

Verdi - Il Trovatore (Giulini) [1989]

Written by bluesever

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Verdi - Il Trovatore (Giulini) [1989]



Disc: 1 1. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 1. Scene 1. No. 1, Introduzione: All'erta! All'erta! 2. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 1. Scene 1. No. 1, Introduzione: Di due figli vivea padre beato... Abbieta zingara/Sull'orlo 3. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 1. Scene 2. No. 2, Scena e Cavatina: Che più t'arresti? 4. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 1. Scene 2. No. 2, Scena e Cavatina: Tacea la notte placida... Di tale amor 5. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 1. Scene 2. No. 3, Scena, Romanza e Terzetto: Tace la notte! 6. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 1. Scene 2. No. 3, Scena, Romanza e Terzetto: Deserto sulla terra 7. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 1. Scene 2. No. 3, Scena, Romanza e Terzetto: Non m'inganno. Ella scende!... Di geloso amor 8. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 2. Scene 1. No. 4, Coro di Zingari e Canzone: Vedi! le fosche notturne spoglie 9. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 2. Scene 1. No. 4, Coro di Zingari e Canzone: Stride la vampa! 10. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 2. Scene 1. No. 4, Coro di Zingari e Canzone: Mesta è la tua canzon! 11. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 2. Scene 1. No. 5, Scena e Racconto: Soli or siam! 12. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 2. Scene 1. No. 5, Scena e Racconto: Condotta ell'era in ceppi 13. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 2. Scene 1. No. 6, Scena e Duetto: Non son tuo figlio? 14. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 2. Scene 1. No. 6, Scena e Duetto: Mal reggendo all'aspro assalto 15. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 2. Scene 2. No. 7, Scena ed Aria: Tutto è deserto 16. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 2. Scene 2. No. 7, Scena ed Aria: Il balen del suo sorriso... Per me, ora fatale 17. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 2. Scene 2. No. 8, Finale Secondo: Ah! se l'error t'ingombra 18. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 2. Scene 2. No. 8, Finale Secondo: Perché piangete? 19. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 2. Scene 2. No. 8, Finale Secondo: E deggio, e posso crederlo? Disc: 2 1. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 3. Scene 1. No. 9, Coro d'Introduzione: Or co' dadi... Squilli, echeggi la tromba guerriera 2. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 3. Scene 1. No. 10, Scena e Terzetto: In braccio al mio rival! 3. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 3. Scene 1. No. 10, Scena e Terzetto: Giorni poveri vivea 4. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 3. Scene 2. No. 11, Scena ed Aria: Quale d'armi fragor poc'anzi intesi? 5. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 3. Scene 2. No. 11, Scena ed Aria: Ah! sì, ben mio 6. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 3. Scene 2. No. 11, Scena ed Aria: L'onda de' suoni mistici 7. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 3. Scene 2. No. 11, Scena ed Aria: Manrico?/Che?/La zingara 8. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 3. Scene 2. No. 11, Scena ed Aria: Di quella pira 9. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 4. Scene 1. No. 12, Scena, Aria e Miserere: Siam giunti 10. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 4. Scene 1. No. 12, Scena, Aria e Miserere: Miserere/Ah! che la morte ognora 11. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 4. Scene 1. No. 12, Scena, Aria e Miserere: Tu vedrai che amore in terra 12. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 4. Scene 1. No. 13, Scena e Duetto: Udiste? Come albeggi 13. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 4. Scene 1. No. 13, Scena e Duetto: Qual voce!/Mira, di acerbe lagrime... Vivrà! Contende il g 14. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 4. Scene 2. No. 14, Finale Ultimo: Madre, non dormi?/Ai nostri monti 15. Il Trovatore, opera: Part 4. Scene

2. No. 14, *Finale Ultimo: Che! Non m'iganna quel fioco lume?... Ha quest'infame l'amo* 16. *Il Trovatore, opera: Part 4. Scene 2. No. 14, Finale Ultimo: Ti scosta!/Non respingermi*
Manrico - Placido Domingo Leonora - Rosalind Plowright Il Conte di Luna - Giorgio Zancanaro
Azucena - Brigitte Fassbaender Ferrando - Evgeny Nesterenko Ines - Anna di Stasio Ruiz -
Walter Gullino Coro e Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia Carlo Maria
Giulini – conductor

To even recommend a recording of *Il trovatore*, let alone say that one is an irreplaceable classic, is sometimes to invite invectives on your head that you would rather not receive. Passions run high in this most passionate of operatic potboilers, and indeed, one wonders if *Il trovatore* even registers on serious musicians' radar as a great work; yet even so stringent a critic as George Bernard Shaw, who often took Verdi to task for writing music that was placed too high in the voice and therefore too difficult to sing comfortably, not only loved this opera but sang bits of it (accompanying himself on the piano) into his senior years.

