

## Newsletter at a glance

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## Items from the Board

I am writing these words as 2008 is drawing to a close. That puts us halfway through our year, which runs from July 1st until June 30th, but only a third of the way through the programmes your Society has on offer this year. Summer is quiet for obvious reasons, and December is a month upon which many other claims are made, so we have refrained from trying to push a G&S programme onto everyone's already overloaded calendars. Below you can read about our AGM in September and the wonderful evening we had with Monica Buckland in October. As we go to press, an outing to Zurich to see the Pocket Opera's version of Offenbach's Bluebeard is a few days away. Also coming in January is a programme in an exciting new format; in fact it is 2 programmes in one: a theatrical workshop and a production of "Dinner for One". Read more about this and our other plans for the second semester in the pages that follow.

The governing board is pleased to welcome Wendy Bucknall and Harry Benjamin to its ranks. Both enthusiastically volunteered to contribute their efforts towards reaching our goals. We also thank and say goodbye – but only as a board member – to Valerie Walder, who for many years has served actively on the board. At the last board meeting, we discussed the roles and responsibilities of the individual board members and decided to publish their roles and contact information in each newsletter, starting with this one.

Increasing membership will continue to be a priority in the upcoming year. We have made a big jump percentagewise in the last year and this is a great accomplishment, but was done on a small basis, 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). The membership renewal notices went out by post in November. As I write these words, 28 renewals have been processed. Last year, 72.4% of the income

from membership fees was employed to help finance the Society's events, 1% paid for administration and the rest, a small surplus, was carried forward to fund future activities of the Society. If you have not sent in your dues yet, please do so soon. If you are not yet a member, please join up to support the cause. To do so, simply send a message to [info@savoyards.ch](mailto:info@savoyards.ch) or visit our website for details.

## Forthcoming Events

### Winter Aperitif and Theatre Night, 23rd January

Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> January 19.00 for 19.30  
Location: Centrepoint  
Cost 20 CHF for members, 30 CHF for non members including a generous apéro  
Please confirm if you are attending by the 19<sup>th</sup> by mailing: [info@savoyards.ch](mailto:info@savoyards.ch)

This event is a social evening spiced up with a pinch of theatre and some very special guests! A generous and rich aperitif will welcome our members and guests. Once everybody is relaxed, glass in hand, a **Gilbert & Sullivan mini-workshop** led by **Semi-circle director Angela Robinson** will present what can be done to feel, look at ease and enjoy performing G&S. Participation in the short workshop is optional but, as working with Angela is immense fun, very highly recommended! Those who choose not to participate will certainly find observation equally rewarding.

The second part of the entertainment for the evening is a special performance of the 1-act comedy "**Dinner for One**" by **Franz & Alison Metzger of Theatre 13** in Nuremberg (Germany). This short play in English is very entertaining and shown on TV all over Germany and Switzerland at New Year in the original English version. Alison & Franz have been performing the play for over 10 years and have written a G&S version especially for our event.

For further details see our website [www.savoyards.ch](http://www.savoyards.ch)

### Our Special Guests who will be with us on January 23rd

**Angela Robinson** has loved drama since school, but it didn't become a big part of her life until she and her family moved to Dar es Salaam, where she played small parts in shows at the amateur Little Theatre.

On arrival in Nairobi four years later, she threw herself into a very active amateur theatre scene. By the end of their 15-year stay she was the manager of a 416-seat theatre and had done just about every job in connection with the productions staged there, including sweeping the stage! Highlights included: playing the Duchess of Plaza-Toro in "The Gondoliers" and twice being asked to direct at the professional Phoenix Players. While she loves being on stage, Angela also adores directing, which is what she has done most of in her 12 years in the Basel area. She also runs the Basel English Panto Group.

For 10 years, **Franz and Alison Metzger** have been presenting their version of Dinner for One on many occasions in Switzerland, Germany and France. Franz started acting with a school company when he was 15 and has been on stage with different amateur companies in Germany ever since. These days his main activities are with **Theatre 13**, an English-speaking company, which has very successfully introduced the tradition of the English Christmas Pantomime to Nuremberg. He is a great admirer of the wit and musical brilliance of Gilbert and Sullivan. Some of his favourite roles were **Bottom** in **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, **Kalchas** in **La Belle Helène** and **Major Petkoff** in **Arms and the Man**. Gilbert and Sullivan were an early influence in Alison's life as her mother often sang pieces from their operas. When she came to Switzerland, Alison joined an English-speaking theatre group in Lausanne, performing in plays written by their American director, one of which, **Imagination**, was filmed and shown on Swiss television. Having written the theme song for the stage production of **Imagination**, Alison went on to write more songs, performing in a group. She can be seen on stage with **Theatre 13** in Nuremberg and has played **The Minstrel** in their two most recent pantomimes

## Dinner Concert, 28th March

This year's Gilbert & Sullivan Society Dinner Concert will take place on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> March, again at L'Esprit in the Laufenstrasse in Basel. As well as an aperitif there will be a sumptuous dinner and concert by the well loved musical ensemble the "Umbrella Singers" Barbara Laurie, Geraldine Cassidy, Will Wood and pianist Boris Chnaider. They will present "Education & Career Success" a new programme of excerpts from the operas of Gilbert & Sullivan plus music by featured composer Mendelssohn. Tickets will be 70 CHF for members of the Society and 85 CHF for non-members. Further details will be circulated shortly in a separate e mail.

