

H.M.S.

# PINAFORE

*Gilbert & Sullivan*



NASHVILLE  
OPERA

STUDY  
GUIDE

# NASHVILLE PERA

PRESENTS

## H.M.S. PINAFORE

Score by Sir Arthur Sullivan

Libretto by Sir William S. Gilbert

Sung in English with projected English supertitles

**January 24, 25, & 26, 2025**

Tennessee Performing Arts Center, Polk Theater

Directed by Emily Pulley

Conducted by Dean Williamson

Featuring the Nashville Opera Orchestra & Chorus

### CAST

Sir Joseph Porter, KCB.....ERIC MCKEEVER  
Captain Corcoran.....ANDREW PAYNE^  
Ralph Rackstraw.....ZACHARY TAYLOR\*  
Dick Deadeye.....LUKE HARNISH  
Boatswain.....KEATON BROWN\*  
Josephine Corcoran.....YEONJAE CHO\*  
Cousin Hebe.....KATHERINE KINCAID\*  
Little Buttercup (Mrs. Cripps).....EMILY PULLEY  
Carpenter's Mate.....BLAKE RYAN

\*2025 Mary Ragland Emerging Artist

^2024 Mary Ragland Emerging Artist

Tickets & Information

Contact Nashville Opera at 615.832.5242

or visit [NashvilleOpera.org](http://NashvilleOpera.org)

## SYNOPSIS ~ BEFORE ACT I

Some time before Act I opens, foremast hand Ralph Rackstraw has fallen in love with Josephine, the daughter of his commanding officer, Captain Corcoran. Likewise, Little Buttercup, a dockside peddler-woman, has fallen in love with the Captain himself. Class pride, however, stands in the way of the natural inclinations of both the Corcorans to reciprocate Ralph's and Buttercup's affections. The Captain has, in fact, been arranging a marriage between his daughter and Sir Joseph Porter, First Lord of the Admiralty, who is of the social class above even the Corcorans.

## ACT I

When Act I opens, the sailors are merrily preparing the ship for Sir Joseph's inspection. The generally happy atmosphere on deck is marred only by Little Buttercup's hints of a dark secret she is hiding, by the misanthropic grumbling of Dick Deadeye, and by the love-lorn complaints of Ralph and Josephine. Sir Joseph appears, attended by a train of ladies (his relatives, who always follow him wherever he goes). He explains how he became Lord of the Admiralty and examines the crew, patronizingly encouraging them to feel that they are everyone's equal, except his. Like the Captain, he is very punctilious, demanding polite speech among the sailors at all times. Josephine finds him insufferable and, when Ralph again pleads his suit and finally threatens suicide, she agrees to elope. The act ends with the general rejoicing of the sailors at Ralph's success; only Dick Deadeye croaks his warning that their hopes will be frustrated.



ERIC MCKEEVER as SIR JOSEPH PORTER, KCB



ANDREW PAYNE as CAPTAIN CORCORAN

## ACT II

Act II opens with the Captain in despair at the demoralization of his crew and the coldness of his daughter towards Sir Joseph. Little Buttercup tries to comfort him and predicts a change in store. But Sir Joseph soon appears and tells the Captain that Josephine has thoroughly discouraged him in his suit; he wishes to call the match off. The Captain suggests that perhaps his daughter feels herself vastly inferior to Sir Joseph and urges him to assure her that inequality of social rank should not be considered a barrier to marriage. This Sir Joseph does, not realizing that his words are as applicable to Josephine in relation to Ralph as they are to himself in relation to Josephine. He thinks that she accepts him, whereas actually she is reaffirming her acceptance of Ralph, and they all join in a happy song.

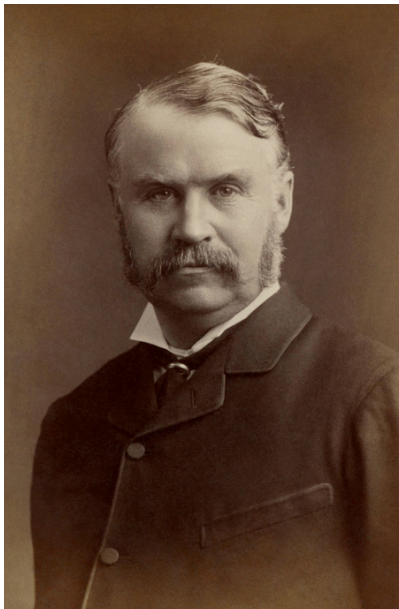
Dick Deadeye finds his way to the Captain and informs him of the planned elopement of his daughter with Ralph. The Captain thereupon intercepts the elopers and is so incensed by the situation that he cries, "Damme!" Unfortunately, Sir Joseph and his relatives hear him and are horrified at his swearing; Sir Joseph sends him to his cabin

in disgrace. But when Sir Joseph also learns from Ralph that Josephine was eloping, he angrily orders Ralph put in irons.

