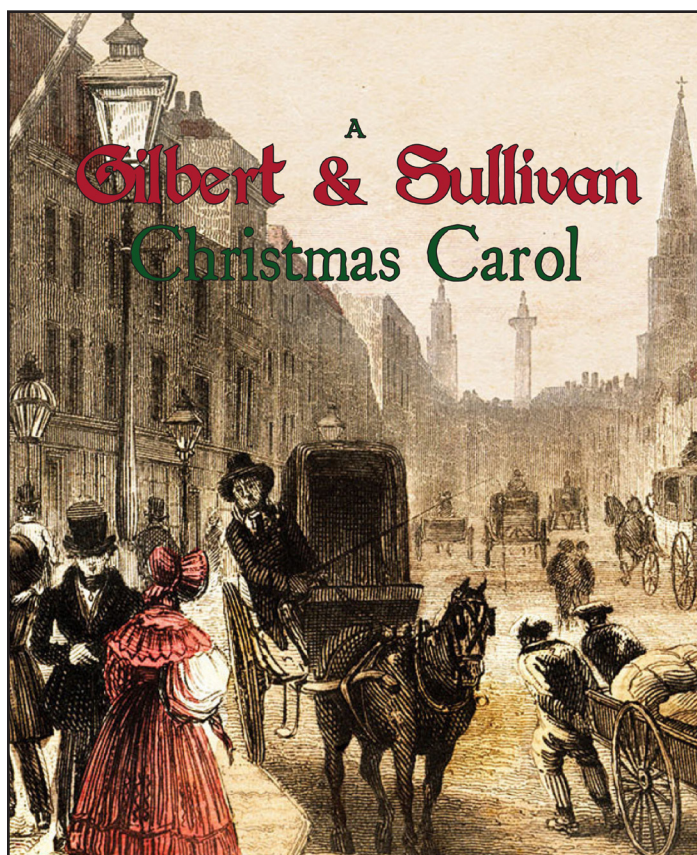


THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD



Gayden Wren meets Charles Dickens: *A Gilbert & Sullivan Christmas Carol*

Charles Dickens' classic novella *A Christmas Carol* was published in 1843. In the 180 years since, the beloved tale has been adapted into numerous films and plays, often as musicals. Thirty years ago, in celebration of the sesquicentennial of the tale, **Gayden Wren** adapted the story using music from various Gilbert & Sullivan shows, with lyrics cleverly modified ("Three little ghosts for Scrooge are we" is one delight). He has two versions of the show, a full-length, full-cast version and a shorter version (about 45 minutes) more suited to the small stage available for our Annual Meeting.

A Christmas Carol is one of the most popular stories in all of English Literature, and was written only 28 years before the first of the operas of Gilbert & Sullivan. The classic tale of hope and redemption is a perfect match for Gilbert & Sullivan's marvellous music. The infamous misanthrope Ebenezer Scrooge would have been a perfect outlet for Gilbert's satirical criticism of the British aristocracy, and the supernatural intercession of three ghosts is exactly the sort of topsy-turvydom the author would have loved!

Our Music Director, **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**, has put together

a team of musicians to introduce the play to us on Sunday, January 7. This will be the Texas premiere of the play. Long-time GSA performer **Sam Johnson** (most recently the Pubagh in June's *The McAdo*) will star as our Scrooge.

You may remember Mr. Wren from his visit to Austin in 2016, when we staged his play *Very Truly Yours, Gilbert & Sullivan*. In the play, he provided a history of the Gilbert-Sullivan collaboration, interspersed with songs taken from the G&S repertoire. He is a New York-based playwright and director, and has been a member of the Gilbert & Sullivan Light Opera Company of Long Island since 1976; with them and with several other companies over the years, he has sung well over half the male roles in the Savoy operas. He is also the author of *A Most Ingenious Paradox: The Art of Gilbert & Sullivan* (Oxford University Press, 2002), which continues to be in print and well received to this day. He spent a quarter-century as entertainment editor for The New York Times Syndicate, and has worked as a country singer/songwriter since 2016.



