Edwardian Extravaganza

The Arcadians – the overture

Track 1

Lionel Monckton and Howard Talbot wrote the music for the Arcadians and the lyrics are by Arthur Wimperis. The work is regarded by theatre historians as the finest example of its genre, with Monckton's melodic talent supported by Talbot's technical skill. The score contains elements characteristic of the [Savoy Operas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Savoy_Operas) of the previous generation as well as broader numbers reminiscent of the [music hall](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_hall).

[Arcadia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arcadia_%28utopia%29), a legendary land of rural perfection peopled by beautiful virtuous innocents, first described by the [Ancient Greeks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Greeks), was a popular setting for writers of the 19th century, notably [W. S. Gilbert](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/W._S._Gilbert) (in [*Happy Arcadia*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Happy_Arcadia) and *[Iolanthe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iolanthe%22%20%5Co%20%22Iolanthe)*). The development of aviation and flying in the early years of the 20th century captivated the public's attention. Writers fantasised about the strange adventures that might befall those who ventured to travel by the new-fangled aeroplane. A forced landing, perhaps, in some long-forgotten land where time has stood still. These stories laid the basis for *The Arcadians*.

Act 1

Sombra, one of the beautiful but naïve Arcadians, is troubled by reports of a place beyond the sea where "monsters" live in cages of brick and stone and never tell the truth – a place called London. The Arcadians beg Father Time to bring them a Londoner. He reluctantly agrees and causes the amateur aviator James Smith, an ageing London restaurateur with passions for aeroplanes and philandering, to crash land in Arcadia, where no one tells lies or grows older, where money is unknown, and employment is unnecessary. The Arcadians and Smith exchange stories, and Smith introduces the Arcadians to some new concepts: ugliness, jealousy and lying. He attempts to seduce Sombra by telling a lie. Far from impressed, the Arcadians immerse him in the Well of Truth, from which he emerges transformed into a young man, wearing the scanty costume of Arcadia, with a luxuriant head of hair but minus his mutton-chop whiskers. They christen him "Simplicitas", and he will remain young until he tells a lie. His hosts dispatch him with missionary zeal, and two agelessly beautiful Arcadian nymphs, Sombra and her sister, Chrysea, to wicked London to "set up the truth in England for ever more, and banish the lie."

Tracks 2 – 5

**Act II**

They begin their crusade at Askwood races, where it is Cup Day. They cause considerable curiosity, being still clothed in the costumes of Arcady (everyone else is dressed up formally in this scene,). But instead of improving the Londoners, the Arcadians adopt some of their wicked ways, including betting on the races. Here Simplicitas meets his wife Mrs. Smith, who, not recognising her husband, proceeds to fall in love with the young stranger. Simplicitas flirts with her and agrees to help her open up an Arcadian restaurant in London. Then comes an opportunity for Simplicitas to distinguish himself. Jack Meadows, who was to have ridden his temperamental horse "The Deuce" has been thrown by the animal, and Peter Doody, the hapless replacement jockey, has also been injured by "The Deuce". Sombra arranges that Simplicitas shall take his mount, and as the Arcadians have the gift of speech with animals, the brute becomes as gentle as a lamb. Simplicitas (while sound asleep), upon "The Deuce," wins the race, to the great satisfaction of its owner. Romantic complications ensue between Meadows and Eileen Cavanagh, a young Irish woman.

Tracks 6 – 10

**Act III**

Simplitas/Smith's Arcadian restaurant has become the rage of London, as the menu is that of the simple life. Simplitas, however, is not living and spreading the simple life as his Arcadian friends had hoped, but rather is having "the time of his life." Mrs. Smith becomes suspicious of Simplicitas, and in endeavouring to explain the reason for an all-night absence, he tells another lie. He falls into the ornamental well in the restaurant and emerges as his former self, with his bald head and shaggy whiskers, to the astonishment and somewhat to the confusion of his wife. Sombra and Chrysea, realising that their mission to make all London tell the truth has failed, return to Arcadia – but they leave two happy couples behind.

Tracks 11 – 15

Interval

‘The Geisha’ pandered to the taste for oriental exoticism with a slight story of a western girl who distracts her sailor fiancé from the attractions of the Japanese geisha O Mimosa San. The geisha’s lot is reflected in her tale of ‘The Amorous Goldfish’, who loves a naval officer and pines away when rejected.

Track 21

Best remembered of the Gaiety Theatre shows, ‘Our Miss Gibbs’ had Monckton’s wife Gertie Millar as a Yorkshire lass in a London department store, where she meets and falls in love with a bank clerk who turns out to be an Earl. In this vehicle for high spirited fun, Millar, clad (for no particular reason) in a Pierrot costume, sang the effervescent ‘Moonstruck’.

Track 22

Another vehicle for Gertie Millar, ‘The Quaker Girl’, was a more refined romantic musical comedy about a Quaker girl, Prudence, who escapes the constraints of her upbringing and visits Paris, where her quaint costume becomes all the rage. In this number Prudence laments her sheltered upbringing.

Track 23

The Dutch cocoa heiress Tina, caring naught for wealth, prefers to marry a violinist. In this beautiful number she rhapsodises over the sound supposedly produced by her lover. In fact it turns out that he not only does not play the instrument, but is also a Duke in disguise. The two separate, but ultimately reconcile.

Track 24

‘Who shall say that loves is cruel’ is from Edward German’s operetta ‘Merrie England’. This was reckoned to be the best English comic opera not composed by Sullivan.

Track 4

‘The Grasshopper's Dance’ was composed by Procida Ernest Luigi Bucalossi in 1905. He came from a family of London theatre conductors and this is one of his best know pieces. You will remember many years later it was used to advertise milk on the television.

Track 5

Sydney Baynes began his music career as accompanist, church organist and choirmaster before becoming chorus master at Drury Lane Theatre. From 1910 to 1914 he was musical director to John Tiller and it was for the Palace Theatre’s troupe of Tiller Girls that he composed the elegant waltz Destiny in 1912.

Track 10

On after ending his collaboration with Monckton and moving to the USA did Ivan Caryll achieve his own most enduring hit. The beautiful lady waltz’ is from the Pink Lady which was produced in 1911.

Track 12

Herman Fink was the son of an immigrant Dutch musician and for over 20 years conducted the orchestra at the Palace Theatre London. He composed the skipping rope routine In the shadows.

Track 14

A Runaway Girl (1898) was another of Monckton’s collaborations with Ivan Caryll for the Gaiety Theatre. It has remained celebrated for the march-song Soldiers in the park

Track 15

Charles Ancliffe was an Irish bandmaster who served for some years in India. It was in 1912 that he composed Nights of gladness which so eloquently sums up the Edwardian era and is a suitable last piece for this programme.

Track 16