

# THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by **Diane Radin**

Looking back over 2022 in the GSA world, it seems like we have been on a roller-coaster.

After the glorious heights of the opening night of **The McAdo**, we crashed into the abyss of it also being closing night and worrying about the health of the members of the cast and orchestra who came down with Covid. Looking at the bottom line for that production did not induce any great cheer either. For although we could not sell the expected number of tickets, we did pay all cast, crew, and orchestra members the full amount that had been contracted. Fortunately, many ticket holders donated the ticket price back to GSA and the Long Center refunded the service fee, too.

If you would like to contribute to the success of **The McAdo 2023**, donations of any amount would be gratefully accepted. Check our website for information about **McAdo** ticket sales starting in May 2023.

So far, the 2022-23 season has gotten off to a great start with our **Victorian Salon in Barton Hills**. This sold-out event was a new venture for GSA and we hope to host similar events in coming years. You can read more about it on page 2.

Board members **Dave Wieckowski**, **Michael Meigs** (and his extremely helpful son **Lamar**), **Sue Caldwell**, **Aletha Read**, and I worked hard to make the event run smoothly and deliciously. **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** brought together talented singers and musicians and a program of Victorian-era music. **Janette Jones**, as Master of Ceremonies, tied the entire afternoon together.

The entire GSA board anticipates a happier 2023. We look forward to sharing the topsy-turvy humor and wonderful music of Gilbert & Sullivan with our members and supporters in the coming months.

Happy New Year!!!



Sunday, January 8, 2 pm

St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Huffman Hall

Have you ever noticed that we have some wonderfully talented people involved with GSA? This January we'd like to show them off! Join us for **GSA's Got Talent!**, a casual concert showcasing many wonderful performers that we have in our midst. You'll even get to learn some tidbits about each performer!

Normally the January show is a sing-along, but we've decided to change things up a bit. There won't be any group singing, except for the usual closing songs before our banquet. But we're also adding an extra treat: previews of the upcoming shows for 2023. We've got a great lineup for next year and want our audience to get a little taste of what's to come.

As always, there will be business to attend to at the beginning of the show. Members will be voting on the Board of Directors for 2023. (See page 5.)

**GSA's Got Talent!** is Sunday, January 8th at 2 pm at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church's Huffman Hall. The show is free for everyone, though donations are welcome. Be sure to bring a snack or treat for the potluck banquet afterwards!



The church's address is 8134 Mesa Drive, but set your GPS to 4121 Steck Avenue to find the parking lot. Huffman Hall has a covered entrance facing that parking lot.

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## Tea & Sherry on Wings of Song

Their comic operas made W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan famous, and that's the context we associate with their music—clever plots with plenty of whimsy and frequent fantasy, storylines advanced and dilemmas intensified by arias, recitatives, and ensemble performances. Those are the performances that G&S Austin has long sought to simulate under the guidance of eminent scholar Ralph MacPhail, Jr., now our artistic director emeritus.

GSA music director Dr. Jeffrey Jones-Ragona proposed shining a different light on the sector of 19th-century London society that embraced music and art. Sir William and Sir Arthur were very much at home at musical séances and evenings sponsored by their admirers and benefactors. On the menu: tea, sherry, *petits fours*, small talk, conversations with the artists, and warm appreciation of their artistry.

In the illustration by Jennifer Rose Davis for our November 6 musical afternoon, the doughty G&S pair, clad in formal attire, contribute to the society magic. To evoke those special events, Dr. Jones-Ragona chose, gathered and led pianist Karl Logue and the corps of vocalists; Ms Jan Jones, in the role of our benefactress, welcomed guests, introduced musical numbers, and held us in her sway.

This was an afternoon of close-up magic. Not prestidigitation or even predominantly the music of Gilbert and Sullivan; just as in the drawing rooms of London, Dr. Jones-Ragona and the musicians also summoned Haydn and popular airs by Schumann, Bachelet, Schubert, Bizet, and Mendelssohn.

Board member Aletha Read located the intimate venue, a large room in a private home in Barton

Hills, equipped and themed for musical performance, just as at London musical evenings, available space limited attendance. On that mild and sunny November afternoon GSA brought in comfortable seating for fifty. Refreshments were varied and bountiful. The cream sherries proved particularly popular; macarons disappeared in minutes. Stocks of other pastries, fruit, and *amuse-gueles* diminished rapidly amidst convivial chatter.

