

VERDI

AIDA

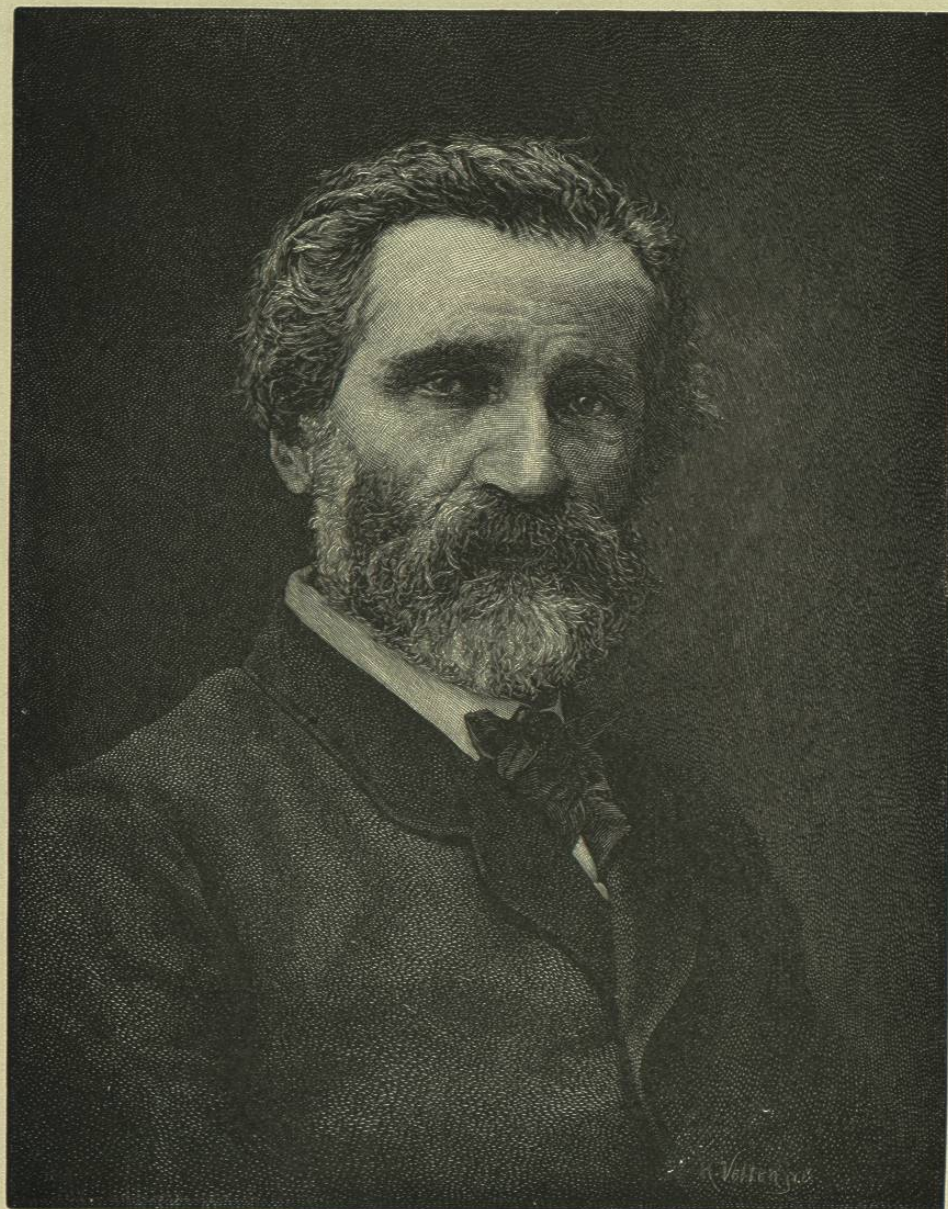
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G. Verdi



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AÏDA

Opera in Four Acts

BY

G. VERDI

LIBRETTO BY

A. GHISLANZONI

THE ENGLISH VERSION BY

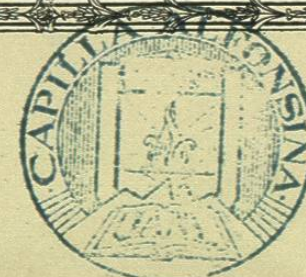
MRS. G. G. LAURENCE

WITH AN ESSAY ON THE HISTORY OF THE OPERA BY

W. J. HENDERSON

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G. SCHIRMER — NEW YORK.



