



IL TROVATORE

Study Guide

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Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre – Atlanta, GA

Starring Angela Brown • www.atlantaopera.org



THE ATLANTA OPERA

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WHAT TO EXPECT AT THE OPERA

Are you unsure about how to act, what to wear or what you are going to see at the Opera? You are not the only one! Many others, students and adults, are apprehensive about their first trip to the opera. Read the truth behind some of the most popular opera myths and see if they answer some of your questions about the opera as well!

MYTH #1 OPERA IS BORING AND STUFFY.

Not true! Operas tell some of the most interesting, scandalous, and beautiful stories of all time. It is not unusual to find love triangles, murders, fatal illnesses, and messages from beyond the grave. It's like *Days of Our Lives* set to music!

MYTH #2 OPERA IS SUNG IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE SO I WON'T UNDERSTAND THE STORY.

We can help! It is true that many operas, like *Il trovatore*, are sung in languages other than English. Since most people in our audience do not speak Italian, we project English translations, called supertitles, of the opera on screens above the stage. This way, you can follow along even if you do not understand the language. You also can read the synopsis of the opera before you arrive. Knowing the story will also help you follow along.

MYTH #3 I NEED TO WEAR A TUXEDO OR A BALL GOWN TO THE OPERA.

While many people like to dress up when they go to the opera, it is definitely not required. Wear something that makes you feel comfortable, but remember that it is a special event and you may want to wear something a little nicer than ripped jeans and a sweatshirt!

MYTH #4 IF I'M A FEW MINUTES LATE, NO ONE WILL CARE. AFTER ALL THE OPERA IS SO LONG, IT DOESN'T MATTER IF I MISS THE FIRST FEW MINUTES.

You don't want to miss the beginning! At most opera houses, the ushers will not seat you if you arrive after the opera has begun, as it is disturbing to the rest of the audience and the performers. If you arrive late, you may need to wait until after the first act before you can enter the hall. And a lot happens in the first act!

HERE ARE A FEW MORE TIPS TO MAKE YOUR TRIP TO THE OPERA MORE COMFORTABLE.

- 1.** Remember: the opera is a live performance. You can hear the performers on stage and that means they can hear you too! Please refrain from talking or whispering during the opera. It is distracting to others around you as well as to the singers. Please do not leave your seat during the performance. This performance of *Il trovatore* will be about two and a half hours long, with one intermission between Act II and Act III.
- 2.** If you have them, please turn off all cell phones, pagers, beeping watches and anything else that may go "beep" in the night!
- 3.** Please do not take photographs or video or audio recordings of the performance.
- 4.** After the orchestra has tuned, the auditorium will become quiet. The conductor, or maestro, will then enter the pit. It is acceptable (and appreciated) to applaud the maestro's entrance. After all, he/she worked very hard to bring this performance to life!
- 5.** If you like what you have seen and heard, let the performers know! It is okay to applaud at the end of songs, called arias, and at the end of a scene. If you really liked what you heard, call out "bravo" (to the men on stage), "brava" (to the women) and "bravi" (for all on stage). And of course, a standing ovation is always welcome!

SYNOPSIS

ACT I: THE DUEL

Scene 1 - Guard room of the Palace of Aliaferia

While the Count di Luna waits beneath Leonora's balcony, the men of the guard keep watch for a mysterious troubadour who has been serenading her. To keep them awake, their captain Ferrando tells them the story of the abduction of Count di Luna's brother. The old Count had two sons, the present Count di Luna and his baby brother, Garcia. One night a gypsy was found bending over the crib of the infant who soon sickened. The gypsy was accused of bewitching him, and she was burnt at stake. Her daughter, Azucena, kidnapped the Count's baby, and later the bones of an infant were found in the ashes of the gypsy's funeral pyre*. Since then, efforts to find the gypsy's daughter have not ceased. The old Count always felt his younger son was still alive and, on his deathbed, made the present Count di Luna swear he would never give up searching for his brother. The soldiers react in horror as they are told how the old gypsy still haunts the palace in the form of an owl. As the bell sounds midnight, the soldiers curse the gypsy witch.

Scene 2 – The palace garden

Leonora tells her companion, Ines, of the mysterious knight in black armor whom she met at a tournament when she placed the laurel wreath of victory on his head. Soon after that event, civil war broke out, and she didn't see him again until one evening when he came, disguised as a troubadour, to serenade her. She then tells Ines that she loves the troubadour. Ines has forebodings but, as they enter the palace, Leonora vows she will live and die for the singer. Di Luna appears, intent on seeing Leonora. When the troubadour's song is heard from off stage, Leonora rushes out and, mistaking the Count for the man she loves, throws herself into his arms. The jealous singer, still with his face covered, accuses Leonora of falseness, but she convinces him it was all a mistake. The Count demands that the troubadour show his face and give his name. He reveals himself as Manrico, and di Luna denounces him as a follower of Urfel, who is condemned to death as an enemy of the state. When Manrico taunts him to call the guards, the count, in spite of Leonora's plea, challenges him to a duel. As they leave, Leonora faints. (Since the duel takes place off stage, we do not know the results until the next act when we learn that it was so fierce that Manrico could have killed di Luna but spared his life at the last moment.)

