

# Savoyardage

January 2005 – Number 80

## WINTER JOY: THE SAVOYARDS IN FEBRUARY

Madison Savoyards will present a midwinter concert on Friday, February 4, 7:30 p.m. at the Unitarian Meeting House, 900 University Bay Drive, Madison.

The theme for the evening is "*Winter Joy: The Savoyards in February*." Twelve recent Savoyards soloists will be joined by members of last summer's chorus to provide this midwinter program of happy, wistful, intriguing and funny Gilbert and Sullivan songs.

The songs will celebrate Groundhog Day (The Changing Seasons), Valentine's Day (Love In and Out of Bloom) and a February 29th Birthday (on which hangs the plot of *The Pirates of Penzance*). The "*Pirates*" section of the concert will include an audience sing-a-long.

To top off what promises to be an enjoyable musical evening, refreshments will be served following the concert.

Tickets are \$10.00 at the door. Children age 12 and younger are invited to attend at no cost.

There is ample free outdoor parking adjacent to the Meeting House itself. Questions? Phone John Kruse (608-238-9225).

## RENEW: A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT

It's an inspiring verb, full of energy and hope. It's what day spas promise and art delivers, restoring our interest and curiosity.

Renewing ourselves is what happens every summer when you and I, members of the Madison Savoyards, bring classic Gilbert and Sullivan light opera back to Madison. Wasn't *Ruddigore* terrific? I hope you didn't miss it. Truly a renewal. A few folks found our setting in 1960's Carnaby Street a bit too new, but most found the freshness invigorating, the voices tuneful, and the ghostly ancestors perfectly timeless. It was nice to read that Isthmus critics thought highly of it. In their Dec 31 issue Kenneth Burns noted that "...Madison Savoyards' lusty *Ruddigore* set the action in Swinging London." John W. Barker said "...Madison Savoyards brought new life to the underrated *Ruddigore* of Gilbert and Sullivan in a sassy updated production." Your contrasting views led all of your Board to think and discuss what being true to G & S means and the meaning of renewal, tradition, and revival.

Renew is also what you and I, individually, must do. The stage stays dark, the pit silent, and the seats empty unless we all renew our membership in the Madison Savoyards. You can renew in two ways, by a gift of at least \$25 or by volunteering in the productions or coming events. Both are essential by goodly numbers of members. And we do thank you, the cast and staff for *Ruddigore*, and many generous fans and supporters for their recent gifts. Even our outstanding ticket sales cover only half the annual budget, a budget that includes no paid staff or office rental. So if G & S light operas matter to you, renew and go a bit beyond. (Send your check to the address on the cover) Your updated membership will assure that the *Pirates of Penzance*, our production for 2005, appears in the theater near you, UW's Music Hall, renewed, alive, and lively.

## SAVOYARDS IN OVERTURE'S INAUGURATION

The new Overture Center of the Arts was finally unveiled on September 19<sup>th</sup>, and the Madison Savoyards joined in the festivities. With its spectacular architecture, the Savoyards were proud to be among the organizations requested in this new and wonderful facility. Most of the cast members from *Ruddigore* reunited for an encore performance, as the women's chorus and Deborah Holbrook opened with "Sir Rupert Murgatroyd." Susan Craft sang Rose Maybud's "etiquette" song and joined Ethan Bremner in the "Battle's Roar" duet. Ethan also sang Richard Dauntless's sea chantey. Dan Weinstein sang Robin Oakapple's patter song "My Boy You Can Take It from Me." Melissa Brooks-Greene reprised Mad Margaret's mad scene, and she joined Dan and Brian Bizzell in the "matter" trio. Everyone sang and acted out the frenetic and magnificent Act I Finale to great applause. The chorus also previewed the Savoyards' 2005 production, *The Pirates of Penzance*. Julie Hutchinson made an appearance as Mabel with her solo "Poor Wandering One" and the chorus finished with the rousing "When the Foreman Bears His Steel" (but they still didn't go!). Afterwards, the performers explored the new art center and the other events, and were proud to participate in this marvelous event.