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AIDA.

FIRST PERFORMED AT CAIRO, EGYPT, DEC. 24, 1871; AND AT MILAN, FEB. 8, 1872.

Characters of the Drama,

With the Original Cast as Presented at the first Performances.

		(At Cairo)	(At Milan)
AIDA	Soprano	Signora POZZONI	Signora STOLZ
AMNERIS	Mezzo-soprano	Signora GROSSI	Signora WALDMANN
RADAMÈS	Tenor	Signor MONGINI	Signor FANCELLI
AMONASRO	Baritone	Signor STELLER	Signor PANDOLFINI
RAMPHIS	Bass	Signor MEDINI	Signor MAINI
THE KING	Bass	Signor COSTA	Signor PAVOLERI
A MESSENGER	Tenor	Signor BOTTARDI	Signor VISTARINI

Priests, Priestesses, Ministers, Captains, Soldiers, Officials, Ethiopian Slaves and Prisoners, Egyptian Populace, etc.

The scene is in Memphis and Thebes, at the time of the Pharaohs' power.

ACT I.—1. THE KING'S PALACE, AT MEMPHIS; 2. TEMPLE OF VULCAN, AT MEMPHIS.

ACT II.—1. A HALL IN THE APARTMENTS OF AMNERIS; 2. BEFORE A GATE

OF THE CITY OF THEBES. ACT III.—ON THE BANK OF THE

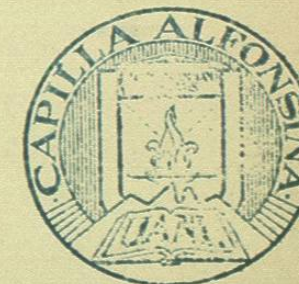
NILE, WITH TEMPLE OF ISIS. ACT IV.—1. HALL IN THE

KING'S PALACE; 2. TEMPLE OF VULCAN.

Aida.

The importance of Verdi's "Aida" as a work of musical art can hardly be overestimated. It is as certain as anything in art-history can be, that this production revolutionized modern Italian opera, and that to its influence is due the composition of such works as "Cavalleria Rusticana" and "Pagliacci." In itself, the opera marks the beginning of what has been called Verdi's third period. Commentators on his work are fond of pointing out that his style changed when he wrote "Ernani," something more than half a century ago, and that it wholly altered once again, when he produced "Aida." The change from his first style to his second is one that can be discerned only by very careful students of his scores, but that from his second to his third was at once patent to the entire world. "Aida" was acclaimed as a revelation of new and unsuspected powers in the composer of

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ACERVO GENERAL

"Il Trovatore" and "La Traviata," though careful judges ought to have said that it was the result of old powers wielded with a new purpose. There was no dissent, however, from the general verdict that the "grand old man" of Italian music had given the world a masterpiece, an opera far and away beyond the best works of Rossini, Donizetti and Bellini, brilliant in its opulence of color, gorgeous in its instrumentation, filled in every measure with a splendor of melodic beauty, and throbbing with dramatic passion. From that verdict there has not yet been any dissent, and the only Italian who has rivaled "Aïda" is Verdi himself in his noble "Otello" and his marvelous "Falstaff."

It is frequently asserted that "Aïda" was written for the opening of the new opera house at Cairo, Egypt, built by Ismail Pacha. The error of this statement, however, is established by the fact that the house was opened in 1869. Ismail Pacha had certain lordly ambitions which did him credit. He desired to appear before the civilized world as a munificent patron of the arts, and his earnest desire was to add to the lustre of his new opera house by producing a work based on an Egyptian story. He naturally turned to Verdi, then the reigning operatic master. Verdi was not at first inclined to accept the offer, and he named as his price a figure so high that he thought it would frighten the Khedive. However, his terms were promptly accepted, and gradually Verdi came to view with interest, and at length with enthusiasm, the opportunities for high coloring and brilliant effects offered by the location of the action in Egypt. The Khedive confided to Mariette Bey, the eminent French Egyptologist, the task of finding a story suitable for operatic treatment and likely to appeal to Verdi. The Bey had found in his studies of ancient Egyptian history an incident from which he developed the original plan of the libretto of "Aïda." This plan was transferred to M. Camille du Locle, who wrote the recitative and lyrics in French prose. His work was done at Verdi's home, at Busseto, Italy, and profited much by the composer's practical advice. Indeed, Verdi did much toward the preparation of his own libretto, and the double stage in the last act, showing Radamès and Aïda dying in the tomb under the temple in which Amneris is bowed in grief, is entirely his. Signor Ghislanzoni translated the French prose into Italian verse, and when the music had been completed, the Italian was translated into French verse for use on the operatic stage of France.

