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Women’s Ensemble / VMIV

6 April 2016

*L’Elesir d’Amore,* Opera Review

The matinee performance of *L’elesir d’Amore* at the Metropolitan Opera House on March 19 welcomed an extensive audience to embark on an entertaining journey with the young peasant Nemorino in his attempts to win the love of the beautiful, impulsive Adina. The masterful work of composer Gaetano Donizetti is evident in the engaging storyline and ingenious arias, and maestro Enrique Mazzola expertly morphs Donizetti’s creations into an impressive new dimension in which audience members can discover suspense, humor, idiocy, cunning, and love.

The libretto of the opera follows the desire of Nemorino (Victoria Gregolo) for Adina (Aleksandra Kurzak), which eventually results in the young peasant buying a fake elixir from a traveling salesman, Dulcamara (Alessandro Corbelli). Dulcamara sells Nemorino a bottle of Bordeaux, claiming that it is a love potion corresponding to the storyline of one of Adina’s favorite novels. In an attempt to make Nemorino jealous, Adina marries Belcore (Adam Plachetka), an army officer. However, her decision results in Nemorino enlisting in the army. Unrelatedly, Nemorino’s uncle dies in another town, leaving the previously poor boy as an eligible wealthy bachelor. Due to his newly elevated status, Nemorino receives romantic interest from every female townsperson, resulting in him finally winning Adina’s heart.

As, a whole, the opera is efficiently and delicately executed. The set design proves to be extravagantly organized and remarkably detailed throughout the entire performance. The scrim provides believable and fluid changes between each scene, resulting in a continuous experience for the audience. If a complicated transition is necessary, the audience remains thoroughly entertained by intricate preludes from the orchestra. In one instance, many audience members were thoroughly impressed by the responsibility that several of the soldiers took on as they moved grass pieces on the stage during the performance while maintaining character and not distracting from the principal. The raked stage also provides an excellent canvas on which the libretto is portrayed. However in some aspects, it is perceivable that the librettist, Felici Romani, did not develop a few of the characters to their fullest potential. The exposition of the story is depthless and superficial because Romani does not include any establishment of the characters other than the brief opening number, which makes any attempt to identify with the characters very difficult for the audience members. Additionally, the character of Belcore seems insincere and desultory due to his limited opportunity to express himself, resulting in no real tragedy or sense of loss when Adina must choose between the two men.

However, several other aspects of the performance are obviously intricately planned and expertly designed. The costumes are simple, but each character’s costume reveals an important part of his individuality and temperament. One unique, noticeable aspect is the distinct difference between both the color and style of Adina’s appearance when compared to the other female townspeople. Her red skirt is an indicator of her attractiveness in comparison with the other pastel-colored, plain-looking girls. Additionally, her hairstyle as a loose, wavy cushion instead of a tight bun represents her refusal to conform to societal standards. Although, the aspect of dramatic facial expression in all cast members is lacking due to the seemingly miniscule amount of makeup that was applied to the performers’ faces. The absence of drama in the face is reflected by the occasional tendency of some characters to remove themselves from the story, as evidence in Dulcamara’s scene with the townspeople. His fraudulence as a salesperson could have easily been defined with makeup, rather than his excessive to effort to stand out, which distracted from the libretto as a whole.

One of the most amazing aspects of the opera can be effortlessly observed in the ensemble cast. It is obvious that each member creates a character backstory with their own personality, but they never distract from the principal performers. Each audience member is aware of the goal that the ensemble cast is aiming to accomplish as a team which aids in progressing the plot. On the contrary, several of the principal actors can be described as boring and comatose. For example, Belcore, portrayed by Adam Plachetka, often only stands on stage rather than contributing any new, creative aspects to the performance. On occasion, Dulcamara, played by Alessandro Corbelli, also easily falls into this pattern. These faults are perhaps most evident in large group numbers when the audience was not able to be entertained by the principals and therefore became distracted by other events occurring on the stage. Inverse to Plachetka’s downfall involving excessive bodily motion, Corbelli did not make any attempt to incorporate movement other than necessary choreographed motions, which is contrary to what an audience member would imagine a salesperson to be.

*L’Elesir d’Amore* is certainly a wonderful piece of art that inspires audience members to further pursue opera as a form of entertainment due to its unexpected comedy, entertaining libretto, talented actors, surprisingly detailed scenery, smooth transitions, and endurable length. Any individual who appreciates musical and theatrical talent will certainly be engaged by the genius of Gaetano Donizetti and his fellow artists.