## MEMBERANDUM

Sarah Meddaugh performed in the highly acclaimed play *The Laramie Project*, November 18th through the 20th at Madison East High. Catherine Neumann returned to CTM's *Christmas Carol* as Mrs Dilbur, the charwoman, the week before Christmas. Jessica Couto Lashbrook returned from Illinois and is currently performing at the Miles Away Café in Stoughton. Bill Rosholt and Anne Baltés recently sang in the

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Wisconsin Chamber Choir, as it celebrates its sixth season. Anna Farkas performed in the Young Shakespeare Production of *Julius Caesar*, in December. Kendra Sundal has enrolled in the Interlocken Arts Academy. Sean Bode takes on a small role in the play *Witness to the Prosecution*, which will begin February 5th. Keith Meyer was Daddy Warbucks in *Annie*.

Many members of past Savoyards' productions participated as chorus members and "supers" in the Madison Opera's magnificent October production of Puccini's *Turandot*. Chorus members included Ethan Bremner, Rachel Bishop, Bill Hoyt, Scott Hurlbert, Gil Peterson, Ilona Pinzke, former Savoyards music director Dennis Reece, and Savoyards percussionist and chorus member Dan Smith. Ethan Bremner was part of the small group of tenors that sang backstage at the beginning of act three. Richard Yde played one of the guards in a non-singing role. We all gained experience in taking cues from backstage TV monitors. To keep a large backstage chorus together, Dennis Reece stood partway up a stairway and conducted the rest of the chorus beyond the range of the monitors. For those of you who missed the opera, there is a webpage with some stunning digital photos of the sets and costumes at [www.jamieyoungphoto.com](http://www.jamieyoungphoto.com).

### **JIM COOPER, MADISON SAVOYARD IN 1973**

I began my G&S love when I volunteered to become the lighting designer for Oberlin College's 1960 production of *Iolanthe*. Throughout the rest of college I worked on the stage crew or in two cases played percussion in the orchestra. (I am not a percussionist, but a pretty good sight-reader, and we always traveled with a full band) In those days, the Oberlin G&S players had a summer season in Falmouth, on Cape Cod, and while in graduate school, I drove out to be in the last show each summer: one was *Iolanthe* and one was *Yeomen* (with John Lithgow as Jack Point). It was on Cape Cod, that I met the late David Crosby.

In 1971, we moved to Madison, where I worked for Nicolet Instruments (now Thermo Electron) and in 1973 I heard that David Crosby was active in the local musical scene and auditioned for him to sing chorus in *Yeomen*. He had imported Robert Gibson, a former D'Oyly-Carte director, who also directed on Cape Cod, and I was among friends. I remember the cast as young, mostly college students, and very friendly. The show, as I recall, was pretty good.

What remains amazing to me is that our first child was born in December of 1972, and here I was running off to rehearsals in the late winter of 1973. I still can't believe I got away with that. My son came to *Yeomen* as a babe in arms. I had to caution my wife about the loud arquebus shot in Act II so he wouldn't startle.

Sadly, we left Madison the next year for a teaching job at Tufts (at the University) and began being parents in earnest.

We ended up in Wilton, CT and I had pretty much put my theater career aside for carting kids off to swim meets until 2000, when the 50th anniversary of the Oberlin G&S players caused all the old G&S alumni to converge at commencement for a special show. It was through these friends that I learned about Troupers Light Opera, and I joined their cast of *Pirates* for their 2001 production. I soon became a full-blown member of their band. I volunteered to become their web master and since have become the vice-president, photographer, program editor, and have played some small roles in addition to being in chorus. In addition, in the summer of 2003, I auditioned for a summer theater production of *Pinafore*, and ended up playing the Boatswain (even though I am a tenor).

We'll be doing *Sorcerer* next Spring, I have my eye on Dr Daly, and incidentally, I have produced a complete, freely downloadable piano-vocal score for the *The Sorcerer*, that you will find on our web site: [www.TroupersLightOpera.org](http://www.TroupersLightOpera.org).

