

HMS Pinafore Characters:

Ralph Rackstraw - tenor

Ralph is seen among the sailors to represent the ideal sailor in Victorian eyes for he is known for his devotion to the duties of sailing and his image as a loyal crewman. Ironically Ralph's abilities on board ship are limited by his poor balance. Yet instead of navigational and officer duties, Rackstraw has been assigned to work in the upper rigging of the ship.

Ralph demonstrates love for the captain's daughter, Josephine, but is aware his class as a common sailor prevents any chance of marriage between him and the daughter of an aristocrat.

Rackstraw personifies the qualities of a dutiful sailor and a hero in an exaggeration which stretches so far as to enjoy acknowledgment from the admiralty and crew as a perfect sailor.

Josephine - soprano

Captain Corcoran's daughter Josephine loves Ralph Rackstraw but, aware he is of lower social class, knows she may not marry him. Josephine, an aristocrat herself, is engaged to Sir Joseph though she barely meets class requirements as ordained by Joseph. She stereotypes the Victorian role of women for she is initially considered helpless and unable to act for herself for her father takes charge of arranging her marriage. Her over dramatic disposition and violent shifts of mood mock the aristocracy.

Captain Corcoran - baritone

Captain Corcoran, captain of Her Majesty's Ship Pinafore, serves as a comical device and a satire of incompetence, British custom, and the role of the gentleman. Corcoran absurdly addresses his crew in an excessively gentlemanly tone, partially prompted by Sir Joseph's orders. Corcoran, like Sir Joseph, openly claims to sympathize with all classes as equals though this sympathy rarely extends beyond the aristocracy. Corcoran's arrogance is humorous though as it is portrayed through exaggeration and satire.

The Rt. Hon. Sir Joseph Porter, K.C.B. First Lord of the Admiralty - bass-baritone

Sir Joseph, an aristocrat who rose to power by associating with the bureaucracy of the British government, has made a career of apple polishing for his superiors. Sir Joseph's commentary on the issue of class mocks the aristocracy of the day for after noting that "love levels all ranks" decides that a certain marriage would be stretching it too far. Sir Joseph's commentary on rank, overemphasis on foolish traditions and etiquette, and general inability within the navy he rules serve a purpose as a key comic device.

Miss. Cripps (Buttercup) - mezzo-soprano|contralto

Miss Cripps, better known as Little Buttercup, is anything but little and a local peddler of goods to sailors in port. She is well acquainted with the crew of the Pinafore as well as Captain Corcoran. Much of her satire plays on the tendency of the aristocracy to turn over the care of children to a nurse. As an adolescent Buttercup cared for younger children, including Captain Corcoran and Ralph Rackstraw. She accidentally switched the two at a young age, by returning them to the wrong parents, one family being wealthy and the other poor.

Dick Deadeye - baritone

Dick Deadeye's role is both satirical and comical. Deadeye is the only true villain in the work. Characterized by dislike from other crew members and a tendency to bluntly relay facts as he observes them. This stereotypical villain, one who often serves as the model for stereotyped villains in modern stage and film productions, serves the plot by relaying Josephine's plan to marry Ralph to the Captain. Ironically the melodramatic bluntness of Deadeye make him the only character in the entire play who speaks with any true wisdom and logic.

Boatswain Bill Bobstay - bass-baritone

The Boatswain serves minor purposes as both a companion of Rackstraw and a mediator of events. His service of counsel is often found as he boosts morale at times of conflict or depression through observation and song.

Hebe - contralto

Hebe, Sir Joseph's first cousin, is one of the many "sisters, cousins, and aunts" who accompany Sir Joseph "wherever he may go." At the conclusion of Act II Sir Joseph takes Hebe as his wife.