

## LA RONDINE

Libretto: Giuseppe Adami

(translated and adapted from a German libretto by: Alfred M. Willner, Heinz Reichert)

Music: Giacomo Puccini

First Performance: Théâtre du Casino, Monte Carlo, 27 March 1917

Gilda dalla Rizza (Magda); Ines Ferraris (Rambaldo); Tito Schipa (Ruggero);  
Dominici (Prunier); Huberdeau (Lisette); conducted by Gino Marinuzzi

Cast:

**Magda**, soprano

**Ruggero**, tenor

**Lisette**, *maid to Magda*, soprano

**Prunier**, *a poet*, tenor

**Rambaldo Fernandez**, *Magda's lover*, baritone

Friends of Magda, guests in her Salon:

**Yvette**, **Bianca**, sopranos; **Suzy**, mezzo-soprano

**Georgette**, **Gabriella**, **Lolette**, *grisettes*

Friends of Rambaldo, guests in Magda's Salon:

**Gobin**, tenor; **Périchaud**, **Crébillon**, basses or baritones

**Rabonnier**, bass

**Majordomo**, bass

**Solo Soprano**

**Young Man**, tenor

**Solo Tenor**

**Chorus of students** (SATTBB)

**ACT I - A salon in a Parisian house. Circa 1860.**

**Rambaldo** Fernandez is entertaining friends in the salon of his mistress, **Magda**.

The center of attention, however, is the poet, **Prunier**. He regales the crowd of young men and women with his gossip and opinions. "Love reigns again in Paris," declares Prunier.

**Lisette**, Magda's maid, scoffs at Prunier's thoughts of *sentimental* love: "We live in a hurry: 'Do you want me?' 'I want you.' That's all!" Prunier is disgusted by her thoughts and behavior. Lisette gets on with her work, as Prunier continues his discussion of Love with Magda, **Yvette**, **Suzy** and **Bianca**. "Romance is all the rage, love-lorn glances, furtive hand-holding, kisses, sighs - but nothing more!" Magda's three friends exaggerate their reactions to such thoughts,

but Magda tells them they should not joke. "Does the latest fad interest you?" asks Prunier. Magda is noncommittal.

Prunier calls the 'latest fad' a malady, an epidemic of madness, effecting the feminine population. "It takes you by surprise." "No one is immune?" ask the ladies. "No one," answers Prunier, "not even Doretta."

The ladies have never heard of this 'Doretta.' She is Prunier's latest heroine - a charming child struck down by this disease of romanticism. He has immortalized her in song. Hearing that Prunier has composed a new song, the ladies clamor to hear it. He is reluctant, but Magda insists. Calling the entire company to attention, Magda ushers Prunier to the piano. Upon hearing that the theme of this new song is 'Love,' Rambaldo comments, "That theme is hackneyed!" But Magda persists; they shall hear the song.

Prunier, playing the piano, introduces his song (*Chi il bel sogno di Doretta*). He tells the tale of a young woman who has a dream, in which a king asks a maid to trust in him, promising all his riches to her. The king is evidently struck by the young girl's beauty. The king begs her not to tremble from fear, not to cry. But she does not weep: she elects to remain as she is, for no gold can purchase happiness.

Prunier ceases playing. "Why don't you go on?" asks Magda, who had been enjoying the song. But Prunier cannot go on - there is no ending, he does not know how to finish it.

"That is easy." Magda joins him at the piano. "The conquest tempts me." She takes up his song, with words of her own (*Chi il bel sogno di Doretta*). Her ending is simple: a young student one day kisses Doretta so passionately that she now knows what passion is.

Magda is so taken with her theme, that the assembled crowd is quite moved. Magda calls her vision of Doretta's dream a golden dream: "Oh to love so...."

Prunier is impressed, and all her friends express their adoration of her exquisite poetry. Even Rambaldo, the practical man, is moved. Prunier thinks this proves his point: in every man's breast lurks the romantic. Rambaldo is not pleased with this remark, declaring himself armed with holy water against this devil.