Should any of you be in Connecticut next April, do come see our *Sorcerer*! And incidentally, we still think Madison is one of the nicest places we ever lived! Even nicer than Ploverleigh!

### **REVIEWING A REVIEWER**

Eugen Weber, in his book review *Camembert: A National Myth* [Spring Key Reporter] has perpetrated a very common error by referring to Camembert as "ruling the roost." The correct quotation is to "rule the roast," referring to the ancient office of the individual in charge of the food at a medieval banquet. Ref: I never strove to rule the roast, She ne'er refus'd to pledge my toast." Matthew Prior (1664-1721) in *Turtle and Sparrow*. W.M. Gilbert got it right in *Princess Ida*, Act II lines 561 ff.: Melissa:

Now wouldn't you like to rule the roast  
And guide this University?  
Blanche: I must agree  
'Twould pleasant me.  
(Sing, hey, a Proper Pride!)

Aside from his insightful comments on university governance 120 years into the future, Gilbert is well worth reading for his incredible command of the English language, not to mention his encyclopedic knowledge of literature, history, and mythology. In fact, I learned the quotation "rule the roast"

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from Gilbert, not from Matthew Prior, a writer of whom I had no prior knowledge. Paul F. Zweifel, Radford, VA.

### **WE'RE ON OUR WAY TO PIRATES IN 2005**

As the performance of one of the “big three” G&S operettas by the Madison Savoyards approaches, we might ask ourselves why *H.M.S. Pinafore*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, and *The Mikado* are so popular while other works such as *Yeoman of the Guard*, *Ruddigore*, *Patience*, or *The Gondoliers* are performed less frequently. Gilbert might have been surprised by this turn of events. When asked later in life to name his favorites, he cited *Ruddigore*, *Yeoman of the Guard*, and *Utopia Limited* as the three he liked best.

Audiences have not agreed with Gilbert's choices. When *Ruddigore* closed in 1987, the big three were revived to take its place in the Savoy Theater until the late operas (*Yeoman of the Guard*, *Gondoliers*, *Utopia Unlimited*, and *The Grand Duke*) made their appearance, and the “big three” continue to draw the largest audiences today.

*The Pirates of Penzance* came on the heels of *H.M.S. Pinafore* and was first performed on December 30, 1879 as a matinee at the Royal Bijou Theatre in Paignton in Devon, England. This first performance of *Pirates* was put on by one of D'Oyly Carte's touring companies after only one full rehearsal. The audience numbered fifty, the cast had done a performance of *H.M.S. Pinafore* earlier that day, the overture wasn't ready, the cast held sheet music on stage during the opera, actors wore *Pinafore* costumes with added scarves for pirates, and the chorus of policemen wore sailors' costumes.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Gilbert and Sullivan were frantically trying to complete preparations for their New York opening of *Pirates*. Sullivan had accidentally left his rough draft of Act I in England and had to rewrite it from memory. He worked nonstop on Christmas Day to complete the score. He finished it one day before the dress rehearsal – two days before the opening. Gilbert's idea of burglars versus policemen (it was originally entitled *The Robbers*) metamorphosed into pirates as Gilbert stewed over pirated performances of his works and felt that they were unlikely to get copyright privileges in America. The obscure performance at the Royal Bijou Theatre the day before the New York opening was done specifically to get copyright in England.

When the show opened in New York on New Year's Eve with striking costumes and Sullivan conducting, it received nine encores. Sullivan felt great relief. He had recently written home to his mother about his difficulties in America and hopes for success: “Our houses at the *Pinafore* have fallen off very much this week. All the theatres are doing badly, and we shall have no profits until the new piece comes out – so

Gilbert and I are reducing our expenditure. We shall begin by not paying the postage of our letters home. We hope to have the new opera out on the 27th or 29th. It is called *The Pirates of Penzance*, or ‘Love and Duty’. I can't help feeling sanguine of success although we ought never to be sanguine.”

Madison Savoyards can feel “sanguine of success” as they head toward a summer 2005 production of *The Pirates of Penzance* under the direction of Brian Bizzell. Brian directed *Ruddigore* this past July, and the show received rave reviews. Those who saw the show marveled at the set and the performance – Brian's brainchild -- assisted by the brilliant musical direction of Mike Alexander and the stellar performance by the cast and musicians.

