

# THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

### *The Scottish Comic Opera?*

by Diane Radin

Do you know that there is a Shakespeare play that is never referred to by name, but always as ***The Scottish Play***? Superstition has it that saying

the name of the play other than as called for in the script while rehearsing or performing will lead to a curse and cause disaster. So perhaps from now on, we need to refer to our production of ***The McAdo*** as ***The Scottish Comic Opera***.

Just kidding ... I think.

It did seem like the three witches were brewing trouble for our June 2022 performances of ***The McAdo***. By the final weekend, half the cast was ill, as were some members of the orchestra. If you needed a demonstration that masks are effective, consider that, in the orchestra pit, the strings, percussion, and conductor were all masked and did not contract Covid, but the woodwinds, who could not be masked, did get Covid. Fortunately, since everyone in the cast and orchestra were vaccinated, they are all recovered.

Thank you to those who donated the cost of their ***McAdo*** tickets to GSA. GSA took a deep financial loss, of course, but your generosity made that loss bearable, and your support and caring cheered us greatly. The Long Center was kind enough to reimburse the service charge along with the ticket price. Any donation of at least \$30 designates you as a member of Gilbert & Sullivan Austin for the next twelve months. We hope you will keep up your membership for many years to come. Thank you for your generosity.

By popular demand from disappointed ticket holders, cast, artistic director, crew, and the GSA board, we will reprise ***The McAdo*** in **June 2023** with nine performances including four matinees, running June 9-18, 2023.

To keep you humming G&S tunes through the coming months, GSA has planned three additional opportunities to enjoy the wealth of talent we are blessed with in Austin. See next column for details. Note that ***Esther the Clever Queen***, an original play based on the Book of Esther, with music by Sullivan and lyrics by Ira Forman and Gilbert, is postponed until the fall of 2023.

We have lots of wonderful music to look forward to in the coming year. I hope to see you at all these events and performances.

## GSA's 2022-2023 Season

### Sunday, November 6, 3 pm — *A Victorian Salon*

A Sunday afternoon featuring tea, scrumptious sweets, wine, and music by Gilbert & Sullivan and their contemporaries will transport you to another time and place. *Location*: A lovely home in Barton Hills. Reservations required: \$55 per person.

### Sunday, January 8, 2 pm — *Gilbert & Sullivan Austin's Got Talent and Annual Meeting.*

This includes a preview of upcoming shows and an opportunity to join in the singing. *Location*: Huffman Hall at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church. No charge. Donations accepted.

### Sunday, March 12, 2 pm — *Gilbert & Sullivan and Sondheim.*

Just as modern theater owes a debt to Shakespeare, contemporary musical theater owes a debt to G&S. Stephen Sondheim and others learned from those Victorian masters. Songs from both the modern and Victorian repertoire will illuminate the connections. *Location*: The Jewish Community Center, Hart Lane. No charge. Donations accepted.

### June 2023 — *The McAdo*

## *The McAdo* 2022 Video on Hold

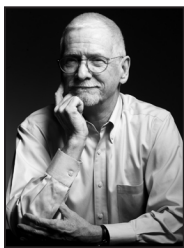
GSA's videographer had only one opportunity—on opening night at our last-minute request—to record the show. Usually, our videographer records at least two performances to create the best possible recording of our grand production. Although the 2022 recording is good, the GSA board has decided to postpone releasing it for purchase until after the June 2023 version of ***The McAdo*** is over. Then we will offer both the 2022 version and the 2023 version for sale. Money will be refunded to all who have already paid for a copy of the 2022 version.

We hope to see you at ***The McAdo*** in 2023.

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## A More Humane McAdo Never in Scotland Did Exist by Michael Meigs



The most striking aspect of GSA's 2022 *The McAdo* was the deep texture of the production. The familiar story was all there, poking joyful fun at hapless, self-important authority (the Lord High Executioner, stupidly vain and venal patrician Pubagh, The McAdo himself). Even after all the 137 years since its London debut, the piece captured our sympathy with young, hopeful protagonists and assured us love conquers all, especially nonsensical authority and class prejudice.

