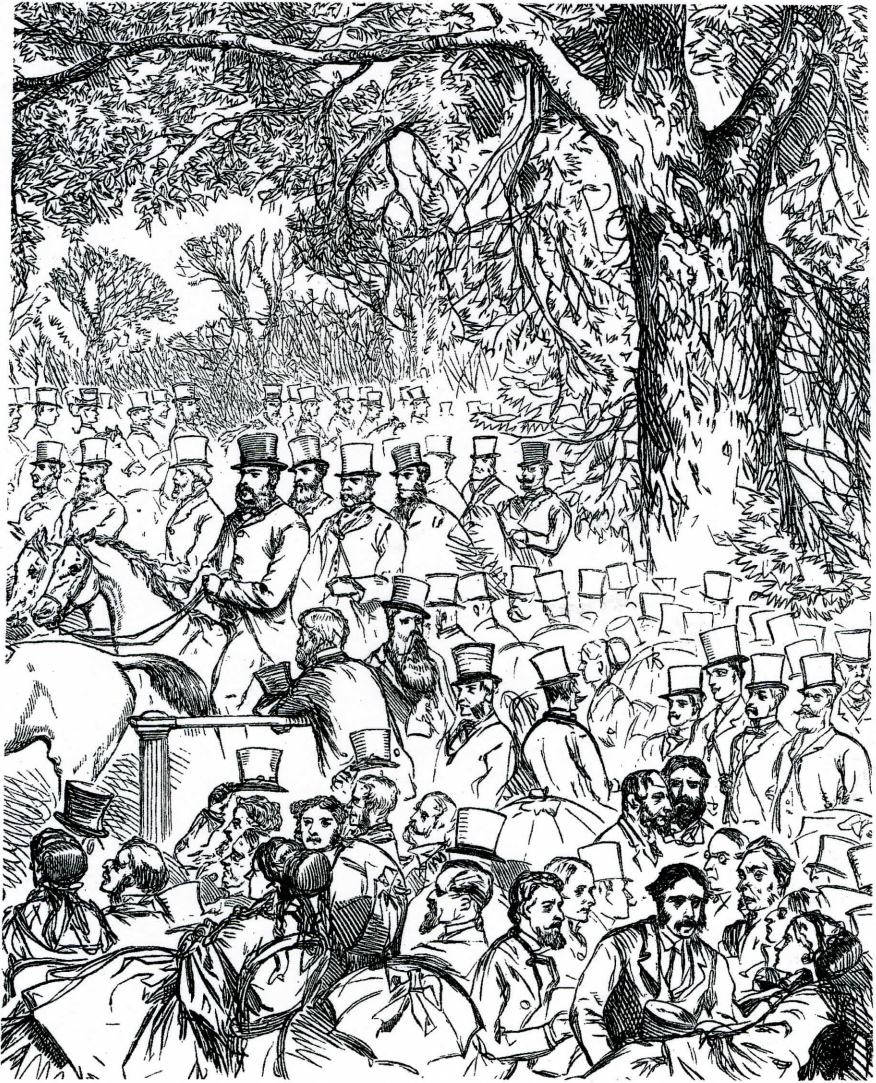


# SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN SOCIETY



MAGAZINE No. 44

SPRING 1997

# SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN SOCIETY

## Magazine No 44 - Spring 1997

Dear Member,

On Sunday 2nd February Stephen Turnbull and I attended the first recording session for the Society's CD of excerpts from Sullivan's late operas. Now entitled *Sullivan & Co*, the CD is produced by John Yap of TER Records. The National Symphony Orchestra is conducted by David Steadman.

The session was held at the EMI recording studios at Abbey Lane, commencing at 8pm in Studio Two - Welsh National Opera were recording in Studio One. It was a slightly unreal experience inasmuch as neither soloists nor chorus were present. What happened was that the orchestra played the accompaniments only to the four excerpts from *Haddon Hall* which will be included on the disc: In days of old; Queen of the garden; The sun's in the sky; When the budding bloom. The occasional flashes of silence in the madrigal were, as Oscar Wilde put it, perfectly delightful. Contributions from the soloists and chorus will be dubbed in at later sessions.

Two reflections in particular struck me as I listened to the superb sounds made by the orchestra, the first being that most of these players had turned up at the studio with no idea of what they were to play, or even of which composer was on the agenda. And yet, such is the professional skill of session players, they immediately gave us *Haddon Hall* as we have never heard it before, and as Sullivan meant it to be. Secondly I was reminded of Sullivan's own comments on the way in which a written orchestral score is able to preserve the composer's intended sound. The music we heard has been virtually silent for a century, and yet the written notes had preserved it for performance without any loss of sound quality from the passage of time. It is an obvious point, whose meaning came home in a moving way on this occasion.

