

**Opera Circle Cleveland's *Il trovatore*:
insights from Christina Carr & Jorge Pita Carreras**

by Mike Telin



Opera Circle Cleveland will revisit Giuseppe Verdi's *Il trovatore* for its season finale at the Ohio Theatre in PlayHouse Square on Saturday, June 11 at 7:30 p.m. Last produced by the company in February of 2012, the opera is the middle child in the trio of popular titles Verdi produced in the early 1850s, preceded by *Rigoletto* and followed by *La traviata*.

Based on a Spanish play by Antonio Garcia Gutierrez adapted by Verdi's librettist Salvatore Cammarano, the opera was an immense success at its premiere at Rome's Teatro Apollo on January 19, 1853. Although the Tiber had flooded earlier that day and the audience had to slog through water and mud to reach the theater, nothing dampened their enthusiasm that evening. *Il trovatore* proved immediately appealing to the crowd. As the *Gazetta Musicale* reported,

The public listened to every number with religious silence and broke out with applause at every interval, the end of the third act and the whole of the fourth arousing such enthusiasm that their repetition was demanded. —
David Ewen, *Encyclopedia of the Opera*.

Verdi's tuneful music and the singing were the obviously the reason for such ovations, but you could imagine that the audience also wanted to back up and have another look at the complicated plot, which is nearly impossible to sum up in a brief synopsis.

The composer realized that too, and chose to begin with a long recitative where Ferrando, the captain of the Queen's guards, relates the back story of the opera to his

soldiers. National Public Radio and Houston Grand Opera have helpfully put it into modern terms [here](#).

Verdi had originally intended to name the opera *Azucena* after the gypsy whose mother is sentenced to death for bewitching the youngest child of the Count di Luna. Azucena's mother commands her daughter to avenge her execution by abducting the Count's baby, Manrico. Confused, Azucena throws her own son onto the execution pyre and raises Manrico as her own child.

Mezzo-soprano Christina Carr, who will sing the role of Azucena, describes her character as complex. "She has the traumatic experience of seeing her mother burned at the stake. She's trying to avenge her mother, but she's not necessarily evil. She's grown to love her 'not-quite son' Manrico, but she still has a vendetta because of what happened to her mother."

Carr pointed out that her character is pulled in many directions because of those events. "She not only saw her own mother killed, but then had to deal with the fact that she inadvertently killed her own child, and chose to raise the Count's child as her own. And then when he grew up, she watched him go to battle against his whole family. She wants him to continue that vengeance by killing the Count (his own brother) and she admonishes Manrico for not stabbing him when he had the chance. I don't want to just say she's crazy, but I think she's riding a fine line between a psychotic breakdown from her childhood and trying to get through life."

Manrico has his own mental issues to deal with. Tenor Jorge Pita Carreras, who will sing the role, believes this is because Manrico has lived his life without knowing where he belongs. "He feels there is another part of his life that he doesn't really understand, and not knowing where he is from is what causes his rage."

Carreras believes that while Manrico always feels out of place, he acts nobly. "Yet he is always roaring into the fire. He lunges in whatever direction his thoughts go with complete abandonment. He's very loving, and resolute in his life, but something calls him. He wants more — he's always searching."

Does Manrico understand that Azucena is not his birth-mother? "I think he has always had that suspicion, and that's part of what he doesn't quite understand."

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