Director **Michelle Haché** imagined a far more complex setting than that of the G&S original. With the remarkable assistance of choreographer **Christie Jean-Jacques** and costumer **Jennifer Rose Davis**, she created an engaging and completely believable new world for it.

Music director Dr. **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** recruited the 18-piece orchestra and directed the familiar score with his usual mastery. He subtly altered the rhythms of the "Miya Sama" tune and at appropriate points in the score inserted passages from Robert Burns and from Scots dialect.



*the staircase tableau*

Bagpipes weren't necessary to persuade the audience to suspend its disbelief. We watched a 32-member cast, authentically and diversely clad in gorgeous Scottish garb, most belonging to one of four Balleydew clans. Each performer had a

distinct identity and set of relationships within the story. Dialect coaching by Reagan Murdock (Coco) brought to the dialogue Scots inflections that surprised and captured the ear.

One could easily watch this *McAdo* performance after performance and always find new and intriguing moves, riffs, and relationships. You'll have that opportunity in June of 2023.

Voices were uniformly superb, and casting couldn't have been better.

The Somme sisters, wards of Coco, did indeed arrive from a seminary—though boldly armed, a neat reversal of audience expectations. From their first steps onstage, **Mary Kettlewell**, **Amy Selby**, and **Julie Allison** were assertive, self-confident young women. Their teasing of Pubagh made it clear that the younger generation was in charge, a theme reinforced in both acts as Allison, portraying Pretty Jean, led the exultant opposition to Patricia Combs's menacing Katishagh.



*Amy Selby, Mary Kettlewell, and Julie Allison*



**Michael Kelley Dixon** as Nanky Doug, runaway heir to The McAdo's throne, paired nicely with Kettlewell's Wynn Somme. He was an earnest suitor with a fine, pure tenor voice; she was an exuberant, lively soprano with a gleaming smile and ever-alert presence. Her solo "The sun, whose rays" was a momentary pause for reflection; more characteristic was her comic participation in trio numbers with Dixon and Murdock.

GSA stalwart **Holton Johnson**, who played the wandering minstrel in the 2011 production, here embodied the imperturbable snob Pubagh, a character whose obtuse seriousness provoked chuckles in the audience. Pubagh's recurring dismay at dealing with "young persons" both in dialogue and dance was slyly deadpan comedy.



Speaking of dance and movement: Haché and Jean-Jacques coached this large cast into almost perpetual movement, all of it purposeful. Not a hint of operatic "park and bark"! Morris dancing (which originated in 16th-century Scotland), the elaborate



*(l-r) Janette Jones, Bonnie Bogovich, Sydney Pérez, Stefanie Taylor, Mindy Rast-Keenan, Megan Barham, Reagan Murdock (Coco), Sarah Manna, Carlee Abschnieder, Susan Johnston Taylor, Lauren Ryan-Holt, Leann Fryer*



interweaving circles that be-ribboned the May pole, sword dances at the clan chieftain's arrival—these and other traditional forms were supplemented with some distinctly vaudevillian antics to remind us this was light-hearted entertainment.



**Reagan Murdock's** appearance as the Lord High Executioner, brandishing a staff of office and cuddling a lamb puppet, opened a full-stage celebration that culminated in a clever staircase tableau.

Katishagh, the spurned elderly spinster seeking her prey (the absconded Nanky Doug), elicited fear and deep sympathy in turn. **Patricia Combs** projected the spinster's proclaimed homeliness by force of character, for the performer herself is anything but plain. In this festival of youth, Katishagh warned us of the pain of loneliness and unaccompanied old age. Combs' reconciliation with Murdock



in Act II's delicious duo scene ("Tit-willow"/"There is beauty in the bellow of the blast") infused her in a twinkling with the joy of hope. There was lovely interplay in this scene, with Combs telegraphing deep emotion as Murdock amused us with his patent duplicity.