Rambaldo makes a presentation to Magda of a beautiful necklace. Magda is surprised, and tells him that she steadfastly holds to her opinion that, as in Prunier's song, love and happiness cannot be bought. However, she accepts the gift, causing Prunier to comment that *his* Doretta would never have done so.

Lisette comes in, announcing the arrival of a young man who had called earlier, but had not been admitted. The young man has come to see Rambaldo. Rambaldo asks Magda's permission to see this man - the son of a childhood friend. She tells him, "You are in your own home."

Lisette, who had been dramatically expressing the comings and goings of the young man, has once again annoyed Prunier. He remarks to Magda, that she should get rid of such a maid. But Magda says that Lisette brings a little sunshine into her life. This surprises Magda's friends, who all comment that she has an enviable life, especially with one so generous as Rambaldo.

"What's the use of a fortune?" says Magda. She asks her friends if they have never dreamed of being a grisette, one so happy with her lover?

Magda mentions, in support of her argument, a time when she ran away from her old aunt. It is obviously a cherished memory (*Può darsi! Ma che non si dimenticano più!*). She spent a few sweet and heavenly hours among students and minettes at Bullier's, a Paris nightspot. She knows now neither how she came to be there, nor how she left. She recalls the singing: "Young woman, love is in bloom! Defend your heart! Kisses and the magic of smiles is paid for with tears." (*Fanciulla è sbocciato l'amore!*). A young man, she says, sat down with her after their dance. His high spirits caused him to shout out to the waiter, "Two bocks." He then gave the waiter twenty sous - an extravagant amount -, saying "keep the change!" The women are impressed at the noble gesture, and beg Magda to continue.

Magda continues: the young man asked her name, and she inscribed her name on the marble tabletop. He wrote his next to hers. "There, among all the commotion, we looked deep into each other's eyes, not saying a word." Yvette is surprised that they did not speak. Bianca asks, what happened next? But Magda has come back from visiting the past. She says she doesn't remember, though she again thinks of the song she heard all those years ago: "Love is in bloom. Defend your heart!" If only she could relive those hours, thinks Magda.

Bianca, Suzy and Yvette discuss this tale of a young Magda, wooed by an unknown man, whom she met and was parted from, all in under two hours. Prunier and the women put down Magda's adventure to the old aunt, who must have been waiting, all alone at home, as the cause of Magda's desire to escape - if even for so short a time.

Prunier purposely mishears what the ladies have been saying, thinking they are describing the old aunt, and not the young lover, as having brown mustaches and drinking beer. "Not my type!" he says. "The woman who conquers me must correspond to my artistic taste. She must be refined and elegant. In short, worthy of me." She must be a Galetea, a Berenice, a Francesca, a Salome, he says. The ladies laugh. Magda desires to know how he can tell whether the women he meets have the qualities he wants. "The destiny of every woman is marked in the palm of her hand," answers Prunier. The ladies are intrigued and demand that Prunier read their palms. The group moves to a quiet corner.

Meanwhile, **Ruggero** Lastouc, the son of Rambaldo's childhood friend, finally shows in. Ruggero hands Rambaldo a letter of introduction from his father.

Prunier announces a portentous future for Magda, as he looks at her palm. Perhaps, like a swallow, she is destined to fly across the seas, he says, toward a sun-filled land of dreams, toward the sun, toward love. He hesitates. She worries that he sees an ill omen. "No, but destiny presents two faces, is it a smile or is it anguish? No one knows." He then examines Bianca's hand.

Rambaldo asks Ruggero if this is the first time he has come to Paris, which, indeed it is.

Rambaldo interrupts Prunier's palmreading to ask if he knows of a place where young Ruggero would have a good time, his first evening in Paris.

Prunier scoffs, saying the magic of a first evening in Paris is a myth.

Lisette tells him that it is no myth, but the truth, which she, as a Parisian and a woman, should know. The two argue as to who is correct, which upsets Prunier. He again tells Magda that she should let the maid go.

