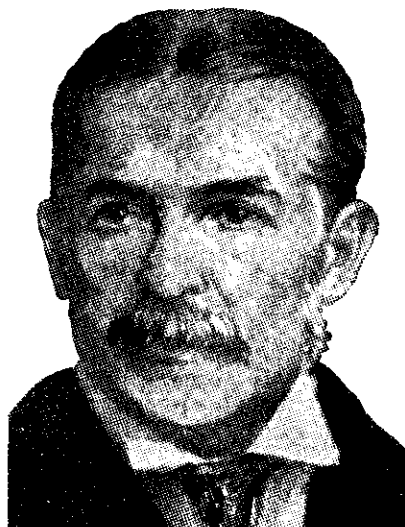


THE MAN WHO WROTE THE MUSIC

Something About Sullivan

EVERYBODY knows about Lambeth Walk, rhapsodised in a contemporary popular song. Well, it was in Lambeth Walk (Bolwell Terrace, to be exact) that there was born, on May 13, 1842, Arthur Seymour Sullivan, whose collaboration with the lyric dramatist Gilbert was to prove the most fruitful one of its kind in the history of comic opera.

Although it is by their partnership that both men are most remembered, we are concerned in this note with Sullivan—the man who wrote the music. Because, long before the partnership began, Sullivan was known as a writer of songs, suites, and sacred music. Except for men like Stainer and Dykes, Monk and Ouseley, there is probably no other musician whose compositions have such a firm hold over the affections of churchgoers.



SIR ARTHUR SULLIVAN

As a Child

This is to be accounted for by the fact that from 1854, when he was twelve, until 1872, when he was thirty, Sullivan was connected with the English Church almost as closely as it was possible to be. One writer on Sullivan says, "The entire atmosphere of his childhood had been, if the terms may be used in this connection, orchestral. His boyhood was choral; his manhood, until the age of thirty . . . was largely occupied with ecclesiastical music, excepting only the short period of his sojourn in Leipzig."

Sullivan was, as a child, all those things which are often absent from budding genius—gentle, lovable, sweet-tempered and tractable. His early ambition was to become a musician, and one of his biographers records that before he was eight he had had instruction in nearly every wind instrument.

It was on Maundy Thursday, 1854, that he first took his place as one of the "Children of the Chapel Royal." The "children" were ten in number; they boarded and were educated at the master's house in Chelsea. Sullivan was almost at once promoted to the rank of soloist.

A Challenge Accepted

Dr. Corfe, one of his fellow choristers, tells a story which gives a line on Sullivan's early brilliance. The occasion was an evening party at the home of the musician, Sir Frederick Ouseley. "To entertain his numerous musical friends, Sir Frederick asked them to his house in the evening. We boys had to go to provide the soprano parts for the concerted music . . . Suddenly Ouseley said, 'Sullivan, I challenge you to play an extempore duet with me.' This savoured of the impossible, considering that one was a chorister and the other Professor of Music at Oxford. But Sullivan said very quietly and modestly, 'Very good, Sir Frederick.' The room was pretty still by this time, and everyone looked on. 'You take the treble, Sullivan, because it will

be easier, and I will take the bass.' Forthwith, they sat down at the piano, agreed upon the key and the rhythm, and fell to . . . I do not suppose that as music it was very remarkable, but they played on without stopping till the piece came to a natural end."

Lessons for Policemen!

Sullivan studied at the Academy and then went to Leipzig; returning after two and a-half years, he brought back with him the first of the compositions which were to make him famous—music to "The Tempest," by Shakespeare. There followed a period of teaching—including lessons to a choir of policemen!

In 1867 came the first real step on Sullivan's ladder of fame—the production of "Cox and Box," an adaptation of the farce "Box and Cox," by Maddison Morton. The operetta was first conceived as a novel entertainment for a party—to raise funds for the widow and children of a "Punch" artist.

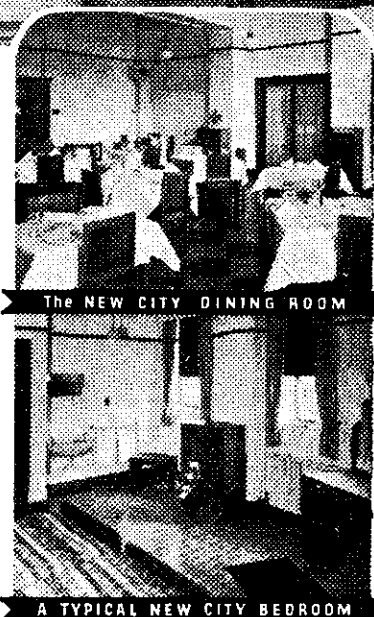
Critics and public acclaimed the rising star. Then came the famous partnership. In 1871, John Hollingshead, manager of the Gaiety, had the brilliant idea of wedding W. S. Gilbert's great facility in lyric writing to Sullivan's musical genius. "Thespis, or the Gods Grown Old," was the first result. D'Oyly Carte entered into his celebrated role as entrepreneur in 1875 with the production of "Trial by Jury." It was acclaimed by all London. Success was here. In 1877 came "The Sorcerer." And when, in May 28, 1878, "H.M.S. Pinafore" was produced, the pinnacle of achievement had been reached.

In succeeding years came all the well-loved Savoy Operas—for the Savoy Theatre became their home. "The Gondoliers," in 1889, was the last of the continuous series written in collaboration with Gilbert; but after that, the spell of success seemed to have come to an end. Several more comic operas (two with Gilbert's librettos), were written, but they did not capture the long runs of the earlier works.



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