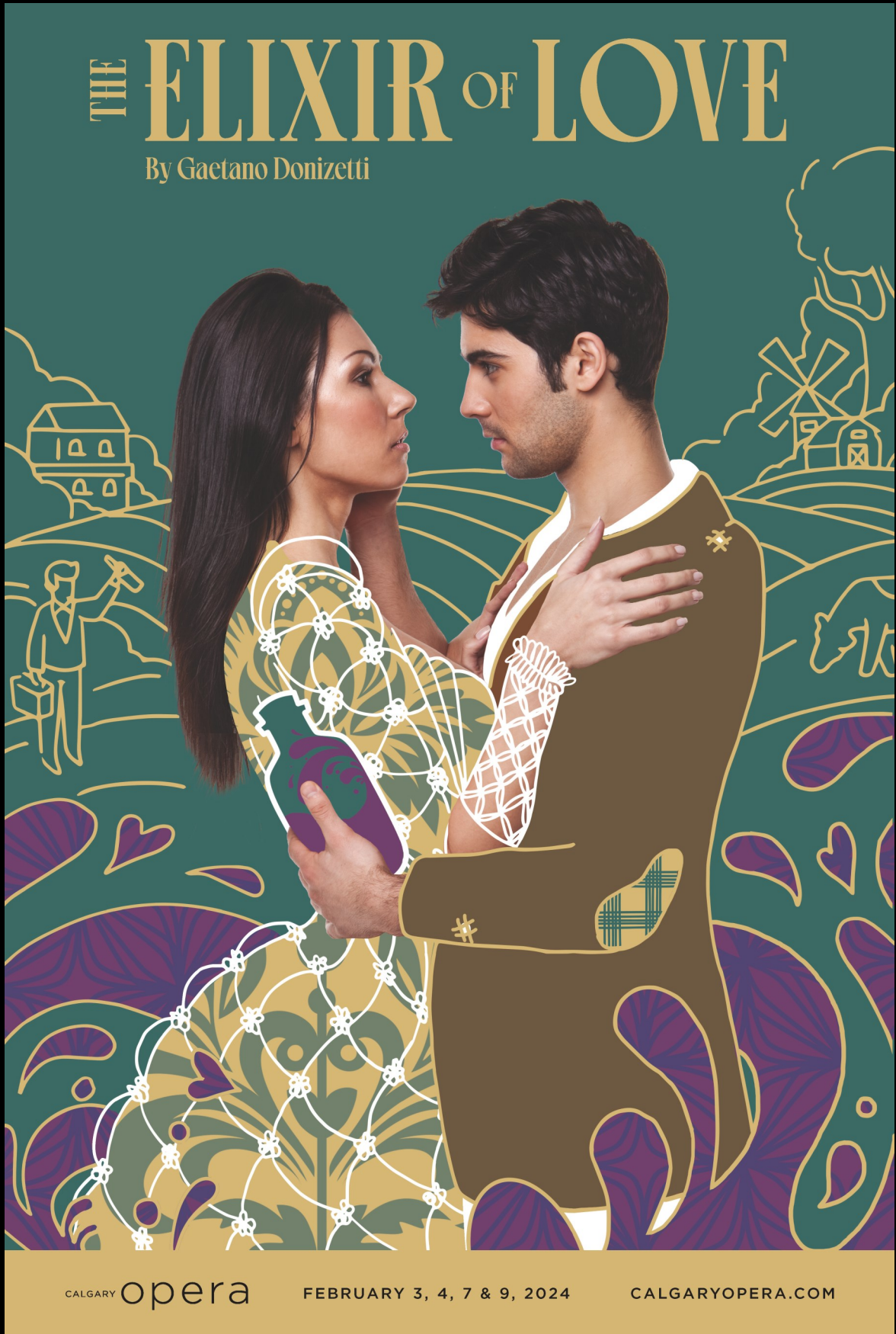


Calgary Opera Study Guide—The Elixir of Love

Student Dress Rehearsal—Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium—February 1, 2024



CALGARY opera

FEBRUARY 3, 4, 7 & 9, 2024

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In the spirit of reconciliation, we acknowledge that we live, work and play on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Iyarhe Nakoda Nations, the Otipemisiwak Métis Government of the Métis Nation within Alberta Districts 5 & 6, and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta

Welcome!

We're excited to offer our second mainstage production of the 2023-24 season, Gaetano Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love*. While this opera is a wonderful comedy and love story written by one of the Kings of Bel Canto style, it goes beyond the surface to expose the insecurities we all feel when we're hoping for love. This is what makes this opera so achingly sweet, so honest and touching. As our Managing Director and CEO Sue Elliott said, "Donizetti makes you smile through the tears".

The final dress rehearsal is a significant event in the opera world. This is the last opportunity that the artists, the Stage Manager, the Conductor, the orchestra and technicians have to see the entire piece and know that their hard work and preparation have paid off with a wonderful work for the audience to enjoy. This being said, there could be final adjustments taking place as you are watching! What an exciting piece of the artistic journey you get to take part in. I believe that you will see the hours and hours of preparation time it takes to bring together something as huge as an opera. Take a look at pages 18 and 19 in this guide to get a sense for the countless people required.

We hope that you enjoy this opera and that you keep coming back for more final dress rehearsals and performances, both at the Jubilee Auditorium as well as at our home in Calgary's Beltline community, the Mamdani Opera Centre.

Warmest regards and wishing you smiles through your tears,

Patricia Kesler

Education and Community Engagement Manager, Calgary Opera

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Canada



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The Elixir of Love—Things to know



Frieda Hempel as Adina and Enrico Caruso as Nemorino in Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore*.
Photo: White Studio

Photo courtesy of Wikicommons

- *The Elixir of Love* is a comedy! Not all operas are tragedies and *Elixir* is not only a comedy, but a romantic comedy! It was the rom com of it's time
- The opera runs for approximately 3 hours with one intermission and is sung in Italian with English translations projected above the stage
- The opera first premiered at Teatro Della Canobbina in Milan, Italy in May of 1832
- The opera was originally written in Italian and is called *L'elisir d'amore* in Italian. In media it is often identified as such but for this study guide we will refer to it as *The Elixir of Love*, the English translation of the title

• The Composer and Librettist (writer), Gaetano Donizetti and Felice Romani respectively, wrote the opera in a mere 6 weeks! Regardless of

the haste of the work the opera has stood the test of time, and is performed as a regular part of the modern repertoire in opera houses all over the world

- The opera is based on Eugène Scribe's libretto for Daniel Auber's opera, *Le Philtre* from 1831. In fact, *The Elixir of Love* is effectively a complete copy of *Le Philtre*, which was a common practice at the time. So many operas were being written and performed that composers and librettists freely 'borrowed' from other works. Auber's *Le Philtre* itself drew heavily from the Commedia dell'Arte tradition which can be understood on page.....
- The elixir in *The Elixir of Love* is supposedly a love potion sold by the travelling "doctor" Dulcamara, but in fact, it's only red wine
- *The Elixir of Love* is a classic opera in the bel canto style, which is a style that centers on the voice, and literally means "beautiful" or "fine" singing, with clear melodic lines and beautiful music. Bel Canto operas were written largely as vocal showcases for the opera singers, where they could demonstrate their incredible vocal talents. The drama and emotion of Bel Canto operas derive from the vocal parts, creating a sound story for the audience to follow.
- Donizetti, along with Gioachino Rossini and Vincenzo Bellini were the kings of Bel Canto, which can be understood as both a singing style and a category of opera
- One of the most famous arias (songs) for tenor voice is *Una furtiva lagrima*, sung in our production by the Tenor David Portillo who plays Nemorino. This aria is so beautiful that it is credited with making a star of Enrico Caruso (pictured above), who went on to worldwide fame after his showstopping performance as Nemorino in 1901 at La Scala opera house in Milan, Italy
- Opera companies often rent sets and costumes from other companies. Our set comes from New Orleans and was designed by Constantinos Kritikos and our costumes come from Sarasota Opera and were designed by Howard Tsvi Kaplan

Your Guide to Attending the Opera

There are many existing preconceived notions about opera and so a first visit to an operatic performance may bring up a number of questions. Here are some tips on how to make your night at the opera a hit.

