulous Helen Sohyun Park, who will direct Carmen for UT's Butler School of Music in spring 2022. Lisa Scheps of Ground Floor Theatre, who directed Episode 2's "Roaring Mikado," provided an



unexpected bonus, her Helen Sohyun Park performance of Allan Sherman's parody of a familiar

G&S tune. We have plans for eventually producing a fourth "Little List"—an astonishing ambition, for in those worried early days we weren't certain we'd be able to conjure up even one!



Lisa Scheps

Fresh Takes Episode 4 October 19 to November 18

Back on the Boards: Wish You Were Here by Janette Jones

I feel I must begin by quoting Robert Burns, "The best laid schemes o' mice and men, gang aft agley." Isn't it just the truth?

Alas, the resurgence of Covid problems has forced us to alter **Back on the Boards** from what we thought would be our first live, in person, post-Covid performance to



instead present it virtually. Hence the name change - adding "wish you were here" because we so do wish you could have joined us at the theatre. We will still be at the theatre for our recording, and there we will be singing some of your favorite arias and duets from the G&S repertoire.

You will just have to join us via your laptops or mobile phones or whatever modern devices would have astounded the honorable gentlemen responsible for our society. You will get to hear and see many of your favorite performers from our previous staged shows as well as a couple of newcomers and even one of our scholarship winners. Although presented as video, this performance will be a bit more traditional in style since we do style ourselves as presenting traditional as well as non-traditional offerings of G&S.

So please visit us at www.gilbertsullivan.org starting November 19th. Wish You Were Here is GSA's holiday season gift to you and will be available until December 31st. This all-star show will brighten whatever holiday you celebrate in December.

We hope to see you in person at our annual meeting on Sunday, January 9, 2022.

Back on the Boards: Wish You Were Here November 19 to December 31

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE by Diane Radin

How do we measure success?

In past years GSA has had several measures of success: reviews in newspapers and websites, audience size and exit surveys, and B. Iden Payne awards.

How do we measure success when we cannot present live performances?

In previous articles I have talked about the money we have infused into the Austin arts community to produce our *Fresh Takes on Gilbert & Sullivan* series of four episodes (more than \$36,000 as I write this). I suppose that is some sort of success.

I am pleased to announce that one of the scenes from **Fresh Takes 3** – "The Computer Pirates of Penzance Avenue" – is so original that it is being considered for B. Iden Payne awards.

Audience size is tricky to measure – we can only count the number of views, not the number of viewers, of Fresh Takes videos. So far, *Fresh Takes 1* and *2* have had 424 and 520 views respectively. As of halfway through the run of *Fresh Takes 3*, at least 330 have viewed it.

Regarding reviews, well, the *Austin American-Statesman* never seems to take notice of our live shows, so we would not expect them to review *Fresh Takes*. Robert Faires has often reviewed our efforts in the *Austin Chronicle* and, indeed, he did give a favorable review to *Fresh Takes 1*, which we reprinted in the August issue of *The Austin Savoyard*. We are grateful for Mr. Fairies' reviews of many of our shows over the years and we will miss them now that he has retired from the *Chronicle*. But we hope he will continue to enjoy our productions.

And then there are the comments from our audiences. It was always fun overhearing audience comments during the intermission of live shows. Usually they were fairly positive, with occasional complaints when the A/C wasn't working properly. We used the paper exit surveys to get an unfiltered overview of audience satisfaction and suggestions for improvements. These surveys also provided information about the demographics of our audience, something requested by the City of Austin Cultural Arts Division, which has provided grants to GSA.

Since those paper exit surveys can't be done for our *Fresh Takes*, I am interested in hearing from our audience about their reactions to it. You can email me at diane@gilbertsullivan.org if you have something (positive or negative) to say about our video productions of the works of G&S.

GSA had hoped to be in person in October with *Back on the Boards*. However, due to COVID, we have renamed that show *Back on the Boards: Wish You Were Here* and are in the process of recording the live performances at the Worley Barton Theater for free distribution, starting November 19 and running through December 31. It is GSA's holiday gift to you. These are traditional performances, not "fresh takes." However, there will be some new performers to GSA along with stars from previous shows.

If you haven't been vaccinated yet, **please** don't put it off any longer. We want to see you in person as soon as possible. Here's hoping that our annual meeting and sing-along will be in person on Sunday, January 9th.

Do you want to help Gilbert & Sullivan Austin????

