Illustration for Manrico aria, Di quella pira Act III, in *Il trovatore*, opera by Giuseppe Verdi, Luigi Morgari (1857-c.1935)

MARCH 7, 12, 15 (M), 18, 21 (M), 24, 29 (M)

Il trovatore

Dramma in four parts by Salvadore Cammarano
Music by Giuseppe Verdi
Sung in Italian
First performed by Sarasota Opera on February 6, 1993
2014 production created by Sarasota Opera

Conductor	**Victor DeRenzi**
Stage Director	**Marco Nisticò**
Scenic Designer	**Michael Schweikardt**
Costume Designer	**Howard Tsvi Kaplan**
Lighting Designer	**Ken Yunker**
Hair & Makeup Designer	**Sue Schaefer**
Chorus Master	**Artyom Pak**
Assistant Conductors	**Stefano Teani, Connor Buckley, Jordan Brooks**
Surtitle Supplier	**Words For Music**
Surtitle Translator	**Victor DeRenzi**

CAST

The Count De Luna	**Ricardo José Rivera**
Leonora	**Aviva Fortunata**
Azucena	**Lisa Chavez**
Manrico	**Victor Starsky**
Ferrando	**Young Bok Kim**
Ines	**Gabrielle Barkidjija ***
Ruiz	**Nathaniel Catasca ***
An old gypsy	**Henry Horstmann ****
A messenger	**Jordan Hammons ****

Sarasota Opera Orchestra
Chorus: Sarasota Opera Apprentice and Studio Artists

**Studio Artist*
***Apprentice Artist*

Production sponsored by Claudia McCorkle and Beau

IL TROVATORE SYNOPSIS

PART I – THE DUEL

SCENE 1

A ball in the Aliaferia palace

Civil war rages between the forces of the Count of Urgel and the Aragonese king. At the De Luna fortress of Aliaferia in Aragon, soldiers are on watch by night. Their captain, Ferrando, tells them a story that took place fifteen years before, when Count De Luna was a little boy. Late one night, the nurse of his baby brother, Garzia, awoke to see a Gypsy woman staring at her charge. When the nurse cried out, servants responded and seized the Gypsy, who protested she had only sought to cast the baby's horoscope. Later, when the infant became sick, the Gypsy was captured, condemned, and burned at the stake. She left a daughter, Azucena, who became obsessed with avenging her mother's death. To that end, Azucena stole the infant Garzia. In vain pursuit of the kidnapper, the old Count De Luna's men found an infant's charred skeleton on the very spot Azucena's mother had been burned. The father never believed those charred remains were those of his son and made his older boy, the present Count, vow never to give up the search for his brother.

SCENE 2

The palace gardens

Leonora, a lady-in-waiting, awaits her lover, a troubadour. She tells the story of a tournament, at which she crowned an unknown knight who vanished after winning every contest and winning her heart. Sometime later he returned, his serenades rekindling her love. After she leaves, Count De Luna, in love with Leonora, enters, hoping to see her. The troubadour is heard singing, and Leonora comes out to meet him. The knight identifies himself as Manrico, whom the Count recognizes as an Urgel supporter and an outlaw. The two men prepare to fight a duel.

PART II – THE GYPSY

SCENE 1

A ruined hut on the slopes of the Biscay mountains

In a Gypsy camp, Azucena is seen with her son, Manrico. As the Gypsies work at their anvils, the fire awakens Azucena's memories. She sings, describing the scene of a women's death. The Gypsies depart, leaving Manrico and Azucena. Manrico learns it was his grandmother who was burned. Azucena tells how she attended the execution with her infant in her arms. As her mother, bound to the stake, cried, "Avenge me," Azucena decided to kidnap the old count's son. Returning to the fire, she threw a child into the embers. But it was not the count's son as she discovered when she came to her senses: it was her own child. Manrico asks if he is not her son. Azucena, distraught, says she was raving. The Gypsy reminds him that he spared the fallen De Luna in the duel over Leonora. Manrico describes how a mysterious force stayed his hand. A messenger arrives with news that Leonora, believing Manrico dead in battle, plans to enter a convent that night. Manrico leaves to prevent her from doing so.

SCENE 2

The cloister of a monastery near Castellor

The Count, who also knows of Leonora's decision to take religious vows, plans to abduct her. The chant of nuns is heard. As the Count moves to seize Leonora, Manrico suddenly appears. Leonora, spurning the convent, leaves with Manrico.

INTERMISSION

PART III – THE GYPSY'S SON

SCENE 1

An encampment

De Luna and his men have surrounded Castellor, which they mean to capture from their enemies. Azucena is discovered by De Luna's scouts. She has penetrated enemy lines searching for Manrico. Azucena is recognized by Ferrando and condemned to death by the Count.

SCENE 2

A room adjoining the chapel of Castellor

In Castellor, Manrico and Leonora are to be wed. Ruiz enters and reports that Azucena is being dragged to the stake in full view of the castle. Manrico tells Leonora his first duty is to his mother and rushes off with his men to save her.

