



The Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Sussex

President: Valerie Masterson C.B.E. **Co-President:** Melvyn Tarran
Vice Presidents: Stephen Brown, Simon Butteriss, Barry Clark, Bruce Graham, Donald Maxwell,
Cynthia Morey, Michael Simkins, Richard Stuart.

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2021

Dear All,

We have survived a long, dreary and confined winter, and Spring is upon us. The covid19 figures are in decline, and we have the encouragement of the successful vaccination programme and gradual lifting of lockdown restrictions. Of course there is a long way to go before things get back to anything like normal, but at least there is hope.

EVENTS REPORT

On Sunday 21st March we held our first event in thirteen months when Laurence Leng gave us a splendid online presentation entitled 'Strange Adventure - the Story of Gilbert & Sullivan.' Live events are not yet possible, so this one came courtesy of Zoom and Jane Leng's technical expertise. Free of charge to all and sundry, it was a forty-five minute tour of all the operas except Thespis, with well-chosen musical and photographic illustrations. Written, devised, and presented by Laurence, it was a very professional project - perhaps better suited to newcomers to G&S, but also an enjoyable refresher for the rest of us. Thank you Laurence (and Jane!)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Building on the success of 'Strange Adventure,,,,,' Laurence Leng is planning to give us the lowdown on The Sorcerer, and the date set for this is Sunday 16th May at 2.45pm. Again free of charge, it will be available to everyone, and the Zoom link will be sent out a day or two beforehand. Note the date in your diaries now.

EDITOR'S JOTTINGS

On Sunday 3rd January we sadly lost our old friend and valued Vice President John Cannon. He was 90, and had been ill for some time. Archivist to the London Society, a member of its Editorial Board, and a frequent contributor to Gilbert & Sullivan News, John is very much missed by us all. Our sincere condolences go to his widow Brenda and to his family, all of whom were with him at the end. John was a familiar figure at our Birch Hotel concerts, and his large collection of G&S memorabilia almost rivalled those of his friends Melvyn Tarran and Peter Parker. John's other great love was Chess, and he played for Sussex well over five hundred times! He was also President of Horsham Chess Club. RIP dear John Cannon.

Our new website launched on 7th February, and we are delighted with it. Designed and built by Webmaster Peter Colbourne (at a fraction of the commercial price) it has already attracted favourable comment. If you have not yet seen it, please do have a look. Access is via gilbertandsullivantoday.org.uk

The International Gilbert & Sullivan Festival is going ahead, but major alterations have had to be made to both the Buxton and Harrogate programmes. And the Malvern leg has been cancelled altogether. The Festival is in dire need of money, so donations are very welcome. Covid19 restrictions have meant that all amateur, foreign, and youth productions are cancelled, and this includes annual gems like SavoyNet and Bus Pass Opera. At the time of writing the plan is to seat the chorus at the side of the stage, and at Harrogate, to have the orchestra on the stage. Social distancing is essential, and audience members must be masked. Not an attractive scenario, but the hope is that some restrictions might be lifted after 21st June.

The BBC Music Magazine's Christmas issue carried a long and very well-written article in praise of Gilbert & Sullivan. And the January issue carried two excellent Letters to the Editor on the same subject, one of which revealed the surprising fact that composer Igor Stravinsky was a great fan of G & S and actually preferred it to the opera in London. Apparently he stayed at the Savoy Hotel on a number of occasions in 1912, 1914 and in the 1920s, partly in order to attend performances by the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company! Then the March issue carried a further letter revealing that Sullivan and Debussy were friends, and the latter was quoted as saying 'There was no phase in the history of music to compare with the enormous success of the comic operas.' Debussy went further, and considered the merits of Sullivan's more serious music such as his cantata The Golden Legend ('being pleasing and melodious'), and deemed Sullivan's opera Ivanhoe as 'equal in merit to the majority of Massenet's operas produced at the Paris Grand Opera, though more vigorous and manly.'

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G&S FAVOURITES - RICHARD NIXON

In 1966 my girlfriend Sylvia (now my wife), joined the chorus of Lewes Road (Brighton) Operatic Society. The musical productions were all G&S, but at that time I had only seen one of their productions, "The Pirates of Penzance". They needed the portraits for the second act gallery scene of their next production "Ruddigore" and I was asked to paint them.

Each of the performers was photographed in the costumes they would be wearing, and I took it from there.

On the opening night I sat and watched spellbound as the portraits came to life, and Sir Roderic sang "When the Night Wind Howls" with his chorus of ghosts. From then on, I was hooked.

My next favourite piece of music would be from "Princess Ida." I remember sitting up in the "gods" at Sadler's Wells Theatre and being pleasantly surprised by the sudden blast of the opening bars of the overture. This was prior to Lewes Road putting on a production of it for the first time ever.

Although it was very cumbersome wearing a full suit of armour on a small stage, I thoroughly enjoyed playing Scynthus (one of the three sons of King Gama). I must have because I have played the part in two productions.

