

Characters

Don Perlimplín, an old wealthy, bookish gentleman	Baritone
Marcolfa, his old housekeeper	Mezzo-Soprano
Belisa, a beautiful young girl	Soprano
Mother of Belisa, an eccentric widow	Soprano
Chorus	Soprano, Alto, two Tenors, two Baritones
Dancers	Five men and a girl, or a man and a girl
Whistlers	Five persons to whistle loudly backstage on cue

Instrumentation (Minimum 24 Players)

Flute (Piccolo)

Oboe (English Horn)

2 Clarinets (#2 Bass Clarinet, Alto Saxophone)

Bassoon (Contrabassoon)

Horn

Trumpet (Flugelhorn)

Trombone

Percussion (3 players)

Bass Drum, Bell Tree, Chimes, Claves, Crash Cymbals (Medium), Finger Cymbals, Glockenspiel, Gong, Hi-hat Cymbal, Maracas, Mark Tree, Snare Drum, 3 Suspended Cymbals (bass bow required), 2 Tambourines (1 mounted and 1 larger, handheld), Splash Cymbal, Tam-tam, Triangle, Vibraslap, Xylophone, Vibraphone, Whistles, Wind Chimes (Glass and Bamboo), 3 Wood Blocks.

Timpani

2 Keyboard players (Harpsichord, Electric Piano, Piano, Celesta, off-stage Piano)

Mandolin (cues in Violin I part)

Harp

Strings (minimum 3-2-2-2-1)

The full score and parts are available on rental from the publisher.

Duration: 1 hour, 10 minutes

Text Copyright Notice

“The Love of Don Perlimplín,” opera in one act, with libretto adapted by Conrad Susa and Richard Street from “Five Plays” by Federico García Lorca, translated by James Graham-Lujan and Richard O’Donnell. Copyright 1941 by Charles Scribner’s Sons. Copyright 1963 by New Directions Publishing Corporation. Used by permission of New Directions Publishing Corporation and the Estate of Federico García Lorca. All rights reserved.

Synopsis

Don Perlimplín, a wealthy, bookish old bachelor, is persuaded by his housekeeper to take a wife. The matching of old age to a young, lusty wife is disastrous, and Perlimplín realizes that Belisa will take lovers. The thought fills him with despair, but at the same time his marriage has allowed him to experience love and has taught him to use his imagination. He devises a plan by which, disguised as a young man in a red cape, he woos and wins Belisa. Honor, however, demands that the husband kill the wife's lover. Since in this case they are one and the same person, Perlimplín makes a love sacrifice and kills himself. Belisa, who has truly experienced love for the first time, is transformed from a wanton, thoughtless girl into a woman capable of loving someone other than herself. Through this tragic act he gives her real life. Theirs is now a perfect union: Perlimplín reaches the only plateau he could have inhabited once his love for Belisa was enkindled, and she attains a stature she could never have reached alone.

Scene One: The Study of Don Perlimplín

Scene Two: The Room of Don Perlimplín

Scene Three: The Study of Don Perlimplín

Scene Four: The Garden with Cypresses, Orange Trees, and Jasmine

Program Notes

The Love of Don Perlimplín is a one-act opera which received its world premiere at the State University of New York at Purchase, as part of the Pepsico Summerfare '84. It takes its text from a play of the same name by Federico García Lorca, who described it as an "erotic lace-paper valentine." Mr. Susa, in collaboration with Richard Street, adapted his own libretto from Lorca's play, and has attempted to retain its delicate balance of comedy and tragedy, eroticism and propriety. The instrumentation calls for an unusual grouping of instruments, including the harpsichord, which gives the sound a bright neo-classical patina.

A Memoir by Conrad Susa

Lorca's play came to my attention in the early 1960s. Brooks Jones, a brilliant young producer-director I had met at Princeton while I was in residence there composing for a theatre company, wanted me to write songs for the production he was doing at the Cincinnati Playhouse-in-the-Park. The following year he revised the show and wanted new songs and some incidental music. By this time, I had heard Lorca singing his own songs (on 78 rpm records) and had read his other writings. The greatness of the plays was obvious, but his intense writing was almost too much for me to bear—perhaps because I am not Spanish. Brooks and I mentioned all of this again when he came to San Francisco twenty years later to discuss a co-commission with the San Francisco Opera and Pepsico Summerfare. This wonderful opportunity dissolved my resistance: I would be given first-rate musicians, ideal circumstances and a wonderful subject.

