

THE ELIXIR OF LOVE

BY GAETANO DONIZETTI
FEBRUARY 13 & 15, 2026

Audience Preview Guide



Wednesday, February 11, 2026 - Student Night at the Opera

Friday, February 13, 2026

Sunday, February 15, 2025

Valentine Theatre

Toledo OPERA

FOR TICKETS, 419-255-7464
OR TOLEDOOPERA.ORG

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The Setting

Place: A small village in the Basque Country, Spain
Time: The end of the 18th century

Characters

The Elixir of Love

By Gaetano Donizetti

Libretto by Felice Romani

Adapted from Daniel Auber's *Le Philtre*

Premiered in Paris on May 12, 1832 at the Teatro della Canobbiana.

Nemorino, a simple peasant in love with Adina

Adina, a wealthy landowner

Dr. Dulcamara, an itinerant medicine man

Belcore, a sergeant

Gianetta, a friend of Adina

Peasants and soldiers of Belcore's platoon



Character Pronunciations

Nemorino: Nem-o-REE-no

Adina: Ah-DEE-nah

Dr. Dulcamara: DOC-tor Dool-kah-MA-ra

Belcore: Bell-CO-re

Gianetta: Jah-NET-ta

Synopsis

Setting: The opera takes place in the Basque Country of Spain.

Time: The end of the 18th century

ACT I

Giannetta and a group of farmhands are finishing their morning harvesting. Nemorino watches Adina from a distance, sad about being too poor to offer her anything but his love and too shy to approach her. Adina reads the story of Tristan and Isolde and how Tristan won Isolde's affection with a love potion.

Sergeant Belcore arrives with his regiment of soldiers. He flirts with the girls and then declares his passion for Adina, asking her to marry him. She is flattered but refuses the offer. The farmhands return to work, and Nemorino finds the courage to declare his love for Adina. She laughs at him, telling him she is too capricious to settle down. Dr. Dulcamara arrives with a supply of medicine for sale. Nemorino asks him if he knows of the magic elixir of love with which Tristan won Isolde. Dulcamara replies that it was he who created it, and he sells a bottle of it to Nemorino. The lad drinks it at once, not realizing that it is simple Bordeaux wine, and the effect of the alcohol is immediate. Certain that he will win Adina's love, Nemorino begins to treat her indifferently. To get even, Adina begins to flirt with Belcore and finally agrees to marry him. When orders arrive calling for Belcore to report to duty at once, he and Adina decide to wed that very evening.

INTERMISSION

ACT II

Annoyed because Nemorino has not attended the party preceding her marriage, Adina delays signing the marriage contract. Nemorino enters and asks the doctor's help. He says Nemorino must double the amount of potion and gives him another bottle of wine. In order to obtain the money to pay for the elixir, Nemorino joins Belcore's regiment and receives an enlistment bonus. The village girls learn that Nemorino's rich uncle has died, leaving the lad a large inheritance. Nemorino swaggers in, reeling from the double dose of elixir. The girls crowd around him, which Nemorino, unaware of his inheritance, credits to Dulcamara's potion. Adina sees Nemorino with the girls and becomes jealous. She is now determined to win him for herself. Nemorino returns, sad at the thought of leaving his village and Adina for the army. Adina joins him and tells him that she has bought back his enlistment papers so that they can be married. All join in praising Dulcamara and his magic elixir.



Domenico Gaetano Maria Donizetti 1797-1848

Donizetti was born in Bergamo, Italy in 1797, to a poor family. His musical abilities were evident at an early age, and so he was sent to study with the noted composer and teacher, Simon Mayr. Mayr not only provided a detailed musical training but was also instrumental in obtaining a place for Donizetti at the Bologna Academy. Though early in his career, he composed in several genres, including orchestral, chamber, and sacred music, cantatas, and songs. Donizetti is primarily remembered for his contributions to the operatic canon, writing over 70 operas during his brief life.



Gaetano Donizetti
1797 - 1848

Donizetti is often grouped with his Italian contemporaries Rossini and Bellini and is frequently described as a bel canto composer: an operatic composer whose compositions demand a certain style of singing marked by a naturally beautiful tone, effortless delivery of florid music, and a seamless legato (smooth and well-supported) line.

