

CONSERVATORIO
DI MILANO

«Potente, singolare e vastissimo... A me piace assai!»

LA FORZA DEL DESTINO

in our Library collection

December 1-7, 2024



Al verda



«Potente, singolare e vastissimo... A me piace assai!»

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The exhibition is curated by the **Library of Conservatory of Milan**
in collaboration with **Livio Aragona** and **Fabio Sartorelli**

December 1–7, 2024

Sala Verdi - Foyer

Texts by

Marta Crippa

Captions and text review by

Marta Cattoglio

CONSERVATORIO
DI MILANO

Conservatory of Milan
Academic Year, 2024/2025
Raffaello Vignali President
Massimiliano Baggio Director

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In copertina:

CARLO FERRARIO
Stage sketches for *La forza del destino*
Interior of the Convent of Our Lady of the Angels
Staged on 27 February 1869 at La Scala
Archivio Storico Ricordi, Milan

Let's celebrate five years of *Prima Diffusa* at the Milan Conservatory!

Richer than in previous years the programme of events that we intend to present this year for the Milan premiere of the La Scala season: as per tradition an exhibition curated by our Library, dedicated to the title opening, Verdi's *La forza del destino*; the presentation of a book, written by Andrea Sicco, in which the protagonist is Giulio Franzetti, violinist of the La Scala Orchestra; a conference dedicated to Luigi Nono, also discovering the «strong and constant poetic-musical ramifications that link him to Giuseppe Verdi»; the traditional conference for the presentation of the opera, on 7 December afternoon in the Sala Verdi, with Fabio Sartorelli, our history of music professor; then *La forza del destino* streamed live from La Scala, for the public who would like to join us again in our Verdi Concert Hall.

Once again, everything happens in the name of Verdi. After Puccini, a young student of the Milan Conservatory, protagonist for *Prima Diffusa* 2019; after the Verdi's *Macbeth* in 2021; Musorskij's *Boris Godunov* in 2022; after Verdi's *Don Carlo* in 2023; this year with «**Potente, singolare e vastissimo... A me piace assai!**» *La forza del destino* in our Library collection we will present the history of the opera through library's bibliographical resources, in collaboration with Archivio Storico Ricordi, Museo Teatrale alla Scala, Amisano©Teatro alla Scala. Library items will be shown: scores, librettos, transcriptions, historical reviews, photo postcards.

The exhibition opening will be in week of the premiere, but a preview will be reserved for the guests of the Annual Congress AEC, Association Européenne des Conservatoires, Académies de Musique et Musikhochschulen, attesting to the centrality of our conservatory not only in the City, but also in Europe and worldwide, in a network of collaborations with major institutions of artistic and musical education.

Raffaello Vignali
Conservatory of Milan President

Massimiliano Baggio
Conservatory of Milan Director



From St. Petersburg to Milan

After his 'prison years' – which ended with *Un ballo in maschera* in 1859 – Verdi worked on the composition of *La forza del destino* in 1861. The opera, in four acts, is his last collaboration with librettist Francesco Maria Piave and is inspired by the Spanish drama *Don Álvaro, ó La Fuerza del sino* by Ángel de Saavedra, Duke of Rivas (written between 1830 and 1833 and performed in Madrid in 1835) with an added scene from Friedrich Schiller's *Wallensteins Lager*, translated by Andrea Maffei. What Verdi probably knew was the version of the drama translated from the Spanish by F. Sanseverino in the Milanese edition, «coi tipi del dott. F. Vallardi', of 1850».

In the opera, the theme of the inexorability of fate is reflected through recurring symbols and musical motifs as well as in the tragic nature of the characters, each one haunted by an inescapable fate. Fatality is intertwined with a plot of love, revenge and redemption characterised by a rich gallery of characters and episodes (main and secondary, with the latter absolutely essential in the overall picture of the opera) and by the presence of several realistic scenes of a popular setting. As Massimo Mila has written «the specific quality of *La forza del destino*, which makes it significant in the panorama of Verdi's mature operas, is precisely the vivid intensity of collective life, the richness of the mass scenes, the presence of the people. [...] The episodic richness of the opera is not dispersive, but on the contrary responds to the purpose of immersing the characters within a real environment».

