

THE HIDDEN CIRCLE GAZETTE

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MUSIC

The Pirates of Penzance

BY CURT ROSEWOOD — 2024-06-02



The Pirates of Penzance¹ is a comic operetta in two acts, with music by Arthur Sullivan and libretto by W. S. Gilbert. Its official premiere was at the Fifth Avenue Theatre in New York City on 31 December 1879.

The story concerns Frederick who has joined a bunch of Pirates and can leave when he is 21. He does so and gets engaged to Mabel. However, he then discovers he was born on 29th of February and so technically is only 5 years old. So he goes to Mabel to tell her he has to leave her, but will be back in 1940. These operettas were always silly, the joke being that he has asked her to wait for him for 60 years. And she will remain faithful, *"Till we are wed, and even after"*, a little comedic stab at the veneer of decency that characterised the Victorian age. But as he turns to leave, Mabel sings this lovely song. There was always a tender moment even in the silliest of these operettas. It was this song *Ah Leave me not to pine alone*, that was performed at Black Rose by our own *Bettsi* in the role of Mabel and *Curt* in the role of Frederick.

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Pirates_of_Penzance



The music used for this performance was a rendition by Valerie Masterson. In addition there is a rendition by pop singer Linda Ronstadt that is an interesting watch.

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

Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGAxcjhV1EQ>

Another delightful song from this opera was the *Major-General's song* of which some fun parody's circulate. Songs like this with tongue-twisting lyrics sung at high speed were regular features in these comic operas, though the idea had been around some time and similar songs featured in operas by, for example, Rossini and Mozart. They are called patter songs².

The *Scientist Salarian* parody nicely pays tribute to the original, keeping the original orchestration, and even mentions the original's lame attempt to find a rhyme for 'strategy'. For another very clever parody of this song, look no further than Tom Lehrer's excellent *Periodic Table of The Elements*.

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

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

Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AcS3NOQnsQM>

With special thanks to Bettsi and Deraí.

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²https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patter_song