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News from the Board

Since our Spring Newsletter went to press, we have had 2 major and very successful events, and we are eagerly anticipating our last (and most mellow) event of the program year, the Summer Apéro. Contributions below review events past and provide details on the Summer Apéro.

Our membership drive has been successful in one important way: we increased membership by 50% (from 30 to 45 paying members). This has been very encouraging indeed. Your board believes that a membership base of 100 active members would be optimal to support programmes on the scale that the Society has sponsored over the last 4 years, and perhaps give us the "courage" to undertake a larger project – such as bringing a full-scale production to our tri-state area. It therefore remains our goal to increase membership in the next programme year, beginning 1 July, to at least 100.

Look for the Society's membership renewal notice over the summer. And please help us to grow by telling others about us and the good (and affordable) times you have had at our events, and perhaps by giving the gift of membership to someone.

By the way, here is an inside tip for you: attend the annual general meeting, which takes place this year on Friday, September 12th, location, tba. It is typically the least well attended event of the year, but one that has never been boring. We conduct our business very seriously, but enjoy at the same time something that could also be called our Annual Fall Apéro. The cost of admission is being a member!

Forthcoming Society events

Summer Apéro

Our summer party will be held on 13 June below Centrepoint in the Lohnhof. The evening starts at 19.00 for 19.30 hrs, and costs CHF 15 for members (CHF 25 for non-members). It will be a relaxing social evening with refreshments, quiz and raffle prizes- an ideal opportunity to meet new people and catch up with old friends!

RSVP by 7 June to info@savoyards.ch.

Gilbert & Sullivan production reviews

Iolanthe

Charles Court Opera Rosemary Branch Theater (London, Islington)

Two years ago on a trip to London, I stumbled upon a delightful theatre and pub called The Rosemary Branch. In our Newsletter No. 8 (August 2006), I wrote a short review of a production I attended at "the Rosie," and ended with the words "this was not my last visit there." However, in seeking to fulfil this prophecy, I was stymied time and time again by the fact that, precisely on the evenings on which I could arrange to be free in London, the theatre was dark. On my last trip to London in early April, success at last crowned my efforts. The Charles Court Opera presented *Iolanthe* and I was able to attend! *Iolanthe* happens to be my favourite piece of the entire G&S repertoire, and coincidentally was the opera featured in the aforementioned Newsletter number 8.

In the context of the Rosemary Branch's intimate (small, closely packed, every seat a good one, and hot) theatre, Charles Court Opera's cast of 14 felt like a cast of 40, just as it should be. The musical accompaniment was provided by the Eaton-Young Piano Duo. The production was well sung, well acted, and humorously done. The two earls, Tolloller and Mountarat, and other peers were convincingly stuffy, detached from reality, and decadent. Phyllis and Strephon made an irresistible pair, and the other members of the cast were all very engaging. The Queen of the Fairies was played by Jill Pert, whose performance was sovereign. I am not sure that she would thank me for the following remark: until I got my hands on a programme, I was convinced that the

Queen was being performed by another well known actress, namely Patrica Routledge, who most of us will know as Hyacinth Bucket from "Keeping up Appearances."

And now, the critical words. The overture was not played, and I suppose that this could be justified by the fact that the musical accompaniment was four (very talented) hands on a piano, and perhaps this was done in the interest of time but I missed it nonetheless. The fairy's costumes, possibly borrowed from a production of Peter Pan, were so extremely silly that I found them mildly irritating and diverting. And, finally, the theatre has open seating, and open-seating arrangements always make me a bit nervous. I did enjoy my fish & chips and glass of ale before the performance, but was plagued by the nagging thought that I should finish up and go and claim my seat.

I truly enjoyed the performance, and I was astounded that *Iolanthe* could be performed so convincingly on this scale. This result is a tribute to the combined talents and teamwork of those on and off stage.

This was not my last visit to the Rosemary Branch Theatre, nor to a production of the Charles Court Opera. Stay tuned.

<http://www.rosemarybranch.co.uk/>
<http://www.charlescourtopera.mfbiz.com/>

Thanks to Bernie MacCabe for this review

Review of recent society events

Annual Dinner Concert

The Gilbert & Sullivan Society's fourth Annual Dinner Concert was held on March 1st at L'Esprit, Basel. This was not a new venue, but the re-christened Treffpunkt Provi, already familiar from previous years.

