

## Accent on comedy

by Albert Storace

Two fully-staged operas and a concert performance of two more brief ones constituted this year's BOV Opera Festival's fare.

**L'Elisir d'Amore – 21 March 2007**



Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore* was given two performances at the Manoel, the second of which is under review here. This is one of the most successful comic operas ever written and there is absolutely never a dull moment in it. The score is beautiful and the opera's charm irresistible. This production's artistic director was Elizabeth Smith with cast and chorus from Palermo's Operalaboratorio. This continues a now well-established tradition of cooperation with and participation by Operalaboratorio during the BOV opera festival.

*Elisir* has four main characters, two of whom, Adina and Nemorino are the busiest on stage. They provide the love interest, something to which even Belcore aspires. This sergeant, so over-convinced of his own importance and sexual prowess, is more of a satyr and provides the main real comic interest, somewhat shared by the rascally but not unlikable quack Dulcamara. Adina is the typical coquette whose yes means no and vice-versa until she finally sorts out her feelings much to the joy of the country yokel Nemorino, a simple soul but not really a dimwit. Looking at the performance of this quartet of singers I found soprano Caterina Ilardo's Adina rather disappointing. She has the looks and the presence and although I was assured that during the first performance she had sung well, this was not the case. She just made it to some of the high notes and was often inaudible in ensemble singing. Although at some point in the second half she seemed to improve, this proved to be ephemeral. Pity as she is a good actress, so this may have been just a bad day. The only non-Italian singer in this performance was our own tenor Charles Vincenti. He is a promising singer who has locally made something of a name for himself. This collaboration with Operalaboratorio gave him the chance to sing his first leading role in opera. He knew it extremely well, is more than a reasonably good actor and his overall singing was pleasant and delivered in a convincing manner. Of course everybody was waiting for the opera's show stopper *Una furtiva lacrima*, which comes rather late in the action. I feel he could have sung parts of it better but the opera is not just this particular number. His performance has to be overall and he did himself credit. There is always room for improvement and this was still a pretty good start. The other male protagonists did very well, giving fine all-round performances. Baritone Giovanni Bellavia was Belcore, the amorous sergeant who burst into the scene very effectively with his *Come Paride vezzoso*. Ardent, jealous and over-precipitate suitor, scheming to get Nemorino out of the way he is thwarted in the end and once all hope of wedding Adina fades, he consoles himself with the thought that the world is full of pretty women. Bellavia gave a very good performance, whether on his own or in ensemble. His comic sense was matched by the more deep-toned baritone, Marco Filippo Romano as Dulcamara. He had a pretty good romp, and was on very good form vocally. From one who knows his elixir is a fake (like the ersatz donkey drawing his cart) he ends up believing in it when we do know of course that is true love not a dubious elixir which wins the day. The minor role of Giannetta was sung by Claudia Munda, while the chorus, all from Operalaboratorio, did a very good job. They moved and sang very well indeed. The ladies wore beautiful costumes by Francesca Pipi while Nadia Campanotta's sets were the simplest possible. The National Orchestra was again under the excellent direction of Michael Laus who held together and consolidated the whole fabric of the opera. By the way it was disappointing to many patrons that printed programmes ran out.