PART IV – THE TORTURE

SCENE 1

A wing of the Aliferia palace

Manrico's rescue of Azucena has failed and they are both imprisoned. Leonora arrives outside the prison tower, hoping to save Manrico. The Count appears and orders the execution of Manrico and Azucena. As he speaks of Leonora, she steps from the shadows to confront him. Leonora offers herself to De Luna for Manrico's life. As the Count accepts her proposal, Leonora secretly sips poison from her ring.

SCENE 2

A horrid prison

Azucena is terrified by her impending death. Manrico calms her, and she falls asleep. When Leonora enters, Manrico's joy turns to scorn when he learns the price she had paid to free him. However, Manrico's unjust suspicions are dispelled as he realizes Leonora is dying. The Count enters, sees that Leonora has deceived him, and furiously sends Manrico to the block. As he is led away, Azucena awakens. She cries out that the Count has executed his own brother, and she has avenged her mother.

World Premiere: at the Teatro Apollo, Rome, January 19, 1853

IL TROVATORE BACKGROUND

Between 1840 and 1853, Giuseppe Verdi was remarkably prolific, composing nearly one opera per year during what he called his "years in the galley." This intense period of labor brought him both artistic acclaim and financial success. The final three operas of this era—*Rigoletto* (1851), *Il trovatore* (1853), and *La traviata* (1853)—cemented his status as the most performed composer in the world.

Verdi was intrigued by the drama *El Trovador* by Garcia Gutierrez, the foremost Spanish dramatist, and proposed it to the experienced librettist Salvadore Cammarano, who had written the librettos for *Lucia di Lammermoor and Luisa Miller,* among others, and with whom he'd discussed his ultimately unfulfilled dream of a *King Lear* opera. Cammarano hesitated, and Verdi became frustrated. "Does he like it or doesn't he?" Verdi wrote to a mutual friend. When Cammarano finally responded, he was full of reservations, to which Verdi tried to respond, even offering to consider a different subject.

Work on *Il trovatore* began in 1850 but proceeded slowly. Verdi first focused on a commission for Venice which became *Rigoletto.* He was also increasingly occupied with managing his estate at Sant'Agata. Despite these distractions—including a battle with the censors—*Rigoletto* was a triumph and Verdi was ready to work on *Il trovatore*.

Rigoletto had been a break with many of the 19th-century operatic conventions. "I conceived *Rigoletto* almost without arias, without finales, but only an unending series of duets..." he wrote to a friend. He hoped for something similar with *Il trovatore*. To Cammarano he wrote: "If in opera there were neither cavatinas, duets, trios, choruses, finales, et cetera, and the whole work consisted, let's say of a single number, I should find that all the more right and proper. For this reason, I would say that if you could avoid beginning with an opening chorus (all operas begin with a chorus!) and start straightaway with the troubadour's song and run the first two acts into one it would be a good thing... "

To Verdi's disappointment, the libretto that Cammarano delivered had all of the elements that Verdi had hoped to avoid. It began with a chorus and then a solo for the soprano and it had all the set pieces that were traditional to Italian opera. Verdi complained to the librettist but eventually decided to move forward, a move complicated by the death of Cammarano in July 1852. It was a deep personal and professional loss for Verdi.

With final touches to the libretto by Leone Bardare, *Il trovatore* premiered in Rome in January 1853 and was a triumph. It quickly made the rounds of the European theaters, with first performances in New York and London in 1855.

Although *Il trovatore* remains popular today, the story has become one ripe for censure and parody (one of these is *H.M.S. Pinafore).* Some feel the story requires qualification or even apology.

Giuseppe Verdi

One wonders why. One element that is often cited is Azucena's actions prior to the start of the opera. Yet are her actions that unbelievable? A woman, mentally unstable, stricken with the grief of having seen her mother burned at the stake and bent on fulfilling her mother's wish to be avenged, loses control and commits an unspeakable act. There have been similarly horrible tragedies in the news in recent years, and half of what Hollywood produces these days is more implausible.

The difficulty of *Il trovatore's* libretto lies in the fact that most of the action takes place before opera or off stage, with the principals left to recount what has already occurred. Yet, Verdi has used this opportunity to create some of his most wonderfully descriptive music. Azucena, the character who most intrigued Verdi, also spurred his musical imagination to considerable heights. Her initial song ("Stride la vampa") contains musical and instrumental devices that vividly illustrate the funeral pyre in her mind's eye. "Condotta ell'era in ceppi," the scene in which she describes the terrible events of that fateful night, is a unique musical narrative, unlike anything in Verdi's output to that point. Even the most conventional operatic structures in *Il trovatore,* Leonora's "Tacea la notte" for instance, inspired Verdi's creativity to write one of the greatest soprano cavatinas in the repertoire.

What is unequivocal is that it is *Il trovatore's* music that has captured the opera lover's imagination. The score is rich with moments that challenge even the best operatic voices, making the achievement of surmounting these obstacles even more exciting to audiences. Tenors dread and enthusiasts clamor for the extraneous but now mostly obligatory high C in "Di quella pira" The other roles offer similar challenges to even the most accomplished artists. Caruso once claimed that to produce *Il trovatore* you needed "the four greatest singers in the world."

During Verdi's lifetime *Il trovatore* was the most popular of his works. Writing to a friend, Verdi said that "in the heart of Africa or the Indies you will always hear *trovatore*."

Richard Russell *is Sarasota Opera's General Director.*