The UO Russian and East European Studies Center is proud to present

The Minor

an eighteenth-century farce by

Denis Fonvizin

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Недоросль

Дениса Фонвизина

Adapted by Julia Nemirovskaya

With Songs by Yulii Kim
УКАЗА
о неподданстве
человека
в собственность
Его Величества
руки
Russia in the 18th century was known as a “woman’s kingdom.” During the course of almost 70 years there was a woman on the throne. Longer than any other ruled the most powerful, the most clever and educated of them all—Catherine the Great. Many Western philosophers, such as Voltaire and Diderot, considered her a truly enlightened monarch.

Denis Fonvizin was the secretary of her personal enemy, Count Panin. Fonvizin wrote his most famous comedy *The Minor* in 1782; it is one of the 10 most famous Russian plays in the canon and one of the most frequently produced. Contemporaries read it as a criticism of female dominance and a satire on Catherine’s reign, with the message that a strong woman is worse than a tyrannical man. The play’s other goal was to show the audience that education improves people morally, while ignorance allows them to degrade and become mere beasts (thus the pig-loving Skotinin). In this comedy, all the educated people are kind and good, and all the uneducated people behave like animals.

Of course, according to the laws of classical comedy, light and goodness conquer darkness and malice. It was not always this way in the 18th century—goodness did not always win. But we remember this century as a time of brilliant individualities, when strong personalities, eccentrics, and other talented people made their mark. This time also marks the flowering of Russian culture and the birth of Russian literature. Fonvizin begins a Russian literary tradition which continues to be relevant and widely read today; even young schoolchildren in Russia read Fonvizin’s play.

The play is immortal in its topicality. The cast has found in it a source of joy and laughter, and an occasion to celebrate the miracle of theater. Please enjoy with us!
Cast

Catherine the Great ......................................... Sarah Volkov
Fonvizin .......................................................... Riley Dugan

Madam Prostakova / Princess Golitsyna ......................... Megan Dixon
Prostakov, her husband / Count Sheremetiev .................... Tom Dolack
Mitrofan, her son / Count Zubov ................................ Nikolai Borisov
Skotinin, her brother / Count Orlov ............................... Josh Overcast

Sofia, the poor orphan girl / Princess Dashkova ................. Masako Fujiyama
Milon, the young officer, Sofia’s beloved / Count Panin ........ David Haines
Starodum, the good uncle of Sofia / Prince Potemkin .......... Alan Kimball

Yeremeevna, the nanny / Countess Razumovskaya .............. Yuliya Tkachyshyn
Deacon Kuteikin, the grammar teacher / Princess Dolgorukaya .......................... Janna Bergquist
Retired sergeant Tsyferkin, the math teacher / Fonvizin .... Riley Dugan
The German Vral’man, the French teacher / The lackey Vas’ka .................................. Michael Brune

Trishka, the serf tailor / Count Rumyanstev ....................... Simon Thompson
Palashka, the servant girl .......................................... Olga Duzha
SYNOPSIS

DON'T READ THE WHOLE SYNOPSIS
BEFORE YOU WATCH THE PLAY!!
(It's no fun that way. But please use it when you need it.)

ACT ONE

English Prologue

Empress Catherine grants Denis Fonvizin an audience to explain his new play. Catherine decides to have the play put on, and to cast her courtiers as the players.

Folk Dance............................................ Palashka

Prostakova is angry that the kaftan sewn by her serf Trishka for her son Mitrofan is too small. Her brother Skotinin arrives; today he is to be betrothed to the orphan girl Sofia, whom the Prostakovs took into their care when her mother died. Sofia has a letter from her uncle Starodum, believed to be dead. The illiterate family cannot read the letter until the arrival of Milon Pravdin, a dashing young officer secretly in love with Sofia. The letter announces that the former orphan is now heir to a fortune of 10,000 rubles. The Prostakovs change their attitude to Sofia. Prostakova now wants Sofia as a wife for her adored son.

"Song of the Ten Thousand".... Prostakova, Prostakov, Skotinin
**ACT TWO**

**English Prologue**

*Catherine, Fonvizin, and the courtiers discuss the play. Catherine casts the roles of the teachers.*

Sofia and Milon find a quiet corner for an ecstatic meeting. Sofia teases Milon about his rival, her new suitor Mitrofan, who is still learning his alphabet. Skotinin surprises them, and tries to take possession of Sofia. Milon hints to him that Prostakova now wants to marry Sofia to Mitrofan. Skotinin, enraged, goes off to look for his nephew. Sofia and Milon slip away as Mitrofan enters with his nanny Yeremeevna, who urges him to study a little. Skotinin reenters and accuses his nephew of taking his bride. When a fight appears likely, Yeremeevna enters the fray.

“Soldiers’ Song” .......................... Cast

Prostakova comes to thank Milon for keeping his soldiers under control in their village. She apologizes for her husband, who tends to fall into seizures from her hen-pecking. The teachers enter and introduce themselves.

“Teachers’ Song”.............. Kuteikin, Tsyferkin, Vral’man

Milon escapes to see Sofia again. Prostakova urges Mitrofan to review his lessons, but flies into a rage when she learns from Yeremeevna that Skotinin has attacked Mitrofan. She blames Yeremeevna for not defending the boy and takes him away. The two teachers comfort Yeremeevna.

“Yeremeevna’s Song” ........... Yeremeevna, Kuteikin, Tsyferkin
ACT THREE

English Prologue

The courtiers praise Zubov for his portrayal of Mitrofan. To
revenge themselves on Fonvizin, they trip him. Further
discussion of the play reveals more ridiculous situations for the
courtiers to put themselves in. After Catherine’s departure they
prevent Fonvizin from running off and hustle him backstage.

