

Newsletter at a glance

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Items from the Board

If we sent out a multiple-choice quiz asking our members to identify the span of the Society's program and financial year and gave 4 choices, I believe that the right answer would surface only slightly more frequently than the laws of probability would predict for a random selection. That the Society's calendar runs from 1 July to 30 June is admittedly an arcane fact and one that has almost no significance to the daily lives of most members. It does, however, have some significance for the governing board. There are things that need to be done to keep the Society ticking and also to keep it legal.

In the "keeping it ticking" department, I would like to mention that the board has prepared a full calendar of events for the upcoming year, right down to our final apéro & sing-along scheduled for 5 June 2009 at the Alterszentrum Weiherweg. More details on other planned events are to be found below and on our website.

In the "keeping it legal" department, we have recently held our annual general meeting, at which the auditor's report was read and the books of account were approved, the board discharged from liability, and so on. All the legal stuff that needed to be done was taken care of. At the same time, we enjoyed a lively discussion about the Society and its future, oiled by the respectable Spanish wines that were on offer. At the AGM, two new board members were elected, and I extend to them a very warm welcome: Wendy Bucknall and Harry Benjamin.

Building membership will continue to be a priority in the upcoming year. We have made a big jump percentage-wise in the last year, and this is a great accomplishment, but this was done on a small base, so the absolute number of members – now 50 –

remains very modest in the light of our theatrical ambitions (i.e., realising a full G&S production). If you are currently a member, thank you, and if you are not one, please join up to support the cause. Members will receive a renewal message very soon, and future members can simply send a message to info@savoyards.ch or visit our website to sign up.

Forthcoming Fun! - Your Gilbert & Sullivan Society events for 2008/09

Welcome to the beginning of a new season of G&S events and a special welcome to all the new members who have recently joined the society!

Our calendar of events this year begins with a **Lecture Apéro in October 2008**. We are very proud to present our guest speaker Monica Buckland, Artistic Director of the Universitätsorchester, Dresden (Germany) who will be sharing with us her knowledge and experience of Gilbert & Sullivan in her presentation "A View from the Orchestra Pit." The talk will be followed by delicious snacks and drinks!

The Society's **New Year Theatre Visit** to see Pocket Opera in Zurich has proved very popular over the past two years and their production this time will be Offenbach's Barbe Bleu. (It was to accompany performances of Offenbach's La Perichole in London that the Gilbert & Sullivan early collaboration Trial By Jury was created.) The Pocket Opera's company of professional soloists and orchestra have played to packed houses every time we have visited and we have enjoyed thrilling standards of singing and dramatic entertainment. Performances take place from 30 December 2008 through the beginning of January 2009 and if you choose to join us, the Society can organise tickets with a group reduction.

A completely new **Theatrical Evening on Friday 23 January 2009** will combine a taste of practical acting skills with a performance of a one act play. The act-along, lead by the Semi-circle stage director and writer Angela Robinson, will give our members (and their friends) a chance to learn how to feel and look at ease on stage and what to do to give a convincing performance. The drama mini-workshop will be followed by a performance the comedy "Dinner for One" presented by an experienced acting duo, both of whom are members of the Gilbert & Sullivan Society.

The highpoint of the calendar, the **Annual Dinner Concert on Saturday 28 March 2009** at Restaurant L'Esprit in Basle, offers an evening of culinary and musical pleasures beginning with a relaxing welcome apero followed by tasty food and a professional concert. The music, a classical mix of humour, harmony & a surprise theme, includes a selection of the best solos, duets and trios from Gilbert & Sullivan presented by the Umbrella Singers (formerly The Gilbert & Sullivan Singers). The always popular raffle provides a chance for you to win CDs, books and other special Gilbert & Sullivan themed prizes (even a Venetian gondola!)

A new format for the Summer event brings us a **Summer Singalong on 5th June 2009**. Singalongs with conductors Christine Archer of the English Seminar Choir and Monica Buckland of the Universitätsorchester Dresden were so successful that we decided to combine the singalong with the summer apero. What could be a nicer start to the summer than joining a group of lovely people to sing some wonderful music under the expert guidance of a professional conductor and socialising afterwards with some fine wine and delicious snacks?

