

Unharmonious Musical Geniuses

From 1871 to 1896, famed musical geniuses W.S. Gilbert and Arthur Sullivan produced 14 musicals together that led to a string of theatrical hits and award-winning songs that are still familiar to most music lovers today.

Yet for all that success, the two men couldn't stand each other. They begrudgingly tolerated each other for years until one day, when Sullivan ordered carpet for a theater they had purchased, and Gilbert raged over the cost.

From that day on, they couldn't even work together in the same room. Sullivan would write music for a new production, then mail it to Gilbert, who would write the lyrics and mail it all back.

Christopher Hibbert, English historian and biographer, wrote about their famous collaboration in his book *Gilbert & Sullivan and Their Victorian World*:

Beneath the two men's enormously popular collaborations were two hearts that beat as two. They simply did not get along. The trigger-tempered Gilbert, with his razor tongue and steady work habits, couldn't understand Sullivan's amiable procrastinations and easy social successes. Sullivan was convinced that his real genius was expressed by his prestigious music. Yet success after success forced the team to stay together for 15 glorious years. Then the whole thing blew up in a tragicomic quarrel about a carpet.

Said one commentator, "They knew how to make beautiful music, but they knew nothing about harmony."

How about you? Is there harmony in your life? In your marriage? In your family? In the workplace? In the fellowship of your church?

If not, perhaps the reason is because of some insignificant event or disagreement – like carpet. Maybe the answer is forgiveness.

Relationships are so much more beautiful, happy and fulfilling when there is harmony.

Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony (Colossians 3:14 NLT).

– Beecher Hunter



W.S. Gilbert



Arthur Sullivan