An offer in 1822 from the impresario of the Teatro di San Carlo in Naples led to his move to Naples and his residency there until 1844. In all, 51 of Donizetti's operas were presented in Naples. His international breakthrough came with *Anna Bolena* in 1830 followed by the great success of *L'elisir d'amore* (*The Elixir of Love*), premiering in Milan in 1832. Though some describe this as an opera buffa or a rustic idyll, there is something deeper in

this piece than a simple village romance. The characters have their roots in opera buffa, but Donizetti's brilliant music gives them greater complexity and depth. Nemorino, whose name means "little nobody," describes himself as a fool, but even in his most ridiculous and intoxicated state, he arouses sympathy. His love for Adina is not infatuation but is deep and genuine. His aria, "Una furtiva lagrima" ("One furtive tear"), is a great tenor showpiece, expressing a maturity and intensity rarely heard in comic operas of the period. Likewise, Adina, the heroine of the opera is not a shallow, flirtatious figure (though she has a natural playful side), but an intelligent "modern" woman who shows her love for Nemorino by buying him out of his army contract with her own money. Her aria, "Prendi per me sei libero" ("Take this, you will be free through me"), demonstrates melodic simplicity imbued with dignity and depth of character.

Even *Dulcamara* (whose name means "bitter-sweet", suggesting the flavor of his magic potions!) is more than the stereotype of an itinerant quack. The eloquent cunning doctor had been a stock figure of Italian comedy since the 16th century, but *Dulcamara* demonstrates the wisdom of a man of experience who uses his wiles to help the undecided young lovers make up their minds and find happiness. Perhaps this opera is more like a 21st century "Rom-Com" than a traditional comic opera of the early 19th century!

Though Donizetti continued to compose successful operas following *L'elisir d'amore* (including the historical dramas *Lucia di Lammermoor* and *Roberto Devereux*) his health began to deteriorate in the late 1830's, and in 1846, he returned to Bergamo where he lived in an institution for the mentally ill until his death in 1848 due to neurosyphilis.

Behind the Curtain: Bringing The Elixir of Love to Life at Toledo Opera

When you take your seat at the Valentine Theatre for Toledo Opera's production of *The Elixir of Love*, you're witnessing the culmination of 18 months of planning and the extraordinary efforts of over 100 artists, technicians, and staff—on stage and behind the scenes. What you see is magic; what makes it happen is a complex, collaborative endeavor that Toledo Opera proudly orchestrates from start to finish.

As with all Toledo Opera productions, the journey begins long before the curtain rises. From casting world-class singers in the leading roles of Nemorino, Adina, Dr. Dulcamara, Belcore, and Gianetta to assembling the Toledo Opera Chorus, as well as hiring a conductor and stage director, and orchestra, our team thoughtfully curates every element to deliver a performance that captures the charm, humor, and heart of Donizetti's comic masterpiece.

To bring the 19th-century Italian village of *The Elixir of Love* to life, Toledo Opera partnered with Tri Cities Opera to rent a fully realized set and props package. The colorful, detailed costumes you see on stage are sourced from Wardrobe Witchery, a company known for its exquisite period garments. These visual components are essential for immersing our audiences in the world of the opera—but they are only part of the picture. A lighting designer brings these visual elements to life with their artful use of color and illumination.

Before opening night, we spend two intense weeks in rehearsal studios, where our cast, chorus, director, and conductor dig into the music, the story, and each character's journey. In the final week, we transition to the Valentine Theatre stage, where set, props, lighting, and costumes are loaded in. This is where everything comes together—music, movement, and design—during what's known as "tech week." Much like the ringleader in a circus, all of this work is controlled by a three-person stage management team who also call all the light cues and scenery shifts. Assistant stage managers even give cues to the performers when to enter the stage and to ensure each has the correct prop and costume.

Every person involved—stage managers, dressers, lighting technicians, wig and makeup artists, carpenters, prop personnel, and more—plays a vital role. Over 100 individuals work together in real time to ensure that the opera flows seamlessly from the first note to the final bow. Each performance is a living, breathing collaboration, built on teamwork, timing, and trust.

And when the curtain falls on our Sunday matinee, this production vanishes forever. That's the ephemeral beauty of live opera: it exists only in the moment, created just for you, our discerning Toledo Opera audience, and never to be repeated in exactly the same way.

