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Greetings from the Society's President

We are celebrating a "first" in the history of The Gilbert & Sullivan Society, namely that one of our events was sold out. Read more about our very well attended and successful Burns Night below. Since the appearance of the Fall Newsletter, we have also visited the Pocket Opera's production of Pirates of Penzance in Zurich. I think it is fair to say that the Society is fulfilling its mission, which is to bring you, our esteemed members and friends, opportunities to enjoy the music, song, and theatrical comedy that we all so fondly associate with Gilbert & Sullivan. As you will see below, we plan to bring you 2 more fantastic events before the summer vacations begin.

Good news on the membership front: our numbers are increasing. As of the beginning of February, we counted 42 active, paid members. On behalf of the Board I would like to warmly welcome our new joiners. I would also very much like to thank our existing members for their loyalty and for their efforts in winning new members. Your Board believes that we must continue to expand membership in order to be able to sustain our programs over the longer term, and to eventually promote full productions of Gilbert & Sullivan's operas. So, please continue to spread the word. Should you require a supply of the Society's attractive flyers to support your efforts, please let me or one of the other board members know. We will be pleased to send you as many as you need.

Did you know that our membership comprises persons of great musical talent, persons of no musical talent whatsoever, such as me, who simply enjoy listening, watching, and occasionally clapping to the rhythm of the music, and persons whose talent is somewhere on the spectrum in between? Virtually all of our events allow for audience participation. Indeed, for some events such as our Summer Apéro,

that is the main point. I mention this simply to reassure those of you who are not by nature performers that there is a comfortable, non-threatening place at all of our events for you. Those who perform always appreciate a good audience.

From Bernie MacCabe, president of the Gilbert & Sullivan Society

Forthcoming Events

Annual Dinner Concert

Please join us for the highlight of our social year, the Annual Dinner Concert "A Musical Tour of London" by the Umbrella singers

Date: Saturday 13th March
Time: 19.00
At: LindenbergSaal
Lindenberg 8
4058 Basel
Tram: Wettsteinplatz or Rheingasse

Included in the ticket price is:

A welcome Apéro
A three-course meal (drinks not included)
A concert

Cost: 70 CHF (G&S Society members)
85 CHF (non members)
40 CHF (16 and under)

For reservations before 8th March please e mail:
events@savoyards.ch

further details at: www.savoyards.ch

Details of event location can be found on this link:

<http://tinyurl.com/Lindenberg8>

Summer event

Come and join us for an act-and-sing-along with Angela Robinson and Christine Archer on the 18th June.

Audience participation purely voluntary!

Further details to follow in the next newsletter

Reviews

A night with Gilbert & Sullivan and Burns



This year's winter event, held on January 29th, was rather a departure from our usual programme: "A Night with Gilbert, Sullivan and Burns". This was one of our best attended events ever and sold out well in advance. The programme included the essential elements of a Burns Night celebration, which don't, we learnt, include dancing. This was probably just as well, as there would hardly have been room to swing a cat, let alone a kilt, in the Lohnhof on the evening.

After welcoming the guests the Society's President, Bernie McCabe, handed over to Alan Chalmers and Tom McClymont to lead us through the evening. It began, of course, with the entry of the Haggis, piped in by David Laurie, to be addressed and dispatched in the traditional manner by Tom.

We were able to compare and contrast poems by Burns and Gilbert with David giving "To a Mouse" and Peter Hilton "The Practical Joker". The poetical initiative was passed to the audience in a competitive rendition of "The Mouse" which row 3 won with a spirited performance, perhaps unfairly advantaged by a block of native speakers in its centre.

Ann McClymont, accompanied by Tim McTaggart, sang two very different versions of Burns "Mary Morison", the folk-song-like original and Sullivan's art song setting. The audience was asked to vote for their favourite and, while we enjoyed both versions, Sullivan's won by a modest majority.