I quickly saw that Lorca's play was too tight to work with as an opera, and I was delighted to read that Lorca had intended to expand it. So I arranged for my actor and director friends at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco to help me find the style of the play. We worked on it for three days, and then I asked the actors where the play seemed too tight. Almost everybody noticed that a scene was missing in which Marcolfa and the mother set up the plot. I hoped that an inserted trio (the Don, Marcolfa, the Mother) could solve that problem.

I decided that the opera would be in English, but the songs, which are of exceptional beauty, would always be heard in the original Spanish first, followed by a translation. The only exception is the centerpiece, a large tango. This is drawn from Lorca's Gypsy Ballads and is sung in English. This choral episode replaces a scene where two street kids (*duende, incarnations of Dionysios*) instruct the audience on the fine points of Spanish honor, as I saw no way of setting his scene. Now, at the core of the work we have a song of successful love-making—the opposite of what is happening in the Don's bedroom.

For more advice I turned to Joaquin Nin Culmell, a brother of Anaïs Nin and a friend of my friend from the New York days, Jean-Pierre Marty, a brilliant pianist specializing in Mozart and Chopin. Maestro Culmell made us a splendid lunch at his home in the Berkeley hills and told stories of Falla and Dali and Lorca. One story he told goes something like this:

Wanting to produce his new play, Don Perlimplín, for a kind of bus-and-truck tour, Lorca invited Falla and Dali to a working lunch. They ate and talked and finally time came to hear Lorca read his new play. So Lorca began: "No, sí. No, sí, no, sí..." and Dali suddenly stood up, banged his cane on the table and said: "My dear, this is a piece of sh--!" and stormed out. Falla and Lorca were too amazed to say very much more.

So the collaboration never took place. Funny, odd story! Culmell then turned to me and asked, “And what have you changed in the play? Anything at all?” I said, “Yes, as a matter of fact...” at which point he slapped his hand on the table and said, “Good, then it has less chance of being a disaster.” That ended his advice.

I went to work and finished it about four months later. At times, however, I was afraid I would collapse from pressure and fatigue and the toxic plot. There is a horrible end to the Lorca story. In his original version, the Don was a retired army general. When that version was produced a sharp reprimand to Lorca was received, which basically said that an impotent army officer was a slander, was incorrect, was a lie, verged on treason, and was impossible. Lorca changed the play to what it is now, but I believe it had only one showing before it was withdrawn. The general did not forget what he took to be a personal insult and arrested Lorca. Falla, hearing of Lorca’s arrest, went down to the police station to try to save his friend, but he was too late—Lorca had already been shot. New charges of homosexuality had been aired. Falla, fearing for his own life, went to Argentina a short time later.

Further Notes by Conrad Susa

Lorca’s play, originally entitled *Amor de Don Perlimplín con Belisa en su jardín* (The Love of Don Perlimplín and Belisa in the Garden) was completed in 1931 and first produced in Madrid in April 1933. It carries the subtitle “an erotic lace-paper valentine,” which the translators James Graham-Lujan and Richard O’Connell considered a contemporary equivalent to Lorca’s term “Aleluya.” Aleluyas were eighteenth-century colored sheets which contained brief stories in caricature and poetry. Lorca wrote, “*The Love of Don Perlimplín* is the sketch for a longer drama. I have placed in it only the precise words needed to draw the characters. I call it a ‘chamber version’ because I intend later on to develop the theme more fully in all its complexity.” Lorca did not live to carry out his intention, as he was murdered on August 19, 1936, by Nationalist zealots during the Civil War in Spain.

The “theme” to which Lorca refers is really a constellation of themes clustering around the concept of Honor, a traditional code based on law, superstition and religion, which orders a strict interpretation of Spanish life. In Lorca’s theater, Fate supersedes all action. Honor is a tool, the means through which Fate controls Man, as in the following scheme:

	HONOR	
Name	Tradition	Law
	TIME	
	FRUSTRATION	
Love	Instinct	Sex
	DEATH	

In this scheme, Time provides the stimulus to plot, dissolving illusions that usually maintain human actions on a predictable level. Once Hope is eliminated by Time, the mind becomes frenzied with despair. This frustration leads to Death by violence. In some cases it leads to Death of the Soul by seclusion from life. These themes are treated by Lorca in a lyrical manner which integrates the comic and tragic elements into a farcical framework. Beneath Lorca’s characters we can sense the *commedia dell’arte* archetypes upon which they were based. Furthermore, by setting his story in the eighteenth century and treating it as a puppet play, Lorca is able to invest it with fantasy, avoid the complexities of realistic motivations, and present the whole as a kind of entertaining greeting card.