The opera was commissioned by the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg for the 1861-62 winter season; in December 1860, in fact, the tenor Enrico Tamberlick, commissioned by the theatre to send a request to the composer, wrote to him «[...] perhaps it would not be impossible to persuade you that you should add another gem to the splendid crown of your operas, which you are threatening to finish. As soon as this ray of hope dawned on me, I quickly spoke to the Director of these imperial theatres, Mr Sabouroff, who immediately authorised me to invite you as warmly as I could to preserve a spark of your genius for the Petersburg theatre». Once he had accepted the commission and chosen the literary source, Verdi wrote his impressions of the Spanish text to the French publisher Léon Escudier in August 1861: «The subject [...] is the *Forza del destino* by the Duke of Rivas. The drama is powerful, singular, and vast; I like it very much: I do not know if the public will find it as I do, but it is certain that it is something out of the ordinary. We will pass through Paris on our way to Petersburg...». He also wrote, again in August 1861, to his friend Andrea Maffei to ask for his permission to use a scene from a drama he had translated, Schiller's *The Field of Wallenstein*, which he intended to turn into the episode of the encampment near Velletri. Maffei answered: «You have chosen *La forza del Destino* as your theme. I have some distant reminiscences of this drama. [...] Your fine shrewdness will have made a most excellent choice for dramatic and musical effect, I have no doubt, and our Piave, who you have directed, will fully satisfy you. [...] If you find any verse in *Wallenstein* that can employ in the melodrama, use it as your own; there is no need for you to ask me». At the end of November, shortly before leaving for Russia, Verdi informed his Milanese publisher Tito Ricordi that the composition of the opera was complete, the last two acts remained to be put to the score and the «strumentazione» was missing, which he counted on completing during rehearsals at the harpsichord; unfortunately, due to the illness of the protagonist, Emma La Grua, the première was postponed until the following

1.
GIUSEPPE VERDI
La Forza del Destino,
reduction for voice and piano
by Luigi Truzzi, Milano,
R. Stabilimento Tito di G. Ricordi,
1862
[Shelfmark: SPART.1275]

year and was not staged until 10 November 1862, when it met with «resounding success» in «crowded theatres», as Verdi himself wrote to Léon Escudier. However, the «Gazzetta Musicale di Milano» also reported a certain dissent that emerged especially in the third performance, defined as a «demonstration in favour of the Russian nationalist school» (let us consider that it was precisely in the 1860s that meetings of young Russian musicians of the Group of Five began at Balakirev's home).

In the following years, the composer radically revised the score, replacing, for example, the original prelude with an impressive symphony; he believed, in fact, that the plot needed more dramatic coherence and that some episodes could be improved, especially for the finale, which in the first version envisaged the death on stage of Leonora and Don Carlo and the suicide of Don Álvaro; to Piave he wrote «we must think about the ending and a way to avoid so many deaths», but the librettist fell seriously ill and could not work on the revision of the text, for which Verdi, in agreement with the publisher Ricordi, turned to Antonio Ghislanzoni.

This new version premiered in Milan at La Scala – thus marking the composer's reconciliation with the Milanese theatre – on 27 February 1869 with an exceptional cast: Teresa Stolz (Leonora), Luigi Colonnese (Don Carlo di Vargas), Mario Tiberini (Don Alvaro), Ida Benza (Preziosilla), Marcel Junca (Padre Guardiano) and Giacomo Rota (Fra Melitone); the conductor was Eugenio Terziani,

2.