Toledo Opera's production of *The Elixir of Love* is more than a night at the theater—it is a one-of-a-kind artistic event made possible by the passion, dedication, and craftsmanship of an entire opera company working in harmony. Thank you for being part of this unforgettable experience.

By James M. Norman

Opera Buffa = Comic Opera

Opera buffa, meaning “comic opera” in Italian, is a genre of opera characterized by its humorous and lighthearted nature, typically focusing on everyday characters and situations. It contrasts with opera seria, which features more serious and dramatic plots, often based on historical or mythological figures. Opera buffa often incorporates elements like servant-master antics, comedic situations, and large ensemble finales.

Key characteristics of opera buffa:

Humor and lightheartedness: Opera buffa aims to entertain and amuse the audience, often with farcical plots and witty characters.

Everyday characters and settings: Unlike opera seria, which often features gods, heroes, and royalty, opera buffa typically depicts common people in their everyday lives.

Ensembles and finales: A hallmark of opera buffa, these are extended scenes where multiple characters sing together, often showcasing the comedic interplay and conflict within the plot.

Recitatives and arias: Like opera seria, opera buffa relies on recitative for dialogue and arias for emotional expression.

Social satire: Opera buffa tends to subtly critique societal structures and conventions, particularly through the portrayal of servants outsmarting their masters.

Examples of notable opera buffa:

- *The Marriage of Figaro* (Mozart): A classic example of opera buffa, exploring themes of social hierarchy and romantic intrigue.
- *The Barber of Seville* (Rossini): Known for its witty dialogue and comedic characters, showcasing Rossini’s mastery of the genre.
- *La serva padrona* (Pergolesi): A pivotal work in the development of opera buffa, telling the story of a maid who tricks her employer.
- *Don Giovanni* (Mozart): While sometimes considered a *dramma giocoso* (playful drama), it incorporates elements of both opera buffa and opera seria.
- *Falstaff* (Verdi): A late work by Verdi that also explores comedic themes, showcasing a more mature approach to the genre.

After seeing *The Elixir of Love*, do you think that it is an opera buffa, or perhaps a style of opera that exceeds that definition and tradition?

What to Listen For

Though *The Elixir of Love* is filled with outstanding ensembles, duets, and trios, it is in these arias that we are given an inside-look into the thoughts and motivations of each character. These five arias also demonstrate Gaetano Donizetti's amazing gift to write beautiful and compelling melodies, ones with which you may find yourselves humming along....

Quanto è bella (Nemorino)

In his first aria, Nemorino, sings of his love for Adina, contrasting her charms and intelligence with his own lack of wit and character.



<https://youtu.be/JVKvFqhxeBg?si=3MIIXGDLEKcf5yPp>

Come Paride vezzoso (Belcore)

Sergeant Belcore and his fellow soldiers march into town, and with swaggering bravado, he presents Adina with a bouquet of flowers as a token of his love.



<https://youtu.be/zXrk3k8iWU4?si=iwJ9mBpuipsZ9zLd>

Udite, udite, o rustici (Dr. Dulcamara)

In his introduction aria, Dr. Dulcamara, an itinerant purveyor of “elixirs” wins over the crowd of townspeople with descriptions of what his potions can do for them.



https://youtu.be/9B5_JWwe1mM?si=aJFBoYlqsiruoQ3c

Una furtiva lagrima (Nemorino)

As Nemorino leaves the village to enlist in the army, he wonders why Adina seems distressed. When he last saw her, one furtive tear fell from her eye, and he sings that he would gladly die if he could just hold her in his arms.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-snRz5L3Ups>

Prendi, per me sei libero (Adina)

Adina presents Nemorino with the contract he had signed to join the army, thus releasing him from his military obligation. She then pleads with him to stay in the village, the place where he is happy and the place where he is loved.