During the musicale Ms Chantal Freeman, soprano, soared with Sullivan's "The Lost Chord" and H.M.S. Pinafore's "The hours creep on apace." Mr. Timothy O'Brien, bass, tall and serious, performed Haydn's "Sailor's Song" and "Regenlied" ("Rain Song") by Brahms. Ms Bethany Ammon, contralto, delivered moving renditions of Haydn's "She never told her love" and Bizet's "*Le spectre de la rose*."

After an intermission for refreshments and conversation, pianist Mr. Karl Logue opened the continuation with Schumann's "*Intermezzo*." Ms Freeman reappeared with "*Chère Nuit*" by Alfred Bachelet, followed by violist Ms Sara Driver's quietly intense performance of Schubert's "*Arpeggione*." Appropriately, Maestro Jones-Ragona, tenor, delivered Mendelssohn's "*Auf Flügeln des Gesanges*" ("On Wings of Song") before Ms. Ammon became tragicomic Katisha from *The Mikado* with "Alone, and yet alive!"

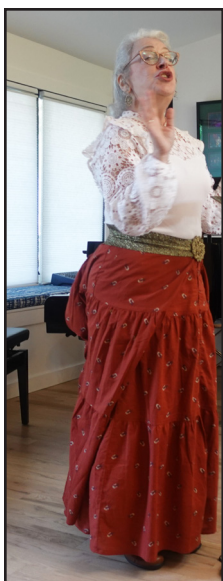
The presentations concluded with Sir Arthur's intricate, beautiful quartet "Echoes," performed with enchanting precision by the Maestro's one-time-only ensemble The Barton Abbey Vocal Quartet.

Visitors lingered after the conclusion of the performance. Several offered their own residences as possible future venues for this kind of musicale. GSA board members who staffed and coordinated the afternoon were unanimous: Dr. Jones-Ragona's newest modulation in GSA's approach to our eponymous artists was a definite and most pleasant success.



**Michael Meigs**, GSA's Production Chair and Bursar, has channeled his inner Victorian to create this delightful review of our recent **Victorian Musical Salon in Barton Hills**.





*Hostess Janette Jones welcomes Jeffrey Jones-Ragona, Chantal Freeman, Timothy O'Brien, and Bethany Ammon to Barton Abbey*



*violist Sara Driver*

### **A Victorian Musical Salon in Barton Alley November 6, 2022**



*GSA President Diane Radin*



*pianist Karl Logue*



see more at [gilbertsullivanaustrin.smugmug.com](https://gilbertsullivanaustrin.smugmug.com)

photos courtesy Michael Meigs and Sue Caldwell



## BIP Awards GSA's *The Computer Pirates of Penzance Avenue*

Gilbert & Sullivan Austin's 2021 experiment in **Fresh Takes** has just been lauded and awarded by the B. Iden Payne (BIP) committee, the revolving group of practitioners and aficionados that has annually assessed theatre arts for the last forty-eight years.

The Payne awards were established in the 1970's in honor of the famous English director who came to the United States in 1913, worked widely across the country, espoused the simplified staging now typical of Shakespeare productions, and taught at the University of Texas in Austin for twenty-seven years.

Recognizing technological change, the BIP folks had created an award category for digital performances for the 2019-2020 season. When the pandemic shuttered performance spaces across the nation in 2020-2021, GSA also went digital, reaching out to many of Austin's idled theatre artists. The seventeen videos we eventually sponsored and featured in four episodes were inventive and wildly different. By giving the artists total freedom, GSA brought G&S into the 21st century in striking, often unexpected ways.

Most of the videos were short re-interpretations, but one—the collaboration sparked with Austin's contemporary music ensemble **Density512** and **Kaci Beeler's American Berserk Theatre** improv group—was astonishingly elaborate and original. ***The Computer Pirates of Penzance Avenue*** was a complete re-conceptualization. **Nicholas Perry Clark** did clever new orchestrations; Kaci Beeler and her confederates rewrote the story, riffing on technology, the corporate world, and hardy bonds of friendship; **Jacob Schnitzler** edited their zany tale, with brilliant computer graphics; and the groups enlisted superb musicians and singers. The result was a bouncy, saucy version bound to appeal to Millennials/Gen Y/and (eventually!) Gen Z. There was no 19th-century fustian to their version of ***The Pirates of Penzance***!