FRANCESCO MARIA PIAVE
[AND ANTONIO GHISLANZONI],
La Forza del Destino, four-act
opera to be performed
at the Regio Teatro della Scala,
Lent 1869, music by G. Verdi,
Milano, R. Stabilimento Ricordi,
1869
[Giorgio Cavallari Collection]





3.
QR CODE for
«Gazzetta Musicale di Milano»,
year XXIV, n. 9, 3rd March 1869
and n. 10, 7th March 1869
[Shelfmark: RIV.8]

4.
FRANCESCO PREDARI
Origine e vicende dei zingari,
Milano, Tipografia di
Paolo Lampato, 1841
[Shelfmark: BVIII.C.374]

the sets were designed by Carlo Ferrario and the costumes by Giovanni Pessina. It was an extraordinarily successful production. On 3 March 1869, the «Gazzetta Musicale di Milano» dedicated a long article to the premiere of the opera at La Scala that brought together various reviews published by other Milanese newspapers, followed four days later by a further essay of a 'monographic' nature.

After the first performance, the critics' reception was triumphant, in the articles collected by the «Gazzetta Musicale di Milano» on 3 March 1869, they spoke of a «triumph of art», «an excellent performance, impeccable in every respect», «immense fanaticism, indescribable. A wonderful performance, such as was perhaps never heard at La Scala. Ecstatic audiences. Verdi moved [by] such an ovation», «a true triumph. The performance surpassed, if it is possible, perfection... orchestra and choirs worked miracles», and again: «one of those great events that the history of Italian art records with infinite pleasure, handing down a glorious legacy to posterity».

The critic of the «Gazzetta Musicale di Milano» before analysing the composition in detail, act by act, summed up the essence of the opera with these words: «Variety and dramatic situations abound in this more than tragic poem, which the illustrious maestro Verdi has been able to brighten up somewhat, with felicitous comic undertones, grafted onto it, with the pleasant characters of the jovial and grumpy Friar Melitone and Trabuco, first a muleteer then a wandering pedlar; and most of all with the gaiety of the songs of the gypsy Preziosilla».



Danza delle Bayadères o Zingare dell'India.

Preziosilla and the gypsy scene

La forza del destino is one of the 19th century operas, not only by Giuseppe Verdi, in which gypsies enter the scene bringing a touch of exoticism and mystery; they are usually free, enigmatic figures, linked to a world of prophecies, magic, superstition and fatalism, elements that reflect the fascination of the times for all that is 'different', popular and connected to local folklore. Gypsies are presented as nomads living outside the conventions of society, in harmony with nature, accepting the inevitability of fate.

Among Verdi's operas, reference to *Il trovatore* and *La traviata* is inevitable. In *Il trovatore*, an opera of 1853 inspired – like *La forza del destino* – by a Spanish drama (*El trovador* by Antonio García Gutiérrez), the gypsy scene comes at the beginning of the second act with the Chorus of Gypsies *Vedi! le fosche notturne spoglie*. The music creates a lively and rhythmic atmosphere in which the life of the gypsy community, of which Azucena is a member, is presented at the forge. In *La traviata*, an opera of 1853 revised the following year (based on the drama *La dame aux camélias* by Alexandre Dumas' son) we find the gypsies again in the second act, dancing and singing to the melody of a popular song – *Noi siamo zingarelle* – revealing, in a lively, festive and colourful scene, their ability to read the future and entertain guests.

The most famous case, if we want to step outside the confines of Giuseppe Verdi's operas, is certainly *Carmen*, Georges Bizet's opéra-comique, which was staged only six years after the Milanese version *La forza del destino*. The protagonist herself is a gypsy and the opera is imbued with her rebellious and free spirit; in the gypsy scene of Act II, the exuberant gypsy song *Les tringles des sistres tintaient* enchants the audience in a whirlwind of music, castanets, dance and colour. *Carmen* embodies the stereotype of the beautiful, wild gypsy, free and sensual, charming and dangerous, who drags the soldier Don José with her to a tragic fate.

