# THE BOURGEOIS GENTLEMAN

*by Molière*
*Translated and Adapted by Robert Cohen*

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## STORY OF THE PLAY

One of the world's great comedies. The wealthy Monsieur Jourdain hires teachers to train him in the Arts, and he succeeds only in appearing foolish to everybody but himself. Then he tries to court an elegant Countess, looking even more foolish. In its time this play was a social satire; today we can appreciate the satire and enjoy the hilarity. The play ends in a hilarious mock Turkish romp.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(Flexible cast: Approx. 10 m, 4 w, extras. Much doubling possible.)*

Music Master
Dancing Master
Monsieur Jourdain
Fencing Master
Philosophy Teacher
Tailor
Nicole
Madame Jourdain
Dorante
Cleonte
Covielle
Lucile
Dorante
Dorimene
The Mufti
Extras as Students, Lackeys, Dervishes, Turkish Dancers, Singers, and Instrumentalists

***(See Playwright's notes at end of script.)***

## ACT I

*(OVERTURE. In the middle of the stage we see one of the Music Master's STUDENTS seated at a table, composing a serenade. The MUSIC MASTER and the DANCING MASTER, each with several STUDENTS, enter from either side.)*

MUSIC MASTER: *(To his SINGER.)* Come on, get in here. Now, stay there until he comes!

DANCING MASTER: *(To his DANCERS.)* You two. Over there!

MUSIC MASTER: *(To his STUDENT.)* Finished?

STUDENT: Yes. *(Gives him the song.)*

MUSIC MASTER: Let me see ... ah yes, very good.

DANCING MASTER: A new piece?

MUSIC MASTER: Yes, it's a new "wake - up serenade." I've had it prepared for you know who.

DANCING MASTER: Ah, let's hear it!

MUSIC MASTER: No, no, you'll hear it, words and all, when he gets here. It won't be long, I assure you!

DANCING MASTER: We also serve, who only stand and wait.

MUSIC MASTER: Ah yes! And we have here just the man to wait upon: our "ticket-to-ride man," this Monsieur Jourdain, with his visions of gallantry and noblesse oblige flitting about in his head. A true "paytrone of the ahts," this "monsewer." I only wish there were more where he came from.

DANCING MASTER: Well, I suppose, but I certainly wish he knew something about the "ahts" he so adores!

MUSIC MASTER: He knows nothing, doesn't he? *(THEY both laugh.)* But he pays through the nose and that's what counts. That's what the arts need these days, my dancing friend, MONEY!

DANCING MASTER: But to produce art for these imbeciles, it's abominable! I must admit to you, my maestro profondo, that I yearn for the glory of noble approval; of the applause of the discriminating critic and the bravos

DANCING MASTER: *(Cont'd.)* echoing down gilded salons of the Court. It pleases me -- as it pleases you, don't argue -- to fashion our creations for the tastes for those whose sensitivities are refined, and whose approbation is both cultured and cordial. Their approval means something; it caresses the soul as it honors the achievement; and that reward, believe me, is far greater than any paycheck!

MUSIC MASTER: Yes, yes, yes, but it doesn't pay the rent! Clever praise and cultured applause are wonderful, I agree, but one must live, one must be comfortable, one must eat! When people give me a hand *(Claps his hands.)* there should be something in it! *(Makes a money gesture.)* Now our Monsieur Jourdain, it's true, is a bit unenlightened -- he speaks backwards and forwards at the same time, he applauds only when he's not supposed to -- but his money makes up for much misery. He has great wisdom in his purse, and his praise is coined in legal tender. Indeed, this ignorant bourgeois is worth far more to us than the grand seigneur who brought us here in the first place.

DANCING MASTER: Well, there's some truth to all this, I suppose, but I don't like it. You're just too money-mad; it's unseemly.

MUSIC MASTER: You take it when he gives it to you.

DANCING MASTER: Yes, but it breaks my heart. If I had my wish ...

MUSIC MASTER: *(Completing the thought.)* And if I had mine ... But that's life now, isn't it? In any event, M. Jourdain is giving us the chance to make names for ourselves at the Court -- and if you take my advice, you'll let him pay us what the Court won't, and let the Court praise us as this jackass can't!