By far, the most popular question and concern is:

What do I wear to the opera?

In the past, opera audiences have been known to wear lavish gowns as well as top hats and bow ties, giving the rest of the public a feeling that opera isn't for everyone, which is definitely not the case! In today's opera lovers' world, audiences come dressed in whatever they feel most comfortable! Your pajamas might attract stares, but you do you!



Where are the performances held?

All Calgary Opera's productions are held at the *Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium*, 1415 14 Ave N.W., Calgary. If you are driving, it is recommended that you arrive approximately 45 minutes prior to the start of the show to avoid traffic. Another great reason to arrive on time is to avoid missing part of the opera! If you arrive after the performance begins, you may be held in the lobby until the ushers can admit you.

Your Experience at the Opera

On Dress Rehearsal nights the performance begins at 7:00pm. The Jubilee Auditorium opens at 6:00pm and doors into the theatre open at 6:30pm. Please arrive early! There are several things to do in the lobby pre-show: snacks, drinks and tea and coffee are available at the bars and there are usually displays set up as photo opportunity sites. Also, our Shopera sells an interesting assortment of Opera merchandise for you to remember

your experience by. You will be advised by an announcement when the doors to the main hall are open. Once in the theatre, you will notice a number of individuals gathered at the very front of the auditorium: these are the patrons that like to look into the orchestra pit and see the musicians. Don't be shy, wander down and have a look!

Food is not allowed inside the hall, however you may bring your drinks if they are in a plastic container.

Please remember that many hours have gone into bringing this particular production to you, so please be considerate of the performers and your fellow audience members and turn off and put away your cell phones.

Please take note that photography is not permitted once the performance begins. The design and direction of the show is under intellectual property and only the official Calgary Opera photographers may take pictures.

Another big concern that the public has about opera is the fact that it is in a different language. This, of course, is true for most operas, however, like any foreign film that is accessible to the public, opera always, no matter what language it's sung in, has easy to read English **SURTITLES** which are projected above the stage.

Please, do feel free to **show your appreciation** to the performers by laughing at the humorous parts and or applauding after a well—performed aria. If you were particularly impressed by a performer's vocal acrobatics, feel free to express your enthusiasm vocally as well as by applause; if you hear fellow audience members shout "**bravo**" for a man, "**brava**" for a woman or "**bravi**" for a group of performers, chime in if the spirit moves you! Remember, for a performer, audience response is one of the most rewarding parts of their work!

Some may argue that opera is an acquired taste. However, to acquire the taste we must first expose ourselves to it, and there is no better way than doing it live!

Below is a helpful Calgary Opera link that may answer any additional questions you may have:

<https://www.calgaryopera.com/plan-your-visit>

The Composer—Who is Gaetano Donizetti?

Composer Gaetano Donizetti was born on November 29th, 1797 in Bergamo, in what is now known as Italy. He was the son of a municipal pawnshop caretaker and a seamstress. His father wanted him to be apprenticed to an architect or lawyer, but the young Gaetano was only interested in art, music and poetry. He talked his father into entering him into the Bergamo School of Music at age nine. There he came under the influence of Professor J.S Mayr who encouraged him to enroll at the Lico Filarmonico at Bologna, where he studied singing, harpsichord, harmony and counterpoint.

He completed his first Opera, *Enrico di Borgogna*, while in the Austrian army in 1818. He became a prolific composer, composing no fewer than 31 operas over the next 12 years, and added a dramatic urgency to the Bel Canto style of singing and a sharp ear for unobtrusive but sensitive orchestration.

His next greatest success was *Anna Bolena* in 1830, which brought him fame across all of Europe and eventually across the Atlantic. Two years later he succeeded again with *L'elisir d'amore* (*The Elixir of Love*) with libretto by Felice Romani, the best theatre poet of the day.



The young Donizetti, photo public domain

Donizetti was driven by an almost frantic need to compose, which he did with ease. He habitually overworked himself, partly to keep earning money, partly to keep pace with the demands of the Opera Houses and other commissions. He wrote so rapidly that he completed the full Opera, *Il Campanello di Notte* in nine days, and finished the last act of *La Favorita* in a few hours. It is believed that he kept meticulous files of unused opera ideas, so that not one would go to waste. A famous print cartoon of the time, had him writing with one quill pen in each hand—one for Opera Buffa, and one for Opera Seria. He was appointed band master to the Austrian Emperor, and accepted many honours during his lifetime.

Donizetti's comic operas are marked by spontaneity and energy that are balanced with tenderness and emotional development of the characters. His most famous are, of course, *L'Elisir d'Amore* (*The Elixir of Love*) (1832), which followed in the footsteps of Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* (1816), *La Fille du Régiment* (*The Daughter of the Regiment*)(1840) and *Don Pasquale* (1843), being his last real success. *Don Pasquale* had both a sparkling score and a clever libretto, written in collaboration with Giovanni Ruffini.

His serious operas that remain in the public mind and eye are known for their powerful passion and swift dramatic action such as in *Anna Bolena* (1830), *Lucrezia Borgia* (1833), *Roberto Devereaux* (1837), the grand work considered his finest serious French opera *La Favorite* (1840); and *Lucia di Lammermoor* (1835).

After a personal life of marriage to Virginia Vasseli, who died after the stillbirth of a son in 1837, and the death of all three of his children at birth, Donizetti died of syphilis. This was also likely the cause of death of his family members. Gaetano Donizetti died on April 8th, 1848 in Lombardy in what is now known as Italy.

The Librettist Felice Romani, The Conductor Farkhad Khudiyev

Librettist Felice Romani was born in Genoa, in what is now known as Italy, in 1788. He was a very famous librettist in his day. Although he studied law to make his family happy, his passion was literature, and he became friends with important literary figures in Italy in the early 19th century.

Romani was offered the position of court poet in Vienna, but he chose to concentrate on writing librettos. He wrote the librettos for many well-known and less well-known operas and became the librettist for La Scala, the famous opera house in Milan.

Among the many composers with whom he worked were Vincenzo Bellini, Gioachino Rossini, and Gaetano Donizetti and Giuseppe Verdi, all great bel canto opera composers.