A central element of the gypsy narration on stage is the instinctive ability to grasp reality, shown in the divinatory skills of fortune tellers and fortune tellers. For example, Preziosilla in the second act of *La forza del destino* does not allow herself to be fooled by the student Don Carlos-Pereda, whose disguise she immediately guesses (*Non sei studente... | non dirò niente... | Ma, gnaffe, a me, | non se la fa*), predicting an inauspicious future for him (*Oh, tu miserrime | vicende hai...*). Also in the third act, when Preziosilla returns to the Velletri camp, she presents herself as a seer, singing a popular melody (*Venite all'indovina | ch'è giunta di lontano, | e puote a voi l'arcano | futuro decifrar. | Correte a lei d'intorno, | la mano le porgete, | le amanti apprenderete | se fide vi restar*).

In a letter from Giuseppe Verdi to De Sanctis dated 18 June 1869, concerning a possible performance of *La forza del destino* at the San Carlo in Naples, the composer emphasises the importance of two only apparently secondary characters in the opera, including the young gypsy girl: «Preziosilla and Melitone [...] those parts are very important, and in a certain respect the first ones in the opera». Preziosilla's role, therefore, although secondary with respect to the main protagonists (Leonora, Don Carlo and Don Alvaro), is fundamental, not only for the drama, but also to characterise the context, the setting, in which the characters move; the young gypsy embodies popular energy imbued with folklore, fatalism and irony and moves among the ranks of the soldiers and the people in the choral scenes that are so important in the overall economy of the opera. As Marcello Conati wrote, in *La forza del destino* «collateral episodes

5.

GIUSEPPE PALANTI
Costume sketches for
La forza del destino, Preziosilla
Staged on 19 March 1908
at La Scala
Museo Teatrale alla Scala, Milan



and incidental situations, apparently inessential to the central nucleus of the story and which Verdi would once have overlooked and eliminated in order to rush to the unravelling of the dramatic knot, here become the subject of drama. The tavern, the convent, the encampment, the sermon, the tarantella, the soup, everything turns out to be functional to the musical path of the action. The scene is populated with pilgrims, travellers, carters, friars, soldiers, peddlers, sutlers, recruits, beggars. It is transformed into a gallery of varied humanity in which secondary characters take prominence alongside the main ones. Verdi's theatre here tends towards a fullness of life in which the tragic does not exclude the comic, the humorous is interwoven with the religious, the grotesque creeps into the realistic».

6.
Ebe Stignani
Preziosilla in the 1943
production at La Scala
[Photo postcards from
the Valsolda collection]

7.
Gianna Pederzini
Preziosilla in the 1934
production at La Scala
[Photo postcards from
the Valsolda collection]



6



7

The first opera after the Unification of Italy

(text by Marta Cattoglio)

«Don't be surprised if you see me in Turin! Do you know why I'm here? Not to be a deputy. Others are struggling to be, I do everything possible not to be, but let's not talk of this», Verdi wrote to his friend Angelo Mariani on 18th January 1861. Again on 26th January of the same year: I was in Turin, as you may have heard from my wife, and perhaps I made a trip to no avail. Maybe I will be a Member of Parliament (heaven forbid that it would be a disgrace for me) but not for long, because in a few months I will give my good resignation, and I said this to Cavour [...].»

This is how Verdi told the story to Francesco Maria Piave in a letter four years later. Cavour had succeeded in persuading Verdi, against his will, to run for the first national parliament. Verdi accepted, but on condition that he could resign «until the solemn day when Rome [will be proclaimed] as capital of Italy».

«St. Agata, on February 4th, 1865. How strange it is that you ask me about news and documents about my public and parliamentary life?... My parliamentary life does not exist. I am a member of Parliament, it is true, but almost myself do not know why and how. At the time of the elections I was proposed and refused; when I knew it, somehow, the Count of Cavour wrote to me urging me to accept. Embarrassed to answer this letter (which I think you have read), I decided to go to Turin. I presented myself to the Count on a day in December, at five o'clock in the morning, with 12 or 14 degrees of cold (and you will be surprised since you are such an idler) and after a long enough interview, I ended up accepting the condition that after some months I would give my resignation. I was elected, and attended the Chamber in the early days, until the solemn day when Rome was proclaimed capital of Italy. Given the vote I approached the Count, and said:

- Now it's time for me to go.
- No, - he replied - we are going to Rome first.
- Are we going?
- Yes.
- When?
- Oh when, when! ... Hurry.