DANCING MASTER: Shh. Here he comes.

M. JOURDAIN: *(Entering and nodding grandly.)* Well, gentlemen? And what do we have here? You have made for me, I presume, some little drollery for the afternoon?

DANCING MASTER: *(Confused.)* Drollery?

M. JOURDAIN: *(Delighted.)* Ah, yes! *(Then, fearful HE has said something wrong.)* Ah, no! *(Desperate.)*

M. JOURDAIN: *(Cont'd.)* But how do you call it? *(To each of them, in turn.)* Your prologue? Your, um, dialogue? Your singing and dancing?

DANCING MASTER: Ah, yes!

MUSIC MASTER: At your service!

M. JOURDAIN: I know I've made you wait a bit, but it is only because I have decided today to dress in the fashion of quality folk, and my tailor has sent me *(HE raises the hem of his gown.)* these stockings -- silk, of course -- which take forever to get on!

MUSIC MASTER: We are here to attend your convenience.

M. JOURDAIN: Well, then, you mustn't go -- they are bringing my new suit, and you must see me in it!

DANCING MASTER: Whatever pleases you.

M. JOURDAIN: Then you will see me in the height of fashion -- from toe to head!

MUSIC MASTER: *(Trying not to laugh.)* We don't doubt it.

M. JOURDAIN: *(Turning about.)* My dressing gown a l' indienne. Do you like it?

DANCING MASTER: Tres, tres, chic!

M. JOURDAIN: My tailor tells me it's the morning fashion of quality folk!

MUSIC MASTER: Suits you perfectly!

M. JOURDAIN: *(Suddenly and imperiously.)* Lackeys! I say, lackeys!

LACKEYS: *(Springing forward in terror.)* Yes, Monsieur?

M. JOURDAIN: Oh, nothing, nothing. Just checking! *(The LACKEYS return to their position.)* How do you like their liveries?

DANCING MASTER: Magnificent.

M. JOURDAIN: *(As one bestowing a precious gift, opens his gown, revealing red velvet tights and a hideous green velvet jacket.)* My little underdress outfit for the morning exercises!

MUSIC MASTER: *(Grinning through his revulsion.)* Oh, *tres gallant, tres gallant* indeed.

M. JOURDAIN: Lackey!

FIRST LACKEY: *(Coming forward.)* Monsieur!
M. JOURDAIN: No, no, the other one!
SECOND LACKEY: Monsieur!
M. JOURDAIN: Hold my gown. *(To the MASTER.)* How do you find me?
DANCING MASTER: Wonderful. Couldn't be better.
M. JOURDAIN: Let's see your dance!
MUSIC MASTER: Ah, but first, your "wake up serenade." Remember, composed just for you this morning ....
M. JOURDAIN: Ah!
MUSIC MASTER: By my student here.
M. JOURDAIN: By your student! And are you too good for that sort of thing?
MUSIC MASTER: Oh no, I mean yes, I mean ... don't abuse the name of student, Monsieur. *Studenten, studere, studiosity* ... why, my scholars are wiser than their masters, and this song is as beautiful as any ever written. Just *ecoutez*, *Monsieur, ecoutez*!
M. JOURDAIN: Give me back my gown; I hear better with it on. On second thought, forget it. No! Give it here. That's better.
MUSIC STUDENT *(Sings.)*:

I languish night and day, I suffer deep.
Your lovely eyes have stolen all my sleep.
Oh, Iris, dear, if thus your lovers treat
What ills befall the enemies you meet?

M. JOURDAIN: A bit lugubrious, don't you think? A bit too sad and boring. Liven it up, can't you a little?
MUSIC MASTER: But the words have to go with the music, Monsieur.
M. JOURDAIN: Hey, I learned a cute little number a few days ago, listen ... la la la ... now how does it go?
DANCING MASTER: I'm afraid I ...
M. JOURDAIN: It's got a sheep in it.
DANCING MASTER: A sheep?
MUSIC MASTER: A sheep?
M. JOURDAIN: A sheep! I got it! *(Sings.)*

Aye Jenny! Dear Jenny! Oh Jenny my love!
As sweet as a lambkin with sheeps' eyes above.

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