We hope you agree that the board has done a great job on creating this interesting new programme of events and I am sure you would like to help make this year a success by joining us and participating in the fun! The Gilbert & Sullivan Society look forward to welcoming you at their next event.

Lecture Apero, Friday 20th October

Renowned Artistic Director of the Universitätsorchester, Dresden (Germany), Monica Buckland will be giving a talk "A View from the Orchestra Pit".

Join us for this fascinating Gilbert & Sullivan presentation.

Date: Friday 24 Oct. 2008, 19:30 hrs

Venue: Ernst & Young
Aeschengraben 9
Basel

Cost : CHF 25 CHF for G&S Society members/ CHF 35 for non-members (including a generous apero)

RSVP: info@savoyards.ch by 21 Oct. to help us with our planning

Su's Mystery Anagrams

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

PAF RENHOMSI

GRIDORUDE

The answers to the anagrams in newsletter 14 are:

EEPANTIC = PATIENCE

ICERINPS SAD = PRINCESS IDA

Riddle me Ree

*The object of this riddle-me-ree
Is to find the name of a DVD!*

My first is in Tom but not in Sue,
My second's in hotpot but not in stew.
My third's in potato and also in pea,
My fourth's not in hear but is in see.
My fifth is in pretty but not in fair -
And now you're already halfway there!

My sixth is in ten and also in two,
My seventh's in much but not in few.
My eighth is in girl but not in lad,
My ninth is in have but not in had.
My last is in merry but not in sad.

Riddle-me-riddle-me-riddle-me-ree
What is the name of this DVD?

Puzzle

What is the word missing from the following song and which operetta does it come from?

**** feeds on many kinds of food, I know,
Some **** for rank, and some for duty:
Some give their hearts away for empty show,
And others **** for youth and beauty.
To **** for money all the world is prone:
Some **** themselves and live all lonely:
Give me the **** that ****s for **** alone -
I **** that **** - I **** it only!

*Solutions to the Riddle me Ree and the puzzle above
will appear in the winter newsletter*

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Solution to Find the Operetta (newsletter 15)

The original puzzle appeared in newsletter 15 like this: 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 **regret**
if, we have failed in **etiquette**
 Towards a man of **rank** so high -
 We shall know better by and by.
 But youth, **of** course, must have its fling,
 So pardon us,
 So pardon us,
 And **don't**, in **girlhood's** happy spring
 Be hard on **us**,
 Be hard on **us**,
 If we're inclined to **dance** and sing.

The solution is Ruddigore!

We are very grateful to Val Walder for contributing puzzles and riddles for the newsletter

HMS Pinafore catchy and well loved lyrics and tunes

When it opened in 1878, Pinafore became a source of popular quotations, such as the exchange:

"What, never?"
 "No, never!"
 "What, never?"
 "Well, hardly ever!"

Also popular was the verse, "For in spite of all temptations / To belong to other nations / He remains an Englishman."

Little Buttercup, the song featured in this month's newsletter is one of the most popular songs from the opera. It is a solo introducing the round, rosy, but mysterious bumboat woman.

"A British tar" is a glee for three men describing the ideal sailor, composed by Sir Joseph "to encourage independent thought and action in the lower branches of the service and to teach the principle that a British sailor is any man's equal, excepting mine";

"Never mind the why and wherefore" (a trio for the Captain, Josephine, and Sir Joseph); and Sir Joseph's patter song

"When I was a lad" (like the judge's song in Trial by Jury, a satire on the meteoric career of an incompetent man to high office – in this case the story bears similarities to the career of William Henry Smith, the newsagent who had risen to the position of First Lord of the Admiralty in 1877).

Pinafore remains one of Gilbert and Sullivan's most popular works, perhaps because of its infectious tunes and generally well-constructed libretto.

This month's song "Little Buttercup"



*Captain
 Corcoran
 touching a
 short
 Buttercup
 under the
 chin*

I'm called Little Buttercup — dear Little Buttercup,
 Though I could never tell why,
 But still I'm called Buttercup — poor little Buttercup,
 Sweet Little Buttercup II!