G&S FAVOURITES - SYLVIA NIXON

Many years ago, when I was young and charming (well, six years old) I was taken to see my Grandfather appearing in The Pirates of Penzance, and from then on went to see all of the shows he appeared in, and they were of course all Gilbert & Sullivan. When I was sixteen, I was old enough to join Lewes Road Operatic Society and they were going to perform Ruddigore. This was my first ever stage performance, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. From then on Ruddigore was my favourite opera.

My second favourite is Princess Ida, in which I played the title role - having played smaller parts previously. I found the music spectacular. I can remember making my second act costume out of our left over lino from the kitchen floor: it worked very well after it had been sprayed with bronze paint, but the tacks dug in quite a bit during the performance.

One night whilst performing Princess Ida I left out half a page of dialogue during her long speech, but no one noticed until we got to the break 5 minutes early!

Lewes Road had one door onto the stage and if your entrance was from stage left you would have to squeeze behind the backdrop and also do the same to exit. This was great fun for the sons of Gama as they were dressed in full armour which clanked as they moved during one of my solos.

All of these things make being on stage so memorable and so much fun!

Thank you very much, Richard and Sylvia, for those insights into your early experiences of G&S - Ed.

Having asked our committee members to say which is their favourite opera I suppose I, Bill Colbourne, should follow suit, but I can't. They are all gems, although I think The Mikado is perhaps the best of them. However, it is not my favourite because I know it so well, having been in it several times and seen it times without number. But I do have particularly soft spots for the following, and for the reasons given:-

Princess Ida - because it is the first show in which I had a principal part (Florian - Lewes 1961), and the show in which I met my wife Christine (Hildebrand - Burgess Hill 1972).

Patience - because it is the first show I was ever in (chorus - Lewes 1959).

The Gondoliers - because I have been in it four times (Duke - Lewes 1965 and Haywards Heath 2000, Giuseppe - Burgess Hill 1971, and Don Alhambra - Worthing Light Opera Company 1998).

The Sorcerer - because I was John Wellington Wells at Burgess Hill in 1968, and loved it.

Utopia Ltd - because I count my King Paramount at Burgess Hill in 1966 as one of my biggest successes.

The Grand Duke - because I remember my Rudolph at Burgess Hill in 1970 as one of the most enjoyable parts I ever played.

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Here is an update from Laurence Leng:-

When the pandemic struck, as with so many societies, it threw our entire entertainment programme into turmoil. Whilst the committee immediately started to meet regularly via Zoom, it was felt that that was not a suitable platform for live concerts. Also we didn't want to "waste" some really good talent by presenting them to you in any other way than "in the flesh".

However, as the lockdowns continued we tried to keep in touch with members through newsletters and quizzes but felt we needed to take things further. Inspired by the success of some of the talks offered by our companion societies in London and Manchester, we thought, "let's give it a go!"

As some of you will know, I present a variety of community based educational talks, so I thought I would try to offer you one. I decided that I would pre-record it to cut down on the things that could go wrong - having to deliver a talk, cue 15 pieces of music and deal with the technical issues of Zoom were all too much to worry collectively about on a Sunday afternoon! As it happens, the whole event went with only minor issues and was attended by over 40 people joining us from Sussex, Surrey, London, Preston, the USA, and Australia! The feedback from the event has also been encouraging, with a number of comments on what a pleasant afternoon it made and how well the presentation had been put together.

The other advantage of pre-recording the talk was that it is now available for multiple use. It has subsequently been "broadcast" by Godalming Operatic Society and shared with Eastbourne G & S Society and parts of the U3A movement for potential use.

Following the same format, I have decided to prepare some abridged versions telling the stories of some of The Savoy Operas for future presentation. The Sorcerer is almost complete and has been given a provisional premiere date of 16th May. I hope to see you then.

Many thanks Laurence! We are looking forward to it already - Ed.

That is about it for this time, so keep safe and well, and I hope to see you all on 16th May!

Regards,
Bill.

Eileen Hall has sent me details of open air G&S in Dyke Road, Brighton this summer. Here they are, together with the links:-
Thurs. 29th July 2021 at 7pm: HMS Pinafore, by a company called Illyria

<https://www.brightonopenairtheatre.co.uk/event/hms-pinafore/>

Then on Sat. 4th & Sun. 5th September 2021: what they are calling a "Gilbert & Sullivan Festival" by Opera Anywhere

<https://www.brightonopenairtheatre.co.uk/event/gilbert-sullivan-festival/>

Opera Anywhere are doing:

Sat. 4th Sept. at 2pm: Pirates of Penzance

Sat. 4th Sept. at 7pm: The Mikado

Sun. 5th Sept. at 11am: HMS Pinafore

Sun. 5th Sept. at 3pm: Patience

They are offering discounts for people booking more than one show (from that set of four shows).

Items for inclusion in our next Newsletter should be sent to:

The Editor, G&S Today, 12 The Platt, Lindfield, Haywards Heath, West Sussex RH16 2SY.

**Committee Members: Chairman/Publicity: Bill Colbourne Vice-Chairman/Treasurer: Laurence Leng Secretary: Sylvia Nixon
Membership Secretary: Christine Colbourne Designer: Richard Nixon
Jane Leng Clare Samson**