Victorian Theatrics, Egyptology, and Villainous Laughter

Seph Stanek ’08
Shelf Life

VICTORIAN THEATRICS, EGYPTOLOGY, AND VILLAINOUS LAUGHTER

We asked Broadway actor Seph Stanek ’08 what works are currently inspiring him.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Seph Stanek’s ’08 studied voice performance at Furman and currently lives in New York City. He performs with the New York Gilbert and Sullivan Players, Light Opera of New York, and Arden Arts, and has completed 10 Off-Broadway contracts, four concerts at Carnegie Hall, and several national tours. A frequent concert singer, Stanek’s recent performances include singing alongside Kristin Chenoweth with the Concert Pops of Long Island and performing for the Breast Cancer Foundation’s gala. Stanek will make his Broadway debut next year starring as The Scribe in Akhenaten the Musical. This year he produced a major benefit concert for 1996 Furman graduate Mary-Mitchell Campbell’s organization ASTEP (Artists Striving to End Poverty). For more information on Stanek, visit www.SephStanek.com or @SephStanek.
world around me operates, I have found that there’s no better way to get the latest science news than on this website. The writers are curious and reliable, the content is updated several times a day, and the articles cover the entire gamut of scientific topics with links to videos and accredited scientific journals and websites.

GILBERT AND SULLIVAN:
A Dual Biography
by Michael Ainger

You can tell a lot about New York City residents by what they read on the subway, and my fellow straphangers can tell without a doubt that I’m a devout Savoyard (in layman’s terms: a Gilbert and Sullivan super-nerd) by my current read, Gilbert and Sullivan: A Dual Biography by Michael Ainger. I am in my fourth year as a company member of the New York Gilbert and Sullivan Players, and as an expert on G&S interpretation, I can never stop learning about the musical duo, their influences, and their legacy. To my surprise, this book has sparked more random conversations with strangers than any other book I’ve read on the subway (Savoyards unite!).

THE MIKADO
By W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan

I’m fascinated by the current hot topic in the Broadway community centering around Gilbert and Sullivan’s opera The Mikado. The work, which first opened in 1885, is set in Japan, which allowed Gilbert and Sullivan to freely satirize Britain’s politics by disguising them as Japanese. Many contemporary critics believe the show is now considered racially insensitive toward the Asian community, using terms like “yellowface” to describe traditional makeup plots, costumes, and staging. As a frequent Gilbert and Sullivan performer, this controversy greatly affects my livelihood; it raises topics from my ethics classes I took at Furman, begging the questions: How has our perception of race evolved since Victorian England and is there a way to neutralize these accusations to save history’s most-performed musical? I was elected to be part of a committee to re-conceptualize the show with the Actors’ Equity Association in hopes of finding a happy balance to satisfy both views.