I've snuff and tobaccy, and excellent jacky,
 I've scissors, and watches, and knives;
 I've ribbons and laces to set off the faces
 Of pretty young sweethearts and wives.

I've treacle and toffee, I've tea and I've coffee,
 Soft tommy and succulent chops;
 I've chickens and conies, and pretty polonies,
 And excellent peppermint drops.

Then buy of your Buttercup — dear Little Buttercup;
 Sailors should never be shy;
 So, buy of your Buttercup — poor Little Buttercup;
 Come, of your Buttercup buy!

Karaoke, sing along with "Little Buttercup"

http://diamond.boisestate.edu/gas/pinafore/web_opera/pin_midi/pin02.mid

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

What G&S means to me by David Laurie

My earliest recollection of G&S was in our local theatre in Largs, Scotland, watching my father play Pooh-Bah in the Mikado - I must have been only about age 6. I had watched him rehearse at home, with my mother reading the other actors' lines, so I knew that the fat Lord-High-Everything-Else was in fact my much slimmer Dad with two of Mum's sofa cushions strapped under his kimono. I remember laughing out loud at Pooh-Bah's grovelling reply to the Mikado (who had ordered them to be executed after luncheon); "But I don't want any lunch!". I think it was the first stage joke I ever got, and I enjoyed it immensely. The local operatic society was very much a family interest, and my aunt played Katisha (a haughty, aging Japanese spinster) in the same production. My aunt is a lady with a strong character, with voice and build to match, and made Katisha quite a daunting figure which contrasted comically with the much smaller, quieter Koko. Nevertheless, Koko's wooing of Katisha with the lament of 'Tit Willow' became one of my favourite songs from the opera.

A few years later I remember our family watching 'Yeoman of the Guard' on television. Or rather, I remember only the final scene where the jester Jack Point, broken-hearted, sighs and dies 'for the love of a ladye'. I think this was the first time I realised that stories and plays did not always have happy endings. The wistful song, with its lovely madrigal-style music, still brings a lump to the throat.

Fast forwarding about a decade, our university produced 'Trial by Jury' in which I played the usher (in a purple gown and Einsteinian grey wig) for the courtroom trial of a Breach of Promise of Marriage (...I wonder if our director was trying to convey a warning to us young students...). We had great fun preparing, as our normal choral repertoire was rather more static, without the opportunity to act. During the trial the judge freely admits that all his 'law is fudge', and that he had reached his status through contacts and marriage rather than by competence and hard work. This is a recurring theme in G&S operas, and I (and probably you) have met one or two such characters over the years. However the opera contains one of what I think is one of Gilbert's best lines; the judge's rich and influential former father-in-law had tried to put a positive spin on his daughter's looks by saying, "she may very well pass for forty-three, in the dusk with the light behind her!" (And now I am forty-three myself....!)

Most recently my wife Barbara and I have been enjoying G&S in Switzerland; performances of Pirates of Penzance and HMS Pinafore by the Pocket Opera in Zurich, excerpts by The Gilbert & Sullivan Singers (now the Umbrella Singers) in Basel, and a wonderful staging of Iolanthe by the Geneva Amateur Operatic Society in Nyon. My prior knowledge of Iolanthe had been limited to knowing it is about fairies and Lords, that it is my mother's favourite, and that she loves the pompous entrance of the Peers, singing "Bow, bow ye lower middle classes ... Tantantara! Zing! Boom! Zing! Boom!". We were (aptly) spellbound for the whole performance and the solos by the amorously susceptible Lord Chancellor and his trio with Lord Tolloller and Lord Mountararat (while mounted on kids' scooters) showed the heights to which good amateur societies can reach.

Looking back over these memories I think they explain why G&S operas have such appeal both personally and internationally. The music is memorable and matches expertly to the lyrics, while the stories address such timeless themes as Comedy, Tragedy, Misplaced Love, Inexpert Authority, Secret Identities, Aging and Magic. In G&S operas these themes occur not just individually but blended together in many permutations, as in real life. And, as in real life, the only thing better than watching is taking part.