Romani's libretto for *the Elixir of Love* was adapted from the work of another libretto for the opera *Le Philtre*. He renamed the characters, but his original libretto did not suggest a change of the setting from Spain. Many productions, however, locate the opera in an Italian village.

Romani often adapted other works, keeping up to date with French drama. Despite this 'borrowing' from others, Romani set himself high standards, insisting on making the words as important as the music.

Romani died in 1865 in Moneglia, in what is now known as Italy.



Felice Romani, photo public domain



Conductor Farkhad Khudiyev

Described as “magician on the podium” (Performing Arts Monterey Bay), Farkhad Khudiyev is the winner of the Gold Medal “Beethoven 250” at the 1st International Arthur Nikisch Conducting Competition; the Solti Foundation US 2018, 2022 Career Assistance Award; the Best Interpretation Prize at the 1st International Taipei Conducting Competition; 3rd prize at the 8th International Sir Georg Solti Conducting Competition in Germany; and the Gold Medal/Grand Prize at the 2007 National Fischhoff Competition.

Khudiyev has worked with orchestras worldwide including the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, Frankfurt Opera Orchestra, Danish National Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Dallas Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Diego Symphony, Monterey Symphony, George Enescu Philharmonic Orchestra, Xi'an Symphony Orchestra and the State Taipei Chinese Orchestra.

Farkhad was born in Turkmenistan, where he studied at the State Music School for gifted musicians, and then completed his studies at Interlochen Arts Academy, Oberlin Conservatory and Yale University.

Khudiyev serves as the Music Director of the University of Texas Symphony Orchestra in Austin, and the Orchestral Institute at the Hidden Valley Institute of the Arts in Carmel, California.

This is Mr. Khudiyev's first time working with Calgary Opera. To find out more about him, please go to:

[Farkhad Khudiyev | Official Website](#)

Director Pablo Maritano

Director Pablo Maritano

Italian-Argentine director Pablo Maritano was born in Buenos Aires, where he graduated at the Ernesto de la Cárcova School of Fine Arts, and Opera Direction at the Teatro Colón. He also completed his training as a pianist and actor. His work received numerous awards and distinctions, including the Berlin Musical Theater Festival for his production of *Cachafaz*, Creative Europe Award for the Italian-Spanish production of *L'Élixir d'amore*, the Chilean International Critics Award for his production of *Platée* and *Otello* (re-staged several times in Chile, Uruguay and Argentina), Konex Prize 2019, ACE and Buenos Aires ACM have distinguished him on numerous occasions.

With a wide repertoire of more than fifty opera productions in America, Europe and Asia, between them the Latin American premieres of *Platée* and *Die Soldaten*, at Teatro Colón, that gained international attention; the new production of *La Ciudad Ausente*, by Argentine composer Gerardo Gandini, at Teatro Argentino de La Plata in 2011, and the South American premiere of *Hippolyte et Aricie*, by Rameau. In 2018 he directed the Brazilian premiere of *Der Rosenkavalier* by R. Strauss at Teatro Municipal de São Paulo, which also gained a new staging at the same Opera house in 2022. In 2012, he staged *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* by Mozart with a new dramaturgy that became a success. He has also directed *Le Malade Imaginaire*, *Carmen*, *Faust*, *Giulio Cesare* and *Le Grand Macabre*, and a multimedia version of *Madama Butterfly* at Teatro SODRE in Montevideo, Uruguay. Further remarkable productions were last year new stagings of *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Sao Paulo) and *Viva La Mamma* (Teatro Colon, Buenos Aires).

Mr. Maritano has had an intense teaching career since 2008, teaching opera directing and acting in several institutions in Argentina, Spain, Chile, Switzerland, Italy, France and Brazil. He was in charge of the artistic production direction of the Colon theaters in Buenos Aires and Argentino de la Plata, professor of the Opera Directing Career at ISA-Teatro Colón, is a frequent guest teacher at the University of Music in Basel, Switzerland, Les Rencontres Baroques de Montfrin, France, Universidad Nacional de Rosario, among others.

His upcoming productions include *Midsummer Night's Dream* (Switzerland), *Orphée aux Enfers* (Chile-Argentina), Puccini's *Trittico*, Cavalli's *La Calisto* and *Le Comte Ory* (Brazil), and *Il Turco in Italia* (Argentina).

This is Mr. Maritano's first time working with Calgary Opera. To find out more about him, please go to:

[Pablo Maritano](#)



Director Pablo Maritano in a photo by Sebastián Freire from an article by Naty Menstrual in the publication *Página 12*, Jan 24, 2020

Synopsis

In opera as well as theatre, the synopsis of the work is written in the program for the audience. What does synopsis mean? According to the online etymology dictionary, which doesn't give us definitions of words, but explains to us the history of a word, where did it come from and how do we use it today, the word comes to us from Latin "synopsis" and from Greek "synopsis" meaning "a general view, "a seeing altogether, al seeing all at once". So, a general storyline, or plot, of the entire piece, so that we can see the piece all at once. Now you know.

The Elixir of Love, opera in two Acts

Setting: a village in the Italian countryside

ACT 1

Nemorino, a poor peasant, is in love with Adina, a beautiful landowner, who torments him with her indifference. When Nemorino hears Adina reading to her workers the story of Tristan and Isolde, he is convinced that a magic potion will help him to gain Adina's love. The self-important Sergeant Belcore appears with his regiment and immediately sets about courting Adina in front of everyone. Nemorino becomes anxious (although Adina meanwhile secretly derides Belcore's complacency) and, alone with Adina, reveals his love for her. Adina rebuffs him, saying that she wants a different lover every day and that Nemorino would do well to follow her example. Nemorino declares that his feelings will never change. The traveling quack doctor, Dulcamara (the self-proclaimed Dr. Encyclopedia), arrives, selling his bottled cure-all to the townspeople. Nemorino innocently asks Dulcamara if he has any of Isolde's love potion. Despite failing to recognize the name "Isolde", Dulcamara's commercial talents nevertheless enable him to sell a bottle of the "elixir" – in reality only cheap red wine – to Nemorino, who pays for it with all the cash at his disposal.

To make a safe escape, Dulcamara tells Nemorino the potion needs 24 hours to take effect – by which time, the doctor will be long gone. Nemorino drinks the potion in haste in order to watch the effect the following day. Emboldened by the "elixir" (in fact, drunk), Nemorino feigns indifference when he encounters Adina, as he expects that the elixir will facilitate his conquest of Adina the next day. She becomes increasingly annoyed; perhaps she has feelings for Nemorino after all? Belcore returns and proposes marriage to Adina. Still riled by Nemorino and wishing to give him a lesson, Adina falsely promises to marry Belcore in six days' time. Yet, Nemorino only laughs in response: such confidence is sustained in the belief in the magic potion. However, when Belcore learns that his regiment must leave the next morning, Adina promises to marry him before his departure. This panics Nemorino, who cries out for Dr. Dulcamara to come to his aid. Adina, meanwhile, invites everyone to the wedding.

