

# THE DENVER POST ENTERTAINMENT

## Music

# In Opera Colorado's "Il Trovatore," Denver-bound soprano Michele Capalbo shows she knows her way around Verdi

By Ray Mark Rinaldi *The Denver Post*

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We go to Mozart operas because they're entertaining and Handel operas because of the plot. We go to Puccini for the drama, Gilbert & Sullivan for the fun of it and Wagner because we like to suffer along with his characters.

But we go to Verdi for the singing. The Italian composer wrote the kind of music that brings out the best in a great voice. His roles are showy and demanding. Performers treasure them, but they have to bring it when they sing it.

For the guest artists who appear on stage with Opera Colorado, that's not always easy. The altitude here can take even the most experienced singer by surprise. The sharp turns necessary for a challenging piece — like this week's production of "Il Trovatore" — can be even more challenging.

"We get all of our balance and strength from our breath," said soprano Michele Capalbo. "I have to sing high and low, slow and fast, heavy and light. That's all affected by how efficient my air is." The trick, says Capalbo, who grew up in Ontario and lives in New



Michele Capalbo plays Leonora in the Opera Colorado production of Verdi's "Il Trovatore." (Photo by McCrimmon, The Denver Post)

York, is modifying, taking a few more breaths, altering the tempo if necessary.

Capalbo sings the part of Leonora in the production, a role she has taken on before. It's one of the best jobs in opera, but not exactly a happy one. Like a lot of Verdi's women, she's doomed from the start. Not that Capalbo minds; a soprano gets used to a gloomy exit.

"It's normal for me. There's something cathartic about it," she says. "And when my girls die, they sing the most heavenly music."



From left, Nancy Maultsby as Azucena, Avgust Amonov as Manrico, Michele Capalbo as Leonora and Robert Hyman as Count di Luna in Opera Colorado's "Il Trovatore." (Cyrus McCrimmon, *The Denver Post*)

Even for a singer who specializes in Italian opera, it's a new challenge because her own voice changes over time. She has learned to trust Verdi's talents and stay true to his intentions: "If you sing what he wrote, it's going to be exciting." Her teacher gets her ready before every job, and she relies on her conductor at each performance to move the musicians and the singers over the top. She knows why audiences come to Verdi operas, and she wants to sing it the way they want to hear it. "I want to hear sweet singing, and I want to hear aggressive, balls-to-the wall singing," she says. "I want it all."

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