

THE WOULD-BE GENTLEMAN

by Molière

Adapted by Paul Caywood

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PUBLISHED BY
ELDRIDGE PUBLISHING COMPANY
hiStage.com

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STORY OF THE PLAY

In this rowdy farce, the ambitious, but foolish, Monsieur Jourdain wants to socialize with the nobility, even though he knows nothing of proper language or social graces. From his highbrow music, dancing, and philosophy teachers to his obsequious tailor, Jourdain makes a fool of himself with his ludicrous attempts to be important. His behavior even allows him to be exploited by an unscrupulous friend who continues to borrow money. Happily, Jourdain's weakness is played to full advantage when, after an elaborate masquerade, he finally gives his daughter's hand in marriage to the man she really loves!

This adaptation has been created with an eye toward simple staging, costumes and properties. It can be a laugh-riot when acted by a cast that enters into the spirit of the absurd situations.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS
(Approx. 4 m, 4 w + 3 flexible)

Male Roles:

Monsieur Jourdain: Wealthy bourgeois who desires to mimic the nobility.

Count Dorante: Unscrupulous “friend” who borrows money from Jourdain.

Cléonte: Young suitor to Lucile.

Covielle: His valet, likes Nicole.

Female Roles:

Nicole: The maid.

Madame Jourdain: The practical wife who tries to keep her husband grounded.

Lucile Jourdain: Their daughter, in love with Cléonte.

Countess Dorimène: Female friend of Count Dorante.

Flexible:

Dancing Master / Turk 1..

Music Master / Turk 2

Philosopher / Turk 3.

Tailor: Role may be doubled.

(The “Turkish Chant” was adapted from Henry S. Taylor’s translation of *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*.)

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

The house of Monsieur Jourdain in Paris, France

Scene 1 - A morning in 1670

Scene 2 - Later that day

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PROPERTIES

1 piano (preferably a spinet) and bench	
2 high-back chairs	1 bench
sheets of music composition	pen with plume
6 books	"diamond" ring
notebook	drum or tom-tom
cymbal or tambourine	3 scimitars
cloth bag with fez for Jourdain	

COSTUMES

The costumes can be simple and only suggest what the period of seventeenth-century French high fashion was like. Lucile and Dorimène wear colors that suggest vibrant youth and luxurious living, perhaps yellow and moss green. Madame Jourdain wears a dull gray and Nicole a servant's black. The accessories which each character adds to his or her costume are very important. Note the following:

JOURDAIN: Robe, nightcap, fancy coat

DANCING MASTER: Dancing shoes

MUSIC MASTER: Powdered wig

PHILOSOPHER: Dark scholarly gown, gray wig

MADAME JOURDAIN: Bonnet

LUCILE: Jewelry

NICOLE: Small apron, bonnet

TAILOR: Large apron

DORANTE: Hat (fashioned from a woman's wide-brimmed hat and plumes added to it), jewelry

DORIMÈNE: Much fancy jewelry, highly decorated hat

TURKS: Fezes, sashes, robes. (Add beards for Cléonte and Covielle. Check with your local lodges about the fezes and robes.)

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Scene 1

(When the curtains open, a simple setting is revealed. A piano and bench are DL, a bench at RC, and two high-backed chairs at R and L of C. The DANCING MASTER is at C, exercising and practicing ballet steps, which he will continue to do throughout the conversation. The MUSIC MASTER is seated at the piano composing.)

DANCING MASTER: May one hear what you've composed?

MUSIC MASTER: *(Stops playing and turns to the Dancing Master.)* You'll hear it - with the dialogue - when he comes. He won't be long.

DANCING MASTER: Yes.

MUSIC MASTER: Ah, we've found a foolish man here, just such a one as we both need. *(Cross LC.)* This Monsieur Jourdain is a sweet income with his visions of nobility and gallantry, which he has gotten into his muddled brain, and it would be well for your capers and my serenades if all the world were like him.

