

GILBERT & SULLIVAN

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D'OYLY CARTE OPERA COMPANY



26 HIGHLIGHTS

Arias & Choruses from: Iolanthe, Mikado,
Yeoman, Gondoliers, Pirates, etc.

Regis

Vintage Gilbert and Sullivan Volume 2

Were it not for Gilbert and Sullivan, light music theatre of the twentieth century would have been vastly different. Of the two, Gilbert cast the longest shadow and each of the greatest lyricists from the Broadway and London stage (most notably P G Wodehouse, Larry Hart, Ira Gershwin, Betty Comden and Adolph Green, Noel Coward and Stephen Sondheim) have all owed him a debt of gratitude. So well crafted were their light operas that a relative failure such as *Ruddigore* is today considered head and shoulders above the efforts of their contemporaries and immediate successors.

William Schwenk Gilbert (1836 - 1911) and Arthur Sullivan (1842 - 1900) first met in 1869 at the Gallery of Illustration. Sullivan had accompanied his friend Fred Clay there to see a play of Gilbert's *Ages Ago* to which Clay had contributed music and the suggestion might have been made that Gilbert and Sullivan collaborate. Sullivan was at the time better known as a composer of serious music (the *Irish Symphony* and the overture *In Memoriam*, both composed in 1866 and incidental music to *The Tempest* from 1861 were especially admired), but had also written two comic operas *Cox and Box* (1866) and *The Contrabandista* (1867) with texts by F C Burnand, a contributor to 'Punch'. At the time of their meeting Gilbert had exhausted two careers - the Civil Service and Law. Being equally bad at both he turned instead to writing and assisted H J Byron at 'Fun' magazine. In the 1860s Byron's farces were the rage and Gilbert naturally followed in his footsteps writing clever burlesques such as *Dulcamara, or The Little Duck and The Great Quack*, a perversion of Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*. Gilbert also published a volume of poetry called *The Bab Ballads* in 1869.

The previous year a play of Gilbert's had been performed at the opening night of the new Gaiety Theatre in the Strand. The Gaiety's owner John Hollingshead believed in giving his audience a little of everything and consequently the public was offered Burlesque alongside imported French drama and Grand Opera. Two major attractions in the early years were the comedian J L Toole and the inimitable Nellie Farren. In 1871 both artists starred in a new work by Gilbert called *Thespis, or The Gods Grown Old*, a comedy with music by Arthur Sullivan. On this occasion both words and music were considered rather highbrow for the Gaiety

audience and Sullivan had been disconcerted to find that the cast possessed only limited musical ability (at least for the type of music he was offering). Consequently no attempt was made by him to preserve the score. One chorus however survived and later turned up in *The Pirates of Penzance* - 'Climbing over rocky mountain'.

Neither Gilbert nor Sullivan felt much inclined to pursue the partnership immediately and it was not until 1875 that the two were brought together once more. The impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte was looking for a curtain-raiser to accompany Offenbach's *La Perichole*. Some years previously Gilbert had written a scenario for a play concerning a breach of promise case in which he poked harmless fun at life in a courtroom. Carte suggested that Gilbert work with Sullivan once more and having converted this into a short opera Gilbert had Sullivan in stitches at the read through. *Trial By Jury* was an even bigger success than *La Perichole* and still is sung regularly today, usually alongside *HMS Pinafore* or *The Pirates of Penzance*. Gilbert himself twice acted in *Trial By Jury* during benefit performances for Nellie Farren and Ellen Terry. The undoubted star of the first run of was Sullivan's brother Fred, who played the Judge. Sadly Fred died before their next opera *The Sorcerer* and in tribute Sullivan composed his song *The Lost Chord*.

For *The Sorcerer* (1877) Gilbert and Sullivan set about collecting a regular ensemble and Rutland Barrington, George Grossmith and Richard Temple, mainstays of the company for many years, all appeared in this delightful and unjustly neglected work. From poking harmless fun at country life and priggishness Gilbert next made the Navy a target with his following work. *HMS Pinafore* (1878) proved to be one of Gilbert and Sullivan's most sparkling works but at first its progress was painfully slow. Troubles mounted when a lengthy heatwave threatened to foreshorten its run (and the Opera Comique was one of the stuffiest theatres in London) before Sullivan played extracts during a concert. Suddenly the heatwave broke and there was a demand for tickets, not only in Britain but also in the United States where several companies simultaneously gave their own versions.