Their 28-minute frolic can be viewed on YouTube at:

<https://t.inyurl.com/2p8adwms>

GSA production coordinator **Michael Meigs** submitted ***The Computer Pirates*** to the BIP Committee for consideration in the 2021-2022 season. The Committee nominated the GSA-sponsored piece for Outstanding Digital Production and nominated Beeler for outstanding direction. **Mykel Jewell** (the Pirate King) was nominated for outstanding lead performer, and both former GSA scholarship grantee **Charissa Memrick** and **Roy Janik** were put on the nomination list for outstanding featured performer.

The GSA/Density512/American Berserk Theatre production fought it out with Jarrott Productions' audio noir production of an original detective story, and the two divided the honors.

Mykel Jewell received the award for outstanding lead performer in a digital production; Charissa Memrick took the honor as outstanding featured performer.

We're delighted that our vigorous, ingenious collaborators were recognized by their BIP Committee peers. The modern-day ***Pirates***' success is an additional reminder of the timelessness of the fun, wit, and melody in the compositions of Sir William and Sir Arthur. And proof that there's more than enough room for all in their topsy-turvy world!



## It Isn't Just About the Money!

by Diane Radin

It is not only dollars that GSA requires to thrive. We also depend on the help of dozens of volunteers. You can become part of this informal "crew" with just a few hours of your time. Here are some tasks that are currently being handled by non-board members who can always use more help:

- Ushering at shows (and then seeing the show for free)
- Greeting audiences as they arrive for shows
- House manager
- Merchandise set-up and sales
- Gala set up, serving, and cleanup
- Membership renewal reminder mailing
- Striking sets after the summer production
- Proofreading newsletters and playbills

And here are some other important tasks that need willing hands:

- Providing occasional meals for cast and/or crew, setting up and serving
- Bringing items from the GSA office/storeroom to the theater (and back again post show)
- Writing grant requests and grant reports
- Helping organize the storeroom
- Publicizing GSA to the Central Texas community

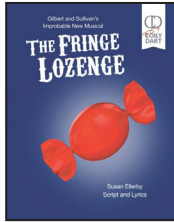
Think about how you would like to help make GSA an even more successful organization and let me know at [diane@gilbertsullivan.org](mailto:diane@gilbertsullivan.org). I would be happy to meet with you to discuss the perfect match between your talents and skills and the needs of GSA.

**"Improbable New Musicals":  
The Fringe Lozenge, Less  
Miserable, ... and Helen  
by Susan Ellerby**

Reviewed by **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**



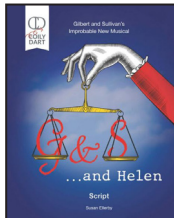
Susan Ellerby wrote and directed three shows for the Coily Dart (get it?) Theatre: **Gilbert and Sullivan's Improbable New Musical: The Fringe Lozenge** premiered at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in 2017; **Less Miserable** followed two years later; and **... and Helen** was written in 2021. I'm bullish on the second and third, thinking they'd make good musicales/mid-season GSA shows, but not on the first, which 1) is rather "meta," dealing as it does with a theatrical company trying to garner rave reviews for their performance at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, and 2) uses many changed or adapted lyrics for Gilbert's originals (though the changes are certainly more skillfully done than those by Robert Bromley Davis reviewed in the September 2021 *Savoyard*).



Each of Ms. Ellerby's libretti cleverly draws on music from all 14 Gilbert & Sullivan operas, runs just under an hour, and features Gilbert and Sullivan themselves as characters.

**Less Miserable** concerns Gilbert & Sullivan's afterlife analysis of modern musicals and their indebtedness to the Savoy operas, then proceeds to tell the familiar story of the wildly popular musical adaptation of Victor Hugo's story with Gilbertian characters singing his lyrics to the usual Sullivan accompaniment. Very entertaining, I'm sure—especially to those who know **Les Misérables** (and who doesn't?). There are 16 named characters in the work, but the original production used a cast of nine (with doubling). The original production in Edinburgh "achieved a sell-out run, was shortlisted for Broadway World's 2019 Award for Best Musical Production at the Fringe and was awarded a Fringe Laurel," according to a blurb on the back cover. And according to a recent message on SavoyNet, the Off-Monroe Players of Rochester, New York, are presenting the show this fall.

