

THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE

**INFORMATION FOR PRESS RELEASE AND PROMOTION
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This New York Gilbert & Sullivan Players production is your chance to get carried away by *Pirates*. Join the band of swashbuckling buccaneers, bumbling British bobbies, frolicsome Victorian maidens, and the delightfully dotty “model of a modern Major-General” for a rollicking romp over the rocky coast of Cornwall. This exuberant musical theater masterpiece, directed and conducted by Albert Bergeret with choreography by Bill Fabris, is performed in its original format. The rich sounds of full orchestra, chorus, and legitimate vocal soloists resonate with classic elegance and power while the company’s vibrancy, energy and contemporary sense of humor keep the show alive and exciting to a modern audience. *The Pirates of Penzance* - they’ll steal your heart away!

The Pirates of Penzance, or The Slave of Duty was first performed at the Fifth Avenue Theatre in New York City on December 31, 1879. It was the only Gilbert & Sullivan operetta to have its world premiere in the United States and it has remained popular both here and throughout the English speaking world ever since. Gilbert’s wit (always incisive but never vicious or dated) and Sullivan’s memorable score (including the original tune from which “Hail, hail the gang’s all here” is drawn) are among the most valuable treasures of musical theater history.

Patter songs are a Gilbert & Sullivan trademark and *Pirates* features the most famous of them all, “I am the very model of a modern Major-General”. This jaunty tune has been cleverly set to different words countless times (Tom Lehrer’s element song a notable example) and used in commercials to sell everything from Campbells soup to Handi-wipes, cars, newspapers and other items. *Pirates* also contains some of Gilbert’s most famous lyrics such as the often used quotation “a policeman’s lot is not a happy one” from the act two lament of the diffident “men in blue”. Other highlights of the show include “For I am a Pirate King”, the pirates’ “Here’s a first rate opportunity”, the policemen’s “When the foeman bears his steel” and Mabel’s show stopping coloratura aria “Poor wand’ring one”.



The plot of *Pirates* centers on the dilemma of young Frederic who, as a child, was mistakenly apprenticed to the pirates until his twenty first birthday. Since he was born in leap year on February 29, he is honor bound to remain a pirate until the distant date of 1940, despite his moral objection to piracy. Helping Frederic to deal with this unusual predicament are the brash Pirate King, Ruth - the pirate maid-of-all-work, romantic Mabel, and the delightfully stuffy Major-General Stanley.

QUOTES ABOUT NYGASP'S *The Pirates of Penzance*

“Opulent... colorful and inventive...beautifully crafted... the stage direction offered the balance of economy and extravagance that makes Gilbert & Sullivan work... lovely choreographic touches... polished but retaining spontaneity... The choruses of pirates, daughters and policemen sang and acted delightfully, and the orchestra, conducted by Mr. Bergeret, supported the cast with robust playing guaranteed to warm the most demanding Savoyard’s heart.”— *THE NEW YORK TIMES*

“Engaging... unfailingly enchanting...visually, the production is impressive, while the stage direction and excellent cast are further pleasures...the conducting showed total musical know how...”
— *NEW YORK DAILY NEWS*

“Fresh, smart, and winning without gimmicks.... keen theatrical sense... consistent quality... the Gilbert & Sullivan canon enters its second century in the best of hands...”— *NEW YORK MAGAZINE*

“Spirited... delightful... meticulous direction...”— *NEW YORK POST*

“One of the most joyous performances of *The Pirates of Penzance* it has been my privilege to witness... guided by good taste and expressed with exceptional enunciation...a particularly apt gathering of players... not only did they sing and move well as choruses, but they also were highly individualized... intelligible characters without recourse to camp or mugging... neat movements, lavish costumes... and Bergeret’s stage direction carefully trod the line between farce and vulgarity.”
— *NEW YORK NEWSDAY*

“ ‘Pirates of Penzance’ a Jolly (Roger) good time... the balance between high-jinks unique to the production and the de rigeur business, without which no aficionado would be satisfied, was just right... wowed the crowd with a dazzling coloratura soprano display... imaginative scenic concoctions. Bergeret conducted with sureness and flair.” — *THE STAR-LEDGER (NJ)*

“ ‘Pirates a treasure’... N.Y. touring troupe shines in this Gilbert & Sullivan classic... a lively production of *The Pirates of Penzance* that soared on exceptionally strong singing... Bergeret kept things moving briskly from the pit...up to date with topical and local references...— *AKRON (OH) BEACON-JOURNAL*



Story of *The Pirates of Penzance*

When Frederic was yet a little boy, his nurse (Ruth) was told to apprentice him to become a pilot. She heard the word incorrectly and apprenticed him to a band of pirates, remaining with them herself as a maid-of-all-work. Although Frederic loathed the trade to which he had thus been bound, he dutifully served. As the curtain rises, his indentures are up and he announces his intention to leave the band and devote himself to the extermination of piracy. He urges the pirates to join him in embracing a more lawful calling, but they refuse. Ruth, however, wishes to become his wife. Having seen but few women during his pirate life at sea, Frederic hesitates to accept a woman so much older than himself, but he finally consents to take her.

