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# Sacramento Opera delivers sizzling 'Elixir'

By Edward Ortiz

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Published: Saturday, Nov. 21, 2009 - 10:54 am

Last Modified: Saturday, Nov. 21, 2009 - 3:21 pm

Like a live wire that throws off sparks wherever it wills, the Sacramento Opera's production of Donizetti's "Elixir of Love," sizzles. And it does so with potent singing and crisp, smart direction.

The result was the delivery, on Friday evening at the Community Center Theater, of the best production this company has staged in recent memory.

Directed by up-and-comer Jose Maria Condemi, this "Elixir" is updated from the Basque hinterlands of the 1840's to Napa Valley in the 1940's. And under Condemi's direction the target is crisp and effective comedy. Big risks are taken to reach that end, mostly to great success.

Here, singers are asked to honor all the broad comic strokes, while also delivering the tiniest of dramatic inflections. Typically you get the first but not the last in such productions. Overall, Condemi pushes his singers to the limit, physically. In this production acting is no poor stepchild to singing. And that serves to bring this story of the peasant Nemorino, who seeks the love of Adina, a capricious landowner, into highest comic relief.

The idea that this will not be your run-of-the-mill staging of "Elixir" becomes clear from the first note of the prelude. Here, Condemi has tenor Dinyar Vania, as Nemorino, and soprano Katrina Thurman, as Adina, appear in front of the curtain for a short quasi-pantomime - a risky Brechtian move that sets the tone of the evening.

In this "Elixir" both Vania and Thurman give impressive vocal performances. They live up to the task of filling the large Community Center Theater with their voices.

In the show-defining last act aria "Una furtiva lagrima," Vania sings with warmth and radiance, never overplaying the emotion, yet selling the bittersweet quality of Donizetti music and Felice Romani's libretto. And the statuesque Thurman, who looks more like a Hollywood starlet in this production than a Napa Valley landowner, uses her strong and youthful soprano to great effect. The sense of comic spontaneity and sexual brio that she brought to the Adina role makes this production a must see.

Also strong was baritone David Small as the braggart sargeant Belcore. The weak link in this production is baritone Igor Vieira in the role of the charlatan doctor Dulcamara. Vieira played his Dulcamara as part pimp, part Madoff-like schemer. As an actor he sold the over the top comic aspects of the role with brio, but there were times when these were overplayed, and his voice did not

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carry well in the hall. To Vieira's credit, the role calls for plenty of fast and clipped singing, and Condemi burdens the role with a mountain of comic action.

In the role of Giannetta, soprano Carrie Hennessey gave a robust performance. She delivered the second act aria "Saria possibile?" with skill and sincere emotion. The chorus also gave a colorful performance.

Conductor Timm Rolek kept the orchestra at a lively pace throughout the evening. He coaxed a workable sound balance from the orchestra, which allowed voices to bloom.

At this opera's end, you were left with the impression that the light bulb was on in the staging, acting and singing of this production, which is a rarity in most operas, no matter where they're given.

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