

THE AUSTIN SAVOYARD



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Diane Radin

H.M.S. Pinafore – A Rare Treat

The April 11 issue of the *New York Times* featured a theater review by Jesse Green that began: "Great musical comedies are great mysteries, and not just because

they are so rare. They're also mysteries in the way they operate. To succeed, they must keep far ahead of the audience, like thrillers with twists you can't see coming. They are whodunits with songs instead of murders."

After reading this paragraph, I thought, "Why, that describes all the works of Gilbert & Sullivan, including GSA's upcoming grand production of *H.M.S. Pinafore*." No great surprise since it was that duo who pretty much invented the genre and have been an inspiration for contemporary musical comedies ever since.

Even if you have seen *Pinafore* in the past, the way the "mystery" is resolved still delights.

And this is not precisely the same *Pinafore*. Maestro **Jeffrey Jones-Ragona** and Director **Carol Brown** are including two songs that Gilbert dropped from the original show because his singers were not up to performing them. GSA's performers are excited to be including them in this production. In addition, some dialogue has been added to make a turn of the plot more transparent. (See Jeffrey's article about all this on p. 4.)

There is no mystery about the new venue GSA is using for this production—and for many to follow. The MacTheatre at the McCallum Fine Arts Center is a winning setting for GSA and its audiences. There is ample free parking at this central Austin location. The theater is well equipped with excellent sound and lighting components. The cast will be happy to see that they have two dressing rooms with lots of mirrors and good



lighting as well as a bathroom in each. The crew is thrilled with the ease of loading into this theater. The spacious lobby has room for the opening night gala and merchandise sales as well as concessions (help yourselves; donations very gratefully accepted). Be sure to check out the beautiful *Pinafore* T-shirts (\$25) designed by **Barb Jernigan**.



Take note of special features on five of the seven show dates:

- Friday, June 13 – Free Gala Buffet after this opening night performance
- Saturday, June 14 – Pre-show Director Talk
- Sunday, June 15 (Father's Day) – Pre-show Children's Activities
- Thursday, June 19 – Discount Thursday
- Saturday, June 21 – Pre-show Director Talk and ASL interpreting

For best seats, please purchase your tickets in advance. This two-and-a-half-hour show is appropriate for children and adults of all ages. All performances will be supertitled.

You won't want to miss this "rare" treat. In the forty-nine years that GSA has been part of the Austin cultural scene, we have produced fully-staged *H.M.S. Pinafore* just six times before (1976, 1989, 1994, 2000, 2006, 2014). In 2019, our concert version of the show included Jeffrey Jones-Ragona in the role of Ralph Rackstraw.

I hope to see you on board the *H.M.S. Pinafore*!

Are we playing your song?

Wouldn't you like to be able to say, "They are playing my song!" when your favorite lyrics from *H.M.S. Pinafore* are being sung on stage? For a donation of \$1000 to GSA, you may select any song in the show to be "your" song. Your sponsorship will be listed in the *Pinafore* playbill if received by May 15 and will be recognized from the stage at the start of the show.

Some of the most popular songs are:

- "I'm called Little Buttercup" (Buttercup)
- "I am the Captain of the *Pinafore*" (Captain Corcoran)
- "I am the monarch of the sea" (Sir Joseph and his Sisters, Cousins, and Aunts)
- *"When I was a lad" (Sir Joseph)
- "Things are seldom what they seem" (Buttercup & Captain Corcoran)
- "Never mind the why and wherefore" (Captain Corcoran, Sir Joseph, Josephine)
- "He is an Englishman"

*Sponsored song as we go to press.

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Celebrating the Community of Theatre

The scope, sophistication, and brilliant professionalism of GSA's grand summer productions—certainly those over the past twenty-five years—are such that few are aware they evolved from informal evenings around the piano in the homes of aficionados, principally within the University of Texas community.