Just then a group of girls, all the wards of Major-General Stanley, happen upon the scene. Frederic sees their beauty - and Ruth's plainness - and renounces her. Of these girls, Mabel takes a particular interest in Frederic, and he in her. The other girls are seized by the pirates and threatened with immediate marriage. When the Major-General arrives, he can dissuade the pirates only by a ruse: he tells them that he is an orphan, and so works upon their sympathies that they let him and his wards go free.

During the ensuing days and nights, however, this lie troubles the Major-General's conscience. He sits brooding over it at night in a ruined chapel. He is consoled by his wards' sympathy and Frederic's plan of immediately leading a band of police against the pirates. The police are reluctant, but Frederic is still enthusiastic.

Meanwhile the Pirate King and Ruth seek out Frederic with surprising news. They have discovered that his indentures were to run until his twenty first birthday, and - as he was born on February 29 - he has really had as yet only five birthdays. Obeying the dictates of his strong sense of duty, he immediately rejoins the pirates and tells them of the deception that has been practiced upon them. They swear revenge as Frederic bids Mabel farewell.

When Mabel tells the police of this change they comment on their unfortunate lot, then decide to hide. The pirates storm the chapel, seize the Major-General, and easily defeat the unarmed policemen, however, when requested to yield "in Queen Victoria's name", they do so at once. Ruth reveals that these apparently lawless pirates are "all noblemen who have gone wrong". The Major-General pardons all and allows them to marry his wards.



Introduction to *The Pirates of Penzance*

by New York Gilbert & Sullivan Players Artistic Director Albert Bergeret

The Pirates of Penzance hardly needs an introduction. Long before Joe Papp's Broadway production and major motion picture added renewed popularity, this engaging operetta had established itself as one of the best loved pieces of musical theatre in the English speaking world.

The Pirates of Penzance was the only Gilbert & Sullivan opus to receive its premiere here in the USA. In a vain attempt to secure an international copyright for their work, the celebrated team brought their fifth collaboration to The Fifth Avenue Theatre in New York in December of 1879. The title might very well have been inspired by the many "pirated" (and therefore not profitable to G&S) productions of *H.M.S. Pinafore* which had preceded them across the Atlantic. Several such productions ran concurrently in New York, clearly establishing the American appreciation for this uniquely British art form. Perhaps because they were in the public domain from the outset (at least here in the States), these works have rarely been absent from the boards ever since.

The history of *Pirates* is notable for several other reasons as well. On the voyage across the ocean, Sullivan misplaced his musical score and had to recreate all of the music from memory. His composition for the women's entrance eluded him, so he substituted a similar chorus from the never published score of *Thespis*. As a result, "Climbing Over Rocky Mountain" is the only authentic chorus in existence from that lost score. With the rousing ensemble number "When the Foeman Bares His Steel", Sullivan perfected the double chorus technique which was to become one of his hallmarks. Two distinct choral themes are introduced separately and then overlapped for a dramatic musical climax. Gilbert also brought to the foreground for the first time his frequent lampooning of the British Aristocracy, with direct references to Queen Victoria and the Peerage. Then of course "I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major-General" raised the art of the patter song to an all time high. This song has been parodied in numerous product commercials (Campbell's Soup, Handiwipes, and The New York Times come to mind immediately), has been frequently used as an elocution exercise for speech students, and was once employed by comedian Tom Lehrer to set a list of all the elements from the periodic table!

The score for *Pirates* is as effervescent as its characters. Sullivan's reference to grand opera (and Verdi in particular) is everywhere, most notably in Mabel's aria "Poor Wand'ring One", which is a direct parody of Violetta's "Sempre Libera" from *La Traviata* - in the same key and with the identical cadenza. Yet another layer of imitation enters the picture when Sullivan's take on the Anvil Chorus in *Il Trovatore*, "Come Friends Who Plough the Sea", later becomes the tune for the popular camp song "Hail, Hail the Gang's All Here". These examples refer to well known moments, however, in many other Gilbert & Sullivan settings the parody remains more memorable than its original source!

Children have always been attracted to *Pirates* because of the child like behavior of these gentle souls and their earnest apprentice. Historically the idea of "noblemen who have gone wrong" is not only familiar child's play but also close to the truth. Most famous "pirates" were political or social outcasts from the upper classes. Gilbert's satiric and deliberately silly ending actually has real historic validity!