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ACT II – THE GYPSY

Scene 1 – Gypsy camp

The gypsies are working while Azucena and Manrico sit to one side. Azucena tells her version of the burning of her mother. As she was brought to the stake, Azucena followed with her own baby in her arms. Her mother cried out "Avenge me!", and Azucena managed to steal the Count's son and throw him into the same fire. It happened on the very spot where Manrico now stands. After the gypsies leave, Azucena finishes the narration, telling how she, in a fit of delirium, threw the wrong child, her own rather the Count's, into the flames. Manrico asks if he is not her son and she tells him not to pay attention to what she said, hasn't she always been his loving mother? She then asks about the duel. Why, when Manrico had di Luna at his mercy, did he spare his life? He doesn't know; something stopped his hand and a voice from heaven told him not to strike. Azucena tells him to kill the Count if he ever has another chance. Ruiz appears with a letter which says: 1) the partisans have taken Castellorm and Manrico is to be in charge of its defense, and 2) Leonora has been deceived into thinking Manrico is dead and has decided to enter a convent that very night. In spite of his mother's protests, he rushes off to find Leonora.

Scene 2 – Outside the convent

The Count, who has come to prevent Leonora from taking her vows, sings of his love for her. He plans to carry her away before she reaches the altar. He and his men hide. Leonora bids Ines farewell and, as the nuns start to lead her away, the Count leaps out to seize her. Just then, Manrico appears. All think he is a ghost, but Leonora reacts with rapture. Ruiz, with a large band of men crying, "Long Live Urgel!", restrains the Count while Manrico takes Leonora away. The nuns hasten into the convent.

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ACT III – The GYPSY’S SON

Scene 1 – Camp of Count di Luna

As they lay siege to the fort, the Count’s soldiers sing of their eagerness for victory and the spoils they will receive. Di Luna torments himself with the thought of Leonora in Manrico’s arms but is interrupted when Azucena is brought in. She has been captured while searching for Manrico. Di Luna recognizes her and tells her he is the brother of the stolen child, gloating that he can both avenge his brother and strike at Manrico through her. He orders a pyre prepared for Azucena. As she is led away she reviles the Count.

Scene 2 – Inside the castle

As they prepare for their wedding, Manrico tells Leonora that they will be attacked on the morrow, but her love will make him strong. Ruiz rushes in with the news that a gypsy has been captured. Manrico looks from the window and recognizes his mother. Telling Leonora that he is the gypsy’s son and, "I was her son before I loved you", he rushes off to save Azucena.

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ACT IV – THE PUNISHMENT

Scene 1 – Outside the dungeon keep

Manrico has been captured and Leonora hopes to save him. She asks the breezes never to let him know of the pain she feels. As the funeral bell tolls, solemn voices are heard singing the Miserere, and the voice of Manrico is heard, longing for death. The Count appears and gives orders: at dawn Manrico is to be beheaded and Azucena is to be burned at the stake. Leonora begs him to save the troubadour, offering herself for Manrico’s freedom. While the count gives orders to a guard, she sucks poison concealed in her ring muttering, "Thou shalt have me, but cold and dead". They enter the tower together.

