

**Verdi's *La forza del destino* - A survey of the studio and selected live recordings**  
by Ralph Moore

Despite its musical quality, variety and sophistication, *La forza del destino* is something of an Ugly Duckling among Verdi's mature works, and it is for that reason that I did not survey it when I previously covered most of Verdi's major and most popular operas. It suffers from a sprawling structure whereby succeeding scenes can seem disjointed, some peculiar motivation, an excess of disguise, an uncertain tone resulting from an uneasy admixture of the tragic and the would-be comical, and the presence of two characters with whom, for different reasons, it is difficult to empathise. Don Carlo suffers from a pathological obsession with revenge resulting in his stabbing his own sister as an "honour killing"; his implacable bloodlust is both bizarre and deeply repugnant, while Preziosilla must be one of the most vapid and irritating cheerleaders in opera. "Rataplan, rataplan" – rum-ti-tum on the drum, indeed; it takes a special singer to transcend the banality of her music but it can be done. Although it is just about possible to argue that guilt and shame are at the root of their behaviour, it is mostly inexplicable to modern audiences that Alvaro and Leonora separate after her father's accidental death and never again try to reunite until they meet again by chance – or fate - in the last scene set five years later. Verdi attempts to lighten the relentlessly grim mood by the inclusion of a supposedly comic character in Fra Melitone who often isn't very funny – and what is the point of Trabuco, a superfluous peddler? Finally, what the heck is an Incan prince doing in Seville, anyway?

While fully aware of its failings, I have returned to *La forza del destino* because it contains some marvellous music and the kinds of emotional turmoil and dramatic confrontation which lie at the heart of opera. "O tu che in seno" is probably my favourite Verdi tenor aria; the heroine's arias, too, are show-stoppers and the three duets between the duelling Carlo and Alvaro have for good reason long been concert favourites. Even the overture introducing the three-note Fate Motif, which Verdi extended subsequent to the opera's premiere in Russia in 1862 to replace the short, original prelude, is highly memorable and dramatic – the Verdian equivalent of the opening phrase of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony or Mahler's drum thwack in the Tenth.

It was initially one of the most popular of Verdi's later period works but increasingly fell out of favour until its revival in the 1950s. It is now fairly regularly performed, but is not seen on stage as often as many of its predecessors and successors and has received surprisingly few studio recordings; the last recording of the revised version was made as long ago as 1986. It has seven major roles for all the voice types, including two for good basses and one each for baritone and bass-baritone. After its 1862 premiere in Russia, Verdi revised it quite extensively over the next few years, and it is the 1869 La Scala performance which is invariably heard today, although in 1981 John Matheson conducted a live performance of the 1862 version which has been released on the Opera Rara label, and Gergiev recorded that original version with Mariinsky Theatre forces in 1995 (see both below).

It has long been a favoured vehicle for star singers: Carlo Bergonzi especially favoured the lead role in the 60's and 70's and probably performed Alvaro more than any other major tenor, but Del Monaco, Corelli, Vickers, Domingo and Carreras also sang it very successfully. Interestingly, Pavarotti avoided it, perhaps because Alvaro is a very heavy role for a lyric tenor but also because he was superstitious and the opera had gradually acquired a reputation for conferring bad luck upon its performers. Its notoriety was reinforced by events such as Leonard Warren's death on stage from heart failure while singing Carlo, aged only 48. Famous sopranos have also excelled in the role of Leonora, especially Zinka Milanov, Renata Tebaldi, Leontyne Price and Martina Arroyo and the best baritones all gravitate towards Don Carlo because despite being a frightful prig, he has some sublime music to sing.

Its title is usually rendered into English as "The Force of Destiny". It should perhaps be more properly translated as "The Power of Fate" but that no longer sounds right to ears habituated to the more euphonious, traditional version and, in any case, the whole sorry mess seems to result largely more from what we'd simply call bad luck - and perhaps stupidity. The ramifications of the plot do indeed

spring more from random events and accidents than the usual “tragic flaw”: the irresistible force of love, the accidental killing of the Marquis of Calatrava, the co-incidence whereby Carlos and Alvaro become friends before the latter's true identity is revealed to the former; in the end, under scrutiny it conforms to the common accusation that opera plots are mostly silly.

I review below all eleven studio recordings available on CD plus five live recordings, four of which are mono. Just two of the sixteen are the 1862 version. While they are undeniably interesting and have intrinsic merit, listening to them only confirms the sense and superiority of Verdi's revisions.

### The Recordings

**Gino Marinuzzi – 1941** (mono) Cetra; Warner Fonit; Naxos; Arkadia, Frequenz; Lyrica Orchestra & Chorus - EIAR Torino

Il Marchese di Calatrava - Ernesto Dominici  
Leonora di Vargas - Maria Caniglia  
Don Carlo - Carlo Tagliabue  
Don Alvaro - Galliano Masini  
Preziosilla - Ebe Stignani  
Fra Melitone - Saturno Meletti  
Curra - Liana Avogardo  
Padre Guardiano - Tancredi Pasero  
Mastro Trabuco - Giuseppe Nessi  
Un Chirurgo - Ernesto Dominici  
Un Alcalde - Dario Caselli

This famous, wartime vintage set has already been exhaustively and expertly reviewed by two MusicWeb colleagues ([review](#) ~ [review](#)), so any further, more extensive commentary on my part would be largely superfluous. The old-school singing is admirable; the cast includes half a dozen more famous singers, especially the veteran Tancredi Pasero who reminds us of how the role of Padre Guardiano should be sung. Meletti is probably the best Fra Melitone on record, as he is clearly enjoying the role and manages to make it entertaining for us, too. Stignani was always a class act and, like Meletti, makes the best of a tricky part. Marinuzzi, in his sole recording, demonstrates that he knows just what to do with the score.

I must stress, however, that no matter how good the playing, singing and conducting are – and they are all superlative – and how skilful the remastering is, we are dealing with poor, historical sound: some hiss, swish and crackle inevitably remain, as do some edge and distortion on the voices – although in the case of Caniglia, that was a flaw as much inherent in the top of her voice as the recording. Masini, too, has a hard, penetrating, spinto tenor so listening to the pair of them is rarely restful. It should be noted too, that this recording has been subjected to the cuts standard for the era, including, most damagingly, a big one in Act 3, in the duet for Alvaro and Carlo beginning “Sleale”. The editing fault noted by Calvin M Goodwin remains, too. As such, this is no substitute for a good stereo recording, but can be only a supplement.