GSA's 45th Anniversary Gala will be held February 24, 2022 at Chez Zee. We want to have a spectacular silent auction!

So, what can you contribute?

- Do you know a business that would donate a gift certificate that we would like to bid on?
- Do you have a special item that folks would cherish and bid to own? a particular painting? a first edition?
- Would you create a gift basket of cheeses and snacks with a bottle of wine?

Look around! ()

We all have special trinkets and treasures that we can pass on and they would bring a welcome contribution to GSA.

These items will create a nice nest egg, so to speak, so we can bring you the finest stage productions of Gilbert & Sullivan's brilliant works for your enjoyment.

Join in the fun of collecting and sharing, all for the benefit of our wonderful organization!

If your favorite business chooses to contribute, they will be recognized and thanked in our newsletter, on our website, and at the Gala.

Please let our Silent Auction Chair, **Saundra Ragona**, know via email at **ssragona@gmail.com**; write AUCTION in the subject line, please.

All items must have a value of at least \$25.

Thank you for your kind attention. We hope you can share.

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/

Sixty-Second Book Reviews, #9

The Grand Duke; or, The Statutory Duel



by W. S. Gilbert
Original Libretto Revised by
John Wolfson
Reviewed by Ralph MacPhail, Jr.

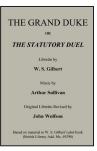
The final Gilbert & Sullivan production, **The Grand Duke**, had the shortest run of any of their thirteen works written for D'Oyly

Carte. The failure of the piece at the Savoy Theatre in London in 1896 was due to many factors, perhaps most notably from the fact that three of the Savoy favorites for whom Gilbert had been writing became unavailable for the production: George Grossmith, Jessie Bond, and Richard Temple. As John Wolfson notes in his brief introduction to his revision, "Gilbert cut their roles down and, to compensate, built up the parts of two other actors in his company, Rutland Barrington . . . and Ilka von Palmay. . . . His libretto suffered tremendously from these changes."

Both Gilbert and Sullivan seemed to have little interest in postopening-night revisions, and the libretto that has come down to us is "overcrowded with incident," in Wolfson's words, and cries out for revision to make it stage-worthy.

Wolfson's earlier researches into the production of the last two Savoy Operas (*Final Curtain* [London: Chappell, 1976]) led him to Gilbert's working papers for *The Grand Duke* which are preserved with his papers at the British library. His revision is actually something of a restoration, for (again in his words), "The present revisions have been executed strictly along lines suggested by Gilbert's own plot sketches."

I enthusiastically entered into the project of publishing this revision because I believe it makes Gilbert's lumbering libretto eminently producible, it runs about the usual length of the mature Savoy operas (instead of over three hours!) and its plot is direct and easy to follow. An appendix specifies the deletions, and notes imbedded in the text clarify the musical cuts in the vocal score (both the



traditional English one and the new American one published by **Lulu.com**).

Gilbert & Sullivan Austin has never produced a "grand" production of *The Grand Duke*. Both John Wolfson and I hope that this "fresh take" on Gilbert's original intentions will be the one to share with Austin audiences.

Wolfson's revision of *The Grand Duke* is available from Amazon.

Note: I prepared this libretto for publication from John Wolfson's "paste-up" working libretto, but I have not received nor will I receive any income from the project.

Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive in late December; the deadline for submissions is December 9. Please send your news to news@gilbertsullivan.org. Thanks!

Notice of Elections

GSA will elect members of the board for 2022 at the Annual Meeting, to be held on Sunday, January 9, at Genesis Presbyterian Church, 1507 Wilshire Boulevard. Our board is a team of volunteers who run the organization; we have no paid office staff. If you have an interest in serving on the board or would like more information, please contact nominations committee chair **Sarah Slaughter** at **volunteer@gilbertsullivan.org**. Sarah and committee members **Monica Kurtz** and **Diane Radin** will prepare a nomination slate to be published in the January issue of **The Austin Savoyard**.

News of Members

GSA former President and frequent cast member **June Julian** is performing the role of Jack's mother in the Stephen Sondheim musical *Into the Woods*. It is produced by ZACH Theatre and performed outdoors at the Topfer Theater Plaza. It opened October 7 and runs through November 7. For more information, please visit



June Julian

zachtheatre.org/shows-events/2021-22-season/ (Photo courtesy Suzanne Cordeiro.)



