GIUSEPPE VERDI
Born October 9, 1813, Roncole, near Busseto, Italy.
Died January 27, 1901, Milan, Italy.

Overture to *La forza del destino*

Early in his career, Verdi became the most talked-about composer in Italy. By the end of his long and astonishingly productive life, he was the most beloved composer in the world. His rise was swift—after a late start and the failure of his first two operas—and relatively free from major setbacks (although he never understood why his beloved *Macbeth* didn’t catch on). And the range of his life couldn’t have been greater—from his childhood in a dirt-floored house in Roncole (more of a crossroads than a village) to a retirement marked by the kind of prestige, wealth, and international fame few composers ever enjoy. When he died in 1901 at the age of eighty-seven, crowds jammed the streets of Milan to catch a glimpse of the funeral procession, and at one point spectators spontaneously broke into “Va, pensiero,” the great chorus from *Nabucco*—his big hit tune from nearly a half century before.

Of his more than two dozen operas, from *Oberto* to *Falstaff*—spanning fifty-four years and including some of the most beloved works ever staged—none has a more rousing or popular overture than *La forza del destino*. When it was first performed in 1862, the opera opened with a modest and conventional prelude, a device that had often served Verdi well in the past. *La forza del destino*, however, is one of a handful of operas that Verdi later extensively reworked, and when he revised the score in 1869, he replaced the prelude with this magnificent full-scale overture. It offers a preview of the opera’s highlights, from the stirring “destiny” motive to Leonora’s soaring prayer, but it is shaped and paced with such skill and ingenuity that it not only sharpens our appetite for the complete opera, but also stands perfectly on its own in the concert hall.
THREE ARIAS

GIUSEPPE VERDI

Tacea la notte placida . . . Di tale amor
FROM IL TROVATORE

GIACOMO PUCCINI

Born December 22, 1858, Lucca, Italy.
Died November 29, 1924, Brussels, Belgium.

Vissi d’arte FROM TOSCA

FRANCESCO CILEA

Born July 23, 1866, Palmi, Reggio Calabria, Italy.
Died November 20, 1950, Varazze, near Savona, Italy.

Ecco: respiro appena. Io son l’umile
ancella FROM ADRIANA LECOUREUR

In the Italian-opera-mad second half of the nineteenth
century, Verdi was every soprano’s dream com-
poser—one who adored the female singing voice (he
married a soprano, after all), knew how to write for it, and
had a peerless ability to turn out grand and unforgettable
melodies. Leonora’s great entrance aria from act I of IL TRO-
VATORE (The troubadour) is one of Verdi’s most celebrated
scenes. The opening portion of the aria, “Tacea la notte
placida,” begins with a lovely, quintessential Verdian theme
that blossoms and rises, moving from minor to major, as
Leonora describes how her mysterious lover has returned
as a troubadour to serenade her. In the fiery, extravagantly
ornamented cabaletta that follows—the brilliant fireworks
demanded by the conventions of the time—she swears
that she would rather die than lose him.

At the end of the century, a number of young composers
staked their claim on Verdi’s territory. Eventually the
logical heir seemed to be Giacomo Puccini, whose MANON
LESCAUT, his third opera and his first triumph, premiered
in Turin in February 1893, just one week before Verdi’s
last opera, FAUST, opened at La Scala. Tosca was Puccini’s
first big overnight sensation, playing to packed houses in
Rome, Milan, Buenos Aires, and London all in the first six
months of 1900. “Tacea la notte placida” is a love song for the title character, a singer, but what audiences really love is the great test of love in Tosca’s love triangle: does the woman who sings it love the man she is supposed to have regretted and who she thought it held for her husband, or the new lover she is in all of opera.

Francesco Cilea, the Italian opera composer, was the
third of these young composers to rise, with 1900’s
ECCO: RESPIRO APPENA. IO SON L’UMILE ANCEL-
LIA FROM ADRIANA LECOUREUR.

FAR HINTS AT THE P PLEASURES OF DAILY LIFE, BOL
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months of 1900. There is just one true aria for the title character; herself a celebrated singer; but what an aria it is: “Vissi d’arte” is the great testimonial to art and life that Tosca sings in act 2, at the peak of this love-triangle drama. Although Puccini is said to have regretted writing the aria because he thought it held up the action, it quickly became one of the most beloved numbers in all of opera.