**Bruno Walter – 1943** (live; mono) Naxos; Arkadia; AS Orchestra & Chorus - Metropolitan Opera

Il Marchese di Calatrava - Louis D' Angelo  
Leonora di Vargas - Stella Roman  
Don Carlo - Lawrence Tibbett  
Don Alvaro - Frederick Jagel  
Preziosilla - Irra Petina

Fra Melitone - Salvatore Baccaloni  
Curra - Thelma Votipka  
Padre Guardiano - Ezio Pinza  
Mastro Trabuco - Alessio De Paolis  
Un Chirurgo - John Gurney  
Un Alcalde - Lorenzo Alvary

Obviously a live, mono recording from as early as 1943 with *strette* shortened, the usual cuts in Carlo's arias and his second duet with Alvaro missing, is never going to be a first choice, but its value as a supplement is enhanced by the rarity of Walter's highly personal manner of conducting Verdi and an interesting cast. Walter is hard, driven and precise and he practises application of dynamic extremes, making for some exciting playing – that is evident right from the coruscating overture. I certainly didn't associate Walter with this kind of whipping up of tension but by golly, he can do it; the pace is electric.

The two leads are, let us say, adequate; nothing special. I am not keen on Roman's piping "little girl" upper register with its trilling vibrato but she has a good lower register, too, so there is some balance to her soprano and although her timbre is peculiar, she has volume. Frederick Jagel, too, has an odd, occluded tone and he sings at a steady, blaring mezzo-forte without imagination, mostly maintaining a poetry-free zone, but like Roman he has amplitude and staying power. Irra Petina as Preziosilla is a bit lightweight but agile and audible in ensemble. The best singer here is Ezio Pinza, whose dark, purring bass is a joy, and anything with the glorious Tibbett is valuable, even if he is slightly past his best and not entirely recognisable as the singer of yore; the gleam has worn off his baritone so the sound is a little dull compared to that of his heyday but the tone is still rich and rounded. His top notes are secure but carefully approached. Baccaloni matches Meletti for Marinuzzi two years earlier with another genuinely entertaining and impressively vocalised Fra Melitone.

Even well remastered, the sound is a bit trying, being boxy and constantly afflicted by swish and crackle but historical buffs won't care. I admit to including this as a curiosity demonstrating Walter's unexpected affinity with Verdi and for its three, stellar lower voices.

**Dimitri Mitropoulos – 1953** (live; mono) Urania; Archipel  
Orchestra & Chorus - Teatro Comunale di Firenze

Il Marchese di Calatrava - Silvio Maionica  
Leonora di Vargas - Renata Tebaldi  
Don Carlo - Aldo Protti  
Don Alvaro - Mario Del Monaco  
Preziosilla - Fedora Barbieri  
Fra Melitone - Renato Capecchi  
Curra - Angela Vercelli  
Padre Guardiano - Cesare Siepi  
Mastro Trabuco - Piero De Palma  
Un Chirurgo - Walter Finessi  
Un Alcalde - Giorgio Giorgetti

The main drawback to this recording is its sound quality, but the Urania issue, engineered from a newly discovered tape has resulted in a considerable improvement. Regrettably, it is still poor, cavernous mono, but the best remastering you will find and as such I replaced my old "Foyer" label set - while making sure that I retained the Italian libretto as this has only cues in the booklet - and, rather puzzlingly, also reproduces on the back the original cover of the Decca issue of the complete studio recording two years later with mostly the same cast but with the considerable advantage of Bastianini as Don Carlo.

Not that Protti is that bad – he is just rather stolid and we'd be glad to hear him today. Otherwise this live recording, fuzzy, muddy sound and all, scores over the studio recording by virtue of its sheer, visceral excitement - and the new remastering has removed most of the hiss without deadening the detail. The audience frequently moo their appreciation like demented cattle, especially upon the absolutely phenomenal delivery of "O tu che in seno agli angeli" by Del Monaco, which remains the single most stirring piece of tenor singing I know. Tebaldi is in sovereign voice and very involved in her character, avoiding the slightly generalised or even marmoreal quality which sometimes marred her singing and free of the edge on top notes which crept in as the years went by. Here in 1953 we hear the true "voce d'angelo" that Toscanini prized. Mitropoulos galvanises his sterling cast and makes a really dramatic theatrical experience out of this rambling opera. The volume and amplitude of the voices we hear could not be faked by recording; you can hear the space around them and the magnitude of their impact on the audience's ears. Björling said singing with Tebaldi was "like singing with two sopranos" but here she meets her match in Del Monaco. Nor do they yell; they simply sing out in a manner almost lost today.

In addition to those two incomparable singers, we hear the finest Padre Guardiano of his era, Cesare Siepi and a stirring, typically stentorian and unwieldy Preziosilla from Barbieri.

Unfortunately, the important scene, "Sleale! Il segreto fu dunque violato" is cut. Again, mainly for reason of the bad sound, I cannot recommend this a first choice, but lovers of great singing will want it – no, *should* have it.

**Tullio Serafin – 1954** EMI; Naxos; Membran, Pristine (Ambient Stereo)  
Orchestra & Chorus - Teatro alla Scala

Il Marchese di Calatrava - Plinio Clabassi  
Leonora di Vargas - Maria Callas  
Don Carlo - Carlo Tagliabue  
Don Alvaro - Richard Tucker  
Preziosilla - Elena Nicolai  
Fra Melitone - Renato Capecchi  
Curra - Rina Cavallari  
Padre Guardiano - Nicola Rossi-Lemeni  
Mastro Trabuco - Gino Del Signore  
Un Chirurgo - Dario Caselli  
Un Alcalde - Dario Caselli

(The following is adapted from my own review of the Pristine issue)

Philip Borg-Wheeler [reviewed](#) the Naxos issue of this back in 2008. He rightly identified the main strengths of the recording as Serafin's authoritative direction and Callas' incomparable Leonora; the conducting is typically well-judged, both pacy and intense by turns, as this gloomily beautiful music demands, and no-one embraces the drama, inflects the text and caresses those glorious melodies as affectingly as Callas - although Price in 1964 and Tebaldi in the (pretty raw!) live Mitropoulos recording above run her close. The infamous "flap" in Callas' voice is only occasionally very slightly in evidence and she more than compensates with heart-wrenching portamenti and thrilling excursions into her lower register, her dark tones matching the foreboding of the music. She enthral the listener from her very first aria; her emotional involvement is absolute.

