

FESTIVAL VERDI

FVJ Journal

1/2018



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in the Light of Verdi

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Genesis

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FESTIVAL
VERDI
PARMA

2018



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It is with a real sense of excitement that I find myself writing this brief article. It isn't intended as an editorial, as you might find in new cultural magazines, but as a welcoming message, or rather, a show of support for the very first publication of the *Festival Verdi Journal*, which will be released to coincide with the 18th edition of *Festival Verdi*. It's a cheerful greeting worth writing because, as I've previously had the opportunity to say, this year's Festival is a special edition: one in which it turns 18 and comes of age. For the occasion, it will give itself a gift that will be shared with all of Verdi's passionate admirers around the world – the launch of its own publication, in both Italian and English, that will be distributed internationally and act as an additional medium for knowledge and to promote our activities globally. Not only that, it is also joyful because, in the days of *social networks* and virtual communication, I like to think that ink and paper still have a profound and important role to play when it comes to our reflections and the sharing of our experiences in recent years.

This magazine, edited by Alessandro Roccatagliati and containing essays, images, notes, and analytical discussions on all the programmed operas in this year's *Festival Verdi*, is a product of the laboratory or creative workshop that the Festival itself has become. As such, *FTJournal* truly represents the idea of a festival that I intend to pursue: that of a place, a cultural hotbed where there is not a supervisor or artistic director in a lone office deciding content molded around personal tastes; but rather where an authentic gathering of working groups come together, where everyone is called to contribute in virtue of their expertise (the Scientific Committee have some experience with this and can testify to how intense it is to work together at regular intervals). Expertise which is very specific, of course, but it all merges into a single planned idea – as outlined by the Theatre Director – that is capable of creating and realizing a cultural event of ever higher quality.

Lastly, I would like to highlight how, even in this case, good planning has allowed us to go to print way in advance, which is why I want to personally thank the curator, the content creators and our colleagues in the Press Office – who will ensure the largest possible dissemination of the *FTJournal* through those purchasing their tickets in advance and at the various *Festival roadshow* locations. In fact, I am convinced that the extra effort we are putting in will also be very useful to distinguish and affirm ourselves: not only for the quality of the programming and the extraordinary results in terms of attendances and international interest, but also in setting ourselves as a theatrical and musical reference point for the interpretation of Verdi throughout the world.

ANNA MARIA MEO



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With this first issue of *Festival Verdi Journal* starting in 2018 the Festival's Scientific Committee wishes to offer a special new publication to the opera houses of Parma and Busseto and their broad audiences. We have created an annual journal, published in two separate editions in English and Italian, which collects essays introducing the four operas on the programme, written by scholars of the highest international standing. Having ensured scholarly substance, rigour, and timeliness, we have imagined a journal whose register and visual appearance are far removed from those of academic periodicals, and seek to engage the reader with a friendly and direct approach, much like a magazine.

In a spacious and welcoming environment, made especially appealing by a rich iconography, for which an artist has been invited to create original illustrations, each opera is explored in two essays and a series of captioned images. The first, longer essay introduces the opera, tracing its origins and creative process, its reception, and salient musical and dramatic features. The second is more specialised, and explores specific themes, such as literary sources, cultural context, dramaturgy, and politics. A series of detailed captions, finally, leads the reader through a journey into visual aspects and staging, providing period illustrations as well as recent photographic documentation.

The *Festival Verdi Journal* is published several months ahead of the productions that will take place during the festival in the autumn, almost like a reflector that shines light on forthcoming performances. Thus, it effectively complements the conventional programme books associated with each opera, which will be available during the Festival Verdi and provide essential information, short essays, production notes, and the libretto. *FV Journal* transcends the specific productions and individual performances, and stands as a publication one will be able to return to in anticipation of other nights at the opera; a tool preparing the reader for a better informed and more fulfilling listening experience and providing a better understanding of Verdi's art and its context. Its aim, in the end, is to assist any lover of Verdi's theatre by providing solid information and insights—which is, after all, the same aim that has inspired us and the other musicologists on the Scientific Committee to join the magnificent cultural organisation of the Festival Verdi.

