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MUSIC REVIEW

Two Debuts at a Diner That Specializes in Donizetti's Secret Sauce



Joshua Bright for The New York Times

David Lomelí and Stefania Dovhan in New York City Opera's production of Donizetti's "Elixir of Love" at the David H. Koch Theater at Lincoln Center.

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It was hard to tell if David Lomelí was laughing or crying at the warm, extended ovation that followed his big aria on Tuesday evening at the [New York City Opera](#), but he certainly deserved all the applause and bravos. As the lovesick small-town bumpkin Nemorino in Donizetti's classic, deliriously entertaining comedy "The Elixir of Love," [this 29-year-old tenor](#) sang with sincerity and style and acted with energy in his New York stage debut.

He doesn't always make the loudest noise, but his sound is sweet and penetrating, with plenty of squillo, that "ping" in a tenor's tone that makes his voice seem to pop out several sizes larger than it is. Alternately dancing and pining, drunk and mournful, Mr. Lomelí captured the [opera's](#) potent combination of hilarity and pathos. He was, in a word, delightful.

As Belcore, the arrogant army sergeant who competes with Nemorino for the love of the beautiful but standoffish Adina, the baritone [José Adán Pérez](#) also had an impressive New York debut, his voice smooth, clear and rich. His second-act duet with Mr. Lomelí — one of Donizetti's most irresistibly lyrical creations — was a highlight, a testament to City Opera's storied and continuing success introducing the city to young, promising singers.

The soprano Stefania Dovhan, so memorable as Donna Anna in the company's "[Don Giovanni](#)" last season, seemed less at ease with Adina's long bel-canto lines than she had been with [Mozart](#)'s dramatic extremes. Though she looked perfect in a blond [Marilyn Monroe](#) wig and clearly understood the character's endearing mix of coyness and warmth, her voice wasn't always dependably steady. The baritone Marco Nisticò lacked larger-than-life power but was restrained and charming as Dulcamara, the quack doctor who sells the town on cheap wine dressed up as the eponymous love potion.

Jonathan Miller's 2006 production sets the opera in and around a roadside diner in the 1950s American Southwest; Adina, a local landowner in the original, is the proprietor. It's a shameless copy of [Peter Sellars](#)'s landmark take on Mozart's "Così Fan Tutte," down to the cursive neon "Diner" sign, but unlike that "Così," this "Elixir" doesn't attempt any real rethinking of the opera.

The updating just provides an excuse for a cute revolving set (by Isabella Bywater), a vintage hot rod for Dulcamara and some [Elvis](#)-ish dance steps. It's not much of a concept. Executed by a cast as game and appealing as this one, though, the show was high-spirited and winning.

Unfortunately the conductor, Brad Cohen, drove those high spirits to the point of mania with a frantic performance that bullied the music, scattered ensembles and left the singers breathless. The orchestra sounded polished and crisp, despite being shoved to its limit. Mr. Cohen, making his City Opera debut, let up the relentless pace only rarely, for moments like Mr. Lomelí's golden-toned, sensitively sung "Una furtiva lagrima," the showstopping aria that earned him those cheers. It was then that you could finally relax and enjoy that sweetest of operagoing experiences: a terrific debut.