

The Pirates of Penzance

or, The Slave of Duty

A New and Original Melo-Dramatic Opera, in Two Acts

Synopsis by Fredric Woodbridge Wilson

First produced by D'Oyly Carte's Opera Company at the Fifth Avenue Theatre, New York, under the management of John T. Ford, on Wednesday, December 31, 1879, through March 6, 1880, and from May 17, 1880 through June 5. Sullivan conducted the first performance. Produced at the Opera Comique Theatre, London, under the management of R. D'Oyly Carte, on Saturday, April 3, 1880, for 363 performances through April 2, 1881. Sullivan conducted the first performance.

		<i>New York</i>	<i>London</i>
MAJOR-GENERAL STANLEY, of the British Army	<i>Light Baritone</i>	J. H. Ryley	George Grossmith
THE PIRATE KING (RICHARD) SAMUEL, the Pirate King's Lieutenant	<i>Baritone</i>	Signor Brocolini	Richard Temple
FREDERIC, a Pirate Apprentice	<i>Baritone</i>	J. Furneaux Cook	George Temple
THE SERGEANT OF POLICE (EDWARD)	<i>Tenor</i>	Hugh Talbot	George Power
Major-General Stanley's Daughters	<i>Baritone</i>	Fred Clifton	Rutland Barrington
MABEL, his Youngest Daughter	<i>Soprano</i>	Blanche Roosevelt	Marion Hood
EDITH	<i>Mezzo-Soprano</i>	Jessie Bond	Julia Gwynne
KATE	<i>Mezzo-Soprano</i>	Rosina Brandram	Lilian La Rue
ISABEL	<i>Chorus</i>	Billie Barlow	Neva Bond
RUTH, a Piratical "Maid-of-all-Work," Frederic's Nurse	<i>Contralto</i>	Alice Barnett	Emily Cross

PIRATES, POLICEMEN, and MAJOR-GENERAL STANLEY'S DAUGHTERS

Produced by D'Oyly Carte's touring company at the Bijou Theatre, Paignton, for a single matinee performance on Tuesday, December 30, 1879, to preserve British copyright. The conductor was Ralph Horner. Produced with a juvenile cast at the Savoy Theatre, under the management of R. D'Oyly Carte, on December 23, 1884, for matinees through February 14, 1885. First revived at the Savoy Theatre, under the management of R. D'Oyly Carte on March 17, 1888, for 80 performances through June 6, 1888. Revived at the Savoy Theatre, under the management of Mrs. D'Oyly Carte, on June 30, 1900, for 127 performances through

November 5, 1900.

ACT I — A ROCKY SEASHORE ON THE COAST OF CORNWALL

The first act opens on a band of Pirates at leisure (Chorus, *Pour, oh, pour the pirate sherry*). The Pirate King salutes Frederic, an apprentice who is about to become “a full-blown member of our band.” However, Frederic has determined that, once released from his indentures, he will leave the Pirates to lead a respectable life. Moreover, his apprenticeship was the result of a mistake. Ruth, the “piratical maid-of-all-work,” reveals that she was Frederic’s nursery maid, and, having been commissioned to arrange his apprenticeship, mistook the word “pilot” for “pirate” (Song, *When Frederic was a little lad he proved so brave and daring*).

Frederic confesses to his comrades that “Individually I love you all with affection unspeakable, but collectively, I look upon you with a disgust that amounts to absolute detestation.” Moreover, he vows that he is “bound to devote myself heart and soul to your extermination.” Although Frederic’s loyalties end at noon, he is obligated until then to absolute loyalty; so he offers constructive criticism aimed to improve their fortunes. Being orphans themselves, they have a natural sympathy for that condition, and word has spread so that every victim claims to be an orphan — “One would think that Great Britain’s mercantile navy was recruited solely from her orphan asylums.”

Ruth suggests that when Frederic leaves he will want to take her with him. Not having seen another woman’s face since he was eight years old, Frederic is hesitant; but the Pirate King insists. Frederic urges his old comrades to accompany him back to civilization, but the Pirate King politely declines: “I don’t think much of our profession, but, contrasted with respectability, it is comparatively honest.” He will “live and die a pirate king” (Song, *Oh, better far to live and die*).

The Pirates take their leave of Ruth and Frederic. Ruth again advances her suitability as a wife for Frederic, and he appears to weaken, but he hears in the distance the voices of young girls. He spies them, and sees that Ruth has misrepresented her own attractions (Duet, *You told me you were fair as gold!*). Frederic renounces her, and she leaves the stage. Conscious of his alarming costume (Recitative, *What shall I do? Before these gentle maidens*), Frederic takes cover as the beautiful daughters of Major-General Stanley arrive, preparing for their luncheon (Chorus, *Climbing over rocky mountain*). As they remove off their shoes and stockings and wade in the water, Frederic appears (Recitative, *Stop, ladies, pray!*). They are horrified at his appearance, but they greatly admire his beauty. Frederic appeals to them (Song, *Oh! is there not one maiden breast*), and one of the girls — Mabel — is moved to accept his petition (Song, *Poor wandering one*). While the two new-found lovers exchange intimacies, the sisters are in an awkward position: whether to stay, for propriety’s sake, or to leave them alone (*What ought we to do*). They agree upon the proper course: “Let us shut

our eyes, And talk about the weather” (“Chattering Chorus,” *How beautifully blue the sky*).

