



DGASS – H.M.S. Pinafore 2020

Notes on characterisation and dialogue auditions

I want you to be as comfortable as possible at the auditions and if you think nerves might get the better of you during the dialogue then by all means use the words. I'm looking for potential, not a polished performance. I just want you to leave with us both feeling that I've seen your best effort. Very best of luck to you all!

Fiona Main
Director

Ralph

Ralph is described as the perfect sailor, devoted to his duties - but also devoted to the Captain's daughter, Josephine. He loves her with an incomparable passion that he waxes lyrical about at every possible opportunity. The ultimate Tenor hero to the point of overkill. At one point he is ready to take his own life after Josephine refuses him - by then many in the audience may be wishing him to succeed! His lowly position as a foremast hand means that any association with Josephine is forbidden but his ardour transcends the constraints of class boundaries. He is a character that is well liked by his fellow crew members, who do their best to support him in his romantic aspirations. Auditionees should milk the flowery overblown speeches to the max.

Although for the sake of sense in the plot Ralph would have to realistically be in his 40's at a minimum, we will not be limiting our options to gentlemen in their 40's. A good vocal match with Josephine and good characterisation are higher priorities.

Playing age: 40's minimum (with room for manoeuvre)
Standard RP accent although could have a bit of a regional accent if desired but not too pronounced

Josephine

Although Josephine at first seems to be a typical wilting soprano, bending to the will of her father and Sir Joseph, she does show some degree of spark and wilfulness when she finds she cannot deny her feelings for the lowly sailor, Ralph. She is a wonderful set of contradictions as she tries her best to uphold the values she has been brought up with and keep within the confines of her 'class' whilst at the same time wrangling with her overwhelming love for the humble foremast hand. Giving in to romance, she finally manipulates Sir Joseph and her father to her own ends and attempts to elope with her love. One of the best G&S Soprano arias belongs to Josephine in 'The Hours Creep on Apace' and full use should be



made of this to show the inner conflict Josephine feels in her situation.

Like Ralph, the playing age for Josephine (if the intricacies of the plot are to be believed), should be late teens to early 20's but this would also be dependent on the ages of Ralph/Captain Corcoran.

However, we will not be placing age constraints on our choice. A good match for Ralph and the ability to wrangle with some very tricky arias whilst ensuring a romantic and occasionally headstrong character shines through.

Playing age: no age constraints

Standard RP upper class English accent preferred

Sir Joseph

Sir Joseph is a bit of a buffoon who has been promoted to his level of incompetence. As I wrote this it reminded me of two characters very much in the forefront of world news and I liked it!! If you would like to try the audition in the style of either of the two floppy-haired buffoons currently gracing the world stage, then I'd love to see it and see where we might take it in the production. Very officious, observant of class distinctions and very much full of his own self-importance to the extent that he has to have an entourage of women accompanying him everywhere he goes. Trump or Boris or your own creation! I'm open to ideas, but Sir Joseph has the opportunity to steal the show so show me what you can do with him!

Playing age: 40's upwards

American, RP or surprise me!

Captain Corcoran

Captain Corcoran is generally happy with his lot at the beginning of the opera and is pretty much a 'good guy', always trying to do his best. He has achieved his position through hard work and is liked and respected by his crew. He has a lovely daughter who is about to marry Sir Joseph Porter – a desirable match which will propel them both into the higher echelons of society. The Captain lives by a strict code – fair treatment and no bad language - and is greatly disturbed when things begin to go awry (his daughter confessing her love for a simple sailor and Sir Joseph questioning his treatment of his crew). He should be a restrained character in the main with his emotions fraying around the edges when things get difficult. These lapses and contrasts should be played upon until he finally 'loses it' when Ralph and Josephine try to elope. He has the added complication of feelings for Little Buttercup, which he is prepared to admit but certainly not prepared to act upon, due to their disparity in class.



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Playing age: 40's minimum (with room for manoeuvre)
Standard RP upper class English accent preferred

Little Buttercup

She may be little in name but Buttercup is big in personality! She's a firm favourite amongst the sailors and feels perfectly comfortable in their company. Much flirting should be expected but in reality she only really has eyes for one man – Captain Corcoran. Buttercup is always on the side of true love and happy to assist Josephine and Ralph in their elopement. She has an air of mystery in the duet with Captain Corcoran in Act 2 and claims mystic powers when she tells the Captain that 'Things are Seldom What They Seem'. Her visionary powers have less to do with the occult and more to do with the fact that she was responsible for swapping Ralph and the Captain when they were babies and she can therefore be pretty certain that they will both experience a change in circumstances when she reveals all! She should be a likeable, larger-than-life lady with a flair for the dramatic when required. A west-country or similar accent is usual for this part but not essential. I'm open to any ideas on that front.

As Buttercup was meant to be nursemaid to Ralph and the Captain she should really be 60's minimum but again, we're not being too strict about that in the casting. This is G&S after all!

Playing age: 60's upwards
West country or regional in some way preferred but not essential

Dick Deadeye

Dick Deadeye is the villain of the piece although sometimes it's difficult to see why since he is the only one who seems to 'tell it like it is' at times. He does quite like the idea of getting people into trouble and always tries to point out the worst in the situation. He's very much a 'glass half empty' kinda guy! His various 'deformities' that he delights in showing off to everyone are another guise of the stereotypical 'bad guy' that Gilbert has great fun caricaturing. This is a gift of a part for a talented character actor. Bring everything you've got, from gurning to hobbling hornpipes (those aren't requirements).

Dick has been round the block a few times so playing age is probably 50's – 60's but make-up is a wonderful thing!

Playing age: 50's – 60's
West Country (or similar) accent preferred

Cousin Hebe

Cousin Hebe is often played down in productions of this show and I never know why. She has the ability to be mistress of the female chorus (and probably the men's chorus too if she puts her mind to it) and we'll ensure she makes a huge impression at Sir Joseph's side.



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In our production she's going to be very much a personality. I know this character has no dialogue but, if it's possible in the singing audition to show what you'd bring to the part, then by all means do. Do you see her as a man-eater or a secret drinker? Does she possess all the military qualities that Sir Joseph is lacking? Perhaps a very strict nanny type? I'm open to ideas on Hebe and will work with the successful auditionee to find a real stand-out character and perfect foil for Sir Joseph.

Playing age: any

Standard RP upper class English preferred but not essential

Bill Bobstay

Bill Bobstay is a good steady hard-working sailor and salt-of-the-earth type. I've no doubt he likes a tot of rum or three and the round, red and rosy figure of Little Buttercup probably sets his heart a-flutter too. He's one of the lads but seems to have a soft spot for Ralph and likes to look out for him. Some of his dialogue is written phonetically and suggests west country so he will need an accent of some kind to give him that old sea-salt, hardy sailor vibe. He's either Ralph's best buddy or a father figure, depending on the age of the successful auditionee. This one's open to everyone.

Playing age: any

West Country (or similar) accent preferred