

Students have a word for opera: 'Bravo!'



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Nikkia McKinley, center, a third-grader at Cannon Beach Elementary School, joins classmates in helping Nemorino the farmer track down the snake-oil salesman Dulcamara who sold him a love potion.

Portland group offers an elixir of fun for Cannon Beach youngsters

By NANCY MCCARTHY
The Daily Astorian

CANNON BEACH — It can be difficult to keep a 6-year-old's interest for an hour. When it involves opera, you'd think it would be impossible.

But you would think wrong. For an hour Thursday morning, every student at Cannon Beach Elementary School stayed tuned to four opera singers with nary a restless outburst or even a yawn.

Despite an aria or two, a few duets and simultaneous singing by the entire four-member ensemble from the Portland Opera, the attention paid by the students never wavered.

"It's beautiful! It's great!" said Joel Silvis, 8, after the performance.

The kid-friendly performance of Gaetano Donizetti's "The Elixir of Love" is being performed during a statewide tour of 37 schools and other 17 other venues by the Portland Opera.

In addition to Cannon Beach Elementary, the opera troupe was set to perform at McMenamins Sand Trap in Gearhart Thursday night. The performances, presented by Portland Opera's education and outreach program, are free.

"The Portland Opera feels very

strongly that everyone should have an opportunity to learn about the opera," said Alexis Hamilton, manager of education and outreach for the Portland Opera.

"This program builds audiences for the future and broadens audiences who might come to see the opera," Hamilton said. "We go to schools that sometimes don't have music programs. But state education standards require students to know the difference between an opera, a play and ballet. If you haven't seen an opera, how would you know what it is?"

Seeing a performance at an early age might also plant a seed for a future vocation, as it did with Portland Opera General Manager Christopher Mattaliano, who, Hamilton said, watched a performance of "The Barber of Seville" when he was a youngster.

"I certainly had that experience, too," said Hamilton.

See OPERA, Page 9A

Second-grader Crystal Rouss delivers a telegram to Belcore, the pilot, during the Portland Opera Company's performance of "The Elixir of Love" Thursday in front of students in the gym at Cannon Beach Elementary School.

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Opera: Delight-filled faces show how much kids appreciate visit

9A



ABOVE: From left, heroine Adina, played by soprano Ainsley Soutiere, shares a kiss and embrace with the farmer Neapolitano, played by tenor Daniel Buchanan, as the pilot Belcore, played by baritone Eric Hurdloff, and snake-oil salesman Dulcamara, played by baritone Stacey Ilurdock, look on with envy. Thursday at Cannon Beach Elementary School.
ABOVE LEFT: Nemorino prepares to drink the love potion as pianist David Safford performs the score for the opera "The Elixir of Love."

Continued from Page 1A

The play is a light-hearted tale about a love-struck farmhand, Nemorino, who hopes that an elixir sold to him by the snake-oil salesman, Dulcensman, will help him overcome his shyness so he can tell pretty young Adina of his love for her. But when the dashing - and conceited - aviator, Belcore, crashes into the farm and begins wooing Adina, Nemorino sees his chance at love slipping away.

Simple scenery consists of a quaint farmhouse with clouds overhead, trees, pigs, a windmill and a fence. The costumes are colorful and fun: Dulcensman wears a long coat, a multi-colored vest and plaid pants.

Belcore sports a leather aviator jacket with medals that he periodically shines with his long, flowing white scarf, a 1930s aviator's leather helmet, and of, course, aviator goggles.

Before the performers take the stage, however, they go into the classrooms to preview the coming attraction. Students learn what an opera is ("a play that is sung"), some of the opera's terminology and how characters are developed through voice.

Teachers also are given curriculum plans that meet state education standards. Discussion from those materials may focus on bullying or alcohol use (the "elixir" turns out to be nothing more than a cheap Merlot).

Two of the students played a special role in the opera: Second-graders Crystal Rouse and Andrew Tuebner each

delivered a telegram to one of the characters, and those telegrams twisted the plot just a little.