Gayden Wren

This event is appropriate for all ages, and free and open to the public. (Donations are always gratefully accepted, of course.) As is our tradition at the Annual Meeting, we invite you to bring munchies to share after the show.

A Gilbert & Sullivan Christmas Carol featuring

Narrator – **Monica Ballard**

Scrooge – **Sam Johnson**

Singers (multiple roles) – **Anthony Ashley, Arthur DiBianca, Andy Fleming, Leann Fryer, Janette Jones, and Annisha Mackenzie**

Pianist – **Nikki Birdsong**

Sunday, January 7, 3 pm

St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Huffman Hall

(see map on page 6)

In This Issue

<i>Salon of the Roses</i>	pp. 2, 3
President's Message: Did you know?	p. 4
Caregiver Cafe Concert	p. 4
News of Members	p. 4
Book Report: <i>Trials by</i> and <i>Panto of Opera</i>	p. 5
Notice of Elections	p. 5

Salon of the Roses: When Victoria Met Tudor by Michael Meigs

G&S Austin's second musical salon was a fundraiser, but it was also an illustration of the approach to art and entertainment both of the company and its eponymous artists Sir William and Sir Arthur: a deft mixture of comedy and strenuous respect for the high arts of vocal and musical performance.

The 2022 salon was an experiment, undertaken at the suggestion of Maestro **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona**. Could GSA create an afternoon event reminiscent of elegant London society's afternoons of tea, sherry, and cakes along with musical entertainment of the highest quality? That first event pleased all who attended, so much so that some offered their own residences for a future event.



*persistent drizzle
may have kept our
seating indoors for the
concert, but we enjoyed
the terrace and the
spectacular view of
the gardens during the
intermission*



Simone Scumpia

Dr. **Simone Scumpia** of Austin Thyroid and Endocrinology was one of our 2022 enthusiasts. She and **Dr. Ion Ratiu** graciously offered their Westlake home and gardens for this 2023 expansion of Dr. Jones-Ragona's idea. Members of the GSA working board who arrived to set up the Sunday afternoon event were a bit disappointed that rainy weather obliged them to cancel plans to set up the salon on the terrace overlooking the extensive gardens. Moving the rented folding chairs inside created a somewhat crowded but eminently cozy locale for the event. The lovely home, its exterior walls painted a delicate yellow to evoke Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna or Louis XIV's Versailles, is furnished with an extensive collection of paintings and pieces of art that gave authenticity to the imagined setting of "Lady Jane's" leisurely London

afternoon. An additional comic touch was provided by board member **Derek Smootz** as the herald who greeted and announced arriving audience members, often conferring titles of nobility that made them smile.

GSA favorite **Janette Jones** played *Lady Jane*, our mistress of ceremonies, with a mix of whimsy and seriousness. GSA music director Dr. Jones-Ragona, who also invited the artists and chose the musical pieces, opened the afternoon with Thomas Linley's *O bid your faithful Ariel* in his fanciful identity as *Geoffrey St. John-Smythe*. In two sequences separated by a pause for audience members to enjoy generous supplies of sweets, berries, cookies,



Derek Smootz



Lady Jane and Geoffrey St. John-Smythe



the cast (l-r): Maimy Fong, Patricia Combs, Jeffrey Jones-Ragona, June Julian, Holton Johnson, Laurel Lawshae, Janette Jones, and Diane Radin



a small sampling of the many culinary delights provided for the intermission

Salon of the Roses: When Victoria Met Tudor



Champagne LaBel, Luciano Gatti Amore, and Wilhelmina Zibell

tea, wine, and sherry, those attending were entertained by GSA stalwarts **June Julian** (as *Champagne LaBel*), **Holton Johnson** (as *Luciano Gatti Amore*), and **Patricia Combs** (as *Wilhelmina Zibell*). Pianist **Maimy Fong** (*Madame Fong*) supported the singers and performed Chopin's delicate *Valse du petit chien*. Violinist **Laurel Lawshae**, concertmaster of GSA's Gillman Light Opera Orchestra since as long as the writer has been associated with the company (soon, 14 years!), left the shadows of the orchestra pit to stand before the audience (as *Lorella "Cannone" di Genova*) and deliver



Madame Fong



Laurella "Cannone" di Genova

Mendelssohn's *A Song without Words* in the first sequence and a melody by HRH Prince Albert to open the second. The musical offerings ranged from Schubert and Bach to (who else) Gilbert & Sullivan, with three numbers from next summer's grand production, ***The Yeomen of the Guard***.