Perhaps some potential viewers thought “Ruddy who – what's that?” and missed a great show. The Madison Savoyards admittedly takes risks by putting on the less celebrated works of Gilbert and Sullivan as well as the “big three,” as they have over the past forty years, but loyal patrons know that all of the G&S operettas from *Trial by Jury* to *The Grand Duke* have beautiful music, unique plots, and witty librettos. Very few groups share the Madison Savoyards' tradition of putting on all the G&S operettas.

Tickets sold are the main source of funding that keeps Madison Savoyards productions rolling year after year, and we hope that our coming production of one of the “big three” will catch everyone's eye. The 2005 production of *The Pirates of Penzance* will mark the seventh (1966, 1970, 1976, 1981, 1987, 1996) by the Savoyards. We hope that our contributors and patrons will continue to keep the Madison Savoyards afloat and sailing on to many future productions of the witty works of Gilbert and Sullivan. See you all in Old Music Hall next July!

### **FROM THE OPERA PROPS NEWSLETTER**

On occasion, but not on cue, a bat flew across the Music Hall stage and out over the audience during two performances by the UW Opera of *Così fan tutte* last spring. At the time I mused that this would have been a subtle ad-placement for Madison Opera's upcoming production of *Die Fledermaus*. This summer, also in Music Hall, a bat (the same one?) appropriately haunted Madison Savoyards' ghostly *Ruddigore* Castle. The creature posed no danger, was courteously quiet (carrying no cell phone), and the singers gave the appearance of not noticing.

UW Opera and Madison Savoyards are linked by more than Music Hall's bats. A stack of Opera Prompters will easily verify that over the years many of UW Madison Opera's leads also sang major roles in productions of the Gilbert and

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Sullivan operas. For instance, when Madison Opera brought UW alum Thomas Murphy to sing Alfred in *Die Fledermaus*, I recalled that he had sung Fenton in UW Opera's 1982 production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, as well as the tenor leads in the Savoyards' *Pirates of Penzance* and *Ruddigore*.

This fall David Gagnon was a featured soloist in the Milwaukee Symphony's opening concert of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He then sang the lead tenor role in Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* for Milwaukee's Skylight Opera. In the early 90's David performed lead roles in the UW Opera's *The Crucible* and *West Side Story* as well as the Savoyards' *The Sorcerer*, *Utopia Ltd.*, and *HMS Pinafore*.

While Savoyards is a community organization whose casts have included singers from ages eight to seventy plus, it also provides a valuable "summer school" opportunity for UW's voice students. Most recently, Julia Foster, Dan Weinstein, and Ethan Bremner sang the love-triangle leads in *Ruddigore*.

Just as UW Opera director Bill Farlow was stage director for Savoyards' 2003 *The Gondoliers*, so Brian Bizzell directed the

2004 *Ruddigore* to great acclaim. Brian recently directed the UW Opera's fall production of the *Turn of the Screw* and next summer will direct *Pirates of Penzance* for Savoyards. It has been my privilege to appear, from time to time, in Savoyards' productions on stage with outstanding School of Music students. They are talented singers and actors, who inject a fresh vitality into the Gilbert and Sullivan standard repertoire, as well as into its aging veterans. John Kruse

### OTHER G&S PRODUCTIONS

LAMPLIGHTERS MUSIC THEATRE, San Francisco,  
<http://www.lamplighters.org> G&S: *The Yeomen of the Guard* (January, 2005); *The Gondoliers* (July, 2005)

VICTORIAN LYRIC OPERA COMPANY, Rockville, MD,  
<http://www.vloc.org> G&S: *Mikado* (February 2005), *Yeomen* (June 2005)

University of Michigan Gilbert & Sullivan Society Ann Arbor, MI,  
*Patience*: April 7-10, 2005.

The Gilbert & Sullivan Very Light Opera Co, Minnesota: *Gondoliers*:  
February 25 - March 20 2005.

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