The next sessions are to be held in March (Studio One). In other words the project is under way, and now is the time for all members to order the disc. The eventual selling price will be about £14.00 per copy, but you may reserve your copy now by sending a cheque for £10.00 (Overseas £12.00) to Stephen Turnbull (Cheques to Sullivan Society). **D.E.**



## THE GROSSMITH FAMILY ALBUM

Availing themselves of the kind co-operation of Mr J.C. Grossmith George, Leon Berger (Baritone) and Selwyn Tillett (Piano) have made a second cassette of the Grossmith family's songs. **Side One:** 1) Go On Talking; 2) The Parrot and the Cat; 3) The City Polka; 4) He was a Careless Man; 5) The Speaker's Eye; 6) The Islington Polka; 7) My Janet; 8) I Don't Mind Flies; 9) The Gay Photographer; 10) Tommy's First Love; 11) I've Loved Another Girl Since Then; 12) The Dicky Birds are Singing; 13) Keep the Baby Warm, Mother; 14) A Little Yachting. **Side Two:** 1) I once was as meek (*Ruddigore*, including 'Gideon Crawle' verse); 2) The French Verbs Song; 3) The Very Much Up To Date Mamma; 4) His Nose was on the Mantlepiece; 5) The Truth, or Something Near It; 6) I'm not in the Vein Tonight; 7) I am tired of the Moon; 8) How I Became a Detective; 9) Beautiful Bountiful Bertie; 10) Johnnie at the Gaiety; 11) Your Honoured and Ancient Name; 12) The Happy Old Days at Peckham; 13) See Me Reverse; 14) Bertie the Bounder; 15) Yip-I-Addy-I-Ay. These are fine, idiomatic performances from an established team. Anyone who bought the first volume will find that the material in the second is possibly even finer, demonstrating how little GG learned from Gilbert, and how little Gilbert had to teach him. The humorous observation of contemporary life that makes *The Diary of a Nobody* a classic is here cast into verse, and with similarly successful results. Buy with confidence.

Available from the Society's Sales Officer, Peter Gibbons, 71 Hockley Lane, Eastern Green, Coventry, CV5 7FS. Price £6.50 inc p&p (UK); \$14.00 airmail ((Overseas). Please make cheques payable to the Sullivan Society.

## BEAUTY STONE VIDEO

The video of the Generally G&S performance of *The Beauty Stone* (see p.11) is available from Mr P. Pimperton, 15 Spitalfields, Blyth, Worksop, Notts, S81 8EB. Price £16.17 inc p&p. In U.S. format £21.57. Please make cheques payable to Generally G&S. For full details of videos & cassettes please see inside back cover of Mag 43.

## FORTHCOMING CONCERTS

A concert by the Southwell Orchestral Society in Ravenshead Parish Church (north of Nottingham) on Saturday 5 July will include Max Taylor's overtures to *The Chieftain* and *Utopia Limited*. Also on the programme will be works by Paisiello, Lehár and Sístek, plus a selection of 1940s pieces to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the church. Further details from John Sheppard on 01636-815108.

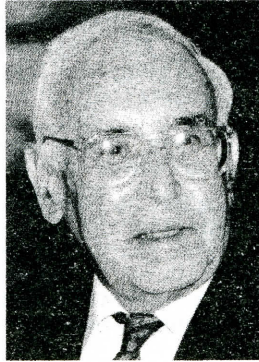
13 April 1997 at 2.30. *Here's Another How de Do*. Concert by Patricia Leonard and David Steadman. Venue: Oak Hall Manor, Sheffield Park, Sussex. Organised by Melvyn Tarran. Reception, drinks, cold salmon supper, inclusive @ £25.00. Tel: 01825 790338.

STOP PRESS: *The Gondoliers* will be performed at the Proms (August)

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Front Cover: Spot Sullivan in Rotten Row in a cartoon from *The Tomahawk* 20 June 1868 (Courtesy of Harold Kanthor). Back Cover: Scenes from *The Beauty Stone* courtesy of Martin Yates and Generally G&S. Inner: Peppin the Hunchback and Saida's Scene; Outer: Two moments in the Beauty Contest Scene.

# ARTHUR JACOBS - 1922-1996



Many members will know from news bulletins and newspaper obituaries that our Vice-President Arthur Jacobs died of cancer on 13 December 1996. We reproduce below (with permission) the obituary notice which appeared in *The Times* of 20 December:

"Arthur Jacobs was a prolific music critic whose energies embraced journalism, lecturing, teaching, editing, biography and a series of highly regarded singing translations of opera.

Born in Manchester, he was educated at Manchester Grammar School and Merton College, Oxford. He began his career as music critic on the *Daily Express* in 1947, moving on to write for a wide variety of newspapers and journals, including *The Sunday Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, the *Financial Times* and the *Jewish Chronicle*, always in the brisk, clear style that was to characterise his work.

He was deputy editor of *Opera* magazine from 1961 to 1971, remaining a board member and a valued contributor until his death. From 1964 to 1979 he taught criticism and history at the Royal Academy of Music, before becoming Head of Music at Huddersfield Polytechnic until 1984 (when he was appointed Professor). He also found time to travel widely, acting as a visiting professor in various American, Canadian and Australian universities; latterly, he was several times a visiting fellow of Wolfson College, Oxford.

