

“Italian Serenade”

Program Notes

Austrian composer **Hugo Wolf** (1860 -1903) is remembered for hundreds of art songs for voice and piano. The sunny mood of “Italian Serenade,” composed in 1887 for string quartet, belies the reality of his personal life which was fraught with depression and symptoms of syphilis. The piece was meant to be the first movement of a multi-movement composition, but the larger work was never realized. He arranged the work for string orchestra in 1892. The “Italian Serenade” is considered one of the finer examples of his mature instrumental works.

Paolo Tosti's (1846-1916) was an Italian composer and music teacher. Although he was educated in Italy, he had little financial success there until he played a concert in Rome for the future queen of Italy. She requested him as her singing teacher and hired him to curate the Italian Musical Archives. Rossini set his hand to composing music in Italy, but his big break was in England. He travelled there in 1875 and was introduced to members of high society, where he experienced high demand for his music in “salons,” featuring music of current composers. By 1885, he was the most popular song composer in England. In 1894, he became professor of music at the Royal Academy of Music and was knighted by King Edward VII in 1906. “La Serenata,” composed in 1888, has been sung around the world in its vocal version. The first verse reads, “Fly now, O thou song of night: My beloved is all alone, And, with her lovely head laid back so carelessly, Midst silken sheets she doth repose: O thou song of night, Fly now.”

Italian composer **Gioachino Rossini** (1792-1868) was the son of musicians and in early life played viola, horn, cello, piano, and sang professionally. He was perhaps best known for his operatic output, 39 works, created in his role as theatre manager and composer in Naples. He composed prolifically until 1829, when he stopped for unknown reasons. Late in life he composed fourteen volumes of what he called “Sins of Old Age,” comprised of 150 vocal, piano, and chamber pieces to be used as salon music. “Serenade in Eb,” composed in 1823 between operas, includes several solos for the violin, flute, oboe, English horn, and cello.

Gaetano Donizetti's (1797-1848) “The Elixir of Love” is an example of *opera buffa*, or comic opera. It was composed in 1832 and first performed in Milan, Italy. The two main characters – Nemorino, a peasant in love with Adina, and lovely Adina, a wealthy landowner – progress in their affection for each other despite competition from Sergeant Belcore and interference from the love potion. “The Elixir of Love” is one of the twelve most performed operas in the world.

- Notes by Rhonda Gowen

“Elixir of Love” Opera Synopsis

Courtesy of Opera North

ACT I

In a small village, somewhere in Italy, a poor young man named Nemorino is hopelessly in love with the capricious and unobtainable Adina. He listens longingly as she reads aloud to her workers and guests the tale of Tristan and Isolde, whose love for one another was inflamed by the drinking of a magic potion.

A stranger arrives in the village—Captain Belcore—who immediately begins to flirt with Adina. Nemorino is miserably jealous, and appalled when Belcore precipitously asks for Adina’s hand in marriage. She does not immediately accept, but neither does she categorically refuse him. Fearful of losing Adina, Nemorino declares his love for her. Kindly, but firmly, she turns him down.

A second stranger drops in—the colorful and charismatic Doctor Dulcamara. Claiming to offer a miraculous cure for every ill, he sells his wares to the villagers. Nemorino, believing that the hand of fate is helping him, asks Dulcamara if he stocks Isolde’s love potion. Seizing the chance to make some easy money, Dulcamara instantly produces the elixir of love. It will not, he warns, take effect for 24 hours; by the time Nemorino discovers it’s nothing but cheap wine, the Doctor will have left the village.

Nemorino, who has never touched alcohol before, proceeds to drink the entire bottle. He quickly grows more cheerful and confident. Seeing Adina, he adopts an air of lofty indifference. Piqued by Nemorino’s change in attitude, she informs Belcore that she will marry him at the end of the week. At that moment, the Captain’s officers arrive with orders to return to duty the following morning. Belcore therefore suggests they move the wedding to that very evening. Nemorino is horrified; by the time the love potion works its magic, Adina will be married. He pleads with her, but to no avail. To the joy of everyone in the village, Adina and Belcore make preparations for their nuptials.

