



THE ELIXIR OF LOVE FOR SCHOOLS

THEMES

Donizetti's *The Elixir of Love* is an engaging romantic comedy with a “boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl” age-old plot that is still familiar to audiences today. Audiences never tire exploring the themes of love, and a great love story with a happy ending is as entertaining and satisfying as ever.

Love is at the heart of *The Elixir of Love*. The opera explores themes of love: the different kinds of love, the roles of men and women and what they will do to feel loved, and the power of love.

All Kinds of Love

The characters in *The Elixir of Love* spring out of the traditions of *commedia dell'arte*, (*comedy of professional artists*), a form of improvisational theater that began in Italy in the mid-15th century. *Commedia dell'arte* was built around the stock characters of the servant, the master and the young lovers.

The characters in Donizetti's opera illustrate the many different kinds of love that are key to the human experience: Romantic love (and the desire for constancy, with the ever changing nature of relationships between romantic partners), self-love (and the importance of self-knowledge to truly achieving this state), false-love (love of money, power, and status), and true, self-less love (the greatest love of all).

The Roles of Men and Women

The young lovers, Adina and Nemorino, play against our expectations of the young lovers. Adina, a highly attractive young lady, is in the driver's seat. She is beautiful, wealthy with high status in the town as a landowner, smart and well-educated. Adina is in the position to choose from the many men who seek her affections. The hero, Nemorino, on the other hand, is a simple boy who is shy, uncertain, awkward and uneducated. He can barely get a word out and lacks confidence that he can convince Adina to pay attention to him. Nemorino's competition, Belcore the bully sergeant, is the manliest of men. Belcore approaches love in the same way that he engages in war. He is quick to display his power and command. Whether he is engaged in fisticuffs or football, Belcore is confident that he will have Adina.

The Game of Love

Propriety, contracts, uniforms, money, and the unspoken rules of behavior that govern the citizens of the town keep true feelings and emotions repressed. The odds of shy Nemorino winning Adina's heart are small, until the outsider, a quack doctor named Dr. Dulcamara, arrives selling his wares. Dulcamara claims that his magic potions have the power to cure all ailments — even the pining heart. Nemorino, desperate in his desire to get Adina's attention, has nothing to lose. He buys the elixir hoping that it will work its magic and make him irresistible. The so-called “elixir of love” is nothing but a cheap bottle of wine, but it does the trick in helping Nemorino loosen up and overcome his fears of displaying his true feelings. Adina struggles to keep her affections for Nemorino under wraps. Upon seeing Nemorino surrounded by a crowd of young women (who are paying attention because the young man is newly wealthy), Adina's feelings of jealousy cannot be contained. She shows her true feelings with “a furtive tear,” and Nemorino is finally hopeful that he will win her affections.

The Power of Love

When Adina and Nemorino can freely admit their truest desires, they break free of societal expectations and dependence on outside influences, such as magic potions and material wealth. Their new self-awareness and self-love gives them the courage to declare their love. *The Elixir of Love* ends with Nemorino and Adina in love, the happiest of endings. For the moment, the audience can rejoice that hidden desires and secret wishes will come true. Love will conquer all.