

Your Performance Selection

Plot Synopsis:

Act 1, Scene 1

The old bachelor, Don Pasquale, has decided to show his nephew a thing or two. He has decided to take a bride for himself and disinherit his nephew, Ernesto, who has refused to marry the girl that Pasquale has chosen for him. Ernesto is in love with Norina, whom Pasquale has never met. Pasquale consults his friend Dr. Malatesta, who tells him that he has the perfect girl in mind. It is his own sister who has just returned from schooling at a convent. Ernesto is despondent when he hears the news of Pasquale's marriage. It appears that Malatesta, also his friend, has betrayed him.

Scene 2

Norina reads a romantic novel in her apartment and reflects on the fact that she can handle men far better than its heroine. She is momentarily depressed by a farewell note from Ernesto when Malatesta arrives and they begin to plan the strategy of their little intrigue. Norina will impersonate Malatesta's sister, a simple and shy girl fresh from a convent. She proves herself to be an actress of conviction and flair.

Scene 3

Ernesto bewails his fate and limps out to wallow in despair. Malatesta arrives with "Sofronia". Pasquale is delighted and can hardly contain himself when the veil is lifted. He wants the marriage to proceed immediately. Malatesta has brought along a notary just in case. Ernesto bursts in and is invited to remain as a witness. Malatesta, as quickly as possible, fills him in on the plan. Pasquale makes a special point to bequeath his fortune to his intended and the contract is sealed. Almost immediately Sofronia changes from a country girl to a shrew and demands more servants, new furniture, carriages and horses. Ernesto is delighted and Pasquale is devastated by the prospects of his future.

Act 2, Scene 1

The living room is in the midst of redecoration and Pasquale is surrounded by bills. Sofronia enters on her way to the theatre and Pasquale mutters that he will bar the door. On the way out she drops a note that Pasquale believes to be a bill, but upon examination finds it is a clear invitation by an admirer to a tryst in the garden that night. Malatesta is summoned and together they plot just how they will catch Sofronia in the garden.

Scene 2

Ernesto serenades Norina in the garden and just escapes as Pasquale and Malatesta enter. Malatesta announces to Sofronia that another lady will be joining her in the house, namely Ernesto's bride. Sofronia feigns anger at the thought and says that she would rather leave than share female control of the household. Pasquale is overjoyed and insists the marriage take place immediately and adds that the inheritance will be restored. As true identities are revealed, the Don, realizing that he has been outsmarted, gives his blessing to Norina and Ernesto. Everyone lives happily ever after.

About the Opera

Prior to the performance, provide each student with a copy of the synopsis of the story, found on page 4 of this packet and then engage in the following activities.

1. Listen to the overture of DON PASQUALE. Have each student write a synopsis of the story based solely on his or her impression of that music. Be sure to have them include in the synopsis a connection between the various musical elements of the story's characters. Then, in a group setting, discuss the differences in the students' versions of PASQUALE.

2. Have the students read the synopsis of DON PASQUALE. You can use the synopsis found on page 4, or most CD versions include a synopsis and often the libretto. You can choose to read it aloud to the students or have them read it silently. Stop to discuss. Discussion topics might include:

What makes this opera a comedy?

Are the actions of the characters realistic?

What makes this opera a parody?

How does this opera portray men and women?

What is Ruffini (the librettist) trying to say about love?

3. For a more dramatic approach, read the libretto as a reader's theatre, having students take turns speaking the different roles. If done in this manner, ask the students to put emotion into their voices and encourage exaggeration. You might have to start them off, but this will provide an interesting way of reading the story.

4. Convert the synopsis into an improvised play. Have students create the dialogue between the characters at key points in the story. The students may also want to improvise present day situations similar to those in the opera. For example: A young couple encounters unreasonable obstacles in their effort to get married. This situation can be treated as a comedy (as in DON PASQUALE), but has often been treated as a tragedy (such as Shakespeare's ROMEO AND JULIETTE). What subtle differences are there between a comedy of this sort and a drama?