

BEYOND THE SCORE

ISSUE SIX

MUSICAL
DEVELOPMENTS
IN THE 19TH
CENTURY

SPOTLIGHT:
GILBERT &
SULLIVAN

THE PIRATES OF
PENZANCE

CHARACTER SONG

GILBERT AND SULLIVAN

THE COMIC OPERA TEAM

A CLOSER LOOK AT MUSICAL THEATRE

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THE 19th CENTURY

As operettas and operas became increasingly popular in Europe and America, and as the 19th century progressed, more musical performance genres were embraced. There were more **melodramas** and **extravaganzas**. These had storylines and a plot that connected. Another genre that was embraced were varieties. This would later be called vaudeville. Varieties are just that - a variety of different performances and skits, unlinked, but performed together.

MELODRAMAS

Traditionally when we hear the word “melodramatic”, we think of over-the-top or exaggerated. However, in terms of musical theatre, it is referring to a play with music. During a melodrama characters can speak between music interludes or speak while the music is accompanying them. In some instances actors may not be speaking, but using gestures in pantomime.

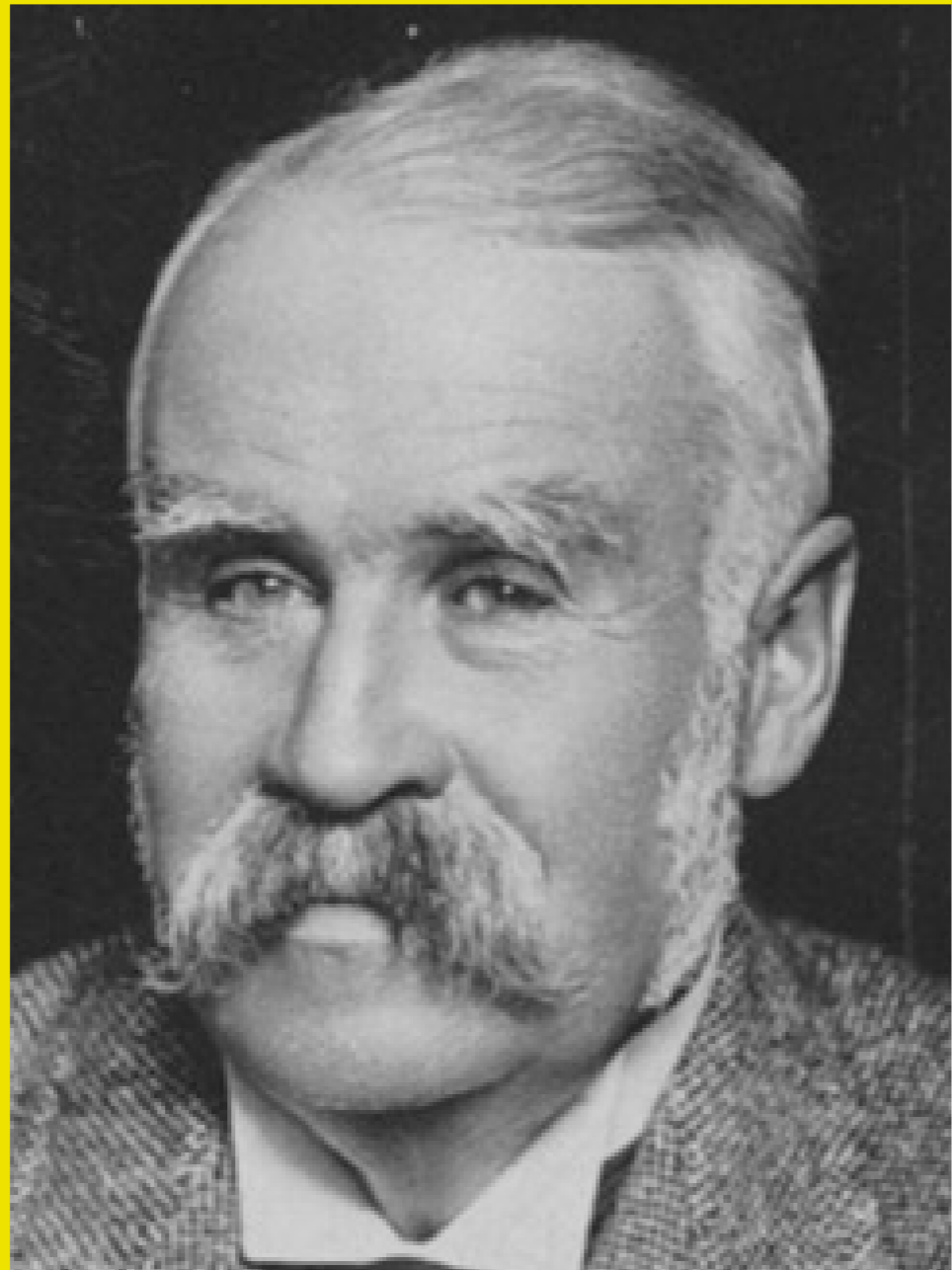
“Despite the diverse characteristics of these genres, they had one feature in common: **they each had a direct influence on the subsequent development of ‘musical theatre’.**” - Musical Theatre An Appreciation, pg. 78

