

The Pittsburgh Savoyards Present

Utopia, Limited;

or,

The Flowers of Progress

A Comic Operetta in Two Acts

Music by Sir Arthur S. Sullivan

Libretto by Sir William S. Gilbert



Study Guide

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Operas, Operettas, and Musicals

An **Operetta** is a form of opera, light both in topic and in music style. English-language operettas are closely related to musical theater in genre. English-language operettas first came on the scene in England in the Victorian Era and were considered more family-friendly than the risqué French operettas that were being composed at the time. English operettas continued to be written through the latter part of the 1800s, at which point they evolved into the Edwardian musical comedies.

Operettas hold similarities with both operas and musicals and the boundaries between the three are often blurred. For example, in American theater there is question as to the classification of Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*, Leonard Bernetein's *Candide*, and George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*, to name a few.

Operas

- have multiple acts
- convey the story through song with little or no spoken lines
- can be serious or humorous
- feature classically-trained singers

Operettas

- are usually shorter than operas
- have a lighter topic and often feature satire
- have some of the libretto spoken rather than sung and the musical segments are broken up with dialogue between the characters
- features classically trained singers

Musicals

- use spoken dialogue to help tell the story, which also allows for more complex characters
- can tell serious or comic stories
- are plays with singing and dancing
- singers are not necessarily classically trained and are often called upon to dance
- These distinctions are often subjective and many shows cross genres and are difficult to categorize.

Some Topics for Discussion:

- Which of the three forms—opera, operetta, or musical—demand the most resources for its production?
- Which form do you think would be most appropriate for a high school production?
- Which would be the least suitable?
- The leads in the three forms all require different types of training. Which do you think would require the most training?
- In which form would a contemporary pop star most easily step into a role?
- Where do *you* draw the line between opera, operetta, and musical? Why?

SYNOPSIS: Utopia, Limited or, The Flowers of Progress

The lovely South Seas island of Utopia is populated by a peaceful, languid people who are happy to be ruled by their benevolent king. In theory, he is an absolute monarch. But in practice, he himself is governed by two Wise Men, judges who have the power to denounce him for any impropriety to the Public Exploder, who then has the authority to explode him right then and there.

The present king is an avid admirer of all things British, including the British governess he has employed to train his youngest twin daughters to be proper English ladies. However, the governess wants nothing at all to do with him, owing to the scandalous articles the king has been forced by the Wise Men to write about himself and publish in the tabloid newspaper, *The Palace Peeper*. Lady Sophy believes the king to be too far below her in terms of respectability and spurns his advances.

Meanwhile, the king's eldest daughter, Princess Zara, is returning home after graduating from an English college. She is distraught by her father's current position and formulates a plan. She has brought back with her to Utopia six Flowers of Progress, including Captain Fitzbattleaxe, with whom she is in love. They are shining examples of English culture, and it is their task to completely reform and Anglicize Utopia and all its institutions. One of these Flowers of Progress is a Company Promoter. Under his advice, every citizen of Utopia declares himself to be a Company Limited, complete with Prospectus, and is now liable only for the amount of his declared capital... which does **not** include explosion.

The Wise Men and Public Exploder are displeased when they realize what has happened, and rouse the Utopian citizenry to revolt. They argue that under the new governance, the citizenry is so healthy that the doctors are being put out of work. Everyone is so well-behaved that the lawyers have nothing to do. The new laws are so effective that crime has been extinguished, making law enforcement officers redundant.

Princess Zara, however, realizes that something very important has been left out governance by party! She argues that once they implement a party system, no political measures will endure because they will constantly be undone by the opposite party, ensuring plenty of sickness, lawsuits, criminals, and incarceration.

Satisfied, the Utopians agree and the Wise Men are led off in defeat. As is customary in Gilbert and Sullivan, everyone gets married and they all live happily ever after.

