

# THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Diane Radin

Our planned visit to Scotland got cancelled in June, but there is still time to head to London via GSA's **Victorian Salon** on November 6. It will take a bit of imagination, but the price of admission is a lot less than the plane fare to England. It will delight your ears, eyes, and sense of taste. In a beautiful spacious home in the Barton Hills neighborhood, you will hear the best of G&S and their contemporaries. In addition, the afternoon will include a varied menu of tea, wine, sherry and scrumptious scones, shortbread, fruits, and other sweet and savory treats.



I just finished reading a biography of Charles Dickens by Claire Tomalin. I'd kept waiting to learn what Dickens thought about G&S. He was an avid theatergoer and they lived during the same period in England. But nowhere in the 527 pages of her excellent book does Ms. Tomalin make mention of either Gilbert or Sullivan. Of course, Google knows everything, so I asked it about those three cultural icons. Here's what I learned from various websites:

Dickens 1812-1870

Gilbert 1836-1911 Sullivan 1842-1900

Charles Dickens was a good friend of Sir Arthur Sullivan. Even though they belonged to completely different generations, Sullivan clearly enjoyed the company of the famous writer. Together they saw Gluck's opera **Orfeo** while in Paris (1862). "He rushed about tremendously all the time and I was often with him," Sullivan said of Dickens. "His electric vitality was extreme, but it was inspiring and not overpowering."

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*scanned by George P. Landow for the Victorian Web*

## A Victorian Musical Salon in Barton Hills

**Sunday, November 6, 3pm**

Join Gilbert & Sullivan Austin for a delightful afternoon of engaging music, delicious treats, and good company!

A salon concert in Victorian England was music for an evening at home with friends. An evening out meant taking in the symphony or the opera, but an evening in was no less musical. Society matrons would host a "salon," inviting the most accomplished musicians to perform for their friends: songs for voice and piano from home composers and from the Continent. Enjoy new songs as well as treasured classics, in a beautiful and intimate setting that Sir Arthur Sullivan himself would have frequented.

Pianist **Karl Logue** will be joined by some of Austin's finest singers to present this Tea Time event: **A Victorian Music Salon.**

Your ticket will include an English afternoon tea with finger sandwiches and Victorian sweets and savories, and beverages such as tea, coffee, wine and more. This event requires reservations and has very limited seating.

**Tickets: \$55 per person**

for reservations, see [gilbertsullivan.org](http://gilbertsullivan.org)

Dickens reportedly enjoyed the music of Chopin, Mendelssohn, and Mozart. He would often attend opera performances whenever traveling in Europe. [Would G&S have been too “low-brow” for him?]

From a 1924 TIME article: Charles Dickens, Trollope, Tennyson, Thackeray, acting, conjuring, photography, the Book of Job, the law, [and] the sea, were among the major interests of William Schwenck Gilbert.

Gilbert adapted **Great Expectations** for the stage and looked upon Dickens as one of his favorite authors. A first-night review from [gsarchive.net](https://gsarchive.net): “**Great Expectations**, one of the latest and most striking of Mr. Charles Dickens’s ever popular novels, has at last found its way to the stage, in the shape of a dramatic version, written by Mr. W. S. Gilbert....”

Dickens is referenced in a patter song in Act I of **Patience** and in another in Act II of **Utopia Limited**.

Others have thought these three must have been connected. Gayden Wren created **A Gilbert & Sullivan Christmas Carol** using Dickens’ 1843 novella but telling the beloved story through new lyrics for songs from a dozen G&S comic operas. For example, to the music of **The Mikado**’s “I am so proud,” Scrooge sings, “My name’s Scrooge, my income’s huge,” to which his grossly underpaid clerk counters, “My name is Bob, I hate my job.” And the Spirits of Christmas Past, Present, and Future sing, “Three little ghosts who, dark and scary, come from a local cemetery.”

Note that GSA member Ira Forman is using the same concept in **Esther, the Clever Queen**, his version of the Book of Esther, which GSA will present in the fall of 2023.