The heart of the Burns Night evening is the toast "To the immortal memory", which was proposed by Tom McClymont. His reflections on the poet's character and his work helped us and perhaps especially the non- Scots, to understand why Burns has always been held in such affection by his countrymen and why this evening is even now celebrated all over the world. There followed a break for refreshments, then

Christine Archer led the audience, fortified by haggis and whisky, in singing "A Policeman's Lot" which has almost become the Society's theme song.

Barbara and David Laurie sang a duet setting of "My Love is like a Red, Red, Rose", again accompanied by Tim. The evening ended with Auld Lang Syne. We drank the bar dry (another first in the Society's annals) before setting off for home.

Special thanks are due to Tom Mc Clymont for the idea and for all his work in researching and putting together the programme and also for providing annotated texts for those of us born south of the border. Thanks too to Ann for managing the catering, as always in a way that gives no idea of the amount of work involved, and taking even an exploding haggis in her stride. Of course thanks are also due to all who entertained us and who worked behind the scenes to make such an enjoyable evening.

Many thanks to Joanna Lonergan for writing such a humorous review

Pocket Opera Visit

The beautifully played overture, with an expressive oboe solo to the tune of "When a Merry Maiden Marries", began The Gondoliers with a flourish, setting the scene for the opera to come. From seats at the top of the tribune our 21 person group from the Gilbert & Sullivan Society in Basel settled to enjoy the show.



The entrance of the ladies chorus, cooing and fluttering on their way to the stage, successfully evoked the doves of the Piazza St Marco in Venice where the story began. In their colourful, flowery dresses their opening chorus "List and Learn", was a feast for the eyes as well as the ears. The ladies play "blind mans buff" with two bachelor gondoliers to find out who they will marry. Marco (beautifully sung by William Lombardi, tenor) catches his favourite,

Gianetta (well sung and acted with great comedy flair by soprano Beverley Worboys) and Giuseppe (bass, James Cleverton) is delighted to find he has his favourite, Tessa (Maja Hermann, mezzo soprano).



A Spanish family arrives, staggering and sea-sick, and vow emphatically in an energetic ensemble "they will never, never, never, cross the sea again". The Duke & Duchess of Plaza Toro, daughter Casilda, drummer Luiz and Grand Inquisitor, have come to find Casilda's long-betrothed fiancé. In a wistful duet Casilda & Luiz see their romantic hopes rapidly fade as Casilda must now marry the future King of Barataria, thought to be a Gondolier. Soprano Irina Kyriakidou's, faultlessly clear voice as Casilda, & Ulrich Amacher as Luiz sang their short love scene beautifully and were convincing despite their obvious age difference.

The act I finale was a real musical highlight with excellent articulation in the ensembles, especially when Tessa & Gianetta, not pleased at being split up from their new husbands (either could be King, so both Marco & Giuseppe must go to Barataria), console themselves that "one of us will be a Queen". Marco and Giuseppe simply excelled "as one individual", with outstanding musical timing when each seamlessly finishes the word of the other.



More excellent singing began act II where Marco & Giuseppe were polishing shoes and happily doing "little errands" in the royal court of Barataria. Giuseppe's patter song about their daily routine was

topped by Marco's solo "Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes" which displayed his beautiful, round tone and superb breath control. When the ladies arrived with Tessa & Gianetta, eager for details of their husbands' new lifestyle at court, the only unsatisfying moment was a surprisingly slow, celebratory "Dance a Cachucha".



Don Alhambra enhanced his solo by incorporating funny walks and Roswitha Muller, as the Duchess, showed off her excellent diction in "On the Day that I was Wedded". Finally the true identity of the king was solved by the Prince's former foster mother who confirmed that the real prince was Luiz, the drummer. Luis re-entered in a costume resembling a Terry's Chocolate Orange, claimed his longed for bride and they live happily ever after.



This was a wonderful performance with an excellent cast; probably the best of Pocket Opera's G&S productions so far. Personally, I wished for less emphasis on the action between the two narrators who replaced the spoken dialogue in English with brief synopses in German. Increasingly in act II their "comedy" act went too far and needlessly interrupted the flow of the performance. Overall, the excellent orchestra, vocal and dramatic strengths of the soloists as well as costumes, set and stage direction, made this a high quality production, well worth the trip to Zurich.