These pirated performances were a source of great concern to Gilbert, Sullivan and D'Oyly Carte, since they received nothing from these unauthorised productions. They determined to thwart these musical pirates by giving almost simultaneous premieres in both countries of their next, called appropriately enough *The Pirates Of Penzance* (1879). The British premiere was

given by D'Oyly Carte's *Pinafore* company in Paignton (in their *Pinafore* costumes!) whilst the regular company gave the work in New York a few hours later.

If Sullivan had ever doubted that his true genius lay in light opera, then a glance at his income at this time surely, albeit unwillingly, convinced him of the fact. The following two works *Patience* and *Iolanthe* are regarded by many as the finest in the partnership. *Patience* (1881), which opened at the Opera Comique and transferred six months later to the new Savoy Theatre, is a satire on affectation and artistic fads (thus making it nearly always up to date), whilst *Iolanthe* (1882) takes aim at the Palace of Westminster, which unfortunately had the effect of making Gilbert slightly unpopular in certain circles.

Unfortunately rifts began to appear in the partnership and their next opera *Princess Ida* (1884), based upon a 'perversion' by Gilbert of Tennyson's poem *The Princess*, was a less than happy experience. The blank verse defeated many in the cast and the splitting into three acts disconcerted the critics, despite the fact that it was one of the most beautifully costumed productions directed by Gilbert and featured some top-notch Sullivan.

Gilbert's idea for *The Mikado* (1885) came about allegedly when a Japanese sword in his study fell off the wall as he angrily paced up and down seeking inspiration. A Japanese exhibition in Kensington and the current popularity of Japanese fabrics sold by Liberty's of Regent Street helped to make *The Mikado* a truly topical show. More popular than any other Savoy Opera it is regularly performed successfully in translation elsewhere in Europe and is a perennial favourite throughout the English-speaking world. Despite the Japanese costumes and the hiring of a geisha girl to demonstrate correct deportment to the cast, it was patently clear that typically British character-types were being lampooned. However this did not prevent the Lord Chamberlain from banning the work in 1907 for fear of offending a visiting Japanese legation.

Despite the success of the light operas Sullivan still wished to work on more serious subjects. Some of his most dramatic music is contained in the next opera *Ruddigore* (1887), known originally as *Ruddygore*. Its melodramatic subject and at times over-ponderous scoring was not to the liking of the first-night audience who gave it the thumbs down. Following shouts from

the galleryites to 'Bring back *The Mikado!*' the work was rewritten in part; however it was many years before *Ruddigore* became accepted as part of the regular Gilbert and Sullivan canon.

The succeeding work *The Yeomen Of The Guard* (1888) was yet darker in character. Although the partnership was decidedly brittle during its composition, once again they were able to combine to produce a work that was serious but by no means overly sentimental. They created a stir by having the audience discover the soubrette in tears as the curtains opened and they create a real lump in the throat as the jester (possibly) dies of a broken heart at the ending. In between they presented an opera full of human interest, spiced up with some of Gilbert's funniest lines. Sullivan's score is tinged throughout with heartfelt melancholy, none more so than the quartet 'When a wooer goes a-wooing'.

Of the two, Sullivan was essentially mild-mannered and easy-going, whilst Gilbert took offence easily and was inclined to overreact. Consequently when Sullivan was stirred enough to tell his partner that he felt he had suppressed his real musical character in order to accommodate Gilbert's lyrics, the lyricist hit the roof. This argument, and variations upon its theme, had been threatening to cause a complete rift for some years and in addition, audiences were now seen to favour the competition from George Edwardes' Gaiety and Prince of Wales Theatres. One of the prime sources of friction at the Savoy came from the artists who felt undervalued. Putting them firmly in their place, Gilbert's script for *The Gondoliers* (1889) provided no less than nine principal parts, none being more nor less important than the others. *The Gondoliers* is one of their happiest creations, a perfect marriage of words and music, graceful, sparkling, witty and delightfully ridiculous.

The infamous carpet quarrel (over expenses at the Savoy Theatre, during which Gilbert accused both Sullivan and D'Oyly Carte of cheating him) led to a further break. Sullivan now felt free to compose his long-awaited Grand Opera *Ivanhoe* which ran for an incredible five months (what other Grand Opera could enjoy a run like that?) and Gilbert finally wrote a Lozenge Plot play (this subject had been constantly resisted by Sullivan). The two finally buried the hatchet and reunited for two final works *Utopia Limited* and *The Grand Duke*. Of the two, *Utopia Limited* is unquestionably the better work but still falls far short of the other operas. Time and evolving tastes had caught up with Gilbert and Sullivan and following the

disastrously short run of *The Grand Duke* they decided to call it a day, although both wrote occasionally thereafter with other collaborators.

