

Tuesday, October 13, 1998 Published at 11:27 GMT 12:27 UK

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Aida comes home



About 3,000 watched the spectacular opening night of Aida

Giuseppe Verdi's opera Aida is being performed against the spectacular backdrop of the Giza pyramids for the first time in more than a decade.



[The BBC's Jim Muir assesses the new production](#)

The opera is staged annually in Egypt but the love story which tells of a slave girl and an Egyptian commander has returned to its spiritual home near the capital

following last year's performance at Luxor.

It was announced in 1997 that the opera would be staged at Luxor every October but less than a month after last autumn's performance Islamic radicals launched an attack on Hatshepsut Temple visitors, killing 58 tourists and four Egyptians.

The massacre led to an overnight collapse of the Egyptian tourist industry.

There have been no further attacks, and visitors are returning to the historic country, but it was decided to move the opera back to its birth place at Cairo where it was first performed in 1871.

A cast of international and local singers performed beneath the floodlit pharaonic monuments at the opening night on Monday.



The production has cost nearly \$3m

Hundreds of security personnel were stationed around the site to protect the guests, who included the wife of the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and the crown prince of Denmark.

More than 1,000 artists, workers and security men were involved in the spectacular production, which cost nearly \$3m.

Aida is a classic tale of love, jealousy, betrayal and death. It tells the story of the princess of Egypt who is in love with Radames, the commander of the Egyptian army which is fighting Ethiopia. Radames is in love with Aida, the daughter of the Ethiopian king.

'Thrill beyond belief'

The opera will be performed nightly beneath the floodlit pyramids until 17 October.

One of the three singers playing the opera's title role, Leona Mitchell, said: "I've sung this opera all over the world and just to be in the correct place where the opera has been written is to me a thrill beyond belief."

Aida's Director, Abdel Meneim Kamel, said there were plans to expand the 3,020-seat theatre at the pyramids



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plateau to hold as many as 6,000 people in 1999 and up to 12,000 in 2000.

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