

# Savoyardage

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MADISON SAVOYARDS, LTD.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

## GRACE PRESENTS THE MADISON SAVOYARDS



Saturday, May 27 at 12:00pm  
Grace Episcopal Church  
116 W Washington Ave  
Madison, WI

Free monthly concerts on the Square  
[gracepresents.org](http://gracepresents.org)

### Grace Presents: The Madison Savoyards

**Where:** Grace Episcopal Church

116 West Washington Ave, Madison, WI

**When:** Saturday, May 27 at 12pm

**COST:** FREE!

Never mind the why and wherefore, any day is a good day for some comic opera! Join us at Grace Episcopal on the Square for *A Wand'ring Minstrel, I*, a noontime concert celebrating the fancies and formulae that make up Gilbert & Sullivan operetta. From the opening chorus apropos of nothing, to a soaring soprano aria highlighting the ingenue's resonance in lieu of reason, the light operas of this Victorian duo adhere to a delightful prescription that pairs clever composition with timeless wit. Under the direction of Erin Bryan, four singers and one intrepid pianist will present a topsy-turvy trip through the Gilbert & Sullivan repertoire.

## TICKETS AVAILABLE NOW!

### *The Pirates of Penzance*

**Where:** The Bartell Theatre

113 E Mifflin St, Madison WI

**When:** August 4, 5, 10, 11, 12 at 7:30pm

August 6, 13 at 3:00pm

Box Office: 608-661-9696

[madisonsavoyards.org](http://madisonsavoyards.org)

*The Pirates of Penzance* meets all criteria of a modern major musical. There is a definite plot: Frederic, who was mistakenly apprenticed to a band of pirates by his aurally challenged nursemaid, just turned 21. He decides to leave the profession to which he was indentured and falls in love with a coloratura soprano (as happens so often in these cases) named Mabel. Ruth, his nursemaid, wants Frederic for her own, and informs the Pirate King that Frederic was born on the 29<sup>th</sup> of February in a leap year. The two of them confront Frederic with the fact that, reckoning by birthdays, he is only 5; and, by appealing to his overweening sense of duty, force him back into the pirate fold. The rest of the story is how the lovers are re-united—boy gets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl.

Within this simple (for W.S. Gilbert) plot, there are subtle nuggets of social criticism to be mined. The Pirate King asks us to consider if piracy is closer to being the rule than the exception in commerce and statecraft. Through the nursemaid Ruth, Gilbert wonders aloud if it's healthy for



British parents to raise their children at arm's length. Major General Stanley lacks in military ability, but is apparently rich in social and political connections, and has managed to climb to the highest rungs of the British Army.

Sullivan's music enthusiastically creates the atmosphere with rollicking nautical rhythms supporting both the actions and characterizations of the pirate band. Frederic's arias are anthems to his overdeveloped sense of duty. Mabel's gratuitous yet wonderful cadenzas are opera as vaudeville. Long after leaving the theatre, when confronted by social absurdities, characters and situations from *Pirates* may readily come to mind.

CELEBRATING  
60 YEARS



1963-2023

*Madison Savoyards, Ltd. was not originally created to be the enduring local institution it has become. It was the brainchild of a number of talented and energetic young people, most of them precocious students at, or recent graduates of, West High School in Madison. They had talked for a while of putting on a stage production as a summer activity, perhaps a Gilbert & Sullivan work, and they finally decided to make the attempt in the summer of 1963. They worked up the operation from scratch, getting advice and assistance where they could, but barely aware of all they were letting themselves in for.*

from *A Short History of Madison Savoyards, Ltd.* by John W. Barker, published 1995

We were delighted to receive a letter from founding member Esther Cappon Gray, reflecting on the first Savoyards production in 1963!

August 4, 2022

Dear Fellow Savoyards,

As one of our founders, I'm writing to pass along some of the history we share as Madison Savoyards. You might or might not know that it was our dream in 1963, when we worked to perform the first Madison Savoyards' Gilbert and Sullivan work, to perform *Ruddigore*. Ellen Davis and I had made a habit of checking out each of the operas at the Madison Public Library and listening to them week after week. Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas and Carl Orff's *Der Mond* were special favorites, and *Ruddigore* appealed to us particularly as 17-year-olds.