The evening began with an aperitif, giving us a good chance to meet a very varied group ranging from life-long enthusiasts to those for whom our heroes were until then only a name, and who'd been brought along by friends who were sure they'd enjoy it. For the first time we had a group from the British Circle.

After the main course, we sat back to enjoy the concert. Like the venue, Geraldine Cassidy, Barbara Laurie and Will Wood were appearing for the first time under a new name. The artists formerly known

as The Gilbert & Sullivan Singers are now The Umbrella Singers, reflecting both their broader repertoire and its essential Britishness, adopting the umbrella as a symbol as important to us as the crossbow is to the Swiss.

Accompanied once again by Boris Chnaider on piano, they opened the concert with numbers ("Beauty and Attraction") from *The Gondoliers*, *Patience* and *The Mikado*.

Songs of the British Isles, was a departure from the G&S repertoire, though not from their themes. A selection of traditional songs ranged from the plaintive ("The Salley Gardens") to the boisterous ("The Dashing White Sergeant"), and two songs by Roger Quilter completed this section.

Returning to Sullivan, though not to Gilbert for the moment, we heard his Daydream No. 5 for piano, performed by Boris Chnaider. One can't help feeling that Sullivan would have viewed this with particular satisfaction, and the work was certainly a demonstration of Sullivan's claim to be taken seriously as a composer in his own right.

Gilbert returned for the last two groups of songs, "Love and Relationships" and "Puzzles and Paradoxes", from *Patience*, *The Mikado*, *Ruddigore*, *HMS Pinafore* and *The Yeomen of the Guard*. In this leap year the final number was, appropriately, "A Paradox" from *The Pirates of Penzance*

As always, The Umbrella Singers entertained us not only with the quality of their singing, but also with their wit and sense of fun, an ideal combination in this repertoire.

Before we turned to the chocolate mousses, our guest of honour, the British Ambassador, Mr Simon Featherstone, kindly agreed to draw the raffle tickets. The bottle of whisky which he generously donated unaccountably raised more interest than the magnificent array of other, more directly G&S related, prizes, even though the latter included the Gondola, generously re-donated (yet again).

Many thanks to The Umbrella Singers and to all whose work made this such an enjoyable evening!

Thanks Joanna for writing this review

We are so grateful to Corinna for organising this event and for the help from all the board members especially Bernie in assisting her

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Pouring the Pirate Sherry at the Singalong in April!

On Friday 25 April at the Weiherhof in Basel 30 members and guests of The Gilbert & Sullivan Society gathered for a social evening and to sing some of the best music from one of the most successful and well known Gilbert & Sullivan operas - *The Pirates of Penzance*. In charge of the music was conductor Monica Buckland, the Artistic Director of two orchestras of the technical University, Dresden (Germany) and at the piano we were delighted to welcome back the Canadian pianist Helen Lockwood. Helen who played for the *Iolanthe* Singalong last year, impressed us all again with her expert provision of the orchestral reduction at the piano.

The guests were welcomed with a generous buffet and delicious wine to help them relax before starting and a brief word of welcome was provided by Ann McClymont. An announcement about a proposed "Act-along" to be led by the English Panto Group and Semi-Circle director Angela Robinson was greeted with interest.

As well as conducting the singing, Monica Buckland talked us through the story of the opera with a lot of humour, as we went through the seven pieces of music selected for the evening. We began, appropriately, with the pirates' drinking song "Pour the pirate sherry!" A short explanation of the unfortunate predicament of young pirate Frederic who was born in a "leap year on the 29th of February" was given in the form of the Pirate King's recitative sung by mezzo soprano Barbara Laurie of the professional ensemble "The Umbrella Singers".

Then followed the exciting scene where the pirates suddenly appear and enthusiastically decide to take the young ladies away and marry them "Too late! Ha, ha! Too late! Ho, ho!" intending to "get married with impunity and indulge in the felicity of unbounded domesticity". We all had great fun in the verbal workout of the Major General's song, "I am the very model of a modern Major General" – probably the most famous of all the Gilbert & Sullivan patter songs.

