



## Giuseppe Verdi San Diego Opera: Aida

### La recensione



Carlo Ventre  
Photo by Cory Weaver,  
2008



Indra Thomas  
Photo by Cory Weaver,  
2008

Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida* provides a sumptuous array of operatic delicacies with its combination of warring kings, heroic soldiers, secret lovers, romantic jealousy, patriotism tainted by treason, and sacrifice in the name of love against a backdrop of the pageantry and ritual of ancient Egypt. First performed in Cairo in 1871, *Aida* has consistently been among the best-known and most performed works in opera houses around the world.

San Diego Opera premiered this *Aida* in 1996, designing and building the sets that were used again in this production. The sets are reasonably attractive, although the use of an immense plain grayish sky as the background during the first two acts gave the impression that the characters were acting in front of a featureless white wall. The austere dryness of the North African deserts permeates the elements of both the story and the characters' desperation, but the stage demands somewhat more definition. Accordingly, it would have been nice to have more variety of elements during the Triumphant March.

*Aida* symbolizes all that is great in Italian Grand Opera: stirring music, a large cast, spectacular visual design, and lavish ballets. It is a story of doomed lovers surrounded by the drama of war, patriotic duty, and the jealousy of a spurned romantic rival. In this performance, the choice was for the forcefulness of the drama to displace the poignancy of the love story. There seemed to be a contest between the tenor and the soprano as to who could sing louder; he won. The romance also suffered in that there was not much chemistry between *Aida* and *Radames*; their voices did not blend well and their characters seemed cordial, rather than genuinely affectionate, toward one another.

American soprano **Indra Thomas**, in the title role, has a big voice that rings out with confident strength. She floats her high notes, but there is a lack of connection between the tenderness of the piano and the flow of the phrase and she often cuts short the soft, lilting notes. For instance, in "O patria mia" she tried to be emotionally moving, but she blunted the high note at the end, resulting in a pleasant experience that could have been an enthralling one.

**Carlo Ventre** performed the role of *Radames*. The Uruguayan tenor has a pleasant voice, with a nice baritone timbre that supports his rich tone. His "Celeste Aida" was powerful, but lacking in tenderness and the final high note was pushed and too loud. Ventre is overly-concerned with being dramatic and falls short in lyric passages. Yes, *Radames* is a warrior, but he is also deeply in love with *Aida* and one would hope for that warmth to come through. The tomb scene came out emotionally flat; no tears were produced by either the performers or the audience during the doomed couple's last duet, "O terra, addio."

### La locandina

Data dello spettacolo:  
12/04/2008

<b>Aida</b>	Indra Thomas
<b>Radames</b>	Carlo Ventre
<b>Amneris</b>	Mariana Pentcheva
<b>Amonasro</b>	Mark Rucker
<b>King of Egypt</b>	José Gallisa
<b>Ramfis</b>	Reinhard Hagen
<b>Priestess</b>	Priti Gandhi
<b>Messenger</b>	Kenneth Morris
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<b>Conductor</b>	Valéry Ryvkin
<b>Director</b>	Garnett Bruce
<b>Choreographer</b>	Kenneth von Heidecke
<b>Chorus Master</b>	Timothy Todd Simmons
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	<b>San Diego Symphony Orchestra</b>
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	<b>San Diego Opera Chorus</b>



Mariana Pentcheva  
Photo by Cory Weaver,  
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Bulgarian mezzo-soprano **Mariana Pentcheva's** Amneris started the evening with a wobbly tone that, fortunately, smoothed out as the night went on. She has an impressive chest voice that chillingly conveyed the manipulative power of this Egyptian princess who was determined to have things her way, no matter the cost. She threw herself with gusto into pleading for Radames's life and convincingly collapsed in despair when he was sent to his death.

**José Gallisa** as Amneris's father, the King of Egypt, delivered some nice phrases and moments. However, his delivery was rather dry, creating an uninteresting character overall. The other King of the opera, Amonasro, was in good voice and he fully embodied the role. **Mark Rucker's** accomplished vocal technique allowed for clarity of diction so that his performance was all the more powerful and commanding. His acting was most effective; subtle gestures fleshed out his personality, making him the most authentic of the evening.



A scene from the Triumphal  
March  
Photo by Cory Weaver,  
2008

**Reinhard Hagen** was effective in carrying the authoritative stature of the High Priest Ramfis. His voice matched the physical demeanor of this character, resulting in a man of supreme power who takes his work quite seriously. Two minor characters shone in their clarity and lightness of tone, Kenneth Morris's Messenger and **Priti Gandhi's** Priestess. Both voices carried through the house with ease; one hopes to see and hear more of them in the future.

The chorus literally fills the stage in several scenes of this opera and their movements were always well-coordinated by **Timothy Todd Simmons**. Their singing was robust and competent. The six trumpet players in the Triumphal scene of Act II performed very well, providing crisp playing, resonance, and rhythm.



Mark Rucker  
Photo by Cory Weaver,  
2008

This production had a ballet during the ritual at the Temple of Ptah in Act I, in which the symmetry of the group's actions was entirely appropriate in the ritualized atmosphere. The Act II ballet in Amneris's chamber was sweetly sensual without being heavy-handed. But during the Triumphal March, **Kenneth von Heidecke's** choreography tended toward redundancy. Perhaps somewhat fewer dancers in order to accommodate more soloists would have been more compelling than a group parroting each other's actions. The one featured dancer was the man who made a stunning entrance by leaping in a perfectly executed side split over the row of female dancers. His pirouettes and jetés were brilliant, thrilling to see.

**Garnett Bruce's** direction was traditional, to the point of stiffness at times. The characters' actions were somewhat elementary, often coming across as either wooden or melodramatic. The orchestra, under the direction of **Valéry Ryvkin** was uneven, sometime coarse in its execution. After a rough beginning, the sound leveled out, but the nuances embedded in Verdi's score were smoothed over and virtually unnoticed in the forceful presentation of this opera.

[Leggi la versione in italiano \(trad. di Paolo Bullo\)](#)

**Olga Hirsch**



Carlo Ventre e Indra  
Thomas  
Photo by Cory Weaver,  
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