There are four adults who deserve credit for making it possible for Madison Savoyards to get off the ground. We kids were convinced that teens could and should be able to perform a musical during the summer if we really wanted to, and if we would put in the effort. A vast number of us worked very hard indeed, including Ellen Davis, Tom Rarick, Sharri Joos, Jeanette Lawver, David Lawver, Randy Young, Tim Lewis, David Lee, Gilbert Peterson, Cathy Crow, Susan Kinne and Armine Gullesterian in the earliest days. We learned early on that looking for support as a group of enthusiastic teens starting without direct sponsorship of a school, a church, or a community recreation group would be challenging. Four adults embraced our idealistic convictions: Our advisor, **Karlos Moser**, known for the UW Opera Workshop; our director, **Michael Birkley**, well-versed in local theater (Lead in Madison Theater Guild *Fiorello!* and composer of the background music for *The Miracle Worker*); **Elizabeth Gould**, *Wisconsin State Journal* Staff Writer (arts);



Karlos Moser and Michael Birkley



and Pastor **Gale Wolf**, First Congregational Church, Madison. Mr. Moser called us "teenagers with dreams."

Our striking confidence in our audacious plans came from an abundance of rich positive experiences, including years of summer-long activities with Madison's Youth Summer Theater program, and from the remarkable teen-organized Orchestra da Camera which was founded and led by Tom Rarick and David Lawver, both class of '63 of West High. Several of us brainstormed at the first meetings and did a lot of phoning to people who might possibly be interested in participating. We created a list of candidates who might be good advisors. Several names were vetoed, and the others declined – until Karlos Moser.

Tom Rarick, who was interested in leading our orchestra, admired Mr. Moser so much he was reluctant to approach him. Eventually Tom nodded a "yes," and we made a call with the now familiar, "Hello. This is Esther Cappon. I am calling on behalf of a group of Madison teenagers who would like to put on a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta this summer. We were wondering if you would consider doing some advising." (Mr. M: What are you thinking of?) Me: "Well, we had been thinking of doing *Ruddigore*." (Mr. M: Have you an orchestra conductor?) Me: "Sort of." (Mr. M: What do you mean? Is he planning to leave you?) Me: "Oh, no! It's just that he doesn't want us using his name right now

in such an indefinite situation." Mr. Moser went into a gale of laughter. (Mr. M: I'm just delighted with your cautious approach!) Then Mr. M proposed an appointment with us, and when we met, he asked many respectful questions and concluded, "Well, you would like to do *Ruddigore* at Washington school, wouldn't you?"

He assigned us tasks to do before our next meeting: arrangements for getting music, a hall, sets, costumes, etc. We did our homework. At the next meeting, Mr. M. told us that he felt we didn't have time to prepare a full production, and he proposed a concert reading. "Do something that you can do well. Do something this year that will make people say, 'My, how clever!' and then do your big production next year when you have established yourselves." He was wise and kind. We set *Ruddigore* aside, embraced the idea of a concert reading, and considered many possible shows. Unfortunately, Mr. Moser did not have any ideas for possible directors.

We called everyone we could think of – teachers, parents, local musical personalities we knew, and everyone anybody suggested. Then when I called Michael Birkley, he picked up his phone, and once again I said – "My name is Esther Cappon. Tom Braatz gave me your name. He thought you might be interested in working with a group of teenagers who are very interested in putting on a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta this summer." etc.

# Savoyards Can Take Big Collective Bow

By ELIZABETH GOULD  
(State Journal Staff Writer)

The Madison Savoyards—teen-age Gilbert and Sullivan enthusiasts—and “all their sisters and their cousins and their aunts,” not to mention their mothers and fathers, should be beaming with pride this morning.

Though it was not until early July that Esther Cappon and Ellen Davis began to organize the group, their first production, “Iolanthe,” which played to a packed house at the First Congregational Church Friday night, is an outstanding success.

Starting from scratch, with nothing but their own zest and talent (not only for music but for organization) the young people enlisted the adult help of Karlos Moser as adviser, Frank Fetherston as technical director, and the versatile Mike Birkley as their director.

We have no idea how many hours were spent in rehearsal through the long hot summer, but we do know that they put on a production which many an older and more experienced group would have difficulty matching.

The orchestra, recruited and rehearsed by Tom Rarick, who graduated in June from West High School, is phenomenally good. The gay music is played with all the lightness and verve it demands. Always clear and sweet, it is muted enough never to drown out the voices, and the fast staccato and pizzicato passages are wonderful.

Of the cast, David Fagin as the Lord Chancellor, Cathy Crow, as Iolanthe, the fairy who married a mortal, and Ralph Williams as Private Willis, are outstanding.