Scene 2 – In the dungeon

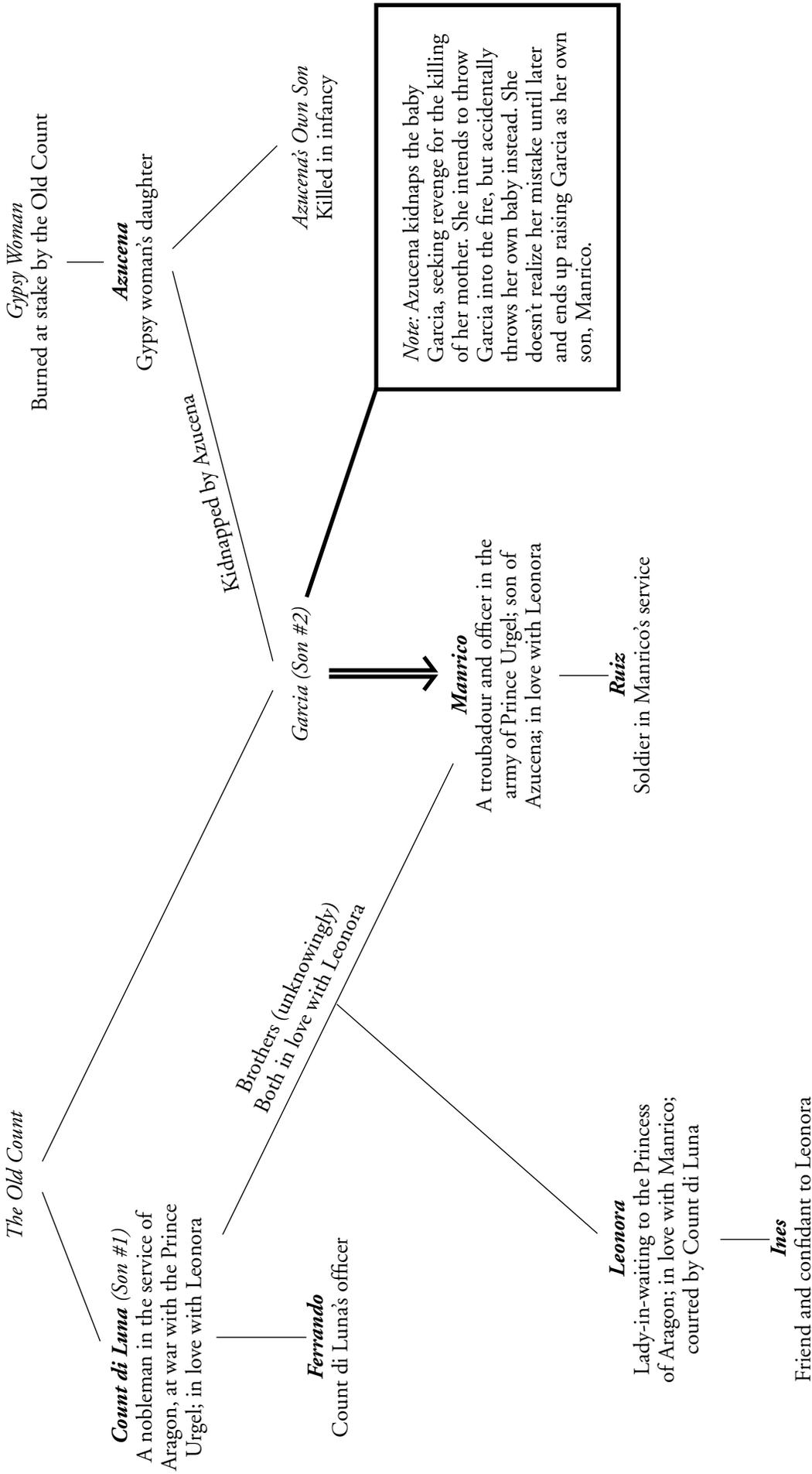
Azucena tries to sleep while Manrico sits beside her. Reacting in horror as she imagines herself being led to the stake, she once more recounts the story of the burning of her mother. The wandering of her mind is echoed by tremolo and staccato strings. With the troubadour’s last song, Manrico comforts her, and she dreams of going back to their mountain home. Azucena falls asleep, and Leonora enters, telling Manrico he is free to go. As she urges him to leave, he suspects what she has done and, in his anger, refuses to go. Protesting her innocence, she dies in his arms. Finding himself betrayed, the Count orders the guards to take Manrico to his execution. Azucena awakes, and di Luna drags her to the window to witness her son’s death. In triumph, Azucena tells the Count that Manrico was his brother. Her mother is avenged! With tragic irony, the horrified Count cries: "And I still live".

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Il trovatore Plot Map

CAUTION! *Il trovatore* has a somewhat confusing plot! Below is a plot map but the “Cliff Notes” version is this:

- Two brothers are separated in their youth – one becomes a Count and the other, a rebel named Manrico.
- The plot thickens when they get older because they are political adversaries and in love with the same woman, Leonora.
- In the end, they are all doomed: Leonora poisons herself, the Count kills Manrico and discovers (too late) that Manrico is his long-lost brother.



MEET THE COMPOSER

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

Giuseppe Verdi was the greatest composer of Italian opera in the nineteenth century. He was also a man who helped shape his time, and his time helped shape him. When he was born, 'Italy' was only a figure of speech; it was composed of small states, each with its own dialect that could not be easily understood by the citizens of other parts of the peninsula. Only the speech of Tuscany, with its capital, Florence, and of other nearby states would be understood as Italian today. The states shared little history; most were under the domination of some foreign power, and each state used different currencies. Music formed the only common bond, and Verdi provided that. He united Italians with his music before they were united politically. His very name, V-E-R-D-I, was an acronym for Vittorio Emanuele, Re d'Italia, the king of Piedmont who later became the first king of a united Italy. 'VIVA VERDI' became the most revolutionary and patriotic cry in Italy.

Verdi was so famous that letters addressed simply "Maestro Verdi, Italy" reached him. Almost all of Verdi's earlier operas had an underlying theme of revolt against oppression, at least to the extent allowed by the censors. The audience understood that the oppressed people in Verdi's works were lightly disguised Italians. Since each Italian city had an opera house as its principal center of recreation, opera was the perfect medium for stirring up patriotic feeling among the oppressed citizens. Applause for Verdi meant applause for independence.

Giuseppe Verdi was born in October 1813 in Le Roncole, a village in the province of Parma. Since Parma was under the control of the French at the time, the child's name was registered as Joseph Fortunin François, although he was known as Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco. In 1814, Napoleon's troops were driven from their positions in Italy by the Russians and Austrians. Cossack troops pursued the French through Le Roncole. Verdi's mother hid with her baby for twenty four hours in a nearby church tower, afraid that he would cry and reveal their presence. While he did escape discovery, their house was set on fire.

In later years, Verdi liked to claim he had illiterate peasant roots, but he really came from a family of small landowners and traders which knew the value of, and were able to provide him with, a classical education. Young Verdi was quiet and precocious. At a time when many country children were not even taught to read, he started studying Latin at age four. Verdi was fascinated by music, especially the sound of the church organ and, when he was seven, his father, who ran an inn and store, bought him a broken down piano which a neighbor repaired.