FRANCESCO IZZO – ALESSANDRO ROCCATAGLIATI

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Cover art and illustrations by Davide Forleo

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Davide Forleo FV Journal Artist

*His motto is "Peach Branch".
Following his own way of feeling, he makes and creates.*

Planets, Gods, astrolabes, ancient mouldings... Davide Forleo, also known as Peach Branch – finds materials in the warehouses of old museums, in the hidden pages of dusty encyclopedias, then enhances these very same elements with the subtle energies that his artworks produce. He restores objects worn out from their initial purpose and returns them to their original vigour. In his tenuous, fluctuating worlds, without precise spatiality, the stories that Forleo creates swim in the sea of dreams. And it is only in this way, in their uniqueness, that they can be truly appreciated. Anywhere, any place, any time, endless... each an essential mental category for the interpretation of his work, and the instability of scratches, of corrosion, of oxidation or burns are defined in digital space. An absolute space where even the finest of dust will remain forever motionless, suspended in air. It is complicated to assemble and enable the coexistence of entities loaded with meaning that can even oppose each other, in a harmony of sense that is like a line without a defined beginning or end (similar to a loop where everything turns, exchanging planes, exchanging perspective). And where each object is unique, separated from everything yet in the same moment perfectly imbued with the energy of the overall meaning. And where the most important objects blend with others of no apparent use, ancient symbols with modern markings whose presence is only an ambiguous allusion to something else. It is not easy to make all the elements that make up a dreamlike artefact coexist in a composition with objects treated like markings and with words as heavy as fabric, with strongly symbolic traces and poetic digressions consumed by time, carefully placed in the drawer of a dream. This is where you find Davide, the man, the artist who wants to passionately communicate his total involvement with the work. He, himself, is on the canvass.

CLAUDIO COMITTO

Shakespeare in the Light of Verdi

It is conceptually misguided to make a value judgement of an opera by measuring it against its literary model. The opera is simply an adaptation of the model for a different means of expression.

BY FABRIZIO DELLA SETA

Only when it attains the popularity of *Il trovatore* and *Un ballo in maschera* [...] will *Macbeth* be appreciated within the mainstream of Verdian masterpieces; and then it will be understood that this recreation of Shakespeare is much more vigorous and powerful than *Otello*, which was watered down by Boito's precisosity.

Thus wrote the eminent Shakespeare scholar Gabriele Baldini in his study of Verdi, published posthumously in 1970. Forty-seven years have past and Baldini's prophecy has been amply fulfilled: Verdi's first Shakespeare opera is today firmly established in the repertoire of the world's major theatres, directors and singers; the available critical edition enables both versions of the opera to be performed; and a wealth of academic research has clarified the main issues surrounding the text, the work's historical context, and its critical interpretation. No one today, upon the announcement of a new production or a new recording, asks whether it was worth

the trouble of "salvaging" it. The results of this change in perspective, to which two generations of interpreters and scholars have contributed in equal measure, can be summarised in just a few lines.

1. In 1847 *Macbeth* was a bold attempt to renew the traditions of Italian opera, as well as being an important episode in the mixed fortunes of Shakespeare in Italy. The Paris version of 1865, while adapting the opera to suit the tastes of a more discerning international audience, would not significantly alter the work's distinctiveness.

2. Verdi approached Shakespeare's masterpiece with a full awareness of the originality of what he was undertaking. He consulted the best translations and the most recent critical texts. He planned the dramatic structure down to the smallest details, remaining as faithful as possible to the original. He followed Francesco Piavesi's drafting of the libretto step by step and, when dissatisfied with this, turned to his more cultivated and ambitious friend, the



It was thus inevitable that the question should arise as to whether Verdi's art was "sufficient" to transpose into music the art of the sublime poet-dramatist, and – if so – to what extent

writer and scholar Andrea Maffei, to rewrite some sections.

3. Verdi's *Macheth* was an Italian response to the romantic taste for the "fantastic" and the "extraordinary" – in other words, for the supernatural (which was also one aspect of the romantics' reception of Shakespeare) – which was represented in the world of opera by works such as Weber's *Der Freischütz* and Meyerbeer's *Robert le diable*. This trend, foreign to Italy's irredeemably classicistic tradition, was the object of criticism, and even friends and admirers of Verdi were perplexed by the work.

