

THE PROPOSAL

An Outrageous Operatic Comedy in One Act

Music by Ross Fiddes

Libretto by David Goddard

after Chekhov

Musically, this work seeks to suggest, if not parody, a Russian ambience. Obvious parodies will be noted, including one which is now somewhat dated.

There was an original intent to provide a companion piece to *The Bear* by Walton, but to be quite different from that work both musically and in effect. *The Proposal* is not through-composed, it does not build on speech patterns, and it is overtly farcical – there is nothing subtle or hidden, and definitely nothing approaching the many “hidden” operatic/musical quotes of the Walton. The Fiddes/Goddard work builds on set pieces – arias, duets, trios with some recitative and even dialogue. There is a use of formal devices such as motif, rondo form, a chaconne which builds from canon and so forth.

The work was first presented in 1986 in a workshop performance by the (then) The Australian Opera, and has since been staged by a further 3 production companies. Some distinguished performers have appeared in or have been involved in the various stagings including Gregory Yurisich, Peta Blyth, Christopher Dawes, Michael Saunders, Jennifer Barnes and Antony Walker.

Synopsis

An opening duet introduces Lomov calling on his neighbour Chubukov. The observation of 19th century manners enables Lomov, an hypochondriac and of nervous disposition, to delay, albeit unwittingly, Chubukov discovering the reason for the visit. Some prodding by Chubukov finally elicits the information that Lomov wants to marry Chubukov's daughter, Natalya.

Chubukov is overjoyed at the prospect, and we can only surmise as to the reasons. He leaves to find Natalya. Lomov, in an extended soliloquy, firstly endeavours to confirm his need to marry, but then launches into a catalogue of his supposed disorders.

Confronted with Natalya, Lomov again unintentionally evades the issue, with dire consequences - an altercation concerning land rights. The argument rolls on through a duet, then emboiling the father in consecutive trios each more frenzied than the other, at the end of the second of which Lomov is unceremoniously ejected from the house.

In the ensuing duet between father and daughter, she discovers, to her immense disappointment, the reason for Lomov's visit. After much wailing & gnashing of teeth, Chubukov is despatched to reclaim the lost suitor.

In their absence, Natalya has an opportunity to reflect on the birds - not, and the bees, but, in the trees.

Lomov returns. Despite encouragement from Natalya he again procrastinates, leading to another argument about the merits of their respective dogs. Chubukov is again embroiled, and Lomov's "illnesses" result in a deathly vapour. A resurrection, nearly worthy of Lazarus, creates a moment of calm, astonishing affection and goodwill, but Chubukov, tired of it all, proposes and accepts for both parties. As the dog argument is reborn, Chubukov brings forth celebratory champagne, hopefully forestalling any further possible estrangement.