These were his last words for me! He died a few weeks later!! ... I left for Russia, came to London, then to Paris. Returned to Russia, went to Madrid, made a trip to Andalusia, and finally stayed in Paris for several months on business.

For two long years I was absent from the Chamber, and then I did not see it very often. Several times I went to give in my resignation, but some hitch was always came up to prevent it, and I am still a parliamentarian, against all my desires, against all my wishes, without having any inclination, or attitude, or talent.

That's all there is to it. If I wanted, or had to write my biography as a member of the Parliament, there would be nothing to do but print these words in the middle of a blank sheet, in large letters: there are not really 450 but 449 members of parliament because Verdi is not active».

In the midst of these events, in which a fervent patriotic, unitary and national feeling permeated Italy, the letter from the tenor Enrico Tamberlick arrived at Sant'Agata for the commission of *La forza del destino* for the Imperial Theatre of Saint Petersburg. The assignment for an opera was the right opportunity for Giuseppe Verdi to leave behind that forced experience as a parliamentarian, especially after the death of Count Cavour. Verdi also accepted thanks to the insistence of his wife Giuseppina Strepponi, who would be with him during the long trip to Russia.

The opera was born in a particularly delicate period for the political history of Italy and its unity. Verdi's soul was imbued with the Risorgimento and patriotic ideals, themes that he managed to transfer also into the opera librettos, thanks to the frequent attendance of theatres and salons in Milan, the most famous of which was undoubtedly that of Clara Carrara-Spinelli and her husband Andrea Maffei, a Milanese employee of the Judicial Office, but above all a poet, librettist and great translator. The salon was frequented by the most prominent figures of the cultural and political environment in Milan and Italy, including Alessandro Manzoni, Carlo Tenca, Francesco Hayez, Arrigo Boito and Giuseppe Verdi. The latter was introduced in the Maffei salon after the great success of *Nabucco*, performed at La Scala in 1842.

Having become a regular guest of the countess, the Maestro found himself part of a group that alternated games of cards until dawn with heated political, literary and artistic discussions. From 1848 to 1859, in addition to preserving the character of a cultured and elegant meeting place, the Maffei drawing room also assumed a strong liberal color, and was a lively hotbed of agitation for the independence of Italy. Arrigo Boito was also a frequent visitor to the Salotto together with Franco Faccio, a great friend and fellow student at the Milan Conservatoire, and Emilio Praga, an exponent of the scapigliatura. Boito e Faccio are the composers of *Le sorelle d'Italia* (1861), a mystery in two parts with prologue for solos, choir and orchestra performed on the occasion of the Academies of the School Year 1860–1861; it is an exaltation for the independence of Italy that also looks at the “sister” nations of Hungary, Poland and Greece, European countries that were still in conditions of foreign domination. There are references to musical culture and traditions. Boito and Faccio, eager to go to Paris, asked Clara Maffei to be introduced to Giuseppe Verdi, who was in the French capital at that time. Verdi chose Arrigo Boito to write the poetic text of the *Inno delle Nazioni* (1862), a composition commissioned for the London Universal Exhibition; the text deals with the themes of sister nations united by feelings of freedom, brotherhood and unity. A look at the frontispiece, by the engraver Roberto Focosi, reveals the representation of nations as three women in statuesque positions, an iconography that will also be found in other contexts for much of the nineteenth century, as for example in the title page of the song *Viva l'Italia!*, a composition by Paolo Giorza published by Francesco Lucca in 1861, the title page designed by the engraver Cassani presents us with a woman posing as a statue with her breasts uncovered and wielding a sword. An image that unambiguously refers to Francesco Hayez and his famous *Meditation*. The 1850 version was exhibited in Brera bearing the title *La meditazione sopra l'antico e il nuovo testamento*. Here the painter works a clever religious disguise of the patriotic theme by converting the back of the Bible into [Sto]ria d'Italia. The painting highlights the sensuality of the female figure associated with the expression of grief and loneliness, a metaphor for the Risorgimento's disappointment. A masterpiece that Hayez completed, not by chance, at the invitation of Andrea Maffei.