He is less enthused by Tucker, whereas I am more of a fan and do not agree that his tone lacks bloom. Tucker is occasionally guilty of his besetting fault of being too lachrymose, but the top rings out magnificently; he could, however, have been more nuanced in his use of dynamic variety as he tends to sing out uniformly loudly. The rest of the cast, with the exception of Capecchi's firm, characterful

Melitone, is not up to their standard, though Nicolai is acceptable in the essentially irritating role of Preziosilla, with her silly tub-thumping music. Tagliabue is clearly past his best, being rather lacklustre and dry-toned, but he does not disgrace himself, despite some rather nasal, laboured sounds, and he improves as the opera progresses. My one real bugbear is Rossi-Lemeni; I have never understood why he was so esteemed. The voice is woolly, unsteady, lacking centre and without the true bass gravitas the role of Padre Guardiano requires - although at least he certainly sounds old...

Unfortunately, although it is not as badly redacted as some earlier recordings and some scenes, such as the soup kitchen scene in Act 4, have even been restored, there are still cuts in some arias and a whole scene between Padre Guardiano and Melitone in Act 4 is missing - not that I much mind about that. The sound is clear, clean and brilliant; EMI first remastered it in 1978 as "stereo" and the 1987 digital remastering for CD is labelled as such, which surprises me given its early recording date and Walter Legge's resistance to that mode. That remaster still sounds to me more like "expanded" mono or very narrow stereo - if that makes any sense - but, in any case, it remains very listenable.

However, it has now reappeared in a new remastering into Ambient Stereo by Pristine and the results are very welcome and apparent - a huge improvement. Sound engineer Andrew Rose has corrected pitches and refreshed the sound such that it now has much more body and spaciousness; the hiss and edginess have gone and everything now sounds much more present, so that new remastering is the one to buy if you want this. Tucker's Alvaro I can hear on the Schippers set but I certainly still want this recording for Callas and Serafin. Nonetheless, as much as I enjoy their contributions, I must advise that in many other respects this recording is superseded by others which enjoy better casting across the board.

**Francesco Molinari-Pradelli - 1955 Decca**  
Orchestra & Chorus - Santa Cecilia

Il Marchese di Calatrava - Silvio Maionica  
Leonora di Vargas - Renata Tebaldi  
Don Carlo - Ettore Bastianini  
Don Alvaro - Mario Del Monaco  
Preziosilla - Giulietta Simionato  
Fra Melitone - Fernando Corena  
Curra - Gabriella Carturan  
Padre Guardiano - Cesare Siepi  
Mastro Trabuco - Piero De Palma  
Un Chirurgo - Eraldo Coda  
Un Alcalde - Ezio Giordano

This is one of three great recordings of *Forza* featuring Tebaldi. To hear her at her youthful best, you need to go to the legendary 1953 live set, thrillingly conducted by Mitropoulos but the sound there isn't great and she is certainly in fresher voice here in 1955 than in 1958; indeed she is sovereign, as you may hear from her first aria, deploying pearly portamenti and floating soft, high notes. Del Monaco also is stunning in that live performance but he is almost as good here, even if, for sheer glamour, Corelli just tops him in the 1958 Hardy recording with the same conductor (also available on black & white DVD). Del Monaco sounds just slightly reined in by studio recording, being without the spur of the atmosphere of a live performance with an audience - some listeners of more delicate sensibilities might welcome that extra restraint and he produces some lovely piano singing in his big Act 3 aria as well as the money notes. Nonetheless, I cannot believe how snooty some critics (especially some of my compatriot British ones who rave about weedy, effete tenors like those of Pears, Bostridge and their like) are about Del Monaco in this, probably his best role after Otello; to me he is tremendous.

Another huge bonus is Bastianini's Carlo. Compared with his burnished, nut-brown tones, Aldo Protti in 1953 was merely adequate; Bastianini is vocally riveting and his duets with Del Monaco are the highlights they should be, reminiscent of the famous recordings by Caruso with Scotti, De Luca and Amato. Finally, the sound in both the 1953 and 1958 recordings is rough mono, whereas this studio recording is in excellent Decca stereo sound which has hardly dated at all.

Molinari-Pradelli's conducting is nothing special but the presence of Simionato and Siepi guarantees singing of real class. The score is given virtually complete, one tiny cut notwithstanding.

**Antonino Votto – 1957** (live; mono) Melodram; Frequenz; Myto; Phoenix; Living Stage; Urania Orchestra & Chorus - Teatro alla Scala

Il Marchese di Calatrava - Franco Calabrese  
Leonora di Vargas - Leyla Gencer  
Don Carlo - Aldo Protti  
Don Alvaro - Giuseppe di Stefano  
Preziosilla - Gabriella Carturan  
Fra Melitone - Enrico Campi  
Curra - Stefania Malagù  
Padre Guardiano - Cesare Siepi  
Mastro Trabuco - Franco Ricciardi  
Un Chirurgo - Franco Piva  
Un Alcalde - Alfredo Giacomotti

I have included this at the prompting of "a learned friend" for several good reasons. First, because he was right; this is special: it features Turkish diva Leyla Gencer – who made hardly any commercial recordings – in best form and Giuseppe Di Stefano singing infinitely better than in his very disappointing studio recording made the following year. A second, pleasant surprise is the combination of vehemence and poetry in Votto's conducting. He could be staid and routine but here he is inspired; even the overture gets a prolonged ovation. He shapes the music poetically but generates excitement when necessary, too. Finally, the mono sound is very good for its provenance and era; little distortion and good definition, although voices are sometimes rather distant compared to the orchestra.

Gencer is wonderful: powerful, impassioned, floating top notes deliciously; the mystery of her continued and sustained neglect by the recording companies intensifies every time I listen to her live recordings. Her crescendo from ppp to fortissimo on the top B flat of "Ahimè!" in her opening aria, or her *messa di voce* on the opening sustained F of "Pace" in her final aria, or the soft B flat at its conclusion, are all enough to make the committed operaphile go weak at the knees. She has the occasional, passing intonation mishap but the beauty and commitment of her singing silence criticism. Her Act 2 duets with Padre Guardiano are highlights and they earn deserved, prolonged applause.

Di Stefano is much bigger and resonant of voice than elsewhere, even though the role of Alvaro remains a stretch for him. He makes a splendid job of his big moment at the start of Act 3 and unless you listened to Del Monaco in 1953 straight after him you would think it could hardly be done better. The audience vociferously and prolongedly (word?) agrees. Inspired by the approbation, Di Stefano sustains that level of inspiration through his magnificent duet, "Solenne in quest'ora", with Protti (taken at a daringly slow but highly effective speed by Votto) to the very end.

