

FRANCESCO MARIA PIAVE, LIBRETTIST BIOGRAPHY



Francesco Maria Piave (May 18, 1810 – March 5, 1876) was an Italian librettist who was born on the island of Murano, located in the lagoon of Venice. He was Giuseppe Verdi's life-long friend and collaborator. Living during the brief Napoleonic Kingdom of Italy Piave, like Verdi, was an ardent Italian patriot.

The son of a glass-maker, Piave studied for the church before obtaining employment as a proofreader. On the failure of his father's business he traveled to Rome, where he joined a literary circle that included the librettist Jacopo Ferretti, with whom he remained on close terms. Eventually, in 1838, Piave returned to his old position in Venice where he wrote a libretto,

Don Marzio (1842) for Samuel Levi (that was never performed). He also provided the third act for Pacini's *Il duca d'Alba*, which Giovanni Peruzzini had been prevented from completing due to illness.

Piave was recommended to Verdi by Count Mocenigo, and their long and successful collaboration began in 1844 with *Ernani*. Piave was frequently summoned to Verdi's side, following Salvatore Cammarano as Verdi's main mid-career librettist. In addition to *Ernani*, Piave wrote librettos for Verdi's operas: *I due Foscari* (1844), *Attila* (1846), *Macbeth* (1847), *Il Corsaro* (1848), *Stiffelio* (1850), *Rigoletto* (1851), *La Traviata* (1853), and *Simon Boccanegra* (1857). Following a period as poet and stage director at La Fenice in 1859, Piave moved to Milan. On Verdi's recommendation he obtained the corresponding position at La Scala. Here he wrote *La forza del destino* with Verdi. It was produced in 1862.

Throughout his career Piave also wrote for many other composers besides Verdi, some well known like Giovanni Pacini, but most of them less significant. There is a wide gulf between Piave's Verdian and non-Verdian librettos. Most of the latter are said to be of poor quality, and with the possible exception of *Elisabetta di Valois* (Antonio Buzzolla, 1850; a precursor to *Don Carlos*) and the extraordinary black comedy *Crispino e la comare* (Luigi and Federico Ricci, 1850), might almost have come from another hand. Both dramatic tension and crisp verses are absent.

Verdi always gave Piave explicit instructions as to what he wanted; often writing out in prose the passages he needed to have versified. Piave had a wide vocabulary, a facile pen, and an uncanny ability for turning Verdi's drafts into verse. With his economy of words, Piave satisfied Verdi's insistence on brevity and provided him with the striking, illuminating expressions he sought. It was Piave's willingness to meet Verdi's detailed requirements that provided the basis for their successful partnership. It is interesting to note that at first Verdi was unsure of Piave's abilities and always harried him unmercifully; often even having his work revised by others. Piave, however, rewarded him with doglike devotion, and Verdi soon returned the favor.

On December 5, 1867, on the way to La Scala for a rehearsal, Piave suffered a stroke which deprived him of speech and movement. He lingered for nine years in this condition, leaving unfinished a libretto (*Vico Bentivoglio*) for Ponchielli. Piave would have prepared the libretto for Verdi's *Aida* (the commission for which Verdi accepted in 1870) had he not suffered from the

disabling stroke. Both Verdi and his wife came generously to Piave's aid in his last years. Piave died in Milan in 1876 at the age of sixty-five. He was buried in the Cimitero Monumentale in Milan, Italy.

Sources: grovemusic.com, wikipedia.com, absoluteastronomy.com, dictionary.com