<https://youtu.be/ygEopLNNBhk?si=tw2cUsEVSirYIYHz>

In Donizetti's Time

- 1797** Donizetti is born on November 29
- 1798** Admiral Horatio Nelson defeats the French fleet in the Battle of the Nile
- 1799** Joseph Haydn's *The Creation* has its first performance in Vienna
- 1801** The United Kingdom is formed
- 1804** Nathaniel Hawthorne is born in Salem, Massachusetts
- 1807** Beethoven's *4th Symphony in B* premiered
- 1809** Joseph Haydn dies at 77
- 1814** Francis Scott Key pens *The Star Spangled Banner*
- 1815** Napoleon defeated at the Battle of Waterloo
- 1816** Argentina declares independence from Spain
- 1817** Henry David Thoreau born in Concord, MA
- 1818** Franz Gruber's "Silent Night" 1st sung in an Austrian church
- 1819** Alabama admitted to Union as 22nd state
- 1820** Antarctica first discovered by von Gellingshausen & Lazarev
- 1822** Pianist Franz Liszt debuts at age 11 in Vienna
- 1824** British romantic poet, Lord Byron dies at age 36
- 1825** Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* 1st opera performed in Italian in the US in NYC
- 1826** Thomas Jefferson & John Adams die on July 4 & 50th anniversary of Declaration of Independence
- 1827** Famed architect (Biltmore & Statue of Liberty base) Richard Morris Hunt born in Vermont
- 1828** Noah Webster copyrights the first American dictionary
- 1829** Geronimo, Apache leader and resistance fighter, born in Mexico
- 1830** *Anna Bolena* premieres at the Teatro Carcano in Milan
- 1831** *America (My Country 'Tis of Thee)* 1st public performance
- 1832** *L'elisir d'amore* premieres in Milan
- 1833** *Lucrezia Borgia* opens at La Scala in Milan
- 1834** Edgar Degas, French painter/sculptor born in Paris
- 1835** *Lucia di Lammermoor* opens in Naples
- 1836** Inauguration of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris
- 1837** *Robert Devereux* premieres at Teatro San Carol in Naples
- 1838** Coronation of England's Queen Victoria, aged 19, at Westminster Abbey
- 1839** First photo of the moon taken by French photographer Louis Daguerre
- 1840** *La Fille du Regiment* opens at the Opéra Comique in Paris
- 1841** William Henry Harrison dies of pneumonia becoming the 1st US president to die in office
- 1842** Giuseppe Verdi's *Nabucco* premieres in Milan
- 1843** *Don Pasquale* premieres at the Théâtre-Italien in Paris
- 1844** University of Notre Dame receives its charter in Indiana
- 1845** The first baseball team, the NY Knickerbockers, organizes & adopts rules
- 1846** Iowa becomes the 29th state of the US
- 1847** 1st US postage stamp goes on sale (10 cents)
- 1848** Donizetti dies on April 8

Pre Opera Activities

Know Before You Go

Synopsis of Tristan and Isolde

As the opera, *The Elixir of Love*, opens, the beautiful Adina is reading the love poem *Tristan and Isolde* and discovers that Tristan used a love potion to win Isolde's affections. The shy, poor farmhand Nemorino decides to use a love potion to win Adina's love. The legend of *Tristan and Isolde* is arguably the first and most well-known story to use a love potion as a central plot point. *Tristan and Isolde* is based on a Celtic legend that is often tied to the King Arthur myths. Below is an excellent article by Dr. Oliver Tearle of Loughborough University that summarizes and analyzes the myth of Tristan and Isolde.

[For a deeper dive into *Tristan und Isolde*, read this article.](#)

Discussion Questions:

After reading the article about Tristan and Isolde, use the following questions to jumpstart a discussion:

1. Describe how Tristan and Isolde fall in love.
2. What are the challenges of their relationship?
3. Why do you think the story of Tristan and Isolde has inspired other works, like *The Elixir of Love*?

Working on your own or with a partner or two, create a poem, ballad, or short story that is a modern re-telling of Tristan and Isolde. Consider the parts of the legend you (and your partners) would keep and other parts you (and your partners) would change.

Connecting Other Works

The trope of a love potion is part of the plot of many works of literature because love is the emotion we all seek in all its various forms. Looking at modern works, we also find magical potions, especially love potions, as catalysts for their respective plots.

OKLAHOMA! - In the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, *Oklahoma!*, Laurie purchases a love potion from travelling salesman Ali Hakim in order to make a decision about her potential relationship with Curly or Jud. As she falls asleep, what follows is a dream ballet that begins in beauty and ends in tragedy.