EXTRAVAGANZAS

In these plays, stagecraft came first. The fancy sets, lighting, and huge cast captivated audiences. The storylines were often simple for those watching to understand, making them easily likable. An extravaganza can also be referred to as a spectacle.

GILBERT & SULLIVAN

THE COMIC OPERA TEAM



SPOTLIGHT

1871 - Thespis
1875 - Trial by Jury
1877 - The Sorcerer
1878 - H.M.S. Pinafore
1879 - The Pirates of Penzance
1881 - Patience
1882 - Iolanthe
1884 - Princess Ida
1885 - The Mikado
1887 - Ruddigore
1888 - The Yeomen of the Guard
1889 - The Gondoliers
1893 - Utopia Limited

In the late 19th century, a new duo emerged. Sir William Gilbert and Sir Arther Sullivan quickly became popular for their comic operas. Gilbert would write the libretto, or the text for the show, and Sullivan would compose the music. Comic operas were light, romantic stories that had happy endings. These operas or operettas usually include love ballads, duets, and big ensemble numbers.

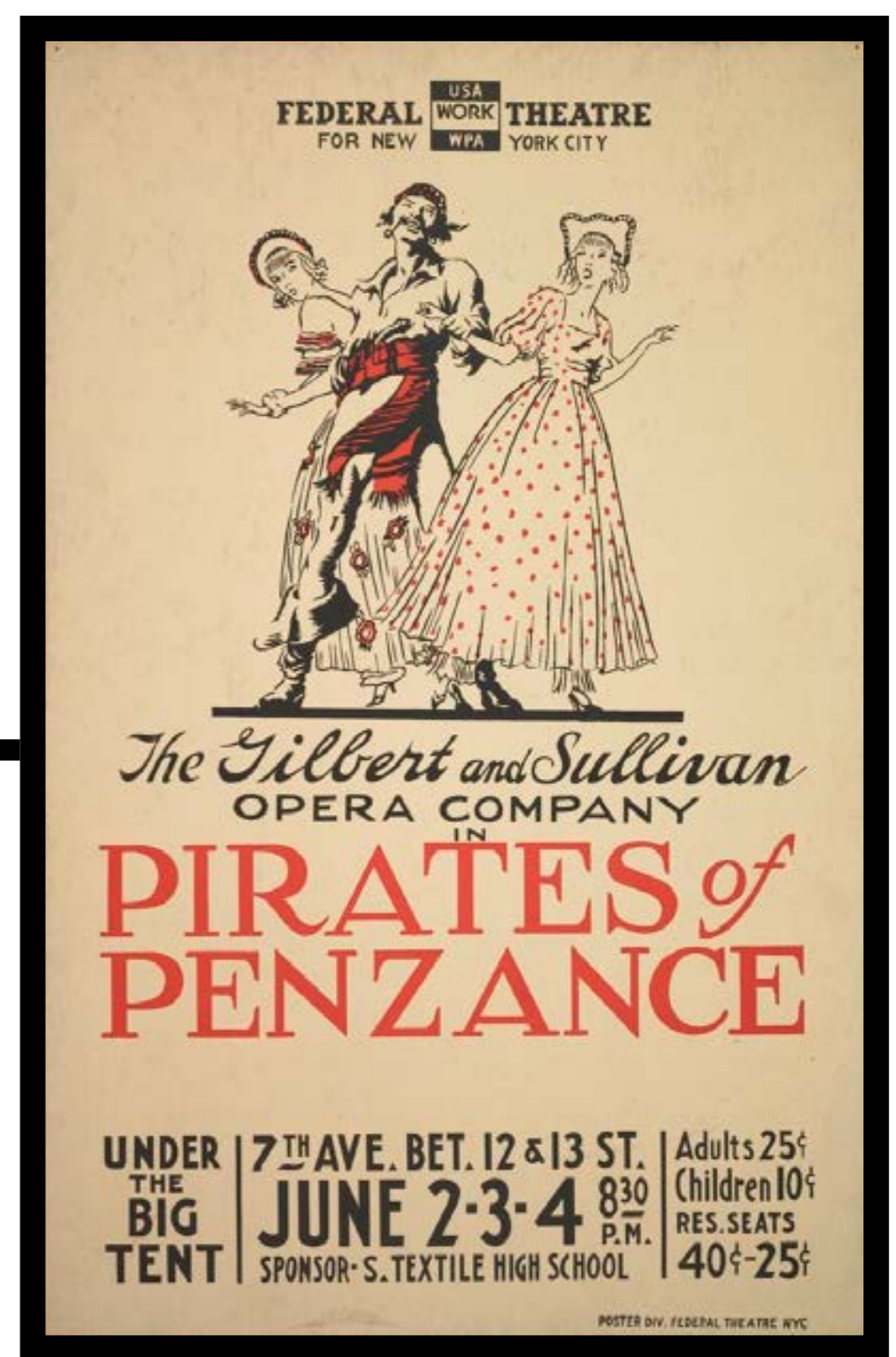
A funny fact about this famous team was that they did not get along! However, despite their personal differences, they were able to come together artistically. Together they wrote fourteen comic operas - some of which are still performed today. Gilbert & Sullivan took the musical and theatre world by storm because of their ingenuity, whimsical storylines, and their music.