The community tradition persists, and for this forty-ninth year after the founding of the Gilbert & Sullivan Society of Austin (now simply "Gilbert & Sullivan Austin"), the all-volunteer board embraced the idea of suspending a weekend music rehearsal for **H.M.S. Pinafore** and insisting instead that cast and crew gather on a Saturday afternoon for a free potluck outdoor picnic. That requirement was even written into all the contracts. No formal program; no performing; families welcome; opportunities for children's games. The aim was to provide the opportunity for GSA friends and the hard-working participants to relax, chat, snack, and celebrate the community theatre origins of our path-breaking organization.

Monica Kurtz, our longtime stage manager for grand productions, came up with the idea and worked out the details with **Melissa McKnight**, managing director of The Vortex, a popular performing arts complex on Manor Road near the university. Melissa and Vortex Producing Artistic Director **Bonnie Cullum** generously made available the extensive yard and terrace; they even arranged for the complex's Butterfly Bar to open early that day in case thespians, techs, friends, and relations should be thirsty for something in addition to the water that was dispensed at no cost.



Bill Hatcher uncovers meat trays

The weather threatened not to cooperate, but Friday rainstorms gave way on Saturday, April 5, to a cool and gusty but dry day. The Vortex yard filled rapidly after the 3 pm start time; mixed music from light opera provided a lively background. Volunteers had set up tables both inside and out for the comestibles donated for sharing. Those ranged from veggies and dips to trays of

barbecue beef and pork. And oh so many cookies and sweet nibbles! Unfortunately, because of the uncertain weather, few children attended. Nothing daunted, a number of attendees happily had their faces painted.

H.M.S. Pinafore t-shirts were available for purchase at advance discount prices. That's another community tradition: a t-shirt is produced each year to celebrate the grand summer production. Since 2011, artist **Barb Jernigan** has provided the t-shirt graphics; since 2010, **Michael Meigs** has arranged for their production by Austin Screen Printing. This year they're available both in a unisex crew-neck version and in a v-neck tailored ladies' version. Michael was there at the t-shirt table to sell them (when he wasn't noshing from the adjacent food tables).



Michael Meigs ran Buttercup's Dockside Sales

The picnic with the **Pinafore** players revealed cast and crew not as Gilbert & Sullivan characters but as interesting, open individuals. It removed the strict structure of their many concentrated music rehearsals. In effect, it was a fun and useful cast party, well ahead of the production itself. And it was open to anyone interested in joining the community of those who enjoy the wit and melodies of our 19th-century theatrical mischief-makers. We're thinking of making it a new G&S Austin community tradition!



Tina Pixie Avent paints Brian Minnick's face



David Fontenot with Music Director Jeffrey Jones-Ragona



GSA President Diane Radin with director Carol Brown



but wait, there's more inside the Butterfly Bar



arts and crafts time!

GSA's Picnic with Pinafore Players on April 5, 2025

photos by David Little

see more at gilbertsullivanatx.smugmug.com



Adam and Stormy Gunderson



production manager Jen Rogers and stage manager Monica Kurtz



Jeff Phillips and June Julian



Jay Young and Stephen Reynolds



Kasey Gunderson and Julius Young



Arthur DiBianca runs the autograph book table



Kat Ellison Williams, Leann Fryer, and Kaley Williams



Carlee Abschneider and Andy Fleming



Annisha Mackenzie and Brenham Sean Adams



Andy Heilveil and Sue Caldwell



Paul Provence and Ayden Crocker



Steve Schwartzman and Dave Wieckowski



T. Desautels and Garrett Cordes

News of Members

This June, our very own **Bill Hatcher** is gearing up for an exhilarating week-long cycling journey. As a seasoned rider, Bill has participated in Discovery Bicycle Tours for the past two years and is excited to continue the tradition this summer.

The group consists of eight riders and two experienced leaders. Starting at Battery Park in lower Manhattan, the group will pedal north along the scenic eastern banks of the Hudson River, culminating in Albany. Over six days, they will cover an impressive 219 miles—an unforgettable ride through stunning landscapes and charming towns.

