

La forza del destino

Conception, Creation, and the Curse

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After almost thirty years, Giuseppe Verdi's *La forza del destino* is making its way back to the Metropolitan stage. In Verdi's case, however, he having composed 26 operas, over half of which are in the regularly-performed canon, this hiatus between productions does not remove The King of Opera from his throne.

In Frank Walker's book, *The Man Verdi*, there is extensive background on the commission of *La Forza del Destino*. Early in 1861, Verdi was offered 60,000 francs with all expenses paid, if he wrote a new work for the Imperial Theatre of St. Petersburg. In his personal life, much of his earnings were invested in land and property and the extensive alterations of his home Sant' Agata had left him short on liquid money. This increased the attractiveness of the offer. Originally, Verdi bid to write an opera based on Victor Hugo's *Ruy Blas*, but it was thought there would be difficulties with the censorship and it was rejected. After going back to brainstorm, Verdi offered his adaptation of the play *Don Alvaro o la fuerza del sino* by Angel de Saavedra, 3rd Duke of Rivas. Verdi also included a scene adapted from Friedrich Schiller's *Wallensteins Lager*. Francesco Maria Piave was chosen as the librettist and they composed *La forza del destino* within the year (pp. 238-248).

Unfortunately, upon arriving in Russia and experiencing the abilities of the talent hired to perform this work, Verdi refused to let it be performed. His wife, Giuseppina Strepponi, wrote in a letter to a friend, "Verdi will not be giving his new opera in St. Petersburg this year. Alas! The voices of the singers are fragile...and the voice of Signora La Grua is, to her and Verid's misfortune, a desolating example of this fragility...they agreed to give the opera next winter..." after negotiating the conditions of the new cast (Walker, F)

After its premier, the public determined *La forza del destino* to be a flop. People found it crazy and emotionally incontinent. There are extremes of emotion which abruptly change from comedy to tragedy, to absurdity, to religiosity, to drinking songs, to hate. (Staff, N.)* Thus, Verdi reworked the

opera so that it might find better success when they returned to western Europe. When he went to do this work with Piave, he found that his librettist was much too ill to assist. Therefore, he partnered with Antonio Ghislanzoni for the revision. (Walker F.)* He would also be the librettist for *Aida*.

To a superstitious perspective, this could be considered the first experience of *La forza del destino's* curse. Throughout the opera community there is a belief that this opera is cursed, and a Verdi curse is a terrible thing; viz *Rigoletto*, *Boccanegra* - it never ends well. (Rhodes, J.)* The reasons for this belief have grown in number through the years. Right before the premier of the opera, Italy's unifying leader Cavour passed away. It was a cause for great mourning in all of Italy. Then the opera's first performance was delayed when its soprano became gravely ill. In the Met's 1960 production, Baritone Leonard Warren died on stage while singing his recitative, "*Morir! Tremenda cosa*" - "To die! Tremendous moment!" For these reasons, Luciano Pavarotti refused to sing it. Franco Corelli agreed to sing it, but performed rituals before and after each show to ward off negative spirits and evil powers. Theaters inexplicably lost power during performances. As recently as 2018, there is a rumor of the curse's power. During a production of *Forza* in Zurich, the set created quite a ruckus during the overture before it fell apart. Producer Andreas Homoki made note that he didn't believe in the curse, and bid the orchestra to start the show again. (Rhodes, J.)*

This Met in HD production is being staged by Mariusz Trelinski. His setting the show in a contemporary world and making great use of the Met's turntable to represent the unstoppable advance of destiny that drives the opera's chain of unfortunate events (Met). In an interview about his production, Trelinski stated, "It is a story about patricide and the consequences. The killing of the father in the first act determines the fate of all the characters. They are pushed like billiard balls and can only continue rolling passively." (Schmid, R.)*

*References

[Metropolitan Opera, *La forza del destino* \(n.d.\)](#)

[Rhodes, J. \(2018, June 6\). *John Rhodes. Seen and Heard International*](#)

[Schmid, R. \(2023, September 25\). *An opera director with the mind of a filmmaker. The New York Times*](#)

[Staff, N. \(2012, November 10\). *Verdi's "la forza," born under a bad sign*](#)

Walker, F. (n.d.). *The Man Verdi*. The University of Chicago Press.