EDITOR'S INSIGHT: Gilbert and Sullivan were responsible for creating a pivotal point in musical theatre. They influenced new genres to emerge in both Europe and America. This is due to Sullivan's unique musical compositions and Gilbert's fantastical plots. I like to consider them a bridge between opera and musical theatre because both areas appreciate and study their works.

The Works of Gilbert & Sullivan

This is the story is about a young man named Frederick who is bound by contract to be an apprentice pirate until his 21st birthday. However, he is faced with an interesting situation on his birthday. After leaving the pirates it is revealed by his nurse maid, Ruth, that because he was born in a leap year, he is technically only five years old. The dutiful Frederick leaves his love, Mabel, and goes back to serving the Pirate King. In the end, all ends happily. Frederick and Mabel are reunited and the pirates are pardoned for their wrong-doings.

Fun fact: When Gilbert and Sullivan travelled to New York for the American premiere of *The Pirates of Penzance*, Sullivan accidentally forgot the musical score for the entire first act of the show! In this day and age we have email and postal services, but back then they didn't have any of those resources. So Sullivan had no choice but to re-compose the entire first act of the show! If you go to New York City today, you can find a plaque at No. 45 East 20th Street that reads, "On this site Sir Arthur Sullivan composed *The Pirates of Penzance* during 1879."



This 1879 comic opera was one of Gilbert and Sullivan's biggest hits and there have been many, many revivals, tours, and community performances since.

