

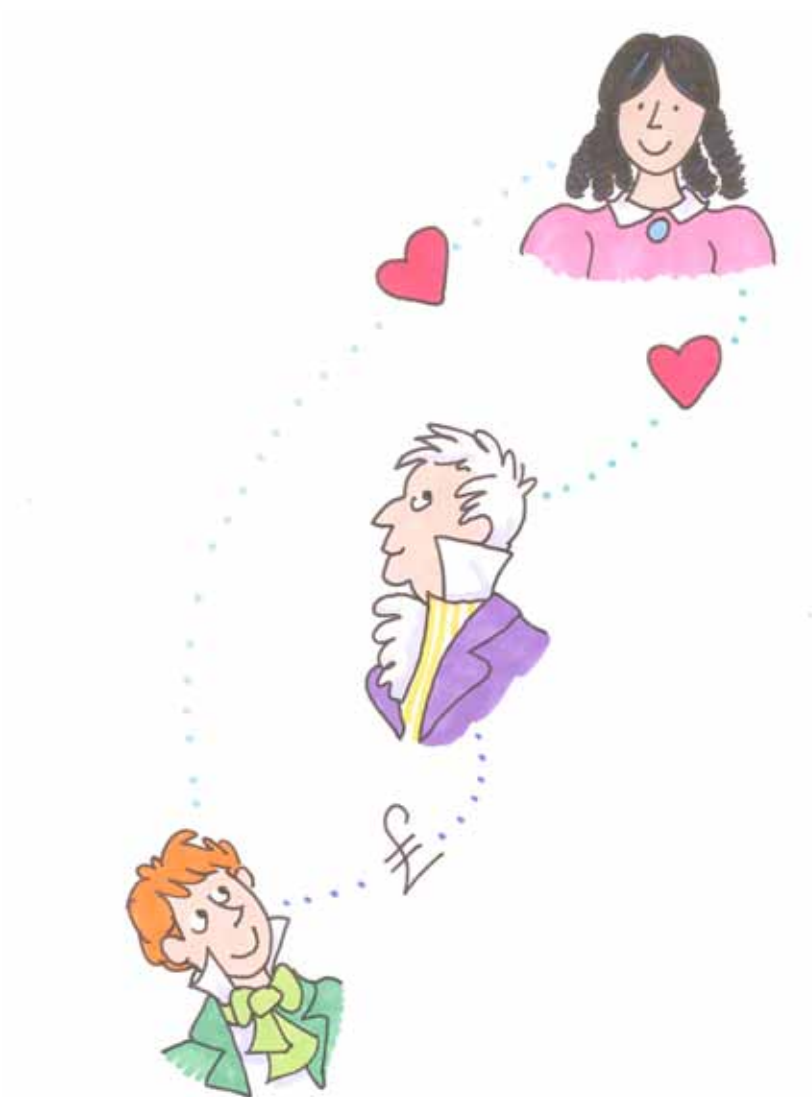


GLYNDEBOURNE

Don Pasquale

Teachers' resource pack

by Sarah Lenton



The Music

There are many excellent recordings of *Don Pasquale* available on the Internet: the EMI version conducted by Riccardo Muti is particularly good. Some sound bites are suggested below to give your class an idea of the voice types, the lead tunes, and what coloratura sounds like.

The four voices in *Don Pasquale* are easy to distinguish and place the cast neatly into their character slots. (The examples below come from the EMI set; but you'll find that the lead line of the aria can be easily located on other recordings or on websites such as YouTube).

Here is the tenor **Ernesto** being mournful
'Sogno soave e casto'
CD 1 track 8

Norina is an agile soprano, she can manage lots of notes (coloratura) and listening to her makes you realise that she's the sort of girl who can handle anything. (This is the tune that turns up in the overture.)
'So anch'io la virtu magica'
CD 1 track 12 (the first section)



Don Pasquale is the bass, grumbling sometimes (usually when his nephew is singing) or rubbing his hands in glee as he thinks about his young bride.

'Un foco insolito'
CD track 5

Pasquale goes through more changes of mood than anyone else in the opera and, in spite of the fact he's the 'villain' of the piece, his appearances, and songs, are eagerly anticipated by the audience.

Dr Malatesta is a dodgy character. He is really a bass singing in the baritone register and, for your students' purposes, he may as well be called a baritone. He certainly sounds as smooth as one. Here he is describing his 'sister' to Don Pasquale.

'Bella siccome un angelo'
CD 1 track 3

But Malatesta adapts himself to whatever person he is singing with and turns himself back, from baritone to bass, when he sings the great 'patter' duet with Pasquale.

