

Verdi's *Il Trovatore*

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smart

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These study materials are produced for use with the Bob Jones University Opera Association's production of *Il Trovatore*.

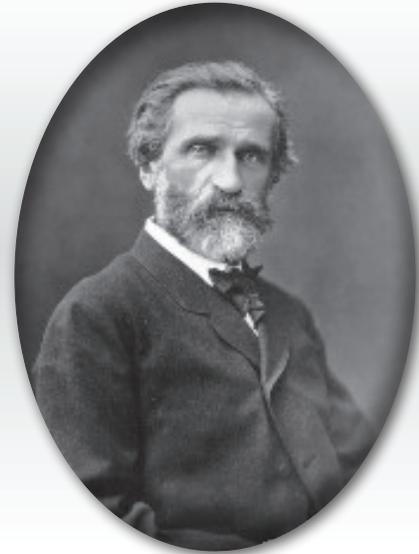
Il Trovatore: Verdi's Saga of Revenge Gone Awry

Giuseppe Verdi was fascinated by various works of fiction written in his own day, especially contemporary melodramas. He, in fact, composed sixteen operas based on this genre that places more emphasis on emotion and action than on realistic characterization.

Verdi's inspiration for *Il Trovatore* was a sprawling drama named *El Trovador*, written in 1836 by Antonio Garcia and set in the Spanish Middle Ages. The work was transformed into an Italian lyric melodrama in antique style by librettist Salvatore Cammarano. Composed by Verdi in only one month's time, the opera premiered at Rome's Teatro Apollo on Jan. 19, 1853.

Consisting of arias, duets, ensemble pieces and choruses for virtuoso singers, *Il Trovatore* can boast more "hit tunes" than any other opera except *Carmen*. Verdi's work portrays a complex story of love, hate, revenge and death. Its four rapidly-moving acts are heavily laced with symbolism that lends a sense of urgency to the plot. Suggestions of fire, both in a literal sense and in the metaphorical sense of passion, run throughout the opera. Highlights of the score include music that depicts a spirit of vengeance alongside sections that suggest passionate love. In the words of Enrico Caruso, it is "an opera for voices."

Juxtaposing beautiful music and high drama, *Il Trovatore* features a plot in which the past overshadows the present. The libretto tells the story of Azucena, a gypsy woman whose mother cried "Avenge my death!" as she was wrongfully burned at the stake. That night Azucena seized the baby of the count who condemned her mother with the intent of throwing the child onto the embers of the fire that had consumed her mother. By a horrible and unthinkable turn of events, however, she mistakenly threw her own baby to his death. When the action of the opera begins, Azucena has for many years been contemplating carrying out revenge against the surviving son of the count who was responsible for her mother's death. As the plot unfolds, it takes one unexpected turn after another until eventually Azucena's desire for vengeance is ironically fulfilled. 🎭



"The basic theme of *Il Trovatore* is love, crossed by adverse fate, leading to death."

—DONALD SHAW



(top) Portrait of Verdi (1828–1906), public domain (above) Act III, Scene 1, from the 1991 performance by the Bob Jones University Opera Association

TROVATORE

SYNOPSIS

The year is 1914; war is raging in Europe. The location is Spain, which, in spite of declaring its neutrality in the Great War, is experiencing civil strife. The story takes place during an internal border war in the northern part of the country, alternately in the provinces of Aragon and Biscay.

ACT I, SCENE I – COURTYARD OF THE PALACE OF ALIAFERIA IN ARAGON

Ferrando, captain of the guard in the service of Count di Luna, interrupts the drowsy night watch hours with a harrowing tale. Many years ago a gypsy was burned as a witch for supposedly casting a spell on Garzia di Luna, the count's infant brother. The gypsy's daughter, Azucena, stole Garzia in order to slay him to avenge her mother's death. Later, the bones of a child are found smoldering in the embers of a fire. The count has been searching for Azucena ever since.

ACT I, SCENE 2 – GARDENS OF THE PALACE OF ALIAFERIA

Leonora, a beautiful attendant to a princess of Aragon, confides to her assistant Inez that she loves a soldier whom she recently met at a series of military games. The count, in love with Leonora, is devoured with jealousy of this mysterious troubadour, Manrico, who now comes to serenade Leonora. In the darkness of the night, Leonora mistakes the count for Manrico. A duel ensues when Manrico appears, and Manrico overcomes the count but spares his life.