The supporting cast is a mixed bag; Siepi is as usual superb as Padre Guardiano, and an enthusiastic, rich-voiced Campi makes a better than average Melitone. Calabrese has a pleasing bass but it is dwarfed by Gencer and Di Stefano in the opening scene. Protti is his usual stolid self, firm of tone and musically accurate without being especially memorable, as per his other recordings here. Franco Ricciardi is an annoying, whining Trabuco but the real weakness is Gabriella Carturan's Preziosilla. She

is clearly no Verrett, Cossotto or Baltsa and is at times quite unsteady and laboured. This somewhat diminishes the overall attractiveness of the performance which also has the standard cuts but I don't usually listen to *Forza* for Preziosilla and its many strong points make it desirable, especially for Gencer and Pippo devotees.

**Francesco Molinari-Pradelli – 1958** (live; mono) Hardy; Melodram; Bongiovanni  
Orchestra & Chorus - Teatro di San Carlo di Napoli

Il Marchese di Calatrava - Giorgio Algorta  
Leonora di Vargas - Renata Tebaldi  
Don Carlo - Ettore Bastianini  
Don Alvaro - Franco Corelli  
Preziosilla - Oralia Domínguez  
Fra Melitone - Renato Capecchi  
Curra - Anna Di Stasio  
Padre Guardiano - Boris Christoff  
Mastro Trabuco - Mariano Caruso  
Un Chirurgo - Gianni Bardi  
Un Alcalde - Giuseppe Forgiione

The cast assembled here is without peer, and although some might prefer Siepi to Christoff in the role of Padre Guardiano, both are deeply satisfying. Likewise, the choice between Del Monaco and Corelli is a happy one, but I think it is clearer that a younger Tebaldi is preferable to her showing here. She is a little harsher-toned and more ungainly at times than a few years previously and the high notes don't come as easily as of yore. She sounds least comfortable in her final aria "Pace, pace", but this is still a passionate, committed performance of real stature. This was Corelli's debut in the role of Alvaro; he is in his youthful prime and his admirers will need no convincing, as he is the only tenor to vie with Del Monaco for vocal thrills and his duets with Bastianini are priceless; two great voices at full throttle - yet Corelli also shows himself capable of superb *diminuendi* in "Solenne in quest'ora" (only I wish they wouldn't sing "Addi-hi-hi-o"...).

Artists of the calibre of Oralia Dominguez and Renato Capecchi ensure that the best is made of two potentially trying roles. She is among the most agile and vibrant of mezzos to undertake Preziosilla and he is that rare thing: a character baritone with a thoroughly well-schooled, resonant voice – after all, he was also a notable Rigoletto. Molinari-Pradelli is really indulgent with his singers in their more soulful moments and risks milking it.

Fans of Corelli will want this as a souvenir of his singing of Alvaro at his very finest. However, you must be aware of two things: first, that the sound is good enough for a live mono recording of its era but the prompter, coughing and enthusiastic audience intrusion (often shushed) are very audible and occasionally proceedings are rather recessed; this is hardly comparable to a stereo studio version. Secondly, the common stage cut of about ten minutes is made in Act 3 (just after "Urna fatale") of the duet beginning "Ne gustare m'e dato", leading to "Sleale! Il segreto fu dunque violato" and culminating in the sword fight between Alvaro and Carlo (so wonderfully recorded by Caruso and De Luca) - so it's not a complete version, unlike the studio sets, which, in combination with its mono sound, makes it recommendable more as a supplement rather than a main choice.

**Fernando Previtali – 1958** Decca  
Orchestra & Chorus - Santa Cecilia

Il Marchese di Calatrava - Paolo Washington  
Leonora di Vargas - Zinka Milanov  
Don Carlo - Leonard Warren

Don Alvaro - Giuseppe di Stefano  
Preziosilla - Rosalind Elias  
Fra Melitone - Dino Mantovani  
Curra - Luisa Gioia  
Padre Guardiano - Giorgio Tozzi  
Mastro Trabuco - Angelo Mercuriali  
Un Chirurgo - Sergio Liviabella  
Un Alcalde - Virgilio Carbonari

The prospect of Zinka Milanov as late as 1958 has always deterred me from sampling this, as I do not much enjoy anything she recorded in the 50's, by which time, although she wasn't in the least old, having been born in 1906, her voice had become edgy and she was given to sliding, scooping and swooping. However, her justly earned reputation as a great singer meant that she was given the opportunity to record beyond the point at which her voice took well to the microphone; her bumpy recording of *Aida* with Björling is a case in point (although to be fair others do not seem to share my dislike of her in that recording). It is especially surprising that Decca recorded a second *Forza* only three years after the one with Del Monaco and Tebaldi, but Giuseppe Di Stefano was vying with him and Corelli for the reputation of "World's Greatest Tenor" and it was the beginning of the lucrative classical recording heyday which has left us with such an *embarrass de richesses*.

The cast assembled around them is equally impressive: Tozzi repeats his smooth, sonorous Padre Guardiano, reigning American baritone Leonard Warren – who was to die only two years later on-stage singing this same role – is a striking Carlo and rising star Rosalind Elias – who died aged 91 earlier this month as I write, – was recruited for Preziosilla, just as RCA employed the young Shirley Verrett for their recording a few years later – only they had the advantage of an equally young Leontyne Price as lead soprano. Previtali was an experienced, often really energised conductor at the head of a proper Italian orchestra but he doesn't sound very involved here.

So was it worth Decca going into competition with themselves – and the EMI Callas recording, of course, from four years earlier? In a word, no, because whatever its merits, it is scuppered by Milanov. She is simply dire.

The first voice we hear is bass Paolo Washington, who has a rather, woolly, soft-grained bass which sits oddly with Milanov's glottal, matronly timbre; honestly, she sounds like someone's granny – and even her lower register is gluey and throttled. Her dramatic instincts are intact but much of her voice has gone; she squawks and slides through her first aria in a manner to make me abandon any resolve to see the opera through. Even by this stage of his career, Di Stefano had been pushing his fundamentally lyric tenor into dramatic spinto roles too enthusiastically, and he sounds taxed and vexed by the role of Alvaro, with grainy, windy tone and nothing the amplitude of voice displayed by Del Monaco, Corelli and Tucker. Whatever their merits, Elias and Warren were wasted in this doomed enterprise and acquaintance with this set quickly reminded me why I had never previously gravitated towards it.

There is a Sony/RCA highlights disc of excerpts from the opera with Milanov, Warren and Jan Peerce recorded in the early 50's which exhibits some of her same flaws but better demonstrates her virtues and how she could truly inhabit a role when she had enough control to make her voice do her bidding.