Little Buttercup now comes out with her secret, which solves the whole difficulty: she confesses that long ago she was the paid foster mother of Ralph and the Captain when they were babies. She somehow got them mixed up; so the one who now is Ralph really should be the Captain, and the one now the Captain should be Ralph. This error is immediately rectified. The sudden reversal in the social status of Ralph and the Corcorans removes Sir Joseph as a suitor for Josephine's hand, thus permitting her to marry Ralph and her father to marry Buttercup. Sir Joseph resigns himself to marrying his cousin, Hebe, and celebration ensues.



ZACHARY TAYLOR as RALPH RACKSTRAW



### SIR WILLIAM S. GILBERT, librettist

1836-1911

Sir William S. Gilbert was an English playwright, humorist, and librettist best known for his comic operas in collaboration with Sir Arthur Sullivan. He originally intended to have a career as a lawyer, but it was recommended that he begin writing based on his comic verse in *Fun* (1861). Gilbert gained commercial success with *Dulcamara*; or *The Little Duck and the Great Quack*. This led to a meeting with Sir Arthur Sullivan in 1870 and they began working together on various comic operas, known as the "Savoy Operas." Their collaboration lasted from 1871 to 1896, although they had some breaks due to creative disagreements. Gilbert was knighted in 1907 and died a few years later when he had a heart attack while rescuing a drowning woman in a lake.

### SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN, composer

1842-1900

Sir Arthur Sullivan was an English composer, credited with establishing the distinctive English form of the operetta. Born to be a musician, he was the son of an Irish musician who was the bandmaster at the Royal Military College. Sullivan joined the choir at Chapel Royal before studying at the Royal Academy of Music and Leipzig Conservatory. He was the organist at St. Michael's London early in his career.

Sullivan began the transition to opera with a setting of Sir Francis Cowley Burnand's *Cox and Box* in 1867. His most famous collaborations were





Tri-Cities Opera Company, Inc. H.M.S. Pinafore Props and Set

with librettist, Sir William S. Gilbert, which began with **Thespis** in 1871. Unfortunately, this operetta was not a success, but they collaborated again in 1875 for **Trial by Jury** and this operetta was a hit. The duo went on to produce a collection of works, known as the "Savoy Operas," including **H.M.S. Pinafore**. The duo had many disagreements, but they worked together, with intermittent breaks, until 1896. While Sullivan's most famous works were his collaborations with Gilbert, he had many other works and continued to compose until he died in 1900, leaving behind an unfinished opera.

## ON OPERATIC VOICES

Every voice is unique, and no singer gets to choose the category in which they sing but must work with the vocal attributes with which they were born. Composers usually assign a voice type to a character based on his/her personality or age. Read these descriptions for examples.

### SOPRANO

This is the highest female voice and has a range similar to a violin. In opera, the soprano most often plays the young girl or the heroine (sometimes called the prima donna), since a high bright voice traditionally suggests femininity, virtue, and innocence. The normal range of a soprano is from middle C through two octaves above middle C, sometimes with extra top notes. Most women are sopranos. In H.M.S. PINAFORE, Josephine Corcoran played by a soprano.

### MEZZO-SOPRANO

Also called a mezzo, this is the middle female voice with a range similar to an oboe. A mezzo's sound is often darker and warmer than a soprano's. In opera, composers generally use a mezzo to portray older women, villainesses, seductive heroines, and sometimes even young boys. The mezzo-soprano's normal range is from the A below middle C to the A two octaves above it. In H.M.S. PINAFORE, Cousin Hebe and Little Buttercup are played by mezzo-sopranos.

### COUNTERTENOR

This is the highest male voice, which was mainly used in very early opera and oratorio. The voice of a countertenor sounds very much like a mezzo-soprano's voice, and they often sing the same repertoire. Like the contralto, true countertenors are very rare.

### TENOR

This is usually the highest male voice in an opera. It is similar to a trumpet in range, tone, color, and acoustical ring. The tenor typically plays the hero or the love interest. His voice ranges from the C below middle C to the above. In H.M.S. PINAFORE, Ralph Rackstraw is played by a tenor.



EMILY PULLEY as LITTLE BUTTERCUP (MRS. CRIPPS)

## BARITONE

This is the middle male voice and is close to a French horn in range and tone color. The baritone usually plays villainous roles or father-figures. The range is from the G an octave and a half below middle C to the G above. In H.M.S. PINAFORE, Sir Joseph Porter, Captain Corcoran, and Boatswain are played by baritones.