There will be a special promotion at this year's dinner concert and some lucky member will leave the concert with two tickets for a Grimsdyke G&S production!

## Summer Aperitif

Our final entertainment for you in the 2008/09 year to be held in June will be a Summer Aperitif including a surprise extra singing event, with audience participation, based on the Gilbert & Sullivan operas. Watch out for an announcement in the newsletter with a definite date and further details.

## *Review of Lecture Aperitif by Barbara Laurie*

### A View from the Orchestra Pit

A very interesting evening with much amusement and hilarity was enjoyed on Friday 24 October at the Gilbert & Sullivan Society's second lecture aperitif event, when Monica Buckland, Artistic Director of the Universitätsorchester Dresden (Germany) gave her presentation "A View from the Orchestra Pit" and a rare insight into a conductor's point of view. She illuminated the many and varied duties and responsibilities of a Gilbert & Sullivan conductor, describing it as a combination of stage manager, traffic policeman, co-ordinator, craftsman and trouble-shooter!

Her talk was liberally sprinkled with musical excerpts (including a live performance sung by the conductor herself!) and began with the appropriately entitled chorus "Welcome Gentry" from Ruddigore. Anecdotes about early original G&S performances and some of Monica's first conducting experiences including the test pieces for novice conductors from Die Zauberflöte and Die Fledermaus (which if you mix them up gives you "Die Zaubermaus").

Monica explained that most first conducting jobs are usually for so-called "light" works like operettas. In Britain this would mean the works of Gilbert & Sullivan, in Spain the equally characteristic Zarzuela works, or operettas by Johann Strauss in Austria and Offenbach in France. Paradoxically, Operettas are more challenging to conduct than symphonies because the conductor has to know all the music of the work and all the words of all the songs in order to be able to rescue any singer who forgets their words. In addition, the conductor has to choose a tempo which balances the speed the composer intended and the ability of the singer to articulate text

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comprehensibly in a patter song! The problem of too fast a tempo was illustrated with another piece from Ruddigore; the “Matter-patter Trio”.

The subject of unforeseen events during performances brought us the image of a conductor saving the orchestra from the impact of a large and out of control tumbling trunk – while conducting! This was a true story from a production of HMS Pinafore set on the “Starship Enterprise” (beloved of Star Trek fans)! On the subject of updating Gilbert & Sullivan for modern times Monica was convincing in her argument that even Princess Ida, with its theme of higher education for women, regarded by some as dated, can be performed with only minimal changes to text and well judged delivery. One of Monica’s experiences of adapting the orchestra itself to fit a performing space (and budget) involved a seven-person orchestra squashed into a tent for an open-air performance on the windy Atlantic coast of Cornwall where a great many clothes pegs were required to keep the music firmly on the stands.

Above all, we learned that the conductor’s job is to be reliable – no matter what! Dancers need the conductor to give the same tempo for their music every time, singers need the orchestra to be with them whatever *they* do and the musicians need the conductor to mediate between the stage and the orchestra, no matter what illness or condition the conductor may be suffering at the time. This was also true in Sullivan’s time; despite being ill with excruciating kidney pain for the premiere of Princess Ida, Sullivan nevertheless went on to conduct after dosing himself with copious amounts of morphine and coffee!

Time flew as the presentation touched on so many interesting subjects. By the time we had heard about all the music, dance, speech and action to be learned, “artistes” to be handled and unforeseen emergencies to be dealt with and overseen by the conductor of a Gilbert and Sullivan production, it was clear to us that the job of waving and pointing that delicate little conducting baton is a much bigger one than probably any of us present had been aware of!

*Many thanks for this review Barbara*

## *Puzzles and Anagrams*

### **Su’s Mystery Anagrams**

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

SSPNIREC ADI

ETH NEOMEY FO EHT DRAGU

The answers to the anagrams in newsletter 16 are:

PAF RENHOMSI = HMS PINAFORE

GRIDORUDE = RUDDIGORE

### **Riddle-Me-Ree**

My first is in primrose and also in spring.  
My second's in object but not in thing.  
My third is in know but not in guess,  
My fourth's in Elizabeth, not in Bess.  
My fifth is in animal but not in beast,  
My sixth is in rising but not in yeast.  
My seventh's in circus but not in tent,  
My last is in happening and also event.  
Riddle-me, riddle-me riddle-me-ree,  
Can you tell me what this place could be?

