SYMPOSIUM RECORDS CD 1206

Sir Arthur Sullivan – Early Recordings
Walter Passmore & Charles H. Workman

WALTER PASSMORE, a Londoner, was born in 1867, and spent a number of years touring the provinces with various concert parties and musical comedies before making his London stage debut at the Savoy in *Jane Annie* in 1893. Later the same year he created the secondary part of Tarara in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Utopia Limited*, briefly joining a D'Oyly Carte touring company in the much larger role of King Paramount the following autumn. Thereafter he starred in every new opera Sullivan wrote, playing Peter Grigg (*The Chieftain* 1894); the title role in *The Grand Duke* (1896); the Devil (The Beauty Stone 1898); Hassan (The Rose of Persia 1899) and Professor Bunn (*The Emerald Isle* 1901). This last work was completed after Sullivan's death by Edward German, in whose *Merrie England* (1902) and *A Princess of Kensington* (1903) Passmore also created roles at the Savoy.

As well as appearing in various non - G or S operas presented at the Savoy from 1894 (*Mirette*, *His Majesty*, *The Grand Duchess of Gerolstein*, *The Lucky Star*), Passmore took part from 1895 in revivals there of some of the most successful Gilbert and Sullivan pieces and so added Ko-Ko (*The Mikado*), Don Alhambra (*The Gondoliers*), the Sergeant of Police (*The Pirates of Penzance*), the Usher (*Trial by Jury*), Mr. Wells (*The Sorcerer*), Sir Joseph Porter (*H.M.S. Pinafore*), Bunthorne (*Patience*), Jack Point (*The Yeomen of the Guard*) and the Lord Chancellor (*Iolanthe*) to his repertoire. This repertoire is reflected in the songs he recorded for Columbia. He appeared as Ko-Ko in the 1908 complete recording of *The Mikado* issued by Odeon.

When he left the Savoy Passmore went into *The Earl and the Girl* at the Adelphi, and appeared in many musical comedies in the ensuing thirty years, often starring opposite his wife, the soprano Agnes Fraser. He was also a minor composer; his output included a piano piece called "The Palmay Barn Dance", named after Ilka Palmay , his co-star in *The Grand Duke*. He died in 1946.

CHARLES HERBERT WORKMAN was born in Bootle (Lancashire) in 1873. He made his stage debut in the spoken role of Calynx (*Utopia Limited*) with a D'Oyly Carte touring company at Stratford-on-Avon in November 1894; during the same tour he also appeared in *The Chieftain*. In March 1896 he created the small part of the costumier Ben Hashbaz in *The Grand Duke*. From 1897 he toured the United Kingdom for a decade in the G & S 'comedian' roles, playing Mr. Wells, Sir Joseph, Major-General Stanley (*The Pirates of Penzance*), Bunthorne, the Lord Chancellor, King Gama (*Princess Ida*), Ko-Ko, Jack Point, the Duke of Plaza-Toro (*The Gondoliers*) and Scaphio (*Utopia Limited*). He added Hassan (*The Rose of Persia*) in 1901 and the Judge (*Trial by Jury*) in 1904. His recordings for Odeon drew on all these roles except Scaphio. Workman also appeared in the famous

Savoy repertory seasons of 1906-07 and 1908-09.
In 1909 Workman ventured into management, leasing the Savoy and presenting three comic operas in which he also appeared. The second of these, *Fallen Fairies*, had music by German and a libretto by Gilbert. None was successful (*The Mountaineers* did the best business with 61 performances), and Workman surrendered his lease when the final opera, *Two Merry Monarchs*, closed after just 43 performances (*Fallen Fairies* managed 51). Workman then went into musical comedy before going to Australia in 1914. He died at sea, returning to Australia from Hong Kong, in 1923 at the early age of 49.