ACT II, SCENE 1 – GYPSY WORK YARD IN BISCAY

Several months later Manrico is recovering from wounds received in the battle of Pelilla against the forces of Aragon led by Count di Luna. Azucena recalls the horrific events surrounding her mother's death and reveals that, out of her mind with grief, she threw her own baby into the flames. She reared Garzia as her son, Manrico. Azucena urges Manrico never to allow the count to escape again but to kill without hesitation. A messenger brings orders from the Prince of

Biscay that Manrico is to take over the command of the Castle Castellor and news that Leonora, believing Manrico dead, is seeking asylum in a convent and that the count is now on his way to abduct her.

ACT II, SCENE 2 – CONVENT CLOISTERS NEAR CASTELLOR

At night the count and his men approach the convent to seize Leonora, but Manrico and his gypsy forces arrive in time to rescue her.

INTERMISSION

ACT III, SCENE I – COUNT DI LUNA'S MILITARY HEADQUARTERS

The count has laid siege to Castellor where Manrico has taken Leonora. Azucena, anxious to find her son, attempts to get through the besieging forces. After Ferrando recognizes her as the gypsy who killed di Luna's young brother, she is captured and sentenced to death by fire.

ACT III, SCENE 2 – GRAND HALL AT CASTELLOR

Just before Manrico and Leonora exchange nuptial vows, Ruiz brings news of Azucena's capture. Manrico leads his forces to rescue her.

ACT IV, SCENE 1 – LOWER WING OF THE PALACE OF ALIAFERIA

The rescue has failed, and Manrico has been captured. Leonora begs the count to spare Manrico's life, promising in exchange to marry the count. When the count, happily consenting, leaves for a moment, Leonora takes poison.

ACT IV, SCENE 2 – PALACE PRISON

Leonora lives only long enough to assure Manrico of her faithful love. The count, cheated of his bride, orders Manrico's death. As Manrico is killed, Azucena shrieks, "He was your brother! O, Mother, you are avenged!" 🎭



Scenes from the 1991 performance by the Bob Jones University Opera Association: (top) Act III, Scene 1 (above) Act II, Scene 1 (left, top to bottom) Act II, Scene 2; Act III, Scene 1

Who's Who in the Opera



AZUCENA—A gypsy who went insane after her mother was wrongly condemned as a witch and burned at the stake, Azucena is the key to the plot of the opera. The mother’s dying words were “Avenge me!” Thus Azucena stole the baby of the old count who condemned her mother to die for staring into the cradle of his youngest son. Intending to take vengeance by tossing this baby into the same fire that consumed her mother, Azucena mistakenly threw her own infant son into the fire. She has reared the other baby, Manrico, as her son.

Azucena also plays a symbolic role in the plot as a woman who is deluded and obsessed with a vision of revenge and fire. Verdi wrote to Cammarano concerning her character in the end of the opera, “Her two great passions, her love for Manrico and her wild thirst to avenge her mother, must be sustained to the end. . . . Do not make Azucena insane. Overcome with weariness, grief, terror, lack of sleep, she is unable to speak coherently. Her mind is oppressed, but not mad.”

COUNT DI LUNA—An army commander and the son of the old count who condemned Azucena’s mother to the fire, di Luna is consumed by two passions: his love for Leonora and his belief that his younger brother may not be dead.

MANRICO—The younger brother of the young Count di Luna who has been reared as a gypsy warrior and poet/singer by Azucena. As “the troubadour,” he is the opera’s title character. When the plot begins, only Azucena knows his true identity.

LEONORA—a noblewoman who is passionately loved by both the young Count di Luna and Manrico ☞



Cast and directors from the 1991 performance by the Bob Jones University Opera Association: (*opposite, left to right*) Count di Luna, Richard Gratton; Leonora, Adelaide Negri; Dwight Gustafson, conductor; Azucena, Corina Circa; Manrico, Augusto Paglialunga; William McCauley, stage director

Why is
Il Trovatore
one of the most
popular operas
of all time?

The answer can be heard in just about every number in the score: It's the music. *Trovatore* features one of the most spectacular tenor arias in any opera, a series of memorable soprano melodies, some truly searing music for the mezzo-soprano and one of Verdi's signature, achingly beautiful baritone arias. And that's not to mention the famous "Anvil Chorus."

In the end, all that music has been more than enough to keep the work firmly planted in the world's opera houses for more than 150 years. Its story may be more than a bit muddled, making it hard to keep track of just who betrayed whom, who threw which baby into the fire, and exactly how all these confounding characters wound up in the same opera in the first place. But if you don't go away from this opera whistling a tune, it's only because there are too many to choose from. 🎭

—BRUCE SCOTT, NPR



Bob Jones University Opera Association 1958 performance—Marian Liverman as Inez; James Ryerson as Ferrando

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