ACT 2

Adina and Belcore's wedding party is in full swing. Dr. Dulcamara encourages Adina to sing a duet with him to entertain the guests. The notary arrives to make the marriage official. Adina is annoyed to see that Nemorino has not appeared, for the whole deal has been intended only to punish him. While everyone goes to witness the signing of the wedding contract, Dulcamara stays behind, helping himself to food and drink. Having seen the notary, Nemorino appears, depressed, as he believes that he has lost Adina. He sees Dulcamara and frantically begs him for a more powerful, faster-acting elixir. Although Dulcamara is proud to boast of his philanthropy, upon discovering that Nemorino now has no money he changes his tune and marches off, refusing to supply him anything.continued on next page

Synopsis continued

Belcore emerges, musing about why Adina has suddenly put off the wedding and signing of the contract. He spots Nemorino and asks his rival why he is depressed. When Nemorino says he needs cash, Belcore suggests joining the army, as he'll receive funds on the spot. Belcore tries to excite Nemorino with tales of military life, while Nemorino only thinks of getting the potion and thus winning Adina, if only for a day before departure. Belcore produces a contract, which Nemorino signs in return for the money. Nemorino privately vows to rush and buy more potion, while Belcore muses about how sending Nemorino off to war has so easily dispatched his rival.

After the two men have left, Giannetta gossips with the women of the village. Swearing them all to secrecy, she reveals that Nemorino's uncle has just died and left his nephew a large fortune. However, neither Nemorino nor Adina is yet aware of this. Nemorino enters, having spent his military signing bonus on – and consumed – a large amount of the fake elixir from Dr. Dulcamara. Hoping to share his fortune, the women approach Nemorino with overly friendly greetings. So out of character is this that Nemorino takes it as proof of the elixir's efficacy. Adina sees Nemorino with the women, is rattled by his newfound popularity, and asks Dr. Dulcamara for an explanation. Unaware that Adina is the object of Nemorino's affection, Dulcamara explains that Nemorino spent his last penny on the elixir and joined the army for money to get more, so desperate was he to win the love of some unnamed cruel beauty. Adina immediately recognises Nemorino's sincerity, regrets her behaviour and realises that she has loved Nemorino all along. Although Dulcamara seizes the opportunity to try to sell her some of his potion to win back Nemorino, Adina declares that she has full confidence in her own powers of attraction.

Nemorino appears alone, pensive, reflecting on a tear he saw in Adina's eye when he was ignoring her earlier. Solely based on that, he convinces himself that Adina loves him. She enters and asks why he has chosen to join the army and leave the village. When Nemorino explains that he was seeking a better life, Adina responds that he is loved and that she has purchased back his military contract from Sergeant Belcore. She offers the cancelled contract to Nemorino and reassures him that, if he stays, he will be happy. As he takes the contract, Adina turns to leave. Nemorino believes she is abandoning him and flies into a desperate fit, vowing that if he is not loved he might as well go off and die a soldier. Deeply moved by his fidelity, Adina finally declares that she will love Nemorino forever. Nemorino is ecstatic. Adina begs him to forgive her, which he does with a kiss. Belcore returns to see Nemorino and Adina in an embrace. When Adina explains that she loves Nemorino, the Sergeant takes the news in stride, noting that there are plenty of other women in the world. Adina and Nemorino learn about the inheritance from his uncle. Dulcamara returns and boasts of the success of his elixir: Nemorino is now not only loved but also rich. Dulcamara exults in the boost this will bring to the sales of his product. As Dulcamara prepares to leave, everyone queues up to buy the elixir and to hail Dulcamara as a great physician.

**Added resource:* The Metropolitan Opera in New York, NY, creates illustrated synopsis that are a quick and easy way to understand the plot of the opera. Here's the one for *The Elixir of Love*: [Metropolitan Opera | L'Elisir d'Amore \(metopera.org\)](https://www.metopera.org/production/elixir-of-love)

Cast, Character Studies

Calgary Opera’s production of *The Elixir of Love* stars opera singers from around the world, however as a special bonus, we are presenting a Sunday matinée performance on February 4th featuring our very own McPhee Artist Development program singers in all of the roles.

Character	Pronunciation	Artist	Voice Type
Adina—a wealthy and beautiful landowner	Ah-DEE-nah	Simone Osborne [^] / Nicole Leung ^{**+}	Soprano
Nemorino– a simple peasantman who is poor, and in love with Adina	Nem-or-EE-noh	David Portillo [^] / Elias Theocharidis ^{**+}	Tenor
Belcore– a brash army sergeant who is sure of his appeal to women	Bel-CORE-ay	Andrew Love [^] / Connor Hoppenbrouwers ^{**+}	Bass Baritone
Dr. Dulcamara—a traveling salesman who sells the elixir of love	Dool-kah-MAH-rah	Ao Li [^] / Branden Olsen ^{**+}	Baritone
Giannetta– a peasant woman	Jah-NAYT-tah	Christina Thanisch-Smith ^{^**+}	Soprano

[^] Artists listed for final dress rehearsal and performances on February 1, 3, 7 & 9, 2024

^{**}Artists listed for Matinée performance on February 4, 2024

⁺ Artists who are members of the McPhee Artist Development Program

Adina—In the 1830’s when this opera premiered, more often than not, fathers were still choosing husbands for their daughters. It was a rare case that a woman could marry for love, as is the case with Adina. She is a wealthy land owner and has the power to pick her partner. However, she is still bound to the need to have her land pass down to her children, so she still must marry and have children in order to keep the land in her family. There is also a need to have her future husband be at the same economic level as she is. In the beginning of the opera Nemorino has nothing and so is not the ideal suitor for Adina. When it is discovered that his rich uncle has died and left him with an inheritance, the path is opened for the two to marry.

Nemorino– Nemorino is a simple, young village man. He is often described as a gullible, inexperienced character. This is supported by his belief in Dr. Dulcamara and his “magic” potions, as well, when he purchases the elixir for the second time, he does it with the money he receives for signing up to Belcore’s army. He doesn’t consider the fact that he will be shipped out to the battle field within days, he just wants Adina to love him at all costs.

Continued on next page...

Character Studies continued, Biographies

Belcore– a pompous army sergeant, Belcore is sure he is irresistible to Adina, and all other women. When she agrees to marry him, he doesn't consider it is because she wants to make Nemorino jealous. When she leaves him for Nemorino at the end of the opera, he simply moves on to the next woman

Dr. Dulcamara– perhaps the most interesting character in the opera, Dr. Dulcamara is a fraud, a traveling salesman who is willing to say anything to sell his potions and elixirs to unsuspecting customers. He is an expert comedian as well and is responsible for much of the hilarity in the opera.

He is aware of his own trickery but feels no remorse. When he sells Nemorino the elixir of love, he conveniently tells him it takes 24 hours to take effect, at which time he will be gone to the next town already. The name Dulcamara translates to “bittersweet” in Italian, literally he is both sweet in offering hope to lovelorn peasants but also bitter as he takes their money in exchange for potions that he knows are ineffective.

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

Simone Osborne (Adina) -Canadian soprano Simone Osborne has been hailed as "a joy to hear" (Los Angeles Times) with "a sweet and clear sound, sensitive phrasing and gleaming sustained high notes" (New York Times). Ms. Osborne was one of the youngest winners of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions. Her hometown is Vancouver, B.C., where she has been seen in Rigoletto (Gilda), Roméo et Juliette (Juliette), and Die Zauberflöte (Pamina) with Vancouver Opera. She joined the Vancouver Symphony and Bach Choirs for Handel's Messiah, and gave a recital for the Music in the Morning series. On the concert stage, Ms. Osborne crossed the United States in a 15-city tour with the Metropolitan Opera Rising Stars series.



