

The Pescadero Opera Society presents

# Il Trovatore



Music by Giuseppe Verdi  
Libretto by Leone Emanuele Bardare  
and Salvatore Cammarano

Based on the play *El Trovador*  
by Antonio García Gutiérrez

Opera in Four Acts

Setting: Biscay and Aragon (Spain)  
Time: Fifteenth century

## CHARACTERS

Count di Luna, a young Noble of Aragon (baritone)..... Dmitri Hvorostovsky  
Leonora, Lady-in-Waiting to Princess Aragon (soprano) ..... Sondra Radvanovsky  
Azecena, Biscayan Gypsy Woman (mezzo-soprano)..... Dolora Zajick  
Manrico, Chieftain under the Prince of Biscay (tenor).....Marcelo Álvarez  
Ferrando, Di Luna's Captain of the Guard (bass).....Stefan Kocán  
Inez, Confidante of Leonora (soprano).....Maria Zifchak  
Ruiz, a soldier in Manrico's Service (tenor).....Eduardo Valdes  
An old gypsy (baritone) ..... Robert Maher  
A messenger (tenor)..... Raymond Aparentado

Conducted by Marco Armiliato  
The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus

Première performance at the Teatro Apollo in Rome on January 19, 1853

# Synopsis

## Act I (The Duel)

### Scene 1: Outside the guardroom in the Palace of Aliaferia

Ferrando, captain of the guards, is waiting to apprehend Manrico, a troubadour, who rivals the count for the favors of the Lady Leonora. Ferrando recounts the history of the Di Luna family to the servants and soldiers around him:

*“When Count di Luna’s two sons were small children an old gypsy had gained access into their chamber, and was discovered leaning over the cradle of the younger child, Garzia. Though she was instantly driven away, the child’s health soon began to fail, and it was believed that the gypsy had bewitched the child. She was pursued, apprehended and burned alive at the stake.*

*Azucena, the old gypsy’s daughter, who was then a young woman with a baby of her own, had witnessed her mother’s death and swore vengeance. The following night she returned to the castle, snatched the Count’s younger child from its cradle, hurried back to the scene of execution and threw the child into the flames that still raged over the spot where they had consumed her mother. She then fled and joined her tribe, telling no one of her secret, raising her son, Manrico, the Troubadour.*

*Manrico has now grown into manhood. Azucena, his mother, has aged, but is still unrelenting in her quest for further vengeance for her mother’s death. As the old Count lay dying, he ordered his son, Count di Luna, to search for this gypsy woman, Azucena, whom he assumed had murdered his son. For years now, everyone has pursued her, and were anxious to bring her to justice.”*

As everyone becomes intent on the story, the midnight bell tolls and all curse the gypsy’s daughter, Azucena. Outside, Count di Luna waits to court the lovely Leonora.

### Scene 2: Gardens in the palace of the princess

Leonora confesses to her confidante, Ines, of her love for Manrico, a mysterious troubadour whom she has heard serenading her below her window. When they have gone, Count di Luna hears the voice of the Troubadour. In the darkness Leonora rushes from the palace and mistakenly into the Count’s arms. The moon then emerges from a cloud, and she recognizes the figure of a masked cavalier. She turns from the Count toward the Troubadour, who now discloses his identity as Manrico, his enemy, who is a follower of the Prince of Biscay. The two men draw their swords and exit, preparing for a duel.



## Act II (The Gypsy)

### Scene 1: An encampment of the gypsies

As dawn breaks in the Biscay Mountains, gypsies are at work with hammer and anvil, singing the “Anvil Chorus.” The gypsies then break camp.

Only Manrico and his mother, Azucena, remain. The old gypsy’s daughter, then a young woman with a baby of her own, confesses to Manrico about the horrific experience of seeing her mother wrongly burned alive for the supposed crime of bewitching Count di Luna’s child. She swore vengeance. Azucena explains to Manrico that the following night she stole back into the castle, snatched the Count’s younger child from its cradle, hurried back to the scene of execution, intending to throw the baby boy into the flames that still raged over the spot where they had consumed her mother. Almost bereft of her senses by

the memory of the horrible scene, she was suddenly overcome by a vision of her mother calling out to her for revenge. When the vision disappeared and she had recovered her senses, Azucena realized that she had mistakenly hurled her own child into the flames. Horrified by what she had done, she took Count's infant in her arms, and fled to rejoin her tribe. She told no one of her secret, and raised the Count's child as her own son, Manrico, the Troubadour.