Jacobs's precision of mind made him a sound lexicographer, and his *Penguin New Dictionary of Music* (1958) went into several editions and translations. He also founded the invaluable *British Music Yearbook* in 1971, editing it until 1979. Other publications included *The Pan Book of Opera* (with Stanley Sadie, 1964), *A Short History of Western Music* (1972), *The Pan Book of Orchestral Music* (1987) and *The Penguin Dictionary of Musical Performers* (1990).

At the centre of his scholarly interests was English music, and he helped to deepen serious appreciation of A.S. Sullivan with *Gilbert and Sullivan* (1951) and with a meticulous biography, *Arthur Sullivan: a Victorian*



*Musician* (1984) [paperback 1986; second edition 1992]. His last biography was a no less scrupulous study, *Sir Henry Wood: Maker of the Proms* (1994), in which his thorough research and keen probing enabled him to shed considerable new light on his subject.

Jacobs's devotion to opera found practical expression in the many performing translations he made. His linguistic gifts gave him an appreciation of the flavour of texts in languages that included Russian, and his somewhat quirky relish of word-play could produce ingenious and witty singing versions, with much theatrical point, of operas by Monteverdi, Rossini, Berlioz, Tchaikovsky and Berg, among others. An original libretto was *One Man Show* by Nicholas Maw (1964).

His advocacy of opera in English, as representing a genuine dramatic experience for audiences who might otherwise have been kept at a distance, was characteristically vigorous. This sharpness and forcefulness of mind could also take expression in sharpness of tongue, though invariably in what he saw as the interests of accuracy and proper standards of professional conduct; and it could quickly be belied by warmth and a lively sense of humour.

He retired to Oxford, where he took pleasure in renewing membership of his old undergraduate college, Merton. He married, in 1953, Betty Hughes; she and their two sons survive him."

In the summer of 1996 *Opera* magazine published a tribute to Arthur to mark his fifty years as music journalist and opera critic. This led our member Stan Meares, a life-long opera enthusiast who is also Chairman of the British Music Society, to pay a public tribute to Arthur at the Sullivan Festival in Oxford on 29 June. Stan's tribute was given immediately before Arthur took the chair to welcome our guest speaker Scott Hayes - Sullivan's great-great nephew - and is reproduced here by permission:

"Ladies and gentlemen, I hold here a copy of the July issue of *Opera* magazine. The lady on the front is Salome. But it is not Salome I am going to talk about. For inside is an article about an event that occurred fifty years ago. Those of us who remember those times will recall that we were in the depths of post-war austerity and were soon to be hit by the worst winter in memory - "Shinwell's winter" it was called - when there were power cuts and fuel shortages. But, as *Opera* tells us, something else happened fifty years ago - our vice-President, Arthur Jacobs here, became a music journalist, and in particular an opera critic.

Yes: fifty years ago! We also read that during that time he saw no less than 840 different operas. Fifty years, 840 operas - those are formidable enough figures. But in reality they are just statistics and say nothing about the man behind them. Arthur was greatly influenced by E.J. Dent, and this is reflected in some of the things he stood for and fought for: for example, the concept of total opera being the important thing rather than the individual parts; and his support for opera in English. As a contributor to *Opera* magazine he was able to press for his belief in good diction in an age when it is sadly lacking; and in ensemble opera rather than opera as a vehicle for stars. He has supported sur-titles (anathema to the present editor of *Opera*) and new, modern interpretations and techniques, though he has a strong aversion to what he terms "post-modern destruction of the narrative" - in other words, producers wilfully changing the intentions of composers and librettists for their own ends and ambitions. In short, Arthur has been a crusading critic.

Now of course one has not always agreed with him. Indeed the first letter of mine printed in *Opera* was one having a go at Arthur. (It was in the late 60s, Arthur - about Jennifer Vyvyan's diction in *English Eccentrics* at Guildford) And of course those of you who attend these Festivals will recall that a few years ago [in 1988, regarding *Ivanhoe*] I was very critical of him. But such things, ladies and gentlemen, are just matters of detail and are burdens a critic, and particularly a crusading critic, must expect. However, let us have no doubts whatsoever, such relatively minor disagreements can never obscure the broad strategy nor the fine principles and marvelously perceptive philosophy that have guided Arthur's work over a lifetime.

Not long ago I found him extremely helpful with his advice over a difficult article I was writing. But what I value even more has been the persistent and beneficial influence he has exerted on opera in Britain over many years. Those of us who love opera and operetta owe him a debt of gratitude. Arthur! We salute and congratulate you." (Prolonged applause)

Arthur's contribution to Sullivan scholarship, and hence to the composer's reputation, was enormous. In addition to his early short book, there were numerous articles, reviews and sleeve notes (notably for the Sargent series of Gilbert and Sullivan operas issued from 1957 - an era when accuracy and intelligence were rare things in a sleeve note), and, of course, the magnificent biography, *Arthur Sullivan: A Victorian Musician*, which immediately became, and remains, the definitive work on Sullivan. There were also broadcasts, and the establishment of the Sullivan archive at the Royal Academy of Music, which is based on his research material for the book.