### **A medley of lines!**

***This medley of lines comes from which of G&S's operettas and who is meant in the last line?***

We're sober men and true,  
We sail the ocean blue.  
Sailors should never be shy  
Though I can never tell you why.  
Be warned my messmates all  
For a British tar is a soaring soul.  
Now landsmen all, whoever you may be,  
I am the monarch of the sea!

*Solutions to the Riddle me Ree and the medley of lines above will appear in the spring newsletter*

### **Riddle me Ree (from autumn newsletter)**

The solution to this is “Topsy Turvy”.

### **Solution to the puzzle from the autumn newsletter**

The word is “love”  
The Operetta is “The Sorcerer”

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## This month's song "Braid the Raven Hair"



*Yum-Yum's sisters and friends are helping her make ready for her wedding*

Braid the raven hair —  
Weave the supple tress —  
Deck the maiden fair  
In her loveliness —  
Paint the pretty face —  
Dye the coral lip —  
Emphasise the grace  
Of her ladyship!  
Art and nature, thus allied,  
Go to make a pretty bride.  
Art and nature, thus allied,  
Go to make a pretty bride

### Pitti-Sing.

Sit with downcast eye —  
Let it brim with dew —  
Try if you can cry —  
We will do so, too.  
When you're summoned, start  
Like a frightened roe —  
Flutter, little heart,  
Colour, come and go!  
Modesty at marriage-tide  
Well becomes a pretty bride!  
Modesty at marriage-tide  
Well becomes a pretty bride!

### Chorus.

Braid the raven hair —  
Weave the supple tress —  
Deck the maiden fair  
In her loveliness —  
Paint the pretty face —  
Dye the coral lip —  
Emphasise the grace  
Of her ladyship!  
Art and nature, thus allied,  
Go to make a pretty bride.  
Art and nature, thus allied,  
Go to make a pretty bride.

## Karaoke, sing along with "Braid the Raven Hair"

[http://diamond.boisestate.edu/gas/mikado/webopera/mk\\_midi/201.mid](http://diamond.boisestate.edu/gas/mikado/webopera/mk_midi/201.mid)

### Tips on Downloading midi files

This is how to save midi files. When done they play in Microsoft "Windows Media Player" just by clicking on the file:

- Locate free "midi" files by doing a search on the internet. There are many sites that allow free download of "midis."
- Review the site's files and find a midi you like.
- Right click on the file name; for example "Light My Fire"
- Click on "Save target as"
- At the bottom of the dialogue box that appears, where it says "Save as type," scroll to and click on "All Files"
- Change the name in the "File name" box if you don't like the default name.
- Click on "Save" File "Light My Fire" is now saved on the hard drive and available to be played.
- To play go into Windows Explorer, find the file and click on it. Windows Media Player will come up and play the song.

## Mikado Trivia

The fan plays a large part in *The Mikado*. Men and women alike are continually opening and shutting and fluttering fans. From behind three of these dainty aids to the imagination the Three Little Maids from School squeak and giggle!

While the opera was under rehearsal, Gilbert had a number of the Japanese men and women from Knightsbridge down to the theatre to give lessons in the art of using a fan. That is only one of many instances of his thoroughness. He literally neglected nothing. Long before the rehearsals of a new opera began, he would go through it all on a little mimic stage at home and settle every detail of grouping, colour and costume to his satisfaction. And yet he was never satisfied! It is the old story. The more we know the more we realise how little we know; and the more we achieve the more we perceive how far our achievement falls short of perfection.

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## *The Operas that we do not know: an article by Bryan Stone*

### *The Grand Duke or the Statutory Duel*

'Utopia, Ltd.' of our last article had, in summer 1894 been taken off after 245 performances and the Savoy was again without a new Gilbert and Sullivan. Gilbert even wrote a musical, 'His Excellency' with music by Osmond Carr and several leading Savoy performers, which opened at the Lyric Theatre in October; and Sullivan, when not on the continent gambling, was set on reviving his old opera 'The Contrabandista', also opening in October at the Savoy. It ran 96 nights and D'Oyly Carte replaced it with a revival of 'The Mikado'. It looked like the end of the road. In July 1895 Gilbert called upon Sullivan, now back from Monte Carlo and renting a villa in Walton. He had a new libretto based on the touring theatrical company plot, which Sullivan had rejected out of hand six years earlier, a gesture which had led, happily, to 'The Gondoliers'. This time Sullivan gave way and, with a good grace, composed a score. So there was after all another G&S, 'The Grand Duke'. It opened at the Savoy on March 7 1896.