Manrico questions Azucena about his true identity, realizing that he is not the biological son of Azucena. He tells her that he loves her as if she were indeed his mother, as she has always been faithful and loving to him. *[The audience may now be aware that Manrico is, in fact, the brother of his rival, Count di Luna.]*

Manrico then tells his mother of his unusual duel with the Count. He explains that some strange force inspired him to spare the Count's life, and he had escaped.

Suddenly, a message arrives from the Prince at the castle of Castellor, asking for Manrico's aid in combating Di Luna's forces. He is told that Leonora thinks that Manrico is dead. She is about to enter a convent and take the veil that night. Despite Azucena's protests, Manrico rushes away to prevent Leonora from taking her vows.



## **Scene 2: In front of the convent**

Count Di Luna, burning with passion for Leonora, waits with his attendants at the convent, intending to abduct Leonora before she takes her vows. Leonora and the nuns appear in procession. Di Luna strides forward, only to be halted by Manrico, who suddenly appears with his contingent of soldiers. Di Luna's plan is thwarted, and Manrico and Leonora are once again reunited. As the two forces struggle, the lovers escape. Manrico proposes marriage to Leonora.

## **Act III (The Gypsy's Son)** **Scene 1: The Camp of Count Di Luna**

Inside the castle, Manrico plans his military defense and his marriage to Leonora. Azucena is found prowling the shadows of the camp and is captured. She is taken to Count di Luna and identified by Ferrando as the witch who kidnapped the old Count's son. Di Luna commands her to be burned at the stake. She cries out to Manrico for deliverance.

## **Scene 2: The Chapel in the Stronghold of Castellor**

Manrico declares his undying devotion to Leonora. As the couple prepares to go to the wedding chapel, Manrico's aide, Ruiz, bursts in to say that Azucena has been imprisoned by Di Luna and is to be burned at the stake. Manrico seizes his sword and rallies his forces. Manrico can already see the glow of flames of the pyre through the windows of Castellor and becomes quite alarmed. He runs to his mother's rescue, vowing vengeance.

## **Act IV (The Execution)** **Scene 1: The Dungeon Tower of Aliaferia**

Not successful in his assault on Di Luna's camp, Manrico has been captured and ordered to be beheaded. Manrico's aide, Ruiz, brings Leonora to the foot of the prison tower, where she voices her undying love and prays for his release. Monks are heard intoning a doleful "Miserere" for the souls of the condemned, while Manrico sings farewell from inside the bastion.

Leonora resolves to save him. When Di Luna appears, Leonora pleads for clemency for Manrico and offers to marry him in exchange for her lover's safety. When the Count agrees Leonora secretly swallows a dose of poison hidden in her ring.

### Scene 2: In the dungeon

In prison, Manrico and Azucena await their execution. Manrico recounts to his mother of their peaceful mountain home. No sooner does the old Gypsy fall asleep than Leonora rushes in to tell Manrico that he is saved and urges him to flee. Realizing Leonora's bargain with the Count, Manrico becomes furious at Leonora and denounces her. Leonora tells him that that has preserved her honor by taking poison and is now dying. As the poison begins to take effect, Manrico takes Leonora in his arms. As she lies dying, Leonora confesses to Manrico that she would prefer to die with him than to marry another.



The Count enters and, witnessing the Leonora's death, now realizes that he's been deceived. He orders Manrico's immediate execution and drags Azucena to the window to witness his death. Once Manrico has been executed, Azucena turns triumphantly to the Count and cries: "He was your brother!" Then, to her mother, cries, "You are avenged, O mother!" Shocked by Azucena's revelation, the Count exclaims, "And I still live!"

## Giuseppe Verdi

**Born in Le Roncole, Duchy of Parma, October 10, 1813; died in Milan, January 27, 1901**



Giuseppe Verdi was born into a family of small landowners and taverners. When he was seven he helped the local church organist; at 12 he studied with the organist at the main church in nearby Busseto, whose assistant he became in 1829. He already had several compositions to his credit. In 1832 he was sent to Milan, but was refused a place at the conservatory and studied with Vincenzo Lavigna, composer and former La Scala musician. He might have taken a post as organist at Monza in 1835, but instead he returned to Busseto where he was passed over as *maestro di cappella*. He became town music master in 1836 and married Margherita Barezzi, his patron's daughter. They had two children who died in infancy.

