

PETER COWDREY
Composer (born 30th June 1963)

Librettist: Hamish Robinson (born 10th May 1964)

PACIENCIA y BARAJAR (Patience and shuffle the cards), or *A SHERRY TRIFLE*

Opera in one act set in a bodega in Jerez.

Visit www.operaunlimited.org.uk to listen to four short audio tasters on soundcloud, and to read reviews in *Decanter* magazine and elsewhere of Cowdrey and Robinson's *The Lovely Ladies*, a drama in which wines come to life in an auction warehouse, loosely based on the wine diaries of Michael Broadbent. *The Lovely Ladies* was performed to critical acclaim at Christies in St James's, London and at the Buxton Opera Festival.

Cast/instrumentation (each singer/dancer is paired onstage with an instrument):

Paco. (a widowed barrel-maker)..... Baritone/Double Bass
Paquita (his older daughter)..... Soprano/Flute
Pilar (his younger daughter).....Soprano/Clarinet
Edmund (a young Scotsman apprenticed at the Bodega).....Tenor/Violin
Don Luis (head of the bodega).....Bass-Baritone/Cello
Esperanza (a secretary).....Mezzosoprano/Cor Anglais
Pepe (foreman at the Bodega)Dancer/Guitar

Place: A sherry bodega in Jerez

Time: The present Running Time: 53 minutes.

A lone guitarist starts to play. Two barrels seem to start talking to each other: young lovers, Paquita, a native, and Edmund, an apprentice from Scotland, are hiding from her father, Paco, the master barrel-maker, and her predatory younger sister, Pilar. They quarrel and part. When discovered by Paco, Edmund pretends to be admiring the barrels. Paco complains of his wayward daughters and seems to be threatening them with a beating. Edmund, relieved to have escaped detection, is then surprised by Pilar, who has been listening in on the whole scene. She entices Edmund, but hides as Don Luis, the owner of the Bodega, enters. He reminds Edmund of the serious nature of their enterprise: "a bodega is not a bordello". A furious Paquita returns and attacks Edmund for talking to Pilar. Pilar reappears, and the sisters begin to fight. Enter a horrified Paco, who separates them.

The clock strikes twelve: Don Luis invites the company to taste sherry as part of Edmund's induction. Enter two strange figures: Pepe, the silent foreman, who comes to draw the sherry with the requisite skill, and Esperanza, a beautiful woman who has applied for the post of Don Luis' new secretary. Don Luis is aroused by Esperanza and decides that she too will be part of the tasting. He is surprised to discover that Pepe and Esperanza are already acquainted. The tasting begins. Edmund tastes a fino sherry, Paco an amontillado, Don Luis an oloroso – but the wine has strange cathartic effect on each and they sing revealingly of their concerns. Don Luis, now eager to be alone with Esperanza, sends them back to work. He insinuates to Esperanza that their work together might lead to intimacy. However Esperanza tells him firmly that she will be a secretary and nothing more. Don Luis, impressed by her character, offers her the job none the less.

The others return, and Pepe is called upon to serve more sherry. Esperanza and Pepe – hope and wine – lead a celebratory dance, and the company sings their praises, as now each has resolved their problems. Edmund will be faithful to Paquita. Moreover it turns out that Paco and Esperanza are drawn to each other: Paco has found a wife and a mother for his daughters. Don Luis has at least found

a capable secretary. All exit in high spirits, leaving only the guitarist on stage. In a coda, Pilar, observes that she alone has been left out of this happy resolution, but she considers this a mark of her superior nature, likening herself to a palo cortado, a mysterious hybrid sherry that is neither amontillado nor oloroso, but more coveted than either. The voice of Don Luis is heard calling her to his office. She leaves the stage with a knowing laugh.