

THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD

A Magic Show, a Wedding, and an Austin Premiere!

by **Dr. Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**
Music Director, GSA
Director, ***The Sorcerer 2022***



Greetings, beloved Savoyards!

After 20+ years preparing the music for our beautiful shows, I've been given the opportunity to stage, in concert, my very own take on ***The Sorcerer***. I accepted with gratitude and a little trepidation. After all, I was stepping into enormous shoes—shoes filled by **Janette Jones**, **Michelle Haché**, and of course **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**

There is no question that our "historical" productions have an abundance of charm and beauty, and of course, the material is best suited to such an approach. I also believe that Gilbert's take on the human condition is more than sufficiently "virtuoso" to stand up to a variety of interpretations and anachronistic settings, and of course, Sir Arthur's music retains its charm and attractiveness in any age. With those thoughts in mind, and after some consultation with **Michael Meigs** and **Janette Jones**, who have been very successful with "outside the box" visions of traditional/historical theatre productions, I decided to set my version in Las Vegas, at the (entirely fictional) Palace Showroom and Elvis Wedding Chapel. A few place name changes were necessitated, but otherwise Gilbert's text and characters hold up very well in a setting that is admittedly vastly different from the rustic charms of 19th century Ploverleigh.

I also opted to use two scenes that were cut from early productions: Lady Sangazure's Act I air, "In days gone by," a bravura showpiece, performed by company newcomer **Pei-Jun Wang**; and an Act II duet, "Oh hideous doom," featuring Wells and the demon Ahrimanes (played by **Brenham Adams**

and **Jake Jacobsen**, respectively) and chorus of Imps and Infernal Beings. These scenes will be Austin premieres, with words by Gilbert but more recently composed music in the style of Sir Arthur, as unfortunately his music for them has been lost. (In the 1880s, no one had any notion that a century and a half later these operas would still be performed, so once something was cut it was not regarded as worth keeping around when the paper could be put to more ready uses.)

I hope you can join us for this production. We've assembled a first-rate ensemble, with some new voices and beloved company stalwarts, accompanied by pianist **Joseph Choi**. Our excellent technical crew is creating a beautiful set for our evening out in the glamorous Palace Showroom. I also want to extend my deepest thanks to **Bill Hatcher** for managing the many production details; **Monica Kurtz**, our Stage Manager; and **Rafe MacPhail** for kindly supplying the surtitles for our production.

Las Vegas, here we come!

GSA's 45th Anniversary Gala Postponed or, There we weren't, due to risk of our lives . . .

GSA celebrates each five-year milestone with a gala gathering featuring songs, food, and fellowship. At the start of 2020, we thought about our 45th anniversary coming in 2021. But then the world changed, thanks to Covid-19. Plans for ***The McAdo*** and musicales were postponed or cancelled. But by early 2021, as vaccines became available, we were certain that it would be safe to plan our 45th Anniversary Gala for February 2022. (Of course, we also thought we could hold our ***Back on the Boards*** musicale in October and our Annual Meeting and Sing-Along in January.)

Then came the Delta Variant, followed by Omicron. GSA cares about the health and welfare of all our members, donors, friends, and performers. The GSA board met on January 31 to assess the likelihood that Travis County would be down to Stage 3 or better by February 24. Sadly, that seems very unlikely, and so we must postpone it until perhaps early April.

The Sorcerer 2022

**Saturday, March 5, at 7:30 pm
and Sunday, March 6, at 2 pm**

Worley Barton Theater
at Brentwood Christian School
11908 North Lamar Blvd., Austin

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Gilbert & Sullivan: The Players and the Plays by Kurt Gänzl



Reviewed by Ralph MacPhail, Jr.

In spite of the immense popularity of the Savoy Operas at the time of their creation (1871-96), we have only a handful of autobiographies/memoirs and biographies of the performing artists who created the roles in the first Gilbert & Sullivan productions, and some of these are sketchy and downright incorrect in their “recollections.”

Kurt Gänzl, who has published widely chronicling the history of musical theater, has turned his attention to these original Savoyards, and the recent, welcome publication of his **Gilbert & Sullivan: The Players and the Plays** is another one of those recent books filling needs in Savoy scholarship. His title reflects the emphasis of his book: it's on the players (for the history of the plays themselves has been chronicled time and again).

And he has tracked down corroborative details on the major as well as the most minor of Savoyards, such as (to cite just two examples, picked quite at random), Aeneas Dymott, the original Bob Beckett in **H.M.S. Pinafore**, who receives two pages and a photograph, and Antonio Medcalf, the Second Yeoman in **The Yeomen of the Guard**, who receives 1.5+.

There are of course sections devoted to George Grossmith, Rutland Barrington, and Jessie Bond (who left reminiscences), in addition to other familiar names (Durward Lely, Decima Moore, Geraldine Ulmar, to name but three) who did not. In a remarkable 11 pages titled “A Clutch of Gianettas,” Kurt Gänzl chronicles what he can find on no fewer than fourteen actresses who followed Geraldine Ulmar in original Savoy run of **The Gondoliers**!