The originality of this interpretation—with which, I confess, I had some small part in at the 2018 beginnings of the project—was strongly reinforced by Jennifer Rose Davis's costume designs. Four clans were signaled with contrasting colors. The wand'ring Nanky Doug turned up in humble browns and grays; Coco, unexpectedly elevated to executioner rank, was dressed in a quirky assemblage of black, white, and gray; Bob Beare as



The McAdo arrived in an extravagant cream jacket over a royal Stuart dress plaid kilt. In Act II the loving couple wore white wedding outfits in traditional tailoring. None of this was off the rack; each outfit was unique, assembled and sewn to measure by Davis's Pilgrimage Designs.



As The McAdo himself, **Bob Beare** brought glee to the final proceedings, bubbling with self-congratulation, tolerating with mild exasperation Katishagh's peremptory intrusions into the ceremonies, and pretending to show concern for the plights of those who unintentionally offended. His "My object all sublime" had jaunty soft-shoe choreography that made it all the funnier.

That grand chieftain The McAdo wasn't quite bright (isn't that a comic satisfaction!). Fortunately, when Coco offered his supremely illogical explanations at the end, the brave Scots' fearless leader was more than happy to accept them and rejoin the celebration.



scenes from the pre-curtain melodrama



"Were you not to Coco plighted"



"I am so proud"



(l-r) Brenham Sean Adams, Andy Fleming, Chaz Nailor, Jay Young (Go-To), Jim Newsome, Ian Stilwell, Garrett Cordes, Julius Young (Pischtusch), Trey Shonkwiler



# THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD

Newsletter Archive

## The Newsletter Project

by Sue Caldwell

To celebrate GSA's 25th anniversary in 2001, our historian, **Leland Smith**, wrote a history of GSA. As GSA's newest historian, I considered updating it for our 45th anniversary—but the history of an ongoing group is outdated when it is printed. Instead, I borrowed from **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**, his collection of GSA newsletters acquired from long-time members **Loel Graber**, **Enid Hallock**, and **Reba Gillman**, plus those he had received, and added my own. Newsletters from 2002 on had been available on our website at [www.gilbertsullivan.org/newsletter-archive/](http://www.gilbertsullivan.org/newsletter-archive/). Recent ones such as this are in **full color**!

We've now added most of the newsletters starting in 1977. The newsletters reveal our growth from G&S fans struggling to share beloved music to the mature production company we have become. I hope you'll enjoy as much as I have reliving the early days of GSA, as we joyfully met in members' homes for informal sing-alongs or prepared selections from G&S. The newsletters listed participants in each meeting. My predecessor, Reba Gillman, became newsletter editor with the January 1984 issue and served for 25 years. She transitioned the newsletter from plain photocopied text to the professionally-printed publication we now enjoy.

Beginning with the 1976 production of **H.M.S. Pinafore** that led to our formation (and in which I was a chorus girl), we partnered with several theaters to produce seven staged productions through 1978. Then we struggled, with only one show per year in 1980-83. A low point came in the mid-1980s, but then-President **Bob Kusnetz** said we "rose like a Phoenix from the flames" in 1987 and resumed at least annual productions. The newsletters trace the growing expansion of productions, the talented performers, the inclusion of an orchestra.

There are gaps in the expanded newsletter archive; there are only one from 1979 and three from 1980. Others may be missing: while the custom was to publish every month except July and August, some appeared in those months, some "extra" issues came mid-month, and some months were skipped. If you have old GSA newsletters in a closet—especially those from before 1989—I'd greatly appreciate it if you'd lend or give them to me to scan and include in our official files. I'm also interested in old production and musicale playbills, as they will be my next project for updating our website!

### 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/](http://www.gilbertsullivan.org/join/)



*a roomful of GSA and Brookdale fans gathered to salute Russell*

## Russell Gregory Day

Among the many plans for **The McAdo** 2022 that were crushed by the pandemic was a celebration of Russell Gregory Day on June 12, the first Sunday of the run. **Russell Gregory** has been a featured performer in countless GSA productions, most recently as Private Willis in 2019's **Iolanthe**. He had been cast as **The McAdo** for our planned 2020 run, but health concerns caused him to drop out during the pandemic pause. His many fans planned a full house for this salute, and Mayor Adler issued a proclamation of Russell Gregory Day in Austin. Alas, the show opened and closed on June 10.