Cast of Characters (in order of appearance)

Phylla - *Utopian Maiden*

Calynx - *Utopian Vice-Chamberlain*

Salata - *Utopian Maiden*

Melene - *Utopian Maiden*

Tarara - *Public Exploder*

Scaphio - *Judge of the Utopian Supreme Court*

Phantis - *the same*

King Paramount of Utopia

Princess Nekaya - *Younger sister to Princess Zara*

Princess Kalbya - *Youngest sister to Princess Zara*

Lady Sophy - *their English Governess*

Princess Zara - *Eldest of King Paramount's daughters*

Captain Fitzbattleaxe - *of the First Life Guards*

Sir Bailey Barre QC, MP - *British Lord Chamberlain*

Lord Dramaleigh - *a British Lord Chamberlain*

Mr Blushington - *of the County Council*

Mr Goldbury - *Company promoter*

Capt. Sir Edward Corcoran KCB - *of the Royal Navy*

Utopia Limited Musical Numbers

as performed in our Production

ACT I. A Utopian Palm Grove

1. Opening Chorus and Solo (*Phylla*) - "In lazy langour - motionless"
2. Chorus: "O make way for the Wise Men"
3. Duet (*Scaphio and Phantis*): "In every mental lore"
4. Duet (*Scaphio and Phantis*): "Let all your doubts take wing"
5. Chorus: "Quaff the nectar"
6. Song and Recit (*King*) with Chorus: "A King of autocratic power we"
7. Chorus: "How fair! How modest! How discreet!"
8. Duet (*Nekaya and Kalyba*): "Although of native maids the cream"
9. Recit and Song (*Lady Sophy*) with Chorus: "Bold Faced Ranger"
10. Song (*King*): "First you're born"
11. Duet (*King and Lady Sophy*): "Subjected to your heavenly gaze"
12. Chorus w Solos (*Zara, Fitz, and Troopers*) "Oh, maiden rich in Girton lore"
13. Duet (*Zara and Fitzbattleaxe*): "Ah! Gallant soldier brave and true"
14. Quartet (*Fitz, Zara, Scaphio and Phantis*): "It's understood, I think, all round"
15. Duet (*Zara and Fitzbattleaxe*): "Oh admirable art!"
16. Finale Act I - "Although your royal summons to appear"

Note: The following musical number from Act I was removed from the original performance in 1983 to enhance the production.

- Song (*Zara*) "Youth is a boon avowed" was cut after the opening night

Utopia Limited Musical Numbers

as performed in our Production

ACT II.

Throne Room in King Paramount's Palace

17. Recit and Song (*Fitzbattleaxe*): "A tenor all singers above"
18. Duet (*Zara and Fitzbattleaxe*): "Words of love too loudly spoken"
19. Song (*King with Flowers of Progress*): "Society has quite forsaken"
20. Instrumental - "Entrance of the Court" followed by "Drawing Room Music"
21. Recit with Unaccompanied Chorus: "Eagle high in cloudland soaring"
22. Duet (*Scaphio and Phantis*): "With fury deep we burn"
23. Trio (*Scaphio, Phantis and King*): "If you think when banded in unity"
24. Trio (*Scaphio, Phantis and Tarara*): "With wily brain upon the spot"
25. Song (*Mr. Goldbury*): "A wonderful joy our eyes to bless"
26. Quartet (*Nekaya, Kalyba, Dramaleigh, Goldbury*): "Then I may sing and play?"
27. Recit and Song (*Lady Sophy*): "When but a maid of fifteen year"
28. Recit and Duet (*King and Lady Sophy*): "Oh, the rapture unrestrained"
29. Chorus: "Upon our sea-girt land"
30. Finale: "There's a little group of isles beyond the wave"

Note: The following musical number from Act II was removed from the original performance in 1983 to enhance the production.

- Chorus: "When the fire-flies dance in the dark" was cut during the rehearsals

A Brief History of Utopia

In 1890 while *The Gondoliers* was in production, Gilbert and Sullivan became embroiled in a legal dispute with their producer, each taking opposite sides. Gilbert vowed to write no more for the company, even going so far as to withdraw the rights to his libretti when *The Gondoliers* closed in 1891. After later mediation with their publisher, Gilbert and Sullivan reconciled and began to plan to renew their work on a new opera, *Utopia, Limited*.

The two men were still distrustful and embittered from the lawsuit and their final collaborations were much less congenial than their former works. They disagreed on several key points, including the character of Lady Sophy and how to set the lyrics to music. Gilbert filled the show with longer-than-usual dialogue sections and Sullivan retaliated with extended orchestral sections, dance interludes, and long chorus sections.

Utopia, Limited was strongly influenced by current events. In 1893, the year *Utopia, Limited* was produced, the Hawaiian Princess Kaiulani of the then independent monarchy of Hawaii attended a private school in England. This was much talked about in social columns and gossip papers, leading many to speculate on the influence that English “civilization” would have on the Princess and her homeland. The story was also influenced by a book published by Anna Leonowens, The English Governess at the Siamese Court. This story was also the basis for the Rogers and Hammerstein musical *The King and I*. These two stories influenced the characters of Princess Zara and Lady Sophy, respectively.