There is a story that, while serving at mass in the church, he became so engrossed in the music that he did not hear the priest ask him for the wine. To get his attention, the priest kicked him. This knocked him out, and he had to be sprinkled with holy water to be revived. Verdi developed musically to the point where, at the age of ten, he was sent to nearby Busseto to live and study, under the patronage of Antonio Barezzi. When he was 12, he was appointed organist at Le Roncole and each Sunday walked the six miles round trip from Busseto to play (he made the trip barefooted to save shoe leather). By the age of 14, he was teaching and giving concerts and soon began to compose pieces for the local Philharmonic Society. On his own, he read classical literature and history and started to develop his interest in nationalism and liberty. He moved in with the Barezzi family and fell in love with one of the daughters, Margherita, one of his piano and voice students.

Later Verdi went to Milan to study, his cost underwritten by Barezzi. Milan is now part of Italy but, at the time, it was part of a different country, the Austrian province of Lombardo Venetia. Passports were necessary to travel between Busseto and Milan. Although Austrian soldiers were everywhere, ordinary citizens

were not interfered with. There were restrictions: beards were forbidden to public employees and students who wore beards or moustaches were refused admission to exams and even expelled; smoking was not permitted in public places. Still, artistic life flourished especially in music, and the opera house of La Scala became the social center of Milan. At the age of 23, upon completion of his studies, Verdi returned to Busseto, married Margherita Barezzi, and started working on his first known opera, *Oberto*. (There might have been an earlier one, *Rochester*, but it was either lost or incorporated into *Oberto*. Produced when he was 26, *Oberto* was a moderately successful work. Tragically, his wife and two children all died within two years of its premiere, and his second opera, the comedy *Un giorno di regno*, was a failure.

The despondent Verdi resolved to give up composing but was later persuaded to return to music by the impresario Bartolomeo Merelli and the soprano Giuseppina Strepponi. The latter, who had been scheduled to sing in *Oberto*, was to become his second wife. The story goes that Merelli put a copy of the libretto for *Nabucco*, the Biblical story of the Israelites' captivity in Babylon, in Verdi's coat pocket. When he got home, he threw the libretto onto the table and his eyes caught the words *Va, pensiero sull'ali dorate*, (Fly, thought, on wings of gold), which the Israelites sing as they long for their homeland and freedom. The words kept running through Verdi's head, and he started to compose. The opera was an immediate success; the Italians identified the captivity of the Israelites with their own dominance by foreigners. "Va, pensiero", including the words, "Oh, my country so beautiful and lost! Oh, memory so dear and fatal!", became almost a national anthem and Verdi became, involuntarily, a leading figure in the movement toward a free, united Italy. Although the authorities forbade encores of arias and choruses, the audience at La Scala demanded repeats of 'Va, pensiero' so insistently the conductors decided a disappointed audience would be more dangerous than the Austrians and gave them the encores. After all, it was a Biblical story.

Verdi became a national figure. His name was used to name hats alla Verdi, shawls alla Verdi, and sauces alla Verdi. In its first season, more seats were sold to *Nabucco* than the city had inhabitants. He continued to test the limits of censorship; in his next opera *I Lombardi*, the tenor sings, "The Holy Land will be ours" and the crowd replies, "Yes!...War! War!". The audience knew that the Holy Land should be identified as a United Italy. It is difficult for non-Italians to realize just how great his influence was. Audiences saw allusions everywhere and Verdi gave them plenty to identify. The choruses "O Signore from I Lombardi" and "Va pensiero" are still taught as patriotic anthems in elementary schools in Italy.

Operas followed one after the other, including one based on Joan of Arc and another on Attila the Hun. After the premiere of *Nabucco*, Verdi wrote 16 operas in 11 years. By the time he was 40 he was the most famous and most frequently performed Italian opera composer in Europe. He commanded huge fees and began to accumulate land and buildings. He was independent and could decide when and for whom he wanted to compose. For a time after the composition of *Macbeth*, based on Shakespeare's play, Verdi and Giuseppina lived in Paris, but when a rebellion started in Milan, Verdi hurried back to Italy.

By 1861, the unification of Italy was well on its way, and Verdi was elected to the first Italian parliament where Vittorio Emanuele II, King of Piedmont, was proclaimed King of Italy. Verdi was not an active member of parliament, and his formal political career was short. It was during this time that Verdi achieved some of his greatest successes as a composer. The most important of his operas during this time are:

Rigoletto, 1851

Il trovatore, 1853

La traviata, 1853

Simon Boccanegra, 1857

Un ballo in maschera, 1859

Verdi started to experiment with his compositions during this time, his Middle Period. He wanted to make the music more continuous and concentrated on the words, not just as poetry, but with their meaning enhanced by the music. In the Miserere scene (Act IV, Scene I) of *Il trovatore*, the music helped to paint the scene and enhanced the action.

In 1859, Verdi announced to his friends that he was retiring from composing. He had written 21 operas in two decades, and he was tired. At the age of 46, he preferred to live the life of a gentleman farmer on his estate. During his "retirement", he lived simply in the country at Sant'Agata, farming and hunting. He rose at 5:00 AM every day and inspected the crops and horses before breakfast. He went for long walks and took drives in the countryside, accompanied only by a pet rooster. He planted a tree for each of his operas and became interested in exotic plants. This hiatus lasted only three years.