A word about GSA's working board. This was a delightful event but not a catered one. All arrangements and gustatory delights were made or provided by board members who take great delight in Gilbert & Sullivan and in providing artists the opportunities to perform the works. GSA has no paid administrative staff, but all performers and musicians are compensated. Board president **Diane Radin** baked many of the delights on offer. **Monica Kurtz** provided beautiful cheese platters. **Aletha Read** drove all the way to Dripping Springs to bring us fresh meat pies from The Great British Baking Company, plus scones from



Lady Di

see more at gilbertsullivanaustrin.smugmug.com

October 29, 2023



Lady Jane introduces Mlle LaBel



"I have a song to sing, O!"

Austin's Brentwood Social House, the day of the Salon. Other board members baked or procured the rest of a generous spread and ample offering of drinks. Diane Radin even performed that afternoon as *Lady Di*, reciting Edward Lear's "The Owl and the Pussycat" — and declined compensation!

Gilbert & Sullivan Austin has been motivated throughout its 47-year existence by the spirit of fun and the reverence for art. Those guiding principles, the intrepid courage of a small working board, and Austin's unbounded musical talent promise fair for the continuation of GSA's mission.



Kay and Russell Gregory
enjoying the feast at
intermission

wonderful treats and
conversation during
intermission



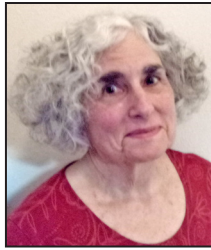
a rapt audience enjoys every performer

photos courtesy Michael Meigs and Sue Caldwell

Did you know ...?

by Diane Radin

Did you know that Gilbert & Sullivan Austin depends on grants from public and private foundations to mount the quality productions that our audiences have come to expect and appreciate?



Pre-COVID, the City of Austin's Cultural Arts Division helped underwrite our grand productions with grants ranging from \$17,400 in 2014 to as much as \$25,500 in 2016, 2017, and 2018. Their 2024 grant application focused on diversity and inclusion and although GSA has made concerted efforts in fulfilling those criteria, we were denied any support. We congratulate the many groups that did receive grants but are very disappointed that GSA is not among them.

Our grand productions cost more than \$120,000, with a large portion of that going to the artists involved in the show, from the singers to the orchestra members to the crew and the directors (music, stage and production). These are all drawn from the rich pool of talent we are blessed with in Austin. They deserve even more compensation, considering the time they spend on rehearsals and learning their parts, but understand that we are a non-profit organization that seeks to attract audiences of all ages.

GSA has some reserves, but a substantial shortfall of the sort we had last year and again project for 2024 is not sustainable and poses an existential problem for us. GSA is the second oldest (after ZACH) continuously performing arts organization in Austin. We attract audiences of all ages, from young children to senior citizens, with consistently excellent major productions, concert versions, musicales, salon concerts, and more. We'd like to be around for our 50th anniversary Gala in 2026 and for many years beyond that, too.

If you have a connection to a foundation that supports the arts, please share that information with me. If you have any ideas for ways that GSA can fill that shortfall, I, or one of our other board members, would be happy to discuss them with you. This goes beyond the "let's hold a bake sale" type of fundraising.

As 2023 draws to a close, please consider a donation to GSA among your end-of-year philanthropic gifts. All donations are tax deductible, and you will receive a letter acknowledging your gift.

I hope to see you at our annual meeting on January 7th. (See the article on page 1 and the Notice of Elections on page 5.) We are excited to be bringing on five new board members to join the ten who have devoted years to GSA and have agreed to continue. As a GSA dues-paying member, you will get to elect the slate proposed by the nominating committee—or run for the board from the floor.