Arthur Jacobs accepted a Vice-Presidency of the Sullivan Society early in 1985, and was active in the Society's affairs until shortly before his death: he attended last year's Sullivan Festival at Oxford and took the chair for one of the sessions. It was during that weekend that I had the privilege of introducing Arthur to another of our Vice-Presidents, Dr. Percy Young: surprisingly, Sullivan's two most important biographers had never met. Even before he became a Vice-President, Arthur gave the first talk at the first Sullivan Festival in 1984. He was a regular attendee at those events, missing only one of the seven; he also spoke at our first Conference in 1992. In addition to this public support, he gave us much help behind the scenes, frequently using his good offices to the Society's benefit.

Arthur was a great communicator. In reviewing *Arthur Sullivan: a Victorian Musician* in Magazine 19, John Gardner wrote, commenting on the absence of musical type from the book: "...this is certainly no weakness. Mr. Jacobs' flair for critical analysis enables him to make his points in words." This is borne out by my own experience: I still recall his vivid exposition of Sullivan's *Tempest* music in that first talk to us in 1984.

It is Arthur the man, the colleague and friend, whom I shall remember with the greatest affection. Like his musical criticism, his advice was always crisp and pertinent; always freely offered and gratefully received. From time to time, he sought assistance from me (often on obscurer points regarding recordings) and his gratitude was always sincere and unstinting; indeed, I sometimes felt that the small services performed scarcely warranted the warm praise and acknowledgement subsequently forthcoming.

Arthur was a great deal more than simply a Vice-President of the Society: he was a friend, both to us, and to Arthur Sullivan. Our deepest sympathies go to Betty, Julian and Michael.

**Stephen Turnbull**



## HOLDERS OF THE MENDELSSOHN SCHOLARSHIP

Jul 1856 - Sep 1860: Arthur Sullivan  
 Jan 1865 - Sep 1867: Charles Heap  
 Sep 1871 - Mar 1875: Wm Shakespeare  
 Jun 1875 - Dec 1878: Frederick Corder  
 Feb 1879 - Feb 1881: Maude White  
 Nov 1881 - Nov 1882: Eugene d'Albert  
 Jan 1884 - Apr 1887: Marie Wurm  
 Mar '91 - Mar '93: Sidney Waddington  
 Apr 1895 - Apr 1898: Hugh Wilson  
 Oct 1899 - Oct 1902: Percy Miles  
 Oct 1904 - Apr 1907: George Dyson  
 Apr 1909 - Apr 1912: Eric Gritton  
 Sep 1912 - Sep 1915: Joseph Taffs  
 Jul 1916 - Nov 1917: Philip Levi  
 Nov 1918 - Nov 1919: Philip Levi (sic)  
 May 1921 - May 1923: Arthur Sandford  
 Dec 1923 - Dec 1926: Percy Turnbull  
 Sep 1927 - Sep 1929: Godfrey Sampson  
 Sep 1929 - Sep 1930: David Evans  
 Sep 1932 - Aug '34: Clifton Walsworth  
 Sep 1935 - Dec 1937: Daniel Jones  
 Nov 1938 - Apr 1939: Patrick Piggott  
 Nov 1946 - Oct 1947: Jocelyn Lubbock  
 Nov 1948 - Oct 1949: Malcolm Arnold  
 Nov 1950 - Oct '51: Kenneth Leighton  
 May 1952: John Lambert  
 1953: James Stevens  
 1954: William Burt  
 1955: NO AWARD  
 1956: John Exton  
 1957: NO AWARD  
 1958: NO AWARD  
 1959: NO AWARD  
 1960: David Blake  
 1961: NO AWARD  
 1962: Richard Stoker

1964: Patric Stanford  
 1966: Michael Short  
 1968: Brian Ferneyhough  
 1970: Jonathan Lloyd  
 1972: Nicola Lefanu  
 1974: Richard Blackford  
 1976: Ian McQueen  
 1978: Paul Parkinson  
 1980: Lionel Sainsbury  
 1982: Mark-Anthony Turnage/Steve  
Martland  
 1984: James Harley  
 1986: Javier Alvarez  
 1988: Martin Butler  
 1990: NO AWARD  
 1992: Philip Cashian  
 1994: Luminata Spinu

Next award open for competition

NOTE: The Mendelssohn Scholarship was originally awarded annually, but due to falling interest rates it is now awarded every two years. The sum of money is, today, £5000.

SOURCE: The Mendelssohn Scholarship Foundation/The Boise Foundation. Department of Music, King's College, Strand, London WC2R 2LS

**Researched by Darren Wood**

# A NOTE ON THE GOLDEN LEGEND

By John Cannon

The September 1888 Birmingham Festival performance of *The Golden Legend* conducted by Richter (*Magazine No 42*) was not the only unauthorised performance of the work to have been planned. Readers may recall the text of my undated Sullivan letter which was included in *Magazine No 13* in the autumn of 1982, which is now reproduced in autograph form (p.p. 00).

The addressee's name has been so heavily scored out in ink that even infra-red photography revealed only a central 'ag' or 'eg' and a few squiggles. However, when these are considered in conjunction with the length of the name, and the phrase 'an old and valued friend' in the text, it seems highly likely that the addressee was Sullivan's fellow composer and conductor Alberto Randegger, who did conduct *The Golden Legend* on at least 5 occasions in the 1890s. This being so, the proposed May 13th performance would seem not to have taken place, since John Gardner's extensive research in *The Golden Legend* has failed to find *any* May 13th performance conducted by Randegger, or indeed a May 13th performance by anyone, which would tie up with one or other of Sullivan's two stays at the Villa Mathilde in 1896-7 and 1897-8.