Review of the summer apero

Friday June 13th proved to be a date of good omen for the now traditional final event of the G&S Society's year, the Summer Apero Party. Once again it was held at Centrepoint, but unlike last year the rain held off and we were able to take ourselves and our drinks out into the courtyard.

The evening was planned as a relaxed get-together for Society members and their friends and judging from the numbers who stayed on as the apero developed into a soiree, the opportunity was very welcome.

Many thanks to all who all who helped, and especially to Ann McClymont and Bernie McCabe, who once again so ably managed the catering so that wine, food and conversation all seemed to give out, gracefully, together.

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Knowing our operas: an article by Bryan Stone

The Operas we don't know: Utopia, Limited, or, The Flowers of Progress

'And I can hum a fugue, of which I've heard the music's din afore, and whistle all the airs of that infernal nonsense 'Pinafore'.'

So sings the Major General in 'The Pirates of Penzance', one of Gilbert's various jokes against himself, and although we may not go around humming fugues, readers of this article will surely know many of the airs from 'Pinafore', as well as 'Pirates', 'Gondoliers' or 'Mikado'.

But do we know any tunes from *The Grand Duke* or *Utopia Limited*? We might suspect not and I can hastily assure readers that I've never sung any and, perhaps most reassuringly, don't intend to. And yet: in *Utopia Limited* we find 'Never? No, never – What, never? Well, hardly ever...' and Gilbert's good humour repeats what had been the catch phrase to beat all others and Sullivan goes along with an echo of Captain Corcoran's little tune, 'I am the Captain of the Pinafore'. So there is one tune we can indeed whistle, albeit borrowed from 'That infernal nonsense' and we may be sure that the Savoy audience roared with glee. Indeed, they did at many other scenes. *Utopia Limited* opened on October 7 1893 to run for 245 performances, a respectable total. But it was not good enough and until 1975 it was never produced by Doyly Carte again. Then it was dusted off for a gala performance and demand was such that it was repeated to run four nights. Alas, that was it, although a passing popularity in the USA in the 1960s had kept it on the stage at schools and colleges where the English had long forgotten it. Gilbert had wrestled with this new work; he wanted a good plot, which would hold Sullivan's interest, after the Carpet quarrel over the costs of Doyly Carte's renovations for his theatre, had separated them, it seemed, for ever. By 1892 revenues were falling, Sullivan had gone on to opera, oratorio and festival music and Carte was longing for another hit in the old style. So Gilbert, swallowing his anger, had turned out plots which gradually crystallised into the story of a South Sea island, the kingdom of Utopia. In Utopia people are happy under a benevolent and bumbling king, who has, however, learned that in a far-off land across the sea (Great Britain) all is perfection and the height of excellence. He sends his gifted and beautiful princess Zara to attend Girton (the then new lady's college) and to bring back to Utopia the qualities that have made Britain best. The younger daughters go to English 'Finishing School', an

institution perhaps less known today than in Gilbert's time. The opera sets the scene as their return is awaited, but Zara has fallen in love with Captain Fitzbattleaxe, the Life Guard officer of her escort. Central to the action is that she also brings several worthies, such as a lord Chancellor (guardian of public morals), Capt. Corcoran KCB of the Royal Navy, Mr Goldbury, a company promoter, a QC (Gilbert despised the law), and a County Councillor. These, whom the audience would have recognised, caricature the best and worst of British public life. They were in 1894 very contemporary butts of humour and could be today.

