

# Abstracts

## Benedict Taylor: The Musician Arthur Sullivan – Aesthetics and Context

Arthur Sullivan's music resists easy placement within the conventional categories of twentieth-century music historiography. His oeuvre seemingly poised in its posthumous reception between serious classical traditions and popular entertainment, the categories of »E- und U-Musik« do as much disservice to the complexities of his situation as they disregard the individual qualities of his music. The root of this matter lies in a conceptual problem in the way music is thought about; Sullivan is actually quite understandable within the historical context of English artistic culture and the continental influences. One needs to look at Sullivan from the perspective of his own aesthetics, national culture and historical situation, unencumbered by unwieldy and unhelpful music-historical categories. Examining Sullivan's music and aesthetics from such a revisionist perspective offers fresh insight into the music of this perennially popular, yet critically still unknown, composer.

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## David Eden: Sullivan and his Librettists

A born man of the theatre, Sullivan lived and worked in a country which was determined to regard opera as a foreign, essentially Italian, entertainment, and, in admiration for Handel, to place oratorio at the heart of its musical life. One cannot speak of the English operatic libretto as one can of the Italian or French because there was no such thing. The story of Sullivan's search for a suitable libretto is therefore the story of a musical pioneer. His search for the right libretto led him in several directions. The enterprise of the manager Richard D'Oyly Carte enabled him to plan deliberately and to assume a permanent character for operas in English. Almost from the first he tried to move his best-known collaborator W. S. Gilbert into a more operatic direction, but eventually it became clear that Gilbert would not or could not make the necessary changes to his personal style. During the 1890s Sullivan therefore began to work with other librettists in an attempt to further his ambitions.

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## Meinhard Saremba: The Sullivan Problem – Notes about an European Composer

Arthur Sullivan became Britain's most important and prolific 19th century composer with his vocal music and his large output of stage and concert works. He influenced the musical life of his home country in many ways, especially

with his popular operas with which he established the first permanent theatre for English opera. Although he mainly set English texts his cosmopolitan outlook provided for a classical pluralistic (European) style in his music.

However the attitude that »a musical knight can hardly write shop ballads« and »must not dare to soil his hands with anything less than an anthem or a madrigal« had a detrimental effect on Sullivan's future reputation. The academic movement of the so-called »English Musical Renaissance« mixed up moral standards and cultural politics and consequently assured that for the large majority of musicologists, Sullivan did not play a major role in British music history. Sullivan was shoved into the niche of an entertainer, a failed genius wasting his talents, unworthy of any serious consideration. This attitude seriously affected the reception in other countries. It was not until the 1970s that this attitude became increasingly questioned. Nowadays evidence has been provided to challenge the misconceptions about Sullivan's achievements and his works. The conclusion is that Sullivan's compositions are an integral part of (Britain's) music history and that especially his concert works and operas (which are not merely plays with music) should be treated, analysed and performed as a part of musical world literature.

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James Brooks Kuykendall: Sullivan, music dramatist

Arthur Sullivan was without doubt the most cosmopolitan British musician of his day. As a music dramatist, Sullivan's accomplishments are not fundamentally different from other dramatic composers often cited as influences (albeit, influencing different aspects of his works): Handel, Mozart, Rossini, Marschner, Lortzing, Mendelssohn, Auber and Berlioz. The breadth of that list, however, is remarkable. Where Sullivan excelled most of these, though, was his ability to execute the evident conviction that a libretto was not merely a story to be set to music, but rather as dry bones needing to be fleshed out and brought to life through his music and its engagement with the audience. Even at moments when his librettist (especially Gilbert) seems to lose interest in a character, Sullivan invests his work with powerfully sympathetic genius, articulated through calculated juxtaposition of musical style. The essay examines the »lyrical« and »prosaic« modes in his major works as well as the dramatic pacing of Sullivan's compositions (both for opera and concert platform), e. g. in *Ivanhoe*, *The Golden Legend* and *The Yeomen of the Guard*.

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Richard Silverman: Stylistic Elements in the concert and stage music of Sullivan, and its interpretation

This essay explores the principal characteristics of Sullivan's compositions such as harmony, orchestration, structure and development in the composer's early

period (Leipzig influence, familiarity with Berlioz's music and his treatise), followed by the time in which he gains extensive knowledge of the opera repertoire. In Sullivan's period of maturity (1880–1890s) newer influences of Liszt, Wagner, and Saint-Saëns can be traced in his strongest oratorios, the Savoy operas and *Ivanhoe*. In his late period, Sullivan anticipates later trends in British music in his Savoy works and incidental music: e.g. folk song revival and Pastoralism. Performance considerations cover orchestral performance practices, oratorio and opera performances then and now.