## BASS-BARITONE/BASS

This is the lowest male voice and is similar to a trombone or bassoon in range and color. Low voices usually suggest age and wisdom in serious opera. The range spans from roughly the F above middle C to the F an octave and a fifth below. In H.M.S. PINAFORE, Dick Deadeye is played by a bass-baritone.



LUKE HARNISH as DICK DEADEYE

## THE SOUND ANATOMY OF OPERA

There are many different kinds of songs in opera. Performers may sing alone, in couples (duets), trios, or larger groups, and there are also moments when no one sings at all - each composer develops their own preferred combination of these options.

## OVERTURE

An opera usually begins with an orchestral piece of music called the overture, which functions as an introduction to the opera. Lasting anywhere from five to twenty-five minutes, these opera overtures usually contain important themes from the rest of the production. Before 1800, houselights were not dimmed while the overture played, and audience members continued to talk, drink, and even play cards! This ceased in the 1900's as the overture became a more integral part of an operatic performance. At the end of the overture, the curtain rises, and the story of the opera unfolds through a series of scenes.

## ARIA

An aria is a solo moment for an opera singer and is usually accompanied by the orchestra. Italian for "air" or song, an aria stops the plot momentarily, giving each character the opportunity to express their innermost thoughts and feelings. These pieces also provide an opportunity for the singer to demonstrate their vocal and artistic skill. Arias balance memorable melodies that perfectly suit the human voice while still reflecting the drama of the text.



Nashville Opera's PIRATES OF PENZANCE, 2023

## RECITATIVES

Recitatives, a type of singing unique to opera, help propel the action forward. They can be accompanied either by a full orchestra, or, as is often the case with opera written before 1800, by harpsichord or keyboard instrument. Often introducing an aria, the text is delivered quickly and encompasses a very limited melodic range. It has no recognizable melody, and the rhythms follow those of the spoken word.



Nashville Opera's PIRATES OF PENZANCE, 2023

## ENSEMBLE

Ensemble singing deals with two or more voices of different ranges performing together. These include duets, trios, quartets, quintets, and sometimes sextets. The composer blends the voices depending on the dramatic requirements of the plot. For instance, a love duet may begin with each performer singing different music at different times, then gradually unifying into harmony. Conversely, the music of a duet may depict conflict.

## CHORUS

Most operas include music sung by a large group of singers (sometimes more than 40) called a chorus. The chorus often appears in a crowd scene and can provide a stunning contrast to solo or ensemble singing. In one opera by Benjamin Britten, the chorus is played by a single male and a single female, as in the tradition of ancient Greek theatre.

## ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

The orchestra accompanies the singing and introduces the opera with the overture. Musical and emotional themes often appear in orchestral introductions and conclusions to arias, recitatives, and choruses.

## OPERA ETIQUETTE

### ALWAYS BE EARLY!

Please arrive early to ensure you can find your seat before the performance begins and before the orchestra tunes. If you are late, you may miss the overture or even the first act!

### OPERA IS FOR ALL AGES TO ENJOY!

Opera is full of emotion, passion, human conflict, and discovery. Nashville Opera usually presents operas in their original language and projects supertitles above the stage so the audience can understand every word.

### WHAT TO WEAR

Many people think of a night at the opera as a glamorous event and an excuse to bring out the fancy attire. But, it is also acceptable to dress comfortably. A light sweater, jacket, or wrap is suggested because the theater is air-conditioned.

### USE THE RESTROOM

Once in the theater it is courteous to remain seated and involved in the production until intermission. Please do not leave the theater unless there is an emergency.



## PLEASE BE COURTEOUS...

to everyone in the audience and on stage. Opera is a live performance, so any talking, cell-phone use (including texting) or other noise/light disruption takes away from everyone's experience at the opera. Wait until intermission to talk to your neighbor or use electronic devices that may distract others.

## APPLAUSE WELCOME!

There are several opportunities for applause during a performance. Applause should take place when the conductor takes the podium at the very beginning of the performance and following intermission. It is also acceptable to applaud after an overture or aria during the performance. You may show your appreciation to the performers by shouting "Bravo!" for a male performer, "Brava" for a female performer, or "Bravi" for an ensemble. At the conclusion of the performance, the singers will take their "curtain call." It is appropriate to continue applauding until all singers have stepped forward to accept their applause.

## NO PHOTOS OR RECORDINGS PERMITTED

For the safety of the actors, no still photography or video recording are permitted during the performance.