**Thomas Schippers – 1964 RCA**  
Orchestra & Chorus - RCA Italiana

Il Marchese di Calatrava - Giovanni Foiani  
Leonora di Vargas - Leontyne Price  
Don Carlo - Robert Merrill



Don Alvaro - Richard Tucker  
Preziosilla - Shirley Verrett  
Fra Melitone - Ezio Flagello  
Curra - Corinna Voza  
Padre Guardiano - Giorgio Tozzi  
Mastro Trabuco - Piero De Palma  
Un Chirurgo - Mario Rinaudo  
Un Alcalde - Rolf Bottcher

This is as good a cast as could be assembled at the time, unless you do not enjoy Richard Tucker's tenor; I do, and he deliver a virile performance very similar to that of a decade earlier with Callas but is in fact subtler here. The main problem is that he hardly sounds young. Price is definitely preferable here to her re-recording of Leonora for Levine twelve years later, by which time a hollowness had crept into; here there is just an attractive wisp of huskiness in its centre and top notes shine. In addition, she sounds deeply involved. A young Shirley Verrett is probably the best Preziosilla on record, displaying the huge range and flexibility of her voice impressively and consistently phrasing so musically.

The lovers are surrounded by singers of the first rank, not least one of the clutch of America's great baritones of this era, Robert Merrill. He and Bastianini are the most impressive singers of the role of Carlo; he sang often with Tucker and together they put on a fine show. Their final confrontation is electric, with Tucker first exhibiting great pathos before being provoked into fury and Merrill resolutely resistant, his big, bronze voice booming out implacably.

Three top-quality basses in Tozzi, Flagello and Foiani complete a very satisfying cast; all three excel. I hear no immaturity in Schippers' conducting; his manner reminds me very much of that of the young Levine in the combination of attack, momentum and the requisite tenderness when necessary; you hear that contrast straight away in the manner that he introduces the three hammer-blows of fate in the overture before caressing that famous *Jean de Florette* melody. He would surely have gone on to have a greater career had he not died so young.

If you like Tucker, this is indubitably a front-runner, especially as RCA's stereo sound is impeccable: rich, clear and beautifully balanced.

#### **Lamberto Gardelli – 1969 EMI**

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra; Ambrosian Opera Chorus

Il Marchese di Calatrava - Antonio Zerbini  
Leonora di Vargas - Martina Arroyo  
Don Carlo - Piero Cappuccilli  
Don Alvaro - Carlo Bergonzi  
Preziosilla - Biancamaria Casoni  
Fra Melitone - Geraint Evans  
Curra - Mila Cova  
Padre Guardiano - Ruggero Raimondi  
Mastro Trabuco - Florindo Andreolli  
Un Chirurgo - Derek Hammond-Stroud  
Un Alcalde - Virgilio Carbonari

Many critics cite this recording as their favourite of this great, sprawling opera and I can see why, although I do not quite agree that it is the best. However, while one might debate the merits of all the principal singers in comparison with other stars who assayed these roles, one stands head and shoulders above the rest: Martina Arroyo. Hers is a huge, flexible, vibrant and beautiful voice and as she never recorded as much as she might, this Leonora, made at the height of her powers (and at

around the same time as her superb Verdi Requiem with Bernstein conducting) is precious; she soars above the excellent orchestra and really brings Leonora alive - though not perhaps, with the same fire and tears as Leontyne Price in her earlier recording with Schippers. For me, the other best feature of this set is the conducting of the under-rated Gardelli of the excellent RPO. He employs finely judged rubato, flexibility of tempi, allows his singers to breathe and secures vivid, expressive playing from a star orchestra.

I am less enthusiastic about the other singers, fine though they are. In almost every case, another singer does better elsewhere. Raimondi hasn't got the low notes, is lugubrious rather than grave and sonorous as Siepi, Tozzi and Christoff are, and he can't touch the best Padre Guardiano of all in the old Marinuzzi set: Tancredi Pasero. Casoni is ordinary, though competent, whereas Verrett is thrilling in the essentially irritating role of Preziosilla for Schippers. Cappuccilli exhibits his usual superb breath control and long line but lacks the heft and richness of Merrill or, perhaps even finer, Bastianini in both the live Naples set and his studio recording. Elegant and impassioned though Bergonzi is, he cannot match the heroic tone of either Corelli or Del Monaco; you simply require a bigger voice to do justice to Alvaro's anguished utterances and I find him rather careful, especially in his big aria.

So this recording does not shake my allegiance to the Schippers or the live and studio Molinari-Pradelli sets (both of which have dream casts) but it's still a very fine version and few purchasers will be disappointed with it, unless, like me, you require something more than "just" the perfection of Arroyo's assumption - after all, this is very much an ensemble opera, dependent on its succession of wonderful duets, not a star-vehicle for one soprano.

**Carol Litvin – 1970** Carlton; World of the Opera; MCPS; Vox Box  
Orchestra & Chorus of Romanian Radio-Television

Il Marchese di Calatrava - Mihai Panghe  
Leonora di Vargas - Maria Slatinaru  
Don Carlo - Nicolae Herlea  
Don Alvaro - Ludovic Spiess  
Preziosilla - Zenaïda Pally  
Fra Melitone - Constantin Gabor  
Curra - Mihaela Marcianu  
Padre Guardiano - Nicolae Florei  
Mastro Trabuco - Ion Stoian

Given that this set is available very cheaply indeed, it's worth buying even if you are merely curious. It's worth it for the glorious baritone of Nicolae Herlea alone but it is also as an engaging performance of the opera as a whole, presenting the Romanian State Opera as a company with strength in depth at the time of the recording of this studio broadcast in 1970. The sound is excellent ADD. Neither the orchestra nor the conducting is of the finest quality, Litvin being really rather leisurely and deliberate, but he is clearly in sympathy with the music and the drama doesn't drag. The chorus is lusty and the soloists often outstanding - and I am not just talking about Herlea, who must surely have possessed one of the most beautiful post-war baritones. Ludovic Spiess had a hefty, slightly strenuous spinto tenor and despite a tendency to gulp was good enough to attract Karajan's attention to sing at Salzburg, serve as principal tenor in Zurich and enjoy an international career in the major opera houses. He sings an impassioned, stentorian Alvaro but is not without subtlety. His fifteen-year international career was cut short by damage to his vocal cords. Soprano Maria Nistor-Slatinaru had a major voice very reminiscent of that of Sylvia Sass; she had a smoky timbre, evenness throughout her range and could sustain a considerable breadth of phrase even though the voice spreads on top notes. The rest of the cast is excellent, including two first rate basses and a characterful baritone as Melitone; the only dubious singing comes from a rather laboured, matronly Preziosilla - a role I never much enjoy in any case.

