Gilbert and Sullivan’s Swan Song: The Grand Duke

Christopher Wren Association
January 2018
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Local companies performing G&S

• Sinfonicron Light Opera, Williamsburg: www.sinfonicron.org *(Grand Duke Jan 18-21)*

The Grand Duke: Resources and references


• www.gsarchive.net: Online source for librettos, original production photos, etc.

• YouTube: Searching “Grand Duke Gilbert Sullivan” will bring up several videos. My personal favorite is the 1996 Washington Savoyards production. Closed captioning is available on this video.

• The piano-vocal score, and several audio CDs (including the 1976 D’Oyly Carte recording) are available on Amazon.
Sir Arthur Sullivan

• Born 1842
• Knighted 1883
• Died 1900

• He wrote the music
Sir William S. Gilbert

• Born 1836
• Knighted 1907
• Died 1911

• He wrote the words
Richard D’Oyly Carte

• Born 1844
• Died 1901
• He ran the business
The G & S Canon, with lengths of original runs in parentheses:

• Thespis, or The Gods Grown Old 1871 (63)

• Trial by Jury 1875 (131)
• The Sorcerer 1877 (178)
• HMS Pinafore, or The Lass That Loved a Sailor 1878 (571)
• The Pirates of Penzance, or The Slave of Duty 1879 (363)
• Patience, or Bunthorne’s Bride 1881 (578)
• Iolanthe, or The Peer and the Peri 1882 (398)
• Princess Ida, or Castle Adamant 1884 (246)
The G & S Canon, continued

• The Mikado, or The Town of Titipu 1885 (672)
• Ruddigore, or The Witch’s Curse 1887 (288)
• The Yeomen of the Guard, or The Merryman & His Maid 1888 (423)
• The Gondoliers, or The King of Barataria 1889 (554)

• Utopia, Limited, or The Flowers of Progress 1893 (245)
• The Grand Duke, or The Statutory Duel 1896 (123)
The G&S Core Cast: Women

• The Lead Soprano: Josephine, Mabel, Yum-yum

• The Mezzo-soprano (Jessie Bond): Hebe, Edith, Pitti-sing

• The Contralto (Rosina Brandram): Little Buttercup, Ruth, Katisha
The G&S Core Cast: Men

• The Tenor: Ralph Rackstraw, Frederic, Nanki-poo

• The Patter Baritone (George Grossmith): Sir Joseph Porter, Major-General Stanley, Ko-ko

• The Heavy Baritone (Rutland Barrington): Captain Corcoran, Police Sergeant, Pooh-bah

• The Bass (Richard Temple): Dick Deadeye, Pirate King, Mikado
It is absolutely essential to the success of this piece that it should be played with the most perfect earnestness and gravity throughout. There should be no exaggeration in costume, makeup, or demeanour; and the characters, one and all, should appear to believe, throughout, in the perfect sincerity of their words and actions. Directly the actors show that they are conscious of the absurdity of their utterances the piece begins to drag.

W.S. Gilbert

His genius is to fuse opposites with an imperceptible sleight of hand, to blend the surreal with the real, and the caricature with the natural. In other words, to tell a perfectly outrageous story in a completely deadpan way.

Mike Leigh, Director, *Topsy-Turvy* (1999)
Features of Gilbert’s stagecraft

- Topsy-Turvydom (a/k/a Gilbertian logic)
- Firm directorial control
- Effective dramatic use of the chorus
- Act I sets up the problem, Act II resolves it
- The issue, usually (but not always): Who will marry the soprano?
- The Invasion Plot
- The Lozenge Plot
- The Virtual Lozenge
Structure of the G&S Plot

- Act I usually (but not always) opens with a chorus
- Characters introduce themselves with a song
- Act I Finale
- The False Resolution
- The News Flash

- Act II: More solos and ensembles, fewer chorus numbers
- Act II Finale: Wrapping it all up
Musical theater works that feature duels

• *La Traviata*, Verdi (1853)

• Not that big a deal: The duel takes place offstage, no one is killed, and Baron Douphol, who is wounded, is an unsympathetic character.
Musical theater works that feature duels

• *Eugene Onegin*, Tchaikovsky (1879)

  • A bigger deal: Onegin kills his friend Lensky and is haunted by guilt for the rest of his life.
Musical theater works that feature duels

  - A huge deal: Burr kills Hamilton and changes the course of American history.
  - Fun fact: The libretto of *Hamilton* includes a quote from *The Pirates of Penzance.*
The Grand Duke, or The Statutory Duel

- The time: 1750
- The place: The fictional German grand duchy of Pfennig Halbfpfennig
- Act I: Public Square of the capital city of Speisesaal
- Act II: Hall in the Grand Ducal Palace
Dramatis Personae (with Core Cast roles in italics)

• RUDOLPH (Grand Duke of Pfennig Halbpfennig) *Patter Baritone*
• ERNEST DUMMKOPF (a Theatrical Manager) *Lead Tenor*
• LUDWIG (his Leading Comedian) *Heavy Baritone*
• DR. TANNHÄUSER (a Notary)
• THE PRINCE OF MONTE CARLO *Bass*
• VISCOUNT MENTONE
• BEN HASHBAZ (a Costumier)
• HERALD
Dramatis Personae continued

• THE PRINCESS OF MONTE CARLO (betrothed to RUDOLPH) *Mezzo-Soprano*
• THE BARONESS VON KRAKENFELDT (betrothed to RUDOLPH) *Contralto*
• JULIA JELLICOE (an English Comédienne) *Lead Soprano*
• LISA (a Soubrette)
• Members of Ernest Dummkopf's Company:
  • OLGA
  • GRETCHEK
  • BERTHA
  • ELSA
  • MARTHA
Act I set, original production
Opening chorus, final refrain

• Here they come, the couple plighted
• On life's journey gaily start them.
• Man and maid for aye united,
• Till divorce or death shall part them.
Ernest Dummkopf, theatrical manager and would-be Grand Duke
Ernest’s song: Final refrain

• Oh, the man who can drive a theatrical team,
• With wheelers and leaders in order supreme,
• Can govern and rule, with a wave of his fin,
• All Europe – with Ireland thrown in!
Dr. Tannhauser: “It is always amusing to the legal mind to see a parcel of laymen bothering themselves about a matter which to a trained lawyer presents no difficulty whatever.”
Rules of Statutory Duelling

• No weapons
• Each combatant draws one card from a deck
• High card wins
• The loser, although physically unharmed, is legally dead
• The winner takes on all of the rights, responsibilities, possessions, obligations, and status of the loser

• The law, being almost 100 years old, expires tomorrow
• Death expunges crime
Rudolph and the Baroness
Rudolph’s Lament

• “When you find you’re a broken-down critter”
Act II: Reviving the glory of ancient Athens; Ludwig and Julia dress for their wedding
Julia’s Lament

• So ends my dream – so fades my vision fair!
• Of hope no gleam – distraction and despair!
• My cherished dream, the Ducal throne to share
• That aim supreme has vanished into air!
The Herald, the Prince of Monte Carlo, and his daughter the Princess