As they are let loose upon Utopia (which the venal financier turns into a limited company, hence the name), public life and private morals in Britain are scorned and parodied. The audience was highly delighted. The highlight of the process in the critics' eyes was a Cabinet Meeting, which is a deliberate parody of the then enormously popular *Christie Minstrels* of black-faced banjo-strumming entertainers. The scene and the song describe what is to be done, with, in every third line, an interjection of how life in England, conducted with the best of noble intentions, either is already, or is about to be, much better. These were undoubtedly the triumph of the show. The 'Daily News' after the opening wrote: The Cabinet Council is one of the funniest incidents... the various officials produce banjos, fiddles, tambourines and bones and a side-splitting burlesque of the *Christie Minstrels* starts..... The Sunday Times enthused: 'This irresistible skit might have been encored half-a-dozen times'. Even George Bernard Shaw praised the scene with the 'exquisite mock-banjo accompaniment' and put it 'on the plane of the gardener's entry in *The Marriage of Figaro*'. Fun ranges from family life ('Divorce is nearly obsolete in England'), that justice was more severe on those of higher rank (A maxim that is prevalent in England'), town planning (We haven't any slummeries in England'), addressing poverty and hunger ('We are going to abolish it in England'), the reform of the peerage, with echoes of *Strephon* and the *Fairy Queen*, ('We are going to re-model it in England'), and culture, literature and the arts would have proper recognition ('As Literary merit does in England'). In short, it is Gilbert's revenge on society's hypocrisy, posturing and social abuse, and upon those in highest places whose actions had long failed to support their words.

Before the Utopian society collapses into disorder under the well-meant anarchy of British influence, the company promoter Goldbury sings a remarkable song which throws a startling light forwards to *Betjeman* and the young amazons of sports girls he so admired. Suggesting that retiring demureness is

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not as general as they might have thought, Goldbury sings:

'A wonderful joy our eyes to bless... .. An English girl of eleven stone two, and five foot ten in her dancing shoe, She follows the hounds....at cricket, lose or win.... a ten-mile-spin, ...she golfs, she punts, she rows, she swims,dances till dawn, .. plays tennis, and 'her soul is sweet as the ocean air, for prudery knows no haven there...' Here Gilbert was in 1893 probably ahead of his middle-class audience, and could have caused great offence, but times were changing. Suffragettes, votes, emancipation, volunteer service in WW1 and Betjeman's priceless word pictures of the freckled athletic Pam or Joan Hunter-Dunne were down the road towards liberation. Gilbert's interest, also in 'Princess Ida', seems to display some method in his madness. But Utopia is now in disorder; all the reforms have had their effect and nothing is as before. Even the jails are empty for the English laws have brought crime and litigation to a standstill. It is insufferable and so they welcome the last reform from England, government by party, which at once stultifies and prevents any further legislative progress. Everything goes back to normal and people are free to sort out their own affairs. Not Utopia, a Monarchy (Limited), but a Limited Monarchy, foresees the King as the curtain falls and the audience no doubt went home delighted.

This is an opera virtually unknown, so I have treated it at some length. Next time we'll look at 'The Grand Duke'.

Bryan

Thanks so much Bryan for contributing this article

Non G&S Society Events

Semi-Circle

A Streetcar Named Desire by Tennessee Williams

Venue: Helmut Förbacher Theatre,
Badischer Bahnhof (www.foernbacher.ch)
Dates: November 2008: Thursday 6th, Friday 7th
& Wednesday 19th, Thursday 20th,
Friday 21st
Starts: Evening 19:30
Tickets: On sale from September 26th from
Bider & Tanner,
Aeschenvorstadt 2, Basel;
Phone +41 (0)61 206 99 96
(Group Reservations possible immediately)
Price: CHF 30, Students: CHF 25

Operissima company

Musical evening

The Operissima Company are organising a musical evening of well known and catchy songs from their new programme on the 13th September. It will be held in the Schützenstube restaurant in Schaffhausen. Start time is 20.00 hrs. Adults cost 25 CHF and children up to 14 years old go free.

Movement in colour, form, space and time

Dance, singing and text based on Radoslav's Kutra's exhibition.

Music is by Arthur Sullivan, Scott Joplin, and Carlos Gruell

The text from Radoslav Kutra, Ernst Jandl and Carlos Gruell

Choreography by Aurora Andreeva
Adriana Schneider, Carlos Gruell

Sunday 7th December 2008 11:00 am
Luzern Kunstseminar Neustadtstr. 24a

For further information and bookings, please call:
079 689 4015

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