

# PAVEL HAAS

(1899–1944)

## The Charlatan

*Opera in three acts and seven scenes*

### STAGING SYNOPSIS

#### ACT I

##### Scene I

In the town square of a small town, a crowd gathers in front of the tent of the travelling doctor, Pustrpalk. Two members of his troupe, Sourmilk and Cobweb, entertain the audience with incredible tales of the doctor's renowned medical expertise. Accompanied by fanfares, Pustrpalk enters and begins treating patients. While he truly helps a man suffering from mumps, the rest of his "successful treatments" are contrived performances with his accomplices to impress the onlookers and convince them to buy his reliable medicinal products. Servants bring in the beautiful wife of professor Meticuloso, Amaranta, who became partially paralyzed after a tragic childbirth and is seeking help. Pustrpalk cleverly sees through the nature of her illness and seats her, back exposed, into a basket filled with nettles. Enchanted by Amaranta's beauty, the doctor invites her to join his troupe. The entire scene is watched by the ominous figure of a mysterious monk, Jochimus, a man hiding his true identity beneath his monk's habit.

##### Scene II

Pustrpalk's troupe travels from town to town.

##### Scene III

This time, the troupe camps in the empty square of another town. Amaranta, who joined the troupe after her recovery, arrives in an enormous crinoline. As Pustrpalk tries to help her into a carriage, he is spotted at the worst possible moment by his jealous wife, Rosina. A heated argument between the couple and both women turns into a public spectacle, and with Jochimus still pursuing him, Pustrpalk and his troupe are forced to leave the town in haste.

## **ACT II**

### **Scene IV**

The troupe camps outside the mill of a sick miller. Pustrpalk confesses his love to Amaranta, whose coyly rejections only further fuel his passion. After they part, Pustrpalk, hiding behind a wagon, overhears a plot by his companions Pickled Herring and Strongman, who plan to rob him. He confronts the conspirators, sharply rebuking them for their ingratitude, but eventually forgives them and decides to share his wealth with the entire troupe. They celebrate with wine, but the merry drinking soon escalates into a brawl, ending in tragedy. The troupe sets the mill on fire, and Pustrpalk flees in panic with Amaranta and Bachelor.

### **[INTERVAL]**

### **Scene V**

Pustrpalk, Amaranta, and Bachelor arrive in a larger town during a carnival. In the square, they watch a performance by Shabby the Quacksalver, to whom Pustrpalk offers a partnership. Pustrpalk draws widespread attention, and even the king, disguised among the crowd, is impressed by his skills. The king rewards him generously and declares him the greatest man of his time. Pustrpalk, celebrated by the crowd, searches for Amaranta, but in the meantime, she was kidnapped by Jochimus' henchmen.

## **ACT III**

### **Scene VI**

Time passes, and Pustrpalk still longs for his lost love, Amaranta. His companion Sourmilk informs him that they are bringing in a seriously ill monk. It is Jochimus, who finally reveals his true identity and begs for forgiveness and salvation. Pustrpalk performs a quick surgery... Afterwards flees with his companions as a mob accuses him of murder and declares him a charlatan.

### **Scene VII**

Years later, when Pustrpalk's glory has long faded, his former companions gather in a tavern. They recount the unfortunate fate of their former master, who nowadays is said to suffer from paranoia and has turned to drink. A worn-out and drunk Pustrpalk enters and generously offers drinks to three poor students. The students try to guess his identity, and when they finally recognize him, Pustrpalk, in a fit of grandeur, improvises a mocking, self-ironic song about his miraculous healing methods. His former companions join in. In the midst of the revelry, Pustrpalk suddenly sees a vision of the monk Jochimus. He charges at the apparition with a sword but falls to the ground, lifeless.