Verdi resumed composing with *La forza del destino* for St. Petersburg, Russia. He traveled extensively to Russia, Paris, Madrid, and London, supervising productions of his operas. He also played the role of farmer and closely supervised all aspects of the management of his farm at Sant'Agata. He became a national monument. When Verdi and his librettist, Boito, walked onstage after the premiere of *Otello*, they received over 20 curtain calls; the audience wept from sheer emotion. At the end of the evening, Verdi's carriage was pulled back to his hotel by the cheering crowd and he was serenaded for hours. A similar reception met *Falstaff*, composed when he was eighty years old.

Verdi was also a philanthropist. In 1857 his long-time librettist, Francesco Maria Piave, suffered a paralyzing stroke. During the eight years that he lived on, unable to move or speak, Verdi gave generous support to his wife and daughter. The composer built a hospital near his estate for the benefit of the neighboring people and took an active interest in it until his death, modestly refusing to have his name on it. During particularly hard times he ordered free polenta (a grain made from corn) be given away every day at noon. After his operas and the famous *Requiem*, his most lasting monument is the Casa di Riposo in Milan, built as a home for 100 impoverished musicians. Verdi established an endowment for it, and it is still in operation today.

In all, Verdi wrote 26 operas, several in two different versions. During his last illness, the streets near his rooms were covered with layers of straw so that he would not be disturbed by the noise of carriages. Crowds waited silently for news of his condition. He died in Milan on January 17, 1901, at the age of 87. The composer asked for a funeral with no music and no singing but, as his coffin was placed in the ground, someone in the crowd started to sing "Va, pensiero" and soon everyone joined in the famous melody. A special session of the Roman Senate was called to listen to eulogies, and schools were closed for the day. One month later, the coffins of Verdi and his wife were moved to the Casa di Riposo, where they rest today. Two hundred thousand people lined the black-draped streets of Milan and Maestro Arturo Toscanini conducted a choir of eight hundred in *Va, pensiero* in tribute to Verdi, the artistic symbol of Italy's drive for freedom.

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MEET THE CONDUCTOR

Edoardo Müller

Atlanta Opera Debut: *Tosca*, 2006

Edoardo Müller made his conducting debut at the Maggio Musicale in Florence in 1973 leading Rossini's *Mosè*. He was then invited to conduct in many of Europe's leading opera houses such as Paris, Geneva, Barcelona, Rome, Venice, Turin, Parma, Bologna and Munich. He has enjoyed a particularly close association with the Teatro alla Scala in Milan, where he has conducted eleven different operas. He made his American debut in 1980 conducting Verdi's *Giovanna d'Arco* for San Diego Opera where he has since returned many times. Engagements during the 2008 – 2009 season include *Madama Butterfly* for Michigan Opera Theatre and both *Tosca* and *Rigoletto* in San Diego. Future plans include *L'Elisir d'Amore* in Houston and *Nabucco* in San Diego. Last season, Maestro Müller conducted Donizetti's *Maria Stuarda* and Mascagni's *Cavalleria Rusticana* and Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci* in San Diego. He conducted *I puritani* for Seattle Opera before returning to Cincinnati Opera for *Madama Butterfly* and *La traviata*.

Maestro Müller has conducted nearly 150 performances at the Metropolitan Opera since his 1984 debut leading *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. He made his debut with the Lyric Opera of Chicago in 1999 with *La traviata*, and in 2000 was greatly acclaimed for his debut at the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires in *Attila*. Other theaters which have welcomed him include the Teatro Municipal in Santiago, Dallas Opera, Pittsburgh Opera and Opera Company of Philadelphia. In Canada he has frequently performed with the opera companies of Montreal, Edmonton and Winnipeg. In 2001 he debuted at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa leading Richard Strauss's *Salome*. Edoardo Müller has frequently appeared in recital with artists including Renata Tebaldi, Leyla Gencer, Katia Ricciarelli, Carlo Bergonzi, Jose Carreras and Piero Cappuccilli.

MEET THE DIRECTOR

Bliss Hebert

Atlanta Opera Debut: *La bohème*, 2005

Bliss Hebert has staged over three hundred productions of one hundred operas with forty-one different opera companies including the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago and San Francisco Opera. He was Artistic Director and General Manager of the Washington D.C. Opera for four years. After serving in the United States Army in France as a conductor of a prize-winning chorus, he returned to the United States and made his debut in Santa Fe directing Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*. This was the beginning of a long collaboration with Igor Stravinsky. Among the operas he has translated for performance are *Carmen*, *Adriana Lecouvreur*, *Erwartung* and *Von Heute auf Morgen*. He has created performing versions of Offenbach's *La Grande Duchesse*, *Orphee aux Enfers* and *La Perichole*. He staged the American premieres of Britten's *Three Parables*, Henze's *Stag King* and *Boulevard Solitude*, Chabrier's *Le Roi Malgré Lui* and Schoenberg's *Von Heute auf Morgen* as well as the world premiere of John Eaton's *Tempest*. Mr. Hebert's productions of Stravinsky's *Le Rossignol* and *Oedipus Rex* appear on Sony Records. In addition, he is chorus master on the Columbia recording of *Boris Godunov highlights with George London*. On other Columbia recordings he is heard as pianist and harpsichordist in works of Bach, Schoenberg and Berg. Last season, he directed *Turandot*, the Atlanta Opera's first production at the Cobb Energy Centre.

