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Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

# Melodious Blend of Humor, Heart, and Vocal Brilliance

Vienna State Opera, 05.02.2026 [ENA]

On a crisp winter evening in Vienna, the venerable auditorium of the Wiener Staatsoper once again welcomed one of bel canto's most beloved treasures: Gaetano Donizetti's L'elisir d'amore (The Elixir of Love). This 19th-century melodramma giocoso — a comic opera with a surprisingly poignant heart — unfolded under the expert musical leadership of Pier Giorgio Morandi and in the classic staging of Otto Schenk, whose human-scaled direction continues to charm Viennese audiences.

Donizetti's score, with its buoyant melodies, deft orchestration, and memorable arias, rewards both the seasoned opera goer and the uninitiated. The production delivered a night of pure vocal delight paired with engaging theatrical wit, reaffirming L'elisir d'amore's status not merely as a staple of the repertoire but as a living, breathing testament to opera's power to touch both heart and funny bone.

At its core, L'elisir d'amore tells an ageless tale: Nemorino's ardent love for the aloof Adina and his belief in a "love potion" that he hopes will secure her affections. While the libretto by Felice Romani is light and comic, Donizetti's gift was to infuse this seemingly simple narrative with genuine emotional nuance — a rare quality that allows this opera to transcend pure farce and touch deeper chords. The result is an evening that oscillates effortlessly between charming comedy and heartfelt sincerity.

Schenk's staging, classic yet never stale, emphasizes the human qualities of the characters. From the playful barracks scenes to the tender duets, the production's visual and dramatic rhythm served to enhance rather than distract from the musical storytelling. Schenk's direction, known for its clarity and warmth, ensured that this giocoso operatic tale felt both timeless and intimately relatable.

Nazarova's portrayal of Adina was a study in vocal elegance and dramatic poise. Her soprano was luminous throughout the evening, embodying both the character's self-assured wit and her gradual emotional softening toward Nemorino. In the famous "Una furtiva lagrima," she approached the line between vivacity and vulnerability with admirable balance, delivering a performance that was as musically exacting as it was emotionally affecting.

Rocha's tenorial presence served as the emotional backbone of the performance. From his early moments of touchingly awkward longing to his triumph in the later ensemble pieces, he sustained a voice of clarity, warmth, and expressive depth. Particularly in his duets with Adina, his tone conveyed a genuine simplicity

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of feeling that avoided caricature even as the plot delighted in comic exaggeration.

Astakhov's Belcore provided the requisite swagger and bravado that the role demands. His baritone was robust and stylish, offering a bracing contrast to Rocha's earnest Nemorino. Astakhov's comic timing contributed significantly to the production's wit; he never allowed the role's bravado to tip over into buffoonery, maintaining a muscular vocal line coupled with compelling stage presence.

As the self-styled purveyor of love's miraculous cure, Alaimo relished every opportunity to inject Buona-fede charm into Dulcamara's spirited buffoonery. His rich baritone was richly textured, his comedic instincts finely tuned. Whether declaiming the virtues of his "elixir" or engaging with the chorus and principals, Alaimo's performance was a highlight in both musical and theatrical terms. Though occupying a smaller role, Zherebiateva's Giannetta lent lightness and vocal sparkle that rounded out the ensemble. Her contributions added a layer of ensemble brightness that elevated the overall community feel of the village setting.

Under Morandi's baton, the orchestra delivered a vivid and flexible reading of Donizetti's score. Rhythms were crisp without becoming brittle, and lyrical lines were allowed to breathe, giving space for both soloists and ensemble to shape phrases organically. Morandi's pacing maintained dramatic momentum across both acts, keeping the comic energy buoyant and the emotional currents clear. In ensembles and choruses alike, the orchestra and singers interacted with a responsive musical intelligence — a sign of careful rehearsal and thoughtful leadership. The interplay between pit and stage was consistently well-balanced, ensuring that the score's characteristic brightness and warmth was fully realized.

This production of L'elisir d'amore at the Wiener Staatsoper was a reminder of why Donizetti's opera has endured as one of the cornerstones of the operatic canon. With a cast that combined musical finesse with theatrical charisma, and a production that married tradition with liveliness, the evening offered both seasoned opera lovers and newcomers a thoroughly engaging experience.
Above all, this performance stood out for its combination of heartfelt expression and joyful comic energy — a true elixir for the soul in the heart of Vienna's opera season.

Bericht online lesen:
https://culture.en-a.eu/kunst_kultur_und_musik/melodious_blend_of_humor_heart_and_vocal_brilliance-92972/

Redaktion und Verantwortlichkeit:
V.i.S.d.P. und gem. § 6 MDStV: Dr. Nadejda Komendantova

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