

Savoyardage

The newsletter of the Madison Savoyards, Ltd.

November 2005 – Number 83

PATIENCE IS COMING YOUR WAY IN 2006

Patience, or, Bunthorne's Bride, although not one of Gilbert and Sullivan's "big three," followed *Pirates of Penzance* and was a great success in its day. Gilbert had set off to poke fun at the cult of aestheticism with *Patience*. Aestheticism – the European arts movement that was based on the belief that a work of art exists for the sake of its beauty alone and not to serve political, moral, or other purposes – was all the rage in London in the late nineteenth century. Londoners displayed an excessive mania for items considered to be beautiful – Japanese prints, blue and white china, etc. – and Gilbert set out to parody this crazed cult with the operetta that became *Patience*. He also wanted to satirize the Anglo-Catholic movement that had appeared in the Church of England and used the story of *The Rival Curates* from his *Bab Ballads* as a basis for his initial sketch of the plot, but he got cold feet and backed away from this plan lest he antagonize and anger the Church by incorporating comic clerics into the operetta (his hero was to be the Reverend Lawn Tennyson). Instead, Gilbert reworked the story and switched from a chorus of comic clerics to a chorus of love-sick maidens infatuated by the poet, Reginald Bunthorne (modeled on Oscar Wilde, Charles Algernon Swinburne, James McNeill Whistler?). The rival curates became rival poets, with Bunthorne thought to represent Whistler and Grosvenor to represent Oscar Wilde. All the well-born young ladies of the village, enraptured with aestheticism, fall in love with the two aesthetic poets. But alas, the poets are both in love with *Patience*, a simple milkmaid who couldn't care less about poetry. The twists and turns that the plot takes are truly delightful, and nearly every character ends up with a suitable partner, except for poor Bunthorne.

Sullivan, as was often the case, was tardy in preparing the music. He had been on holiday in Nice but rushed home and worked night and day, orchestrating *Patience* in only ten days and finishing it just before the opening. The score came piece by piece to the theater as rehearsals were under way. The show opened at the Opéra Comique on April 23, 1881, and was favorably received. There were eight encores given on opening night, and the *Daily News* reported that "The composer's settings of the lyrical portions of Mr. Gilbert's satire are in nearly every case, bright and melodious. The sentiment and grace of most of Mr. Sullivan's music gives the additional zest to the quaintness and humour of the other portions, and there is little doubt that these qualities and

merits of Mr. Gilbert's book will secure a success as great as any that hitherto resulted from the same cooperation."

Patience became the first "Savoy" opera when it was transferred to the newly-constructed 1,292-seat Savoy Theatre on October 10, 1881. Although it had already opened at the Opéra Comique six months earlier, it enjoyed a second opening on October 10 when, for the first time, the crowded theater auditorium was illuminated by 1,200 electrical bulbs powered by a straining electrical generator. When the second opening at the Savoy was reviewed, Gilbert and Sullivan found the description of their new production was nearly eclipsed by the reviewers' preoccupation with Richard D'Oyly Carte's incorporation of electrical lighting into the new theater's auditorium. The stage continued to be lit by gaslights until December 28, 1881, when a second generator was installed that allowed the stage to be illuminated by a (as reported by the *Daily Chronicle*) "soft, soothing light, clearer and far more graceful than gas." In fact, when D'Oyly Carte appeared on stage holding an electric light and gave a presentation and demonstration on the safety of electrical lighting ("A hush fell upon the audience, who thought that electricity was always fatal" as reported in the *Electrical Times*), he received resounding and enthusiastic cheers and had to take two calls.

Patience ran for 578 performances in London due to its appeal to the public, for it had more "catchy" tunes than any of the previous Gilbert and Sullivan operettas and was weighted with more duets, trios, and ensembles than solo arias as compared to their previous works. The Prince of Wales attended the opening at the Savoy, and Oscar Wilde went to see the opera. In fact, D'Oyly Carte arranged for Wilde to tour America as *Patience* was performed there, and Wilde would appear in an audience or lecture in a particular city as *Patience* opened in different locations to publicize the opera and the cult of aestheticism (and ramp up ticket sales, no doubt).

Patience has been performed only twice – 1982 and 1991 – by the Madison Savoyards, and it is overdue for another showing in Old Music Hall. Wendy Rowe (the significant other of Jim Rowe, who recently performed in our 2005 production of *Pirates of Penzance* as Samuel) was cast as *Patience* in the 1982 show. I interviewed her about the 1982 production and her thoughts on *Patience*. Wendy commented on her recollections ... "I had just finished my freshman year at UW, and I was thrilled to be called back at all, let alone be

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up for the lead. I really didn't even know who Gilbert and Sullivan were or anything about being on stage. I was just a kid and was thrown into this thing. I had been Marian the Librarian in *Music Man* my senior year in high school (Whitefish Bay, WI), but I didn't really know what community theater was all about. I learned so much!"