These recordings of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas were among the first performances to be issued by Decca on LP. The Musical Director of the D'Oyly Carte Company then was **Isidore Godfrey**, who at the time of his retirement in 1968 had held that position for 39 years. Another longstanding member heard here in fine voice is **Darrell Fancourt** who joined in 1920, and immediately assumed the principal bass roles. His instantly recognisable dark bass changed remarkably little over the years from the acoustic recordings of the early 1920s to those shortly before his death in 1953. **Martyn Green** succeeded to the patter-roles made famous by Grossmith and Henry Lytton following Lytton's retirement in 1934, although he had joined as far back as 1919. He starred in the 1938 film of *The Mikado* and acted as adviser for *The Story of Gilbert and Sullivan* (1953) in which he played the part of Grossmith. He was one of many to leave the company following a disagreement in 1951 and later went to America. **Leonard Osborn** was one of the most popular members of the company between 1937 and 1959 (although both he and Martyn Green served in the RAF during the Second World War). His virile tenor and good looks ensured a loyal following and audiences admired the way he threw himself into the part (literally once in *Ruddigore* when he broke his ankle!). He later became Production Director of the old D'Oyly Carte company. The Australian bass **Richard Watson** joined the company in 1932 from Covent Garden but left shortly afterwards due to lack of opportunity, rejoining again after the war where he remained until the 'exodus' of 1951. He died in Australia in 1968. **Alan Styler** played all the principal baritone roles during his distinguished career with them from 1947 to 1968 when ill-health forced retirement. Among the other male principals can be heard Green's eventual replacement **Peter Pratt**, the tenor **Neville Griffiths** who later joined Sadler's Wells (later English National Opera), **Eric Thornton**, who sang with the company for just three seasons, and **Fisher Morgan**, whose fruity bass distinguished a number of D'Oyly Carte recordings before 1956.

Ella Halman, the principal contralto on these recordings, joined the chorus in 1937 and three years later assumed the solo roles. She was married to the bass Radley Flynn and both left the company in 1951. Halman's successor **Ann Drummond-Grant**, who was married to Isidore

Godfrey, joined the company as a soprano in 1933 and spent some time outside the D'Oyly Carte singing in musical comedy. She died in 1959. **Muriel Harding** joined the chorus in 1945 and sang many of the principal soprano roles before leaving in 1954. She was married to the bass Donald Adams.

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VINTAGE GILBERT & SULLIVAN FAVOURITES Vol.2

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16. When A Wooer Goes A-Wooing - Muriel Harding,
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Patience (Rec.1951)

17. If Saphir I Choose To Marry - Yvonne Dean, Ann Drummond-Grant,
Neville Griffiths, Peter Pratt and Darrell Fancourt - 2.46

Ruddigore (Rec.1950)

18. When The Night Wind Howls - Darrell Fancourt - 2.35
19. My Eyes Are Fully Open - Ann Drummond-Grant, Martyn Green, Richard Watson - 1.37

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20. The Law Is The True Embodiment - Martyn Green - 2.52
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26. If You Go In - Leonard Osborn, Martyn Green and Eric Thornton - 2.23

with Chorus and Orchestra conducted by Isidore Godfrey Total playing time: 77.03

MORE VINTAGE GILBERT & SULLIVAN FAVOURITES

RRC 1068

Classic Stars of the D'Oyly Carte under Isidore Godfrey
(Martyn Green, Leonard Osborn, Darrell Fancourt, Eric Thornton,
Muriel Harding, Alan Styler, Anne Drummond-Grant, Ella Halman,
Richard Watson, & Co) perform 26 highlights

Including:

(Yeomen Of The Guard, 1950) I Have A Song To Sing O; - I've Jibe
And Joke - Were I Thy Bride - O, A Private Buffoon - Strange Adventure-
A Man Who Would Woo A Fair Maid - When A Wooer Goes A-Wooing -
Iolanthe (1951) - The Law Is The True Embodiment - When I Went To The
Bar - When All Night Long - When Britain Really Ruled The Waves -
O Foolish Fay - Nightmare Song - If You Go In - **Patience (1951)** - If Saphir
I Choose To Marry - **Ruddigore (1950)** - When The Night Wind Howls -
My Eyes Are Fully Open - **Mikado (1950)** - Our Great Mikado, Virtuous
Man - Braid The Raven Hair - **The Gondoliers (1950)** - There Lived A King
- Small Titles And Orders - I Am A Courtier Grave And Serious - **Pirates Of
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