Thanks to Barbara Laurie for such a professional and interesting review

16th Buxton International Gilbert & Sullivan Festival 2009

Oh bliss and rapture!



Of all people, I am probably the least qualified to write about my Buxton experience given my relative inexperience of Gilbert & Sullivan. Although I have been a proud Irishman for the past 25 years when I changed my nationality and moved to the Emerald Isle, I was born and raised in Germany. This accounts for my initial ignorance as Gilbert & Sullivan enjoy an extremely limited popularity in non-anglophone continental Europe.

For those who don't know Buxton – it's a little gem of a market town nestling in the midst of the Derbyshire Peak District, surrounded by superb countryside and steeped in history and heritage. Today's Buxton Theatre, is a magnificent historical and beautifully renovated building that somehow reminded me of the old Vienna-style opera houses with its many balconies, intricate golden ornaments, its oval layout and the mere richness and mastery in interior design.

I found an excellent accommodation ('Linden Tree Lodge') and exquisite hosts who went out of their way to make my stay most comfortable and pleasant.

I treated myself to two full weeks in Buxton (although the festival lasts for three) and had the privilege of seeing 15 performances. While professional groups usually performed at the weekends, the rest of the weeks were reserved for the many amateur groups from the UK, USA, Australia and Ireland. However, the actual performances were only one part of my



Buxton experience. Many mornings saw extremely interesting events, such as master acting classes (with Alistair Donkin), chorus auditions, presentations (e.g. by Ian Bradley), rehearsals, and podium discussions in the adjoining Paxton Suite. One that particularly sticks in my mind is a presentation by Jeremy Stevenson who possesses the largest audio archives in the world and who gave the audience the opportunity to listen to rare original recordings of former and famous Savoyards. Although I am a 'newcomer' to G&S I am convinced that this kind of presentation would be of extreme interest to anyone who enjoys opera and, particularly, the voices of Savoyards.

The early afternoons saw productions, mostly in the Paxton Suite, such as 'The Emerald Isle', 'The Miller and His Man' and 'The Spectre Knight'. Other afternoons included exquisite renditions by various groups, e.g. 'The Wandering Minstrels' of Peterborough, 'Edwardian Delights' with Ian Henderson and Romy McCabe, and many more most enjoyable events.



Actress Jill Pert treated the audience to some wonderful recitals under the motto 'In the dusk with the light behind them'. A most enjoyable part was her rendition of Wagner's 'The Ring of the Nibelungen' – in 5 minutes! Seldom in my life have I laughed so much. Whoever knows Wagner, also knows that Wagner demands stamina particularly as very

little actually happens. Jill managed with wonderful wit and exquisite humour to tell the entire story in the shortest possible time – to the great enjoyment of the audience.

Another highlight was an afternoon with Richard Stuart and his 'Little List'. Naturally the staged discussion with Ian G. Smith covered much more than the 'Little List' and it was an absolute delight to listen to Richard's stories. Incidentally, he had played the title role in last year's 'The Parson's Pirates'.



What intrigued me most was the incredibly friendly atmosphere not only at the theatre and among the audiences but also in Buxton itself. It was almost as if the spirit of Gilbert and Sullivan engulfed not only the fans but literally everyone in town.

The theatre seats about 1,000 spectators and was packed to the last seat during each and every performance, evening or afternoon. Needless to say that the professional performances attracted the greatest interest, however, many of the amateur groups amazed the audience with lush and extravagant scenery, exquisite costumes, superb voices, great choreography and the most amazing lighting. Of particular quality were the G&S groups from Bournemouth, South Anglia, Trent Opera and also Opera della Luna (though their more modernized interpretations of 'The Sorcerer' may have raised some eyebrows among the traditionalists☺). Some groups managed to incorporate modern communication techniques to the great enjoyment and laughter of the audience, e.g. the explanation of economy in 'Utopia Ltd.' By means of an excellently made brief PowerPoint presentation☺.

