

About *Aïda* - Peter Gordon



When the Khedive of Egypt wanted to open his new opera house, whom else but to Giuseppe Verdi would the commission for an Egyptian opera go? The Franco-Prussian War unfortunately intervened and *Aïda*'s sets and costumes got stuck in Paris; *Rigoletto* was performed instead. But *Aïda* finally received its world premiere in Cairo on Christmas Eve in 1871.

La Scala followed in February; within two years *Aïda* was a global hit. Europe was then in the throes of Egyptomania. Obelisks were being set up in European capitals, mummies populated European museums and the Suez Canal had just opened. With its famous triumphal march and often over-the-top pageantry (elephants have been known to appear on stage, including twelve at the Cairo premiere), *Aïda* was everything that nineteenth-century Europe thought Egypt should be.

It used to be that you could remember the three most-performed operas by repeating “ABC” for *Aïda*, *La Bohème* and *Carmen*. Giuseppe Verdi's *Aïda* retains its audience appeal almost 150 years later, with audience figures that still rival Broadway blockbusters.

One of the most famous performances of *Aïda* was a 1950s-era Italian film from Cinecittà — the “Italian Hollywood” — in which Sophia Loren (lip-synching the great soprano Renata Tebaldi) got her big break. Director Jean-Louis Grinda, seeks to capture that cinematic spirit in this new production by placing the opera within a period film set, bringing the exotic into a more modern context as a reminder of its continuing relevance.

The Ethiopian princess *Aïda* — captured and enslaved — is in love with Radamès, a noble Egyptian warrior, and he with her. Radamès opens the opera with one of all of opera's biggest opening numbers, “*Celeste Aïda*” (*Heavenly Aïda*). Radamès has however also fatally caught the eye of the Pharaoh's daughter Amneris.

The music of the overture evokes the exoticism of ancient Egypt. As the chords fade, Abyssinia is invading Egypt — with an army led by *Aïda*'s father, the Ethiopian King Amonasro. Radamès has been chosen to lead the Egyptian armies against them; *Aïda* finds herself caught between her love of Radamès and her country. She catches herself saying “*Ritorna vincitor!*” — “return victorious!” — “... vincitor del padre mio...”, she then rebukes herself. She has called for Radamès to defeat her own father in battle. This, indeed, is the theme that plays out throughout the opera: where does patriotism sit in the pantheon of virtues?

Radamès is victorious — trumpets blare as processions and dancers cross the stage in the immediately recognizable *Marcia trionfale*. He is given Amneris's hand in reward and Amneris tortures *Aïda* with *her* victory. *Aïda*, meanwhile, is trapped between her father — captured in the battle — and Radamès. Amonasro uses Radamès's love to convince him to defect. “*O patria, quanto mi costi!*” she laments, “my country, how much you have cost me.”

Aïda, of course, isn't about Egypt at all, but rather the conflict between duties to state, family and the heart. Although the music sets the opera in a far-away place, Verdi manages to include triumph, passion, pathos, anguish, ruthlessness, deception, bigotry and redemption in unforgettable arias, duets and choruses, all within a single work. As do all great works of art, it asks questions for which there are no answers.

As is often the case in opera, the women come out of it better than the men. Radamès seems somewhat clueless about the way the world really works and the ruthless Amonasro is all too ready to manipulate those around him. Amneris at least finally realises her malevolent role and repents, albeit too late. *Aïda*, who has struggled with the impossible position that fate has put her in, follows her heart to the tomb once freed from her duty.

有關《阿伊達》 - 高博德

當埃及總督要委約一位作曲家為新歌劇院創作一齣作品時，威爾第實在是不二之選。可是，《阿伊達》的佈景和服裝因普法之戰滯留巴黎，最後開幕典禮上演了《弄臣》，而《阿伊達》在 1871 年平安夜才於開羅進行全球首演，翌年二月在米蘭斯卡拉歌劇院公演。

其後兩年，《阿伊達》風靡主全球。整個歐洲掀起一股埃及熱——方尖碑屏豎立在歐洲各首都；博物館放置木乃伊；蘇伊士大運河也啟用了。劇中著名的《凱旋進行曲》和盛大的禮儀場面（舞台上曾出現大象，開羅首演就使用了十二隻），令《阿伊達》近一百五十年後至今仍大受歡迎，觀眾人數媲美百老匯的長壽劇作。

民間流行一種講法，要說出最常演出的三部歌劇作品就是 ABC：A 指《阿伊達》*Aida*，B 指《波希米亞人》*La Bohème*，C 指《卡門》*Carmen*。

《阿伊達》其中一個最著名的演繹，是來自 1950 年代「意大利荷李活」奇尼奇塔的一部電影，當中蘇菲亞·羅蘭（雷納塔·泰巴爾迪幕後代唱）的演出矚目。導演格蘭達欲把電影的神韻放進這新製作中，把歌劇帶進一部舊電影的框架裡，劇中的異國風情會以較現代的手法交代，表達作品跨時代性。

被虜成奴的埃塞俄比亞公主阿伊達與埃及備受尊崇的軍官拉達梅斯相戀。拉達梅斯唱的《聖潔的阿伊達》是歌劇中最偉大的開場歌曲之一。此時，法老的女兒安奈莉絲同時也對拉達梅斯萌生愛意。

序曲的音樂令人聯想古埃及的異國情調。當最後的和弦開始消退時，埃塞俄比亞在阿伊達父親國王阿莫納斯羅的帶領下入侵埃及，拉達梅斯奉命率領埃及軍迎戰。阿伊達被迫在愛情與國家大義之間作出抉擇——她責備自己嘴裡念著「凱旋而歸」，因為這代表要拉達梅斯打敗自己的爸爸。而這也是貫穿整部歌劇的主題：愛國與愛情如何並存？

拉達梅斯凱旋歸來，將領和舞者列隊進場，嘹亮的喇叭聲響起為人熟識的《凱旋進行曲》。為嘉許拉達梅斯，他獲賜與安奈莉絲成婚。安奈莉絲「勝利」了，她要折磨阿伊達。另一方面，阿伊達處於被虜的父親和拉達梅斯之間。阿莫納斯羅要求女兒利用拉達梅斯的愛，教他在戰事中落敗，阿伊達悲痛不已：《我要為國家犧牲多少？》。

《阿伊達》其實不只是講述一個埃及故事，而是人面對國家、家庭及良知間的矛盾。雖然歌劇的背景在一個遙遠的國度，威爾第仍能成功地把勝利、激情、痛苦、憤怒、殘忍、欺騙、偏執和救贖等元素，演化成劇中令人難忘的詠嘆調、二重奏及合唱作品。像其他傑作一樣，此劇帶出一些沒有答案的問題。

跟很多其他歌劇一樣，女性所扮演的角色往往比男性突出。拉達梅斯好像有點不諳世情，而冷酷無情的阿莫納斯羅則肆意擺佈身邊的人。安奈莉絲最後對自己的惡行感到後悔，可惜為時已晚。命運令阿伊達痛苦掙扎，且陷入窘境，最後走入墓中，才獲得解脫。