

TENTH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

April 13, 1989

In celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Gilbert and Sullivan Very Light Opera Company, we invite you to stay after the production tonight for a brief on-stage presentation including a drawing for prizes. After that, please join cast, crew, and orchestra in the lobby for further festivities and refreshments.



COMMEMORATIVE BUTTONS

Company members and some audience members will be wearing buttons festooned with various colorful ribbons. Each ribbon denotes the wearer's participation in a different production of the company. Seven of the "founding members" are in this production of Pinafore:

Waldyn Benbenek
Peter Erickson
Dick Fishel
Dean Laurance

Warren Loud
Charlotte Morrison
Barbara Webber



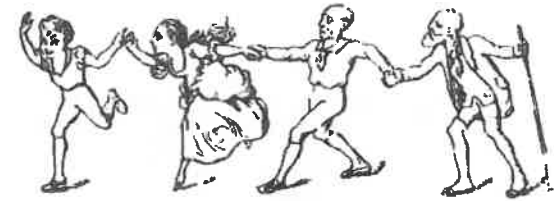
THE WHY AND WHEREFORE



In 1979, Dick Fishel and Jim Hart started the Gilbert and Sullivan Very Light Opera Company in order to fill a serious gap in the Twin Cities arts community. Every major metropolitan area should have a Gilbert and Sullivan company, but Minneapolis/St. Paul at that time could only claim that theatre companies occasionally scheduled a G & S work. It was not enough.

After trying its wings with the one-act Trial by Jury, the company presented Patience as its first full-length production. The men's chorus of dragoons wore red jackets (band uniforms), and the chorus of "rapturous maidens" was draped with pastel sheets. An elaborate pair of flats flanked the stage, but there were no platforms, and a large potted plant had to be brought in to screen the electrical outlet on the upstage wall. [Yielding to the pressures of nostalgia, our director for Pinafore has worked a potted palm into this production as a reference to those early days.]

The company has grown from a group of people singing around an out-of-tune piano to a troupe of talented and dedicated performers who work with a 22-piece orchestra. As the orchestra grew, we stopped making a "pit" at the front of the stage by removing seats. Now the orchestra sits backstage on a two-level tiered system of platforming, and the cast watches the music director on television monitors.



COMPANY MEMBERS

The company uses annual general auditions to cast principals and fill vacancies in the chorus. Many performers, both in the cast and in the orchestra, come back year after year to work with the company. We have had the same music director since 1985. The stage manager, house manager, and lighting designer have also been with us for several years. This cannot be attributed solely to our custom of throwing a cast party after every performance.

The range of occupations represented by our performers over the years has included high school students and teachers, a dentist, chemists, librarians, computer programmers, physicians, lawyers, nurses, an architect, writers, and a microbiologist. From teenagers to people in their 70s, performers have included father-son and mother-daughter combinations, as well as a brother and his two sisters.

Inevitably, there have been losses among our alumni: Henry Allen who endeared himself to our audience as the elderly notary in Patience, and, more recently, Charlotte Overend, who had a memorable combination of wit, wackiness, and poise. An improved lighting system was installed in the Howard Conn theatre last year in her memory.

There have been company births as well. We have had pregnant leading ladies in two past productions (Donna Carroll, our current stage director, as Elsie in Yeomen of the Guard and Judie Anderson as Tessa in The Gondoliers). Some other performers have brought babies to rehearsals, from the newborn Tanqueray infant in Iolanthe to the more recent Sullivan daughter in Yeomen.

The infectious Gilbert and Sullivan spirit and the emphasis on happy endings ("Oh, Rapture!") has evidently cast its spell over some of our members. Two couples met and married under the wing of the company, and another wedding is scheduled for later this spring.

REMINISCENCES OF PAST PRODUCTIONS

TRIAL BY JURY - Over the course of several years, various productions of Trial were presented. What must rank as the company's worst performance ever (paradoxically, our greatest trial) was one given at the old Lake Harriet bandshell. Not only did we follow a rock band whose audience melted away with our opening chords, but the directional microphones only picked up parts of the songs as the chorus danced by. A fine rain began to fall part way through, so only half of the company came out for the curtain call in front of a small but loyal audience. Unfortunately, it was the principals who had run for dry shelter, leaving a handful of damp chorus members on stage to bow sheepishly.

PATIENCE (1980) - The women's primitive sheet costumes were rather plain, so a few women in the company began to add decorations to their robes with each performance. The rest of the company noted with amusement the added flowers and rickrack that appeared each night as they tried to outdo each other.

IOLANTHE (1981) - One of the technical problems with Iolanthe is devising wings for the women's chorus of fairies and for the men's chorus of peers who are transformed into fairies at the end. We finally hit upon splendid gauze-covered piano wire wings that could be neatly folded under the peers' cloaks until the transformation. The audience was generally so distracted by the tights and pastel tunics that were revealed at the same time that they gave little thought to the engineering accomplishment of the wings.

RUDDIGORE (1983) - One of the settings is a picture gallery, where the hero's ancestors step down from their frames to confront him. We ingeniously painted full-length portraits on window shades so that the shades could be whisked up in the blackout, and a real man could instantly replace his portrait and "come to life." Ghostly shades, though, are not completely reliable, and in one performance, a portrait noisily and unexpectedly snapped up, revealing a black hole. The two characters on stage had a difficult time retaining their poise as a stealthy hand pulled the shade back down into position.

THE GONDOLIERS (1984) - The energetic choreography (by director Barbara Bloom) sometimes put our performers at risk. In the church basement where we rehearsed, one woman, thrown into the air in a jitterbug lift, kicked loose a ceiling tile. In performance, one enthusiastic dancing couple fell over the cushioned stage seating, and another woman sustained abrasions when her partner lost his grip on her at a crucial moment.

THE MIKADO (1985) - A sudden March snowstorm stranded both our Katisha (the alto lead) and her understudy far from the theatre and reduced our audience to three dozen. The show went on, however, with one of our chorus members doing the part with the score in her hand. After the show, cast members helped to shovel the audience out of the parking lot and struggled to the closest houses where they holed up for the night.

THE SORCERER (1985) - Inventive director Yale Marshall decided that most of the cast should spend the intermission on stage asleep. Because the stage has no curtain, this was a logical bridge between the end of Act I (when the cast falls asleep under the spell of the love potion) to the beginning of Act II (when they awake and fall in love with the wrong people). Aside from the difficulties of being still for so long (particularly when audience members come up for a closer look) there was also the danger of actually falling asleep.

THE YEOMEN OF THE GUARD (1987) Sometimes the cast uses the mid-week brush-up rehearsal as an occasion for pulling pranks on unsuspecting fellow cast members. For the somber execution scene in Yeomen (the execution is, of course, forestalled), the headsmen processed in carrying a chain saw instead of his executioner's axe while the cast somehow tried to remain solemn.

UTOPIA, LTD (1988) - Two charming Utopian sisters have just met English men for the first time. In the midst of the delightful quartet that ensues, one of the twins trod on her skirt while crossing the stage, and it fell to the floor, revealing (fortunately) perfectly modest Victorian undergarments. While her sister helped her back into her skirt, the two men gamely continued the scene as if it had all been planned.

LOOKING AHEAD

The GSVLOC has performed all but Thespis (Gilbert and Sullivan's first collaboration, for which the music has been lost) and The Grand Duke (their last, when perhaps inspiration was waning). We haven't planned our schedule beyond next year's production of Patience, so

Wherefore waste our elocution
On impossible solution?
Life's a pleasant institution;
Let us take it as it comes!

