

WOLF TRAP OPERA

THE TOUCHSTONE: THE STORY

Act I

Count **Asdrubale** is a wise, wealthy and generous man who is pursued by three women – **Aspasia**, **Clarice** and **Fulvia**. The corrupt journalist **Macrobio** loves Aspasia, who pretends to favor him only so she can make Asdrubale jealous. The hack poet **Pacuvio** is attracted to Fulvia, but she's just using him in her scheme to snare Asdrubale. **Giocondo** is a true friend of Asdrubale's, but he is secretly in love with Clarice, and she loves Asdrubale.

Asdrubale cannot be sure if any of the women are motivated by love or simply by a desire for his money, and although he is attracted to Clarice, he doesn't trust himself. He decides to test the sincerity of the women (and the friendship of the men) by using a touchstone to reveal the true nature of their feelings. He pretends that he has been bankrupted and asks for their help. Believing him penniless, Aspasia and Fulvia congratulate themselves that they got away before marriage, and both Pacuvio and Macrobio abandon him. Only Clarice and Giocondo stand by him, and when his fortune is "miraculously" saved, they have the last laugh.

Act II

Asdrubale invites all to a hunting party, which turns chaotic as a (typically Rossinian) storm erupts.

Aspasia and Fulvia realize that they have been manipulated and are plotting revenge. Macrobio and Pacuvio promise that they will defend the ladies' honor by challenging Asdrubale and Giocondo to a duel. This spawns an escalating series of lies and rumors, almost (but not quite) culminating in an actual sword fight.

Giocondo tells Clarice that he is torn between his love for her and his friendship with Asdrubale. Asdrubale overhears the two of them and misunderstands, believing that he has been betrayed.

Clarice decides she will also play the "touchstone" trick to test Asdrubale's affections. She appears disguised as her long lost brother who has come to give her in marriage to Giocondo. When Giocondo refuses, the brother says he will take Clarice away, and Asdrubale will never see her again. This forces Asdrubale to expose his true feelings. Clarice reveals her identity, and the opera ends joyfully.