4. Though remaining faithful to the traditional structures of post-Rossini opera, Verdi adopted an innovative musical language: vocal writing based on a very close interaction between word, sound and gesture, supported by a rich harmonic palette and dark, robust orchestration. In particular, he distanced himself from the Donizetti-Bellini ideal of the *belcanto*, in which even the most tense emotional situations were handled with lyrical beauty, adhering resolutely instead to the notion of poetic truth elaborated, on the basis of Shakespeare, by his other hero Victor Hugo. (It is well known that Verdi did not wish to give the role of Lady Macbeth to the great Eugenia Tadolini, whom he considered was gifted with too beautiful a figure and too beautiful a voice – the opposite of how the composer had imagined the character).

5. Verdi followed personally all aspects of the opera's production, from the preparation of the singer-actors to the staging of the scenic effects (the apparition of Banco, the procession of the kings). He studied the performance tradition of *Macheth* in England, and when in the same year he visited London he did not fail to attend

performances of the tragedy; aspects of which he was to incorporate in subsequent productions of the original version of the opera and, to an even greater extent, in his revision of the work for Paris.

All the above bears witness to Verdi's awareness of the task he had set himself as he approached what he defined as "a drama that has nothing in common with the others," "one of the greatest creations of man," from which he desired to create, if not "something great [...] at least something out of the ordinary." But it is precisely this that has proved a stumbling block against which the critical evaluation of this and Verdi's two other Shakespearean operas has often stumbled, and one which must be clarified before we go on to examine *Macheth* in greater depth. In Anglophone cultures Shakespeare has always been revered as sacred, and towards the end of the eighteenth century this attitude was to spread throughout the whole of the western world. The "Immortal Bard" is among that small group of undisputed geniuses – cultural monuments – that are spoken of with almost religious fervour. In justifying how the exponent of an artistic genre such as opera – a genre considered as "popular", in all the senses of that ambiguous word – could dare to have compared himself with Shakespeare, it was thus inevitable that the question should arise as to whether Verdi's art was "adequate" to transpose into music the art of the sublime poet-dramatist, and – if so – to what extent this was the case at different times in his long career. The question touched a nerve in Verdi, who reacted to the criticism directed towards his opera in Paris in 1865 in the following terms:

It may be that I have not rendered Macheth well, but that I don't know, don't understand, and don't feel Shakespeare



"Macbeth" in Pictures by Alessandro Roccatagliati

Key Elements

Verdi was a master of synthesis, also in his letters. "In short, the things that need special care in this opera are Chorus and stage machinery [Machismoi]," he wrote in good time to Lanari, who was preparing for the Florentine premiere of *Macbeth* in 1847. And for the new Paris version of 1865, to the publisher Escudier he wrote: "there are three roles in this opera and three is all there can be: Lady Macbeth, Macbeth, and the Chorus of Witches." (It is thus not by chance that the emblematic illustration in the frontispiece of the first score of the work, published by Ricordi (1847; Figure 1), depicts a situation in which three of these factors – the witches as a group; Macbeth, and the scenic-technical effects – all act together: the so-called scene of the apparitions at the heart of Act III of the opera. It is thus interesting to trace details of this scene in images from both the past and the present – all the more so since much of the iconography relating to Shakespeare's *Macbeth* that was available to Verdi, from Fussli (Figure 2) to Dawes, and from von Holst to Delacroix, specifically concerned this same scene.

- no, by God, no. He is a favorite poet of mine, whom I have had in my hands from earliest youth, and whom I read and reread constantly.

