
ACT 3

SCENE 1

Don Pasquale's Study

Don Pasquale's new bride has quickly rearranged his house and filled her new wardrobe. The servants race around doing their mistress's bidding, whilst their master foots the bill. Norina announces that she is going to the theatre and, when Don Pasquale objects, a quarrel erupts until he is silenced with a slap. This blow ends all Don Pasquale's hopes for a happy marriage. Norina is secretly regretful, but knows that all this must happen if she is to finally marry Ernesto. Leaving for the theatre, she carefully drops a letter where Don Pasquale can find it. The note tells of a secret liaison between Sofronia and a lover at the theatre that night. Don Pasquale, upon reading the letter, sends for Malatesta.

The servants enter, exhausted, and discuss the happenings in the house, before realising that they have a chance to profit from the chaos. Malatesta arrives and Don Pasquale bitterly reveals how he plans to go to the theatre and trap the lovers. Malatesta suggests a softer resolution; they both agree and depart.

SCENE 2

Backstage at the Theatre

Ernesto serenades Norina from the wings of the stage. After the performance, Norina and Ernesto share a moment before they are surprised by Don Pasquale and Malatesta. Demanding satisfaction and a divorce, Don Pasquale is happy for Malatesta to intercede. After skilful manipulation, Ernesto and Norina are finally allowed to marry with Don Pasquale's full approval.



Baritone, Luigi LaBlache as Don Pasquale

WHY PASQUALE?

When *Don Pasquale* opened in Paris at the Comédie-Italienne on 3rd January 1843, Gaetano Donizetti had written over sixty operas and he was at the peak of his career. The theatre management had muttered during rehearsals that this one was sure to fail – that it was more suited to “tumbler” than the illustrious cast assembled, including Giulia Grisi as Norina and Luigi Lablache in the title role (this was Lablache's tenth Donizetti premiere, and his most celebrated; his son, Federico, also appeared as the Notary). In fact, no great confidence in the piece was held by anyone except Donizetti; the librettist, Giovanni Ruffini, disapproved so strongly of Donizetti's tampering with (re-shaping, not shy of re-writing) his work that he withheld his name, supplying only the pseudonymous initials M.A.

From its first performance, *Don Pasquale* was a tremendous success, rivalled in that theatre only by Bellini's *I Puritani*. Within weeks it was staged with equal success at La Scala, Milan, followed in the same season by productions in Turin, Naples, Vienna, and London; within three years it was playing all over the world, in very many different languages from English to Lithuanian, Finnish to Bulgarian.

Donizetti himself was modest and straightforward about his achievement. To a former pupil he wrote:

“Yesterday evening I gave Don Pasquale. The result was of the happiest... I am content. Not a piece from the sinfonia on, but was applauded more or less.”

To a friend in his home town of Bergamo he described the great fuss in the newspapers:

“I myself am stupefied, but that's the way it is: sixteen thousand francs in eleven days! A stroke of fortune. Voilà tout! Un impudence...”

Donizetti was not shy of addressing the relation between money and his work. Of course, what he referred to was not his



ETO's production of *Mary, Queen of Scots*, Spring 2005

fee for writing and directing *Don Pasquale* (a generous but not extraordinary amount for a work dedicated, after all, to the wife of his Paris banker), but the theatre's takings, always a matter of great concern to him. Donizetti was a consummate professional, and a zealous man of the theatre (neither of those things considered at odds with being an artist in those healthy times for opera). He directed his own operas, and took care with every stage of their preparation and production, schedule permitting. He worked, it seems, fantastically hard, distancing himself from the poverty of his childhood – though not from his family and friends, who shared in his prosperity.

I admit that I once foolishly imagined his accomplishments too easily won – at the same time as I mistrusted his appealing melodies and the sure and steady pacing of the operas. It's as if I thought that an opera

like *Don Pasquale* 'worked' too well to be really good, that the numbers were complete in a way that did not make them need to be part of an opera to really score. If he wrote so many operas, so swiftly, how could they be good? Surely a composer who was so generous to other composers (some of them competing for the same posts and honours he coveted), so ready to acknowledge qualities in their work different to his own, must have seen that his facility was itself a weakness. "Maestro Orgasmo" (the one critical jibe that really hurt Donizetti), indeed!