The assembled company toss out names of nightspots. But it is Lisette's suggestion, Bullier's, which is taken up as the favorite. Yes, Ruggero must go to Bullier's! "Love, joy and pleasure are there," says Lisette (*Amore è là, gioia e piacer*).

Magda seems transported back to her thoughts of the mysterious student she met all those years ago at Bullier's.

Ruggero leaves.

Prunier comments that Ruggero possessed the perfumed flower of youth. "The air simple reeks with the smell of his lavender!"

Rambaldo assents, and takes his leave.

Quickly, **Périchaud**, Bianca, Yvette, **Gobin**, then **Crébillon**, Prunier and Suzy depart.

Magda is alone.

When Lisette returns from showing the guests out, Magda orders a carriage.

Lisette reminds her mistress that she has been given the rest of the evening off, then leaves the room.

Magda's only thoughts are of Prunier's words: "Like a swallow I will migrate across the seas toward a sun-filled land of dreams." She then notices that the written list of nightspots has been left behind by Ruggero in his rush to leave. She thinks of Bullier's.

With thoughts on her mind, she goes into her boudoir.

With Magda gone, Prunier re-enters. He has come to get Lisette, with whom he is having an affair (*T'amo!*). Declaring his love, he also tells Lisette that she is not worthy of a poet like him. "Only rich women can be loved by the likes of me. But instead I am yours!"

As they are about to leave, Prunier takes a dislike to her hat. "It's my lady's finest," replies the maid. But Prunier insists that she change it, as it does not match the rest of her outfit.

Alone, Prunier muses on his situation (*Nove Muse, a voi perdono*), asking the muses to pardon him for his actions. He loves her and cannot reason.

Lisette returns with a new hat, but this time Prunier asks her to change her coat for the black silk cloak she had on the night before.

Again, he muses on his situation. "But I cannot abandon her, no matter how esthetic I am."

Lisette returns, asking Prunier if she should wear lipstick, mascara and blush. Yes, of course. And when all is done, they slowly depart, Prunier declaring his love for her, each telling the other "I am yours."

Magda comes out of her boudoir. She is dressed as a **grisette**. Thinking of Prunier's Doretta, and knowing no one will recognize her, she departs... for Bullier's.

## **ACT II - Bullier's.**

Crowds of people are enjoying themselves at Bullier's (*Fiori freschi!*). Women sell flowers, couples dance, students drink and pick up girls, lovers are kissing. The champagne is flowing, as a group of **grisettes** discuss men and love.

A group of students notice a hesitant figure approaching. **It is Magda. They declare her to be shabby**, but utterly charming. One offers Magda his arm, which she declines. The students cluster around, prompting Magda to agree that she already has a date. They see her look at Ruggero as he enters the restaurant. Assuming the young man is whom she was waiting for, they bring her to him.

Magda begs his pardon for her intrusion (*Scusatemi, scusate*).

Ruggero asks her not to leave. He tells her that she seems different from the other girls here. This pleases her. She sits down. Ruggero asks her why she is so shy and lonely. She reminds him, he tells her, of the girls from Montauban, who are all smiles and youth when they dance to an old song. When she seems to not fully understand his comment, he tells her that the girls of Montauban are very beautiful, but simple and modest. "Unlike the girls here, in Paris, they need only a **simple flower in their hair as adornment**. Like you."

When Magda wishes she could dance like the girls of Montauban, Ruggero asks her if she would like to dance with him. Once in his arms, she recalls to herself how this is like her experience of youth.

The two join the crowd of dancers, lost in a dream of intoxicating love (*Nella dolce carezza della danza*).

Prunier and Lisette enter.

Prunier is asking Lisette to be dignified. She tells him how much she loves him, but that his attitude is choking her. "You are forever telling me what to do and not do." Prunier defends himself, saying that he does it for her own good, to improve her. They join in the dancing.