Dr. Jeffrey Jones-Ragona, GSA's Music Director, taught a G&S Masterclass in San Antonio at the Atonement Catholic Academy in San Antonio on September 23, as part of an in-class project to learn the staging of a chorus number from *H.M.S. Pinafore*. The instructor, Kelly Leary, said "The Masterclass was absolutely fantastic and my 8th graders in our Musical Theatre Class loved it!"

Jeffrey reports that the students "were an absolute delight, smart, well prepared, and did a terrific job, asked smart questions and paid attention throughout. It was a good day for us all."

Fresh Takes on Gilbert & Sullivan, Episode 3 by David Treadwell



The *Fresh Takes on Gilbert & Sullivan* project now streaming online offers food for thought. Opera can be a journey on which we members of a community travel together with the characters for a shared experience. Often, what keeps us as opera lovers on the journey are cultural references found in the words and music

that act as road signs. Some of the most joyous moments come when we recognize the signs of shared experience, glance over at our fellow travelers and let the music wash over us. Some of the most poignant moments in opera come when the characters misread cultural road signs and we watch for the inevitable, tragic outcome.

And so it is with the Gilbert & Sullivan operas. They're often viewed as lighthearted and comic, but they have a seriousness about them, and the humor is used to soften Gilbert's japes at both the bulwarks and frailties of English society. Gilbert was very much a man of his time and place, and he put much of his time and place into his libretti (so much so that we have a lexicon specifically to help us unpack the references). And Sullivan? He engages us fully in Gilbert's topsy-turvy stories with beautifully crafted music. Lots of us love that about the Savoy operas and wouldn't have it any other way. But here's the thing: there are other ways. The G&S repertoire is vast and sturdy enough to stand, even if some of our signposts are translated to help others gain access and find meaning. It is vast and sturdy enough to stand precisely because these bulwarks and frailties aren't just nineteenth-century English, they are universally human.

We mustn't fear that if we don't have all our signposts, we might not find our way into and through the vast countryside of otherwise enjoyable music. Rather, let us celebrate adding

new ways for others to join us. In his introduction to Episode 3 of *Fresh Takes on Gilbert & Sullivan*, Michael Meigs relates advice he received from his time as a U.S. diplomat: When experiencing a new culture (if I may so paraphrase to continue my metaphor), we don't see familiar signposts to help us navigate, and this lack of familiarity



can cause "acute discomfort." That's OK. We are on this journey with our fellow humans, and if we can look over and smile a knowing smile at someone new in the audience, and tap our toes together to a beautiful melody, then we're all better for the experience.

The third episode of *Fresh Takes* continues this reconfiguring of cultural signposts. Contexts have changed, accents are different, the scenery sure is different, and the times, they are a changin. But even for the most traditional lover of G&S there are enough signposts to help us find our way. In the first Fresh Take, the **American Berserk Theatre** and the musicians of **Density512** tell the story of the apprenticed Fred in "The Computer Pirates of Penzance Ave."

Signpost changes abound: the familiar coastline lair of the pirates is replaced by a den of computer hacktivists, complete with punk rock album art and a conspiracy theory-style bulletin board. These modern pirates are easy for a twenty-first-century American to follow. The iconography is in common usage, and even the class struggle in which the pirates engage is familiar. That acute discomfort at seeing a resetting of the venerable *The Pirates of Penzance* is easily overcome with the reorienting influence of American life, but as a group they do lead us somewhere new. The pirate crew has an abiding love for each other, strong ethics, and a general disdain for the distasteful work-a-day world. Very Gilbertian. Very human.

The Computer Pirates of Penzance Ave based on The Pirates of Penzance adapted by Kaci Beeler and Roy Janik



Mykel Jewell the Pirate King



Kenzie Slottow Charissa Memrick Fred Aunt Ruth



Lil-Hacky-Sak

Kenzie Slottow

Fred

Roy Janik AARP*rate

Sam Charissa Memrick Ruth

songs: "Pour, O pour the pirate sherry" "When Frederic was a little lad"

"Oh, better far to live and die"

"Hail, Poetry"

"When you had left our pirate fold"

"Hail, Poetry" (reprise)
"Poor wandering one"

director: Kaci Beeler

associate director and film editor: Jacob Schnitzer

music: **Density512**

orchestrations: Nicholas Perry Clark

Acute discomfort is an accurate description of the second Fresh Take. **Marcelo Tesón** sings a "A British Tar is a Soaring Soul," taken directly from **H.M.S. Pinafore** and accompanied by **Jeanne Sasaki**. Marcelo does a yeoman's job of it: a familiar signpost, indeed! His singing invites us to look at the background

(continued from previous page)

imagery: icons of king and country initially, as Gilbert would have seen in London, but subsequent images grow darker. They make us remember that the terrible price of empire is paid by its subjects. As the song continues, we see ourselves, Americans, as heirs of the British Empire, exacting the same terrible price from people around the world, and from ourselves. Just as Alexander Gardner's photographs brought home the horrors of the Civil War and the atrocities visited on Native Americans, this Fresh Take holds up a lens and plate to create signposts to a history we'd rather not see.

