

Savoyardage

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MADISON SAVOYARDS, LTD.

GRACE PRESENTS THE MADISON SAVOYARDS



The Flowers That Bloom in the Spring a selection of Gilbert & Sullivan floral favorites

Saturday, April 11 at 12:00pm
Grace Episcopal Church, 116 W Washington Ave, Madison

UPCOMING EVENTS

Grace Presents: The Madison Savoyards
Saturday, April 11 at 12:00pm
Grace Episcopal Church
116 West Washington Ave, Madison
FREE

Savoyards Spring Sing
Saturday, May 9, 6:00 - 8:30pm
Wisconsin Brewing Co.
1079 American Way, Verona, WI
FREE

Tickets available now for *The McAdo*
a new adaptation of Gilbert & Sullivan's
The Mikado set in the Scottish Highlands

July 31 & August 6, 7 at 7:30pm
August 1, 2, 8, 9 at 3:00pm
Bartell Theatre, 113 E Mifflin St, Madison
Box Office: 608-661-9696
Online: bartelltheatre.org



Happy Spring, Savoyards! This spring we're looking forward to Gilbert & Sullivan in concert, and an outdoor singalong! These spring sings are free and open to the public—please bring family and friends.

Join us on April 11, the first day of the Dane County Farmer's Market, for a Grace Presents concert of selected botanical works by Gilbert & Sullivan. Grace Presents is a free monthly concert series that takes place in the historic Grace Episcopal Church on the Capitol Square. Concerts are at noon on Saturdays.

Be part of our outdoor singalong on May 9, at 6pm at Wisconsin Brewing Company! Grab a group of friends for a relaxing and hilarious time. Stay tuned to madisonsavoyards.org for score updates and to sign up for a solo!

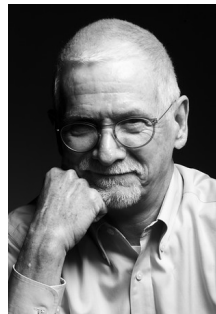
We are busy making plans for this year's August production of *The McAdo*. While the setting and character names are altered, it's otherwise the same topsyturvy tale and brilliant musical score that has delighted audiences worldwide for well over a century.

How Do You Solve a Problem Like *The Mikado*? or, Motivations of Gilbert Sullivan Austin's Adaptation

by Michael Meigs

A runaway success when first staged in 1885 London, *The Mikado* remains by far the best known of the comic operas of W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan. Its melodies and comic bits are deeply embedded in English-speaking popular culture, and many generations have delighted in G&S cleverness in satirizing foibles of London society thinly disguised as a mythical Japan. Kimonos, bizarre headwear, mincing geishas; scrolls, gongs, and an executioner's axe; visuals evoking exotic depictions of samurai and teahouses – who could possibly object to such fun?

Very few in the United Kingdom, it still appears; but in her erudite 2010 book-length analysis *The Japan of Pure Invention*,



scholar Josephine Lee situated *The Mikado* in the context of European-American orientalism, stereotyping, commodity racialism, and “yellow face” performance. Asian-Americans, long uneasy with the cartoonish G&S vision of ancient Japan, took Lee's condemnations to heart.

Back in Austin, TX, Gilbert Sullivan Austin (GSA) had scheduled a 2020 production of *The Mikado*, the first since our 2011 traditional staging was criticized. In 2018 GSA's all-volunteer board put together a working group to consider how to solve a problem like *The Mikado*. The points they sought to resolve:

- **Orientalism.** The twenty-first-century world is far smaller than that of 1895; Sullivan's Japan, always imaginary, is no longer acceptable. Asian-American objections are valid even though not widely shared by potential audiences. Reworking was necessary, even though a percentage of potential audiences might reject any changes to the beloved work.
- **Caricature.** Traditional stagings have been cartoonish of costume and gesture.

- **Yellow face.** Virtually all traditional stagings have had non-Asian performers pretending to be Japanese.
- **Portrayal of female characters.** Traditional staging has presented child-like geishas. Sullivan's names for the "three little girls from school"—Yum-yum, Piti-Sing- and Peep-bo—evoke "baby talk" and infantilize those characters.
- **Consistency of action and setting.** Altering place, country, and era would depend upon identifying an appropriately isolated feudal setting where execution by beheading is a credible danger.
- **Direction of the satire.** A revision should not denigrate the place or people where the action is set. The text should read clearly as a satire of the English ruling class, Gilbert's original target.
- **Consultation and signaling.** Any GSA plans to alter *The Mikado* should be discussed with knowledgeable local theatre makers and opinion leaders.

GSA's close reading of the text initially determined that fewer than two dozen remarks or passages tied the work to Japan. Sullivan's score contained only one Japanese melody, *Miya Sama*, the lyrics of which mimic Japanese speech. The ensemble's chants in pseudo-Japanese at the close of Act I drown out revelations by the Mikado's daughter-in-law elect. This inventory indicated that the work could be preserved virtually intact despite a change in setting and staging.

Gilbert and Sullivan Austin's intention in reworking *The Mikado* into *The McAdo* was always to preserve the comic and musical genius of the work as intact as possible while moving the setting out of the mythical Japan of 19th-century imagination. Many Victorian-era misconceptions persist even today as stereotypes in American and European imaginations. GSA's reworking is probably more effective in a U.S. and Canadian context, where the Scottish are prominent and generally admired in the history of

both nations (for example, the Scottish National Library notes that 34 of the first 45 U.S. presidents had Scottish ancestry). It appears that audiences and companies in the United Kingdom may be less sensitive to Asian stereotyping and might in fact perceive the GSA approach as satirizing the Scots instead of Gilbert's original target the English.