The evenings continued in the G & S spirit with the Festival Club in the restaurant adjoining the theatre. It became almost a daily ritual at the end of the adjudication by David Turner (and often even before) that there was a rush out of the theatre, then a quick walk through the greenhouse directly into the festival Club, trying to get a seat. Like the performances, the club was packed virtually every evening. The most overwhelming experience for me was hearing the incredible voices: The evening started with a sing-along from the performed opera and I was amazed to see and hear that virtually everyone in the club audience not only knew the words by heart but also sang at top of their voices. And what voices they were! If anyone unrelated to the festival had entered, I am sure; they would have thought that a professional choir was practising. The sing-along was then followed by an hour of cabaret, ad hoc performances or other musical gourmet pieces by the performing artists and groups of that respective

evening. This also afforded me the opportunity to speak to many of the actors and visitors.



Among many other excellent services, the festival organizers had arranged a very much appreciated 'extra': Instead of the usual performance photographs, each performance (matinees and evening performances) was available as a DVD the next morning! This brilliant support and the work of many dedicated technicians resulted in my travelling home with 16 DVDs of this year's festival, and many an evening I rejoice in watching again some of these excellent performances. Naturally, it made me particularly proud, that the Irish Festival Productions won – the third year in a row – this time with their performance of 'The Gondoliers'.

I well know that a typical newcomer – goes on and on and on..... That's why I had better stop here. Anyone who hasn't been to Buxton should plan to go next time – I'll be there and will order my tickets in December ☺

Thanks to Gert Venghaus for sending in this fascinating review

“Pirates of Penzance” at Southwark’s Union Theatre, London

This was a most unusual traditional take on Gilbert & Sullivan done in the warm, informal atmosphere of the Union Theatre Southwark, within walking distance of St Paul's Cathedral.

The theatre is small, probably seating around 50 people and you really feel that you are living in the production rather than looking at it. At £15 a ticket, for a traditional production of G&S, I thought this was great value.

Under the artistic directorship of Sasha Reagan a fresh, fast, and funny approach with an all –male cast reinvigorated The Pirates of Penzance with a newly subversive satirical edge.

There is plenty to choose from in the homely, plain faces department, since all of the maidens, of course, are being played by men. But the clever approach of Regan's production is that, although fine falsetto voices are adopted for the singing, there is no attempt to otherwise disguise their gender- no dodgy wigs or chest waxes were on offer here!



Final act of Pirates of Penzance



Newsletter editor's son Tom outside the Union theatre before the performance started!

At the start the Pirates bounded and bounced onto stage, all bluff and bluster, filling the room with bodies and voices and pulling you into "the show" with a bang. There amongst them was the cherry-lipped nurse maid Ruth as unattractive a 47-year-old nursemaid as Frederick could ever hope to escape!

After this scene there was a quick switch off-stage and suddenly the pirates were all back in white skirts, neck ribbons and plimsoles as the maidens. Seeing the cast in both roles like this added to the comedy and they did a fair job of falsetto singing. The lead girl Mabel (Adam Ellis) had a strong high voice that was verging on a counter-tenor.

The major general played by Fred Broom sang well. He managed both gravitas and a quivering lower lip and really did justice to the role.

The set was modest but it was in tune with the small intimate space in which the production was staged. Being so close to the actors I could pretty well understand every word they spoke including the patter songs and was able to laugh at almost every joke. This production was fun to watch as well as to listen to. The energetic cast put on a traditional production while having a great time playing with the presentation.

This production will be **on show again** in the spring from 18th April to the 16th May. This time it will be staged in Wiltons music hall (near Tower underground station).

BOOKING LINE 020 7702 2789 or 0844 847 2256

Online: www.wiltons.org.uk

DATES

Previews from 8 April 2010
Opens 13 April - 16 May 2010

TIMES

Tues - Sat 7:30pm
Sat - Sun 2.30pm

PRICES

Previews £10
Standard £22.50
Concessions £17.50
All tickets £15 on Tuesdays

If you happen to be in London during this period, I thoroughly recommend your seeing this production!