"A British Tar is a Soaring Soul" from H.M.S. Pinafore



a trio of Marcelo Tesóns





direction, performance, and editing: Marcelo Tesón

filmed by: Sarah Mackenzie recorded by: Fadeelah Muhyee

piano: Jeanne Sasaki

In the third Fresh Take, music from *The Gondoliers* begets "The New Gondoliers: A Love Story in Three Parts." The Duchess of Plaza-Toro and Casilda, played by Ellie Jarrett Shattles and **Abigail Jackson**, lead the cast in a very different direction from the original work. Gone are the opulent staging and costumes of Gilbert's idea of Venice; instead, we have an intimate story of two couples sharing their backyard pool on a hot Austin summer afternoon. There are signposts here, too: relaxation in the heat, a beach ball and float, the sounds of our friend's accents that differ from our own, and yet they're still our friends. As sometimes it may happen, friends may find that they are more than friends: The Duchess and Casilda have their own fandango, perhaps not as lively as the Duke might have ordered in Barataria, but consequential for the women. Gilbert's words and Sullivan's setting get repurposed by director Margaret **Jumonville** and the performers as an admission of the men's dissatisfaction with their lives and an admission of the women's unrequited love for each other.

In the fourth Take, we are treated to another "Little List" from The Mikado. Michael Meigs updates this G&S favorite, and it's brought to life by **Suzanne Orzech**, playing a cultural consultant who's out to teach us all how to be culturally aware.

The New Gondoliers: a love story in three parts based on The Gondoliers



William Sturrock Luis

Abigail Jackson

Casilda

Andres Losada Dimate

Ellie Jarrett Shattles

Duke of Plaza Toro **Duchess of Plaza Toro**

"In enterprise of martial kind" songs:

"O rapture, when alone together"

"There was a time"

director: Margaret Jumonville

piano: Jeanne Sasaki

Leann Fryer is beside herself (literally!), playing a delightful chorus, and Jeanne Sasaki again provides her incomparable piano accompaniment. Need cultural signposts? Michael's lyrics have them aplenty, including the requisite insulte amicale aimed at the French. Good neighbors can trade their guips and quibbles, japes and gibes, so long as we respect the dignity of every human being and share with them a knowing smile. This Take's key phrase is the advice that "Life is just a cookie jar of unexpected circumstances."

The Mikado parodies





and a trio of Leann Fryers

http://gilbertsullivan.org

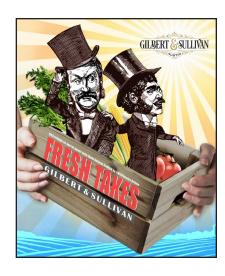
songs: "Welcome to our seminar" ("Taken from the county jail") "As events these days may demonstrate" (a.k.a. "I've got a little list")

lyrics: Michael Meigs piano: Jeanne Sasaki

recorded by: Fadeelah Muhyee

So, dear reader, enjoy the third episode of **Fresh Takes**, available free of charge online until October 18. Understand that some of your favorite cultural signposts have been moved a bit or translated to allow your neighbor to find the way through the delicious works of Gilbert & Sullivan. If you've made it this far with us, fantastic! There's a fourth and final episode scheduled for October, and there's more traveling ahead in next summer's The McAdo, where some signposts are written in Scots, and we'll "run about the braes / And pu'd the gowans fine."

now playing: Fresh Takes on Gilbert & Sullivan



Coming Events

Oct.19 Fresh Takes Episode 4 online for one

month (see p. 1)

Nov. 19 **Back on the Boards: Wish You Were**

Here online through Dec. 31 (see p. 1)

Jan. 9 Annual Meeting and Sing-Along

Feb. 24 **45th Anniversary Gala**

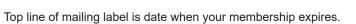
Mar. 5-6 **The Sorcerer in Concert**

June 10-19 *The McAdo* summer grand production



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



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THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD - OCTOBER 2021
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