I have many versions of this epic opera and while this is not a first choice, I will still find room for it on my shelves, as it is a good ensemble recording featuring some major voices headed by Herlea.

**James Levine – 1976 RCA/BMG**

London Symphony Orchestra; John Alldis Choir

Il Marchese di Calatrava - Kurt Moll  
Leonora di Vargas - Leontyne Price  
Don Carlo - Sherrill Milnes  
Don Alvaro - Plácido Domingo  
Preziosilla - Fiorenza Cossotto  
Fra Melitone - Gabriel Bacquier  
Curra - Gillian Knight  
Padre Guardiano - Bonaldo Giaiotti  
Mastro Trabuco - Michel Sénéchal  
Un Chirurgo - William Elvin  
Un Alcalde - Malcolm King

Levine's recent disgrace and the details of his alleged behaviour in past years make it hard to gauge his achievements objectively but there is no gainsaying that he is responsible for directing some of my favourite operatic recordings. His usual of sweep, thrust and rhythmic precision and sensibility are much in evidence the John Alldis chorus is as fine as ever and the LSO are in terrific form.

So far, so good, but...despite its starry line-up, the main issue here is that because of ongoing deficiencies in her technique, Price's voice had by this time become permanently hoarse and hollow in its centre, with a shrill, squawking top – absolutely terrible in the Act 2, Scene 1 Preghiera, for example (you don't believe me? Listen again) and something of a hole in her tone, especially in comparison with her earlier recording twelve years previously. I have known lovers of this opera wish to concoct a hybrid by replacing Price's arias here with those from 1964. In a way, for me this set mirrors Milanov's, insofar as despite the presence of several excellent co-singers, the lead soprano is a liability. Domingo is in fresh, sappy voice and honeyed in the love music, even if he lacks true spinto heft, which results in his occasionally being overwhelmed by the LSO. Milnes is in best form, resonant, resolute and lyrical by turns, sounding very like Warren, Bacquier is predictably characterful as Melitone despite some dry tone, the beautiful basses of Kurt Moll and Giaiotti are always a welcome bonus and Cossotto is her usual formidable self, but none of that matters if the Leonora is inadequate.

**John Matheson – 1981 (live concert performance; stereo) Opera Rara. N.B. Original 1862 version**

BBC Concert Orchestra; BBC Singers

Il Marchese di Calatrava - Roderick Kennedy  
Leonora di Vargas - Martina Arroyo  
Don Carlo - Peter Glossop  
Don Alvaro - Kenneth Collins  
Preziosilla - Janet Coster  
Fra Melitone - Derek Hammond-Stroud  
Curra - Alison Truefitt  
Padre Guardiano - Don Garrard  
Mastro Trabuco - Kenneth Bowen  
Un Chirurgo - David Fieldsend  
Un Alcalde - Philip O'Reilly

Bob Farr comprehensively [reviewed](#) this fifteen years ago. It's never a prime choice, for reasons of both the edition and the performance, but it's worth hearing.

Anyone unfamiliar with Verdi's first thoughts is in for a shock; there are major differences in both the music and the dramaturgy - and the consensus is that virtually all of Verdi's revisions were improvements. The biggest difference lies in the conclusion: the recognition scene between Alvaro and Leonora is extended compared with the final version and there is no concluding trio or consolatory benediction from Padre Guardiano. Alvaro no longer utters the words, 'A quell'accento più non poss'io resistere' ('At the sound of that voice, I can resist no longer') but instead, overcome with remorse and despair at having been indirectly responsible for wiping out the entire Calatrava nuclear family, leaps to his death into a ravine. It's more dramatic, perhaps melodramatic.

At the other end of the opera, the famous overture begins recognisably but is truncated into being just a short Prelude. In between, the main changes occur in Act 3, where the duets between Alvaro and Carlos are separated by the camp scene and the tenor is given an additional, taxing aria to conclude the act.

The first voices we hear fall very gratefully on the ear: Roderick Kennedy's neat, grave, sonorous bass, Alison Truefitt's pleasing Curra, then Arroyo's ample, voluptuous spinto soprano, with its generous but not intrusive vibrato and round, bell-like tone. Whenever she opens her mouth, you immediately become aware of the sheer size of the sound she makes in comparison with her co-singers. Glossop has a similarly prominent vibrato and a distinctive nasal edge to his baritone. I quite like his assertive, admittedly rather effortful, singing and his grating tone insinuates that he is an unpleasant character but there is no doubt that his voice has loosened since he recorded *Iago* for Karajan I wish he didn't make such a meal of the divisions in his "Son Pereda" aria, bouncing all over the place. Kenneth Collins sang some quite heavy roles for the ENO and here he sings beautifully and intelligently. His light, incisive tenor perhaps just occasionally sounds half a size too small for Alvaro but his musical, well-phrased singing gives considerable pleasure and still cuts through - and he rises to provide real spinto heft in his big arias. Janet Coster has no difficulty with *Preziosilla's* music, having an agile, well-registered voice of impressive range and power (although she rolls her r's rather too ferociously...) in fact, she is one of those rarer singers who makes *Preziosilla's* music enjoyable. Don Garrard has a lean, smooth bass similar to Kennedy's; not huge but even and resonant - much more than adequate. Hammond-Stroud extracts what humour he can out of *Melitone* without becoming hammy and turns him into a real character rather than a caricature. Matheson direction is well-paced and wholly unobtrusive without being bland. The BBC chorus and orchestra are excellent but rather distant in the aural field. There is an especially lovely clarinet solo before Alvaro's big Act 3 solo. What is missing in general, however, is theatrical temperament and atmosphere; although the voice is glorious, Arroyo is rather placid even at moments of high drama, and the whole enterprise has a slightly studio-bound feeling to it.

The live sound is very good: broad and spacious. This is not the 8th August Prom performance it is sometimes called but was separately recorded in the Golders Green Hippodrome five days before in concert in one session for later broadcast, with no audience present - certainly none is audible and there's no applause, which perhaps accounts for the flatness of the atmosphere. In the end, it is thoroughly enjoyable, without any major flaws or irritations and presents a first-rate introduction to Verdi's original creation. The question is, unless you are a completist collector and must have both, if you want to hear those first thoughts, which of the two 1862 versions should you have - this or Gergiev's? See my recommendations for my response.