Ms. Osborne made her role debut as the title role in Lucia di Lammermoor at Edmonton Opera. On the concert stage, she appeared in Honegger's Jeanne d'Arc au bûcher (Marguerite) for her debuts with Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo, Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse, and Orchestre de Paris, all under Kazuki Yamada. She also debuted with the New York Philharmonic in the same piece under Alan Gilbert. She is a graduate of the Canadian Opera Company's Studio Ensemble program and has returned to the COC repeatedly. To find out more, please visit:

[Simone Osborne — Soprano —](#)

David Portillo (Nemorino) -Praised by Opera News for “high notes with ease, singing with a luxuriant warm glow that seduced the ear as he bounded about the stage with abandon,” American tenor David Portillo has established himself as a leading classical singer of his generation. Projects for 2022-2023 include Tamino in The Magic Flute at the Metropolitan Opera, Ferrando in Così fan tutte with The Dallas Opera, Nadir in The Pearl Fishers with Austin Opera, Tonio in La fille du regiment with Minnesota Opera, Henry in Die schweigsame Frau with Bard Festival and Don Ottavio in Don Giovanni in Osaka, Japan. He will also join the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra for Britten's Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings and select Mozart arias, Jane Glover and Music of the Baroque as the title role in Handel's Jephtha, and present a recital as part of the Source Song Festival in Minneapolis. In the 2021-2022 season, David performed Lurcanio in Ariodante with the Palau des les Arts Reina Sofia in Valencia, Spain, Lysander in A Midsummer Night's Dream with Opéra de Lille and Tamino in Die Zauberflöte with Pittsburgh Opera.



An accomplished recitalist, David Portillo collaborated with pianist Craig Terry for appearances with Vocal Arts DC, Harris Theater and the Cleveland Art Song Festival.

To find out more please visit: [David Portillo Tenor home](#) | [David Portillo](#)

Artist Biographies continued



Andrew Love (Belcore)-

Calgary native Andrew Love is in the enviable position of balancing his time between engagements on Broadway and on the opera stage. Heard as the Bishop and Javert (understudy) in *Les Misérables* in

Toronto, he was also engaged for the same roles in the 2014 Broadway revival of the show and the National Tour that ran from 2017 - 2020. In 2021-2022, Andrew joined Pacific Opera Victoria for a filmed presentation of *For A Look Or A Touch* by Jake Heggie. He continued his 2022 season in Calgary making his role debut as Danilo in *The Merry Widow*.

In earlier seasons, he starred as Doug Hansen in *Everest*, Charlie in the Calgary Opera production of *Filumena*, Marcello in *La bohème* for Against the Grain Theatre, and Schultz in *Louis Riel* for the Can inaugural member of the Calgary Opera Emerging Artist Development Program (now known as the McPhee Artist Development Program).

He now lives in Connecticut with his husband and their dogs Toby and Walter, where he runs a vocal studio emphasizing performance skills and communication. To find out more please visit:

www.andrewjlove.com

Ao Li (Dr. Dulcamara) - Ao

Li is a bass baritone from China, and a graduate of the prestigious international young artist training programs at Merola and Adler. He is a Professor at Shandong University of the Arts. He made his professional opera debut as Dancaïre in Bizet's *Carmen* in 2011. He made his title role debut of *Le nozze di Figaro* as Figaro at the NCPA in Beijing in 2014 and made his title role debut of *Don Pasquale* at NCPA in 2016. He was the winner of Plácido Domingo Operalia International Opera competition in 2013 and a grand prize winner of the Metropolitan Opera National Council Audition of 2014. He also won the second prize of 8th Mt.Fuji International Opera Competition of Shizuoka in 2017. He was the third prize winner of 2018 Queen Elisabeth Competition in Belgium and the first prize winner of Golden bell award of China.



Christina Thanisch-Smith* (Giannetta) - Praised for "shimmering vocals with pitch perfect intonation"

and "ringing high notes" (Opera Canada), Ms. Thanisch-Smith is establishing herself as one of Canada's up and coming singers. Born in Fredericton, raised in Winnipeg, the Canadian/German soprano graduated from of McGill University's Schulich School of Music as a member of Dominique Labelle and Michael McMahon's respective studios.



22/23, Christina was a member of Les Jeunes Ambassadeurs Lyriques, a finalist for the Atelier lyrique de l'Opéra de Montréal, and debuted with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra as soprano soloist in Handel's *Messiah*. In the summer, she attended the Franz Schubert Institute as an artist in residence.

Christina recently made her Maison Symphonique de Montréal debut as the soloist for Mahler's Symphony No. 4, her role debut as Eurydice in Gluck's *Orphée et Eurydice* with Manitoba Underground Opera, and attended Toronto Summer Music Festival as an Art of Song Fellow. While at McGill, she sang the title roles in Poulenc's *Les mamelles de Tirésias* and Handel's *Partenope* with Opera McGill and was a singer for the McGill-UdeM Piano/Vocal Residency.

Christina is delighted to join the Calgary Opera's McPhee Artists for the 2023-24 season. To find out more, please visit: [Christina Thanisch-Smith \(christinathanischsmith.com\)](http://christinathanischsmith.com)



Nicole Leung *(Adina)- Canadian soprano Nicole Leung is in her second season in the McPhee Artist Development Program where she was recently seen as Barbarina in *The Marriage of Figaro*. Past season

highlights at Calgary Opera include Frasquita (*Carmen*), Delia in Joe Illick's *Stone Soup*, Héro (*Béatrice et Bénédicte*), and The Fairy Godmother (*Cinderella*) for their school touring production. Last summer she appeared as Pamina in The Little Opera Company's production of *The Magic Flute: The Trials of Tamino and Pamina*. A graduate of the Yale School of Music, she was seen as Adina (*L'elisir d'amore*), Morgana (*Alcina*), and Rosalba (*Florencia en el Amazonas*). Visit: Nicole Leung

Artist Biographies continued, Artistic Staff



Elias Theocharidis*

(Nemorino)- Toronto-born tenor Elias Theocharidis, now in his 2nd year of the McPhee Artist Development Program, recent roles include Malcolm in

Calgary Opera's *Macbeth*, *Bénédict* in Berlioz's *Béatrice et Bénédict*, and The Prince in their touring production of *Cinderella* adapted by Rob Herriot. Other notable roles include Don José in Peter Brook's *La Tragédie de Carmen*, Don Ottavio in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Mr. Rushworth in the Canadian Premiere of Jonathan Dove's *Mansfield Park*, and Nemorino in *Donizetti's L'elisir d'amore*. In 2019, he was the tenor soloist in Mozart's *Requiem* with the Toronto Sinfonietta under Maestro Matthew Jaskiewicz. Later this season he will be seen as Froh in Wagner's *Das Rheingold* with Calgary Opera.