DANCING MASTER: He understands nothing of our artistry, but he pays well. And money is what we want most of all.

MUSIC MASTER: *(Puts music and pen on piano.)* Still, it would be good to receive some of our pay in understanding and praise and applause.

DANCING MASTER: I agree. But we can't live on praise and applause. There has to be something more solid mixed with it, and the best method of praising is with the open hand. *(He extends a hand with the palm up.)* There's no limit to his money. And this ignorant snob is more valuable to us than that Count Dorante who introduced us to him.

MUSIC MASTER: But if he only had some good taste.

DANCING MASTER: Shh! Here he comes.

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(MONSIEUR JOURDAIN rushes in UC and comes C. He wears a fancy dressing gown and nightcap.)

JOURDAIN: Good morning, gentleman. Are you going to do your little fiddle-dee-dee for me this morning?

DANCING MASTER: *(Coming to Jourdain.)* I beg your pardon, sir. Fiddle-dee-dee?

JOURDAIN: Well, whatever you call your music and dancing. I'm sorry to have kept you waiting, but I was being dressed like a real gentleman today, and my tailor sent me such a tight pair of stockings. *(Rubs his leg.)* I thought I'd never get into them.

MUSIC MASTER: *(L of Jourdain.)* We're at your service, sir.

JOURDAIN: *(Turning around to show off his robe.)* My tailor tells me gentlemen always wear these in the morning.

DANCING MASTER: It fits you beautifully.

MUSIC MASTER: It's splendid. You couldn't look better, sir.

JOURDAIN: Do you really think so?

MUSIC MASTER: Uh - Monsieur, I take the liberty of asking you to listen to a new song.

JOURDAIN: Of course. I wear my dressing gown so that I can hear better. *(He sits in chair L of C.)*

MUSIC MASTER: *(Going toward piano.)* You should learn music. *(Sits.)*

DANCING MASTER: *(R of Jourdain.)* Just as you're learning to dance.

JOURDAIN: Yes. *(Stands and does a dance step.)* Yes.

DANCING MASTER: Music and dancing ... dancing and music. That's everything you need.

MUSIC MASTER: There's nothing more important in the world than music. Do you agree, sir?

JOURDAIN: Oh, yes, I do.

DANCING MASTER: There's nothing more useful in life than dancing. Do you agree?

JOURDAIN: *(Befuddled.)* Yes ... yes, I do.

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MUSIC MASTER: All political disorders are caused by people who never learned music.

DANCING MASTER: Wars are caused by a lack of harmony and rhythm.

JOURDAIN: You're quite right.

DANCING MASTER: And when a general makes a mistake, we say he took a false step.

JOURDAIN: Yes, we do say that.

(The PHILOSOPHER enters carrying several books, which he places on the bench RC.)

JOURDAIN: *(Stands and goes to Philosopher.)* Ah, my philosophy teacher! We need some of your philosophy, sir. We're discussing the values of music and dancing.

PHILOSOPHER: *(Sits on bench RC.)* My good sirs, it is wisdom and virtue alone that have significance.

DANCING MASTER: What! Dancing is an art to be honored.

MUSIC MASTER: Music is an art that has been revered through the ages.

PHILOSOPHER: *(Stands.)* Pray, and where does philosophy come in all of this? *(Crosses C.)* Are you applying the name of science to subjects that are hardly worthy of being classed among the arts. Why, those so-called arts are comprehended only by ballad-singers and - and - gigolos!

(MUSIC MASTER and DANCING MASTER move to PHILOSOPHER, Music Master L of him, Dancing Master R.)

MUSIC MASTER: You muddle-headed ape!

PHILOSOPHER: You're an ignorant nincompoop!

DANCING MASTER: Jackanape!

MUSIC MASTER: Quack! Quack, quack, quack!

JOURDAIN: Mr. Philosopher! Gentlemen!

PHILOSOPHER: *(To Music Master.)* Buffoon! *(To Dancing Master.)* Milksop!

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