In order to respond adequately to criticism of this kind we should first observe that when talking of "understanding" Shakespeare it is important to clarify the cultural context to which we are referring. We approach the poet today with a hundred and seventy years of criticism behind us – historical, sociological, symbolic, psychoanalytic, structuralist, deconstructionist; but our mode of understanding his oeuvre is no more "right" than Verdi's: it is merely mediated through different cultural filters. Verdi read Shakespeare through the filters of romantic criticism, of contemporary actors, and of the artists who had already transmitted

their experience of the Bard in their own works (Goethe, Schiller, Byron, Hugo and, in music, Meyerbeer and Berlioz). Even today there are those who still express surprise at the triviality of the witches choruses ("Mère frullata nel pensiero"; "Le sorelle vagabonde"); but if we bear in mind Verdi's definition of those hags, whom he considered together as "truly a character, and a character of the utmost importance [...] coarse and gossipy in the first act, sublime and prophetic in the third", then we can appreciate that these scenes are a concrete realisation of the "agly", as Victor Hugo had theorised it (using Shakespeare as a model), in the lineage that would lead to the opening scenes of *Rigoletto*, and that they are closely related not only to *Robert le diable* but also to the *Symphonic Fantasiaque*. An even more essential point is that it is conceptually mistaken to make a value

Verdi and Shakespeare had the same goal: to create “situations” of the highest dramatic intensity – that special “something” that can be transmitted from the stage to the audience

The libretto is merely the scaffold that supports the opera: it is the music that supplies the images, the texture, the pace

Witches

In comparison with the general cultural context of Italy at the time, resistant as it was to Romantic notions, the young Verdi approached Shakespeare and *Macbeth* with a fairly up-to-date critical guide, August Wilhelm Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art* (1809, translated into Italian in 1817). His conception of the witches, in particular, is proof of this. For the German scholar the witches are “base agents of hell” whom it would be “contradictory to try to render noble”; thus “they chatter like slatterns, since that is what they must be”, except that “their style [of speech] becomes better when they address Macbeth”: “Compare Verdi, whose ideas are almost identical: “in both their singing and their acting, they must be brutal and coarse from the beginning up to the moment in Act III where they are confronted with Macbeth. From this point on, they are sublime and prophetic”. We might well ask whether, among the many possibilities of representing such a low, ugly, gross type of woman, explicit images of conception and birth are the most appropriate (as in Emma Dante's scenography for Turin in 2016; Figure 3), even in view of the oracular transfiguration that follows. Or whether perhaps, even today, a more traditional northern approach to the imagery, as at the 2011 Salzburg *Festspiele* (scenography by Anna Maria Heinrich, Figure 4) might not be more suitable.



judgement of an opera by measuring it against its literary model. In some cases the model may consist of a prestigious text, and in others not, but never is the opera a simple adaptation of the model for a different means of expression. Verdi's *Macbeth* is *not* a musical translation of Shakespeare's work, any more than the latter is a dramatic translation of the events on which it is based. The poet contributed to the formation of the musician's poetics; the tragedy supplied the raw material for the opera; but the opera, once it has been composed, is something

new and autonomous and, as such, must be evaluated in the context of the artistic tradition to which it belongs. It is in this sense that Baldini's “Shakespeare *recreated*” is to be understood. To understand this key point that defines the relationship between the English poet-dramatist and the Italian musician-dramatist we must consider it in greater depth. Both artists had the same goal: to create “situations” of the highest dramatic intensity – that special “something” that can be transmitted from the stage to the

audience to keep them glued to their seats. Shakespeare achieves this not so much through the “story” itself, but rather by means of his poetry, with his magical ability to weave verbal images and to combine them rhythmically. No translation, however valid – let alone a transcription for an opera libretto – can adequately render this magic, which is a true music of words; the question of comparing the value of the libretto with that of the original therefore does not even arise. (That said, some of the librettist's solutions are surprisingly effective: the reply

of Lady Macbeth to the Servant: “Trovì accoglienza quale un re si merita” (“He shall find the welcome here that a King deserves,” Act I, scene 6) and Macbeth's injunction to the witches: “se cielo e terra / dovessero innovar l'antica guerra” (“even if heaven and earth renew their ancient war,” Act III, scene 3) have an incisiveness – the former sarcastic, the latter metaphorical – that the original, at those particular points, simply does not possess.) But the libretto is merely the scaffold that supports the opera: it is the music that supplies the images, the

*The real event, in fact, is the remorse that wells up immediately
after the murder in the conscience of the assassin, which his accomplice
strives in vain to repress*

texture, the pace; and it is from this point of view that a comparison is possible. The composer creates in music the same type of tension that the poet had created in words; he does not achieve this by means of abstract musical invention, but his starting point is the situations and the words (*parole scritte*, theatrical words, according to Verdi's memorable definition) that are given substance by the libretto. Even so, it is extremely instructive to compare the opera with its source in order to understand exactly how the authors created their new work of art by making cuts, additions and alterations to the original material; and it is this that we shall now do, using as a basis for our comparison two of those sections unanimously recognised as the most crucial, most innovative parts of the entire opera.