Connor Hoppenbrouwers*

(Belcore)-Baritone Connor Hoppenbrouwers recently made his debut as a soloist with the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra and is in his second season of

Calgary Opera's McPhee Artist Development Program. Originally from Edmonton, Connor began his studies with John Tessier and continued on with J. Patrick Raftery. Prominent roles for Connor include Paul Jobs in *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, *Dancaire* in *Carmen* with Calgary Opera (2022/23), *Count Almaviva* in *Le Nozze di Figaro* with the University of British Columbia Opera Workshop, *Papageno* in *Die Zauberflöte* with The University of Alberta Opera Workshop, and as a soloist with The Alberta Baroque Ensemble. An avid musician, Connor also performs regularly with orchestras and jazz bands as a double bassist.



Branden Olson* (Dr. Dulcama)

Branden Olsen is an Atlantic Canadian bass-baritone in his second year of the McPhee Artist Development Program.

He is a pedagogical clinician and conductor of exceptional promise. In 2021 Branden won first place (voice) at the Federation of Canadian

Music Festivals National Competition. He has a master's in both choral conducting and voice performance and is currently studying under renowned Canadian tenor David Pomeroy. Branden was honoured to workshop the newly commissioned February with Opera on the Avalon, and also to conduct the Atlantic Boychoir in Cornwall, UK. He was recently seen on the Calgary Opera stage as Antonio (*The Marriage of Figaro*), and with the Little Opera Company in Winnipeg as Papageno (*The Magic Flute*). Branden is proudly funded by ArtsNB.

*Denotes a member of the McPhee Artist Development Program

Artistic Staff

Stage Manager- Amy Lippold

Assistant Stage Manager (ASM)- Shelby-Jai Flick

ASM- Kate Pallesen

Accompanist- Ron Bennie

Head of Props- Kate Greggersen

Head of Wardrobe- Heather Moore

Lighting Designer—Jason Hand

Titles Operator- Nicole Bergen

Hair & Wigs—Franca Vaccarro

Makeup—Gail Kennedy

Director of Production- Cody Stadel

Technical Director—Murray Palmer

Assistant Technical Director- Brett Johnson

General Director and CEO- Sue Elliott

Artistic Director—Jonathan Brandani

To see a list of Administrative Staff at Calgary Opera, please go to:

[Contact — Calgary Opera](#)

A Brief History of Opera

Opera is a combination of so many different art forms. It is a sung work on stage that can sometimes include acting, singing, dancing, scenery, props, lighting, costumes and maybe even projections and holograms! An orchestra accompanies the performers and usually performs from the pit, which is a sunken space at the front of the stage and a conductor conducts both the orchestra and the performers from a raised step in the pit.

The word opera is the plural form of the Latin word "opus", which translates quite literally as 'work.' The use of the plural form speaks to the many art forms that combine to create an operatic performance.

Opera developed as a result of discussions held in Florence in the 1570's by a group of artists known as the Camerata who were influenced by earlier Greek drama. Their discussions led to the musical setting of Rinuccini's drama, *Dafne*, by composer Jacopo Peri in 1597.



Image of Peri's score for *Dafne*, 1597 from www.at.or.at

the soloist an opportunity to develop the emotions of the character through emotive singing. The new art form was greeted enthusiastically by the nobility of the time and, over the centuries, to the public, where it became a popular entertainment that often dealt with the common people and stories of the day.

Opera has flourished throughout the world as way to express the full range of human emotions. Italians claim the art form as their own, with the bulk of famous opera composers being of Italian origin through to the 1900s. Puccini, Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Leoncavallo developed the art form through clearly defined periods that produced opera buffa, opera seria, bel canto, and verismo. The Austrian Mozart also wrote operas in Italian. Further,

he championed the singspiel (sing play), which combined the spoken word with music, a form also used by Beethoven in his only opera, *Fidelio*. Bizet (*Carmen*), Offenbach (*Les Contes D'Hoffmann*), Gounod, Faust, and Meyerbeer (*Les Huguenots*) led adaptations by the French which ranged from the opera comique to the grand full-scale tragedie lyrique. German composers von Weber (*Der Freischutz*), Richard Strauss (*Ariadne auf Naxos*), and Wagner (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*) developed diverse forms, such as singspiel and through-composed spectacles. The English ballad opera, Spanish zarzuela and Viennese operetta styles all helped to establish opera as a form of entertainment, one that continues to enjoy great popularity throughout the world today.



Will Liverman and Angel Blue in *Fire Shut up in my Bones*, Opera Theatre of St. Louis, 2019

With the beginning of the 20th century, composers in America diverged from European traditions in order to focus on their roots while exploring and developing the work of folk music and legends in the country. Composers such as Douglas Moore, Carlisle Floyd, Scott Joplin and more recently Jake Heggie and Terence Blanchard have all crafted operas that have been presented throughout the world to great success. In Canada, composer John Estacio and librettist John Murrell were commissioned by Calgary Opera to produce *Filumena*, based on a true Canadian story of the last woman to be hanged in Alberta - which premiered in 2003 in Calgary to great success, and is one of the most produced Canadian grand-operas in the world.

Origins of Opera Buffa & Commedia dell'Arte

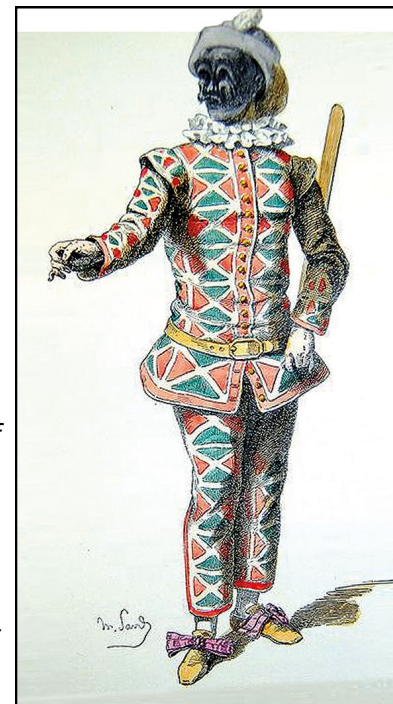
Opera Buffa is the Italian name for a genre of comic opera, which in itself is a type of opera. The world of opera contains many different genres including: *Grand opéra* (French) a large scale opera with intricate sets, large casts and orchestras from the 19th century; *Opera seria* (Italian) which literally means serious opera and was a dominant style in the 18th century, often based on ancient history, to name a few. Comic opera has as its elements a light subject matter, happy endings and was generally spoken instead of sung. Although we call *Elixir of Love* an *opera buffa*, it is also referred to as a *melodrama giocoso*, or comic melodrama, which is used often interchangeably with *opera buffa*.

In Italy *opera buffa* began in Naples in the mid-18th century and developed from the light, comedic opera interludes performed between serious operas. These interludes, or intermezzi as they are known in Italian, were sung, not spoken and were set on two groups of characters. These groups were a comic group of male and female people and a pair or more of lovers.

The first opera in Calgary Opera's 2023-2024 season, Beethoven's *The Marriage of Figaro*, was also an *opera buffa*, and highlighted beautifully the element that *opera buffa* is known to have developed; the operatic finale with all of the characters re-emerging to sing in a long finale song that concludes the opera act.