The Weather Song "How beautifully blue the sky" was next on the agenda with the challenge of chorus and soloists singing simultaneously in two different time signatures! The Umbrella Singers' soprano Geraldine Cassidy joined her colleague Barbara Laurie to provide Mabel's and Frederic's solos while

the chorus talked "about the weather"! Even the conductor got in on the act, singing the part of Frederic to Barbara's Ruth in an entertaining duet when Frederic, having seen young ladies for the first time, realises his nanny is not "fair as gold" as he had been led to believe and accuses her "Oh false one, you have deceived me!"

By now, all were well warmed up and ready to tackle the rousing "When the foeman bares his steel" followed by the policemen's song "When a felon's not engaged in his employment". This was sung with such gusto and hilarity that the ladies got to swap roles with the men and become "WPCs" for an encore of this piece. A final short extract of pirates and police in "Come friends who plough the sea" and a reprise of "When the foeman" finished us off – or so we thought – until a spontaneous request from Carlos of Operissima in Schaffhausen had a dozen of us clustered round the piano, sharing musical scores for the G&S anthem "Hail Poetry" in four parts.

After the presentation of flowers to Monica and Helen, we adjourned to the buffet to chat and relax for the rest of the evening. Judging from the feedback on the night, everyone really enjoyed singing the music from *The Pirates of Penzance*. The Gilbert & Sullivan Society is most grateful to the heroine of the day, Monica Buckland, who came at very short notice that morning, by train, from Dresden to lead the evening for us, taking over for Christine Archer who had been taken ill. Luckily her train was punctual and she arrived with just enough time for a quick look once through the music before the evening got under way!

Thanks to Barbara Laurie for writing this review

Su's Mystery Anagrams

The anagrams below are scrambled versions of titles of two Gilbert & Sullivan Operas:

EEPANTIC

ICERINPS SAD

The answers to the anagrams in newsletter 14 are:

NOHAILET = IOLANTHE

THESEDRON'I RUBBN = BUNTHORNE'S BRIDE

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This month's song "Take a pair of Sparkling Eyes"



*Sad
Gondolier
sitting on a
rock next to
a contadine
who is
dancing*

Take a pair of sparkling eyes,
Hidden, ever and anon,
In a merciful eclipse —
Do not heed their mild surprise —
Having passed the Rubicon,
Take a pair of rosy lips;
Take a figure trimly planned —
Such as admiration whets —
(Be particular in this);
Take a tender little hand,
Fringed with dainty fingerettes,
Press it, press it — in parenthesis; —
Ah! Take all these, you lucky man —
Take and keep them, if you can,
If you can!
Take all these, you lucky man--
Take and keep them, if you can,
If you can!

Take a pretty little cot —
Quite a miniature affair —
Hung about with trellised vine,
Furnish it upon the spot
With the treasures rich and rare
I've endeavour'd to define.
Live to love and love to live —
You will ripen at your ease,
Growing on the sunny side —
Fate has nothing more to give.
You're a dainty man to please
If you're not satisfied, not satisfied.
Ah! Take my counsel, happy man;
Act upon it, if you can
If you can!
Take my counsel, happy man;
Act upon it, if you can,
If you can!
Take my counsel, happy man;
Act upon it, if you can,
If you can,
Act upon it, if you can,
Happy man, if you can!

Karaoke, sing along with "Take a pair of sparkling eyes"

http://diamond.boisestate.edu/gas/gondoliers/web_opera/gon_midi/203.mid

This web link will work on some but not all computers depending on how your computer is set up.

Gondoliers Trivia

The Gondoliers, or, The King of Barataria, was the twelfth opera written together by Gilbert and Sullivan. Opening on December 7, 1889 at the Savoy Theatre, *The Gondoliers* ran for 554 performances, and was the last of the G&S operas that would achieve wide popularity. Its lilting score has, perhaps, the most sparkling and tuneful music of them all and calls, perhaps, for the most dancing.

Find the Operetta

Fill in the words missing from this song in 'The Mikado'. Take the first letter of each word and rearrange to form the name of another G&S operetta.

**So please you, Sir, we much -----
--, we have failed in -----
Towards a man of ---- so high -
We shall know better by and by.
But youth, -- course, must have its fling,
So pardon us,
So pardon us,
And ---'t, in -----'s happy spring
Be hard on --,
Be hard on us,
If we're inclined to ----- and sing.**

The solution will be provided in the next newsletter!