The truth is, of course, that difficulty is no superior to facility. Even though it was immediately successful, *Don Pasquale* is fairly well perfect, and it lasts – like, in their different ways, the dozen or so other operas of his I have come to know. I reckon it is also true that Donizetti was a sort of genius who

wanted to be well-off, and who worked like the very devil every day. I hope that English Touring Opera will perform many more of his operas (we have already had some of our strongest work with his *Maria Stuarda* and *Anna Bolena*, *L'elisir d'amore* and *La Fille du Régiment*), because we have a chance of doing them well. Personally, it makes my heart beat a bit faster to think we might get a chance to try *Roberto Devereux*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *L'assedio di Calais*, *Linda di Chamonix* or *La Favorite*. Which ones would you like?

JAMES CONWAY



Julia Riley in ETO's Production of *Anna Bolena* (Spring, 2008)



Fiona McAndrew in ETO's production of *The Daughter of the Regiment* (Spring, 1999)

DONIZETTI RAGS TO ROYAL APPOINTMENT

Gaetano
Donizetti



Born in a windowless cellar in a straggle of houses clinging to the hillside at Bergamo in 1797, a ragged child, Domenico Gaetano Maria Donizetti (Gaetano Donizetti as we know him) had the near-miraculous good fortune to be taken under the wing of Johann Simon Mayr, Maestro di Cappella of the Lombard city who educated, protected and sent him on for further musical training under the renowned Padre Stanislao Mattei at Bologna.

Dazzled by this transformation and at first inclined to devote himself to church music, the youthful Donizetti only tentatively embraced the stage. Perhaps unbelieving of his fate, he only slowly abandoned the lighter forms - the farces and semi-seria works which initiated his operatic career – but always flaunting quick-wits and ingenuity which drew attentive ears even in the age of Rossini. Based in Naples from 1822, between 1820 and 1830 he indefatigably attempted every type of opera on offer in the peninsula – sometimes with fleeting success [*Zoraida di Granata* (1822) and *La zingara* (1822)], sometimes with abject failure [*Chiara e Serafina* (1822) and *Alfredo il grande* (1823)], but always relentlessly professional and

fluent. Nothing was ever left to chance. In 1826 he tried his hand at tragedy for the first time [*Gabriella di Vergy* (staged in 1842 in Naples)]; from 1827 onwards he turned his hand to heroic neo-classical drama [*L'esule di Roma* (1828)] and film-script-like travelogue plots [*Otto mesi in due ore* (1827), *Il castello di Kenilworth* (1829) and *Emilia di Liverpool* (1824 revised in 1828)] capping the decade with gory romantic melodramma [*Il Paria* (1829) and *Imelda de' Lambertazzi* (1830)]. Successful comedy also co-existed throughout this long pilgrimage [*L'ajo nell'imbarazzo* (1824); *Le convenienze ed inconvenienze teatrali* (1827); and *Il giovedì grasso* (1829)] so that, unlike most of his rivals, he found himself with every style at his disposal for the rest of his life. To bring this whole phase to a climax, to mark the end of this evolution – sometimes light-hearted, often painful, always vivid – his momentous *Anna Bolena* of 1830 proved to be a catalyst, a matrix. Championed by the soprano Giuditta Pasta and Giovanni Rubini, the super-stars of the day, he burst beyond the Italian frontiers to shine on every major stage. Henceforth Donizetti took the operatic world by storm.

Expansive, good-natured and prodigal he was always at his desk, indifferent or unaware of the jealousies that surrounded him, he wrote two or three high-profile operas a year, together with cantatas, masses and motets, fulfilling every commission. In a flurry of contracts, of libretti, at the hub of all theatrical turmoil, he took on a teaching role at Naples Conservatoire in 1834-5 surrounding himself with pupils who remembered his warmth and generosity for the rest of their lives. Neapolitan enough to have written some of the most popular songs of the day he remained an outsider, a "foreigner" throughout his stay, an abrasive