The characters of Adina and Nemorino, and Belcore, in *Elixir of Love*, form the requisite lovers at the centre of the story, with all of the townspeople and the sly Doctor Dulcamara as the comic group. However, Donizetti's music and story make space for the characters to mature and fill out more than the standard stock *opera buffa* characters.

Ultimately the comic operas of Italy and many places in Europe were influenced by the older theatrical form of *Commedia dell'Arte*, which translates literally from the Italian to "comedy of the profession." This was a well-developed theatrical style originating in Italy in the 16th century that consisted of ensemble acting with standard story lines, characters, costumes and masks. The performances often happened in the streets and audience would know the characters by their masks.



Character of Fritellino from a commedia dell'arte study, illustrated by Maurice Sand



Typical papier maché commedia dell'arte masks from Venice, Italy

Many troupes were created and toured across Europe, contributing to the development of further art forms and famous characters and character-types like the harlequin and Pierrot of French mime, Punch from the English pair Punch and Judy and English pantomime, and many more. Much of the success of commedia dell'arte performances rested with the sensibility of the actor portraying the stock character and many actors of the time became famous for their portrayal of a particular character.

Voice Types in Opera

Voice Types

SOPRANO	Traditionally considered highest female voice
MEZZO-SOPRANO	Voice type between Soprano and Contralto
CONTRALTO	Usually the lowest female voice
TENOR	Usually the highest male voice
COUNTER TENOR	Higher than a tenor, but less common, however it is becoming a more common and popular type, and it is considered highest voice type for a male voice
BARITONE	Voice between Tenor and Bass
BASS	The lowest voice type of them all

Breaking down the voice types, categories within the types listed above:

COLORATURA	Typically a voice with a very high range and the ability to sing complicated passages with great agility
DRAMATIC	A heavy, powerful voice with a steely timbre capable of great range and emotion
LYRIC	An average size voice, but capable of singing long beautiful phrases.
HELDEN	A German term referring to a powerful voice capable of singing very demanding roles
FALSETTO	The upper part of a voice, more often used in reference to male voices
SPINTO	A somewhat more powerful voice than that of a true lyric.

*Bonus Resource : To watch a short but descriptive video on operatic voice types explained, go to the Royal Opera House London (ROH) YouTube video here:

<https://youtu.be/hLfvkwTnJVMsi=bWyF65R0D8mI7nkO>

Who's Who at the Opera? Opera Professions

Every opera has hundreds of people that work on it from initial idea to presentation on stage, and every opera begins with a story.

A **Librettist** (author) writes the story (called the libretto). The word librettist comes to us from Italian. The libretto of an opera is the full written text. Libretto comes from the Italian word for book, libro. Libretto means little book, which refers to the practice of writing the words of the opera into a little book for opera audiences to read and understand the story.

A **Composer** writes the music to match the dialogue and action in the libretto. Sometimes the music takes over for the singing and the emotion is expressed musically. What does sadness sound like? Heartbreak? This is the work of the Composer to figure out.

A **Conductor** rehearses and prepares the production musically and leads the orchestra, principal singers and chorus in performance. The conductor leads the whole performance, giving it energy and shape and keeping the performers together, making sure instruments play and singers sing at the right moments and with the right volume of sound and expression; that ensembles sing together and, in general, that the sound produced by the orchestra closely supports and enhances the dramatic action that is happening onstage.

An **Orchestra** plays the music (sometimes there are only a few musicians; sometimes as many as 80 or 90, depending on the opera).

A **Stage Director** rehearses the singers, chorus, supers and dancers as to how to move onstage and how to “act” their roles. The performers have to memorize all of this in order to perform their roles. That’s what they do in rehearsals. The Director has to also choose the overall feel of the opera and decides which storylines to focus on with the singers so that the audience can better follow the action on stage.



Stage director Julia Mintzer working with a performer on stage.
Image from the National Opera Association

A **Stage Manager** helps make the vision of the Director a reality on stage. They run all of the backstage crew and call the cues (signals for action) for lighting changes and scene shifts, alerting chorus and principal singers about when they are supposed to come onstage, and initiating special effects like smoke or snow at the exact moment when they are supposed to happen in the opera.

A **Set Designer** creates a design for the set that supports the time and place of the opera as well as the vision of the artistic team for the opera. Sets require carpenters and painters to build and finish it as well as other tradesmen if necessary. Some elements on stage might be mechanical or require electricity. The set designer also works with a Projections Designer on video and still images that are projected as part of the set.

A **Lighting Designer** decides what type of lighting should be used to make the set look its best as well as the enhance the overall mood of the opera. They may also have to create special lighting effects like a sunrise or lightning. Electricians are also necessary to implement the lighting design.

A **Costume Designer** designs the costumes, intended to look like what people wore at the time the story takes place. The Costume Designer also has to give clues about the character through their wardrobe. It takes many people to cut the fabric and sew the costumes. Since singers usually have to get dressed in a rush, wardrobe people (called dressers) help them. Costume designers also design headpieces and hats for the performers, sometimes requiring hat makers to build them. Shoe makers are also often involved in building special period shoes and boots for operas.

Who's Who at the Opera? Opera Professions

A **Wig Designer** creates wigs for the performers to complete their costume. Hairstylists also work to create hair looks.

A **Make-up Artist** must apply make-up to each performer to balance the bright lighting onstage. Makeup also serves to accentuate or add character features such as old age.

Most opera are not sung in English so **Language Coaches** help the singers during rehearsals learn how to pronounce words of foreign languages correctly. Vocal Coaches accompany singers on the piano in private rehearsals or coachings, to help the singers to practice and memorize their parts, and to help them to add in emotion when needed.

Dancers are part of many operas that include ballet numbers. When ballet numbers are called for in an opera, there is typically a **Choreographer**, who creates the dance numbers (the specific moves and steps) to be performed.

Supernumeraries or **Supers** are actors who are on stage but do not sing. They are often seen as the maids and valets of the principal singers, but they can also be part of a crowd or they can be acrobats or help with changes in sets or furniture that are happening on-stage during the performance.

A **Props Designer** is responsible for the tables, chairs, lamps, swords, and other items that are used or carried by characters onstage in an opera, but which are not considered part of the set. The Props Designer must either make or obtain the props, keep track of them, and have them onstage at the right time. Props or Properties are divided into scene and hand props. A scene prop is an object that sits on the stage and is placed in one location; typically, a piece of furniture, like a lamp. A hand prop is an object that a performer carries on stage and uses in acting the part he is performing, such as a fan. **Stage Hands** and **Prop Handlers** put all the sets, furniture and props into place onstage. Set changes usually have to happen very quickly. It takes expert coordination to get everything done fast in the time available.



Example of a props table backstage. Every item is labelled and has its own place.

Sound Designers and **Sound Effects** people take care of making special noises in the opera, such as thunder, a cannon blast or a creaking door opening to add to the story and drama. They might have a recording of a sound, or might create it in various ways.

An **Artistic Director** or sometimes a **General Director**, is responsible for deciding which operas to stage each season, selecting the singers, musicians and other artists, the conductors, directors and designers, and making sure that everyone is working together and that the final product is of the best possible quality.