Sofia complains to Milon about the Prostakov family. Both are
delighted to recognize Starodum, Sofia’s uncle. Skotinin comes
running in pursued by his enraged sister, Prostakova. Milon
prevents them from fighting for a moment, but Prostakova
escapes his grip. The comical fight makes Starodum laugh, and
Prostakova is furious until she realizes that this is the rich uncle.
She calls frantically for her husband and son, disregarding the
feverish condition of her servant girl. She hugs Starodum
vigorously, followed by her brother, husband, and son, urging
Mitrofan to call Starodum his “second father” in the hope that the
uncle will catch the hint about her son marrying Sofia. Starodum
announces that he is taking Sofia to Moscow to be married.
Everyone’s shock is relieved when Starodum promises to honor
Sofia’s own wishes. Prostakova tries to press her advantage, but
Starodum, Sofia, and Milon withdraw to rest. Prostakova urges
Mitrofan to study in order to impress Starodum.

“I don’t want to study, I want to marry” ............... Mitrofan.

The lesson begins, interrupted by Prostakova. She solves the
division problem by instructing Mitrofan not to share any money
he finds, and the addition problem by assuring Tsyferkin she will
not add any money to his salary. The grammar lesson ends badly
for Mitrofan, who has to recite “I am a worm, and not a person.”

“Mitrofan’s Sad Song” ........................................ Mitrofan
Vral’man enters to stop the lesson. While the other teachers fume, he warns Prostakova that Mitrofan is tiring from all this worthless grammar and math. All that is needed, Vral’man says, is to look at the world from the coachbox. Prostakova is impressed until he uses this coachman’s phrase, but Vral’man quickly recovers her admiration.

“Vral’man’s Song” ...................... Vral’man and Mitrofan

Prostakova follows Mitrofan to watch his behavior, while the other two teachers threaten Vral’man. He escapes, taunting them.

“Begone foreigners!” ...................... Kuteikin and Tsyferkin

intermission

**ACT FOUR**

*English Prologue*

*Fonvizin describes the next scenes. Catherine expresses approval of Prostakova. The courtiers wonder how the play will end.*

Starodum speaks to Sofia of his plans for her to marry. Sofia confesses that her heart already belongs to Milon, who enters. It turns out that Milon was Starodum’s choice for Sofia, and all rejoice. Skotinin enters, seeking Starodum’s approval to marry Sofia. Starodum hints that Milon has the upper hand in the
rivalry. Prostakova enters with her husband and son, determined to show Mitrofan’s learning to Starodum. Milon examines him in grammar, history (which Mitrofan understands as fairy tales), and geography (which Prostakova dismisses as unnecessary to aristocrats who have coachmen). Starodum announces that he and Sofia are leaving for Moscow the next day. Prostakova, furious again, makes a plan to kidnap Sofia and marry her to Mitrofan before anyone else is awake, sure that Starodum will forgive them afterwards.

![Image](image.png)

**ACT FIVE**

**English Prologue**

*Fonvizin describes the play’s denouement and how the characters will ask for forgiveness and give it. The courtiers have begun to take their roles rather seriously. Zubov complains that he gets nothing in the end, and the courtiers try to keep their distance through laughter.*

Milon disrupts the kidnapping, catching Mitrofan and the nanny in the act of carrying off Sofia. Prostakova threatens to have her household beaten for insubordination. She is furious that she can’t be master in her own house. Starodum reveals that Milon is Sofia’s fiancé, and Prostakova sees that she needs to surrender. Sofia grants forgiveness, as does Starodum, and Prostakova sets off to punish everyone. But Milon arrests Prostakova for violence against her serfs, and confiscates her estate. Skotinin sees a moment to escape, while Prostakova insists that there are debts to the teachers. Kuteikin says that he is owed a lot, while Tsyferkin refuses to take a cent, since Mitrofan didn’t learn
anything. Milon and Starodum reward his honesty, while Kuteikin is left to appeal to Prostakova. In despair, Prostakova clings to Mitrofan, but he throws her off, and she faints. Milon promises Mitrofan a place in his regiment while all note the justness of Prostakova’s miserable end.

Epilogue

Catherine threatens Fonvizin with a trip to Siberia. The courtiers return to dancing.

Starodum reads a poem about the fickleness of life, written by Fonvizin about the time of the play. (Translated into verse by Alan Kimball.)

The whole world, it seems to me, is a baby’s toy...
The Creator made it all first to show off he was able.
He scattered us all across the earth, dolls across a table.
Some dolls laugh and dance, they frisk, they rule,
While others cringe and grieve, they yearn, they cry.
That’s how this old world turns! And why?
No one can say, neither genius nor fool.

~ Denis Fonvizin. 1745-1792 ~
Credits

Director -- Julia Nemirovskaya

Assistant Directors -- Kris Santoro and Megan Dixon

Technical Director -- David Haines

English Script -- Riley Dugan, Sarah Volkov and Julia Nemirovskaya

Costume Designer, Accessories -- Masako Fujiyama
Costumes -- The Very Little Theater
Courtesy of Darlene Moyer

Set Decoration -- Christa Mann

Music Director -- Sarah Volkov
Music Technician -- Christa Mann

Accordion -- Oleg Kripkov

Lighting Director -- Kris Santoro

Publicity -- Tom Dolack

Program -- Megan Dixon