

## Opera Circle Cleveland: Jorge Pita Carreras and Christina Carr talk about their first plunges into opera

by Mike Telin



“What do I enjoy about singing Verdi? Oh my gosh, everything about it,” tenor [Jorge Pita Carreras](#) exclaimed during a recent interview. On Saturday, June 11 at 7:30 pm at the Ohio Theatre in Playhouse Square, Carreras will perform the role of Manrico in [Opera Circle Cleveland](#)’s production of Giuseppe Verdi’s *Il trovatore*. Mezzo-soprano [Christina Carr](#), who will perform the role of

Azucena, shares Carreras’s feelings about the composer’s music. “There’s just something about the way Verdi approaches the emotional side of his music that brings you along. It’s just wonderful,” she said during a separate interview.

Based on a Spanish play by Antonio Garcia Gutierrez adapted by Verdi’s librettist Salvatore Cammarano, 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*. Joel Smirnoff will conduct the Opera Circle Orchestra and a cast that will also include baritone Kevin Wetzel as Il Conte di Luna, soprano Dorota Sobieska as Leonora, bass Nathan Resika as Ferrando, tenor Brian Skoog as Ruiz, and soprano Lauren Wright as Inez.

“The first time that I felt the true sense of Verdi’s major-league status was when I was in Berlin Opera singing *Don Carlo*” Carreras recalled. “We were in rehearsals with maestro Fabio Luisi and he began to get the color that he wanted from the orchestra. For the first time I felt the force that is needed to create the sound that Verdi requires. It was an eye-opener for me.”

“*Il trovatore* was my first Verdi opera,” Christina Carr pointed out. “I remember diving into the score and it was like the gates of heaven opened. I thought, Yes, this is it — his music just feels right to me.”

Although Carreras and Carr have a shared love for Verdi, their paths to the opera stage were quite different. His began in high school, and hers later in undergraduate school.

Carr, a native of Olmsted Falls, said that she doesn’t remember *not* singing. “I was probably singing before I could talk, but I was one of those kids who wanted to do everything that I possibly could like band, choir, and horseback riding.”

After graduating high school, Carr entered Miami University in Oxford, Ohio as a pre-med and music student, and it was there that she had her first experience performing opera. “I had played pieces like the *Carmen* overture at music camp, but I had never listened to or been to an opera until I was in Bedřich Smetana’s *The Bartered Bride*. I just fell in love.”

Carr said that her decision to pursue opera as a career came at the end of her junior year. “One of my professors sat me down and said that I could go to med school anytime, but if I wanted to be a singer, I had to do it now. So I decided to apply to the best graduate schools and got into them all. I ended up going to Eastman, and from there to Juilliard. After that I spent the next twelve years in New York creating a career as an opera singer.”

Carreras’s first opera performances came at the age of seventeen, when on the advice of a high school teacher he joined the chorus of the Greater Miami Opera. Things changed quickly for Carreras when Plácido Domingo came to sing with the company. “I had a *bravura* about me,” Carreras said, “so I approached him and asked if he would be so kind as to listen to me and tell me if I can sing or not. He thought that was really funny and gave me a date, time, and place to meet him — and he showed up. He was very nice to me and actually played for me. A few months later I discovered he had made all of the arrangements for me to take the Metropolitan Opera audition for the young artist program.”

Although the people at the Met were impressed with Carreras’s talent, because he had never had a structured music education, they decided the best thing for him would be to go to university. He ended up going to Indiana University, and while there he entered and won the West Palm Beach competition. “As a result I was offered the opportunity to go the Vienna Staatsoper, so I went back to school, picked up my stuff, and went to Vienna. Although I was only 21 and in the studio program, I got to sing over 60

performances that year.” The following year, at age of 22, Carreras became the youngest tenor to debut with the company, singing Pinkerton in Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*.

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