Frederic warns the girls that they are in danger from the Pirates (Recitative, *Stay, we must not lose our senses*), but it is too late; the Pirates have entered stealthily and capture the girls (Chorus, *Here’s a first-rate opportunity*). But Mabel defies them (Recitative, *How, monsters!*), boasting that their father is a major-general — speaking of whom, Major-General Stanley appears (Song, *I am the very pattern of a modern major-gineral*). The Pirates proclaim their intention to marry his daughters (“Against our wills, papa — against our wills!”), but the major-general, having heard of the Pirates of Penzance, appeals to them as an orphan (Recitative, *Oh, men of dark and dismal fate*). In an aside, he confesses that “I’m telling a terrible story.”

The Pirate King (*Although our dark career*) leads a p’an to Poetry (Chorus, *Hail, Poetry, thou heaven-born maid*), and the Major-General and his daughters are elected honorary members of the band (*For he is an orphan boy*). Ruth pleads once again with her beloved Frederic (*Oh, master, hear one word, I do implore you!*), but Frederic adamantly spurns her (*Away, you did deceive me!*). The company acknowledge the courtesy of the Pirates (Ensemble, *Pray observe the magnanimity*), and the act closes as the Pirates indulge in a wild dance of delight, as the Major-General and the Pirate King display, respectively, the Union Jack and the Jolly Roger.

ACT II — A CHAPEL ON MAJOR-GENERAL STANLEY’S ESTATE,
SEVERAL DAYS LATER, AT NIGHT

Major-General Stanley is discovered, seated pensively in the ruined chapel of Tremorden Castle, surrounded by his daughters who try to console him (Chorus, *Oh, dry the glistening tear*). Frederic enters, and the Major-General confesses that his sadness has its origin in the dishonor of having lied to the Pirates to save himself and his daughters. Frederic has determined to lead a march against the Pirates at eleven that night, and he has enlisted the assistance of the Police, who enter, commanded by the Sergeant (Song, *When the foeman bares his steel*). Mabel leads the girls in a passionate valediction (*Go, ye heroes, go to glory*) in which she incites the Police to “Go to death, and go to slaughter.” While acknowledging that “These attentions are well meant,” the Police confess that “Such expressions don’t appear Calculated men to cheer.” Accordingly they take a great deal of persuading before they eventually go, all the while exclaiming “Tarantara!” as a sort of talisman.

Frederic is left alone (Recitative, *Now for the pirate’s lair! Oh, joy unbounded!*), but he is soon surprised by the appearance of the Pirate King and Ruth, both armed. They have come to share with him “a curious paradox” (Trio, *When first you left our pirate fold*). The King explains (Chant, *For some ridiculous reason*) that, as Frederic’s birthday happened to occur on the twenty-ninth of February, “though you’ve lived twenty-one years, yet, if we go by birthdays, you’re only five and a little bit over!” Furthermore, he produces a document

showing that Frederic has been indentured until his twenty-first *birthday*. Frederic's sense of duty requires not only that he should rejoin the pirate band, but that he should inform the Pirates of the Major-General's deception. They vow vengeance (Trio, *Away, away, my heart's on fire*), and Frederic is again left alone, this time in despair.

Mabel enters (Recitative, *All is prepared, your gallant crew await you*), and Frederic tells her of the Pirate King's revelation. She tries vainly to change his mind (Duet, *Stay, Frederic, stay!*), and they sing a melancholy farewell (*Ah, leave me not to pine*). But Frederic promises to return when he is of age — in 1940 — and she swears she will wait for him (Duet, *Oh, here is love, and here is truth*). Frederic leaps out of the window to join the Pirates, and the Police march in (*Though in body and in mind, We are timidly inclined*). Mabel relates the recent events to the Sergeant, and the Police resolve to capture the Pirates without Frederic's help. "The policeman's lot is not a happy one" sings the Sergeant (Song, *When a felon's not engaged in his employment*). The Pirates are heard in the distance (Chorus, *A rollicking band of pirates we*); they "seek a penalty — fifty-fold For General Stanley's story." The Police hide themselves, and the Pirates enter, carrying pistols and their "burglarious tools" (Chorus, *With cat-like tread Upon our prey we steal*).

Frederic enters (Recitative, *Hush, not a word*), followed by the still guilt-ridden Major-General, who is still wearing his dressing-gown (Solo, *Tormented with the anguish dread*). The Pirates take cover, and the Major-General, thinking he has heard a sound, but being convinced it was only the breeze, is moved to sing a sentimental ballad (*Sighing softly to the river*). His daughters enter, dressed in peignoirs and nightcaps and carrying candles (Chorus, *Now, what is this, and what is that, and why does father leave his rest*). The Pirates seize them, and the Police, hitherto in hiding, struggle with the Pirates. The Pirates are victorious, and they brandish swords over the prostrate Police (Chorus, *You triumph now, for well we trow*). But the Sergeant has the last word: "We charge you yield, in Queen Victoria's name!" The Pirates "yield at once, with humbled mien, Because, with all our faults, we love our Queen." Major-General Stanley commands that they should be arrested, but Ruth enters and reveals that "They are no members of the common throng; They are all noblemen, who have gone wrong!" That makes all the difference: "No Englishman unmoved that statement hears, Because, with all our faults, we love our House of Peers." All kneel to the Pirates, and the Major-General begs them (Recitative, *I pray you, pardon me, ex-Pirate King*) to "take my daughters, all of whom are beauties." The opera ends with general rejoicing at the rehabilitation of the Pirates (Finale, *Poor wandering ones*).

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