We held a salute to Russell in the Garden Room at Brookdale Westlake, where Russell and Kay reside, on Saturday, July 9. GSA President **Diane Radin** read the proclamation and extolled Russell's long history with us. Russell entertained us with a rendition of "Tit-willow." After a standing ovation, we adjourned to a feast Diane and Brookdale provided and took turns congratulating Russell.



*Russell sings "Tit-willow"*



*Pixie Avent and Monica Kurtz congratulate Russell*



*Kay and Russell Gregory with Libby Weed*

*photos by Chris Buggé,  
Monica Kurtz,  
and Sue Caldwell*

## Treasures for Treasured Cast and Crew by Mindy Rast-Keenan



I have been a rabid knitter for over fifteen years now, and for the most part, my knitting has always been directed towards each of my productions. Starting over a decade ago, I started knitting cast/crew gifts for every play I'm in. It's not an uncommon sight at rehearsals or performances to see me during breaks sitting there with a pair or two of needles in my hand, and a ball of yarn falling out of my knitting bag and rolling along the floor somewhere. It's a way to create a tangible piece of art to remember the experience of the intangible and temporary piece of art that the group of us collectively makes. I had originally only started making flowers for people (I mean, what actor doesn't like getting flowers, right?), but after a couple plays, that just got boring. So I started personalized items for everyone. Everyone has a unique part to play. Why shouldn't they get a unique gift? So I make things based on character moments or inside jokes, and things unique to the play.

For *The McAdo*, there were the ones celebrating Scotland like director **Michelle Haché's** unicorn (the national animal of Scotland) and music director **Jeffery Jones-Ragona's** Nessie. There were ones



based on moments in the script like **Patricia Combs** (Katishagh) getting an "ill-omened owl" and **Holton Johnson** (Pubagh) getting Nanky Doug's severed head since "Now though you'd have said that head was dead / (For its owner dead was he). / It stood on its neck, with a smile well-bred, / And bowed three times to me!" An



inside joke meant that **Julie Allison** (Pretty Jean) got a log to caber toss, and **Carlee Abschnieder** (red clan ensemble) got a red skirt as a gentle poke for her skirt falling off during the one performance we did have. While this production was so unfortunately short lived, it doesn't mean it wasn't real, and therefore the art and each artist behind it should be celebrated. And what better way than with presents!



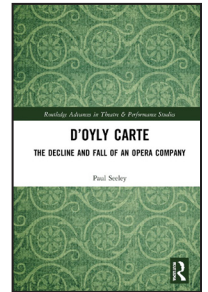
## Sixty-Second Book Reviews, #15



## D'Oyly Carte: The Decline and Fall of an Opera Company by Paul Seeley

Reviewed by Ralph MacPhail, Jr.

Regular readers of these columns will know that I've been delighted that in recent years books have given fresh attention to the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, its leadership, staff, and its running as this remarkable organization toured 48 weeks each year for over a hundred of them, performing the Gilbert & Sullivan operas. Paul Seeley joined "the Carte" in 1976, worked on the music staff, and ultimately served as assistant to the Company Manager by the time the Company closed in 1982—a victim of economic pressures of touring an opera company with dozens of personnel presenting multiple productions in repertory.



Routledge has published Dr. Seeley's history of this company from its formation in 1879 through its demise in 1982 (as well as The Comedy Opera Company, which preceded it, and the "New" D'Oyly Carte, which followed it).

Dr. Seeley is a diligent researcher in a field that often settles for chronicles of personalities and stories, true and apocryphal, and he supports his objective history with sources, many primary and some only recently made available. It is, then, a welcome history that delves behind the scenes in the beloved company and exposes its shortcomings, some recognizable from its earliest days, that led to its refusal to change with the times and its ultimate demise.