Francesco Cilea, another promising Italian opera composer, struck box office gold just once, with Adriana Lecouvreur, which premiered in 1902, midway between Puccini’s Tosco and Madame Butterfly. Based on a story by Eugène Scribe, who had collaborated with both Rossini and Verdi, Adriana Lecouvreur is a classic of the high-voltage verismo brand of opera that flourished around the turn of the century. In her signature act 1 aria, Adriana, a famous actress with the Comédie-Française, explains that she is simply the poet’s handmaid.

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"Tacea la notte placida... Di tale amor from Il trovatore"

Tacea la notte placida e Bella in ciel sereno
La luna il viso argentee mostrava lieto e pieno...
Quando suonar per l’aere, infino allor si muto,
Dolci s’udirlo e feliili gli accordi d’un liuto,
E versi melanconici e versi lirici
Un trovatore cantò.
Versi di prece ed umile
Quel d’uom che prega l’Iddio
In quella ripetesi
Un nome... Il nome mio!...
Corsi al veron sollecita...
Egli era! Egli era dessol!...
Gia provar che agli’ angeli
Solo è provare concesso!...
Al core, al guardo estatico
La terra un ciel sembro!

Di tale amor che dirsi
Mal può dalla parola,
D’amor che intendo io sola,
Il core s’inebbriò!
Il mio destino compiersi
Non può che a lui d’approso...
S’io non vivrò per esso,
Per esso io morirò!

The serene night was silent and beautiful in the calm sky; the moon happily revealed its full and silvery face... When resounding in the air, until then so quiet, sweet and sad were heard the sounds of a lute, and a troubadour sang melancholy verses, verses beseeching and humble, like a man praying to God: and in them was repeated a name, my name!...

I ran eagerly to the balcony... There he was, it was he!... I felt a joy that only the angels are allowed to feel... To my heart, my ecstatic gaze, the earth seemed like heaven!

A love that can hardly be put into words, a love that only I can understand, such a love has filled my heart! My destiny will be fulfilled only at his side... I will live only for him, if not, I will die for him!

(Please turn the page quietly).
Vissi d'arte from *Tosca*

Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore,  
non feci mai male ad anima viva!  
Con man furtiva  
quante miserie conobbi, aiutai.  
Sempre con fè sincera,  
là mia preghiera  
ai santi tabernacoli sali.  
Sempre con fè sincera  
diedi fiori agli'altar:  
Nell'ora del dolore  
perchè, perchè, Signore,  
perchè me ne rimuveri così?  
Diedi gioielli della Madonna al manto,  
e diedi il canto  
agli astri, al ciel,  
che ne ridean più belli.  
Nell'ora del dolor  
perchè, perchè, Signor;  
ah, perchè me ne rimuveri così?

I lived for art, I lived for love,  
I never harmed a living soul!  
With a secret hand  
I relieved as many misfortunes as I knew of.  
Always with true faith,  
my prayer  
rose to the holy shrines.  
Always with true faith,  
I gave flowers to the altar.  
In the hour of grief  
why, why, O Lord,  
why do you reward me thus?  
I gave jewels for the Madonna's mantle,  
and I gave my song  
to the stars, to heaven,  
which smiled with more beauty.  
In the hour of grief  
why, why, O Lord,  
ah, why do you reward me thus?

Ecco: respiro appena. Io son l'umile ancella from *Adriana Lecouvreur*

Ecco: respiro appena.  
Io son l'umile ancella  
del Genio Creatore;  
ei m'offre la favella,  
io la diffondo ai cor.  
Del verso io son l'accento,  
l'eco del dramma uman,  
il fragile strumento  
vassallo della man.  
Mite, gioconda, atroce,  
mi chiamo Fedeltà:  
un soffio è la mia voce,  
che al novo di morrà.

See: I simply breathe.  
I am the humble maid  
of the creator:  
He gives me speech,  
which I impart to the heart of man.  
I am the accent of the verse,  
the echo of human drama,  
the fragile instrument,  
servant to the hand.  
Gentle, merry, cruel by turn,  
I am named Fidelity:  
My voice is but a whisper  
that tomorrow will die.