Further information at www.piratesisback.com

Article by Rachel Bunger with aid of professional reviews

The Law is the True Embodiment

In my last article we looked at some references in the Savoy Operas which are not immediately clear, as much to singers as to listeners and readers. We found two main groups. One was those, often very funny, which Gilbert had deliberately planted, defying his audiences to realize what they had heard. The other was the references which today are simply no longer part of our world. Of course there are overlaps, for we also use expressions from Shakespeare, the Authorised Version of the Bible, farming, maritime or military life. These are clear to us, but we may be at a loss to explain them. When Dick Deadeye and the Captain clumsily spy on Ralph, the noise is shrugged off with 'It was the cat'. Indeed, as sing the hidden pair, 'it was the cat'. Further explanations are in my last article!



For the Gilbertian 'plants', the patter-songs are a source of wonder. Some years ago I cheerfully sang 'Or assume that the witnesses summoned in force, in Exchequer, Queen's Bench, Common Pleas, or Divorce, have perjured themselves'.... And what was a Ward in Chancery? Since it is a central theme of *Iolanthe*, it's good to know that Chancery takes its name from Chancery Lane in London where the various courts were once all located. 'The constitutional guardian I', was correct; for the Lord Chancellor was, at least nominally, the ultimate arbiter of the honour of Wards entrusted to the Court of Chancery. A Ward of Court or in Chancery, was a minor (then defined as under 21) whose guardianship was vested in the court, often for reasons of inheritance or marital strife. So the Lord Chancellor sings unhappily of the inevitable tensions of being entrusted with 'very agreeable girls and none are over the age of 21...' The legal divisions, Exchequer and so on, were all reformed in the 1870s into the High Court. Chancery remained embracing also 'Divorce'. These divisions are not relevant today. '21 today' for coming of age (equally basic to Frederick's unhappy lot in 'Pirates') is also forgotten. While on legal fun, Attorneys, at least in Britain, can no longer 'send me a brief'; they are now solicitors. However, Admiral Sir Joseph Porter was also 'Office boy to an Attorneys' firm' in the course of that distinguished career in which he never went to sea.



There is here another link between *Iolanthe* and *Pinafore*. The Fairy Queen puts Strephon into Parliament ('Into Parliament you shall go!'), to wreak havoc with real reforms (oh, horror) and explains, 'I have a borough or two at my disposal'. (Act 1). Sir Joseph Porter sings that he 'grew so rich, that I was sent by a pocket

borough into Parliament'. What are we talking about? Democracy had long, as elsewhere, a shaky basis in Britain. Some think it still has. Apart from property and other rules and the exclusion of women (which comes back in *Princess Ida* as a subject), many constituencies were not voted on at all, but filled by nominees of the landowner, sometimes the church. Pocket Boroughs (in the pocket of the wealthy) had often resulted from decline or deliberate depopulation, leaving those MPs owing their seat to their landed proprietor. They were careful to remember it. The Reform Act of 1832 did away with many of these, but in Gilbert's time there were still some 60 cases of pocket borough nominees.

Another one worth noting is the Fairy Queen's threat that Strephon will 'prick that annual blister, Marriage with deceased wife's sister.' Was that remarkable? It was most controversial! In the 'Table of Kindred and Affinity' on the last page of the 'Book of Common Prayer' then obligatory for C.of E. churches, there is a list of those degrees of kinship with which marriage is forbidden; one of these until well into the 20th century was 'Wife's sister'. Gladstone and the Liberals had tried for many years to bring through Parliament a reform of this clause. It took over 70 years, an 'annual blister' indeed. Gilbert was not conspicuously liberal!

Seven Dials, a Gilbertian synonym for petty crime and profligacy, was on Monmouth Street, south of Holborn as my last article noted; in Lord Tololler's splendid song it is put on a par with Belgrave Square, then as now one of the most desirable quarters of Mayfair. Phyllis will have none of it. Thus Tololler laments that 'Blue Blood' is clearly of no avail. Blue Blood is used still today as an expression for hereditary aristocracy. Bradley attributes it to Spain, whose pure-blooded aristocrats without Moorish crossbreeding were considered to have notably bluer veins. The song has one of Sullivan's masterpieces of a ballad tune, regal and dignified, and yet it is still clearly a parody.