**Giuseppe Sinopoli - 1985** (digital) DG  
Philharmonia Orchestra; Ambrosian Opera Chorus

Il Marchese di Calatrava - John Tomlinson

Leonora di Vargas - Rosalind Plowright  
Don Carlo - Renato Bruson  
Don Alvaro - José Carreras  
Preziosilla - Agnes Baltsa  
Fra Melitone - Juan Pons  
Curra - Jean Rigby  
Padre Guardiano - Paata Burchuladze  
Mastro Trabuco - Mark Curtis  
Un Chirurgo - Petteri Salomaa  
Un Alcalde - Richard Van Allan

Sinopoli remains oddly divisive as a conductor; his admirers – amongst whom I would number myself – find him to be sensitive, original and exciting, while his critics accuse him of bombast and self-conscious manipulation. He immediately makes his mark in the overture with an extreme contrast between the tempi of its first three themes played very fast, slowly and very slowly respectively with telling pauses and he is never routine or boring. To aid his efforts, he has here a great orchestra, the best chorus and superb digital sound; unfortunately, there was something of a dearth of Verdi singers around the same time. What I hadn't expected to encounter in Sinopoli's conducting here is his measured, studied, almost cautious approach; overall the reading lacks thrust and élan.

Let me continue to play devil's advocate and present the case for the prosecution: it could be argued that Carreras was already past his peak, as an obtrusive beat gradually became established in his vocal production and evident strain marring his loud singing; Rosalind Plowright was a bold choice – perhaps a gamble; Paata Burchuladze's bass always an acquired taste given his Slavonic timbre and mangled Italian; Bruson was no favourite baritone of voice-fanciers like me who dislike his bleat; finally, John Tomlinson is a singer whose woofy tone and lumpy vocal technique have never charmed me either and he sounds not the slightest bit like a nobleman. By far the safest bits of casting here were Agnes Baltsa and Juan Pons but - and you'll have to go with me on this one – no-one chooses a favourite *La forza del destino* for its Preziosilla and Melitone.

Considering the voices in the order in which we hear them, we start with Rosalind Plowright. I enjoy her Leonora recorded in the studio for Giulini but her voice here two years later has rather more of a shrill edge here; nonetheless, its sweep and amplitude still give pleasure and her floated top notes in particular are strong. "Pace, pace" is something of a tour de force.

Carreras' tenor is still recognisably the warm, plangent instrument which propelled him to fame and this was recorded before his illness. It never really has the heroic ring of tenors more evidently suited to the role of Alvaro but the beat referred to above is not yet in evidence and the sheer beauty of his timbre carries him through. He is most effective when expressing more plaintive emotions, as in his "Ne gustare m'e dato un'ora di quiete" or when he is wounded, and his rendering of the big Act 3 aria is touching and expressive but not really thrilling like Del Monaco – especially at Sinopoli's languorous speeds. Nonetheless, I find myself increasingly enjoying his singing as the opera progresses and he especially good in the final, desperate duet, "Invano, Alvaro" – even if Bruson is disappointing.

Compared with really excellent Marquises like Moll, Tomlinson is undistinguished. Baltsa is as expected: feisty, flexible and smoky-toned; the excellence of her sparkling singing consistently distracts me from the banality of her music and she rides Sinopoli's fast tempi with ease (he is mostly on the slow side elsewhere). Bruson is oddly inert in characterisation and windy of tone and his low notes especially weak; his Carlo presents little menace – Merrill, Bastianini and Milnes are hugely more striking in timbre and presence. Juan Pons is a rather refined, civilised Melitone; his beautiful voice isn't really a good fit for the grouchy friar and he would have made a much better Carlo than Bruson. Burchuladze's opaque, swallowed vowels are as expected but his grave, sonorous bass as voice per se is stately and hieratic.

All in all, the thoughtful conducting, excellent sound and generally pleasing singing make this recording a very satisfactory experience – and considerably better than might have been anticipated – but it is still eclipsed by more consistently, aptly cast, authentically Italianate versions with greater drive than Sinopoli provides.

**Riccardo Muti – 1986** (digital) EM  
Orchestra & Chorus - Teatro alla Scala

Il Marchese di Calatrava - Giorgio Surjan  
Leonora di Vargas - Mirella Freni  
Don Carlo - Giorgio Zancanaro  
Don Alvaro - Plácido Domingo  
Preziosilla - Dolora Zajick  
Fra Melitone - Sesto Bruscantini  
Curra - Francesca Garbi  
Padre Guardiano - Paul Plishka  
Mastro Trabuco - Ernesto Gavazzi  
Un Chirurgo - Frank Hadrian  
Un Alcalde - Silvestro Sammaritano

Before first listening to this set, I had read negative reports of both the digital sound and the cool, uninvolved nature of the performance here; all I can say is that to my ears the former is rich, full well-balanced and wholly acceptable. I have no idea what the complaints are about.

With regard to its aesthetics, Muti directs a swift, no-nonsense account, rather short of affection but without any interventionist or self-conscious aspects and his driven, energised approach suits the opera. His La Scala forces are first-class and his singers are as good a cast as could be assembled in the mid-80's; the first thing one notices is the amplitude of Mirella Freni's full, vibrant soprano, especially compared with the smooth but under-powered bass of Giorgio Surjan singing her father. It might be thought Freni would be over-parted as Leonora but she copes well and generates surprising power while sustaining rich, voluptuous tone, only very occasionally sounding stretched to her limits. She is the wrong side of fifty here and there is evidence in other of her recordings around this time that her vibrato was beginning to loosen somewhat but that is not the case here. I hear no lack of involvement in her vocal acting, even though she never sang Leonora on stage.

Domingo is in his mid-forties and arguably in his prime, even if he is understandably not quite as free and fresh as for Levine a decade earlier. On the other hand, his vocal acting is better than ever and he is especially expressive in his big aria and his climactic top B is the best I have ever heard from him on a recording; this is indubitably one of his best recorded performances. I have a special affection for Giorgio Zancanaro's vibrant, sonorous baritone and always regretted that he didn't record more and when he did, that it was not in better company, but this is a role which ideally suits his talents and he is well-partnered here. His voice is somewhat dryer and more refined than Big Beast Baritones like Milnes, Merrill and Bastianini but his singing still gives much pleasure and provides another reason for prizing this recording. Dolora Zajick is a bit shrill and wobbly and not especially individual as Preziosilla but it takes a Baltsa, Verrett or Borodina to do wonders with that ungrateful role. Veteran Sesto Bruscantini, here in his mid-sixties, has suffered little vocal deterioration; his baritone was always light and dry so lacks the fruitiness which is surely ideal for a basso buffa character. In compensation, he is a consummate comic actor and his voice contrasts strongly with Plishka's gravelly, rotund tones but the recording does not seem to capture Plishka's low notes well, and his Guardiano lacks the necessary impact and resonance brought to the role by Siepi and Pinza.