A **Production Manager** is responsible for ensuring that sets, costumes, props and all other onstage components of the opera are produced on time and on budget, to the exact specifications provided by the designers. In opera often sets and costumes are rented from other opera companies, the Production Manager ensures that everything arrives on time and is returned after the run.

The **Administration Staff** handles many functions, such as writing contracts for the artists, scheduling rehearsals, doing publicity, selling tickets, paying people after the show is done and many business details. There is also an Education staff which gives talks, does tours, writes Study Guides and generally works to introduce opera to audiences every-

Musical Highlights, The Most Famous Aria

The Elixir of Love is in the bel canto (beautiful singing) style, this means there are many gorgeous melodies and lush instrumentation to listen for. There are several elements in *The Elixir of Love* which point to the bel canto genre: Long, ornamented vocal phrases; an attempt to accentuate the mood and the story with the music by adding vocal elements; vocal slides of the voice up and down the scales known as portamento, heard throughout the opera.

Here are some musical excerpts to listen to in order to acquaint yourself with the opera and to help you to make sense of the musical story in pieces before you hear the entire work at the Jubilee Auditorium:

Act 1, Scene 1

Nemorino is pining for the beautiful Adina, saying that he would never give up loving her and sings *Quanto é bella, quanto é cara!* (How beautiful she is, how dear she is!)

https://youtu.be/JVKvFqhxeBg?si=QpYed_xouFm-P_Yp—sung here by Luciano Pavarotti as Nemorino in the Metropolitan Opera 1981 performance

Act 1, Scene 2

The tricky Doctor Dulcamara has rolled into town and is advertising the incredible healing qualities of the potions he has for sale as he sings *Udite, udite o rustici* (Listen, you village people)

<https://youtu.be/j9JJ2pbWT4A?si=nYdDUuopYg-D5k3m>—sung here by Bryn Terfel at the Royal Opera House performance in 2014

The brash army sergeant Belcore enters the scene, explaining how irresistible he is to the women in *Come Paride vezzoso il pomo* (Just as the charming Paris gave an apple to Aphrodite, I give you this flower)

<https://youtu.be/ge1cGeXXqXQ?si=9RcfMoAuSXue1chl>—sung by Alredo Daza at the Glyndebourne Opera House in 2009

Doctor Dulcamara's advertising works and Nemorino purchases the love potion with his remaining money. He brazenly ignores Adina, thinking the potion will make him irresistible, but Adina will not be played and makes the decision on the spot to marry Belcore. Nemorino is beside himself, begging her to wait until the next day, when the potion is supposed to take effect. He sings to her *Adina, credimi* (Adina, believe me)

<https://youtu.be/kGOaxZNNaII?si=zER5PA9dIHbBwBFm>—sung here again by Luciano Pavarotti with the outstanding Kathleen Battle as Adina in the Metropolitan Opera 1991 performance. Here you also hear the interplay of Belcore, Adina and Nemorino as they share their personal emotional reactions to the situation, this highlights Donizetti's emotional brilliance in his operas.

Act 2, Scene 1

Belcore and Adina are making wedding plans and Nemorino is desperate. He sees Dr Dulcamara and begs him for a stronger, faster acting potion, which he is able to purchase with the signing bonus for joining Belcore's army. Adina's anger shows that she really cares for Nemorino, so Dulcamara moves in to sell her a potion as well. She sings that she doesn't need a potion, she just needs to give him a tender look in *Una tenera occhiatina* (a tender look)

https://youtu.be/vPfrM_7QreY?si=bJ3aLKROyrRWX74W—sung by Pretty Yende and Ildebrando d'Arcangelo at the Metropolitan Opera in 2018

Act 2, Scene 2

Nemorino appears alone, pensive, reflecting on a tear he saw in Adina's eye. He suspects that this is proof that Adina loves him and sings the most recognizable aria in the opera, and one of the most famous tenor arias ever *Una furtiva lagrima* (one furtive tear).

Listen especially for the musical introduction that sounds lonely and unsure, which is played by strings and a bassoon. Listen to how the mood changes into a more confident feeling as Nemorino is sure she does love him, and then falls again into an unsure place. The music itself tells the emotional story, the "she loves me, she loves me not" battle that is going on in Nemorino's head.

<https://youtu.be/ZYSE0C3hEEY?si=sEQHdCRg32GxUj0E>—sung here by Xabier Anduaga in his Metropolitan Opera debut, 2023

Ideas to Consider, Exercises

As is stated in the English Language Arts Curriculum in Alberta for High school students, “the study of literature allows students to experience, vicariously, persons, places, times and events that may be far removed from their day-to-day experiences. Literature invites students to reflect on the significance of cultural values and the fundamentals of human existence..”

This understanding and pathos that is derived from the study of literature and poetry, operatic language and story is enhanced with music. Opera not only tells stories of the fundamentals of human existence, but through action and song, helps one to feel these fundamentals.

IDEA #1

The Elixir of Love deals with one of the most basic human fundamentals; love. It is a love story told through a series of unfortunate and comedic events and includes one mythical addition to these fundamentals—the love potion. The opera begins with Adina telling the story of Tristan and Isolde and the love potion that made them accidentally fall in love, even though it has a tragic ending. The love potion in this opera is much less harmful and has a much better outcome: helping two lovers who were already in love to come together.

Here is a brief synopsis of the legend of Tristan and Isolde taken from Encyclopedia Britannica online:

The young Tristan ventures to Ireland to ask the hand of the princess Isolde for his uncle, King Mark of Cornwall, and, having slain a dragon that is devastating the country, succeeds in his mission. On the homeward journey Tristan and Isolde, by misadventure, drink the love potion prepared by the queen for her daughter and King Mark. Henceforward, the two are bound to each other by an imperishable love that dares all dangers and makes light of hardships but does not destroy their loyalty to the king.

Exercise: How does the legend of Tristan and Isolde compare to the love story of Nemorino and Adina? Why would Donizetti and Romani highlight the tragic legend in this opera? Was it to illustrate how long love potions have been in existence? The love potion in this opera turns out to be fake, did Donizetti and Romani use the Tristan and Isolde legend to discredit the idea of love potions? Consider and discuss.

IDEA #2

According to several books researched and written on the subject, such as Richard White’s *Railroaded* and Lakshmi Gandhi’s *A history of Snake Oil Salesmen*, the idea of the travelling salesman who sells cures for everything, aka a snake oil salesman, originated with a real type of snake oil which came from the Chinese water snake, brought to the United States between 1849 and 1882 with the Chinese immigrant wave of Transcontinental Railroad workers. Originally known to contain a high amount of omega-3 acids which helped to alleviate arthritis and bursitis, this snake oil was eventually supplanted by clever conmen who came up with cheap and fake alternatives and sold them as the real thing.

Eventually the food and drug administration in the United States got involved and it was proven that the fake elixirs had no actual snake in them. Thus the trope of the duplicitous snake oil salesman was cemented into the minds of the people.

Exercise: Explore this idea of being tricked. Have you had similar experiences? Are there some well-known cases in media that you are aware of when average people were fooled? What are some examples of snake oil salesmen today? Do you believe that you could never be tricked into believing something was real when it wasn’t?

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