



A “Sing In” with Gilbert and Sullivan Professor Robin Wilson 22 September 2010

Welcome to our sing-in of Gilbert & Sullivan, designed as the London launch of Gilbert & Sullivan Choruses, which I recently edited with the broadcaster and conductor Brian Kay.

In the next 75 minutes or so, we'll introduce you to most of the fourteen G&S operas, and you'll be meeting two kings, the Grand Duke of Pfennig Halpfennig, a Lord Chancellor, a Major-General, a sea captain, an executioner, a magician, a police sergeant and two spin-doctors.

So, to get us off to a lively start, let's sing our first chorus, 'For the merriest fellows are we' from The Gondoliers, which is Chorus number 23 on page 179 of the book. If you haven't yet bought the book, I'll project the pages onto the screen - and if you don't read music at all, here are the words.

OPENING CHORUS (from The Gondoliers)

1. Solo (Sheridan) with chorus: For the merriest fellows are we

As you can see, we have several singers here to help us, all from Oxford. The role of the gondolier Antonio has just been sung by Sheridan Edward (tenor), with David Jones conducting and Sam Baker as our orchestra, and we also welcome Taya Smith (soprano) and Jordan Bell (baritone). Gilbert and Sullivan first met at a rehearsal of *Ages Ago*, a work written by Gilbert with music by Sullivan's friend Frederick Clay, composer of such well-known ballads as 'I'll sing thee songs of Araby'. *Ages Ago* included a scene in which a picture gallery of ancestors come alive and descend from their frames - an idea that Gilbert later revived in *Ruddigore*.

Their first collaboration was *Thespis*, which ran for six weeks. Most of its music is lost, though you can hear two items from it if you come to the Oxford launch of the book on 2nd October. One person who saw *Thespis* was the theatre impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte, who remembered Gilbert and Sullivan three years later when he needed a short piece to follow an Offenbach opera that he was presenting in London.

The result was *Trial by Jury*, about a case of breach of promise of marriage. Let's sing the opening chorus, which is Chorus number 1 on page 2 of the book. Imagine yourself in a Court of Law where the trial is about to start.

TRIAL BY JURY

2. Chorus: Hark, the hour of ten is sounding

After the enormous success of *Trial by Jury*, D'Oyly Carte commissioned a full-length G & S opera, and the result was *The Sorcerer*. It concerns a love potion which the sorcerer, John Wellington Wells, administers to a whole village at a wedding feast, with predictably disastrous results. Here, in a typical G & S patter song, the sorcerer introduces himself.

THE SORCERER

3. Solo: My name is John Wellington Wells

The Sorcerer had a moderately successful run, and was succeeded by *HMS Pinafore*, which started with poor audiences due to an unusually hot summer, until Sullivan included some of its music in a Promenade Concert - *Pinafore* was soon the smash hit of London. The story is set on board ship and features Josephine, the Captain's daughter. Her father wishes her to marry Sir Joseph Porter, the First Lord of the Admiralty, but she's secretly in love with a common sailor on board ship, with whom she plans to elope. In this trio, the three of them discuss the situation.

H.M.S. PINAFORE

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