A point not previously made is how Sullivan's proverbial good nature is revealed, even though he was clearly unhappy about the circumstances in which the letter came to be written. The text of the letter is as follows.

Villa Mathilde

Saturday

St Jean de Villefranche

My dear

It gave me much regret not to be able to wire "yes" in reply to your request, but in the first place I am more and more indisposed to appear in public conducting my own works - I dislike it. Then again the 13th May is my birthday. I generally have some friends to dinner that evening - the Prince of Wales amongst others has honoured me for many years on this occasion. Thirdly, I did not know anything about the performance of the "Golden Legend" - because I have resolved to sanction no more performances of it in London for some time to come. It is getting too hackneyed, and I fear very shortly people won't listen to it at all. I told Bendall to give no more permission for its performance, as I want to give it a year or two's rest, that is in London.



you into an embarrassing position.  
As to please you to do as you  
like about it.

Yours sincerely

Arthur Sullivan.

Mlle Mathiez

St Jean de Villefranche

Saturday

My dear

It gave me much regret  
not to be able to write "yes" in  
reply to your requests, but in the  
first place I am more and more  
indisposed to appear in public  
instructing my own works. I did like it

then again the B<sup>th</sup> may is my  
birth-day, & I personally have some  
friends to dinner that evening - the

Price of shares, averaged often has  
lowered me for many years on this  
occasion. Finally, I did not know  
anything about the performance of  
the "Index depend" - because I have  
never had to make any more  
performances of it in London, for  
some time to come. It is getting too  
late to say, and I fear that very  
shabby people want to take  
a toll. I tell you that I give no  
more permission for its performance, as  
I want to give it a year or two's

rest, better in London. Of course, to  
an end and we had found like yourself,  
I should be sorry to do anything which  
might appear ill-intended, and even  
if the manager of your concert has  
forgotten to apply for permission to  
perform it, I want to stand in

the way of your doing it, if you have  
made arrangements for it. But if  
you are only as yet proposing to do it,  
I would really much rather you did  
for the reasons I have already given.  
You have always been kind and  
helpful to me, and I would not find



Of course, to an old and valued friend like yourself, I should be sorry to do anything which might appear illnatured, and even if the manager of your concerts has forgotten to apply for permission to perform the work, I won't stand in the way of your doing it, if you have made arrangements for it. But if you are only as yet proposing to do it, I would really much rather you didn't, for the reasons I have already given. You have always been kind and helpful to me, and I wouldn't put you into an embarrassing position, and so I leave you to do as you like about it.

Yours sincerely,

Arthur Sullivan

\*

### A GLIMPSE OF SULLIVAN?

Sir A. Sullivan went to see Rubinstein at his hotel in London. The Russian composer asked him to step out on the balcony, and smoke a cigarette. They sat down, twisted their cigarettes, and puffed the blue clouds into the air. After a long pause Sir A. Sullivan observed:

"You are a great admirer of Beethoven, I presume?"

"Yes," said Rubinstein.

"And Wagner?"

"No," was the reply.

Not another word was spoken. They rocked themselves in their chairs and smoked away. After a very long time Sullivan said:

"I think it is time for me to be going."

"Don't say so," said Rubinstein. "Stay a bit longer. It is so nice to talk to you."

Sullivan stayed, and went on rocking himself into the small hours of the morning, when he got up and said:

"I must go off now; I think we have chatted long enough."

Rubinstein drew out his watch:

"Half past two," he said. "Strange how quick time flies in pleasant company!"

**THE MINIM July 1897 page 245**

# THE BEAUTY STONE

Generally G&S - Retford 15-19 October 1996

Martin Yates - Director

Libretto Adapted by David Eden

As someone who has loved this work since first hearing the historic Prince Consort recording, and who watched with enthusiasm every performance at Retford, including the Sunday evening dress rehearsal, I do not profess to be able to review Generally G&S's *Beauty Stone* with any great detachment. So I hope I shall be forgiven my impassioned ravings of appreciation. Basically, if you missed this opportunity of seeing the rarest of all rare Sullivan operas (and most of the population of Retford and of the rest of Great Britain did miss it) you passed up on an unforgettable treat.

## THE BOOK

If you have seen the original libretto (copies available through Society sales) or read the accounts of the original run you will be aware of the seemingly insurmountable problems posed by Pinero and Carr's leaden book. David Eden's 'respectful per-version' of the spoken dialogue, whilst retaining the original lyrics to the songs and the original storyline and essential structure, gives *The Beauty Stone* not only new performability but also a contextual framework within which some aspects which could be difficult for modern audiences are largely resolved by reworking the piece as a pseudo-medieval mystery play, so that the details of the plot are translated through the eyes of a stage audience watching a play-within-a-play.