## Austin Theatre Awards Applaud a GSA Fresh Take!

The committee that administers Austin’s annual B. Iden Payne awards for outstanding theatre has announced five nominations for GSA’s 2021 **Fresh Takes** episode, **The Computer Pirates of Penzance Avenue**. The 28-minute streaming video we commissioned from the Density512 contemporary music ensemble and the improv collective American Berserk Theatre was put up for consideration in four categories for streaming productions: best streaming production; **Mykell Jewell** as best leading actor (the Pirate King); two supporting actor nominations—**Charissa Memrick**, a previous



Mykel Jewell



Charissa Memrick



Ron Janik

GSA scholarship recipient, as Aunt Ruth and **Roy Janik** as pirate AARP\*RATE and the office manager; and Density512 executive director **Jacob Schnitzer** for best editing of a streaming production.

This was the longest and most elaborate of the seventeen contemporary re-interpretations GSA commissioned from Austin area artists during the 2021 general shutdown of theatres due to Covid. Production coordinator **Michael Meigs**, an inveterate follower of the theatre scene and chronicler for his website [www.CTXLiveTheatre.com](https://www.CTXLiveTheatre.com), had reported in December 2020 on the zany Zoom-streaming musical **Human Resources** by Mallory Schlossberg that roped in performers from across the country. His review began, “These pandemic times have driven us all a little mad; they’ve also driven directors, performers, and musicians into new digital realms.” (<https://tinyurl.com/5n6men7r>)

When the GSA board embraced the **Fresh Takes** concept, Michael pitched the Human Resources folks, and assistant musical director Kenzie Slottow ran with the idea. Slottow (who later played flute for GSA’s orchestra for **The McAdo**) brought it to Density512 and Austin improv artist Kaci Beeler. Those partners came back with an ambitious proposal that included reorchestration by Nicolas Perry Clark of major numbers from **The Pirates of Penzance**, vocal recordings by local artists, and a wild script by Beeler and her associates. The project was far more elaborate and costly than our initial **Fresh Takes**, but Density512’s Jacob Schnitzer provided a meticulous breakdown and timeline. GSA took the plunge, and the result, a portrait of a mischievous, tuneful bunch of hackers resisting the corporate world, was a musical, visual, and comic delight. It’s still available on GSA’s YouTube channel (<https://tinyurl.com/2p8adwms>).

A nomination is no guarantee of an award, of course, but since our beautiful staging of **The McAdo** is out of the running this year for the B. Iden Payne theatre awards, we’re delighted to be cheering the work of Austin artists from Density512 and American Berserk Theatre. “Pour, oh pour the pirate sherry!”



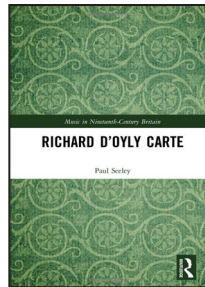


**Richard D'Oyly Carte**  
by Paul Seeley  
**Queen of the Savoy**  
by Elisabeth Kehoe

Reviewed by Ralph MacPhail, Jr.

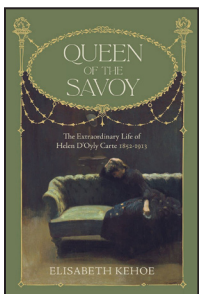
Regular readers of these reviews will know that primary research material has only come to light recently concerning the lives of the three-generation D'Oyly Carte dynasty that was responsible for the continual popularity and success of the Gilbert & Sullivan operas. Two recently published books take us beneath the usual brief, surface biographies of the original producers of the works in the nineteenth century.

Paul Seeley, whose *D'Oyly Carte: The Decline and Fall of an Opera Company* I reviewed in last month's *Savoyard*, has concentrated on the original producer of the operas in *Richard D'Oyly Carte*. This biography provides the most complete chronicle to date, from his Welsh ancestry to his death in London in 1901, of this remarkable agent, producer, theatrical and hospitality visionary, and hotelier. It is meticulously documented and a refreshing, in-depth re-telling of the life of the man often relegated to the status of "Gilbert & Sullivan's third partner." He was so much more.