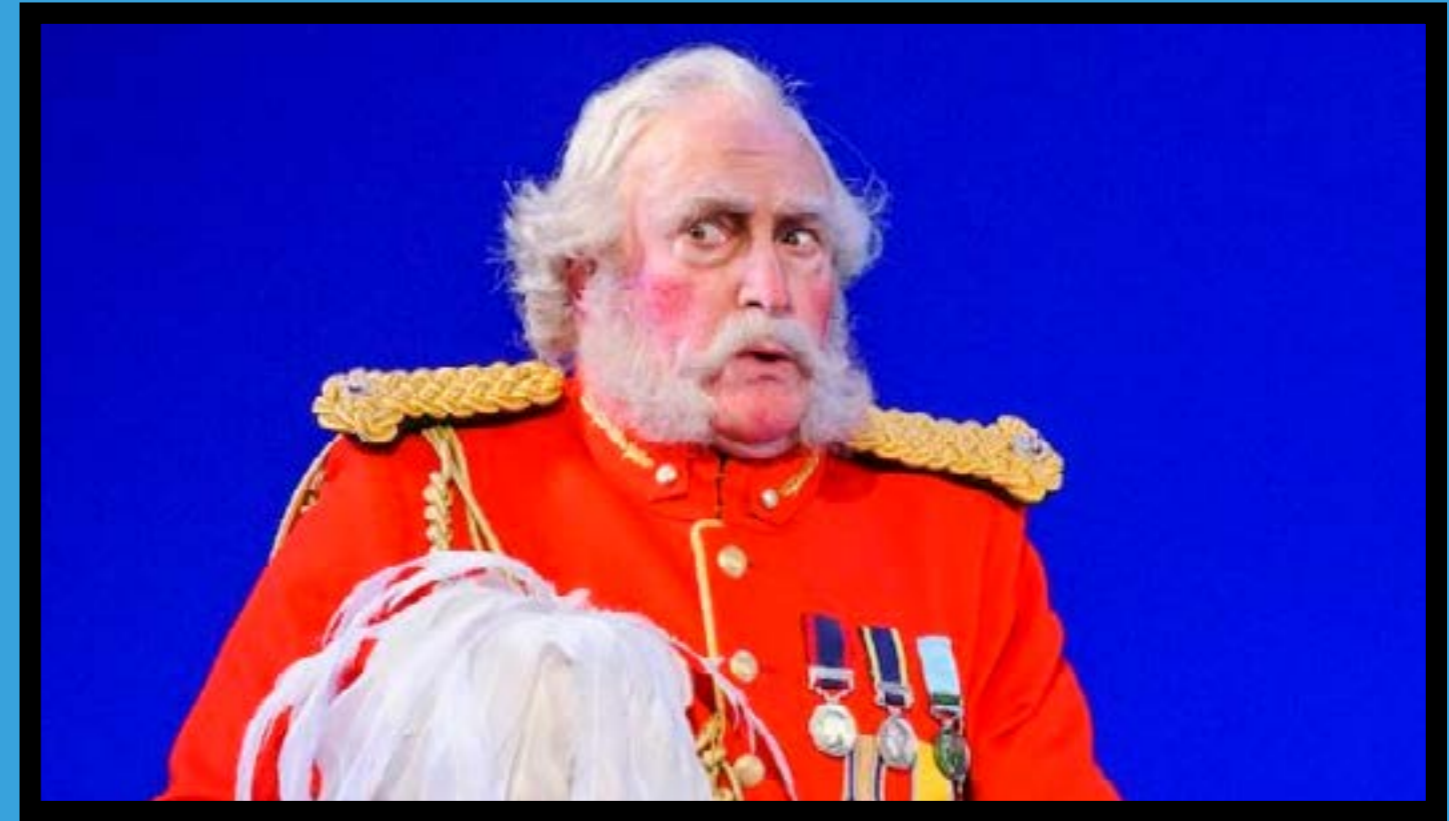
THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE

CHARACTER SONG

I AM THE VERY MODEL OF A MODERN MAJOR GENERAL

from *The Pirates of Penzance*

A character song in musical theatre is a song that reveals personality traits about a certain character. For example, in the musical *Wicked*, Galinda sings a song about being popular, which reveals her self-centered yet charming personality. In *The Pirates of Penzance*, the Major-General sings a song that is a wonderful example of this. A patter song is when the lines are sung at an extremely fast-paced tempo. This song would be considered a patter song and requires focus and preciseness from the performer.



Click on the picture to watch the performance and consider the following questions:

1. What characteristics do you notice about the Modern Major-General?
2. How does his surrounding audience react to what he is saying?
3. Why do you think character songs are important in storytelling?

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