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Program Notes (continued)

ACT II

The pre-wedding party is in full swing. Dulcamara invites Adina to sing a duet with him. Belcore summons a lawyer to arrange the wedding contract but Adina, annoyed by Nemorino’s apparent absence, decides to wait before putting pen to paper.

Nemorino, in despair at the prospect of losing the love of his life, begs Doctor Dulcamara for another dose of the love potion. The Doctor says he will be happy to oblige—in return for hard cash, of course. The penniless Nemorino is therefore easy prey for his rival Belcore, who offers him money to enlist.

What Nemorino does not know is that he has just inherited a fortune, thanks to the death of his uncle. But Giannetta, one of Adina’s senior employees, has heard the news and passes it on to the women in the village. All at once, Nemorino has become the most eligible bachelor in the area. Initially bewildered, he attributes his sudden popularity with the ladies to the effects of the elixir. Dulcamara, too, starts to believe in the power of his own potion.

Adina, fearing that she is about to lose Nemorino to another woman, finally acknowledges the strength of her feelings for him and resolves to win him back. Nemorino dares to hope that his dream may be about to come true. It does: Adina, having repaid Belcore the recruitment fee, confesses to Nemorino that she loves him. When they hear of the inheritance, their happiness is complete. Belcore is obliged to leave empty-handed, but Dulcamara, attributing all this success to the power of his elixir, departs in triumph.

MELISSA MCCANN, *Soprano*



Hailed as “particularly charming” (Opera Canada), soprano **Melissa McCann**’s career highlights include her Carnegie Hall debut with Angels Vocal Art and her performance of the American National Anthem for President Barack Obama at the University of California, Irvine 50th Anniversary Celebration. Operatic highlights include Zerbinetta in *Ariadne auf Naxos* (Highlands Opera Studio); Xanthe in *Die liebe der Danae* (Pittsburgh Festival Opera); Fortuna in *Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria* (dell’Arte Opera Ensemble); and Musetta in *La bohème* (Opera San José). Recent orchestral appearances include soprano soloist with the McKinney Philharmonic; soprano soloist in Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater* (Dakota Pro Musica); and soprano soloist in Mozart’s *Requiem* (Bismarck-Mandan Symphony Orchestra).

SEBASTIAN HABOCZKI, *Tenor*



Sebastian Haboczki, tenor, has made significant operatic debuts across Canada, Europe, and the USA, including a debut at Amsterdam’s Het Concertgebouw with Opera Netherlands. Recently, he starred as Scott Fitzgerald in *27* with Opéra de Montréal and as the Ring Announcer in the Canadian premiere of *Champion*. His expansive repertoire features roles including Rodolfo *La Bohème*, Tybalt in *Roméo et Juliette*, Reporter in *JFK*, Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*, Alfredo *La traviata*, and Count Almaviva in *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. Other notable roles include Lysander in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Ferrando in *Così fan tutte*, Ulisse in *Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria*.

DENNIS GOWEN, *Conductor*



Dennis Gowen is in his 37th season as Professor of Music, Director of Bands and High Brass Studies at the University of Mary. A native of Maine, he holds degrees from Western Michigan University and the University of Southern Maine. He has served as conductor for the College Band Directors National Association’s North Central Intercollegiate Band, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Honor Band Festival, the Bismarck-Mandan Symphony Orchestra, and the Missouri Valley Chamber Orchestra. He has conducted numerous large collaborations such as Stravinsky’s “Firebird,” Johann Strauss’s *Die Fledermaus*, Handel’s *Messiah*, and Meredith Wilson’s *The Music Man*. As a performer, Dennis has served as principal trumpet and soloist with the Bismarck-Mandan Symphony and the Missouri Valley Chamber Orchestra.