Magda and Ruggero return, exhausted, to their table. Magda remarks that she is thirsty and Ruggero orders them two bocks. "Quickly, Quickly," cries Magda, "could I ask a favor? When the waiter returns, could you pay him 20 sous and tell him to keep the change?" Ruggero does not understand the request, but acquiesces.

Ruggero proposes a toast: to your health. Magda proposes her own: to your loves! "Don't say that," replies Ruggero, "If I were to love, then it would be only one, and for as long as I live." "For as long as I live," repeats Magda.

Ruggero comments that he does not even know his new friend's name. As she had done those years ago, she scribbles a name - Paulette - on the tabletop. Ruggero, in turn, writes his next to hers. "Now something of ours will remain," says Magda. But Ruggero is more practical, "No, they will wipe it away. But the thought of you will remain with me."

Magda tells him that fortune has brought her to him.

Ruggero confesses that he knows nothing of her, but does not feel that she is a stranger (*Io non so chi siate voi*). "You are the creature my heart has been waiting for!"

Magda is overcome. They kiss.

Lisette screams out "Look, it's my mistress!", pointing to Magda. Knowing full-well that it is indeed Lisette's mistress, Prunier tells Lisette that the wine has gone to her head. But as she is insistent that this woman and her mistress are one and the same, Prunier asks if she wants proof.

They walk toward the table.

Lisette now recognizes Ruggero. Prunier introduces himself and Lisette to Ruggero, telling her that is it, indeed, the young man from earlier in the evening, but that the young lady is certainly not her mistress. "You are drunk!" Prunier asks Ruggero to introduce his young lady to them. "My friend, Paulette." "Are you convinced?" asks Prunier of Lisette, as he introduces himself to 'Paulette.'

Magda, playing along, asks Lisette why she stares at her.

Lisette tells Ruggero that her mistress is exactly like this girl, were she elegantly dressed. Magda laughs, commenting that Lisette seems to be elegantly dressed. "It doesn't cost much," replies Lisette, "everything belongs to my mistress." "That is very imprudent!" says Magda. Prunier self-consciously laughs out loud and Magda takes the opportunity to ask if this woman, her maid, is his Salome or his Berenice? "Perhaps Lisette can choose to imitate the one or the other," she slyly remarks.

Ruggero offers a toast: Let us drink to love! The two couples drink, then Ruggero toasts Magda. "I drink to your fresh smile. I drink to your profound desires and to your lips, which have uttered my name." (*Bevo al tuo fresco sorriso*).

To Magda, this evening is a fulfillment of her dream. She is supremely happy.

Lisette and Prunier exchange thoughts of love for each other. Prunier even tells her that she is the first who has spoken to his heart.

Ruggero and Magda swear to be with each other forever.

Suddenly, Prunier catches sight of Rambaldo.

Magda begs Ruggero to leave, but Prunier has a plan. He asks Ruggero to take Lisette to a quiet corner.

Magda does not even know whether Rambaldo has seen her.

As Rambaldo heads toward the table, Prunier tells Magda to go, to leave him to explain. She will not do so. Prunier tells her to think about what she is doing. "When you love, you don't think," replies Magda.

Rambaldo asks to speak alone with Magda. He has brought along her necklace, which she so casually left lying around her salon. "What's the meaning of this?" he demands. "I have nothing to add to what you've already seen," she replies.

Rambaldo, in a more conciliatory tone, tells her it was nothing serious and asks her to leave with him. "I'm staying. I love him."

Rambaldo asks what madness possesses her. "You don't know what it is like to thirst for love and find love, to long for life and find life. Let me follow my destiny. Leave me. It's over."

Magda asks that he forgive her for bringing him so much pain. "But I cannot help it. My love is too strong."

Rambaldo, telling her he hopes she never regrets this, departs.

Ruggero returns to the table.

Prunier and Lisette have left, he tells Magda. "And now it is morning. Where shall we go?" He notices that Magda is upset. She only tells him how much she loves him. "You see, I am afraid. I am *too* happy!"