8.

SAVERIO MERCADANTE
Inno a Vittorio Emanuele
Re d'Italia, reduced for military
band by Gaetano Cortellini,
Milano, F. Lucca, 1861
[Shelfmark: A.45.25.13]

Next pages

9.

PAOLO GIORZA
Viva l'Italia!, op. 110, march for
piano on popular Italian motifs,
Milano, F. Lucca, 1861
[Shelfmark: 1.A.255.44]

10.

FRANCESCO HAYEZ
Meditation, 1850
Commissioned by Andrea Maffei
(private collection)
Photo by Wikimedia Commons

INNO A VITTORIO EMMANUELE II
RE D'ITALIA

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Sol 2
Capitolo 8

MUSICA DEL MAESTRO
SAVERIO MERCADANTE
RIDOTTO PER BANDA MILITARE
DA
GAETANO CORTELLINI
Capomusica del 46. Reggimento Fanteria.
MILANO, F. LUCCA.

Prop. dell'Editore.

12458 Fr. 6 —

Venezia, Tratelli Durci.

Chiasso, Esterpe Tiesini.

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DI MUSICA

VIVA L'ITALIA!

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MILANO

MARCIA
per Piano
PIANOFORTE
SOPRA MOTIVI POPOLARI ITALIANI
DI PAOLO GIORZA OP. 110

in Parigi ecc.
1762 R. 2

Proprietà dell'Editore
Fratelli Bocca
Chiosso, Entrepôt, Firenze.



20th-Century opera singers

The bibliographic exhibition concludes with a collection of photographic postcards, often autographed by the performers, relating to performances of La Scala's *La forza del destino* in the 20th century, from the Fondo Valsolda. Donated to the Conservatorio G. Verdi Library in Milan in the spring of 2022 – by his children Ave and Arrigo – the Fondo Valsolda contains the personal library of Elio Valsolda (Abbiategrasso, 22 December 1921 – Corsico, 3 February 2009). It consists of a collection of books on musical subjects, records, opera librettos, albums of newspaper cuttings relating to reviews of concerts and opera performances and albums with photo postcards of singers (many of them with dedications and autographs of the performers). The section dedicated to photographic postcards, subdivided and arranged into 13 albums, offers an ex-



11.

Gina Cigna
Donna Leonora in the 1940
production at La Scala
[Photo postcards from the
Valsolda collection]

11

traordinary source for delving into the history of costume, artistic trends and theatre performances of the 20th century. Within this precious collection are countless images that testify to the variety and richness of the Milanese scene and the centrality of La Scala in the artistic and cultural life of the city. Each postcard photographs not only the most acclaimed performers of the time, but also captures expressions, costumes and sometimes sets, carefully documenting the evolution of stage forms and style. Among the faces portrayed, the protagonists of an era emerge, figures who marked the collective imagination through memorable performances. This collection, therefore, not only has great documentary value, but offers a privileged vantage point for reflecting on the transformations that have taken place in the world of entertainment and in the tastes of the audiences.



12.
Carmelo Maugeri
Fra Melitone in the 1943
production at La Scala
[Photo postcards from
the Valsolda collection]

Thanks to the Teatro alla Scala
for the reproduction of the
Valsolda photo albums
Amisano@Teatro alla Scala

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13.
*Un secolo di scenografia
alla Scala*, presentation
by Giuseppe Adami, Milano,
Emilio Bestetti Edizioni d'Arte,
1945
EDOARDO MARCHIORO
Valle tra rupi inaccessibili, 1928
production at La Scala
[Shelfmark: TEATRI.E.5]