As operettas typically do, *Utopia, Limited* has a strong element of satire. Not only did it explore the idea of civilizing native cultures and jingoism, but it also poked fun at England’s Limited Liability Act of 1862, British imperialism, the monarchy, English prudery, English airs, and party politics. By setting the show on an imaginary island, Gilbert and Sullivan were free to make sharp use of satire in way that would have been impossible had they used a realistic setting.

Audiences were thrilled to see Gilbert and Sullivan back together again. The critics, however, had a more mixed response. It was called everything from “limited indeed” to the “very best”. The show ran longer and cost more than any previous Gilbert and

Sullivan operetta, but despite it all *Utopia, Limited* still managed to make a modest profit.

Utopia, Limited ran for 245 performances, a shorter run than any of Gilbert and Sullivan's other 1880s shows. After it closed, it toured briefly, but the cost of production was so high that tours and revivals were abandoned. *Utopia* was not revived by D'Oyly Carte Opera Company until 1975, at which point it sold out so quickly that additional performances had to be added.

Since then, it has been performed by various amateur companies, although with nowhere near the popularity of other Gilbert and Sullivan shows, again due to the high cost of production and long running time of the show. Many of these newer productions are highly revised and redacted, cutting sections of dialogues, dance, and orchestral interludes to help make the show shorter and more coherent. This production of *Utopia, Limited* by the Pittsburgh Savoyards is the first production of the show ever in Pittsburgh.

A Company Limited. What May That Mean?

In *Utopia, Limited* the citizens of the island of Utopia declare themselves to be a limited company in accordance with England's Joint Stock Company Act of 1862. A limited company is a company in which the stockholders or members have a liability, or financial responsibility, that is limited to what they have invested in the company. The 1862 Act declared that a company could be made up of seven or more persons and made it easier for small investors to pool together their resources and incorporate with a limited personal risk, because liability is limited to what has been invested and cannot spill over into an investor's personal assets. In the United States, this might be known as a corporation.

Utopia and Dystopia

Utopian fiction is a genre of literature that explores political and social structures in the context of an ideal society. In *Utopia, Limited* it's the very name of the imaginary island on which our story takes place. The word **utopia** was first used by Sir Thomas More in his 1516 work *Utopia*. The word hints at both the Greek words for "no place" and "good place". An even earlier example of a utopia, although the word is never actually used, is

Plato's *Republic*. Prior to 1900, over 400 English-language works were published, attesting to the popularity of envisioning an ideal society.

Dystopian literature explores the flip side of idealized society. Instead of a world where all is right, a **dystopia** is characterized by oppression, injustice, and inequity, usually brought on by society itself. Keith Booker wrote that dystopian literature can “provide fresh perspectives on problematic social and political practices that might otherwise be taken for granted or considered natural or inevitable.” In fact, many of the great dystopian stories begin with someone else's utopia.

While the production itself is relatively light, *Utopia, Limited* has both utopian and dystopian elements. In the beginning of the operetta, we see an ideal island utopia, with pretty maids drifting about “in lazy languor motionless.” As the story goes on, we see that things are not quite as they seem. The king is controlled by outside forces who have their own agenda and the peaceful tranquility of the island is being wished away on a dream of British “civilization.” When the so-called Flowers of Progress do have their way with the isle of Utopia, the citizenry is convinced in fairly short order to find fault with the new utopia and demand a return to the old.

While the dystopian elements of *Utopia, Limited* never progress to Hunger Games level, we still see a familiar trajectory laid out in many utopia-dystopia stories. Like Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, *Utopia, Limited* allows us to explore what is both good and bad in a society. As in Lois Duncan's young adult novel *The Giver*, *Utopia, Limited* begins as a utopia and then gradually spins out the dystopian elements so we can see that someone's utopia is someone else's dystopia. And as in Ursula K. LeGuin's *Always Coming Home*, *Utopia, Limited* explores the idea that the choices we make now can lead to a better or worse world in the future. Of course, being that this is a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, the formulaic ending winds up with a mass wedding and a happily ever after and the Island of Utopia is returned to a true utopian society once again... at least for now.