Baritone Stacey Murodock, who has been touring with the Portland Opera for six years, said he loves the experience.

"Next time when they hear something about the opera, they won't be scared to see it," he said. "Instead, they'll say, 'Wow, it's fun.'"

As the students settled into their chairs to perform as the audience, Hamilton told them they would have to listen differently than they listen to television or to another play where the words are spoken.

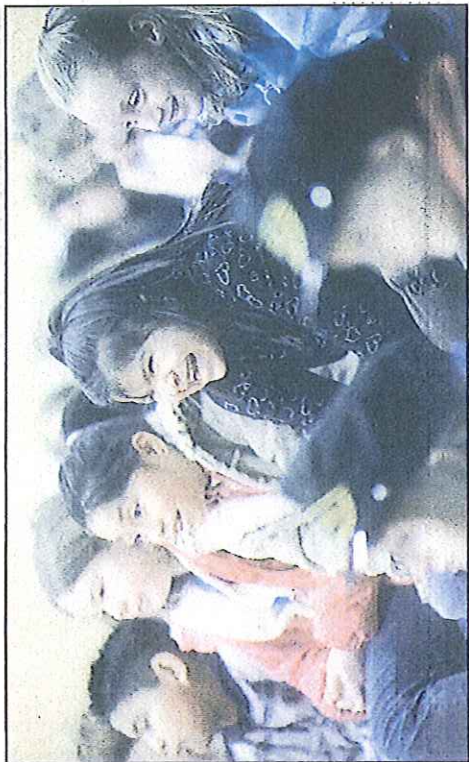
"These words can go really, really fast," Hamilton said. She explained that, because opera singers don't use microphones, they must project their voices to reach audiences that could number 3,000 people.

"What an opera audience gets to do no other audience gets to do," Hamilton said. If, at the end of the opera the audience likes the "super, colossal, awesome actor," it shouts "Bravo!" If the actress is awesome, the audience yells "Brava!"

And, in their own way, the students voiced their own versions of "Bravo" and "Brava" after the play.

"I liked it when they kissed," said Ann Lynda Aldrich, 6.

"I liked the singing. I liked how fun it was," chimed in Rebecca Manic, 7. Asked if she would want to see another opera, she answered, "Maybe. Probably."

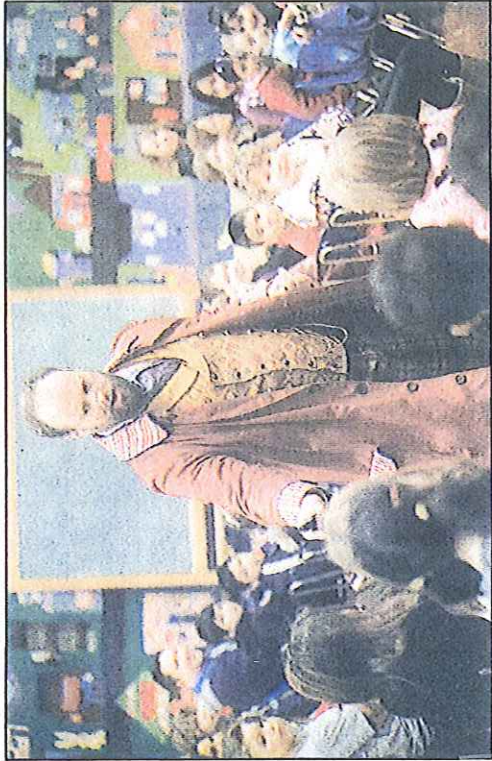


ABOVE: Jasmine Villaluna, a first grader at Carmon Beach Elementary School, gets a laugh out of the love triangle between Adina and her suitors Nemorino, the farmer, and Belcore, the pilot.



LEFT: Alexis Hamilton, the manager of education and outreach for the Portland Opera, introduces the young actors at Carmon Beach Elementary School to the opera "The Elixir of Love."

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Baritone Stacey Murodock, the snake-oil salesman, jolts to find some suckers, or customers, for his magic elixirs among the young audience at Carmon Beach Elementary School.

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