

2026|27 SEASON

VERDI'S

IL TROVATORE

Keynotes

What a pain: Love, Loss, and Vengeance

ALEX CHEN

Verdi and Il trovatore

ROBERT HOLLISTON

Building the Future of Opera

Upcoming Events

OPERA
PACIFIC
OPERA
VICTORIA

SEASON SPONSOR & HOST HOTEL



Chateau Victoria
HOTEL & SUITES

PRODUCTION SPONSOR



PRODUCTION PATRON



Robert and Devi Jaul
FOUNDATION

What a pain: Love, Loss, and Vengeance in *Il trovatore*

How do we deal with pain? For the small things, maybe some ibuprofen and a sick day. But how about those bigger pains like political conflicts, troubles with love (or lust), and murderous wrongs inflicted on one's family? For those, we have *Il trovatore*. The opera puts a magnifying glass on the manifold pains of humanity so you don't have to.

Set in the fifteenth century on the Iberian peninsula, *Il trovatore* transpires in a time of civil war. Socioeconomic circumstances and disparate loyalties pit a wealthy caste (represented by the Conte di Luna) against scrappy rebel forces (represented by Manrico, the titular trovatore or troubadour). What follows is a showcase of how pain is dealt with, through acts of love, lust, and vengeance, writ large thanks to the precarious nature and high stakes of war. The characters of the Conte di Luna and Manrico work through their manly pains of romantic rejections, relationship misunderstandings, and wounded pride through bravado, battle, and brash decisions, amplified dramatically by their opposing political positions and associated militia. Typical—no time for therapy for these boys. But the setup does facilitate a great deal of masculine chorus moments. (enjoy!)

It's in the characters of Leonora and Azucena where we see more involved agency in response to pain. For Leonora, in the absence of militia and political power to bolster her, she deals with the pains of separation from her beloved Manrico through personally risky, bold, and unambiguous choices. She assuages pain by choosing the route that preserves the sanctity of her love for Manrico. Despite a rich, competing suitor (i.e. Conte di Luna) and opera-scaled misunderstandings, Leonora is steadfast and puts herself into a convent, a snap wedding, and a poison plot, all to affirm the importance of her love for Manrico or protect his life. Admirable.

Despite the pains of love and separation being very real, Azucena unfortunately wins the lottery for most painful circumstances. Firstly, her mother has been wrongfully burned at the stake due to superstition and prejudice. Secondly, she murdered her own son in an accidental baby pyre (opera-scaled misunderstanding). Finally, her adopted son, who she has grown to love, is the very boy she was supposed to murder to avenge her mother. Complicated.

Azucena shows us how pain can keep us stuck in place. While separated from her trauma by over fifteen years, she is still haunted by the memory of her mother's execution when she sees the flames of a fire. Even though she's raised Manrico and loves him, she is shamed by the knowledge that she has a duty to hate him and that she has been dishonest about Manrico's parentage. Honesty and vulnerability with Manrico might strengthen their bond and absolve Azucena from her guilt. Alternatively, they might lead to outrage and her abandonment.

When an attempted escape from pain could lead to evermore suffering, Azucena stays with the pain she knows and the inaction that goes with it. Let us all hope not to personally run into pains at the scale or extremity of *Il trovatore*. Instead, let Verdi guide you, with vocal fireworks, dramatic turns, and bared humanity, through the plights of Azucena, Leonora, Manrico, and the Conte di Luna. Who knows? Maybe we'll glean some insight into the dos and don'ts of how to weave our way out of our contemporary pains.

ALEX CHEN

Verdi and *Il trovatore*

By the early 1850s Giuseppe Verdi was nearing forty years of age and had been a professional opera composer for well over a decade. His works were presented in all the major houses in Italy – with additional premières in London and Paris (1847) – and his reputation was sufficient to guarantee that his more successful operas would be produced virtually throughout the operatic world (in the eight years following its première in 1842 Verdi's first smash success, *Nabucco*, was heard and seen in, among other centres, Vienna, Lisbon, Barcelona, Berlin, Paris, Hamburg, New York, and Buenos Aires). Always a shrewd negotiator, Verdi ensured that he would be handsomely remunerated for his work; upon returning in 1849 to Busseto, the Parmesan town where he had spent his student

days, Verdi's earnings allowed him to purchase the most prominent residence in the area. And after suffering the devastating losses of his wife and two children a decade earlier, Verdi now settled into the Palazzo Cavalli with retired soprano Giuseppina Strepponi, who would remain his life companion until her death in 1897. It was not an easy transition, however: the couple was unmarried (eventually they tied the knot in 1859), which scandalized the local citizens (including the composer's parents, who were basically divorced by their famous son, who nevertheless supported them financially). The Bussetani could hardly revile Giuseppe Verdi openly, but

they vented their contempt on his partner, who could not walk about the town or even attend Mass there, effectively becoming the Yoko Ono of Busseto.

