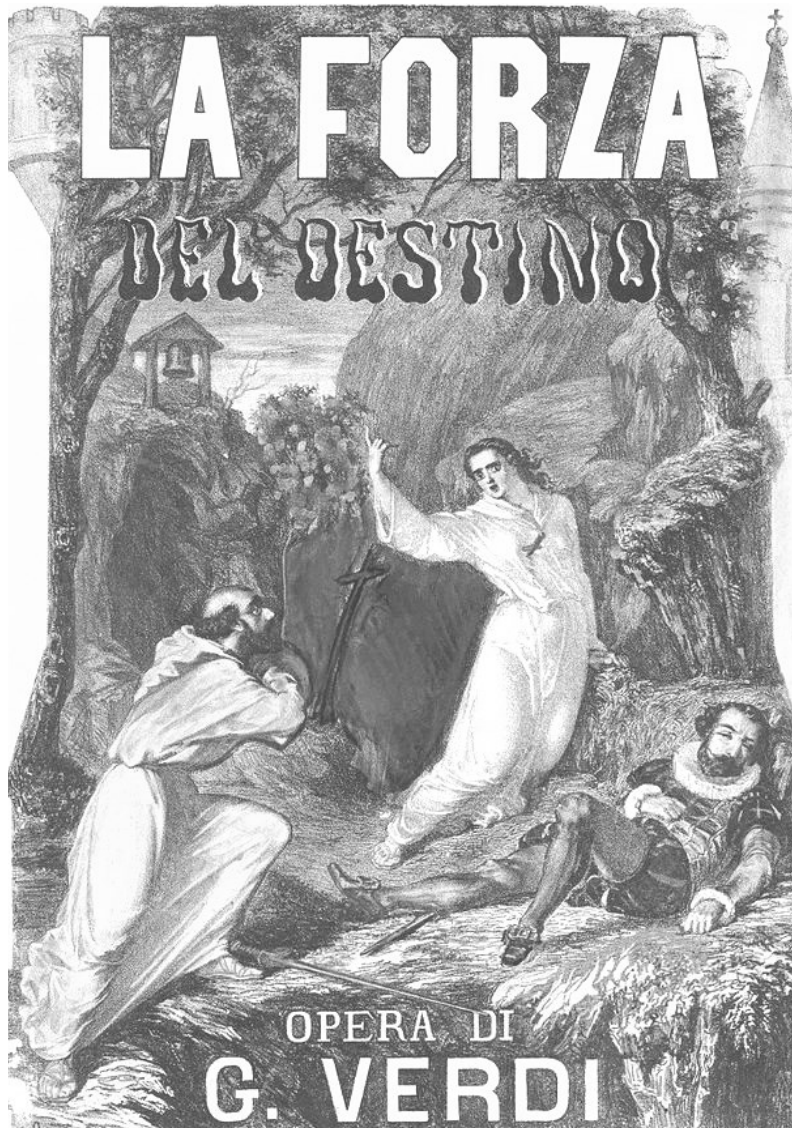


PROBLEM OPERAS SOLVED



9. MANAGING MELODRAMA

14 November, 2023

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GIUSEPPE VERDI WAS AT THE HEIGHT OF HIS POWERS when he wrote *La forza del destino* (The Force of Destiny) for Saint Petersburg in 1861, yet he kept tinkering with it for the rest of the decade. Why? He could never get the balance quite right, or shape the sprawling plot into a cohesive whole. A Spanish melodrama of the kind that had served him well enough with *Il trovatore* a decade earlier was no longer in tune with his new depth of psychological insight, yet his writing for the soprano heroine Leonora and the fierce duets between the two men who love her are some of the most powerful of his career. Thanks to video, we are in the fortunate position of being able to compare a revival from Saint Petersburg in the original sets to a modern approach such as the 2016 Munich production by **Martin Kusej** that will occupy the larger portion of the class.

Verdi: *La forza del destino* (original version). St. Petersburg 1998 (DVD).
Galina Gorchakova (Leonora), Gegam Grigorian (Alvaro), Nikolai Putilin (Carlo), Grigory Karasev (Marchese); Valery Gergiev (c), Elisha Moshinsky (d)

Verdi: *La forza del destino* (revised version). Munich 2016 (DVD).
Anja Harteros (Leonora), Jonas Kaufmann (Alvaro), Ludovic Tézier (Carlo), Vitalij Kowaljow (Marchese &c); Asher Fisch (c), Martin Kusej (d)

Only the clips from the Munich production are listed below; examples from St. Petersburg given as a preview will on the whole be very brief. This synopsis only gives events affecting the major characters; see the website for a more complete one.

ACT ONE

[*Leonora awaits her lover Alvaro, whom her father Marchese Calatrava has forbidden her to marry on account of his mixed blood; he is from Peru, and of Inca heritage.*] Alvaro arrives and eventually persuades her to elope, but just as they are about to do so, the Marchese challenges him at gunpoint. Protesting that he has not dishonored Leonora, Alvaro throws down his own gun, which goes off, fatally wounding the older man, who curses his daughter then dies.

- **Overture, excerpt**
- **Act 1: love duet and closing**

ACT TWO

[*Months of years later. Leonora and Alvaro have become separated. Traveling in male disguise, she comes to a tavern, where she sees her brother Don Carlo, who has sworn to kill both her seducer and her.*] Fleeing to a monastery, she prays to the Virgin for protection.

- **Act 2: aria, "Madre, pietosa Vergine"**

[*Leonora asks the Padre Guardiano (Father Superior) for permission to live out her years in a hermit's cell on the grounds of the monastery.*] He summons a midnight conclave of the monks to prepare her for her solitary penance, and warns that anybody invading her sanctuary will be subject to eternal damnation.

- **Act 2: finale, "La vergine degli Angeli"**

ACT THREE

Carlo and Alvaro have both volunteered as officers in the Spanish army under false names; currently they are fighting the Austrians in southern Italy. Alvaro saves Carlo from bandits, and the two swear an oath of friendship. Shortly after this, Alvaro is wounded in a battle and, believing that he will die, gives Carlo a key to a sealed box that he says contains

materials that must not see the light of day. Carlo agrees to this, but something makes him suspect that Alvaro might be the man who killed his father.

- **Act 3: rescue, friendship duet, and battle sequence**

[*Carlo does indeed open the box, and discovers a portrait of his sister Leonora. Knowing now that his suspicions were justified, he waits until Alvaro recovers before challenging him to a duel. Although Alvaro is reluctant to fight, he turns on Carlo when he taunts him with his mixed blood. Their fight is broken up by other soldiers, but Alvaro decides to hide himself away by joining a monastery.*]

ACT FOUR

[*After years of searching, Carlo succeeds in tracking Alvaro down, finding him at the same monastery where Leonora had sought sanctuary years before, although neither man is aware of this.*] Once more Carlo challenges Alvaro to fight; once more Alvaro refuses; once more it is an insult about his heritage that spurs him to accept.

- **Act 4: duet, "Invano, Alvaro"**

The scene changes immediately to the outside of Leonora's cell. After a passionate prayer, she hears footsteps and hides. Alvaro has fatally wounded Carlo, who calls for the Hermit to hear his confession. Leonora refuses at first, but both men recognize her when she emerges, and the final blows of the tragedy fall quickly.

- **Act 4: aria, "Pace, pace, mio Dio"**
- **Act 4 finale**

For materials used in each class, see the instructor's website:

<http://www.brunyate.com/problem-operas/>

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