From a performing company's perspective *Pirates* has many charms. First and foremost is the predominant role that the chorus plays, and the opportunity for individual characterizations within the ensembles. The interaction between the various groups of pirates, policemen, and daughters is particularly playful and always delights both the audience and the cast participants. Another colorful aspect is the wide range of the vocal parts, from the very high coloratura soprano of Mabel and the lyric tenor of Frederic, to the growly low bass of the policemen. In the first production of *Pirates* in which I performed back in college, I sang first tenor in the first act and second bass in the second act because I could actually hit both extremes! It is an oddity of the printed score that the Major-General is listed as singing with the basses at certain points and with the tenors at other times - certainly not a musical necessity and rarely followed in practice.

To describe *Pirates* as a romp is surely no exaggeration. It's representation of naivet  , romance, and sentiment - all mixed with wit and sophisticated verbal by play - leaves the audience and performers alike with a giddy sense of joy that is timeless. I'm sure that *Pirates* will remain a staple of the G&S canon for as long as these classic operettas continue to enthrall the child in all of us!



MUSICAL NUMBERS

OVERTURE

ACT I

“POUR, O POUR THE PIRATE SHERRY” (Opening Chorus and Solo).....	Pirates and Samuel
“WHEN FREDERIC WAS A LITTLE LAD” (Solo).....	Ruth
“OH, BETTER FAR TO LIVE AND DIE” (Solo and Chorus).....	Pirate King and Pirates
“OH, FALSE ONE, YOU HAVE DECEIVED ME!” (Recitative and Duet).....	Frederic and Ruth
“CLIMBING OVER ROCKY MOUNTAIN” (Chorus and Solos).....	Girls, Edith, and Kate
“STOP, LADIES, PRAY!” (Recitative and Chorus).....	Frederic, Edith, Kate, and Girls
“OH, IS THERE NOT ONE MAIDEN BREAST” (Solos and Chorus).....	Frederic, Mabel, and Girls
“POOR WANDERING ONE!” (Solo and Chorus).....	Mabel and Girls
“WHAT OUGHT WE TO Do” (Solos and Chorus).....	Edith, Kate, and Girls
“HOW BEAUTIFULLY BLUE THE SKY” (Chattering Chorus and Duet).....	Girls, Mabel, and Frederic
“STAY, WE MUST NOT LOSE OUR SENSES” (Recitative and Chorus).....	Frederic, Girls, and Pirates
“HOLD, MONSTERS!” (Recitative and Chorus).....	Mabel, Samuel, Major-General, Girls, and Pirates
“I AM THE VERY MODEL OF A MODERN MAJOR-GENERAL” (Solo and Chorus).....
.....	Major-General, Girls, and Pirates
“OH, MEN OF DARK AND DISMAL FATE” (Finale of Act 1).....	Ensemble

ACT II

“OH, DRY THE GLISTENING TEAR” (Opening Chorus and Solo).....	Girls and Mabel
“THEN, FREDERIC, LET YOUR ESCORT LION-HEARTED” (Recitative)....	Major-General and Frederic
“WHEN THE FOEMAN BARES HIS STEEL” (Solos and Chorus).....
.....	Sergeant, Mabel, Edith, Kate, Major-General, Police, and Girls
“NOW FOR THE PIRATES’ LAIR!” (Recitative).....	Frederic, Pirate King, and Ruth
“WHEN YOU HAD LEFT OUR PIRATE FOLD (Solos, Trio, and Chant)...	Ruth, Frederic, and Pirate King
“AWAY, AWAY! MY HEART’S ON FIRE” (Trio).....	Ruth, Pirate King, and Frederic
“ALL IS PREPARED” (Recitative).....	Mabel and Frederic
“STAY, FREDERIC, STAY!” (Duet).....	Mabel and Frederic
“NO, I AM BRAVE!” (Recitative, Solo, and Chorus).....	Mabel, Sergeant, and Police
“WHEN A FELON’S NOT ENGAGED IN HIS EMPLOYMENT” (Solo and Chorus)....	Sergeant and Police
“A ROLLICKING BAND OP PIRATES WE (Chorus and Solo).....	Pirates, Sergeant, and Police
“WITH CAT-LIKE TREAD, UPON OUR PREY WE STEAL” (Chorus and Solo).....	Pirates, Police, Samuel
‘HUSH, HUSH! NOT A WORD” (Recitative, Chorus, and Solo)...	Frederic, Pirates, Police, Major-General
“SIGHING SOFTLY TO THE RIVER” (Ballad and Finale of Act II).....	Major-General and Ensemble