Patter songs are used in all 19th comic opera, from Donizetti to Gilbert and Sullivan. They are sung at high speed and frequently encored (to get the singers to sing them even faster).

A good example of the speed Italian singers can manage is at the end of Act 2 as Pasquale erupts into fury.

'Son tradito, beffeggiato'
CD 2 track 9

One other soloist isn't a singer at all; it's the melancholy **trumpet player** who introduces Ernesto's scene *'Povero Ernesto!'*
CD 1 track 17

The Overture

The overture is only 6 minutes long and divides into obvious sections. You might find it helpful to go through it in the class room. (It will be CD 1 track 1 on all recordings of the piece).

The following is a rough guide to the way it develops, but your students may well feel that Ernesto and Norina's melodies tell us other things about them.

(If nothing else, you can instil in your class the idea that overtures are there to be listened to. The orchestra will thank you for it.)

The overture starts with a bang, to wake the audience up, and then goes quiet, to get them to listen. You're hearing one of Ernesto's love songs played on a solo 'cello. Cellos traditionally accompany lovers and you can tell at once that Ernesto is a melancholy soul, the sort of boy who puts his hands in his pockets and glooms.

The next tune is Norina's, much sparkier and sounding as if it could get faster, or louder, or go anywhere. The orchestra picks up her mood and races along until it hits a thunder storm.

After the storm everything quietens down, the band toss some tunes around – and Norina's tune comes back, full of energy and very cheerful. In fact it's her tune that finishes the overture and, listening to it, we realise that nothing will stop her getting her man by the end of the show.

The background to the story

Your class may find the plot disconcerting: particularly the trick the hero and heroine play on *Don Pasquale*. Placing the opera in its social context should help.

Cash

Italy in the early 19th century was cash hungry. Landlords and peasants dealt with each other in crops and fields and the (pre-industrial) towns offered hardly any jobs at all. Oddly enough one of the few places where you could get a wage packet was in the theatre, it's why so many bright young Italians ended up there.

Middle class Italians were particularly stuck: a few went into the professions – like Dr Malatesta – but many young men were simply brought up to inherit money. The protocol was that you behaved respectfully to your elderly relations, and they did the right thing by you in their will.

Ernesto vs. Pasquale

Ernesto and his uncle are on a collision course. Ernesto can't live without money and his uncle is thinking of getting married and disinheriting him. Pasquale's decision is based on his annoyance with Ernesto for daring to be independent. The young man has refused to marry the girl his uncle has chosen for him and fallen in love with somebody else.

Of course, as his heir, Ernesto should respect his uncle's wishes but, watching the quarrel develop, the original audience would have instantly sided with the boy. Don Pasquale is too old, and too fat, to get married (there were no worries about being PC in the 19th century) and nobody approved of elderly gentlemen who brought their nephews up to be heirs only to disinherit them at the last moment.

Added to which Don Pasquale is the bass in an opera buffa, he's there to be outwitted.

Opera Buffa

Opera buffa is the Italian name for comic opera. It is descended from the slapstick shows put on by the itinerant acting troupes who roamed Italy, the *Commedia dell'arte*.

The *Commedia* used the same plots over and over again. A young man is in love with a young woman and finds himself thwarted by an older man (her father, guardian or husband). Helped by a friend, or a rascally servant, the youngsters hurtle through a series of farcical adventures, in which they outwit the old man and end up happily united at the end of the show.

The comedies were fast paced, brilliant and (normally) heartless. Nobody cared about anyone's feelings except, sometimes, in comic operas by Rossini or Donizetti.

In *Don Pasquale*, Donizetti allows us a moment of genuine feeling when Pasquale is slapped by Norina in Act II: the old man is shattered and even Norina feels sorry for him, for a moment. But the next minute she has dismissed the incident ('it's a hard lesson' she says, 'but it has to be learnt') and Don Pasquale – like a true comic bass – soon bounces back.

Virgins and widows

Norina is described as a young widow – a plot device to give her freedom of action. Unmarried girls (all virgins of course) were practically invisible in 19th century Italy, and in opera they've either got a minder or are stuck indoors. (Lower class women, like maidservants or gypsies, are much freer, though they run into more danger.)

As a widow Norina is independent, she can look after herself and go where she wants. She can even pretend to get married.

The Game

As part of this pack you can find two versions of the *Don Pasquale* 'snakes and ladders' game. You can play it either conventionally on a table, or a more energetic version of the game by arranging a grid of floor mats in the room (or numbered double sheets of newspaper) and attaching some rewards and penalty text on them as shown in the template.