Caregiving Cafe Concert

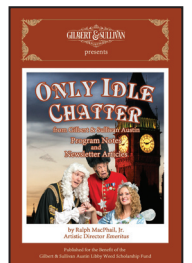


Lynn Greenblatt, founder of Caregiving Cafe, invited Gilbert & Sullivan Austin to join other Austin musicians in honoring caregivers with a free concert on Saturday afternoon, November 4, at the Lakeway Activity Center.

Janette Jones put together a charming scene using three lovely numbers from *The Pirates of Penzance*. **Jeanne Sasaki** accompanied as **Holton Johnson** asked if there was a maiden for him, **June Julian** replied that she could love a poor wand'ring one, and the two of them worked through the problems of honor and leap year birthdays. It was a joy to share our love of Gilbert & Sullivan's beautiful and witty creations. Jeanne, as always was perfection and Holton in his pirate boots and belted on sword was a fabulous romantic leading man for June in her fair maiden Victorian dress and bonnet who sang with an amazing sparkling coloratura!

News of Members

Only Idle Chatter from Gilbert & Sullivan Austin is a new book by GSA Artistic Director Emeritus **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.** It consists of his program notes and newsletter articles from 2010 to 2020; a foreword by the late, beloved **Libby Weed**; plus an introduction, extensive notes on the articles, reproductions of playbill covers, and comprehensive bibliography.



All income from the sale of the book will go directly to the Libby Weed Gilbert & Sullivan Austin Scholarship Fund.

Only Idle Chatter will be available from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and [Lulu.com](https://www.lulu.com) by the end of the year. More information will be in the next issue of *The Austin Savoyard*.

The Trials by Opera
by Jean Gouldsmith Skinner,
Linda Barker, & Miles Bailey
The Panto of the Opera

A Pantomime by Stuart Arden

Reviewed by **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**

I had high hopes before reading *The Trials by Opera: Gilbert and Sullivan and Richard D'Oyly Carte*, the latest in a long line of dramatic works attempting to tell the story of the collaboration that created the Savoy operas.

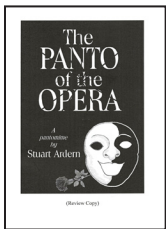
It quickly became clear that the authors had done their homework, for they cover highlights of the collaboration accurately (there are a few lapses), but the “play in two acts” is episodic, unbalanced, needs over two dozen named characters, multiple sets, and uses music inconsistently.

The play is divided into 17 scenes. Act I (Scenes 1-8) covers *Trial by Jury* through the “*Pinafore* riot” (1875-1879); Act II (Scenes 9-16) covers *The Pirates of Penzance* through the “carpet quarrel” following *The Gondoliers* (1880-1889). The emphasis in Act I is on *H.M.S. Pinafore*, and Act II is focused on *The Mikado*. I had the impression that Act I rather “got away” from the authors, and the unevenly balanced Act II became a rush to finish the story.

Act I features the Judge’s song from *Trial by Jury* and “George Grossmith” singing “When I was a lad.” “Suggested music” is often, well, suggested as transitions between the scenes. The Policeman’s song, “Three little maids,” and (most of) the Mikado’s song are featured in Act II.

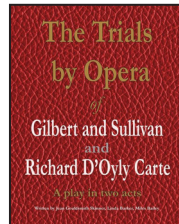
Scene 17 features Gilbert, Sullivan, Richard and Helen D’Oyly Carte singing rewritten lyrics to “I’ve got a little list” to finish the story. Like many parody lyrics, they remind the reader of Gilbert’s genius by demonstrating how difficult it is to emulate him.

I was hoping that I would be able to recommend this entertainment to GSA for a mid-season show, but I can’t. But to end on a positive note, adding a copy to one’s library is a very economical investment. The price is right!



I also had high hopes when I received a flyer from the venerable G&S company The Arden Singers of Arden, Delaware, advertising their forthcoming production of *The Panto of the Opera*. The show contains the characteristics of traditional English “pantomime” of which the vast majority of American theatregoers are not familiar: traditional responses from the audience when prompted from the stage, absurd anachronisms, the “dame” character (an older man dressed and made up typically as an overweight past-middle-aged woman), terrible puns: all-in-all delightful to Anglophiles like me. (And an important influence on the evolution of Savoy opera.)

