



Opera Preview:
Giuseppe Verdi's "Il Trovatore"

By Maria Falco

On April 1 and 3 of 2011, the New Orleans Opera will present

Giuseppe Verdi's *Il Trovatore* (The Troubadour) at the Mahalia Jackson Theatre in New Orleans. Considered the most successful opera of the nineteenth century, the plot reads like a murder mystery, so let's pretend for a moment that Hercule Poirot is in the audience trying to solve it.

We begin with the Locale: Northern Spain, 1412; two forces battling for control of Aragon prior to the unification of the country, one led by the Count di Luna, supporter of Fernando, considered the legitimate heir to the throne, and one led by the "Black Knight," Manrico, supporter of the leader of the opposition, Prince Urgel of Biscay.

The Characters: Both the Count and Manrico are suitors for the hand of Leonora, a lady-in-waiting to the Queen of Aragon. Manrico has been serenading her disguised as a Troubadour and has succeeded in gaining her love. The Gypsy, Azucena, is Manrico's mother, the presumed perpetrator of the crime.

The Crime: Azucena, is rumored to have cast the baby brother of the Count into the flames which consumed her own mother years earlier when she was burned at the stake for witchcraft.

The Question to be answered by Poirot (and the audience) is this: Did Azucena really burn the Count's brother, or was it someone else? And what are the consequences for both crimes? When, in fact, does the truth finally come out? And what does Leonora try to do about it? Is anyone left standing when this crime mystery and melodrama is over? Is anyone innocent or are all guilty?

Many of the scenes in this opera have been praised not only for the action but for its extraordinary music as well. From the "Anvil Chorus" to the "*Miserere*", opera aficionados have been

overwhelming in their positive reviews of this work by Verdi. Enrico Caruso once remarked that all that was needed for a successful performance of *Il Trovatore* was four of the best singers in the world.

In New Orleans, we never disappoint! Among the singers in the cast of this opera are two who made *Tosca* truly memorable last year: Mary Elizabeth Williams as Leonora (Tosca) and Mark Rucker as the Count di Luna (Scarpia). Joining them are Renzo Zulian as Manrico and Irina Mishura as Azucena. Come to witness what they can do this April, and try not to shiver in your seats at the outcome!