

# Precious Nonsense

NEWSLETTER OF THE MIDWESTERN GILBERT AND SULLIVAN SOCIETY

July 1993 -- Issue 39

**Toil, sorrow, and plot, Fly away quicker and quicker--  
Three spoons to the pot--That is the brew of your vicar!**

Thanks to Barbara Staffen and the kindness of the Savoy-Aires,

## This is the Plan for the Midwestern Gilbert and Sullivan Society 1993 Annual Meeting

Date:	Sunday, August 15, 1993
Time:	1:30 pm (Performance begins at 2:00, but we will have a short meeting beforehand)
Place:	Marillac Theater (315 Waukegan Road {the corner of Waukegan and Willow Road}, Northfield, IL
Event:	The Savoy-Aires' production of <i>The Sorcerer</i>
Cost:	\$10.00 per ticket (\$2.00 off the regular price), to be picked up at the performance.* Call (312) 862-7781 to place your order, and identify yourself as a MGS member.

(\*the catch here is that the tickets have to be ordered by phone, and paid for with Visa or Mastercard. If you want to pay by check, send your request for tickets to the August 15th Matinee to *The Savoy-Aires*; P.O. Box 126; Evanston, IL 60204 and include a self-addressed stamped envelope. In order to insure that you receive your tickets in time, these orders must be received by **August 1, 1993** (though they seem willing to extend it a couple of days in a pinch. If you can't do either, give S/A Cole a call, and she'll see what she can do). Either way, don't wait to order your tickets.)

This year, no arrangements have been made for a "formal" dinner, since the organizing committee's direct knowledge of the restaurants in the area doesn't extend any farther than the Pancake House on Willow Road. Therefore, we're going to have a short meeting first (mainly to greet each other and pass out door prizes), and then members can go with whomever they want to whichever restaurant pleases them most. Or we'll decide at the performance: we'll see what happens.

In any event, don't wait to order your tickets: We'll look forward to seeing you there! If you have any questions about the performance itself, call the ticket-ordering number above, or Barbara Staffen at (312) 784-4866. If you have any questions about the arrangements, call Sarah Cole (708) 859-2918 or 896-8860).

What Cheer! What Cheer! {Midwestern}

As we just finished saying, The Savoy-Aires are

going to be giving **The Sorcerer** at the Marillac High School Auditorium in Northbrook August 13-14 and 20-21 at 8:00 pm (as well as August 15 at 2:00). If you can't come to the MGS Annual Meet-

ing, maybe you can catch another performance. For more information, the company can be contacted at P.O. Box 126, Evanston, IL 60204, or call (312) 862-7781 to use their voice mail system to order tickets.

Incidentally, the Savoy-Aires now have a newsletter. You might want to ask about it when you contact them.

Light Opera Works' will be presenting *Babes in Toyland* and **Iolanthe** during its 1993 season. **Iolanthe** is scheduled for August 27-29, and this year's big attraction, Herbert's *Babes in Toyland*, will be given December 26-January 2. At the same time, **Iolanthe** sounds like it ought to really be something, too: there's a rumor going about that the fairies are going to be Military Fairies. From all appearances, these productions are likely to be sell-outs. For more information, Light Opera Works can be reached at 927 Noyes St., Evanston, IL 60201-2799 {(708) 869-6300}.

The Mariott Lincolnshire Resort and Theater is presenting *The Hot Mikado* June 16 through August 22. The flyer states, "This all-new boogie-woogie adaptation of Gilbert and Sullivan most popular opera, *The Mikado* swings the Big Band Sounds of the 1940's. The reviewer for *The Chicago Tribune* liked it. For more information, call the Mariott Lincolnshire Theater at (708) 634-0200 (or write the theater at Ten Mariott drive; Lincolnshire, IL 60065).

Thomas Weakley has pointed out that **Pinafore** will be produced by the Kentucky Opera at the Macauley Theatre December 7, 10, 11 (1:00 pm matinee), and 14, 1993. For more details, call the Kentucky Opera at (502) 584-4500.