The journey kicks off during the second weekend of our **H.M.S. Pinafore** production. Bill plans to attend opening weekend before embarking on this incredible cycling experience.

VIP Tickets

If you would like to show a bit of extra appreciation to Gilbert & Sullivan Austin, consider purchasing VIP level tickets for **H.M.S. Pinafore**. At \$125 each, they go a long way to supporting this production. Reserved parking for VIPs is in the closest parking lot, along Sunshine Drive, near the handicap parking area. Before the show, Stage Manager **Monica Kurtz** will treat you to a backstage tour. And you will be recognized from the stage at the start of the performance you attend.

GSA appreciates all its audience members, with special gratitude to its VIP ticket holders.

**A Note from the Music Director:
Duet, Scene, and Love Unrequited
by Dr. Jeffrey Jones-Ragona
Music Director
and Principal Conductor
Gilbert & Sullivan Austin**



H.M.S. Pinafore, this year's Grand Production and one of the most beloved of the so-called "Savoy Operas," promises to be an exceptional offering to our audience. **Carol Brown** (Director), **Janette Jones** (Assistant Director), and I have assembled an outstanding cast, and have elected to restore some elements of the original libretto that have either not been seen by our audience in over 30 years, or at all. Namely: Restoring the Act I duet between Josephine and Captain Corcoran (her father), "Reflect, my child;" the Hebe-Sir Joseph-Captain Corcoran dialogue in Act II; and an interpolated aria for Hebe. This last is not strictly speaking a restoration of a formerly cut number, but rather an unofficial tradition practiced by several companies, which, along with the restored dialogue, helps flesh out the character of Cousin Hebe, making her motivations clearer than they may otherwise be. In the most performed version that has come down to us from the first performances, Cousin Hebe rather mysteriously steps out of the chorus and immediately offers her hand in marriage to Sir Joseph. While those in the cast seem to accept it as a natural if not entirely expected development, the audience has no idea who she is, other than the singer of random solo lines in "I am the monarch of the sea." For our production, Ms. Brown selected the air "When he is here" from **The Sorcerer** to satisfy our purpose.

The other addition affecting the character of Hebe is the dialogue between her, Sir Joseph, and Captain Corcoran in Act II, which takes place immediately after Buttercup's dramatic exit following the duet, "Things are seldom what they seem."

This dialogue was cut, not because Gilbert found it superfluous, but because he was not satisfied with the musical abilities of the performer, Mrs. Howard Paul, originally cast in the role. Cousin Hebe's sung lines in Act I were reassigned to a role created for that purpose, called simply "First Relative," which was to be assayed by newcomer Jesse Bond. Ultimately, Mrs. Paul was dropped from the production and "First Relative" was rolled back into the role of Cousin Hebe and assumed by Ms. Bond. This also had the effect of changing, at least outwardly, the role of Cousin Hebe from a matron to a younger character. Jesse Bond was also less certain of her acting/speaking ability, and so the rest of the lines were cut (also in accordance with Ms. Bond's original contract, which specified only singing duties, no spoken lines). Savoyards will debate endlessly as to the value of the lines to the show itself, and here, speaking only as an interested party (dialogue is well outside the purview of the Music Director), I believe this dialogue is both informative and very funny in the hands of an able comic actor (whom we have in **Annisha Mackenzie**, taking on her third G&S role here). Ultimately, it helps us understand a character who may seem peripheral at first, but turns out to be very important, nearly as

much of a *deus ex machina* as Little Buttercup. In addition to these spoken lines, the song which we have adapted for Hebe, "When he is near," further shows her genuine motivation, and humanizes someone who may seem to be an otherwise aloof, even frosty, character. Early on, Hebe was written as a rather elitist matron, making disparaging remarks not only about Josephine but about Buttercup, referring to the poor Bumboat Woman as a 'vile creature.' Thankfully, those lines were excised early in the process, and will not be restored here.