She goes on ... "I owe Savoyards so much for giving me a break and casting me in the lead role. They were so good for me and really nurtured my talent. The social aspect of the group was really wonderful too. I met people that I would never have had a chance to encounter and get to know otherwise. John Barker, Richard Knowles and Perry Allaire were all in the chorus, and the directors were J. Leon Miller (artistic) and Christopher McGahan (music). The character, Patience, is this innocent milkmaid who doesn't know the ways of the world, but as the show progresses, her character grows, but she doesn't really know who she is in love with. A lot of us can relate to these conflicts. By Act II she realizes what is happening to her. I remember sitting on a rock, alone on stage, as I sang *Love Is a Plaintive Song*, and realizing that this (opera and musical theater) was really what I wanted to do in my life as I sang about what love does to a person. This song, to me, is deeper and more poignant than many of the lighter, comic arias in the various Gilbert and Sullivan operettas."

As many of us know, Wendy went on to pursue a career in music and was cast as a lead in subsequent Madison Savoyard productions in later years, as have many others who have performed with our group over the decades.

The Savoyards are proud to bring *Patience* to the stage in 2006. Be sure to work viewing at least one performance of *Patience* by the Madison Savoyards into your summer schedule in the coming year. The music is delightful, and you will undoubtedly find the performance electrifying!
by Keith Meyer

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

My dad would be so proud!

When I was growing up he shared with me his favorite music. He praised the talent of Benny Goodman, the absurdity of Spike Jones and the beauty or cleverness of various show tunes, but when he spoke of Gilbert and Sullivan an almost reverential tone would come into his voice. They were "brilliant" and there was "nothing like them". From him I learned to love the intelligence, humor and unforgettable melodies of G&S and

enthusiastically embraced his view that they were the nonpareil of musical theater.

Dad was no longer with us by the time I re-located to Madison, but I know he would have appreciated my first Savoyard moment. Walking down State Street, after thirteen years in a region devoid of Gilbert and Sullivan, I spied a poster for *Princess Ida* in a store window and stood staring in delight at it as my family strolled on. "Oh joy, Oh rapture unforeseen!" Eventually they returned for me and we rejoiced together that we had landed in a city of such sophistication and wit to have their own G&S company.

Not long after, our five year old (who seemed to have absorbed the G&S canon while in utero) became one of Buttercup's urchins in *H.M.S. Pinafore* and I became a devotee of the Madison Savoyards. My husband, Joe, served on the Board in 2000 and 2001, then I took a turn and our affection and devotion to the organization has only grown. For the past two years I've joined my daughter on the stage and had the great pleasure of singing in chorus. I've also served as Vice President for the past two years, filling in occasionally for the amazing Helen Baldwin and working to get our school outreach program started.

This fall, in keeping with Savoyard tradition, I will be stepping up to the Presidency. Helen is a tough act to follow - during her three year Presidential tenure we have accomplished so much: the Board has expanded, we've grown more savvy at applying for grants and Savoyards has become more professional and organized. I am pleased and grateful to tell you that Helen will remain on the Board and be devoting her energies to keeping Savoyards funded so that we can continue to deliver productions that are a delight to see and hear. For my part, I will try to maintain her standard of excellence and keep us growing and our production values improving. As you will see, planning for *Patience* has begun in earnest and we can all look forward to a quintessential Gilbert and Sullivan experience in July, 2006!

By Caryl Emra Farkas

MEMBERANDUM

The Madison Savoyards performed their Outreach Event on October 9th. Fellow Savoyards Paul Bushland, John Kruse, Ethan Bremner, Susan Craft and Julie Hutchinson joined together to perform G&S favorites from *Yeomen of the Guard*, *Pirates of Penzance*, *Ruddigore* and their upcoming production, *Patience*. Ted Reinke was the accompanist. Their next Outreach performance will be on Friday, February 3, 2006. Richard Yde appeared as the Cardinal, Bill Hoyt in the chorus and Jamie-Rose Guarrine as shepherd boy in Madison Opera's production of *Tosca*. Julia Foster will be performing