Chapter 9, "Legacy and posterity," reads like a *précis* of Seeley's later book on the history of the opera company D'Oyly Carte founded and which kept Gilbert & Sullivan on the road and in the public's eye for over a century, which was in no small measure responsible for the survival for so long of their brilliant works.

Elisabeth Kehoe's book on "D'Oyly's" second wife (*Queen of the Savoy: The Extraordinary Life of Helen D'Oyly Carte 1852-1913: An Exceptional Talent for Managing Chaos*) is a lovely and loving tribute to the remarkable Helen Couper Black, who became known as Helen Lenoir and later as Helen D'Oyly Carte, a brilliant career woman with a huge appetite for work and detail but also with necessary "people skills" to tame the at-times irascible Gilbert, and coax the conflicted Sullivan. She also freed



D'Oyly from day-to-day administrative minutæ so he could dream big while she juggled

smaller but critical realities of their several enterprises. She outlived her husband by a dozen years and was responsible for revivals in the early 20th-century that made clear that the Savoy operas, products of their Victorian times, also transcended it. She trained D'Oyly's son Rupert (born of the producer's first wife) to carry on the family businesses (the hotels and the theatre as well as the opera company). The hotels and the theatre survived, as, of course, did the Savoy operas, which secured their place in theatrical history not as museum pieces of the past but as viable entertainments for newer generations—down to our own.

Ms. Kehoe's book is not only beautifully written, but it is elegantly produced with illustrative endpapers, many color illustrations accompanying the text, and even a lovely ribbon for marking the reader's "place." But more important, it is a story of the remarkable success of a Victorian woman triumphing in the worlds of arts and commerce when women were not usually administrators.

Paul Seeley's *Richard D'Oyly Carte* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019) and Elisabeth Kehoe's *Queen of the Savoy* (Lewes, U.K.: Unicorn, 2022) are available from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

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

### Seeking Members for the GSA Board

The GSA Nominating Committee for 2023 consists of **Michael Meigs** (chair), **Aletha Read**, and **Diane Radin**. If you would like to serve on the board, please contact Michael at [ctxlivetheatre@gmail.com](mailto:ctxlivetheatre@gmail.com). The GSA board is a working board—GSA has no paid staff. Board members get a behind-the-scenes look at what makes great theater. The 15-member board consists of a congenial group who are dedicated to presenting the topsy-turvy works of Gilbert & Sullivan in both traditional and contemporary settings to the delight of people of all ages.

GSA will elect members of the board for 2023 at the Annual Meeting, to be held on Sunday, January 8, at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, 8134 Mesa Drive.



## ***A Victorian Musical Salon in Barton Hills***

**Sunday, November 6, 3pm**



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

## **Coming Events**

- Nov. 6 ***A Victorian Musical Salon*** (see p. 1)  
Jan. 8 ***GSA's Got Talent*** and **Annual Meeting**  
Mar. 12 ***Gilbert & Sullivan and Sondheim***  
June 9-18 ***The McAdo*** summer grand production

## **Send Us Your News!**

The next newsletter should arrive in late December; the deadline for submissions is **December 6**. Please send your news to [news@gilbertsullivan.org](mailto:news@gilbertsullivan.org). Thanks!

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**THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD - OCTOBER 2022**

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Mailing Address: **P. O. Box 684542, Austin, TX 78768-4542**

G&S Office: **310 West 43rd Street, Austin, TX 78751**

Phone: (512) **472-4772** (GSA-GSSA)

Website: [www.gilbertsullivan.org](http://www.gilbertsullivan.org) E-mail: [info@gilbertsullivan.org](mailto:info@gilbertsullivan.org)

Artistic Director Emeritus

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**Sue Ricket Caldwell**

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

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