

Wine becomes magic potion in Florentine's 'Elixir of Love'

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Many a guy has hoped a bottle of wine would be the magic potion that wins him the affection of his crush. Florentine Opera tests that thesis in its entertaining new production of Donizetti's comic "Elixir of Love" ("L'elisir d'Amore").

At Florentine's invitation, I saw the "Elixir" dress rehearsal Wednesday evening at the Marcus Performing Arts Center.

Doubling down on the wine theme, stage director Brenna Corner and scenic designer Lisa Schlenker have transferred Donizetti's opera from 19th-century Italy to a California vineyard in the 1930s; costume designer Christianne Myers has dressed the performers, including members of the Florentine Opera Chorus, like Steinbeck characters.

Poor farmworker Nemorino (tenor Andrew Stenson) pines for wealthy landowner Adina (soprano Marie-Eve Munger), who's uninterested in settling down with any man. After hear-

If you go

Florentine Opera performs Donizetti's "Elixir of Love" at 7:30 p.m. tonight and 2:30 p.m. Sunday at Marcus Performing Arts Center's Uihlein Hall, 929 N. Water St. For tickets, visit florentineopera.org.

ing about the magic potion the legendary Tristan used to win Isolde, Nemorino begs traveling medical charlatan Dulcamara (baritone Zachary Nelson) for such an elixir. Dulcamara takes the sap's last \$20 for the elixir (really a bottle of "cheap Bordeaux," the con man tells us).

The hijinks that follow include Nemorino, convinced the potion takes a day to work, playing hard to get with Adina; the intrigued and miffed Adina impulsively getting engaged to Belcore (baritone Darren Drone), a pompous and boorish recruiting sergeant; rumors of an inheritance that make one nebbish suddenly look more attractive to every woman; and Dulcamara wondering if his cheap wine really is the precursor of "Love Potion No. 9."



Andrew Stenson and cast perform in Florentine Opera's "Elixir of Love."

TRAVELING LEMUR PRODUCTIONS

Even on her fake wedding day, Adina wears slacks, reflecting who really wears the pants in this story. Similarly, Munger is the boss here, with forceful gestures and sweetly timed hip bumps, the mostly sane woman around these knuckleheads.

Stenson sings the opera's best known aria, "Una furtiva lagrima" ("A single tear"); it's the moment when it finally seems he might be a worthy partner for this strong woman.

Domenico Boyagian conducts the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra in Donizetti's sweet score, which goes down very smoothly. Florentine performs "Elixir" in Italian with English supertitles.