

La Forza del Destino, Overture **Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)**

There are some interesting and amusing anecdotes worth sharing about Verdi's immense popularity, not only as an international superstar composer, but as a prominent personage in Italy, where he reluctantly accepted his election to parliament in 1860 two years before writing his opera *La Forza del Destino*. A particularly jocund account relates the experience of a music student visiting a major Italian city and asking the traffic policeman a question that seemed to puzzle him. "Scusi...you have Via Puccini, Via Vivaldi, Via Rossini, Via Palestrina, Via Scarlatti...Where is Via Verdi?" To which question the policeman is supposed to have solemnly straightened, and crisply saluting said "Piazza!!" Then there is the popularity of VERDI, which during the monarchist resistance was scrawled in letters ten feet high throughout town. It spelt Vittorio Emmanuel Re D'Italia. Even without the sensationalism that was to draw itself to Verdi's earthly life, his immortal contribution is, in my view, comparable with Bach. He wrote in a specific style and so utterly mastered, exalted and exhausted it that it is an entire period in historical perception embodied in one person.

Verdi brought to his operas an orchestral fury that stylistically infuriated his critics but was just the thing for the drama. The Boston Evening Transcript, March 27th 1882 recorded, "when Verdi sees a strong dramatic situation, he rushes straight into the thick of it like a mad bull". Intended as invective, it may appropriately describe the 'new' drama that he had brought to opera houses, and that had brought patrons to their feet. He was also accused of impropriety of language, crude colors and the inability to spin a melody...! These were, by all accounts, French reports from Paris. They may have been right about the crude colors and impropriety...that's entertainment!!! Anyone tracing the artistic development of motion pictures in the 20th century would understand the need for public appeal. Film is but a modern version of opera, in its artistic form and in its intended 'reflex-action' viewing. As to the quip about melodies and impropriety I refer the reader to the Manzoni Requiem.

In the case of a predominantly operatic composer - for a romping musical "good time", whilst not entirely interested in the whole opera, why not raid the overtures as one frequently hears done in the case of Rossini? The truth is that Verdi's overtures are not self-contained, formal patterns that sit by themselves. They are intrinsically involved in the drama to come by tempo, mood and position. The overture to *La Forza del Destino* is an exception and provides us with a free-standing capsule of the best of Verdi. As the three blows of fate that open the score and pervade the work shift through extraordinary melodies, shimmering timbres, lofty ideals and that irresistible brute drama for the

common man, I am tempted to pick up my spray paint and find a wall big enough for the inscription VERDI.