Verdi's professional success was not without frustrations. His contract with the publishing house Ricordi demanded a great deal of their composer in return – at least one opera was produced each year between 1839 and 1851, and Verdi felt he was not always free to select dramatic subject matter that aligned with his artistic vision. Later he was to refer to

these as his “galley years,” a period in his professional life that brought him renown and success but kept him yoked to contractual obligations.

The composer's situation began to change in 1850 with a commission from Le Fenice, Venice, to compose



Marcelo Puente, Jacques Lemay, and members of the Pacific Opera Chorus during the rehearsals of *Il trovatore* at The Wingate Studio. Photo by Arcade Pallot

a new opera. Verdi and his librettist Francesco Maria Piave selected as their subject a highly controversial contemporary French play by Victor Hugo, *Le rois s'amuse*, which premièred triumphantly as *Rigoletto* in 1851. By this time Verdi was already at work on two new works: *La traviata* (also based on a contemporary French play: *La dame aux camélias* by Alexandre Dumas fils) and *Il trovatore* (“The troubadour”), both produced in 1853. Based on the successful Spanish play *El trovador* (1836) by Antonio García Gutiérrez, the work has been described by one leading Verdi scholar as “a high flown, sprawling melodrama ... packed with all manner of

fantastic and bizarre incident" - just the right material for an Italian opera! Verdi collaborated with Salvatore Cammarano (also the librettist of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*) until the latter's unfortunate death in mid-1852 - the composer sent money to his widow and their six daughters - and then with Leone Emanuele Bardare. As always, however, Verdi was very much a "hands-on" collaborator, proposing many significant revisions that were accomplished under his oversight - notably the expansion of the role of Leonora and the crucial importance placed on that of Azucena (called the principal role by Verdi himself).

The première of *Il trovatore* at the Teatro Apollo in Rome on January 19, 1853 was a great success and the work was soon heard throughout the operatic world. By 1861 a Boston publication stated, "*Trovatore* is almost the only opera. It stands for all operas." In response to complaints about the grimness of the opera and its high body count, Verdi wrote, "But after all, in life isn't everything death? What else exists?" The plot has always encountered criticism, from professional music critics to comics like the Marx Brothers and Danny Kaye. It is said to be far-fetched and insane (fair enough) as well as overcomplicated (not true!). Musically, contemporary scholars such as Charles Osborne have noted that, after the experimentation in *Rigoletto*, Verdi seems to be returning to the "closed forms" of bel canto - i.e., self-contained arias and ensembles, with expressive cavatinas and virtuosic cabalettas. "It is as though," Osborne writes, "Verdi had decided to do something which he had been perfecting over the years, and to do it so beautifully that he need never do it again. Formally, it is a step backwards after *Rigoletto*." Others have pointed out the "propulsive quality" of the music, and the "sheer musical energy apparent in all the numbers." Perhaps the most enduring assessment of the score's difficulty is attributed to Enrico Caruso: "*Il trovatore* is relatively easy. All that is needed are the four greatest singers in the world." In his delightful and highly informative book *Verdi with a Vengeance*, author

William Berger writes: "*Trovatore* has been called the culmination, and therefore the death, of the bel canto [style]. In other words, it ideally calls for all the artistry needed to sing Rossini, plus something else."

As these three masterworks were produced and embraced throughout the world, Verdi was at last able to liberate himself from the "galley," as he was now financially independent enough to accept only projects he believed in, to select colleagues that met his exacting standards, and even to examine performance venues applying for permission to produce his works, to ensure they were up to the task.

