

L'Elisir D'Amore
By
Gaetano Donizetti

Opera Preview
By
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On Friday, March 1st at 7:30 PM at the Baton Rouge River Center, the Opera Louisiane will present the first grand opera performance in its history, Donizetti's "L'Elisir D'Amore," Directed by Dugg McDonough and Conducted by Michael Borowitz.

Background

This opera was Donizetti's most popular comedy (opera buffa) in his lifetime and today is one of the twelve most performed operas world wide.

Donizetti was born in 1797 of poor parents (father a pawn broker) with no background in music, in the city of Bergamo, Italy. As a member of the church choir, he nevertheless attracted the attention of the choirmaster of the local church, and was enrolled with a full scholarship in the "Lezioni Caritatevoli" school where he learned the arts of the fugue and counterpoint. He immediately began to write hundreds of choral pieces, operas, concertos, etc., some of which continue to be performed today. Among his other most performed operas are "Lucia di Lammermoor," based on Sir Walter Scott's The Bride of Lammermoor, Don Pasquale, Anna Bolena (Anne Boleyn), and The Daughter of the Regiment (in French).

Donizetti is ranked with Rossini and Bellini as one of the three most important masters of “Bel Canto” music. Over his lifetime he succeeded in writing about seventy operas, even though in his last few years he was incapacitated by a severe mental disability, and died at the age of 51 (1848).

The Opera

The plot of the story has to do with the inability of a poor peasant, Nemoreno, to attract the attention of Adina, the beautiful daughter of a rich landowner. He overhears Adina reading the story of Tristan and Isolde and decides to seek a similar magic potion to win Adina’s love. When Sergeant Belcore begins to court Adina in full view of his regiment as well as the townspeople, Nemorino panics. When alone with Adina he declares his love for her but Adina laughs him off, saying, “I will never love you.” He replies, “I will die for you.”

He then asks a travelling “doctor” Dulcamara if he has any such potion for him to purchase. Although Dulcamara admits he had never heard of Isolde, he assures Nemorino that his “cure-all” (actually some cheap Bordeaux) is exactly what he is looking for. To give himself time to make a get-away, Dulcamara assures Nemorino that the potion will not be fully effective for 24 hours.

But Nemorino takes the “Elixir” at once and believes he immediately begins to feel its effects, so when he sees Adina again, he pretends to be indifferent. Adina becomes annoyed (did she really love him?), and when Belcore reappears and proposes marriage, she accepts—in six days time (!) Nemorino believes the potion will be fully effective the next day, but when Belcore receives the call to leave with his regiment by morning, Adina agrees to marry him before he leaves. Nemorino once

again panics and searches for Dulcamara while Adina invites everyone to the wedding.

The following morning Nemorino begs Dulcamara for a more powerful potion, but when Dulcamara learns that Nemorino has no more money, he walks off. Belcore comes by and announces his surprise that Adina has put off the wedding. He asks Nemorino why he is so depressed and when Nemorino says he needs cash, Belcore offers him a contract to join the Army and immediately gives him the money. Nemorino believes he will win over Adina by his bravery and Belcore is pleased that he has removed his rival from the scene.

While Nemorino goes off to buy more of the Elixir from Dulcamara and Belcore returns to his men, a group of women gossip about a rumor that Nemorino's uncle has just died and left him a huge fortune. When Nemorino returns the women all begin flirting with him, which convinces him that the new Elixir must be working. Adina sees this and is annoyed.

She asks Dulcamara if he knows why Nemorino is now so popular with the ladies. Dulcamara explains that Nemorino spent all his money on a potion to win the love of a "cruel beauty," and when that failed he joined the Army to buy more of the potion with his signing bonus. She then realizes Nemorino's sincerity and regrets her previous rejection of him. When Dulcamara offers her some of the same potion she refuses saying her own charms are stronger than any potion.

Alone, Nemorino reflects on the tiny tear he saw in Adina's eye when he ignored her earlier, and sings the lovely aria, "Una furtive lagrima," becoming convinced that Adina does love him. Adina then approaches and asks why he joined the Army. He replies "to seek a better life." She tells him that he already has a good life and that he is loved.

She has bought back his contract from Sergeant Belcore and returns it to him. When she turns to leave, Nemorino believes she is abandoning him once again, and he cries out that if he is not loved he will go back into the army and die a soldier. Adina then declares that she will love him forever and begs him to forgive her. While they embrace Belcore returns, sees them, and declares that there are many other pretty women to be wooed.

Adina and Nemorino then learn of his inheritance from his uncle; Dulcamara boasts about the success of his Elixir; and everyone lines up to buy some of it from this great “Doctor.”