INTERESTING TIDBITS ABOUT VERDI AND *IL TROVATORE*...

- A few years after his first wife died, Verdi began an affair with Giuseppina Strepponi, a famous soprano of the time. The couple lived together for several years, which created scandal, before marrying in 1859. Verdi considered himself an agnostic. He was not religious, and didn't want to get married in a church.
- As a young man, Verdi applied to the Milan Conservatory. The teachers were duly impressed by his talents, but rules were rules: They told him he was four years too old to be accepted. (Verdi got back at them many years later, when he was a world-famous composer and he refused their request to name the conservatory after him. "They wouldn't have me young," he said. "They can not have me old.")
- In addition to composing 26 operas, Verdi was also a successful farmer.
- Verdi died on January 27, 1901. Maestro Arturo Toscanini conducted combined orchestras and choirs comprised of musicians from throughout Italy at the state funeral for the composer in Milan. To date, it remains the largest public assembly of any event in the history of Italy.
- *Il trovatore* is based the play, *El Trovador*, by Antonio García Gutiérrez.
- The idea for one Verdi's other most popular works, *La traviata*, came to him while writing *Il trovatore*. The two works were written simultaneously.
- The librettist for *Il trovatore*, Salvatore Cammarano, died halfway through the composition of the work, which had to be finished by Leone Emanuele Bardare.
- *Il trovatore* premiered in Rome on January 19, 1853. The US premiere was two years later in May 1855, at the Academy of Music in New York. The work was wildly received by audiences, but critics didn't like it. It has since become a staple of the operatic repertoire, and appears at number 17 of OPERA America's list of the top 20 most performed operas in North America.
- *Il trovatore* is set against the political background of civil war in Spain during 15th century.
- According to music historian Donald Jay Grout, Verdi stuck to "violent, blood-and-thunder melodramas, full of improbably characters and ridiculous coincidences." Verdi believed in giving audiences what they wanted, not what was good for them.
- Verdi insisted that the central figure of the drama was Azucena, the gypsy. (Her seek for revenge sets the whole plot into motion.) The term gypsy (or gipsy) has several overlapping meanings. Initially the word was used to referred to the Romani people, who first appeared in England at about the beginning of the 16th century.
- In medieval times gypsies were tinkers by trade, which explains why the anvil plays such a prominent part in the opening chorus of *Il trovatore*. The Anvil Chorus is quite famous, and is often parodied in cartoons. Glenn Miller also arranged a jazz version of this chorus.

A HISTORY OF OPERA IN ATLANTA

Opera has been beloved in Atlanta since 1866. Though there hasn't always been a local opera company, audience members throughout Atlanta have been enjoying opera for over 137 years.

It began when the Ghioni and Sussini Grand Italian Opera Company presented three operas in Atlanta in October 1866. They were well received and soon after, small touring companies began to bring full-length operas to Atlanta. When there wasn't a touring opera company in town, people would throw parties where they could entertain, often with musical presentations. Even without the presence of an opera in town, audience appreciation for opera was growing!

In 1910, New York's Metropolitan Opera first brought its opera tour to Atlanta. By this time, Atlantans were in love with opera. Once a year, for a full week during spring, people flocked to the city to see the Metropolitan Opera's wonderful performances and enjoy the many parties that were hosted throughout the city in celebration of the operas' arrival. It was a magnificent time! The opera was the place to see and to be seen, with people crowding the lobbies and balconies. This continued for nearly seven decades, with the exception of 1931-1939, when the Metropolitan was unable to tour due to the Depression.

Soon, citizens of Atlanta began to yearn for their own opera company, to represent and support local talent, as well as to provide performances throughout the year, instead of only once in the spring. Several smaller, local opera companies began to crop up. With the arrival of local opera companies, and with troubles of its own, the Metropolitan Opera discontinued its nationwide tour, giving its last Atlanta performance in 1986.

In 1980, The Atlanta Civic Opera was born as a result of two smaller companies merging together, the Atlanta Lyric Opera and the Georgia Opera. Since then, the company has changed and grown tremendously!

The Atlanta Opera was the first resident company in the new Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre upon completion of the facility in fall 2007. Patrons and performers alike are extremely happy with the new theater, acoustically designed for opera.

Besides our mainstage performances, The Atlanta Opera has many services to offer. There are balls and galas to attend, dinners, concerts, opera classes and talks. The Atlanta Opera Studio, founded in 1980, brings children's opera (complete with sets and costumes) opera workshops and master classes to schools throughout the state in an effort to teach students about opera.

The Atlanta Opera strives to present quality opera productions, while educating and fostering a sense of appreciation for the opera within the community. So long as there are those in Atlanta who love music and the art of opera, we can continue to perform and to grow!

OPERA: THEN AND NOW

INTRODUCTION

Opera combines all of the fine arts: music, drama, visual art, and dance. The performance of an opera includes many craftspeople: costume designers, seamstresses, stagehands, makeup artists and wigmakers; the musicians in the orchestra, the singers in the chorus, and the dancers on stage; the artistic director, stage director and choreographer; the engineers running the computers and lighting. How have major inventions over the centuries affected the opera performances we see? Let's find out!