I’ll keep this script in my library because it contains two characters, Schwenck and Seymour (Gilbert’s and Sullivan’s middle names)



who do nothing more than appear twice to offer two punny Savoy opera titles.

The plot is coherent, but I suspect most readers of this column would be puzzled by much of the traditional panto elements, and the fact that one would need to order a copy from England may influence a final decision to let this one pass. (Had I known more about it before ordering, I would have, too, even though I love pantomime.)

Jean Gouldsmith Skinner, Linda Barker, and Miles Bailey’s *The Trials by Opera: Gilbert and Sullivan and Richard D’Oyly Carte* (Gloucester: The Choir Press, 2022) is available from [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). Stuart Arden’s *The Panto of the Opera* is available from Lazy Bee Scripts (www.lazybeescripts.co.uk).

Notice of Elections

GSA will elect members of the Board of Directors for 2024 at our **A Gilbert & Sullivan Christmas Carol and Annual Meeting**, to be held on Sunday, January 7 (*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 ten current board members have agreed to have their names placed on the ballot to serve on the board for 2024: **Sue Caldwell, Leann Fryer, Janette Jones, Monica Kurtz, Michael Meigs, Diane Radin, Aletha Read, Sarah Slaughter, Derek Smootz, and Dave Wieckowski.**

David Little and Dr. **Robert (Bob) Kerr** are stepping off the GSA board after many years of service.

David oversaw publicity for the grand summer productions for many years, creating gorgeous posters, video promotions, still photographs, interview opportunities for cast members on the radio, and more. David will continue to help with promotional videos. Thank you, David.

Bob and his wife, **Mary Ann**, have supported GSA’s scholarship program, fully funding two of those scholarships for young singers to advance in their careers. They have been generous supporters of GSA with their many significant donations. As the GSA “doctor in residence” he helped GSA get through the COVID pandemic with sensible advice and suggestions. Thank you, Bob.

The nominating committee, consisting of **Diane Radin** (chair), **Sarah Slaughter, Aletha Read, and Monica Kurtz**, offers five additional nominees: **Dalton Flake, Bill Hatcher, June Julian, Laurel Lawshae, and Susan Weed Womack**. Nominations will also be accepted from the floor at the Annual Meeting.

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 9, 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. Thanks!

A Gilbert & Sullivan Christmas Carol & Annual Meeting



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.



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

Coming Events

- Jan. 7 **A Gilbert & Sullivan Christmas Carol and Annual Meeting** (see pages 1 & 5)
- March **Trial by Jury ... and More**
- Summer **The Yeomen of the Guard** summer grand production

For more information, please visit our website at

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/.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Nonprofit
Organization
US Postage Paid
Permit No. 2054
Austin, Texas



Top line of mailing label is date when your membership expires.

THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD - DECEMBER 2023

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.

**Annual Grand Productions • Concert Productions
Educational/Community Outreach**

Musicales • Music Scholarships • Newsletters

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 E-mail: info@gilbertsullivan.org

Artistic Director Emeritus

Database Manager

Newsletter Editor

Ralph MacPhail, Jr.

Leann Fryer

Sue Ricket Caldwell

This project is funded and supported
in part by a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts
and in part by an award from the National Endowment for the Arts.



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

Music Director

Jeffrey Jones-Ragona

Board of Directors

Diane Radin

President and CEO

Sarah Slaughter

Vice President and Publicity Director

Dave Wieckowski

Treasurer and CFO

Aletha Read

Secretary and Technology Coordinator

Michael Meigs

Production Chair and Bursar

Sue Caldwell

Publications and Historian

Leann Fryer

Musicale Coordinator

Janette Jones

School Outreach & Musicale Director

Robert O. Kerr

Fund-Raising Coordinator

Monica Kurtz

Office Manager

David Little

Videographer

Derek Smootz

Scholarship Chair