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**What Cheer! What Cheer! {Elsewhere}**

The Lamplighters (2350 Turk Blvd., San Francisco, CA 94118 / (415) 752-7755) are going to be giving **Gondoliers** weekends between October 2 and November 7, 1993. Tickets are \$22.00 (\$17.00 for youth, and they knock off a dollar for paying with cash/check). For more information, contact them: we've heard nothing but good reports of their work.

This sounds like it ought to be something. The Connecticut Gilbert and Sullivan Society is going to be presenting a

double bill of *Trial By Jury* and Robert Cumming's "fairy tale operetta" *Rumpelstiltskin* November 5-7, 1993, at the Middletown High School, and November 13-14 at the Ivoryton Playhouse. Tickets will be \$12.00 (though seniors and children get a special price of \$10.00 at the matinees, which will be November 6, 7, and 14th). For more information, contact the company at P.O. Box 2152; Middletown, CT 06457 / (203) 873-1005.

We learn from Charlee Hutton that Ambassador Pops Subscription Series (at the Ambassador Auditorium in Pasadena, CA) is going to feature Donald Adams "in his solo musical autobiography *My Life in Songs and Arias*" on Wednesday, May 4, 1994 at 8:00. There's no word yet on individual ticket prices, but you can call 1-800-266-2378 or (818) 304-6161 for more information. If you're going to be in the area, it ought to be a lot of fun. We hear from Robert Sheldon, of *Opera A La Carte*, that he's also going to be appearing with them in their April 30 (evening) and May 1 (matinee) performances of **The Gondoliers** at the Ambassador Auditorium. We'll pass on details of the performances as they become available.

The Gilbert and Sullivan Society of Shreveport is planning to present **Mikado** in 1994. For more information, you can contact the society at 270 Bruce Ave.; Shreveport, LA 71105

## The Winners of the Last Postcard Drawing

This time around, we found that most MGS members who respond to MGS Post Card drawings have VCRs, CD players, and record players. But *all* of them have cassette players. The MGS will keep that in mind when choosing prizes (and performing companies may want to keep that in mind when coming up with promotional tie-ins for their productions).

In the meantime, *Tom and Ruthann Stetak* were the winners of the drawing (using the ol' CD player random select function selection method. Incidentally, the tune that had the same number as their post card was "Climbing Over Rocky Mountain".) Since they still had a functioning record player, they won an Arabesque recording of *Iolanthe* and the Donald Adams/Thomas Round Gilbert and Sullivan bio-recording. We hope they will enjoy the records; and we'll look forward to hearing from you during the next Postcard drawing.

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## The Pirates of Penzance "Kinderhostel"

Surprisingly enough, over the last couple of years, some of the most innovative programs to get underserved audiences involved in Gilbert and Sullivan has come from Waubonsee Community College, in Sugar Grove, Illinois. A couple of years ago, some of you may remember they provided Signers for the hearing-impaired to a local production of *Pirates*. This year, Waubonsee has been hosting a two-week theater day camp for youths in sixth grade through high school, at the end of which they will present their own production of *Pirates*.

Dr. Susan Birch, the head of Waubonsee's Youth Enrichment program, says they got the idea to organize this comprehensive theater class from observing community theaters. In general, youth have so little opportunity to participate (due frequently to their inexperience and already established community theater performers). All the youth who enroll in the program will participate in one way or another: the students make their own costumes and sets, design their own programs, and, of course, perform in the show. The result may not be Broadway-bound, but the students will know a lot more about stagecraft than they did when they started. Their experience would also help them become better audience members: when they go to a show in the future, they will have a better appreciation of the amount of work that went into the performance.

Waubonsee's theater camp began July 19 and runs through July 29. That evening at 7:30, the students will give a (free) performance of a condensed version of *Pirates* for their fans (and any G&S fans who might be passing). We certainly hope the camp goes well for these ambitious youth, and we will look forward to seeing them in full-length G&S operas in the future.