Verdi set to work at once. Meanwhile the Khedive had decided that he would like to have the composer go to Egypt to conduct the first performance. Verdi's price for writing the opera was \$20,000, and \$30,000 if he went to Egypt. But at the end, his horror of the ocean—he had once gone to London and suffered from sea-sickness—overcame him, and he refused to go at any price. The original plan was to produce the opera toward the close of 1870, and for that purpose the scenery was painted in Paris. But the Franco-Prussian war broke out, and the scenery was a prisoner. Verdi, during the year's postponement, was not idle. He made some important improvements in the score. He cut out a chorus in Palestrina style, and substituted a chorus and a romanza for "Aïda." He had come to the wise conclusion, that the Palestrina style would be incongruous in an Egyptian

opera. The opera was produced on December 24, 1871. The conductor was Signor Bottesini, the famous double-bass player, and the cast was as given above. The audience was a strange mixture of Europeans and Orientals. Filippi, the Italian critic, wrote:

"The Arabians, even the rich, do not love our shows; they prefer the mewings of their tunes, the monotonous beatings of their drums, to all the melodies of the past, present, and future. It is a true miracle to see a turban in a theatre of Cairo. Sunday evening the opera house was crowded before the curtain rose. Many of the boxes were filled with women, who neither chattered nor rustled their robes. There was beauty, and there was intelligence, especially among the Greeks and the strangers of rank, who abound in Cairo. For truth's sake, I must add that, by the side of the most beautiful and the most richly dressed, were Coptic and Jewish faces, with strange head-dresses, impossible costumes, a howling of colors,—no one could deliberately have invented worse. The women of the harem could not be seen. They were in the first three boxes on the right, in the second gallery. Thick white muslin hid their faces from prying glances."

The success of the opera was most emphatic. A chorus of praise rang through Europe, and the genius of Verdi was acclaimed in glowing terms. "Aïda" was next given at La Scala, Milan, February 8, 1872. It was given in Paris on April 22, 1876, with Mme. Stolz, Mlle. Waldmann, Signor Masini, Signor Pandolfini, Signor Medini, and M. Edouard de Reszké in the cast. The first performance in America was given at the Academy of Music, New York, on November 26, 1873, with the following great cast: Aïda, Octavia Torriani; Amneris, Annie Louise Cary; Radamès, Signor Italo Campanini; Amonasro, M. Victor Maurel; Ramphis, Signor Nannetti; King, Signor Scolara.

The story of "Aïda" is supposed to belong to the time of the Pharaohs, and its action is located at Memphis and Thebes. The first act begins in the King's palace in the former city. The High Priest, Ramphis, tells Radamès that the Ethiopians are marching against Egypt and that the goddess Isis has named the leader of the defending army. Radamès, left alone, declares how happy he would be could he lead the army to victory and return to lay his laurels at the feet of Amneris's slave, Aïda, whom he loves. Amneris and Aïda join him. Amneris loves him, and from his demeanor and that of Aïda she suspects the truth. She swears to avenge herself if her suspicion proves correct. The King and his court enter, and presently a messenger comes to announce that it is Amonasro who is leading the invaders. Amonasro is Aïda's father, but she alone knows this. The King declares that Isis has chosen Radamès to lead the Egyptian army, and directs him to go to the temple of Ptha (Ptah) to receive the consecrated arms. The scene concludes with a martial ensemble. The second scene takes place in the temple, where the priests invoke Ptha and the priestesses dance the sacred dance. Radamès receives the arms, and departs upon his mission.

The second act opens in the apartments of Amneris at Thebes. Amneris bewails the absence of Radamès, and her slaves vainly try to console her. Aïda enters, and Amneris, to test her, says that news has come of the death of Radamès.