Verdi had begun an opera and tried to arrange a performance in Parma or Milan, but was unsuccessful. He had some songs published and decided to settle in Milan in 1839 where his *Oberto* was accepted at La Scala and further operas were commissioned. This one was well received, but his next one, *Un Giorno di Regno*, failed totally. His wife died during its composition.

Verdi nearly gave up, but was excited by the libretto of *Nabucco* and, in 1842, saw its successful production, which carried his reputation across Italy, Europe and the United States over the next five years. *Nabucco* was followed by another opera, *I Lombardi alla Prima Crociata*, which was also with marked political overtones, and again was well received.

Verdi's gift for stirring melody and tragic and heroic situations struck a chord in an Italy struggling for freedom and unity, causes with which he was sympathetic. Much opera of this period had political themes, and the involvement of Verdi's operas in politics were easily exaggerated.

Now began the period Verdi later called his "years in the galleys," with a long and demanding series of operas to compose and (usually) direct, in the main Italian centers and abroad. They include *Ernani*, *Macbeth*, *Luisa Miller* and eight others in 1844-1850, in Paris and London as well as Rome, Milan, Naples, Venice, Florence and Trieste (with a pause in 1846 when his health gave way). Features of these works include strong, somber stories, a vigorous, almost crude orchestral style that gradually grew fuller and richer, forceful vocal writing including broad lines in 9/8 and 12/8 meter and, above all, a seriousness

in his determination to convey the full force of the drama, modeled after the late Rossini, Mercadante and Donizetti. He took great care over the choice of topics and about the detailed planning of his librettos. In *Ernani* he established his basic vocal types early — the vigorous, determined baritone, the ardent, courageous but sometimes despairing tenor, the severe bass.

The “galley years” had their climax in the three great popular operas of 1851-1853. First among them was *Rigoletto*, produced in Venice after trouble with the censors — a recurring theme in Verdi. It was a huge success. No less successful, in Rome, was the more direct *Il Trovatore*, at the beginning of 1853. Six weeks later *La Traviata*, the most personal and intimate of Verdi’s operas, was a failure in Venice though, with some revisions, it was favorably received the following year at a different Venetian theater. With the dark drama of the one, the heroics of the second and the grace and pathos of the third, Verdi had shown how extraordinarily wide expressive range.

Later in 1853 he went to Paris with the soprano, Giuseppina Strepponi, to prepare *Les Vêpres Siciliennes* for the Opéra, where it was given in 1855 with modest success. Verdi had been living with her for several years, and they eventually married in 1859. Verdi remained there for a time to defend his rights in face of the piracies of the Théâtre des Italiens and to deal with translations of some of his operas. The next new one was the somber *Simon Boccanegra*, a drama about love and politics in medieval Genoa, given in Venice. Plans for *Un Ballo in Maschera*, about the assassination of a Swedish king, in Naples were called off because of the censors and it was given instead in Rome (1859). Verdi was involved himself in political activity at this time, as representative of Busseto (where he lived) in the provincial parliament; later, pressed by Cavour, he was elected to the national parliament, and ultimately he was a senator. In 1862 *La Forza del Destino* had its premiere at St. Petersburg. A revised *Macbeth* was given in Paris in 1865, but his most important work for the French capital was *Don Carlos*, a grand opera after Schiller in which personal dramas of love, comradeship and liberty are set against the persecutions of the Inquisition and the Spanish monarchy. It was given in 1867 and several times revised for later, Italian revivals.

Verdi returned to Italy, to live at Genoa. In 1870 he began work on *Aida*, given at Cairo Opera House at the end of 1871 to mark the opening of the Suez Canal (Verdi was not present) — again, in the grand opera tradition, and more taut in structure than *Don Carlos*. Verdi was ready to give up opera; his works of 1873 are a string quartet and the vivid, appealing Requiem in honor of the poet Manzoni, given in 1874-5, in Milan (San Marco and La Scala, aptly), Paris, London and Vienna. In 1879 the composer-poet Boito and the publisher Ricordi prevailed upon Verdi to write another opera, *Otello*; Verdi, working slowly and much occupied with revisions of earlier operas, completed it only in 1886. This, his most powerful tragic work, a study in evil and jealousy, had its premiere in Milan in 1887. It is notable for the increasing richness of allusive detail in the orchestral writing and the approach to a more continuous musical texture, though Verdi, with his faith in the expressive force of the human voice, did not abandon the “set piece” (aria, duet, etc.) even if he integrated it more fully into its context — above all in his next opera. This was another Shakespeare work, *Falstaff*, on which he embarked two years later — his first comedy since the beginning of his career, with a score whose wit and lightness betray the hand of a serene master, was given in 1893. That was his last opera; still to come was a set of *Quattro Pezzi Sacri*, although Verdi was a non-believer.