Finally, the restoration of the Act I duet—this was a greater mystery, as it seemed to have vanished entirely. Proof of its existence relies on both "positive" and "negative" evidence. The positive evidence includes that the words are seen in the Lord Chamberlain's copy of the libretto (required of every theatrical production at the time); two mentions in Gilbert's personal diary; and more recently, the discovery in 1976 of a first violin part with some of the music still visible, marked through with an indication to proceed to "Over the bright blue sea," renumbered as 6. The negative evidence is a missing page in the conductor's score and note of a cut, "no. 6 OUT."

"Reflect, my child" was retained as part of the libretto long enough for Sullivan to have composed the music, and had parts for it copied, probably up to the very last week of rehearsals. Once the decision to cut it had been made, there was simply no reason to keep the no-longer-needed music. Long thought lost, it wasn't until the early 1990s that an incomplete set of parts was discovered, which led to a reconstruction of the duet by Bruce Miller and Helga J. Perry, published in 1999 and given its premiere (and a genuine premiere, as the duet never even made it to the opening night in 1876). With a large portion of the orchestration now in hand (all but the second violin part), the vocal parts, of which no extant copies are (yet) known, were drawn by inference from the violin and flute lines, in accordance with what is understood to be Sullivan's practice at that stage of his career. The second violin part was rather easy to reconstruct and likewise follows the standard practice of the day. The surviving instrumental parts do not indicate the full orchestra, only the strings and a few winds (flutes, horn and clarinets). The editors chose not to add oboe, bassoon, cornets or percussion, citing similar duets by Sullivan which likewise employed smaller forces. The result is a charming, rather Mozartean piece in which Captain Corcoran seeks to comfort his heart-broken daughter while reminding her of the impracticalities of her situation. We are very pleased and excited to present this as the Austin—if not Texas—premiere.

Why was this number cut? No direct answer comes from either of the creators, nor anyone involved in the early performances. Gilbert was known to make very late changes to his scripts (the cut and subsequent restoration of the Mikado's song the night before the premiere performance is among the most notorious Savoy stories), and it may be that he found this number to be unnecessarily stalling the scene. The original Captain Corcoran, Rutland Barrington, was also suffering a rather severe head-cold and it may have been deemed wise to remove all but his most necessary musical moments (the house manager even going so far as to beg the audience's kind indulgence on behalf of Mr. Barrington). Some suspect Sullivan himself was still

smarting from a critic's accusation of plagiarism in his earlier effort, *Thespis*. It must be admitted that "Reflect, my child" bears at least a passing resemblance to music of Mozart's later operas, which Sullivan was known to admire. As Music Director, I am not convinced of this for the simple reason that there are, in effect, 12 notes used in European music, and with a history stretching back at least 1500 years, some overlap is bound to occur here and there.

These additions could very easily be viewed as mere academic exercise, and understandably so. After all, this comic opera has enjoyed unbroken success as most people know it for nearly 150 years. We did not take the decision to do this lightly at all and had many earnest discussions about how to honor this most beloved of comic operas, but also bring something exciting and new to our audience. We found the answers entirely within the work that Gilbert and Sullivan themselves had already created.

And now, to Sail the Ocean Blue!

Sixty-Second Book Reviews, #30

Mr. Punch's Dramatic Sequels by St. John Hankin

Reviewed by **Ralph MacPhail, Jr.**

William Hyder of Maryland is my Savoyard friend of longest standing. Bill introduced me, back in the late-1960s, to a little book held by the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore that he checked out from time-to-time. Happy was I, several years later, when I found a used copy of the book and sent it to Bill.

I recently thought that I'd like to revisit this book, knowing that in the intervening years, computers had made finding out-of-print books (to read online or to purchase) a snap. Computers have also made republication of public-domain titles easy and (usually) affordable.