The device is original and works remarkably well: a narrator leads the audience through the developments of the story and covers for scene changes, which are simplified and minimised in any case because of the mystery play approach. The action of the piece is therefore accelerated, and delays between musical items reduced. The use of rhyming couplets in all the dialogue underlines the artificiality of what is going on and the whole approach admirably suits the moralistic messages which drive the plot and lead to the final 'love is blind and conquers all' outcome. This is no mere rewriting therefore: it is a revision and rehabilitation of *The Beauty Stone* which makes it perfectly viable for performance, if other companies, as admirably innovative and audacious as Generally G&S, can be found to attempt it.

## THE MUSIC

The music is sumptuous and gorgeous. Whilst there is lots more of the characteristic material which one might rightly expect of Sullivan in his maturity, there is also innovation and development - if the librettists were more hindrance than help to the composer, the tone and human qualities of the piece certainly inspired Sullivan to compose more expansive and developed music, more akin to *Ivanhoe* than any of his other stage works.



Laine's music is of tearfully honest sentiment throughout, her 'Prayer' and duet with Philip being particularly high spots. Saida's exotic sequence of dance and song in Act II and her Act III *tour de force* 'Ride on' are strikingly memorable. Humorous and sinister, the Devil's music is impressive, while Crazy Jacqueline's material strikes a lighter note. The opera is punctuated with excellent chorus work, sometimes rollicking and boisterous, sometimes subtly underpinning the principals. The overture and orchestral passages between the scenes are delightful, and the quality of composition overall is consistent and high.

The Generally G&S orchestra coped admirably with the demands placed on them and, although a little overpowering in some of the numbers, more than adequately interpreted the rich beauty and subtlety of the score.

## **THE PRODUCTION**

Martin Yates is to be heartily congratulated on his innovative production. Members who have visited Retford on previous occasions will be aware of the technical difficulties posed by the School Hall setting - small stage, no fly tower, no orchestra pit, etc. Generally G&S have developed a formula which works in this setting and which, in the context of the adapted libretto, was made to work very well indeed.

The set consisted of a 'backdrop' of three curtained archways; a raised performance platform in front, and benches either side for the mainly seated chorus. The simple expedient of bringing forward a garlanded, ribboned pole on either side of the platform suggested moments of outdoor celebration. Simple furnishings and props, including a splendidly realistic weaving loom, together with much use of lighting effects provided all else that was required to create the necessary scene changes - without, in general, uncomfortable delays.

This set provided a succession of surprises as the audience was introduced to its various elements, particularly in Act I - a blue and white Heaven hidden in the right-hand arch, complete with beatific Virgin Mary and cherubs; a fiery red Hell in the left-hand arch, with its flashing-horned demons; a general ceremonial entrance centre for the Beauty Contestants and later Lord Philip and Saida. Effective use was made of entrances and exits through the audience, especially at the end of Act II, when the male chorus-as-soldiers march off to fight, concluding with a final tenor echo of 'Philip of Mirlemont, Hail' from the rear of the hall.

Movement in the small inner playing area was simple and appropriate at all times. It was also uncluttered as, most of the time, there was little on-stage chorus work. The nature of the piece is such that characterisation and stylised but natural action predominate over complicated moves and synchronised routines, though it is no doubt due to the skill of both producer and performers that much which was very complex came over as effortless and simple. Costumes were colourful, appropriate and, in many cases, surprisingly close to the original designs for the Savoy (seen by Society members during the Hull Festival).

## **THE COMPANY**

Performance standards were universally high, and casting careful and appropriate. Those of us who have become regular visitors to Retford have developed certain expectations of this company, and these were more than met. It was interesting to see old friends in new roles and to note their versatility and range. Max Taylor (Ferdinand in *The Chieftain*) was noble and imposing as Philip

of Mirlmont, and demonstrated commanding stage presence and emotional range; Margaret Doherty (Inez in *The Chieftain*) was brooding, sensual and powerfully restrained as Saida - what a part that is (and how much more beautiful she appeared before the stone wove its spell!); Kevin Ogden (Grigg in *The Chieftain*) was powerful and sang beautifully in his skilled and polished portrayal of the Devil; new face Claire Pimperton was naive and innocent as Laine and therefore carried the audience with her with ease, in spite of some lack of experience; John Britton (Oswald in *Haddon Hall*) and Angela Mitchell (first principal role) were sympathetic (and cheerful in their adversity) and sang most beautifully in their 'I would see a maid' duet; Diana Barrett (Juanita in *The Chieftain*) had elfin charm as Jacqueline, and the various smaller roles were consistently well played by David Bovill (Nicholas Dircks), Robert Claridge (Peppin), Jan Pimperton (Loyse), and Frank Carroll (Guntran) who had a notable amount of good music which he performed with great style and authority; finally Peter Hunt (who could forget his McCrankie in *Haddon Hall*?) fronted the whole thing all evening with skill and humour as the narrator.

The chorus were disciplined (even in their disarray - when this was called for), provided discreet 'backing vocals' and romped through their lively choruses. One could only admire their power of concentration and constant involvement in what was going on, even when firmly 'in the wings' - the only distracting activity coming from the very youngest members, who appeared to be no more than five or six years old. Their stamina also has to be admired: counting dress rehearsals on Sunday and Monday, the company performed *The Beauty Stone* on seven consecutive evenings - and then turned out at Grove Street Methodist Church to sing at Morning Service. What energy and commitment!

