



A CLASSIC SITCOM GOES CLASSICAL

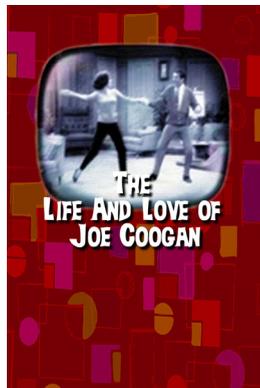
Music professor Paul Salerni found inspiration for his latest one-act opera in an episode of The Dick Van Dyke Show written by comic genius Carl Reiner.

Most people wouldn't think of The Dick Van Dyke Show as an opera, but Paul Salerni sees things differently. Salerni, professor of music and NEH distinguished chair in the humanities, is a life-long fan of the television series—he stayed up late to watch it as a child and now owns the complete DVD set. So it makes sense that his latest production, a one-act opera called The Life and Love of Joe Coogan, is adapted from an eponymous episode of the show.

Three years ago, Salerni was looking for a subject for a companion piece to his first opera, Tony Caruso's Final Broadcast, which won the National Opera Association's one-act chamber opera competition. A recording of Tony Caruso was recently released on the

Naxos label.

When Salerni's wife suggested that he adapt an episode of the sitcom, he knew he had found his next project.



“Opera is naturally an adaptive art form,” Salerni says. “Some of the great operas are based on novels, short stories, or plays. The Dick Van Dyke Show has a lot of witty ensemble dialogue that is perfect for opera, and this episode includes naturally operatic elements. For example, the central motivating force is a box of sonnets, a poetic form that lends itself to writing music very well.”

In the episode, Rob Petrie (Dick Van Dyke) plays a game of golf with Joe Coogan,

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who happens to be a former boyfriend of Rob's wife, Laura (Mary Tyler Moore). Laura still keeps a box of Joe's love poems and Rob becomes jealous, but by the end of the show, he realizes he had no reason to doubt her and everything ends happily.

To get permission to adapt “Joe Coogan,” Salerni contacted Carl Reiner, the show's creator and producer and the author of this particular episode. Reiner quickly became an enthusiastic supporter, attending the Los Angeles premiere of Tony Caruso and inviting Salerni to his home for what Salerni calls “one of the most entertaining and magical afternoons of my life.”

Salerni based the opera's score on musical motives from the sitcom's original theme music, producing pieces in a variety of musical styles, including a round, a 1950s rock tune, and two Italianate quartets. He and Kate Light, the librettist, also wrote several arias to introduce the main characters to an audience who may not be familiar with them.

The Life and Love of Joe Coogan premiered at Lehigh's Zoellner Arts Center in September starring a cast of professional opera singers underwritten by George D'Angelo '47 and his wife, Mary. For Mary, it was part of a lifelong passion for opera.

“It started out with my father, actually,” she says. “He was a big opera buff. We always listened to the Met every Saturday on the radio. And he had a pretty good collection.”

Mary herself loved to sing and took voice lessons for several years from a teacher in Allentown who had been a student of renowned contralto Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heink. The D'Angelos have long been ardent supporters of music, both at Lehigh and in their hometown of Eric, Pa.—*Emily Groff*