

# Laughs best medicine in 'Elixir of Love'

By CRAIG REYNOLDS

How do you indulge in producing a beautiful bit of opera buffa fluff that would likely bore an American audience to tears.

One way is to corral a fun-loving company of singing performers on stage and hog-tie that restless audience with laughter.

Which is pretty much what stage director James de Blasis of the Cincinnati Opera has done with Donizetti's "Elixir of Love." Hired on by the Michigan Opera Theatre for a two-week stand, de Blasis has herded a Texas-sized version of Donizetti's airy melodious and inconsequential little work into the Music Hall Theatre. FROM THE cactus in the lobby and the horseshoes over the refreshment stand to the red longjohns and heart-shaped bottle of aneaky pete onstage, this "Elixir" takes a long, unashamed look at the best and worst in Grand Opera.

It's the kind of look you'd expect to be given an Italian opera transported to the Texas Territory, circa 1845.

Even after Alaskan statchood, Texans could always go to everyone else one better in anything, and the exaggerated emoting from pourings out of various hearts to the selling of snakeoil becomes as much a parody the less attractive

aspects of opera as of the more grandiloquent aspects of the American character.

Still, MOT's "Elixir of Love" is not a total burlesque, as the exaggeration springs from genuine feeling and a couple scenes, notably the lead tenor's serenely beautiful Act II aria, are performed unencumbered and show off the best that opera can offer.

THE BEST certainly applies to this MOT production.

From de Blasis' ingenious and often innovative staging to a gallery of superior singing actors, through the hand-clapping, foot-stomping chorus and right down to the delightful sets and perfect stage props, "Elixir of Love" is an absolute confection of entertainment.

William McDonald looks and acts like a lovable coward who gets drunk too easily, but there's no mistaking his accomplished lead tenor sounds.

As his nemesis, the sergeant of the town garrison, baritone Forrest Lorey extends everything from the light step, bright and straying eye and overpopulated smile to the clear, commanding and slightly sinister voice of the villain into the realm of high comedy.

THE OBJECT of both affections honest and carnal is sung by soprano Linda Cook in a somewhat sharp but completely true and deliciously coquettish manner.

While all the world could love these lovers, a real fascination exists for a successful conman, and basso Andrew Foldi portrays one of the most successful from his sunshine yellow spats up to his Italianate diction, which swings to a congenial southwesterly direction when the pitch is delivered for his proven rabies remedy.

The four leads are supported by the other stars of MOT's "Elixir of Love," the Chorus. With spritely determination, this outstanding congregation of local talent has taken to de Blasis' difficult staging with a hip-swinging, suspender-snapping, toe-tapping verve that turns the show to one hoedown of a good time.

NEATLY DEFINED costumes by Suzanne Mess, big, bright scenery of Henry Heymann and well-toned lighting by Thomas H. Mendenhall complete the stage picture, while Jonathan Dudley of Opera/Omaha conducts the whole affair with alacrity and precision.

About the only problems with "Elixir of Love" are the pointlessly extended sections of music, vast deserts in the action (that are good

for showing off vocal talents) but a trifle tiresome for all but the connoisseur.

The thumping good staging also often covers up the facile and humorous libretto translated especially for this version by Ruth and Thomas Martin.

Nevertheless, one long hard look at the stage supplies whatever def-

inition the ear might miss.

MOT's "Elixir of Love" supplies a two-hour panacea of equal parts color, movement and sound from the gray drudgery outside the Music Hall Theatre.

## 'Medea' opens at Hilberry

Robinson Jeffers' adaptation of Euripides' "Medea" opens at the Hilberry Theatre Wednesday, Feb. 5, runs Feb. 6, 8 and continues in the repertory through April.

"Medea," a Greek classic, has been translated many times and is the story of the revenge of a princess who is forsaken in a strange land by a politically ambitious husband.

Robinson Jeffers has adapted "Hippolytus" another of Euripides' works. He rewrote "Medea" in 1946.

Medea is played by Harper Jane McAdoo, and Jason, her husband, by Thomas C. Spackman. Both are in their second year with the Hilberry group. The cast also includes Al Hamcher, Colby Schneider, Wayne S. Turney, James Kasicki and Jon Ludman.

The production is directed by Richard Spear. Scenery design is by Linda Conner Baldwin. Daniel Thomas Field

did costumes and Gary M. Witt, lighting. Ticket information is available from

the Wayne State University Theatre box office and in the Hilberry Theatre lobby, located at Cass and Hancock.

## Tryouts set for theater

Open tryouts will be held Thursday (Jan. 23) and Friday at 7 p.m. in the Henry Ford Museum Theatre, Dearborn, for a non-Equity production of "Rumpelstiltskin" to be performed Saturdays at 2 p.m. from March 22 to May 10, March 24 through 27 at 10

a.m. and 1 p.m. and March 31 through April 14 at 2 p.m. Actors are asked to bring resumes and photos, if possible. For further information contact Dr. Joseph French, theater arts manager, Greenfield Village.

## Glicks to exhibit

Farmington artists John and Ruby Glick will open their first retrospective exhibit at 1 p.m. Sunday, in Michigan State University's Pewabic Pottery, 10125 East Jefferson Ave., Detroit.

In fine arts from Cranbrook Art Academy, was awarded a Tiffany grant for the creation of a studio. He spent two years in Germany before buying and converting the farm building in which he and his wife, Ruby, also a potter, now ply their artistry.

John Glick, who has his masters

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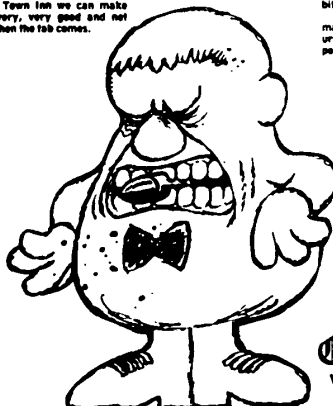
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