I didn't remember the name of the author, but I was sure that "Dramatic Sequels" was a part of the title. It took but one Google search to uncover both author and title: St. John Hankin, *Mr. Punch's Dramatic Sequels*. (The "sequels" had originally been published separately in the renowned English humor magazine.) Before I found an online copy to read, I found a copy of the 1901 book for sale, but it was too expensive to consider purchasing. This led me to Amazon to search for an affordable copy—a reprint—which I ordered: one for me and one for Bill.

When my copy arrived, I rediscovered Hankin's witty sequels to *Hamlet*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The School for Scandal*, *She Stoops to Conquer*, one Savoy opera, and eight other lesser known (today) dramatic works.

What brought me to the book was Hankin's treatment of Gilbert & Sullivan's *Patience*. We will remember that at the end of the opera the Aesthetic Maidens became "every-day young girls" and reunited with their dragoon-guard swains. E. S. Wheeler's illustration for Hankin's book (reproduced) suggests how trying domestic life and motherhood is to the former love-sick maidens in this dramatic sequel. As they lament:

Twenty heart-sick ladies we,
Living down at Aldershot [a garrison town],
Every morning fervently
Wishing, wishing we were not.

"Ennuie" becomes their plaint, instead of "Miserie"!

Clearly they are suffering. As Saphir notes, "I never imagined that when we were married we should find ourselves so completely 'out of it' . . . Out of the world, the fashion, what you please. Aestheticism is out of vogue now, of course, but there have been lots of fascinating 'movements' since then. There's been Ibsen and the Revolt of the Daughters, and Aubrey Beardsley and the Decadence, and Maeterlinck. The world has been through all these wonderfully thrilling phases since 1880, and where are WE?"



E. S. Wheeler's illustration

Married life is clearly not their cuppa, and the backwaters of Aldershot are no substitute for the fashionable world:

I said, "I shall live in Mayfair,
With plenty of money to spare,
Have admirers in flocks
Wear adorable frocks,
And diamonds everywhere."
Yes, that's what I certainly said
When first I consented to wed.

They've even grown tired of "those preposterous clothes" their husbands wear on duty, and mock them in a parody of "A magnet hung in a hardware shop."

The Colonel sings a parody of Bunthorne's "If you're anxious for the shine," exhausting the maidens' um, patience, who vow to apply "for a judicial separation."

"Impossible!" exclaim the officers, but their wives will not be deterred: "Oh, yes, we shall, we cannot consent to remain at Aldershot any longer. At any moment a new movement in the world of Art or Letters may begin in London, and we shall not be in it. The thought is unendurable. We must go and pack at once."

Hankin's title suggests their attitude toward marriage: "Out of Patience; or, Bunthorne Avenged"!

Various editions of St. John Hankin's *Mr. Punch's Dramatic Sequels* are available from several online publishers in reprint formats, but caveat emptor: some (such as the one I ordered) lack the illustrations and seem to have been assembled by a scanner with no divisions, display type, or other niceties such as relevant cover illustrations. I've also discovered that the original book can be downloaded free of charge from the Digital Public Library of America (in facsimile), Project Gutenberg (with reset typography), and other sources which can be found by patiently Googling "Mr. Punch's Dramatic Sequels."

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/.

Send Us Your News!

The next newsletter should arrive in early June; the deadline for submissions will be in mid-May. Please send your news to news@gilbertsullivan.org. Thanks!



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Coming Events

June 13-22	H.M.S. Pinafore summer grand production		
Fri	June 13	7:30 pm	Free Gala Buffet after this opening night performance
Sat	June 14	7:30 pm	Pre-show Director Talk
Sun	June 15	2:00 pm	Pre-show Children's Activities (Father's Day)
Thu	June 19	7:30 pm	Reduced Price Thursday
Fri	June 20	7:30 pm	
Sat	June 21	2:00 pm	Pre-show Director Talk show ASL interpreted
Sun	June 22	2:00 pm	Closing show

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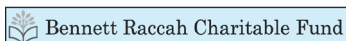
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