[Watch the *Oklahoma!* Dream Ballet here.](#)

Pre-Opera Activities cont'd

SWEENEY TODD - Stephen Sondheim's musical, *Sweeney Todd*, incorporates a magical hair elixir that can make a man grow his hair to be more desirable and virile. As with all "magical elixirs," the magic is in the mind of the customer. Here is the character Toby hawking expert barber Pirelli's "miracle elixir":

[Watch Pirelli's magical elixir here.](#)

HARRY POTTER AND THE HALF-BLOOD PRINCE - As a final example, the characters of Fred and George Weasley from the Harry Potter series open their own magic shop, Weasleys' Wizard Wheezes, filled with pranks and potions. They also create a love potion that makes the receiver fall temporarily in love with the purchaser. Here is a delightful excerpt from the movie, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, that introduces many of the Weasleys' magical products including the love potion:

[Watch Weasleys' magical products here.](#)

Discussion Questions:

1. Can you think of any other operas, musicals, movies, or works of literature that incorporate love potions or magical potions? If so, what is the result of their usage?
2. Why do you think the idea of a love potion still intrigues modern audiences?

Trope of Potions:

Make a list of as many movies, musicals, songs, and works of literature that use love potions or miracle potions to further the plot.

Do these potions help or hinder the characters who use them?

Explain.



Post-Opera Activities

Activity 1 Will Love Last?

When Adina and Nemorino decide to marry at the end of the opera, there is a number of red flags to their relationship.

1. They are from different social classes.
2. Adina is capricious and flirtatious, while Nemorino is shy.
3. Nemorino tries to get Adina to fall in love with him by the use of a love potion.
4. Adina actually becomes engaged to the soldier Belcore during the course of the opera.

Picture yourself as a relationship counselor, what advice would you give to Adina and Nemorino for making their love last and to find their “happily ever after”? To further add to your advice, read the following article from marriage.com to help guide the discussion.

5 Premarital Tips for a Great Marriage

Activity 2 Elixir and the Modern-Rom Com

The website *Grantland: a Hollywood Prospectus* lists six common tropes of modern romantic comedies. They are as follows:

1. The flawed protagonist seeking salvation—the main character has a major character flaw, and he or she can find redemption for that flaw through love.
2. The Meet-Cute—the love interests meet in an unusual way or place.
3. The False Start—if the relationship is established under unlikely circumstances, the dissolution of the initial relationship will occur, only to be reestablished in another way.
4. The Grand Epiphany and the Grand Declaration—when one of the characters realizes the power and scope of the relationship and states why the relationship should be “forever”
5. A Supporting Cast of Friends—these characters can be broke down into 3 groups—the confidants, the colleagues, and the indulgent friends. They lend comedy and are catalysts to the plot.
6. The City as a Character—the location becomes a character itself because of the energy and beauty of the location itself

Discussion Questions:

1. What traits of the modern rom-com, if any, does *Elixir* possess?
2. Are there any rom-coms that have similar plot points as *Elixir*?
3. If you were to recreate *Elixir* as a modern rom-com, who would you cast and why? How would you alter the plot? Would you change the setting?

Post-Opera Activities cont'd

Activity 3 Will Love Last!

Therapy Session (for further exploration):

In a group of three, decide together who will be the therapist (Dr. Dulcamara), Adina, and Nemorino. Working together, put together a short scene where the Dr. Dulcamara asks questions to help Adina and Nemorino analyze their compatibility and relationship. After the scene ends and based on the answers of the characters, discuss the possible outcome(s) of Adina's and Nemorino's marital engagement.



Activity 4 Musicalize the Rom-Com

Make Your Own Jukebox Musical: The popularity of jukebox musicals has taken Broadway by storm. Jukebox musicals use popular music to forward the plot of the production and help the audience relate to the story. Famous jukebox musicals include *Moulin Rouge*, *Mamma Mia!*, and *& Juliet*, just to name a few.

Create on your own (or with a group of 2-3) a jukebox musical using *The Elixir of Love* as inspiration.

1. Who would you cast in the show as Dr. Dulcamara, Adina, Nemorino, Belcore, and others?
2. What songs would you include to further the plot?
3. What characters would sing them?

In addition, design a poster for your production. Share with others your production explaining your choices.