### **ACT III - *A seaside hotel.***

Ruggero and Magda are enjoying a quiet moment in a seaside garden. Magda comments on the heavenly scent of the flowers - the air is saturated with their scent! "Tell me again that I still please you." "Everything about you, my love, pleases me."

Magda hopes that the solitude is not too much for him, but he tells her that he is not alone.

Magda speaks of their love being born among the flowers - the flowers at Bullier's.

Ruggero tells her she deserves something special today. He will give her a secret: he had not said anything before, but he has written to his parents. Magda is surprised by this news. Yes, he confesses, he wrote three days previous, asking them for money.

Magda blames herself for their financial troubles.

But I still has not told you the secret, he says. The secret is he also wrote asking his parents for consent to their marriage. "You did that?" asks Magda, "I didn't know, I didn't expect it."

She asks Ruggero to tell her everything, but he says there is nothing to tell. "If I love you and you love me, then let it be forever! You are not just a lover, Magda, you are love itself" (*E laggiù non sapevo*).

He asks that she accompany him to his home. He describes a lovely house, on a hill, with an orchard, which wakes in the morning to the rays of the sun. In the sacred protection of his mother, they will be protected from all pain. And perhaps they will welcome a child there.

Ruggero kisses her, then leaves. Magda is in a quandary - should she tell him all about her past, or keep quiet?

Lisette and Prunier enter, unsure that they are at the right place.

Lisette berates Prunier for ruining her. He had wanted to make her a singer - and her career has been a disaster. She can still hear the audience hissing her! He had wanted to get rid of the maid and replace her with an artist - that was their legacy from the evening spent at Bullier's. Prunier has promised, if at all possible, to bring her back to her old life. That is their reason for seeking out Magda.

They ask the maitre d'hotel whether Magda resides there. Prunier instructs him to simply announce that two friends from Paris are waiting for her.

Lisette is extremely nervous, totally overrout, due to her stage experiences. "All my illusions are gone," she tells him.

As they quarrel, Magda enters.

She is touched that they remember their old Parisian friend. Prunier, ever the cynic, asks if she is still happy. "Entirely."

He tells her that all Paris still talks about what happened, adding that few believe it. Magda asks why. "Because this isn't the life for you."

Magda is extremely hurt by his comments. She quickly changes the subject, asking why they have come.

Prunier explains that the theater in Nice decided the previous night that Lisette was not to its liking. "She wants to return to you as a maid."

Magda is pleased to have her back. "She's happy," Prunier tells Magda, "she's returned to her old way of life, as you yourself will do soon. You will have to abandon the illusion you think is reality."

Magda soon learns that Prunier is only acting on behalf of someone, presumably Rambaldo, who has heard of her financial plight and is ready to help in any way.



Prunier acts as if he is taking his leave of both Magda and Lisette forever, but quickly, with Magda's permission, asks Lisette what time she gets off from work that evening. He will be waiting.

Lisette is in a hurry to get back to work, departs.

Ruggero has received a letter from his mother.

He notices Magda's changed attitude. She is trembling. "Did you think she wouldn't consent?"

He presses the letter into her hands.

Magda reads the letter, in which his mother writes "May the Lord bless the sweet creature whom He sent to you. She will be the mother of your children. It is motherhood which sanctifies love. If you know she is good, mild, pure and possesses all the virtues, then she is blessed." His mother asks Ruggero to embrace his future wife for her; she is anxious for their return.

"Here is my mother's kiss." But Magda confesses that she cannot receive it. "I cannot erase my past. I cannot enter your house."

Ruggero is uninterested in her past, it is not important to him: "You are mine, that is all."

Magda tells him she lived among shame and gold, as Ruggero begs her not to continue. "I can be a lover, but never a wife."

Ruggero cannot live without her, she is destroying his life.

But she persists: she can never enter his home. "Because I love you, I will not be your ruin."

Ruggero begs her to stay. "Say nothing more, let this pain be mine," says Magda, as she leaves the side of the crying Ruggero.