



The Pirates of Penzance

Performance Guide

In Gilbert and Sullivan's beloved comedy, the dashing Frederic is apprenticed to a band of pirates until his 21st birthday, which he just celebrated. But with a leap year birthday on February 29th, is he duty-bound to remain a pirate for another 63 years? And will his sweetheart Mabel wait for him? Add the "very model of a modern Major-General" and you have a performance filled with mayhem, humor and fabulous melodies. The Artists-in-Residence of Dayton Opera will perform all nine roles in this fast-paced 40-minute version of *The Pirates of Penzance*!

This performance guide includes:

- Artist bios
- A warmup activity and discussion prompt
- Background information
- Key vocabulary
- Suggested Q & A questions
- Post-show discussion questions
- An opera extension activity
- Related Ohio Learning Standards

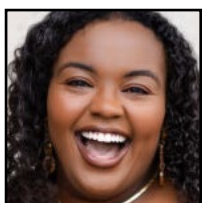
BEFORE THE SHOW

Meet the Artists

Dayton Opera was founded in 1962 to enrich the cultural life of the Miami Valley. In 2003, Dayton Opera moved from its long-time home of Memorial Hall to its current home at the Benjamin and Marian Schuster Performing Arts Center. Many accomplished and well-known singers have been heard in Dayton Opera productions throughout the years.

The Dayton Opera Artists-in-Residence Program was established in 1987 to serve as a professional training program for young singers as a bridge to move from the university/conservatory education experience into the arena of a professional opera company.

Read more about our Artists in Residence here: <https://daytonperformingarts.org/artists-in-residence/>.



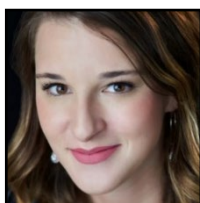
Isabel Randall
Mezzo-soprano

RUTH / EDITH /
MAJOR-GENERAL
STANLEY / POLICE
SERGEANT



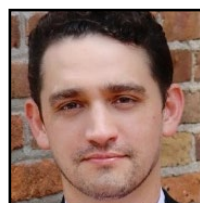
Randell McGee
Baritone

THE PIRATE KING



Gabrielle Flannery
Soprano

PIRATE / MABEL /
POLICE OFFICER



Carl Rosenthal
Tenor

FREDERIC



Clara Passmore
Pianist

Accompanist

Find **@daytonopera** on Twitter and Facebook and **@daytonoperaofficial** on Instagram.

Classroom Warmup

The Pirates of Penzance is a comic operetta written by Gilbert and Sullivan. It premiered in 1879 and has since become one of the most popular and enduring works in the operatic repertoire. An **operetta** falls somewhere between an opera and a musical. Like a musical, an operetta contains spoken dialogue, as well as song.

Read or watch a synopsis of the plot:

1. Cincinnati Opera (via Lyric Opera of Kansas City) offers a short, written version. <https://www.cincinnatiopera.org/pirates-of-penzance/synopsis>
2. Praeclara's 2017 cast attempts to tell the story in a one-minute video synopsis. <https://youtu.be/PP7YjFwGBxM?si=MjXoNKc6vJC4cZAY>

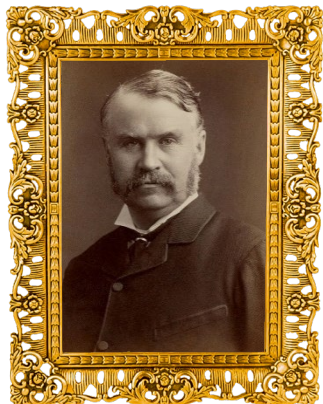
Think While You Watch

The operetta is set in Victorian England, an era named for Queen Victoria, which is when Gilbert and Sullivan were alive. According to Huntington Theatre Company, the Victorians believed that honoring their word and fulfilling obligations to others would be rewarded with “a place in heaven but also middle-class respectability.”

As you watch, notice how Frederic takes his devotion to duty to an absurd extreme. Gilbert and Sullivan seem to be asking whether doing your duty is always the right thing to do.

Have you ever been faced with a situation where “doing the right thing” has negative consequences? What did you do?

Powerhouse Partners for Patter



W. S. Gilbert

English dramatist W.S. Gilbert and composer Arthur Sullivan collaborated on fourteen comic operas between 1871 and 1896. Their taste for absurd plots, complex rhyme schemes, memorable melodies, and social commentary influenced the development of musical theater in the early 20th century. Today, everyone simply refers to them as “Gilbert and Sullivan.” (Read more about them [here!](#))

The Pirates of Penzance contains one of Gilbert and Sullivan’s best and most tuneful “patter” songs, the Major-General’s aria. Not only is it a tongue twister, but it includes skillful juxtapositions of unusual rhymes, one of Gilbert’s specialties.

“I Am the Very Model of a Modern Major-General”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rs3dPaz9nAo>

This song has been parodied endlessly. A parody is a humorous imitation, using the same form as the original. Check out these examples... have you heard others?