Ralph Williams' voice is the richest of the entire group, and his sentry song is a highlight. Da-

vid Fagin displays a fine stage presence and gift for comedy as he rattles off the amusing, tongue-twisting lines of the pompous “very susceptible Chancellor,” who always manages to argue himself into doing what he wants to do. And Cathy Crow's clear, fresh soprano voice is equal to the highest notes of Iolanthe's songs.

Eric Newhouse and Tim Lewis make a fine and funny pair of dignified peers, and David Westley and Esther Cappon a charming pair of young lovers. As the queen of the Fairies, Phyllis Ferry displays a sweet, clear voice and charming youthful dignity, and Judith Sonstadt, Ellen Davis, and Susan Kinne all shine in their song.

Now and then there are high notes that individual voices can't quite reach, but every chorus is beautifully done, with every voice coming in strong and clear.

In the Fair chorus are Cynthia Cottam, Susan Crane, Debby Holmes, Jeannette Lawver, Jean Maraniss, Jackie Nevil, Shelley O'Meara, and Jane Wolman. The chorus of Peers includes Tim Fishel, Tim Johnson, Don Luebke, Toby Potter, Steve Webster, Randy Young, James Miller — and sometimes Ralph Williams.

The operetta will be repeated at 8 tonight.

Whew! Not an immediate ‘no’ answer! Mr. Birkley was curious and asked friendly questions. Then he said, “I have to think it over and talk it over with my family first. I'll call you back in 20 minutes – I owe some time to my kids . . . If we could have some rehearsals for principals at my house, it would help a lot.” I believe that every chair in Mr. B's modest house was in use at Tues. and Thur. rehearsals. His three children would sit wide-eyed and watch us; his wife would stand smiling in the kitchen doorway; and his kitten would attack us unexpectedly from time to time. Mr. Birkley was familiar with *Iolanthe* and raved about it: “It's a scream any way you look at it, and it can be taken on 6 different intellectual levels!”

I wrote a letter to each of our two newspaper City Editors, *Capital Times* and *Wisconsin State Journal*, requesting an announcement, saying that it “could reach many we wouldn't know of.” On July 24, 1963, both newspapers ran announcements. After I met with Elizabeth Gould of the *State Journal*, she supported

**Wisconsin State Journal review**  
**September 7, 1963**

our work with positive articles nearly weekly and reviewed our performance with warmth. Gale Wolf, a pastor at First Congregational Church who knew several of us well, agreed to vouch for us, which made it possible for us to rehearse and perform in the church dining hall.

I am pleased to see that Madison Savoyards 2022 is coming to life after COVID dealt you some devastating challenges! I'm especially happy that you have attracted young participants to join you. (It was actually our intention to establish a teenager-run Gilbert and Sullivan organization that could not be controlled by adults! We even wrote and passed a constitution intended to assure that.) Obviously, the longevity of the organization has been fostered by the dedicated hard work of people of many ages and backgrounds.

Sincerely,

*Esther Cappon Gray*

Associate Professor Emerita  
Department of English  
Western Michigan University  
Kalamazoo, MI

## 2023 Board of Directors

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## Thank You to the Wisconsin Arts Board

Madison Savoyards is a proud and grateful recipient of a Wisconsin Arts Board 2023 Creation and Presentation grant, through funds from the State of Wisconsin and the National Endowment of the Arts.



## Contact Us

madison.savoyards@gmail.com  
voicemail: (608) 616-5706  
www.madisonsavoyards.org

## Thank You to our Supporters

Madison Savoyards is deeply grateful for your continued support of our company through your donations and well wishes. If you have interest in helping to 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.

## Donate

Consider a legacy gift to our Endowment Fund through Madison Community Foundation. Interest from this fund supports Madison Savoyards productions *in perpetuity*.

Gifts to our General Fund are used in their entirety to support administrative and production needs, and are vital in bringing the joy and musicality of G&S to our community every year.

Top L to R: Megan McCarthy, William Volmar, Cat Richmond, Jude Balthazar.  
Photos by J. Miner Photography

## Madison Savoyards' Ruddigore 2022



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

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**Madison Savoyards, Ltd. Donation Form**

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

- Member (\$35 - \$59)                       Patron (\$60 - \$149)                       Sustaining Member (\$150 - \$499)  
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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 2022 *Ruddigore* recording:**

I would like to purchase \_\_\_\_\_ DVDs (\$26, tax and shipping included) of *Ruddigore*. Go online to **www.madisonsavoyards.org > Support > Purchase DVDs** for a complete list of available recordings.