This book is a balanced study, even if written by an insider. The management of the company, following the expiry of the Gilbert copyright in 1961, supposedly overseen by the newly formed D'Oyly Carte Opera Trust (composed of trustees with little knowledge of music, theatre, its combination, or touring) was remarkably inept and resistant to changes demanded by new audiences, new economies, and new theatrical artistry and realities. It's a sometimes sad but always enlightening history, even for one who reveres the company as he knew it (in the 1960s and '70s). Hindsight and the passage of time (and the deaths of major administrators) have made this book possible, and while it will never erase the delight still in the hearts of the company's fans (many of us "Associate Members of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Trust"), it gives a fuller understanding of this much-loved organization and its behind-the-scenes struggles, and makes us even more grateful for the engaging performances and personalities we continue to cherish from photographs, recordings, and in our "theatres of memory."

Paul Seeley's *D'Oyly Carte: The Decline and Fall of an Opera Company* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022) is available from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).



## GSA Scholarships Awarded

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 four scholarship recipients, each of whom will receive \$1,000 scholarship for the 2022-2023 academic year.

### GSA Libby Weed Scholarship Program winners

**Andres Felipe Losada Dimante** completed his master's degree in Opera Performance at Butler school of Music at the University of Texas and will be continuing his education this fall at Texas Christian University. He recently performed in GSA's *Fresh Takes* program as The Duke of Plaza Toro from *The Gondoliers* and the role of Florian from *Princess Ida*, as well as a variety of roles with The Butler Opera Center.



**Evan K. Brown** will be pursuing his doctorate degree at University of Texas Butler School of Music this fall. Evan has performed a variety of roles with a wide range of companies, including Austin Opera, Spotlight on Opera, and Butler Opera Theatre. He recently performed the role of Don Jose in *Carmen* with MIOpera.

### Dr. Robert O. Kerr and Mary Ann Kerr Music Scholarship winners

**Sydney Perez's** greatest passion is performing. Over the years, she has proven her steadfast determination to pursue a professional operatic career. She will be pursuing her bachelor's degree this fall at the prestigious Longy School of Music at Bard College. She was recently seen as Aline in GSA's concert production of *The Sorcerer*.



**Molly Snodgrass**, a previous scholarship winner, is entering her third year at The Juilliard School, pursuing her bachelor's degree in opera performance. While there, she has performed in a variety of operas, most notably the role of Dorabella in *Così fan Tutte*. She has also participated in a wide variety of opera programs and workshops from Tanglewood, Interlochen, and Washington National Opera.



### Topsy Turvy Tams

Relocating *The Mikado* to a fictitious Scotland managed to be both easy and hard. Back in the early planning days, the committee found that much of the show just worked in the new setting. Easy! In the years that followed, our talented team poured their hearts, souls, and genius into this production. Hard, but worth it!

One difficulty we did not anticipate was the challenge of finding affordable merchandise. Gilbert & Sullivan shows usually lend themselves to inexpensive merchandising. Fairy wings! Sparkling crowns! Pirate eyepatches! These are easy to find. Perhaps the very practicality of the iconic Scottish kilt and tam should have made it obvious from the outset that Scottish trinkets don't sell for less than the price of show tickets.

For *The McAdo* we skipped the *tchotchkes*. Thanks to the effort of **Lenna Slaughter**, herself of Scottish descent, we ended up with a merchandise table towering with handmade tams. Lenna's approach captured a bit of the Austin spirit. She scoured local thrift stores and in the end purchased stacks of wool and cotton flannel shirts from the Salvation Army. Using one authentic hat purchased online, she crafted a pattern and recruited some helpers to up-cycle the button-downs.

In the end three generations collaborated: **Lenna, Sarah, and Isabella Slaughter** hung out and made hats. Isabella's young eyes were key when it came to cutting out the black lining fabric. Depending on the thrift store shirt size, each one yielded two to four tams. The shirtfronts provided the crowns. Hatbands came from shirt backs and sleeves. Bright pom-poms served as the toorie, and black grosgrain ribbons made tidy bindings for the outer and lining fabrics. From this flannel fray more than two dozen hats were created, providing a joyful explosion of plaid in the lobby. These fittingly functional keepsakes from *The McAdo* are tucked away for next year.

### Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive in early October; the deadline for submissions is **September 19**. Please send your news to [news@gilbertsullivan.org](mailto:news@gilbertsullivan.org). Thanks!