In sum, despite some weakness in the minor roles, the three principal singers are in fine form, even if individually they are surpassed by even better exponents in other recordings. This is most certainly not the disappointment some would have us believe it to be, even if it is not a prime recommendation.

**Valery Gergiev – 1995 (digital) Philips. N.B. original 1862 version**

Orchestra & Chorus - Kirov Theatre

Il Marchese di Calatrava - Askar Abdrazakov

Leonora di Vargas - Galina Gorchakova

Don Carlo - Nikolai Putilin

Don Alvaro - Gegam Grigorian

Preziosilla - Olga Borodina

Fra Melitone - Georgy Zastavny

Curra - Lia Shevtzova

Padre Guardiano - Mikail Kit

Mastro Trabuco - Nikolai Gassiev

Un Chirurgo - Yuri Laptev

Un Alcalde - Gennadi Bezzubenko

While there is a nice historical consonance in the fact that this is an all-Russian recording from St Petersburg where the original version of *La forza del destino* was first performed in 1862, any claim to authenticity is somewhat diminished by the fact the premiere was performed by Italian singers not in the Mariinsky, as per here, but in a different, rival theatre, the Imperial Bolshoi Kamenny Theatre - long since demolished to make way for the St Petersburg Conservatory.

The differences between this and the final version are summarised above under the Matheson recording above and detailed in the nice, fat, booklet accompanying this handsome Philips issue, which contains two essays detailing the differences between this original and Verdi's revisions, a synopsis and a quadrilingual libretto.

I have to say that I was immediately bowled over by the power and beauty of the Gorchakova's voice. I knew from her 1997 recording of *Don Carlo* under Haitink that in her prime she was a superb Verdi singer and she does it again here: she has a big, rich, creamy soprano which soars magnificently and she uses it very expressively. Her top notes are exceptionally warm and powerful – her huge top B flat on "Ahimè" in her opening aria is enough to make you go weak at the knees -and she occasionally plunges into her lower register to thrilling effect; she has voice you can simply drink in.

Grigorian, too, has a large, if rather hard, voice, a spinto tenor with a cutting edge which at times sounds uncannily like Richard Tucker. He's no mere stentorian belter and his stamina is impressive, especially given that he has extra music to sing in this version, including a whole, taxing new aria at the end of Act 3, culminating in a held high C. He tackles his other big aria at the start of the act with plenty of breath and a long, legato line – which is admirable, given Gergiev's slow tempo – so it's a pity he messes up his words, singing "isquardar" instead of "iscordar" (mixing it up with "lo sguardo" which follows). He begins "Solenne in quest'ora" in a most unattractive groan, which is meant to be expressive (yes; I know he has a bullet in his chest, but this is Italian opera and you have to suffer and die beautifully); fortunately, he cuts that out quickly. Ultimately, he's not exactly idiomatic but he's still impressive.

Nikolai Putilin has a slightly throaty baritone but his singing is strong and positive and he sings excellent Italian. He is probably best known as Boris Godunov in Gergiev's recording of the earlier version of that opera; his voice has a bass-baritone timbre and is not as free up top or anywhere near as glamorously toned as Bastianini or Merrill – who is? – and his duets with Grigorian are not perhaps the vocal highlights they can be, but he doesn't let the side down.

Olga Borodina is in top form as Preziosilla and her performance makes me realise why I sometimes react so negatively to other singers in this role. Like Baltza for Sinopoli, rather than hamming it up by trying too hard to inject colour and character into her portrayal and turn it into a propaganda exercise, she just brings out its musical qualities as if it were any grand Verdi mezzo role - and she earns my gratitude thereby. Similarly, Georgy Zastavny's neatly sung, more restrained and sober Melitone pays dividends by not going into *buffo* overdrive.

Askar Abdrazakov (elder brother of fellow bass Ildar) makes a very good Marchese, even if – as is the case with several singers here – he has that almost indefinably “Russian” timbre about his vocal production, which is not necessarily such a bad thing, merely an observation especially as their Italian is to my ears, generally good. The other basses in the cast are more variable; Mikail Kit is a bit unsteady and nowhere near as smooth and imposing in the role of Padre Guardiano as Siepi, Christoff or Tozzi but, as with Putilin, even if he is not the best, he is by no means poor and sounds suitably venerable and portentous.

Gergiev's pacing is immaculate; he really makes the best of this version and is especially good at illuminating the unfamiliar music. The Kirov Orchestra and Chorus are simply excellent – incisive and energised, as good as any apart from some occasional slight disjunctures in synchronisation in ensemble.

### Recommendations

When Flora Willson surveyed recordings of this opera on BBC Radio 3's Record Review in February 2019, she managed to do so without even mentioning Corelli and brusquely informed us that Del Monaco, Bergonzi and Carreras “for various reasons did not make the cut”. Really? That's not just a deliberate oversight; it's criminal negligence, especially with regard to Mario. At least the Schippers recording was her prime recommendation, though.

My own recommendations are so venerable that I am not sure who should be more embarrassed: the voice departments of modern universities and conservatories or I. The most recent highly recommendable recording of the normal, revised version is over fifty years old, although like many people I admire even have a soft spot for the Sinopoli recording from 1985, despite its shortcomings – but even that is now already 35 years old. At least there is no shortage of good versions, old though they be; that is why I have recommended no fewer than six of the sixteen considered. If sound is a weightier consideration for you, you have to go for one of the two studio, stereo issues below; hardier souls more inured to historic sound will not want to miss out on hearing singers like Gencer and Corelli.

Collectors will want to hear the original version as well, and the choice is between only two. That is made difficult by the fact that both lead sopranos are on top form and have similar voices; on the other hand, I somewhat prefer Collins' more idiomatic and Italianate Alvaro to Grigorian's harder tone and there's not much to choose between Glossop and Putilin, as neither is ideal. I prefer Garrard's smoother sound to Kit's as Padre Guardiano, but Borodina is marginally preferable to Coster as Preziosilla. Both Zastavny and Hammond-Stroud make a fine job of another potentially irksome character. Otherwise, in terms of sound, conducting and supporting cast, Gergiev's studio recording is on balance, better. In the end, both are interesting and you must choose according to your taste as neither is markedly superior to the other.

**1862 version:** Either Matheson 1975 or Gergiev 1995, as above

**Live mono:** Mitropoulos – 1953; Votto – 1957; Molinari-Pradelli – 1958

**Studio stereo:** Molinari-Pradelli – 1955; Schippers – 1964