The critics were enthusiastic, but Gilbert called it privately 'an ugly misshapen brat' and Sullivan noted that parts of it dragged with redundant dialogue. He had conducted the opening night and then left at once again for Monte Carlo, saying 'Another week's rehearsal with WSG and I should have gone raving mad'. It ran for only 123 performances and is scarcely seen or heard today, though the BBC recorded a 1975 one-night D'Oyly carte performance and commissioned its own performance in 1989 for radio. But at the Savoy this disappointment in 1895 now really was the end; the creative fire no longer burned brightly and the two never spoke to each other again. Gilbert wrote to Sullivan in 1900 suggesting they might meet at a revival of 'Patience', but Sullivan was too ill to attend. He died on Nov 22 1900.

The 'Grand Duke' is, in fact, quite demanding. The travelling theatrical troupe managed by Ernest Dummkopf is to play the roles of those to whom they are performing and there is much allegory about the theatre as a mirror of life. Everyone role-plays. The Grand Duke Rudolph is a thinly veiled unattractive parody of Kaiser Wilhelm II of Prussia (not difficult, for he was in the end a very sinister person) and the action is the absurd and impecunious German state of Pfennig-Halbpennig, with its main and only town, Speisesaal. The Grand Duke is unpopular and oppresses his people and servants, a court of 6 ministers, 3 housekeepers and 6 soldiers, none of

whom have been paid. The Gilbertian bit is that he was betrothed at birth to a princess, whom he cannot afford to visit to marry, and she cannot come to him. But now her father is bringing her and so a wedding and the resolution of Pfennig-Halbpennig's economic crisis seem a justified hope. Unfortunately, the Duke has already fallen in love with a Baroness, ugly but hugely wealthy, and plans to marry her. The curtain rises, however, on the theatrical company, because they too are expecting a wedding between two of their leading persons, Ludwig and Lisa. It rapidly turns out that this is only an act, because they are planning to dethrone the Grand Duke tomorrow – and Dummkopf will replace him.

Are you with me so far?

There is more to come, for another member of the troupe is destined to play Dummkopf's Grand Duchess, but has resolutely resisted his amorous advances. But disaster strikes; the plot is betrayed and the Statutory Duel of the title enters the action. This is a duel of honour decided by drawing a card to avoid bloodshed and the loser is declared legally dead. The snag is that the winner takes on all the rights, debts, family and obligations of the loser. That is a Gilbertian fantasy again. By the end of Act I, Rudolph himself has been defeated in a Statutory Duel and Ludwig of the theatrical conspirators is now Grand Duke. Act II opens dramatically, with a choral procession as for Shakespeare's 'Troilus and Cressida', into the Ducal hall, 'As before you we defile', of which the critic of The Times wrote 'It is a good many years since the composer gave us anything so fine as the opening chorus of the second act'. The 'Sunday Times' called it 'a massive and impressive piece' worthy of 'The Martyr of Antioch'. It was the most warmly applauded number of the whole work and was followed by a classic and very funny patter-song, also very successful.

We may overlook the complexity of events, including the arrival of the Grand Duke's promised childhood bride, who finds herself with various rivals, as the action leads back finally to the point of resolution where all marry those they should, order and happiness is restored, all go back to their accustomed roles and Pfennig-Halbpennig withdraws to its former obscurity.

Taking a little of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', and of 'The Prisoner of Zenda' and then back to the first, and lost, libretto of Gilbert and Sullivan, 'Thespis', 'The Grand Duke' is certainly funny in parts and a long, if entertaining, romp, but its carrying points and themes do not strike home. It has no obvious focus except for its play of theatre against implied and absurd reality, which amused Gilbert, but hardly inspires such loyalty today as do 'Gondoliers' or 'Iolanthe'. This proves, finally, to be its weakness. Some really good music and a delicious song about

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gambling at the casino, just as topical today in our days of unearned fortunes and undeserved wealth, immorality against injustice, in Act II, are not enough to keep it memorable. Even reading the Libretto is hard work!

With this I complete my review of the Operas we don't know. Next time we discover some perhaps unknown nooks and crannies in the familiar repertoire.

*Thanks so much Bryan for contributing this article*

### *Meet the G&S Society board members*

We thought our members might like to know a little more about whom we are and what we do!

To e mail any of us, type in the first name, then a full stop then the surname followed by [@savoyards.ch](mailto:)

For instance to contact Bernie MacCabe, e mail:

[bernie.maccabe@savoyards.ch](mailto:bernie.maccabe@savoyards.ch)

Bernie MacCabe	Chairman, Treasurer
Barbara Laurie	Secretary
Corinna Balfour	Auditor, Events
Ann McClymont	Events
Joanna Lonergan	Membership
Rachel Bungler	Newsletter
Harry Benjamin	Publicity, Webmaster
David Laurie	Publicity
Wendy Bucknall	Public relations

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