If there is one constructive criticism to be made about the performances in general it is that it was difficult to pick up the unfamiliar words, unless you were seated well forward in the auditorium. To some extent, this did not hinder the understanding of the plot, in view of the role of the narrator and the performance itself, but appreciation would have been significantly increased if the words could have been heard with greater ease.

Generally G&S are a remarkable bunch of people, not only for their daring in their choice of operas to perform, and consequent services rendered to Sullivan's less well known repertoire, but also for their individual and collective abilities. This is more than just an average amateur Operatic Society and it turns Retford into an unlikely Mecca for the seemingly exclusive band of pilgrims who have discovered the town's very special charms.

## **AFTERTHOUGHTS**

True to the spirit of the original run, a dishearteningly small audience (some 60-70 persons on Wednesday and Thursday) turned out to see *The Beauty Stone* - no great surprise perhaps to those of us involved in the amateur operatic sphere ourselves. Some of this must be put down to promotion and publicity, but these are minor matters compared with the problem of tempting audiences out to shows with unfamiliar titles. Then there is the age-old problem that Gilbert and Sullivan audiences do not always take to the heavier style of Sullivan in romantic opera mode, and Opera (capital O) audiences won't take him seriously anyway. So, is there a niche for *The Beauty Stone*?



There is no doubt that it deserves a hearing much more often than once every forty-odd years, but who is to perform it? Perhaps the amateur Grand Opera Societies should be targeted. It demands a lot of the average operatic society and, unless Cameron Mackintosh scents a West End triumph (one can always hope - imagine what could be done with full professional attention and proper funding) it is hard to imagine where it might emerge next.

*The Beauty Stone* is problematic, even now that most of the problems have been resolved. The sentiments and situations belong to Victorian High Art and as such are inherently unfashionable. But then there is plenty of absurdity to take on board in the standard operatic repertoire which does not get in the way of public appreciation and acceptance. I certainly found that, with *The Beauty Stone*, what struck me as unusual on first viewing became insignificant and unimportant as my familiarity with the work, its situations and its characters increased.

Like several more famous works which failed at first performance *The Beauty Stone* demands rehearing and certainly its only life expectancy for the time being would appear to be in amateur recordings. For this reason it is heartening to learn that Generally G&S's performance has recorded well and, if you had the misfortune to miss the Society's mini-festival and have therefore not yet placed your order, you may rectify that by contacting Mr P. Pimperton, 15 Spitalfields, Blyth, Worksop, Notts, S81 8EB (See p.2 for details).

## **POSTSCRIPT**

If any of my mania has rubbed off on you yet, you may wish to note that Generally G&S will take *The Beauty Stone* to this year's Buxton G&S Festival (9th August). If you miss that, you may have to wait another forty years, so be advised and watch the journal for further announcements.

Sincere thanks to David Eden, Martin Yates, and to the Generally G&S Society of Retford.

**STEVE SKINNER**

## **ARTHUR JACOBS - A PERSONAL NOTE**

I never felt quite at ease in the company of Arthur Jacobs, partly because I was conscious of the great (and very real) difference between his eminence as a music critic and mine as the editor of a disreputable fanzine. It was also a question of his guarded attitude to Sullivan. I wanted him to be as enthusiastic about Sullivan as myself - which of course he never was. A similar feeling attached to his book - why did he write the biography of a man for whom he apparently felt so little regard? I cannot answer this question, but I do think that my wariness did less than justice to his courage and sincerity in paying attention to Sullivan at all. A musician of Arthur Jacobs' generation imbibed with his mother's milk the prejudices of Ernest Walker and Fuller-Maitland: he *knew* - as many English musicians still *know* - that Sullivan was a worthless fellow and not to be touched with a barge pole. Arthur Jacobs could have spent his career in the service of these prejudices, but instead he had the honesty to respond to the music as it affected him, and say as much in public, thereby risking loss of reputation among his colleagues. His book, restrained as it may be, is worth far more than an unprincipled effusion by a barely disguised hagiographer. It creates a base line from which the student may advance with confidence, knowing that it has been set by a man of judgement and integrity. The enthusiast may perhaps be sobered by the caution of so fine a mind. **D.E.**



## DAISY CANNING

Daisy Canning died on 5 January 1997 at the age of 90. She had been a member of the Society for many years, and attended all the Sullivan Festivals from 1984 until 1992. Her lively and active approach to life belied her age, and my enduring memory is of her perched on a bar stool at the Old Ship Hotel, Brighton during the 1990 Festival, holding court to a gathered multitude of considerably younger Society members. She last took part in a residential event in 1993, when the Society's Grim's Dyke weekend that May coincided with her 87th birthday. She revealed that day that she had joined the Gilbert and Sullivan Society in 1924, and first visited Grim's Dyke while Lady Gilbert was still alive.

