

DON PASQUALE

Music by Gaetano Donizetti

Text by Giovanni Ruffini and Donizetti.

First performed January 3, 1843 in Paris.

Characters

Don Pasquale (bass), a very wealthy, aging bachelor

Dr. Malatesta (baritone), his doctor and friend

Ernesto (tenor), Don Pasquale's nephew

Norina (soprano), a young widow, Ernesto's fiancé

A Notary (baritone)

Servants, major-domo, dressmaker, milliner, hairdresser.

Act I

Don Pasquale is furious at his nephew Ernesto for refusing to marry the woman Pasquale had chosen for him. Deciding to disinherit Ernesto for becoming engaged to the beautiful but poor widow Norina, Pasquale has asked his friend Dr. Malatesta to help him find a wife so he may have a child to inherit his fortune.

Malatesta, both aware and supportive of Ernesto and Norina's relationship, devises a plan to change Pasquale's mind. He tells Pasquale that he has a sister -- Sofronia -- raised in a convent, who would be the perfect bride ("Bella siccome un angelo" -- Fair as the fairest angel). In reality, he plans to have Norina pose as the bride-to-be. Pasquale informs Ernesto of his plans to marry ("Prender moglie" -- Getting married) and orders him out of the house. Ernesto sadly decides to break his engagement to Norina, rather than submit her to a life of poverty.

Norina, reading a book on chivalrous love, delights in her own skills at flirtation ("So anch'io la virtù magica" -- I know how much a glance can do). A servant brings her a note from Ernesto which changes her mood entirely: Ernesto relates his uncle's plans and his own resolve to give her up. Dr. Malatesta enters and, after reading the letter, calms Norina and shares his scheme to fool Pasquale. She agrees to play along ("Pronta io son" -- I'll play the part), and they rehearse how she will act when she meets Pasquale.

Act II

Ernesto, miserable, prepares to leave ("Cercherò lontana terra" -- I shall find some distant country). Meanwhile, Malatesta presents the veil-clad "Sofronia" -- Norina in disguise -- to Pasquale. He is thrilled, and particularly pleased when she tells him that her main interests are sewing and tending to the home. When she removes her veil, Pasquale is totally smitten and calls immediately for a lawyer to perform the ceremony. Malatesta has conveniently arranged for a Notary -- actually his cousin -- who he ushers in to seal the deal. As part of the marriage decree, Pasquale agrees to bequeath half of his property to his wife. Ernesto, still unaware of the scheme, unwittingly interrupts the ceremony to say goodbye to his uncle. Outraged when he sees Norina dressed as the bride, Ernesto almost gives away her identity, but Malatesta manages to whisper just enough of their plans to calm him down. Ernesto, although very unwilling and still skeptical, signs the contract as a witness.

As soon as the deal is signed, Norina immediately switches roles. She affects a willful manner and insults Pasquale, announcing that, from now on, she will be the boss in their household. She doubles the major-domo's wages, orders him to hire many more servants, and then moves on to describing her grand plans for more horses, new furniture, and expensive jewelry. She even

employs Ernesto as her escort, who by now has figured out the scheme. Pasquale is overcome with shock and must be helped out by Malatesta, who warns the lovers to be careful.

Act III

Pasquale, in a rage, is tallying up the bills. He resolves to tame Norina or die in the effort. Norina enters hurriedly and announces she is going out for the evening. He objects and an argument ensues, at the height of which Norina slaps his face, which she immediately regrets. Pasquale, shamed by her slap, resolves to be rid of his foolish marriage ("E'finita, Don Pasquale" -- That's the end of Don Pasquale). Norina, who is beginning to feel sorry for him, suggests that he get a good night's sleep ("Via, caro sposino" -- Be good now, my darling) and leaves, intentionally dropping a note on the way which Pasquale picks up and reads. Stunned, Pasquale learns that she has made a date to rendezvous with a lover that evening in the garden. He summons Malatesta to help him disclose her infidelity ("Cheti, cheti, immantinente" -- Softly, softly we will hasten). Malatesta, meanwhile, still orchestrating the plot, has tipped Ernesto off to his role in the upcoming rendezvous.

Ernesto is serenading Norina ("Com'è gentil" -- How soft and light). She joins him, and together they sing the love duet "Tornami a dir che m'ami" (Only to know you love me). Pasquale, as they had planned, observes their tryst, becoming furious at what he sees. Malatesta calms his friend and, revealing the truth, convinces him that the two young people are right for each other and that Pasquale should allow them to marry. Too relieved by the prospect of being free of his troublesome "wife" to be angry, Pasquale gives them his blessing.