

## DON PASQUALE – AN OPERA BY GAETANO DONIZETTI

Presented by George Kurti Plohn



Anna Netrebko and Mariusz Kwiecien in Don Pasquale

Along with Gioachino Rossini and Vincenzo Bellini, Donizetti was a leading composer of the *bel canto* opera style, meaning beauty and evenness of tone, *legato* phrasing, meaning that the singer transits from note to note with no intervening silence, and skill in executing highly florid passages, prevalent during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Donizetti was born in 1797, six years after the death of Mozart, and died in 1848, at only 51 years of age.

Composed in 1843, five years before his death, this was Donizetti's last opera. It stands at the twilight of the graceful, uncluttered melodic lyricism of the Italian *bel canto* era that would soon give way to the heavier dramatic touches of Verdi. Of Donizetti's three comic operas, *L'Elisir d'Amore* (The Elixir of Love), *La Fille du Regiment* (The Daughter of Regiment) and *Don Pasquale*, the latter is widely regarded as his best effort in this comic genre.

*Don Pasquale* is an opera buffa, or comic opera, in three acts, and it is one of the most popular of his operas.

Pasquale, the well-to-do elderly bachelor in this delightful opera, never has a fighting chance against the conspirators bent on teaching him a lesson (and a costly one at

that) — spearheaded by a young widow who is arguably every lustful old man's worst nightmare: Norina. Norina is a role every soprano is eager to perform. Beyond the shapely bel canto arias, cavatinas, meaning short songs of simple character, and great ensemble gems (particularly the amusing duets), you'll see her getting married to a rich man, shopping 'till you drop, prancing around the house while throwing hissy fits — and slapping her husband in the face. And our exceptional singer in this role, Anna Netrebko looks like she is relishing the part.

Don Pasquale is the age-old zany tale of the old man who wants a young wife. He is a wealthy and tightfisted man. The hoary, rich character chasing the ingénue has been a staple comic figure since the ancient Greek comedies.

Don Pasquale's nephew and heir Ernesto has refused to marry the woman his uncle selected for him because he is in love with a young widow. To punish Ernesto for his disobedience, Don Pasquale decides to take a bride himself and disinherit him. He consults Dr. Malatesta (the word means "headache" in Italian), a light-hearted, astute counselor of the rich merchant, who thwarts the plans of his master in favor of his own interests. His sister is the young widow Norina and the object of Ernesto's affection. Malatesta plots to introduce her to Don Pasquale as a young virgin direct from the convent as a prospective wife. His scheme is for her to access the Don's wealth and secure her madly in love Ernesto's (and her own and probably brother Malatesta's) future. She pretends to be demure at first, but immediately after the fake marriage ceremony performed by a fake notary, Norina morphs into a shrew and a spendthrift woman. With her luscious voice, beauty and comic abandon, she feeds us a real banquet. Don Pasquale tries to tame her, but to no avail, and finally relents to a settlement to get rid of her, this burdensome creature. But then, at the very end, all reappear revealing their true identity and their real story in an atmosphere of prevailing good humor, and Don Pasquale forgives them all and gives his blessing to the young lovers' marriage.

No one knows whether W.C. Fields was thinking of *Don Pasquale* when he delivered the phrase, "never give a sucker an even break." But when it comes to the plot of Donizetti's farce, the celebrated American comedian was right on target.

This recording is a live HD transmission in 2010 from the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

Our cast includes the famous soprano Anna Netrebko in the role of Norina, baritone Mariusz Kwiecien in the role of Dr. Malatesta, and the American bass-baritone John del Carlo in the title role (that of Don Pasquale). I would like to mention here that Mr. del Carlo passed away in October of last year – after having sung 285

performances at the Metropolitan Opera over the past 23 years. He was only 65 years old. In the role of Ernesto, the nephew of Don Pasquale is the tenor Matthew Polenzani, while in the fake Notary's role is the Canadian tenor Bernard Fitch. The Metropolitan Opera and Chorus is under the baton of James Levine, its famous Music Director Emeritus.

This DVD disk starts with a short introduction by the American mezzo-soprano Susan Graham. Between the last two acts there will be a short backstage interview with our singers – always a very touching addition to the performance.

Duration of this opera is 2:20.

Don Pasquale: Anna Netrebko, Mariusz Kwiecien, & John Del Carlo  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jafe4AmIvBU>