Arthur Sullivan

1. **The Elemental Model of a Modern Major-General**

https://youtu.be/dz_BQo5DaXI?si=bZE3azT08bPIPn_i

2. **The Animaniacs**

<https://youtu.be/wN5ykq326As?si=VWB8wi5apxLE08Pdu>

3. **Despicable Me 3**

<https://youtu.be/CVcXZxOri58?si=3aATgkTaU9YU64PU>

The Peculiar Town of Penzance



In Gilbert and Sullivan's time, Penzance was a restful coastal town where people liked to go on holiday. Not a likely place for pirates! Setting the operetta here was one clue to the audience that the story was **ironic**. Irony is when something happens that is opposite from what is expected, and it can often be very funny!

In what modern setting could you place the story of Pirates and still make it ironic?

Can you think of an ironic setting for a different story with other characters?

Vocabulary

The following terms will help you to understand and appreciate Dayton Opera's performance.

- **Apprentice:** A person that learns a trade or skill under the guidance of an expert
- **Duty:** A moral or legal obligation
- **Impunity:** Freedom from punishment, harm, or loss
- **Indentures:** A written agreement to serve someone for length of time
- **Leap year:** One year out of every four in which a day is added to the calendar year (February 29)
- **Natal day:** Birthday
- **Paradox:** A statement that may be true but seems to say two opposite things
- **Tarantara:** The sound of several notes played on a trumpet or horn

The Q & A

Artists love to answer thoughtful questions! If you are having trouble thinking of a question, here are some that are sure to be well-received.

- What drew you to this art form?
- What's your favorite opera role to play?
- What kind of training/education did you complete?
- What's your favorite (or least favorite) part about your work? Why?
- What advice would you have for someone wanting to follow in your footsteps?

AFTER THE SHOW

Post-Show Discussion

Teachers can facilitate a conversation or have students write their responses.

Follow-up Questions

- What did you like or dislike about the performance? Why?
- What did you appreciate about the performances by the singers?
- What surprised you?
- Would you be interested in seeing a full opera?

Student Survey

Tell us about your experience at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/SK876YC>

Post-Performance Activity



Purposeful Patter

As a class, watch the following video to review the Major-General's song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rs3dPaz9nAo>

Ask students to see how quickly can they say the first verse of the song (copied below). They should try this first in their heads. Then, ask for volunteers to show off!

*I am the very model of a modern Major-General,
I've information vegetable, animal, and mineral,
I know the kings of England, and I quote the fights historical
From Marathon to Waterloo, in order categorical;*

Discuss:

- Which words were the hardest to say quickly?
- Are there times when you speak faster or slower?
- When are times you might speak louder or softer?
- Why do you think your speed changes in these times?
- Does who you are around and what you want them to think of you change your speed?
- Why is the Major-General singing in this way? Who is he trying to impress and why? (Is he really very impressive?)

Adapted from [materials by Opera Theatre of St. Louis](#)

FOR TEACHERS

Related Ohio Learning Standards

The following standards are linked to the artist’s performance and/or the activities in the performance guide. Teachers may be able to make additional connections.

Music

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|--|---|
| <i>Enduring Understandings:</i> Artists/students engage in analysis and interpretation to understand and evaluate artistic works. Artists/students understand and communicate the value of creative expressions in internal and external contexts. | |
| Responding | |
| 6-7.1RE | Identify the major periods, genres, and composers in the development of music of various cultures. |
| HSP.1RE | Analyze selected composers and their works. |
| Connecting | |
| 6-7.1CO | Describe the connection between emotion and music in selected musical works using elements of music. |
| 6.2CO | Attend and critique live music performances and demonstrate appropriate audience behavior for the context and style of music performed. |
| 6-7.5CO | Identify different careers in music. |
| 7.7CO | Recognize and identify historical and cultural contexts (time and place of a music event) that have influenced music. |
| 8.4CO | Discuss the purpose and value of music in various cultures and settings. |
| HSP.7CO | Identify the social contexts from which music of various cultures evolved. |

Drama/Theatre

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|--|---|
| <i>Enduring Understandings:</i> Artists/students engage in analysis and interpretation to understand and evaluate artistic works. Artists/students understand and communicate the value of creative expressions in internal and external contexts. | |
| Responding | |
| 7.2RE | Explain how the interactions of characters and conflicts in a dramatic work illustrate the playwright’s style. |
| Connecting | |
| 6.1CO | Investigate the time period and place of a drama or theatre work to better understand performance and design choices. |
| 6.2CO | Explain how the actions and motivations of characters in a drama or theatre work impact perspective of a community or culture. |
| HSP.2CO | Investigate, compare, and contrast dramatic and theatrical works as products and reflections of the time period and culture in which they were created. |

Writing

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| CCR Anchor Standard 1 | Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence. |
| CCR Anchor Standard 4 | Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. |
| CCR Anchor Standard 10 | Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. |

Speaking and Listening

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| CCR Anchor Standard 1 | Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. |
| CCR Anchor Standard 2 | Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. |

Social and Emotional Learning

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Self-Awareness | A4: Demonstrate a sense of personal responsibility, confidence, and advocacy |
| Relationship Skills | D1: Apply positive verbal and non-verbal communication and social skills to interact effectively with others and in groups D2: Develop and maintain positive relationships |
| Responsible Decision-making | E4: Explore and approach new situations with an open mind and curiosity while recognizing that some outcomes are not certain or comfortable |