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The Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Sussex

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**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 Suart.

# NEWSLETTER

Winter2021

## Harrogate 2021

Like so many others, when the 2020 G & S Annual Festival was cancelled due to Covid Laurence and I were disappointed but at least pleased to see that the Convention Centre had been converted into a Nightingale Hospital.

When the initial programme for 2021 arrived we had some doubts about how it would pan out. The theatre would only be booked to less than half capacity, there would be a reduced orchestra and the chorus would be static - how could that work? Once the vaccines started to be distributed at pace we started to think "We must support the Festival - if not, it might not be here next year" so we booked for a long weekend in Harrogate so we could see all the professional shows on offer.

The organisers obviously realised that people may not wish to attend or some from overseas might not be able to travel, so, for the first time, live streaming of the operas was arranged from Buxton during the first week. This proved very successful and it gave us an opportunity to see the shows before we got to Harrogate. It would seem a good idea to continue with such streaming in future years as a way of increasing access to such lovely productions.

On the Friday afternoon we went to a one man presentation of "The Diary of a Nobody" with the inimitable Simon Butteriss as Mr Pooter. An excellent book was given an accomplished stage adaptation and it was very well received by all in attendance.

While we were there we also saw some lovely National Gilbert and Sullivan Opera Company productions including "Patience", not a favourite G and S opera for either of us, but it turned out to be a highlight being performed in such an energetic and creative manner. We also enjoyed "HMS Pinafore" which had Mae Heydorn as Buttercup, which as Martin Wells commented in the latest edition of the Sir Arthur Sullivan Society magazine, was most pleasing, if not plump! "The Mikado" we saw was also very successful not least by poking fun at colonialism.

Not everyone liked the Covid-related measures in the productions, such as a static, limited chorus behind a veil in "The Mikado" but Laurence and I thought such measures worked well and did not detract from the success of the productions.

It was a great pleasure to be attending live performances again and we look forward to our future visits to the festival.

## John Cannon's G & S Collection

As most of you will be aware, John Cannon, one of our Vice Presidents, who sadly died at the beginning of the year, was a great collector of all things G & S and was an accomplished speaker on that topic. A couple of months ago, I was lucky enough to be given access to John's photo library - a complete treasure trove!

Some of you may recall I prepared all 13 of the Savoy Operas as 45 minute presentations with key songs, a precis of the story and illustrated with relevant photographs and images. As a result of now having scans of a whole range of new images, I am gradually updating these presentations to include these and the revised versions will be available again shortly on a number of the G & S Societies' websites.

I have also been given all of John's notes and images he used on his wide range of presentations. My intention, in the new year, is to record these as audio / video presentations and to also offer these up to the Society for inclusion on the websites to ensure John's knowledge and collection is not lost and is accessible to the Society's membership.

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### **Mae's concert**

After several false starts and Covid cancelled concerts, we finally got to welcome the mezzo-soprano, Mae Heydorn and her accompanist, Anthony Roberts, to The Birch Hotel on 26th September to give us an afternoon's entertainment - and what an afternoon!

Mae, who has performed with Glyndebourne, ENO and, of main relevance to us, the National Gilbert & Sullivan Opera Company gave us a wide and varied selection of music and the occasional poem. Along with some of her best known contralto songs, she sang Phoebe's "When maiden loves" and some all-time classics such as "Moon River". During the first half, we were even treated to a number of the bass / baritone solos all sung in their original key! Before she was allowed to leave, we all enjoyed, as an encore, Mad Margaret's song from act 1 of Ruddigore.

This was her first visit to us but I am sure it will not be the last!

### **Laurence's CV**

My first brush with G & S came in the form of "The Pirates Of Penzance" - a school production in 1971. I think it was typical of any school production at the time whereby the pirates and policemen were played by the seniors and the very short daughters were the juniors. Also, it was dreadful!! However, there must have been something there that appealed as I went out to investigate the other titles in the canon.

A few months later the D'Oyly Carte came to Brighton so I managed to see all that was on offer. I joined the Burgess Hill Operatic Society (BHOS) in the early 1970s with my first show being "Princess Ida". Whilst there I was lucky enough to play a number of roles such as the Lord Chancellor, The Judge, JW Wells, Shadbolt and Grosvenor. My BHOS experiences and personal research has increased my G & S knowledge and I have, for several years now, given educational talks on both G & S and Sullivan without Gilbert.

Also, during the 70ies, I was taken under the wing of Betty Elburn, a mezzo in the Carte in the 20ies who played Peep-Bo, Tessa and Phoebe and who also recorded these roles with HMV. I felt greatly honoured to have met and worked with her as she taught me so much of my stage craft I still use today - especially in voice projection.

Working in London restricted my opportunities to perform but since retiring I have been able to undertake concerts and to perform in non-musical plays. Over recent years, with the drama groups in Burgess Hill, Wivelsfield and Cuckfield, I have played heavyweight roles such as Andre in "The Father", the Inspector in "An Inspector Calls" and Lionel in "Racing Demon" and the more comic such as the U-Boat Captain in "Dad's Army".

Having been born and bred in Sussex it would be great to see our local society being at the fore-front of this wonderful Victorian art-form.

### **Jane's CV**

My first exposure to Gilbert and Sullivan was as a child attending a D'Oyly Carte production of "The Pirates of Penzance" at Blackpool. Some years later, I played the plump and pleasing part of Buttercup in a school production of "HMS Pinafore" which I enjoyed. Coincidentally, when I met Laurence during the time I was a student nurse, he was directing this same opera at Burgess Hill Operatic Society. Was this meant to be?

I have been Laurence's "bag carrier" throughout his singing and acting ventures with only occasional forays beyond programme selling including being in the chorus of a production of "The Mikado" in the 1980s. A larger commitment to productions was problematic all the time I was working as a nurse and then a senior teaching fellow at the University of Surrey. I have always known I enjoy singing but did very little in my adult life until I retired in September 2017 when I joined Burgess Hill Choral Society, where I am now the current Chair Person. That same year, I also participated in the G and S Today Christmas concert production of "The Mikado", playing the part of Pitti Sing. Having "caught the bug" I belong to several choirs including Coro Nuovo as well as St Mary's Singers, a group which comes together to sing at different cathedrals throughout the year. This transmogrification has been completed by the conversion of a bedroom into a music room in an effort to contain my, not always melodious, rehearsal. In addition, I have made some forays into amateur dramatics most recently as part of a "swarm of old ladies" in "The Ladykillers" at Burgess Hill Theatre Club.

The G and S Today community has helped me appreciate the joy of G and S and I am very grateful for the encouragement and welcome I have received from the society. I am clear that we can play a significant role in sustaining a life enhancing musical tradition and look forward to working as part of the committee to enable the spirit of G and S to flourish in the years to come.



THE SEASONS GREETINGS TO ALL OF OUR MEMBERS



**Steering Group:** Melvyn Tarran, Laurence Leng, Jane Leng, Sylvia Nixon, Richard Nixon