FOREIGN LANGUAGES

If so many operas are in **foreign languages** how can we understand the story, the humor, or the dramatic situations in which the characters find themselves? Throughout history, on-stage conventions have helped audiences understand the stories of their favorite operas. Period **costumes**, magnificent **stage sets** and elaborate **dances** describe the time and place in which the opera is set. The **stage direction** and **choreography** communicate elements of the story. The **music** conveys emotions and the subtexts of the story. Many opera companies, however, offer their audiences a little more help, with the aid of modern technology. Using large screens above or beside the stage, English translations are projected. These **Supertitles** do not include every word that is sung, but enough to understand the story. As the technology advances, opera companies have begun to move from using slide projectors to computers to project the Supertitles onto the screens.

THE SINGERS

Over the years, the **singers** have changed, too! In early Italian operas, singers did very little acting on stage, focusing on showcasing their voices. Operas often resembled concerts, more than plays. By Mozart's time in the late 18th century, however, singers were encouraged to play out the action in the story, adding the dramatic element that we see on stage today. At that time, the singers sometimes did not always "look the part" they were singing. The singers sometimes did not look like princesses or lovely young maidens, and the prince may not have looked young and handsome. The **bel canto** style of singing, which literally means "beautiful singing," was favored in Italian opera, especially in the operas of Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti. This style focuses on the voice as the most important expressive element in the opera. It is more important than the words and even the orchestra. In later operas by Wagner and Berlioz, the orchestra became a partner with the singers, rather than an accompanist. This meant that the singers had to produce even more power to be heard over a large, rich symphonic orchestra.

THE ORCHESTRA

And what about the **orchestra** in the pit? The orchestra provides a framework for the opera by playing recurring themes and providing dramatic clues to the drama while accompanying the singing. But the orchestra wasn't always as we see it today. In the 17th century, some operas were intended for entertainment at private parties, primarily at weddings (Monteverdi's *Orfeo* begins with a wedding scene). The principal accompanying instruments were a **continuo** (a small organ) or **harpsichord** and a few **viols** (stringed instruments). In the 18th century, Mozart began to write his operas for an orchestra of 20 musicians and harpsichord and he was the first composer to add clarinet to his opera orchestra. The small-scale accompaniment, however, was still often used during a **recitative**, a musical selection in which the singing imitates the sound of spoken words and helps to move along the story line. (**Arias**, on the other hand, are more melodic and are often written to express strong emotion, rather than to tell parts of the story.) By Wagner's 19th century, the opera orchestra had increased in size, mostly due to large symphonies composed by Beethoven (d. 1827). Wagner referred to opera as "**music drama**" and is one of the few composers who wrote the **libretto** (the book or story of the opera) as well as all the stage directions

and music! Many composers work with colleagues to complete one or more of these elements. [FYI: Beethoven only wrote one opera, *Fidelio*. Just as he persistently made changes and corrections in his other works, Beethoven composed four different overtures for this one opera.]

The orchestras that you see at opera houses today consist of between 45 and 120 musicians, depending on the requirements of the composer. It is made up of several sections: strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion. It is situated in the orchestra pit, the area which is in front of the stage. The orchestra is seated lower than the stage so that the sound of the singers' voice may travel over it. The orchestra pit in the John A. Williams Theatre at the Cobb Energy Performing Arts Centre has a retractable cover. The cover is removed for Atlanta Opera productions to accommodate the orchestra. For some other performances at the theatre, the pit may be closed to allow for extra seating in the theatre.

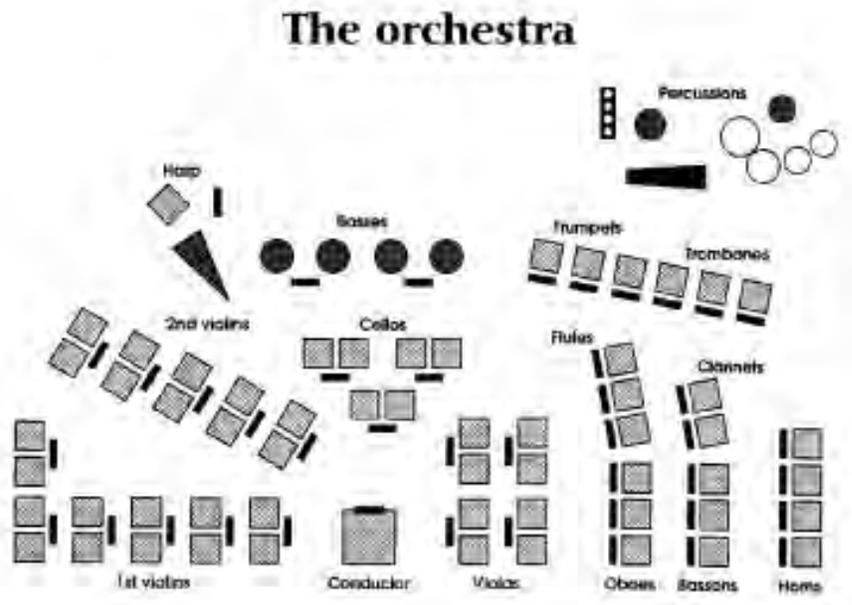


Diagram used by permission of the Montréal Opera Guild

THE STAGE

Power to the stage! Even before electricity was available, Monteverdi used torches to light his early opera, *Orfeo*, in 1607 and all of Mozart's operas (1769 – 1791) were staged with candle-powered and reflected oil lamps around the front of the stage. While Wagner's Festival Theatre at Bayreuth (1870's) had one of the first electric generators in all of Europe, **electricity** continues to enhance fantastic opera performances in many ways in opera houses around the world. At the Metropolitan Opera at Lincoln Center in New York, for example, four stages move **hydraulically**: one stage lifts and moves to the side as another replaces it with the scenery for the next act. This changes work the stage crews need to do and allows for more elaborate and grandiose sets and smoother scene changes. Engines controlled by computers make this possible as well as controlling lighting and special effects on stage.