GSA copyrighted its text of *The McAdo*, or *The Town of Balleydew* in 2019. The board decided to administer the work on a "Creative Commons" basis, meaning that anyone may copy or redistribute it in any format for any purpose, and anyone may remix, transform, and build upon it, provided that GSA is given appropriate credit.

Michael Meigs is the founder of CTXLiveTheatre.com, a site dedicated to publicizing and reviewing live theatre throughout Central Texas. Michael has served on the board of Gilbert & Sullivan Austin (GSA) in various capacities since 2010.

INTRODUCING MADISON SAVOYARDS' 2026 DIRECTORS

Sam D. White, Stage Director



My first theater-going experience was in 1969. I saw Madison Savoyards production of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* at Memorial High School (my eventual Alma Mater). Two of my neighbor buddies were in it, Steve and Allen Becknell. It was directed by their father, the amazing Arthur Becknell. So, it was kind of obligatory for me to attend. I had no idea what I was getting into, or how profoundly it would affect my life.

I remember parts of it vaguely. I don't remember who took me, probably Mom. We most likely got comps. I do remember the "wow" of walking into Memorial High School theater for the first time – a place where I would eventually be irrevocably bitten by the venomous theater bug. I don't remember much of the show. I'm sure I didn't understand much of it. What I do remember very well is, after seeing my buddies prance around on stage in very cool looking Japanese costumes and heavy makeup, I had a very profound and a palpable and almost overwhelming sense of "I wanna do that! I can do that!" I'm sure Mom had a challenge keeping me in my seat.

Now, 57 years later, I am directing MSL's 2026 Scottish adaptation of *The Mikado*, called *The McAdo*! Irony? Fate? Both? Does it matter? Gird thy loins, all! It will ROCK – can I say that about a G&S operetta?

Sam D. White is a long-time actor, director, and playwright in the Wisconsin theater community.

Alessio Tranchell, Music Director



When I was eighteen, I was cast as a chorus member in my first Gilbert and Sullivan production, *The Pirates of Penzance*. Between the community, the wittiness, the hilarity, and the sublime music I knew I had stumbled upon something special. During my undergraduate degree in vocal performance, I completed my first "big three" cycle with productions of *H.M.S. Pinafore* and *The Mikado*. At every point in my schooling and career, I have managed

to seek out and participate in the local G&S scene - from Opera Lytes in Buffalo, NY (first as Pirate King, then as Music Director for *The Gondoliers*) to GSVLOC in Minneapolis where I have been involved in many productions, summer sings, fundraising events, and more since 2017.

Last fall in Minneapolis, I was able to attend and hear from colleagues second hand about the magic of *The McAdo*, the new production set in Scotland originally premiered by the G&S folks in Austin, TX. It was a brilliant way to experience the unforgettable music of the show without having to wrestle with the appropriation of the original production. I am excited to bring this music to life for audiences in Madison and continue to share this story in a way that reaches out to everyone.

Alessio Tranchell currently serves as an instructor and student pursuing his D.M.A. at UW-Madison in conducting. He is a teaching assistant for the undergraduate conducting course and conductor of the University Chorus.

A look back at 2025



Clockwise from top left: (1) March 2 & 8, *The Zoo* in concert at Monona Library, (2) May 10, Grace Presents Madison Savoyards celebrating women's arias of G&S (3) July 19 *Iolanthe* in concert at Capitol Lakes, (4) August 1-10 Gilbert & Sullivan's *Iolanthe* at the Bartell Theatre, (5) October 25, a *Ruddigore* singalong at Wisconsin Brewing Co. and (6) December 2, Caroling on Monroe Street

Board of Directors 2025-26

- Bradley J. Carter President
- Aimee Teo Broman Vice President
- Pamela Ziemlewicz Secretary
- Jeremy Dyer Treasurer
- Angela Joy Bleke Member at large
- Elena DeMajistre Member at large

Thank You to our Supporters

Madison Savoyards is deeply grateful for your continued support of our company through your donations and well wishes. Do you have interest in board service or in helping shepherd our organization into the future? Please reach out to any current board member for a quick coffee or chat. We'd love to hear from you.

Thank You to the Wisconsin Arts Board

Madison Savoyards is a proud and grateful recipient of a Wisconsin Arts Board 2026 Creation and Presentation grant, through funds from the State of Wisconsin and the National Endowment for the Arts.



Contact Us

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 voicemail: (608) 616-5706
www.madisonsavoyards.org

In Memoriam



On December 7, 2025, Phil Saganski passed away after a long battle with cancer. Our hearts go out to his family.

Phil joined Madison Savoyards on the stage as a ukelele-playing juror, a pirate, and a dragoon. He served on our board from 2019 to 2025, most recently as Board President. His love for music and community was unmistakable, and he strived to make our productions welcome and enjoyable for all. We will dearly miss his good humor and joyful song.

The Madison Savoyards, Ltd.
P.O. Box 1612
Madison, WI 53701-1612

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Yes, I wish to ensure more Madison Savoyards productions at the following level:

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Additional Comments: _____

Please make your check payable to **Madison Savoyards, Ltd.**

Mail your check and this form to: **P.O. Box 1612, Madison, WI 53701-1612**

Madison Savoyards is a 501(c)3 organization. Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Contributors will be acknowledged in the program and online, unless otherwise requested.

Thank you for your contribution!

Order a copy of our 2024 *Patience*:

I would like to purchase _____ DVDs (\$26, tax and shipping included) of *Patience*. Shipping fee may be waived if pick-up can be arranged in Madison. Email **madison.savoyards@gmail.com** for more information.