**... and Helen** is a musical biography of Helen D'Oyly Carte in which she appears with Gilbert, Sullivan, Richard D'Oyly Carte and a handful of Gilbertian characters, telling the story of her life with "D'Oyly" and the original G&S productions, and singing familiar Savoy opera tunes with their original lyrics, which, in their new contexts, skillfully and often amusingly enhance the plot. Designed for a cast of ten, it can actually be performed by five or six with doubling. I found it entertaining and very accurate, for I read it just after finishing Elisabeth Kehoe's biography of **Helen, Queen of the Savoy** (reviewed in the October 2022 *Savoyard*).



All three of Susan Ellerby's works (each published in separate libretto and vocal score formats) are available from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

December 2022

## News of Members

On October 28, the Queen Sofia Spanish Institute announced the shortlist for the Queen Sofia Prize for translation from Spanish into English. Among the six 2021 works honored was **Michael Meigs's** translation of Dolores Redondo's novel **The North Face of the Heart** (Amazon Crossing). (This book was discussed in the August 2021 *Savoyard*.)

Long-time member **Doug Glenn** died in September after a long illness. He and his wife **Sheila** were both active GSA members in the 1980s and 1990s prior to moving to Middletown NY in 2001. They were involved in the production crew, with Doug serving as lighting technician or master electrician.

Member **Gayden Wren** opines that there may be overlap between G&S fans and those of Laurel & Hardy. He commends to us the new Austin chapter of the International Laurel & Hardy appreciation group, The Sons of the Desert. If you are interested, you will find them on Facebook as "Them Thar Hills Austin."

## Notice of Elections

GSA will elect members of the Board of Directors for 2023 at the **GSA's Got Talent! and Annual Meeting**, to be held on Sunday, January 8 (see article on page 1).

GSA operates without any paid staff—it is the board members who do all the work of the organization, with the help of some additional dedicated volunteers. Our bylaws allow up to 15 members on the board. The following eleven current board members have agreed to have their names placed on the ballot to serve on the board for 2023: **Sue Caldwell, Leann Fryer, Holton Johnson, Janette Jones, Robert Kerr, David Little, Michael Meigs, Diane Radin, Aletha Read, Sarah Slaughter, and Dave Wieckowski.**

Leaving the board after many years of devoted service are **Sandra Ragona, Charles Smaistrila, and David Treadwell.** David has relocated to Vermont and is busy volunteering in his new community. Sandra will continue to volunteer with merchandise sales and volunteer recruitment. Charles will continue to serve as GSA's legal advisor (and occasional house manager). Thank you, Sandra, Charles, and David for your commitment and leadership.

The nominating committee, consisting of **Michael Meigs** (chair), **Aletha Read**, and **Diane Radin**, offers two additional nominees, **Monica Kurtz** and **Derek Smootz**. If you wish to have your name added to this slate or to nominate someone else, please contact Michael at [ctxlivetheatre@gmail.com](mailto:ctxlivetheatre@gmail.com).

In accordance with our by-laws, officers are elected by the board during their first meeting after the Annual Meeting; that meeting is set for Tuesday, January 10, at 7:30 pm.

## Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive around the first of March; the deadline for submissions will be about February 14. Please send your news to [news@gilbertsullivan.org](mailto:news@gilbertsullivan.org). Thanks!



*the Barton Abbey Vocal Quartet (see pages 2-3)*

## Coming Events

Jan. 8 ***GSA's Got Talent*** and **Annual Meeting**  
(see pages 1 and 5)

Mar. 12 ***Gilbert & Sullivan and Sondheim***

June 9-18 ***The McAdo*** summer grand production

For more information, please visit our website at

[www.gilbertsullivan.org](http://www.gilbertsullivan.org)

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



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**THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD** - DECEMBER 2022

### 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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Artistic Director Emeritus

**Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**

Database Manager

**Leann Fryer**

Newsletter Editor

**Sue Ricket Caldwell**

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

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Interim Artistic Director

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