It is telling that among the fifteen Verdi operas between 1839 and 1851 only a very few are produced today with any regularity (*Nabucco*, *Macbeth*, possibly *Ernani*). Between 1851 and 1893, he completed only eleven new operas, extensively revising several older ones (including a version of *Trovatore* for Paris in 1856 - *Le trouvère*, which of course includes ballet music), and the great *Manzoni Requiem*. Every one of Verdi's works created afterwards - when his financial independence afforded him the freedom to choose his own texts and to cogitate and ruminate about his musical treatment of them - is not only an enduring part of the standard repertoire, but each one also represents developments in Verdi's evolution as a composer of opera, of music drama.

ROBERT HOLLISTON

Building the Future of Opera

At the heart of opera is the belief in what becomes possible when artists are supported, audiences are inspired, and new opportunities emerge. Together, we can shape a future where opera moves us, brings us together, and makes room for new voices, ideas, and experiences.

Four pillars guide this work: Centre Stage, Youth and Opera, Artists at the Centre, and Sustainability. Together, they reflect this community's commitment to new artistic experiences, opportunities for young people and professional artists, and more sustainable ways of producing opera.

Centre Stage

CREATING NEW WAYS TO EXPERIENCE OPERA

What happens when we create more ways for people to find their way into opera?

For Pacific Opera Victoria, bringing bold opera to the stage means more than presenting familiar works. It means exploring new forms of storytelling, creating distinctive artistic experiences, and welcoming audiences who may be discovering opera for the first time.



Teiya Kasahara 笠原貞野 in *The Queen In Me*. Photo by Dahlia Katz.

The connection between artist and audience continues this season with *Remembering Mary's Wedding* and *Albertine en cinq temps*. Both offer distinctive Canadian stories with more intimate operatic storytelling, while *Hansel & Gretel* brings a familiar, family-friendly fairy tale to the stage. With its imaginative puppetry and children's chorus, this production offers younger audiences and families another way to enter the world of opera.

Making opera more accessible also means considering the practical barriers to attending. New youth ticket prices this season make it easier for young people to experience live opera in the theatre.

Together, these initiatives reflect the purpose of Centre Stage: supporting artistic ambition while creating more opportunities for people to encounter opera in ways that feel welcoming, engaging, and relevant to their lives.

Youth and Opera

INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION

For a young person, stepping onto a stage can be transformative. It can be a first opportunity to perform, to lead, to create something with others, or to discover a sense of belonging.

This summer, Pacific Opera Victoria's Youth Summer Performance Program brought young performers together to

create and perform *Robin Hood*. For participants, the experience offered a chance to collaborate, develop their skills, and discover the excitement of working towards a production. Next summer, *Jungle Book* will continue to offer youth opportunities to learn, grow, and experience the joy of making opera together.



Callum Spivak as Robin Hood with the Spirit Chorus in *Robin Hood* by Ben Moore and Kelley Rourke, Pacific Opera Victoria 2026. Photo by Arcade Pallot

One parent described their child's first opera experience as "amazing and thoughtfully executed," expressing gratitude for the time and creativity invested in the young performers.

Youth and Opera also reaches beyond the stage. Through Opera Sprouts, Pacific Opera is helping bring new operatic works directly into schools. In spring 2027, *HOWL* will tour to schools across the province, reaching approximately 30,000 students in Grades 3 to 5. For librettist Sarah Henstra, the program has a wider significance. "Opera Sprouts is achieving something very special: fostering the creation of brand-new operatic works specifically for young audiences while supporting a new generation of opera creators."

From participating in a production to encountering live opera in the classroom, young people are invited to experience the art form from different perspectives. These opportunities can nurture creativity, confidence, and curiosity while introducing the next generation to the people and possibilities of opera.

Artists at the Centre

INVESTING IN THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE OPERA POSSIBLE

Every opera begins with people. The singers, musicians, and creative professionals who bring a production to life need opportunities to perform, collaborate, and continue developing their craft.

Together we can support emerging artists through the Master's of Staged Voice program, an innovative partnership between Pacific Opera Victoria and the University of Victoria. Combining an accredited Master of Music degree with immersive professional training inside an opera company, the program bridges academic study and the realities of a professional artistic career.

Supporting artists at every stage of their careers is also the focus of the Chorus Development Program. Chorus members have opportunities to perform in productions including *Il trovatore* and *The Magic Flute*, while continuing to develop their skills through workshops, private coaching, and masterclasses with guest artists.