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## Where Can it Be?

We're still looking for G&S-related materials or dealers in that sort of memorabilia, let S/A Cole

know who they are, what they have, and how to get in touch with them. The next Nonsense is going to be a shopper issue, if all goes well, and the information will appear in it. It ought to be a big help to collectors. But it's going to look pretty funny unless we get some more information. If you belong to a performing group that sells videos of its performances, or has old promotional items (tee shirts, coffee mugs, snickersnees, what-you-will) it wants to unload, let us know. A reference in the Nonsense could open a whole new market.

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## Plots of Gilbert's and Sullivan's Independent Works: **Rosencrantz and Guildenstern** Synopsis by Arthur Robinson

W.S. Gilbert's play *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* first appeared in the periodical *Fun* in 1874, but was apparently not performed in public until 1891. A benefit performance in 1904 had a cast that included Gilbert himself, George Bernard Shaw, Francis Burnand, and Anthony Hope (author of *The Prisoner of Zenda*, among other well-known works); an amateur performance in 1900 had featured P.B. Wodehouse as Guildenstern.

The main characters in Gilbert's play are **King Claudius** and **Queen Gertrude** of Denmark, their son **Hamlet** (while King Claudius has a secret sin, it is not having murdered his brother), the courtiers **Rosencrantz** and **Guildenstern**, and **Ophelia**. Any resemblance between these characters and those in any other plays, living or dead, is, of course, purely coincidental.

The play opens with King Claudius of Denmark confessing (in blank verse) to his wife an indiscretion of his youth: he was once guilty of writing a five-act tragedy. But his play had a somewhat short run: it closed half-way through the first act, as a result of hysterical laughter from the first-night audience. For the opening performance, Claudius had packed the theatre with sycophantic courtiers, but, he confesses, "My tragedy was more than even sycophants could stand." The humiliated Claudius then decreed that anyone who mentioned the play was to be executed.

Gertrude urges her husband to forget the past and concentrate on their present problem: young Hamlet's alarming "tendency to long soliloquy." She has summoned Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to

distract her son's mind. Rosencrantz, it turns out, is in love with Ophelia who, tells him when he tells her, that she *may* not love him (just like Casilda *may* not love Luiz). She is betrothed to Hamlet, whose sanity is in doubt. For one thing, although he is an eleventh-century Dane, "he always dresses as King James the First". Opinion is divided on whether Hamlet is actually mad, but the favorite theory seems to be that "Hamlet is idiotically sane with lucid intervals of lunacy." She enters enthusiastically into Guildenstern's plan to break her unwanted engagement. He suggests that he and Rosencrantz trick Hamlet into putting on Claudius' "damned" tragedy and incurring the king's wrath. The only extant copy of the play, though, is in the possession of Ophelia's father, the Lord Chamberlain (the state censor). Ophelia is confident she can steal it that night, because, after spending the day "reading all the rubbishing new plays," her father always "sleeps exceeding sound".

In the second tableau, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern tell the Queen they play to divert Hamlet by having him play a leading part in some court theatricals. Hamlet approaches, rumpling his hair and rolling his eyes. The horrified queen recognizes the symptoms: "That means--he's going to soliloquize!" She begs the others to prevent this. Hamlet enters and begins "To be--or not to be," but the others interrupt him, converting the soliloquy into a trio, in which they urge him to commit suicide. Finally, Hamlet rebukes them: "It must be patent to the merest dunce/Three persons can't soliloquize at once!" He retires up to finish uninterrupted, as a terrified Ophelia enters. It seems "the mouldy spectres of five thousand plays, all dead and gone" haunt her father's study, "chattering forth the scenes and parts of scenes [her] poor father had cut out." After that harrowing experience, she had concluded that, in cutting them, her father had acted most judiciously. But she was able to secure the fatal manuscript.