## CAVAN O'CONNOR

Cavan O'Connor died on 11 January 1997 at the age of 97. Born in Nottingham on 1 July 1899, he began his career in the 1920s and performed for over 60 years, still topping the bill at the Hackney Empire in 1985. Although he is perhaps best remembered for Irish type ballads, most notably "I'm only a strolling vagabond", (which was actually by a German, Eduard Kunnecke), he made hundreds of records of a wide variety of music, using a number of aliases. He was also a prolific broadcaster. Early in his career, he took part (under his own name) in a series of G & S recordings for Vocalion, appearing as soloist in items from *Iolanthe* (2), *The Mikado* (3) and *The Gondoliers* (3), published in 1927. He was the subject of an interview/feature in *The Stage* as recently as 1996.

## REVIEWS

### **Boer War Te Deum: 22 December 1996**

Canon David Whittington, Vicar of Stockton-on-Tees, completed twenty years in that post on 21 December 1996. David Whittington is one of those larger-than-life characters who are all too few in today's bland Church of England, and it was no surprise that he should celebrate in the grand style. A special Eucharist was celebrated by the Bishop of Durham, and the service was preceded by a performance of Sullivan's *Boer War Te Deum* - a work of whose existence Canon Whittington had learned through this Society's compact disc *That Glorious Song of Old*. The performance, employing the arrangement for brass, percussion and organ by David Mackie, was of particular interest in that the version for three horns was used, whereas previous performances, and the recording, had featured the two-horn version. Conductor John Forsyth's tempi followed Paul Trepte's lead quite closely, and the largely youthful choir sang with good clarity of diction and a surprisingly powerful sound for a group only some forty strong. There were a couple of split notes from the first trumpet, and a moment at the beginning of "O Lord, save thy people" where the choir (they divide into eight parts at this point) wavered a little, but otherwise this was a technically accomplished account. The episcopal procession moved into the church during the final (St. Gertrude) section, and mighty impressive it looked and sounded! Canon Whittington's excellent "programme note" in the order of service told us we were permitted a smile at this point, and I was not alone in so indulging. Judging by comments overheard after the service, the *Te Deum* had gone down well and won us a few more converts.

## **VICTORIA AND MERRIE ENGLAND - 31 DECEMBER 1996**

The weather played a cruel trick by closing the trans-Pennine A66 road on New Year's Eve, so I was prevented from attending the National Concert Orchestra's concert in the Grand Theatre, Blackpool, at which was given the first live modern performance of the final scene from *Victoria and Merrie England*. David Steadman, the conductor of the NCO, had included the scene in a mixed programme of festive lollipops. He told me a day or two after the performance that *V&ME* had been a huge success with the audience, who, it seems, spontaneously stood and joined in the National Anthem at the very end of the work.

### **THOSE CHRISTMAS SCHEDULES IN FULL:**

Sullivan on Classic FM during the Christmas/New Year period:

22 December: *The Mikado* (complete); *Patience* (abridged)

25 December: *Iolanthe* (complete)

12 January: *The Gondoliers* (complete); *Pineapple Poll* (abridged)

Sullivan on BBC Radio 3 during the Christmas/New Year period:

25 December: It Came Upon the Midnight Clear ( in the service of  
Nine Lessons and Carols, first broadcast on Radio 4 the previous day)

The first Sullivan on Radio 3 in 1997 was the overture *In Memoriam*, included by Brian Kay in his Sunday morning programme on 19 January at the request of Robin Wilson and broadcast as a tribute to Arthur Jacobs. The previous evening BBC Radio 2 had broadcast a live 2-hour concert from Cheltenham Town Hall. Valerie Masterson, Gillian Knight, David Fieldsend and Donald Maxwell were joined by the Cotswold Savoyards and the BBC Concert Orchestra, conducted by Barry Wordsworth. A basically mainstream concert concluded with the finale from *The Grand Duke*.

### **L'ILE ENCHANTÉE**

A substantial suite from *L'Île Enchantée* will be performed by the Cambridge Youth Orchestra at concerts in Impington Village College (near Cambridge) on Friday 21 March and West Road Concert Hall, Cambridge on Sunday 18 May. The conductor will be William Lovell, whose father, our member Percy Lovell, conducted a suite from *L'Île Enchantée* at Hexham in November 1996.

### **SULLIVAN ON VIDEO**

Isis Records have issued a video (ISIS VC002) entitled "Carols for a Victorian Christmas". The 50-minute tape features narration by Robert Hardy and Dorothy Tutin, and contains traditional carols performed by the choir of Magdalen College, Oxford, directed by Grayston Ives. The venue is Queen Victoria's parish church, St. Mildred's, Whippingham (Isle of Wight), and included in the selection of carols is Sullivan's "All this night bright angels sing". (Information: Arthur Barrett).

### **TRIAL BY JURY**

Through the good offices of Yana Polyanskaya, and with the support of the British Council, *Trial by Jury* was given what must certainly have been its Russian première on 2 October 1996 at the Holy Philharmonic Hall, St. Petersburg. The opera was sung in Russian and the performance was well received by reviewers and audience alike. Yana writes that interest was shown by some theatres. A radio programme was made about the performance and illustrated with extracts from it.