Kurt Gänzl enlivens so many facts (birth- and death-places and dates, roles, theatres, dramatic works) with an informal and extremely readable style. Expressions such as “Cartesian maybetheology” delightfully pepper his work, and his humor keeps the reader's attention. For example:

Trial by Jury has an unchallenged place in the history of the musical theater, and even if it has finally slipped somewhat from the produced repertoire of the twenty-first-century days of sound systems, click tracks, and chesty howling, it remains—speaking “from bias free of every kind”—a little gem in the idol's forehead of English-language comic opera. And of course, historically, the first real stone in what was to become the edifice known, perhaps a little inaccurately, as “the Savoy opera.” But I like the term, and we all know what it means, so let's stick with it, even if it is a wee bit semantically inaccurate. (35-36)

In introducing Courtice Pounds (the original Nanki-Poo), Gänzl writes,

“To condense his remarkable career into a few lines is really rather rude. But I guess I have to—without letting the wives, mistresses, sisters, cousins, and aunts distract me—so here are the bare facts.” (189)

One more before I reluctantly stop quoting, this concerning James Wilbraham (the original Sir Gilbert Murgatroyd in **Ruddigore** (a chorister):

I see him in 1900 musically directing a *Cloches de Cornville* company, and in the 1901 census, while Jessie is working as a cook in Peckham Rye, he is shackled up with a twenty-three-year-old named “Rae” (Rachel Abrahams) who claims to be Mrs. Wilbraham. Habits die hard: he produced two more children by her. Rae must have sensed she was backing a loser, because she hoofed it, with her two babies and her brother, to Christchurch, New Zealand, married a carpenter, and lived half a century more. (204)

Seventy-six photographs of the Savoyards from the collections of David B. Lovell and David Stone break up the densely-packed but highly readable pages of this rather expensive reference, which was clearly meant for research libraries and Savoy Opera students Who Must Have Everything.

Kurt Gänzl's **Gilbert & Sullivan: The Players and the Plays** (New York: SUNY Press, 2021) is available from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

GSA's Board of Directors 2022

Due to the cancellation of our Sing-Along and Annual Meeting because of pandemic concerns, GSA's board election had to be held online. Many thanks to **Leann Fryer** for conducting the election. Most of the 2021 board members are returning for 2022.

The new member of the board is **Aletha Read**, who has been a G&S fan since childhood. She is the granddaughter of **Len and Reba Gillman**, who were among the early members of GSA and long-time performers and supporters. Aletha never misses a GSA production if she is in town. She attended UT Austin and has lived in Austin except for several years in Slovakia, Japan, and England. Growing up in a family of classically trained musicians, Aletha took up drumming and, while living in Japan, performed at Shinto and Buddhist ceremonies. She started her own small woman-owned technical training business in 2003. Headquartered in Austin, it has worldwide reach. In her own words: “As we continue our creative journey, I plan to continue [my grandparents'] tradition of growing the audience and recruiting performers—and donors—while supporting our loyal fans.”

Aletha will assume the positions of Secretary and Technology Coordinator with a focus on social media promotion of all things GSA. She started working on that even before being elected! We are grateful that her enthusiasm and knowledge will be put to work for GSA. She looks forward to meeting our members and supporters at upcoming GSA events.

Officers of the Board of Directors are elected by the board at their first meeting following the board elections. The following officers comprise the Executive Committee and will serve for 2022:

President: **Diane Radin**

Executive Vice President: **Sarah Slaughter**

Treasurer & Chief Financial Officer: **Dave Wieckowski**

Secretary: **Aletha Read**

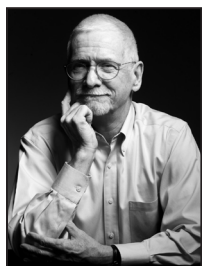
Production Chair: **Michael Meigs**

All board members are listed on the last page of **The Austin Savoyard**. This is a working board, since GSA has no paid staff. If you would like to volunteer in any capacity, please email volunteer@gilbertsullivan.org.



Fresh Takes: Here They All Are!