For chorus member Alex Chen, who has been with Pacific Opera for eight years, the chorus offers more than



Members of the Pacific Opera Victoria chorus with Christian Sanders in rehearsal for *Orpheus & Eurydice*, Pacific Opera Victoria 2026. Photo by Arcade Pallot

performance experience. It brings together “outstanding musicians from diverse careers and stages of life,” where “unexpectedly wonderful connections are made, stories and skills are shared.” These relationships create space for musicians to learn from one another, share their experience, and work towards a common artistic goal.

This is the heart of Artists at the Centre: investing in the people who make opera possible. From emerging singers taking their first steps into professional performance to established artists continuing to refine their craft, these opportunities help build a connected, collaborative artistic community.

Sustainability

Sustainability in Action

Some of the most important changes happening at Pacific Opera Victoria are not always visible from the audience. Behind the curtain, sustainability is influencing how productions are designed, built, stored, and reused. We are investing in the resources and infrastructure needed to create ambitious work while using materials more thoughtfully.

Pacific Opera is investing in digital infrastructure, including projection equipment, LED panels and screens, as well as reusable modular scenery. These investments can serve multiple productions and seasons, giving creators greater flexibility while reducing the need to start from scratch.

This season, *Il trovatore* offers a tangible example, reimagining modular elements and utilizing video projection techniques to achieve an artistic vision. Rather than treating a finished set as something with a single purpose, the production explores how existing resources can inspire new creative possibilities.

This is where creativity and climate responsibility meet. Reusing materials does not mean repeating the same design. It means approaching the work with fresh eyes, finding new uses for what already exists, and making thoughtful choices about what needs to be built.

Pacific Opera’s in-house production teams also help extend the life of scenery, props, and costumes by delivering made-in-Victoria productions to opera companies across the country and across the continent.

Sustainability is not simply about reducing the impact of one production. It is about building the capacity to create opera differently, season after season, while keeping artistic ambition at the centre.

Support the Heart of Opera

Each pillar represents a different part of a shared future: bold artistic experiences, young people discovering opera, artists building their careers, and more sustainable ways of creating productions. Together, these priorities help Pacific Opera continue to grow as an artistic home for performers, a place of discovery for audiences, and a creative resource for our community.

Want to learn more? Contact Chelsea Kutyn, Senior Development Officer at chelsea@pacificopera.ca

Upcoming Events



LIVING OPERA | OCTOBER 23

10:30 AM | The Baumann Centre | Free!

A free, family-friendly workshop for curious creatives of all ages. Using live opera moments, participants of all ages are invited to listen, imagine, and explore what it means to bring a story to life on stage. Working together, you'll make creative choices and develop stage directions inspired by the music, combining elements of music, drama, and leadership along the way.



FOUND IN TRANSLATION | OCTOBER 29

7:00 PM | The Baumann Centre | Pay What You Want

Indigenous Elders, newcomers to Canada, and local artists come together for an evening of music and conversation. Hear classical Western art songs transformed through Indigenous and newcomer languages, exploring how music and language can celebrate cultural knowledge, foster belonging, and connect communities.



REMEMBERING MARY'S WEDDING | NOVEMBER 6 & 7

7:30 PM & 4:00 PM | The Baumann Centre

Weaving together text and music from the 2011 opera, composer Andrew Paul MacDonald and librettist Stephen Massicotte reimagine *Mary's Wedding* for narrator, two singers, and piano—an intimate reflection on love and remembrance. Originally developed and premiered in Victoria, this new presentation returns following last year's performances.



PACIFIC OPERA VICTORIA AGM | NOVEMBER 26

6:30 PM | The Baumann Centre

Join Pacific Opera Victoria for our Annual General Meeting, an opportunity to reflect on the past year and look ahead to the future. Hear updates on the company's artistic and community activities, learn more about our work, and celebrate the artists, supporters, and community members who make it possible.

HOST HOTEL



PRODUCTION SPONSOR



PRODUCTION PATRON



MEDIA PARTNERS



ANNUAL OPERATING SUPPORT



ARTIST PATRON FOR ROBERT HOLLISTON

Barbara Hubbard

Pacific Opera Victoria works and creates on the traditional lands of the ɫəkwəŋən speaking people, now known as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations.