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## Staying Loyal to Gilbert and Sullivan

By ALLAN KOZINN

"We believe in doing Gilbert and Sullivan straight," said Albert Bergeret, the founder, artistic director and principal conductor of the New York Gilbert and Sullivan Players. "That is, we try to keep the material faithful and true to the intent of the authors, but we also try to bring life, energy and contemporary wit to it, so that it remains alive and exciting to a modern audience."

Mr. Bergeret and his company are currently applying that doctrine to a new production of "The Pirates of Penzance" that includes some variants that have not been heard since the score's earliest performances, nearly a century ago. The production, which stars the British comic baritone John Reed, can be seen at Symphony Space, Broadway and 95th Street, tonight at 8 and tomorrow at 3 and 8 P.M.

Tickets for tomorrow night's performance, a New Year's Eve gala that includes a champagne reception at intermission, are \$25 to \$35. Tickets for tonight and tomorrow afternoon's performances are \$15 to \$25 (Information: 769-1000).

Among the novelties in this version is a finale that includes a musical quotation from another Gilbert and Sullivan work, "H.M.S. Pinafore," as well as reprises of some of the first-

### A new 'Pirates of Penzance' has variants unheard in nearly a century.

act tunes from "Pirates" that do not return in the standard edition. There are also places where the order of the selections has been altered.

#### Original Is on Microfilm

"These variations come from real sources," Mr. Bergeret said. "We haven't made them up. The original score of 'Pirates' is available on microfilm at the Morgan Library, and we got some of the material from there. We also got some textual ideas from Reginald Allen's book about Gilbert and Sullivan opening nights, 'The First Night Gilbert and Sullivan.'"

"We felt that by restoring some of the quotations from the first act, we could tie up the work more neatly," Mr. Bergeret said. "And it also let us do something different, so that people who have heard Gilbert and Sullivan up to their ears could have something new to think about."

The New York Gilbert and Sullivan Players began in 1974 as an offshoot of Vincent La Selva's New York Grand Opera company — for which Mr. Bergeret is still technical direc-



Ken Howard

Michael Collins, left, John Reed and Tom Smith, in Gilbert and Sullivan's "Pirates of Penzance" at Symphony Space.

tor in the summer. The group's growth has been steady if not always smooth.

"Vincent La Selva, who is in many ways my mentor, was running an opera workshop at a community center on West 89th Street," the conductor said the other day, "and he let us use the workshop on Sunday afternoons. That's how it started. Our budget that first year was \$35. Now it's about \$500,000."

After five years, Mr. Bergeret raised enough money to move his company to Symphony Space for four productions a year, and in 1981 the troupe began touring.

"But we had tremendous problems getting the word out about what we do," he said. "And as the scale of the productions grew, the budgets grew, too, so we had to sell more tickets to pay for them. There were times when we lost our shirts."

Eventually, Mr. Bergeret restructured the company's schedule to include a six-week season in New York, around the holidays, with tours the rest of the year. That approach has been successful enough that last year the company wiped out its deficit.

To a degree, the company has remained a one-man show, with Mr. Bergeret handling most of the artistic and administrative chores as well as overseeing both the design and building of the productions. "I drive trucks," he said. "I move scenery. That's the way I like to work. In the morning I arrive in my blue jeans and work all day setting up; and then the crew turns around and I'm in a tuxedo, coming in to conduct the orchestra."

On the other hand, the company's success has been built on the efforts

of a fairly steady roster of singers, some of whom have worked with Mr. Bergeret for a decade. A turning point in the company's history, though, was the arrival of John Reed, who had been a member of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company for 28 years and whose connection with the Savoyard tradition has made him a jewel in the New York troupe's crown.

#### Just a Company Member

"But you know," Mr. Reed said, "I don't think of it that way. I think of myself just as a member of the company. That was the way we looked at it in the D'Oyly Carte: there were no principals, no privileges. We were all the same. It was a family. This crowd is very much like that."

"They also keep me fresh. For instance, in this production of 'Pirates,' the different order of things in the finale keeps me thinking. There are several lines, both in my part and in some of the others, that I've never heard before. It's very freshening, to say the least."

Mr. Reed says, however, that this may be his final season with the company. "Actually, I said last year that I would not be coming back, but Al Bergeret wrote to me, and I agreed to come this last time," he said. "This is the way I go on — it's always another swan song. But what I prefer to do now, really, is direct, as I have been doing for the last 10 summers at the University of Colorado in Boulder. I enjoy passing on to younger singers what I know, or what they think I know. And I have no great desire to go running about on the stage anymore. I enjoy it while I'm doing it. But I'm perfectly willing to stand aside and let someone better come along."