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the roles of Daphne and Enone in Marc-Antoine Charpentier's *La Descente d'Orphee aux Enfers* in November, and will play Nina in Massenet's *Cherubin* in Spring 2006...Christiaan Smith-Kotlarek had a recent recital at Morphy Hall, and currently plays in a Jazz Jam every Tuesday night at the Rathskellar...Albrecht Gaub, Bill Rosholt, and Julie Hutchinson performed in the Wisconsin Chamber Choir's first in a series of concerts, "Songs of Lamentation and Veneration" on October 23rd. Their next performance will be on December 9th at 8 PM, when they present "Welcome All Wonders" at St. James Church...Sean Bode recently played the part of Bill Ray in R&R's version of *On Golden Pond*. Catherine Neuman will be appearing as Mrs. Mops and Keith Meyer as Old Joe in *A Christmas Carol* with CTM-Family Theater of Madison. Performances will be Dec 2-18 in the (newly renovated) Capitol Theater. *By Sean Bode*

A WINTRY SALUTE TO POETRY-HAIL POETRY

It's coming! Winter, yes, and **Hail Poetry**, too. On February 3, 2006 you will be treated with a program of Gilbert and Sullivan's poetry and poetic song. Find your brand new 2006 calendar and mark the evening: 3 February 2006, 7:30 PM at the First Unitarian Society, University Bay Drive, Madison. John Kruse is creating a poetic evening with lots of your favorite songs and singers. Bill Lutes and Martha Fischer will entertain and delight us.

A special pre-program treat awaits our valued supporters. Your generous gift to the Madison Savoyards Ltd. will merit an invitation to meet early that evening for knowing commentary on *Patience* and on poetry produced and parodied by Gilbert in this delicious light opera.
By Helen Baldwin, Past President

Helen reminds, too, that it's a good time to repeat our thanks to the Dane County Cultural Affairs Commission, and Madison Arts Council. Also, the Evjue Foundation provided valued help to the Summer Music Consortium for their joint publicity efforts, visible at the Square and in local media.

A SONG OF GRATITUDE

(To be sung to the music of "I am the very model of a modern Major-General")

1.

One day in May I found myself apprenticed to your pirate band.
I bought the music, started memorizing with the score in hand.
While Gilbert's twisted lyrics made it difficult to get the gist,
I all the same enjoyed rehearsals in the basement Methodist.

When Brian said, "you guys can go, but you guys stay here," we obeyed,

We learned that swords and open shoes don't mix, and how to wield a blade.
Our insufficient diction brought about that Blake was ill at ease,
And general commotion rose until Steph shouted, "Quiet, please!"

Chorus:

And general commotion rose until Steph shouted, "Quiet, please!"
Yet once from our indentures freed, no man was left to keep us down
Determined as we were to stage the very greatest show in town.
Because in Gilbert, Sullivan and other things Victorian
Each of us is the very model of a Savoyardian.

Chorus:

Because in Gilbert, Sullivan, and other things Victorian
Each of us is the very model of a Savoyardian.

2.

One critic counts the people in the pit, and he finds twenty-five,
(Most of them beauties.) But he says the stage is only half alive.
He quite ignores the dancing wards, particularly Emerald,
And practically all his kudos goes to Mr. Wetherald.

The other paper disagrees—not on the Major-General,
But on direction, which it calls "inventive" and phenomenal.
Poor fellow Kenneth burns our Mardi Gras, but we look over it.
The life of Brian won't be changed by mediocre *Isthmus* writ.

Chorus:

The life of Brian won't be changed by mediocre *Isthmus* writ.

The hall is packed, the audience rejoices in the great event,
And it is very evident that these attentions are well meant.
Because in Gilbert, Sullivan and other things Victorian
Each of us is the very model of a Savoyardian.

Chorus:

Because in Gilbert, Sullivan, and other things Victorian
Each of us is the very model of a Savoyardian

3.

As Madison and Middleton and Shorewood Hills are rocked and bounced,
We take the chance, and very soon an extra Thursday show's announced.
A cellist has to be replaced, a flute, bassoon, and oboe, too.
The cell phones ring in all the music schools of the UW.

We have achieved a great success by singery and dancery—
Police, the pirates, Vicky-man, and all the wards-in-chancery.
Of Stoughton's famous Opera House was honorable mention made—
Hail poetry, thou heav'nly maid, thou gildest ev'n the pirates' trade!

Chorus:

Hail poetry, thou heav'nly maid, thou gildest ev'n the pirates' trade!

I thank you for the chance to take a share in this euphoria,
(And all this with the accent of the grandson of Victoria)
Because in Gilbert, Sullivan, and other things Victorian
Each of us is the very model of a Savoyardian.

Chorus:

Because in Gilbert, Sullivan, and other things Victorian
Each of us is the very model of a Savoyardian.

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