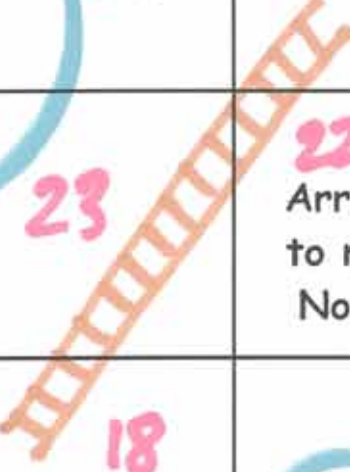










Make an enormous dice out of a stout square box (covering it in stiff white paper with the dots marked on) or buy a bouncy one from a party shop or on line.

The children either hop from square to square on the roll of the dice or, if there are too many, split them into a couple of teams. One representative of each team does the hopping, while his or her teammates take turns to throw the dice.

The first to land on the Norina square wins.

Game Counters



 <p>Norina!</p>	<p>34</p> 	<p>Uncle catches us</p>	<p>32</p> 	<p>Buy one way ticket to Europe</p> <p>31</p>
<p>Norina is un-faithful!</p> <p>26</p>	<p>27</p>  <p>Malatesta explains everything</p>	<p>28</p>	<p>29</p> 	<p>30</p>
<p>25</p>	<p>24</p>	<p>23</p> 	<p>22</p> <p>Arrange to meet Norina</p> 	<p>21</p> <p>Uncle wants to get married</p>
<p>16</p>	<p>17</p>	<p>18</p> <p>Malatesta has a Plan</p> 	<p>19</p> 	<p>20</p>
<p>15</p> <p>Uncle throws me out</p>	<p>14</p> 	<p>13</p>	<p>Uncle and I quarrel</p> <p>12</p> 	<p>11</p>
<p>6</p>	<p>7</p> 	<p>8</p> 	<p>9</p>	<p>10</p> <p>Tenors always win</p>
<p>5</p>	<p>4</p> <p>I'm Uncle's heir</p> 	<p>3</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Norina loves me</p> 	<p>Start</p> <p>1</p> 

Norina!



16

Uncle catches
us 15
go back 4



Uncle decides
to marry 8
go back 5

7

Uncle throws
me out 6
go back 3



Uncle and I
quarrel 5
go back 2

I'm Uncle's
heir 4
go forward 5

3



9

Malatesta
has a plan
go forward 10



Norina meets
me in garden
go forward 2 14

Malatesta
explains all
go forward 3 13

Norina 12
marries Uncle!
go back 5

11

Start 1



Norina loves
me 2
go forward 1

Things to talk about

1 What makes *Don Pasquale* funny?

(The plot, any jokes the cast come up with, the way the singers perform the show – they probably won't be any actual one-liners in the surtitles to make you laugh – the music itself, especially when it speeds up or the high notes go bananas.)

2 Do we like the hero and heroine?

(Suggest that, however the discussion goes, the kids should reserve judgement until after the show.)

It's astonishing how the plot comes to life on the stage: they'll probably discover that Norina is much kinder than she appears on the page, Ernesto is not as wet as he seems, Dr Malatesta is a nice guy really and Don Pasquale turns the opera into a comedy every time he enters.

Staging *Don Pasquale*

What sort of props and costumes would you need to put on a production of *Don Pasquale*? Using the 'Prop Box' illustrations provided, split the kids into groups and give them a scene each. Encourage them to draw the characters and any extra props they think would be useful.

See 'prop box' images page 9

Essential items would be:

- A watch for Don Pasquale to check the time
- A book for Norina
- A veil for 'Sofronia'
- A wedding contract and a couple of pens
- Loads of hat boxes, large carrier bags apparently full of frocks, and anything else you think Sofronia may have been buying. Jewels perhaps, or a pet dog
- A letter for Sofronia to drop
- A bush for Don Pasquale and Malatesta to hide behind
- Another wedding contract, more pens

If the kids get stuck, suggest the following extras:

How do we know Don Pasquale is vain – would he have a large mirror?

Or be always arranging his hair?

How are you going to make him fat?

How do we know he's wealthy?

Does he wear jewellery, and does he pull out wads of money?

Do we ever see the famous will?

Does Malatesta have to look like a doctor?

How would you do that?

Norina is described in the cast list as a young widow – how do we make her look like one?

(A wedding ring at the very least)

Will she change when she become Sofronia?

And will she have changed again by the beginning of Act 3?

How about a shopping list?

What sort of clothes do you think a modern Ernesto would wear?

How are you going to make it obvious that we've moved from Pasquale's house to Norina's?

And *how* do you do a garden by moonlight?

Prop Box – do you need any of these?



How to survive an opera

Before the show

Read the story



Work out how long the opera is



Gag your mobile



During the show

Listen to the music...



Kill your cough



Shut your friends up



At the end of the opera...



...make as much noise as you like!