Verdi's Aida

Visions and Voices presents the Metropolitan Opera's HD telecast of Giuseppe Verdi's Aida. To help you learn more about Verdi's masterpiece, Ross Scimeca of the USC Libraries has selected the following resources.

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Introduction

Giuseppe Verdi composed twenty-eight operas during his lifetime. "Aida" is the twenty-sixth, followed by his late masterpieces, Otello and Falstaff. What is unique about "Aida" is that it is a grand opera, meaning it features extended choruses, ballets, and marches composed in a theatrically spectacular style. Like Don Carlos, which preceded Aida by five years and premiered at the Paris Opera, Verdi brilliantly integrated these spectacular elements with the vocal elements of traditional opera.

Camille du Locle took the plot for his French-language libretto for Aida from the work of Egyptologist Mariette Bey. The libretto was later translated into Italian verse by Antonio Ghislanzoni. Commissioned by the Khedive of Egypt, "Aida" premiered at the Italian Theatre in Cairo on December 24th, 1871. It was a sensational success, as it was two months later at Milan's La Scala. The opera reached New York's Academy of Music on November 26th, 1873. You can find the Italian-language libretto of "Aida" and an English translation in the Opera Classics Library by clicking on the Databases tab from www.usc.edu/libraries/eresources.

Comments (0)
Aida Summary

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Synopsis

In four acts and seven scenes, Aida depicts a "love-triangle" between Radames, the commander of the Egyptian army; Aida, an Ethiopian slave who is actually the daughter of Amonasro, the King of Ethiopia; and Amneris, daughter of the King of Egypt.

The Metropolitan Opera's Opera News provides a helpful summary:

**ACT I**. In ancient Egypt, near the royal palace at Memphis, Radamés learns from the high priest, Ramfis, that Ethiopia soon may bring war to the Nile valley. The young officer hopes he will be chosen as commander of the army, envisioning triumph so he can free his beloved Aida, who is the Ethiopian slave of the proud Princess Amneris. Amneris, who herself loves Radamés, jealously senses his feelings for Aida when the three meet. A procession led by the King arrives to confirm that the Ethiopians are advancing on Thebes. He appoints the jubilant Radamés as Egyptian commander, at which shouts of victory fill the air. Left alone, Aida is torn between her love for Radamés and for her native land: though now a slave, she is in fact the daughter of Amonasro, king of Ethiopia. She prays to the gods for mercy. In the temple, as priestesses chant the praises of Ptah, priests consecrate Radamès' sword in a sacred ritual.

**ACT II**. Ethiopia has been defeated. Amneris, entertained by slaves, prepares for Radamés' triumphal entry into Thebes. When Aida approaches, the princess dismisses her other attendants and tries to learn Aida's private thoughts, first pretending Radamés is dead, then saying he is still alive. Certain from Aida's reactions — horror, followed by joy — that her slave loves Radamés, jealously senses his feelings for Aida when the three meet. A procession led by the King arrives to confirm that the Ethiopians are advancing on Thebes. He appoints the jubilant Radamés as Egyptian commander, at which shouts of victory fill the air. Left alone, Aida is torn between her love for Radamés and for her native land: though now a slave, she is in fact the daughter of Amonasro, king of Ethiopia. She prays to the gods for mercy. In the temple, as priestesses chant the praises of Ptah, priests consecrate Radamés' sword in a sacred ritual.

**ACT III**. On a moonlit bank of the Nile, Amneris is led by Ramfis to a temple of Isis for a wedding vigil. Nearby, waiting for Radamés, Aida is overcome with nostalgia for her homeland. Amonasro, who suddenly appears, preys on these feelings, forcing his daughter to agree to ask Radamés where the Egyptian army plans to enter Ethiopia. Just as he reveals the military secret, Amonasro steps out of hiding, and Ramfis and Amneris come forth from the temple. While Aida escapes with her father, Radamés surrenders to the priests as a traitor.

**ACT IV**. In a temple of judgment, awaiting trial, Radamés is unmoved by Amneris' offer to save him if he will renounce Aida and marry her. When he is led away, Amneris' pride dissolves, and her love for Radamés revealed by her agony in hearing him condemned to death. Enraged, the princess curses the judges. Buried alive in a crypt, Radamés is joined by Aida, who has hidden there to share his fate. The lovers bid farewell to earth as Amneris, above the tomb, prays for peace.

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Events

Verdi's Aida
A Live Broadcast from the MET
Sunday, November 1, 2009 : 1:00pm
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Further Reading

Verdi with a Vengeance: An Energetic Guide to the Life and Complete Operas of the King of Opera
By William Berger

Music Library and Online Library
ML410.V4829 2000

The Operas of Verdi [3 volumes.]
By Julian Budden
[Volume 3 deals with the last four of Verdi's operas, including Aida.]

Music Library
ML410.V4B88 1992

Verdi's Aida: A Record of the Life of the Opera on and off the Stage
By Clyde T. McCants

Music Library
ML310.V4M34 2006

The Complete Operas of Verdi
By Charles Osbourne

Music Library and Grand Library
MT100.V4708 1970

Verdi's Theater: Creating Drama through Music
By Gilles de Van

Music Library

Verdi's Aida: The History of an Opera in Letters and Documents
By Giuseppe Verdi, translated by Hans Busch
Verdi's letters and other documents pertaining to Aida

Music Library
ML410.V4V33

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Recommended Recordings

More than 60 recordings of Verdi’s Aida are currently available. Many great sopranos have performed the title role, including Maria Callas, Renata Tebaldi, Leontyne Price, Zinka Milanov, and Montserrat Caballe. You can find many of these recordings at USC’s Music Library on the ground floor of Doheny Library. Three recordings are essential for any opera lover’s collection:

- Jonel Perlea’s 1956 RCA monaural recording with the Rome Opera House and Chorus featuring performers Zinka Milanov, Jussi Bjorling, and Fedora Barbieri

  **Music Library 14242mus**

  - Herbert von Karajan’s 1959 Decca/London stereo recording features the Vienna Philharmonic with Renata Tebaldi, Giulietta Simionato, and Carlo Bergonzi.

  [Not currently available at the libraries.]

- Riccardo Muti’s 1974 EMI recording with the New Philharmonia Orchestra and the Royal Opera Chorus features Montserrat Caballe, Placido Domingo, and Fiorenza Cossotto.

  **Music Library 4125mus**