They then employ reverse psychology, showing Hamlet the five-act tragedy "Gonzago" (without revealing its authorship), but urging him not to put it on. Not only is it a poor play (Rosencrantz at one

point calls it "a thing of shreds and patches") but, they tell him, it is too long, and all the parts are insignificant except his own: a mad Archbishop, who stabs his aunt for no discernible reason and enters upon a "career of murder, tempered by soliloquy" who is finally blown from a gun by the Bench of Bishops. Hamlet, however, is stagestruck, and insists on performing the tragedy.

In the third and last scene, the king and his court attend the performance; but in Gilbert's version, the play is a trap for Hamlet, not Claudius. Soon the audience is roaring with laughter, except for Claudius, who first comments that the lines seem familiar, then realizes the truth. The laughter continues until the audience learns that there are five acts to come, whereupon, according to the stage directions, "All groan." King Claudius then reveals that the play is his, and condemns both of his worthless children (Hamlet and the play) to death. Hamlet, as a philosopher, can't bear death. As the King draws his dagger, Ophelia suggests that, instead of killing the prince, the King should banish him to a "certain isle beyond the sea" called "Engle-land," where the natives are more likely to appreciate Hamlet. The King consents and sends Hamlet there with the comment, "They're welcome to his philosophic brain." So Hamlet gets deported, Rosencrantz gets Ophelia, and the play ends. So, presumably, does the revival of "Gonzago", which this time hasn't even made it to the middle of Act I.

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Well, here we are at the end of another *Nonsense*. We'll look forward to seeing you at the Annual Meeting, and we'll look forward to hearing from you regardless.

Speaking of the Annual Meeting, the Midwestern Gilbert and Sullivan Society has two problems (at least two that come to mind). Now is the time for every good MGSser to come to the aid of his or her Society:

**Problem 1:** The MGS needs a social director. Another G&S society recently referred to the MGS as a "one-woman organization", which is certainly not true. As a member can see, from

the return addresses on the birthday cards to the names on the plot synopses to the observant people who pass on performance information, the efforts of many people go into making the MGS an interesting organization. But judging from who ends up getting billing in the *Nonsense* for the events the MGS has, it does appear to outsiders that S/A Cole does most of the work. Well, Ms Cole is tired of it, and wants to get some "new blood" into the high-visibility aspects of the Society. Social Director would be an excellent spot, since the MGS has so many members who are good at organizing fun parties.

The social director would plan MGS events (such as the Annual Meeting, though not necessarily limited to that), coordinate the ticket purchases for members (if a show is involved), arrange for prizes and gifts, and make arrangements with any restaurants, if necessary. If you would like to be Social Director (or even *a* social director), call S/A Cole to work something out.

**Problem 2:** The MGS needs membership unity. S/A Cole has been alarmed lately over the number of members who refer to the Midwestern Gilbert and Sullivan Society as "your" (meaning S/A Cole) society. The MGS was organized to be *our* society, for Midwesterners interested in G&S, and anyone else interested in G&S in the Midwest. Ms Cole has mentioned this problem to several other members, and it was pointed out to her that part of the so-called problem may be that members want to hear about what's going on with G&S, but don't want the responsibility of participating in organized activities. And the distance between members is certainly something to consider. Maybe that is the reason for the frequent "your"s. But then again, if the members *like* the society that way (as a "your" society), then there isn't a problem, except for S/A Cole. **SO**, we're going to have another postcard drawing on the subject of the MGS and its members. The questions are:

1. *From your perspective, **Is** there a problem? (That is to say, are you contented with the way the MGS functions?)*
- and 2. *If there **is** a problem, what could the MGS do to solve the problem.*

Please send your postcard back with your response by August 30, 1993. One of the returned postcards will be selected at random, and the sender will win some nice prize. Suggestions will certainly be wel-

comed.

The next issue should be the Shopper issue, and there should also be another plot synopsis and show review in it, too. If you have anything *you* would like to add, please do pass it on. We'll all look forward to hearing from you.

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