Solution to Riddle me Ree from newsletter 14

Comic Opera

Some encounters with Gilbert and Sullivan by Corinna Balfour

It was probably not the very first encounter that I had with Gilbert & Sullivan overall, but the one most worthy of mention was going to the first performance in London of *Iolanthe* given by the Sadler's Wells Opera Company (predecessor of the English National Opera) at Sadler's Wells Theatre on 24 January 1962. This was the first time that a professional company had been able to produce a Gilbert & Sullivan Opera after the expiry of the D'Oyle Carte copyright at the end of 1961.

Sadler's Wells got in quickly with *Iolanthe*!

My father was keen to go to this performance (which had been premiered in Stratford-on-Avon on 1 January), as it was meant to set higher standards of singing and production than had been achieved at least latterly by the D'Oyle Carte Company. I think it probably did, though I don't remember a great deal about it. Certainly the singers were among the Sadler's Wells Company regulars at the time (Denis Dowling, Eric Shilling, Patricia Kern, Elizabeth Harwood). The Band of the Irish Guards played as well as the orchestra. I have kept the programme as a memento in my scrapbook of opera programmes.

The second encounter with Gilbert & Sullivan worth mentioning is that I played the clarinet in the orchestra of a production of *Ruddigore* given by the staff of Headington Girls' School in Oxford while I was at university there a few years later. I enjoyed this, though I don't remember much about the plot (something about ghosts?). What I do remember is that at one point the audience – which presumably was mostly the pupils and their parents – laughed uproariously which had more to do with the particular member of staff playing the role than what Gilbert & Sullivan had written at that point.

The third encounter I would like to mention belongs to my mother. She tells that when she was in London (during the early 1930s) she used to stay with her great aunt who lived at that time at 39 Harrington Gardens. My mother remembers the ship on the top of the house, saying that it was built by Gilbert with the proceeds of *HMS Pinafore*, but an article in the Survey of London notes that it was the success of *Patience*, which was produced in 1881-2, that enabled Gilbert to commission the house from the architects Ernest George and Peto. The ship on the top alluded to Gilbert's supposed descent from Sir Humphrey Gilbert, the Elizabethan seafarer.

Gilbert is said to have remarked "Sir, I would not put my trademark on my house". The house was built in 1882-83 and was part of a small development by the architects that the Survey of London describes as "the extreme point of late-Victorian architectural individualism". The Survey mentions a large number of guest bedrooms and my mother says that it was the only house that she knew, apart from Buckingham Palace, where the loos were set in a wide mahogany top and the flush worked by a handle beside the hole, which one pulled up. The Survey of London does not refer to this, though does comment that a remark by Beatrix Potter that the house contained "twenty-six bedrooms with a bathroom to each (fancy twenty-six burst water pipes)" was wholly fantastic. Gilbert moved out of the house in 1890. My mother's great aunt moved into the house with her father in that year and lived there until her death in 1956.

Many thanks Corinna for sharing this with us

Book review

The following book is listed in the Music Catalogue from Oxford University Press:

'Oh Joy! Oh Rapture!' The Enduring Phenomenon of Gilbert and Sullivan

by Ian Bradley, University of St Andrews

Ian Bradley explores the last 45 years from the expiry of copyright in 1961, looking at various forms of revival, parody, and most of all the surprising on-going and straightforward popularity in schools, universities, amateur societies and circles of enthusiasts.

Published 2007, 234 pages, paperback, cost £14.95

English Book Sale

This will take place on Saturday, 7th June from 9.00 am until 2.30 pm.

Venue:
Oekolampad Church Hall
Allschwilerplatz
4055 Basel (No.6 tram goes direct)

The proceeds of the sale will be donated to the Wohn- und Bürozentrum für Körperbehinderte. For more info: re this, visit www.wbz.ch

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Knowing our operas: 'Princess Ida, or Castle Adamant'

It is certainly no cause for embarrassment not to know or whistle the tunes of all the operas in which Gilbert and Sullivan provided words and music.

There were fourteen of them and the first, *Thespis or the Gods grown old* of 1871, was only performed 64 times. The score was never published and the work is almost completely lost. Then *Trial by Jury* of 1876 is not typical, a one-acter lasting only 45 minutes, set entirely to music and without dialogue. It is very funny and quite musical and sometimes performed by clubs and schools, but was dropped by D'Oyly Carte in 1976.