THE OPERAS

Where do the stories for operas come from? Are all operas based on fairytales and myths? Do they all have tragic endings like *Il trovatore*? Throughout the history of opera, their stories have come from many sources, including myths and history, are funny and tragic, take place hundreds of years ago or in modern times, and address topics including love, death, and fantasy.

Myths have been the inspiration to many composers for highly imaginative operas. Monteverdi's *Orfeo* was based on the Greek myth that was a familiar story during the Renaissance. Ideas of the ancient world, primarily from the Greeks, were popular themes in architecture, painting and drama at that time. Even in the 19th century, Wagner was fascinated with many of the same tales, though they had since evolved into Nordic folktales. "The Lord of the Rings" stories are very much like many of Wagner's "music dramas," including greedy dwarves and the precious golden ring that makes one invincible.

Traditional stories of medieval kings and queens, magicians, and great knights are favorite topics for opera. Classic **literature** has also provided the basis for many operas. Popular themes from literature include various Shakespeare plays and the adventures of Don Quixote. Some operas, especially in more recent times, have been inspired by **actual events**. *Andrea Chenier* (1896) by Umberto Giordano was based on the life of the poet Andrea Chenier, a supporter and then victim of the French Revolution and *Nixon in China* by John Adams reflected actual events in the 1970's. There is even an opera written in the 1960's based on the life of Lizzie Borden!

Grand opera is a term that is often heard in opera circles. Grand opera means grand everything: big stage sets, big voices, big orchestra! Grand opera was popular in Europe in the mid-19th century. Grand operas include huge crowd scenes and feature a wide range of emotions and events, including heroic feats, great passion and intense suffering within a religious or romantic story. One of the best-known grand operas is Verdi's *Aïda*.

Composers from different countries and periods of history use different **styles** of writing. In his writing, Puccini matches specific instruments and combinations of instruments to dramatic moments, allowing the orchestra to create the atmosphere for the scene. Music scholars agree that Puccini's style of writing emphasizes melody, and he uses **leitmotif** to connect characters (or combinations of characters). A leitmotif is a recurring musical theme, associated with a particular person, place, or idea. Wagner also used this tool in his operatic works. Another distinctive quality in Puccini's works is the use of the voice in the style of speech: characters sing short phrases one after another as if they were talking to each other.

**** Next, you will find a worksheet entitled "What Have You Learned?" for your students to complete. You may want to assist them by listing the bold words from this lesson on the board.**

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?

Name the four fine arts.

In what language is *Il trovatore* written and performed? _____

What do the singers do that helps the audience understand what is happening in the opera?

What are Supertitles? _____

Name two ways in which stages were lit in the early days of opera. _____

What is a recitative? _____

What is bel canto? When was it popular? _____

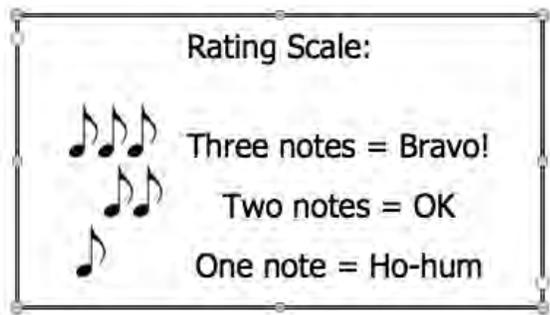
What is leitmotif? _____

What are two themes/story ideas that are often seen in opera? _____

After reading the synopsis of *Il trovatore*, do you think that this opera is based on a myth or fairy tale?
What kinds of themes do you think will be represented?

BE AN OPERA CRITIC

You are the opera critic. Think about the performance you just saw of *Il trovatore* and write your thoughts like you might see in the newspaper or an online review. Remember that a critic reports both the positive and negative features of a production. You might want to focus on one part of the opera that you particularly liked or disliked. Keep in mind that reviews express the opinions of the person who writes the review and different people will often have different ideas about the same performance. Be sure to include a headline for your review. Also, give the performance an overall rating.



Please share your performance reviews with us!

You can post reviews and comments on The Atlanta Opera Facebook fan page, email reviews to eyden@atlantaopera.org or mail them to:

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SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Suggested Listening

Il trovatore

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

RCA Victor Symphony Orchestra

Renato Cellini, Conductor

Label: RCA

ASIN: B000003EPY

Suggested Reading

"Getting Opera: A Guide for the Cultured but Confused" by Matt Dobkin (2000, Pocket, USA, ISBN 0671041398)

"Verdi: His Music, Life and Times" by George Martin (2004, Limelight Editions, USA, ISBN 0879101601)

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