

LYRIC OPERA

KANSAS CITY

THE ELIXIR OF LOVE

BY GAETANO DONIZETTI | MARCH 12, 16, 18, AND 20, 2016

LYRIC OPERA'S TUNEFUL AND INNOCENT 'THE ELIXIR OF LOVE'
IS A PLEASING POTION

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By Libby Hanssen

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In a world of seemingly endless discord, isn't it refreshing to disappear into a place of nostalgic jollity, a place where even the bad guys are merely charming rascals and everyone leaves singing a peppy tune? Such is the case with Gaetano Donizetti's "The Elixir of Love," where a little bit of yearning and a lot of liquid courage bring together a fresh-faced pair of lovers.

Lyric Opera of Kansas City presents this pleasing scenario, with libretto by Felice Romani, at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts.

This production, which opened Saturday night, re-imagines Donizetti's generic Italian village as a turn-of-the-century rural American hamlet, with a streamer-festooned white gazebo, grassy town square perfect for market day and picnics, and a fresh color palette that insinuates a more innocent, peaceful time, even if it exists only in imagination. It's directed by James Robinson and designed by Allen Moyer (sets), Martin Pakledinaz (costumes) and Paul Palazzo (lighting).

The cast, a cadre of fine comic actors, brought a likable fresh innocence to their performances. Tenor Norman Reinhardt played the smitten admirer/itinerant ice cream vendor Nemorino to soprano Susannah Biller's feisty Adina. Baritone Elliot Madore gave his role as Sergeant Belcore a loose, overly confident swagger, while bass-baritone Patrick Carfizzi offered a flashy physicality to Dr. Dulcamara. Soprano Ashley Yvonne Wheat completed the cast as the flirty friend and confidant Gianetta.

The show is supremely tuneful, and the cast carried it well, generally. There were some unsupported starts and issues with sustain and projection, but technique failed usually when the characters were asked to take miscellaneous actions.

Though Act 1 had amusing sequences (with well-coached chorus and children), the exposition lacked momentum. The humor and vocal quality improved in Act 2, with Nemorino's awkward dancing (an extension of his amusing Act 1 drunken scene) and both of Dulcamara's and Adina's duets.

Reinhardt sang a sensitive yet commanding “Una furtiva lagrima,” an aria that is often surprising and always welcome. Biller followed that with an equally excellent “Prendi, per me sei libero.”

The eager orchestra, conducted by Christopher Allen, provided a lively reading, but its enthusiasm consistently drowned out the cast and chorus instead of supporting them. This was unfortunate, as the magic of Donizetti’s bel canto lines comes from their virtuosic twining and vocal gymnastics, too often unheard this evening.

Ultimately, though, the relatable positivity and feel-good energy projected success.