Of course, the greatest obstacle to appreciating *Trovatore* as a great work is the plot. Taken from a sensational pop novel of the time and then absurdly reduced in the libretto by Cammarano, what reached the stage really didn't please Verdi dramatically and left audiences either scratching their heads or laughing. Yet captain of the guard Ferrando does a fair job of explaining the pre-history of what you are about to see and hear; after all, this isn't Goethe or Schiller. It's your typical revenge-oriented love triangle with a crazed gypsy woman thrown in for local color. What kept this opera on the boards for nearly two centuries, and still keeps it there, is the extraordinarily high quality of the music. It is not only tuneful in the best Verdian tradition, but inventive and well composed. There are too many examples to give, but the opening scene for the soprano, the act I and act II/scene 1 finales, and the long duets between Azucena and Manrico (act II) and between Leonora and Count di Luna (act IV) are masterly by any measurement.

But then we come to how you want your *Trovatore* performed, and most people want it loud, fast, and raucous, with plenty of high notes (even extra ones not written in the score) thrown in and held for as long as the singers have breath to do so. As a result, the late Franco Corelli is normally the Manrico of choice—that is, if you are not a fan of Mario del Monaco or Kurt Baum. The Callas clique always stumps for her recording, which is in fact one of the very best except for Giuseppe di Stefano, who literally ruins the performance with his lumpy phrasing of both “Ah sì, ben mio” and “Di quella pira.” (In my view, if you've ruined “Di quella pira,” you've pretty much ruined the performance.) And I, for one, want to hear all the trills that Verdi wrote into the score because they're interesting and add to both the musical value and the elegance of the artists. These include not only the obvious moments, such as the soprano's two arias and “Ah

si, ben mio," but also Ferrando's opening scene, Manrico's "Deserto sulla terra," and Azucena's "Stride la vampa," which calls for no fewer than 20 trills. By the same token, I also want to hear all the trills that Wagner wrote into Brünnhilde's music for Walküre and Siegfried, as well as the written trills for Magdalena, Walther, and Hans Sachs in *Die Meistersinger*. Just call me a tick for trills.

When this recording first appeared in 1981, it garnered some glorious reviews, particularly from British critics who adored Giulini much more than Americans did, but left *Trovatore* nuts scratching their heads. So much of this performance is slower than we are used to, which was a Giulini specialty, but in this case he claimed that he found all these slower tempos (and bits of the music not previously recorded) in Verdi's manuscript. The slower tempos give the singers the chance to sing those trills, and they all give it the old college try. Although Domingo really only produces a couple of flutters in "Deserto sulla terra," and one flutter and one real trill in "Ah si, ben mio," at least he is trying to do so. Everyone else sings all of their trills as written, with excellent results.

In addition, Giulini's slower pace brings out the tragedy of the opera better than anyone else with the exception of Karajan (with Callas). If you take the plot at least somewhat seriously there is one thing you will grasp, and that is that both Azucena and the Count are insane and must be played that way. Sadly, to my knowledge no baritone ever played di Luna as really insane except Leonard Warren, who did it twice (1952 and 1959), and in the second recording he was not only more dramatic but had a wonderful soprano to respond to his acting in Leontyne Price, but otherwise that second recording is very dull. Here, Zancanaro gives us the usual aggressive, angry di Luna, and it suffices. More interestingly, and not necessarily to my liking, Fassbaender's Azucena does not sound crazed but simply like an overly concerned mother trying to protect her "son" (Manrico), who is really the Count's brother, but at least she gives us an interpretation of the role. Once you move away from *Fedora* Barbieri (with Milanov in 1952 and Callas in 1956), you pretty much leave the concept of a crazed Azucena, mostly because everyone else just sang the part straight with no dramatic accents at all (particularly Fiorenza Cossotto, who had a gold-plated voice but zero acting ability).

By employing slower tempos in such scenes as "Mal reggendo" through "Condetta all'era in ceppi" (act II) and even "Di quella pira," Giulini is able to tease the listener more familiar with rattletrap run-throughs of the score with his more musical and dramatic reading. Manrico has only two high Cs in the latter scene, and the second one (on the final "All'armi") is cut off quickly on the syllable "-mi." There are no high notes for either soprano or tenor at the end of act I ("Di geloso amor") or for soprano or baritone at the end of "Vivra! Contendre il giublio" (act IV), which is bound to disappoint the high-note maniacs among listeners. But what fails to boil the blood succeeds in delineating Verdi's and Piave's dark musical drama. (Note, for instance, the preponderance of minor keys in this music, far more than one may remember from casual

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listening to other recordings.)

Do I wish that the Callas-Karajan recording had a better tenor? Of course I do. If they had, that would be my first choice. But they didn't, so here we are with Giulini and company. Of course, if you can suffer through di Stefano's loud, graceless singing better than I can, you may safely ignore this recommendation and head for that recording, but I for one want a Manrico who can sing all of his music properly, so this is the Trovatore for me. ---FANFARE: Lynn René Bayley, arkivmusic.com

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