But then there are the three which have, by present standards, to be regarded as failures; although they had respectable theatrical runs when first produced, they were subsequently seldom performed and today hardly any of us (including this writer) knows the tunes or recognises the words. Indeed, many would be hard put to say what they are about. In the next three articles we will look at these operas.

They include the last two, *Utopia Limited* or *The Flowers of Progress* of 1893 and *The Grand Duke* or *The Statutory Duel* of 1896. The first of these articles however concerns the third, *Princess Ida* or *Castle Adamant*, which opened in January 1884. It followed *Iolanthe* and was in turn, after an unconvincing run of 246 performances at the Savoy Theatre, succeeded (in every way) by *The Mikado*.

It was produced at a time when Sullivan was bored with Gilbert's early plots and, after knighthood, wanted to be a serious classical musician. *Princess Ida* brought him back, enthusiastic about the subject which involved no swapped babies or magic potions, but a serious issue of the day, the move towards further education for women, marked by the creation of Girton and Newnham, Somerville and Lady Margaret at Cambridge and Oxford in the previous 10 years.

But the theme was not Gilbert's own. He had taken it from an unusual source, the Poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson, 1809-92, who wrote an epic poem, *The Princess*, in 1847. The 'Cambridge Guide to English Literature' calls this an 'amorous polemic' and, like many things, it has been largely forgotten today. Even Tennyson, once Poet Laureate, is little studied now, but in his time his works were taken seriously.

The Princess appealed to Gilbert and it is indeed even in Tennyson's 1847 form mildly comical. Gilbert took the story, some of the verse and much of the phrasing, closely following the story and first produced a stage play, also called *The Princess*, at the Olympic Theatre in London in 1870. This was successful enough, and Gilbert reworked it into the libretto of the new opera which was needed to follow *Iolanthe*. It was, despite patter songs and some funny lines, a serious work, all in blank verse and uniquely had three acts. The story is of a prince betrothed in childhood to Princess Ida, daughter of King Gama. However, Ida vows to forego men and becomes an early protagonist of women's rights, setting up an all-woman university. The prince and his companions, disguised as young women, gain entrance, but inevitably they are discovered and trouble ensues. Finally after a set-piece battle and reconciliation where the students nurse the wounded, Ida and the prince come together and all ends well.

Yes, the audiences were sceptical too. A run of 246 nights was not good enough. Although first-nighters were euphoric, the critics were not and the theme could not perhaps engage the broad Savoy middle class public of the day. While D'Oyly Carte could usually keep things going with repeats and royalties, it would be 30 years before *Princess Ida* was produced in London again at the time of the Suffragette movement for votes for women in Britain. Subsequent revivals have been ineffective.

However the BBC did not forget it. In the interlude on September 3, 1939 before Neville Chamberlain's speech announcing the 'state of war' with Germany, they played a recorded selection of Sullivan's music to *Princess Ida*.

As ever, many thanks to Bryan Stone for researching and writing this article for us

The Gilbert and Sullivan Festival

The next International Gilbert and Sullivan Festival will be held in Buxton from the 2nd to the 23rd August. Now in its fifteenth year, the festival has captivated audiences from all around the world and every year never fails to delight.

Established in 1994 by enthusiasts Ian Smith and son Neil, the Festival goes from strength to strength, attracting thousands of visitors to the delightful spa town of Buxton. Ian and Neil had one goal; to enhance the knowledge and understanding of Gilbert

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& Sullivan and ensure that this quintessentially British entertainment continued to flourish.

And they certainly succeeded! The Festival runs for three weeks throughout the summer in the beautiful, Edwardian Buxton Opera House. A highlight is the international competition which attracts groups from around the world performing for a range of prestigious awards.

In addition to the competing productions, are a range of stunning, professional performances every weekend. The Festival's very own Gilbert & Sullivan Opera Company receive rave reviews and always play to near capacity audiences. Their wonderful performances of *The Mikado*, *The Gondoliers* and *Iolanthe* are highly recommended and not to be missed. In addition to the competing productions, are a range of stunning, professional performances every weekend.

As ever, this year's fringe provides dawn till dusk G&S and with around 70 events there is truly something for everyone. Master classes, performances, comedy – there is a fantastic array of G&S favourites to keep even the most dedicated follower spoilt for choice!

The International Gilbert & Sullivan Festival is certainly in a class of its own. It's fun. It's friendly. It's for all the family – a truly wonderful experience!

For all enquiries about the Festival please contact:
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