In the course of assembling this work I came upon two quotations by Joaquín Rodrigo which helped crystalize my attitude toward its style and orchestration. The first, on his own music: “...(it) wants to be as nimble as a butterfly, and as controlled as a bullfighters *veronica*.” The other, on the ideal Spanish guitar: “...a strange, fantastic, multiform instrument, with the wings of a harp, the tail of a piano, and the soul of a guitar.”

These descriptions also suited my notion of Don Perlimplín’s favorite composer, Domenico Scarlatti, two of whose harpsichord sonatas (K. 513, and K20) are alluded to in the work, especially at the moments when we see the workings of the Don’s controlled yet fantastical inner life.

—Conrad Susa

The Love of Don Perlimplín
Opera in One Act

Scenes

I.	Entrada (Chorus).....	1
Scene One: Don Perlimplín's Study		
II.	Pantomime.....	2
III.	Duet.....	20
IV.	Aria.....	23
V.	Narrative.....	29
VI.	Recitative and Trio.....	30
VII.	Quartet.....	41
VIII.	Duet.....	46
IX.	Recitative and Bolero.....	48
X.	Recitative and Scene.....	48
XI.	Recitative and Trio.....	58
XII.	Recitative and Trio.....	68
XIII.	Scene Change: Wedding Day Celebrations.....	75
Scene Two: Don Perlimplín's Bedroom		
XIV.	Recitative.....	79
XV.	Pantomime and Aria.....	80
XVI.	Serenata.....	84
XVII.	Recitative and Scene.....	88
XVIII.	Interlude (Chorus).....	98
XIX.	Ballad and Dance (Tango) (Chorus).....	99
XX.	Transition.....	134
XXI.	Recitative and Scene.....	135
XXII.	Transition and Aria.....	144
XXIII.	Scene Change: Don Perlimplín forms his plan.....	147
Scene Three: The Study		
XXIV.	Recitative and Scene.....	150
XXV.	Recitative and Duet.....	160
XXVI.	Recitative and Scene.....	165
XXVII.	Aria.....	166
XXVIII.	Scene change:.....	169
Transition into the Garden of Don Perlimplín		
Scene Four: The Garden		
XXIX.	Melodrama.....	171
XXX.	Serenata (Octet).....	172
XXXI.	Recitative and Pantomime.....	195
XXXII.	Arietta.....	197
XXXIII.	Recitative and Scene.....	198
XXXIV.	Duet and Scene.....	204
XXXV.	Recitative and Scene.....	209
XXXVI.	Aria and Scene.....	211
XXXVII.	Finale (Lament).....	218

Producers and Cast of the Original 1984 Production

CONDUCTOR.....Andrew Meltzer
STAGE DIRECTOR.....David Alden
ASSISTANT STAGE DIRECTOR.....Jonathan Field
CHOREOGRAPHER.....Marleen Pennison
SETTINGS.....Douglas W. Schmidt
COSTUMES.....Patricia Zipprodt
LIGHTING.....John McLain
Don Perlimplín.....David Malis
Marcolfa.....Dolora Zajic
Belisa.....Ruth Ann Swenson
Belisa's Mother.....Nancy Gustafson
ORCHESTRA.....The New Orchestra of Westchester
CHORUS.....Francine Lancaster, Soprano;
Kate Rowland, Mezzo-Soprano;
David O'Dell, Tenor;
Timothy Driesel, Tenor;
David Burakus, Baritone;
Nicholas Netos, Bass
DANCERS.....Marleen Pennison, Peter Bass, Thomas Wilkinson

The Love of Don Perlimplín

PRE-SCENE: The Entrada accompanies the entrance of the Chorus. After a promenade they sit, three on each side, on benches placed at the sides of the stage.

SCENE ONE: Eighteenth-century Spain. The house of Don Perlimplín. His study, a cartoon-like setting, largely two-dimensional, suggests a puppet play. At the rear a deep window through which Belisa's balcony may be seen.

Pantomime music: DON PERLIMPLÍN is seated at his desk, immersed in his books. He wears a green cassock and a white wig full of curls. MARCOLFA, one servant, wears the classic striped dress. She chatters (silently) as she dusts and carries books. Don Perlimplín has heard it all before and pays little attention to her, or at least he tries to.