

Don Pasquale

[Opera buffa, in three acts; text and music by Donizetti. First produced at the Theatre des Italiens, Paris, January 4, 1843.]

PERSONAGES.

Don Pasquale, an obstinate but kind-hearted bachelor. Dr. Malatesta, his friend and physician. Ernesto, Don Pasquale's nephew. Norina, a young widow. Notary.

[Valets, chambermaids, majordomo, dressmaker, etc.]

The scene is laid in Rome; time, last century.

The opening of the first act of "Don Pasquale" discloses the Don enraged with Ernesto, his nephew, because he will not marry to suit him. Dr. Malatesta, a mutual friend, comes to the help of Ernesto, to whom he is greatly attached, and contrives a scheme to further his interests. He urges the Don to marry a lady, pretending she is his (the doctor's) sister, in reality Norina, with whom Ernesto is in love. Norina is let into the secret, her part being to consent to the marriage contract and then so torment Don Pasquale that he will be glad to get rid of her and even consent to her marriage with Ernesto.

In the second act Ernesto is found bewailing his fate. The Don enters, showily arrayed for his wedding. Norina appears with the doctor, and shyly and reluctantly signs the wedding-contract. As soon as she has signed it, however, she drops all modesty. The bewildered Ernesto is kept quiet by signs from the doctor. Norina first refuses all the Don's demonstrations, and then declares Ernesto shall be her escort. She summons the servants, and lays out a scheme of housekeeping upon such an extravagant scale that Don Pasquale declares he will not pay the bills. She says he shall, as she is now master of the house.

In the third act Norina continues her annoying antics. She employs the most expensive milliners and modistes. At length, when he finds that she is going to the theatre, he forbids it. A quarrel follows. She boxes his ears, and as she flounces out of the room she purposely drops a letter, the contents of which add jealousy to his other troubles. At this juncture Dr. Malatesta comes in and condoles with him. Nothing will satisfy Don Pasquale, however, except her leaving the house, and finally he orders her to go, at the same time taxing her with having a lover concealed on the premises. The doctor pleads with him to let his nephew marry Norina. When he finds she is really the doctor's sister, he is only too glad to get out of his troubles by consenting to the marriage of the young couple and blessing them.

The principal numbers in the first act are the duet for Ernesto and Don Pasquale; the scena for Norina, "And in that Look she gave"; and the charming duet for Norina and the doctor, "What Sport we'll have," closing the act. The second act opens with the lugubrious aria, "Oh! how at one Fell Blow," in which Ernesto bewails his sad condition, and also contains a charming quartette. The gem of the opera is the serenade in the last act, "How Soft the Air -- in April Night so Fair," better known perhaps by its Italian title, "Com 'e gentil," which was inserted by Donizetti after the first performance to strengthen the work and make it more popular. The serenade has been heard the world over and is a favorite concert number still. The charm of "Don Pasquale" lies in its humorous situations and the bright, melodious music which illustrates them. For brilliant gayety it stands in the front rank of comic operas.