Verdi spent his last years in Milan — rich, authoritarian but charitable, much visited, revered and honored. When he died on January 27, 1901, at the age of 87, there were over 28,000 people lining the streets for his funeral.

## ***Il Trovatore***

One of the best-known Italian operas, *Il Trovatore* has been immensely popular since it was first performed in 1853. It is the second opera of the so-called “trilogia popolare” of *Rigoletto*, *Il Trovatore* and *La Traviata*. Its composition overlapped that of *La Traviata*. The opera is appreciated for Verdi’s

remarkable music, but many audiences find the plot confusing. The melodramatic story is set in 15th-century Spain and focuses on the fortunes of Manrico, a troubadour and leader of a rebel army.

*Il Trovatore* has been an opera of worldwide popularity, and for a long time could be considered the most popular work in the operatic repertoire in practically every country. While it doesn't seem to retain its former popularity in the United States, it is still a good drawing card and, with an especially good cast, is an exceptional one.

In Verdi's mind Azucena was to be the main role of the drama — he initially wanted to title his opera *La Zingara* ("The Gypsy") or *La Vendetta* ("The Revenge"). There is a first draft of the plot by Verdi, written before Cammarano had been chosen as the librettist. Azucena is the main character, and her revenge is the heart of the plot. She intentionally lets the Count imprison her in order to attract Manrico in a deadly trap — basically the same ending we know, but with its meaning changed in a radical way. Verdi brought this theme to the surface with explosive power in the few ending lines of the finale.

The libretto of *Il Trovatore* is often considered to be absurd, usually because a considerable part of the story is supposed to have transpired before the curtain goes up. These events are narrated by Ferrando, Count di Luna's captain of the guard, soon after the opera opens. But, as even spoken narrative on the stage makes little impression, narrative when sung may be said to make none at all. Could the audience know what Ferrando is singing about, the subsequent proceeding would not appear so hopelessly involved, or appeal so strongly to humorous rhymesters, who usually begin their parodies on the opera.

The popularity of the opera, notwithstanding, is believed to be entirely due to the almost unbroken melodiousness of Verdi's score. While it is true that the story of this opera seems to be a good deal of a mix-up, it is also fact that, under the spur of Verdi's music, even a person who has not a clear grasp of the plot can sense the dramatic power of many of the scenes. It is an opera of immense verve, of temperament almost unbridled, of genius for the melodramatic so unerring that its composer has taken dance rhythms, like those of mazurka and waltz, and on them developed melodies most passionate in expression and dramatic in effect. Swift, spontaneous, and stirring is the music of *Il Trovatore*. Absurdities, complexities, unintelligibilities of story are swept away in its unrelenting progress.

On many different occasions, this opera and its music has been featured in various forms of popular culture and entertainment. Scenes of hilarious comic chaos play out over a performance of the opera in the Marx Brothers' film, *A Night at the Opera*, while, on a more serious note, the opening sequence of Luchino Visconti's 1954 film, *Senso* features a performance at *La Fenice*. Noting that the opera is very easy to produce, Enrico Caruso once said that "All you need is the four best singers in the world." *Il Trovatore* has always been a staple of the standard operatic repertoire, listed as #17 on Opera America's list of the 20 most-performed operas in North America.

## ***Il Trovatore*: The Video (2011)**

**Starring Marcelo Alvarez, Sondra Radvanovsky and Dolora Zajick**



This highly acclaimed 2011 Met production by David McVicar is musically near-perfect and the staging is wonderful, with singers who can act as well as sing. It is the perfect example of 19th century Italian opera at it best.

The plot of *Il Trovatore* is another story. Having been parodied by Gilbert & Sullivan and even the Marx Brothers, it is only redeemed by Verdi's glorious score. David McVicar, the Scottish director, delivers a highly praised production, using the Met stage's turntable to achieve fluidity and momentum from scene to scene, and his direction is specific, dynamic and physical.

Sondra Radvanovsky is the Verdi soprano that many have hoped for. She has the perfect voice and superb vocal technique — and can she act! Hvorostovsky is simply the best Count di Luna, having a voice that is huge, but capable of surprising delicacy in the softer passages. Dolora Zajick has sung a lot of Azucenas in her career, but there's no let-up in the intensity of her performance. Vocally and dramatically, she's the real deal!