Memorable melodies and fanciful worlds – the comic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan remain as popular today as when they were first performed. This Companion provides a timely guide to the history and development of the collaboration between the two men, including a fresh examination of the many myths and half-truths surrounding their relationship. Written by an international team of specialists, the volume features a personal account from film director Mike Leigh on his connection with the Savoy operas and the creation of his film Topsy-Turvy. Starting with the early history of the operatic stage in Britain, the Companion places the operas in their theatrical and musical context, investigating the amateur performing tradition, providing new perspectives on the famous patter songs and analysing their dramatic and operatic potential. Perfect for enthusiasts, performers and students of Gilbert and Sullivan’s enduring work, the book examines their legacy and looks forward to the future.

David Eden is a former Chairman of the Sir Arthur Sullivan Society and is currently editor of its Magazine.

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Preface

Almost a century after the deaths of Sullivan and Gilbert and fifty years after the expiry of the copyright in their work a new look at the collaboration of these two brilliant men is imperative. By taking a fundamentally musical approach this volume makes use of the latest developments in research and offers fresh insights which will open new perspectives and inspire future research, exciting investigation and thrilling performances.

This book is a work of inter-disciplinary research which adds up to a deeper understanding of the place of the Savoy operas in the wider operatic context. The first part throws light on the historic, artistic and cultural background, putting the achievements of Sullivan and Gilbert into perspective. Part II focuses on relevant aspects and details of the operas. The third part covers the reception, educational and practical aspects of the operas, the perception in countries other than England and Part IV looks at the laborious process of rediscovering the originals of the Savoy operas and provides an outlook on future perspectives.

In order to remove the accumulated burden from the plot and score, we must be able to link the past to the present, the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries, and find answers to the question of what can be discovered if we are prepared to look below the surface.

David Eden
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