by Michael Meigs



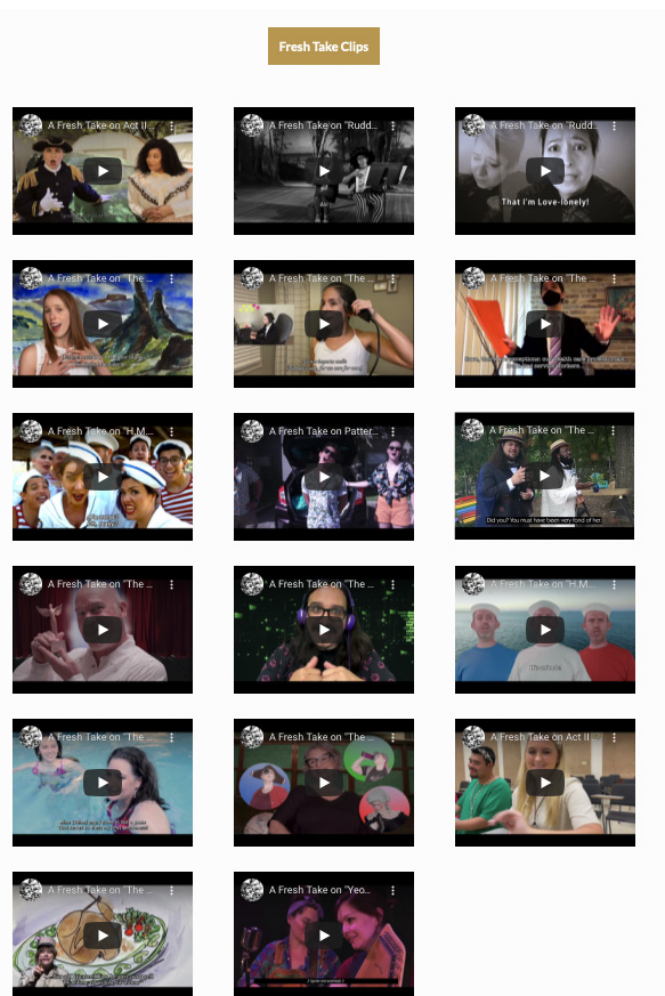
As a usually anonymous face in theatre audiences since 2008, I'd written reviews of almost 800 evenings of live narrative theatre and published them at CTXLiveTheatre.com. GSA's all-volunteer board realigned duties in late 2019, and I enthusiastically agreed to coordinate the production committee, knowing that GSA's current directors and production manager had a twenty-year run of delivering great, big shining grand summer productions.

And then, you know, COVID. And we embraced **Michelle Haché's** proposal to commission Austin artists to do updates of familiar G&S scenes.

The exhilarated panic I felt at the prospect was like looking down from above the clouds, about to launch into my first skydive.

That was a year ago. We streamed seventeen **Fresh Takes** in four episodes, and you can now view any or all of them at the GSA website. Go to www.gilbertsullivan.org; click on the "shows" tab; scroll down to the **Fresh Takes** poster; click on "Learn more." Or: simply type this URL: <https://www.gilbertsullivan.org/shows/fresh-takes-2021/>. And up will pop, as if by magic, a display of seventeen thumbnails. Click any one to start it; then click on the YouTube legend in the icon to open it in full screen.

And what a variety they are! Austin directors did "treatments" on **The Gondoliers**, **HMS Pinafore**, **The Pirates of Penzance**, **Princess Ida**, **Ruddigore**, and **The Yeomen of the Guard**. Our "little lists" were admonitions from a virus ward doctor, a musical theatre performer, and a saucy cultural counselor. Our



engaging Patter Trio was a young ménage à trois acting out with four of those virtuoso tongue-twisting songs. Contemporary values sometimes clashed with those of the 19th century, but Gilbert's wit and Sullivan's ingenious music always came shining through.

Michelle's audacious proposal, fully realized, spread the joys of Gilbert & Sullivan among Austin's vigorous community of highly talented artists, most of whom are early in their careers. GSA hired while performance venues were shut down; we proudly supported more than a hundred Austin artists and paid out almost \$40,000 in honoraria. And we've been sharing the **Fresh Takes** one by one with Facebook's Savoyet group, a gathering of G&S enthusiasts right across the globe.

The Annual Sing-Along That Wasn't

As you know, GSA was unable to hold our Sing-Along and Annual Meeting as scheduled in January. With COVID numbers rising in the area, we felt that it was too risky to get together in person, as much as we had been looking forward to it. Because a lot of preparation was put into the show, we would like to acknowledge everyone who was involved for their hard work.

We would like to thank **Jeanne Sasaki** for accompanying our rehearsal, and for preparing to play for the Sing-Along. Thanks to **Holton Johnson** and **Janette Jones** for helping

with the rehearsal and planning, and to **Aletha Read** for preparing the projector that would have displayed the sing-along lyrics. And thanks to **Leann Fryer** for recruiting singers and producing the whole event.

We would also like to extend a special thanks to the performers, who worked hard on their songs but were unable to perform them: **Megan Barham**, **Leann Fryer**, **Holton Johnson**, **Susan Johnston Taylor**, **Janette Jones**, **Amy Selby**, **Marcelo Teson**, and **Brittany Trinité**.

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."



P.O. Box 684542
Austin, Texas 78768-4542

Coming Events

Mar. 5-6 ***The Sorcerer 2022*** (see p. 2)

June 10-19 ***The McAdo*** summer grand production

GSA's Vaccination Policy

For the safety of our audience,
volunteers, and performers:

Everyone attending a GSA event must present a
NEGATIVE COVID-19 TEST or PROOF OF VACCINATION.

Negative test result must be dated
within 72 hours of event.

Final vaccine must be dated
at least 14 days before event.

Wear a mask! Masks are required in our venues.

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THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD - February 2022

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Economic Development Department. Visit Austin at
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Database Manager
Newsletter Editor

Ralph MacPhail, Jr.
Leann Fryer
Sue Ricket Caldwell

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

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