## GSA Remembers John Aielli



John Aielli broadcast on KUT and KUTX for more than 50 years, providing Austin with an eclectic assortment of music; he passed away on July 31. Here are two reminiscences of him.

### John Aielli: The “Voice of Austin”

by Dr. Jeffrey Jones-Ragona

#### GSA Musical Director and Principal Conductor

I first met John Aielli before I lived in Austin, as a singer in the inaugural season of The New Texas Festival (Spring 1993), which became the basis for the Conspirare choir. He was chatting with Danny Johnson, director of the UT Early Music Ensemble, during our rehearsal break. I was eager to meet Maestro Johnson and so made bold to introduce myself. And as happens sometimes, I ended up chatting with John, at one point observing that he had “quite the radio voice,” which brought a good deal of laughter from those in earshot. That was how I learned John was quite literally “the voice of Austin.” And it so happened that the first week I lived in Austin, I was contacted by Robert Mellin of the (then) Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin, about musically directing/conducting *H.M.S. Pinafore*.

Not long after that, I made my first appearance on *Eklektikos* to promote our production. It was there I learned that *Eklektikos*, which I had assumed was a scripted, thought-out morning program, was actually an improvised, stream-of-consciousness performance that was the brainchild of John Aielli, and the antithesis of “corporate radio.” I loved it, as did the thousands who tuned in every weekday morning. What made nonprofit radio so fascinating in the 60s and 70s was alive and well in Austin (where else!) and would remain so even when leadership changes at the University level forced John to abandon much about his style—but he always kept that spark, still managed to keep us guessing and engaged.



Alas, health concerns forced John to step back from a good deal of his work, and John retired. Austin not only lost the last of the freewheeling, non-corporate radio voices, it lost one of its most tireless supporters of local performers. John always asked good questions—he did prepare those ahead of time, but if something struck his fancy, he’d not hesitate to interject a new question, and more than once he made me think about the “why” of whatever he asked about.

Fortunately we are blessed with KMFA, Austin’s brilliant classical station (also one of a kind!), so we should continue to enjoy broadcast support for our productions for some time to come.

Fare thee well, dear John. May the angels greet you in Paradise, with an obscure and beautiful song or unusual chant arrangement. Thank you for your humor, insights, and most of all, your support. *Requiescat in pace.*

## John Aielli

by Ralph MacPhail, Jr.

#### GSA Artistic Director Emeritus

A visit with John Aielli for an appearance on *Eklektikos* or on *Aielli Unleashed* was always something I looked forward to in the run-up to each of the summer productions I directed for Gilbert & Sullivan Austin.



We first met in the subterranean Studio 1A of KUT, and then later in the airier (with windows!) version of that venerable venue. John would welcome us—up to a dozen or more of us—or perhaps just two or three of us around the counter in his smaller office-like studio—even when, we understood, his producers didn’t want him featuring “operatic music” on his program.

I had been told, early on, of John’s far-ranging interest in most genres of music, and his knowledge of and advocacy for many on the air. A memory I cherish of one appearance made this very clear: Jeffrey and I, and several performers, visited with John to talk about the forthcoming production of *The Yeomen of the Guard*. Somehow the favorite number from the opera, “I have a song to sing, O!” came up, and John both exclaimed and questioned, “Did Peter, Paul and Mary record that?” I assured him he was right.

Following the interview, we tuned in to KUT as we drove away, and within minutes, John was playing this song as recorded by the famous folk trio on their album, *Peter, Paul and Mommy*, which he’d located in his vast music library after we left him.

GSA lost a supportive friend in his passing, as did all of musical Austin. I feel honored to have known him.



Karl Logue, Janette Jones, Arthur DiBianca, Angela Irving, and Andy Fleming with Jeffrey, Rafe, and John to publicize our 2019 production of *Iolanthe*





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**THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD - SEPTEMBER 2022**



the Highland Fling in **The McAdo**



standing ovation for **The McAdo** (see pp. 2-3)

## Gilbert & Sullivan Austin

Entertaining and educating Texas audiences since 1976, Gilbert & Sullivan Austin is dedicated to spreading the topsy-turvy humor and joyful music of W. S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan.

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