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'The Elixir of Love' Fills
Chautauqua's Norton Hall
By Robert W. Plyler

CHAUTAUQUA-Wednesday's weather was cold and damp, but there was a wonderfully warm and sunny production on the stage of Norton Hall.

"The Elixir of Love" by Gaetano Donizetti is a light, funny work, and Chautauqua Opera gave it a cast which was first rate and outstanding production values, making for delight in every area.

The story is of Nemorino, a simple country boy who has grown up with the wealthy Adina. Although he loves her deeply, he can't find the courage to ask for her hand.

Deciding he isn't interested after all, Adina accepts the attention of the handsome, self-interested Belcore. Now Nemorino is discouraged, so he purchases a love potion from a traveling snake oil salesman, and

tries to win her by magic, with comic results.

Director Jay Lesenger has moved the opera's setting from 19th century Italy to California's Napa Valley, during the years of Prohibition. It gave more dramatic realism to the action, and even gave him an opportunity to get off an inside joke about Chautauqua's decision, this year, to reduce slightly its historic ban on drink stronger than lemonade.

Harold Gray Meers was an ideal Nemorino. He was very handsome, yet appeared young enough to be so shy about love, and to be taken in by a quack with a love potion. His tenor was unusually rich and vibrant, and soared effortlessly, throughout the performance.

Anita Johnson was certainly beautiful enough to inspire all the plotting and planning as the fickle Adina, and her singing was lovely.

Michael Chioldi was an audience favorite as the cocky

Belcore, a position which he earned with both bravura acting and a truly fine baritone. He was handsome enough to be a credible rival, as well.

Steven Condry was masterful as the crooked seller of magic potions.

Gary Thor Wedow and the Chautauqua Opera orchestra accompanied beautifully, always complimenting the performance, and with a fine degree of unison.

Ron Kadri's set and Michael Baumgarten's lighting design were bright and attractive, yet required no distracting changes, of significant degree.

The result was fun dramatically and splendid, musically. I recommend it to you with enthusiasm.

"Elixir of Love" was reviewed in dress rehearsal, by company request. It will be performed Friday and Monday evenings at 7:30 p.m., in Norton Hall, on the grounds of the Chautauqua Institution.