Before we leave '*Iolanthe*', Lord Mountarat (beautifully mischievous name indeed, 'dating from the Flood', for that was where Noah's Ark was said to have touched land) has that wonderful song praising the institution of the House of Lords. Its humour is essentially Sullivan, who writes the epitome of a classic patriotic song, common at the time. It's a splendid tune. To this are set Gilbert's scurrilous words, 'And while the House of Lords withholds its legislative hand, And noble statesmen do not itch To interfere in matters which They do not understand'.... I always found this a supremely funny line, pompously declaring precisely how useless are their entire presence and splendour, Now then, for the Nightmare song: 'the most brilliant of all Gilbertian patter songs', says Bradley, and having sung it many times, I have never failed to discover new shafts of wit and ingenuity in Gilbert's

text. The 6-8 rhythm drives it and yet the text must prevail; slight variations of tempo are part of the expression. Singing the commas is another good rule because it makes such eminently good sense and only then can be comic. There are some anachronisms tucked away. Literally, the ticking is one; it's a stuffed 'biscuit' of padding serving as pillow or mattress. A steamer from Harwich? Yes, these started in the 1840s. Railways owned steamers to the Netherlands at Rotterdam. Both Gilbert and Sullivan had travelled widely. The 'very small second-class carriage' came between 1st and 3rd Class and was abolished in Britain in the 1880s to come back in the 1950s, when the long anachronistic 'Firsts and Thirds' were renamed 1st and 2nd. However, a bathing machine? It was a small hut on wheels, which permitted you to change at the sea edge into your bathing attire and, without further embarrassment, to enter the water. You may find them still in some deliberately traditional resorts like Weymouth, but discretion no longer decrees their use. The stations referred to are on the Circle Line of the Underground, in those days, however, with steam trains and real compartments, A four-wheeler is a variety of horse-drawn cab also featuring in the Sherlock Holmes stories. The inspired folly of the dreamlike business proposition mentions a boot-tree, which was a device for stretching leather button-up boots to preserve their form. Banburys are cakes from that place, with fruit and spices. Rothschild and Baring were the two great private banking houses of the day, of which Barings was ruined by a young investment banker before this became recently fashionable. !What the bank or ruination? Suggest: -day, the latter being ruined before this bank became...

With the big banks' cornering of the deal, the Nightmare Song reaches its end in terms and emotions that we can feel as keenly today, as also the 'general sense that we haven't been sleeping in clover' (a phrase as easily on the tongue today as it was then). Gilbert has brought us back to reality.

Interestingly, a much more exclusive private bank still in existence, is mentioned in passing in 'Gondoliers'. In the song 'For everyone who feels inclined', a parody of comic socialist ideas, comes 'The aristocrat who banks with Coutts'. Coutts is still there and does not speculate with shaky mortgages or pay out obscene boni. Their main aim, as much today as in Gilbert's time, is perhaps not to be mentioned at all, but he got them!

But with that, I've exceeded my length limit yet again. Next time we'll look at the linguistic ingenuity of 'Patience'.

Very many thanks to Bryan Stone for providing this article

Puzzles

Take the first letter of the operetta that the songs, represented by their first lines, come from ignoring the word 'The'. There is one exception, namely number nine when the second word should be taken. The solution consists of two words describing ??????

**A wandering minstrel I
None shall part us from each other
I stole the Prince and brought him here
We sail the ocean blue
A nice dilemma we have here
When maiden loves, she sits and sighs**

**True love must single-hearted be
I know a youth who knows a little maid
Today we meet, my baby bride and
I10) Strange the views some people hold**
Many thanks Val for designing this puzzle for us

Solution to Gilbert & Sullivan Opera Quiz from autumn 2009 newsletter