THE MUSIC
Most of the music recorded here was originally written to be sung by the baritone George Grossmith (1847-1912), who was the chief comedian of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas from 1877 till his departure in 1888. Grossmith was not a fine singer in the conventional sense, but his voice was adaptable, allowing him to sing high or low at will. In writing for Grossmith's particular talents Sullivan effectively determined that all future performers of the same parts should have similar vocal qualities however much they might differ in other respects. Besides writing for Grossmith as an individual, Sullivan also took care to ensure that the words he sang were capable of being clearly enunciated. Generally speaking this meant what Sullivan called 'word setting', that is to say the use of a single note to correspond with each syllable of the text. As with their vocal qualities, all subsequent performers of Grossmith's parts have also been able to give clear articulation to the words. Both Passmore and Workman were true inheritors of Grossmith's mantle in this respect.
Sullivan's treatment of the lyrics has made the 'Grossmith' songs among the most popular in the Gilbert and Sullivan canon - indeed for many people the very idea of Gilbert and Sullivan is inseparable from tongue-twisting words performed at a rapid pace by a little man in uniform. However, as the present collection shows, Sullivan varied his approach considerably, so that 'My name is John Wellington Wells' (*The Sorcerer* 1877) is quite unlike 'I have a song to sing-o' (*The Yeomen of the Guard* 1888) although written for the same man and performed by his successors. By the time of his departure from the Savoy Grossmith had in fact created a pattern of public expectation which meant that even new operas had to contain a part bearing a general resemblance to those with which he was associated. Hence 'The small street-Arab' (*The Rose of Persia*) and 'In enterprise of martial kind' (*The Gondoliers*) are 'Grossmith' songs in spirit if not in fact. At the same time the versatility of men like Passmore and Workman is shown in their ability to sing music such as 'First you're born' (*Utopia Limited*), which was originally written for Grossmith's partner in comedy, Rutland Barrington, and 'I stole the prince' (*The Gondoliers*).

THE RECORDS

Walter Passmore recorded 15 Gilbert and Sullivan items on the Columbia label in 1912, although his recording debut had occurred in 1900 with two songs on 7" Berliner discs (Bunthorne's song from *Patience* and Mr. Wells' song from *The Sorcerer*). At the same time, Passmore also recorded three items from *Merrie England* (Basil Hood and Edward German): he had starred in the original production in 1902 and subsequent tour. The *Merrie England* titles were pressed in poor quality shellac, and did not sell well, but the G & S titles survived in the catalogue and continued to be issued when the quality of shellac improved: the last of Passmore's discs was still in the catalogue in 1941. It is these later pressings that are largely used in this compilation: they provide an interesting comparison to the Workman recordings. Passmore's more relaxed approach is in stark contrast to the energy of Workman, and he "talks" his way through many of the songs.

Before 1906 no attempt had been made to record a complete (or near - complete) Gilbert and Sullivan opera, but in the years 1906-08, three companies made versions of three of the most popular operas, as interest in the works was no doubt heightened by the return of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company to the Savoy Theatre. The Gramophone Company made *The Mikado* (1906 - 17 single-sided discs), *The Yeomen of the Guard* (1907 - 19 single-sided discs) *and H.M.S. Pinafore* (1908 - 18 single-sided discs). The first two of these predated the return to the Savoy of the operas concerned. Pathé issued *The Yeomen of the Guard* on 9 hill and dale centre-start double-sided 11" discs (November 1907 - a month before the Gramophone Company). Finally, English Odeon launched *H.M.S. Pinafore* on 10 double-sided 10¾" discs (December 1907) and *The Mikado* on 12 double-sided 10¾" discs (autumn 1908).

Because of contractual and artistic considerations all these companies chose to use their own stable of recording artistes rather than members of the D'Oyly Carte. This decision robbed modem day listeners of hearing many interesting performances, but a notable exception was the inclusion of Walter Passmore as Ko-Ko in *The Mikado*, of which four tracks are included here. The fake encore to "Here's a how-de-do" is a highly unusual snippet of gramophone history.

C.H. Workman recorded a series of 20 songs from the (Gilbert and) Sullivan operas in three sessions in 1910 and 1912. He also made four sides from *The Chocolate Soldier* (Oscar Straus), in which he was then appearing. These records are all highly uncommon, and much loved by collectors. His diction is exemplary, and the sound quality is extremely good for the period. The selection in this compilation includes his "Tit willow" (*The Mikado*) with Workman's own idiosyncratic cadenza, and two of the tracks have been transferred from test pressings that have unexpectedly survived. These test pressings bear the same matrix numbers as the issued discs, but it is highly unusual for such early test recordings to be available. The issued discs bear a facsimile of Workman's signature across the label face.

Acknowledgements:
Original records from the collections of Stephen Turnbull and Roger Wild. Notes by David Eden, Stephen Turnbull and Roger Wild.
Photograph of Walter Passmore at home circa 1901 from the collection of Stephen Turnbull.
Photograph of C.H. Workman as Reginald Bunthorne from the collection of Kevin Chapple.
Thanks to Selwyn Tillett for technical assistance.
Passmore tracks first published 1912 except for 4 and 5 (1915); 11, 12, 13 and 14 (1908). Workman tracks first published 1910 except for 25 and 26 (1913).
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