



# Verdi's Aida: A Record of the Life of the Opera On and Off the Stage

*Clyde T. McCants*

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Every opera tells a story, but sometimes the creation of an opera makes a pretty fascinating tale on its own. If Verdi's *Aida* is the quintessential opera, it is also an amazing piece of musical history. This work examines the origin, composition, premiere, recording history, and consistent popularity of one of Verdi's greatest works.

In the late 1860s, Ismail Pasha, Khedive (viceroy) of Egypt, asked Verdi to compose a work to premiere in the Cairo Opera House. Although Verdi was uninterested in the project at first, persistence on the part of the Khedive as well as a tempting plot line written by Mariette Bey, one of the day's leading Egyptologists, drew him in. To this day, however, much mystery still surrounds the opera's inception. This book explores that mystery, highlights the genius of *Aida's* plot and characters, and traces the process through which Verdi and his librettist Ghislanzoni shaped the lyrics. It also considers *Aida's* spread from Cairo to the rest of the world, discussing aspects of its unique and interesting staging.

Following this history, the book provides a critical survey of recordings of *Aida*, including 33 of the entire opera and three abridged versions. The final chapter discusses film and video presentations. Appendices offer a discography of complete recordings, a videography of versions generally available and an annotated guide to further sources.

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