The Scene and Duet between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth (Act I, scenes 10-15) presents the crucial tragic element, already prepared in the previous scenes and from which all the subsequent events come about: the murder of the king, which is not actually shown on stage. The real event, in fact, is the remorse that wells up immediately after the murder in the conscience of the assassin, which his accomplice strives in vain to repress. Externally the form is everything that one would traditionally expect: a long recitative followed by four brief sections (or, in the jargon of the time, *tempi*): a *tempo d'allargato* ("Fatal mia donna, un murmure"), a *cantabile* ("Allor questa voce m'intesi nel petto"), a *tempo di mezzo* ("Il pugnal là riportate") and a *stretta* ("Veni altrove! ogni sospetto"). If we compare the text of the libretto with that of the corresponding scene in Shakespeare we find not only that the words set by Verdi are already all there in the original, but also that their layout seems designed to suit the "usual form of the duets" (to use the phrase of Abramo Basevi, the first musicologist to consider Verdi's music in depth): Shakespeare's dramatic form is

substantially the same as that of Verdi. As a result of its musical setting, however, the passage – as presented on the operatic stage – produces a totally original effect with its *sottovoce* vocal delivery, interrupted at times by short-lived flights of melody to be sung *a voce spiegata* (in full voice), and its sparse, dark-hued orchestral accompaniment.

Let us now look more closely at the *Andantino* that forms the cantabile section, placing the text of the libretto side by side with its model (Verdi and Prave used an Italian prose translation by Carlo Rusconi, published in 1838).

Prave and Verdi kept very closely to Shakespeare's text, extracting from it the key concepts. At some points they eliminated what was superfluous (for their purposes), as, for instance, the variations on sleep in Macbeth's first lines; elsewhere they added something, remaining faithful to the spirit and even to the letter of Shakespeare: having removed the references to sleep from Macbeth's text, and needing for the *Andantino* four quatrains but having material only for two, they drew additional text from an earlier scene in the play (Act I, scene 7), simplifying as "voce tonante" Shakespeare's original "trumpet-tongued."

Although Lady Macbeth's first two lines do not have a direct equivalent in Shakespeare, her opening line, "Ma, dimmi, altra voce non parti d'udirne?", recalls that of Macbeth ("Methought I heard a voice cry"), while the third and fourth freely paraphrase Shakespeare's concept: Macbeth's delirious ravings do not baffle his valour. This is no mere filling inserted to complete the metric measure with parallel lines to those of Macbeth (necessary to balance the musical phrases). On the contrary, these lines enrich the dramatic content by their ironic reference to Macbeth's previous utterance: Lady Macbeth reproaches her husband for his cowardice, throwing back at him his own words – "Allor questa voce m'intesi

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yet they enrich the dramatic content by their ironic reference to Macbeth's
previous utterance*

SHAKESPEARE-RUSCONI, II 2

PAVE-VERDI, I 12
(N. 4 Scena e Duetto)

MACBETH
Methought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep," the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast.

MACBETH
Allor questa voce m'intesi nel petto:
Avrai per guanciali sol veprì, o Macbetho!

LADY MACBETH
What do you mean?

MACBETH
Still it cried "Sleep no more" to all the house:
"Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor
Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more."

Il sonno per sempre, Glamis, uccidesti!
Non v'è che vigilia, Caudore, per te!

LADY MACBETH
Who was it that thus cried? Why, worthy thane,
You do unbend your noble strength, to think
So brain-sickly of things.

LADY
Ma, dimmi, altra voce non parti d'udirne?
Sei vano, o Macbetho, ma privo d'ardire:
Glamis, a mezz'opra vacilli, t'arresti,
Panciul vanitoso, Caudore, tu se'.

<17. MACBETH
[...] his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking off;

MACBETH
Vendetta, tuonarmi com'angeli dirai,
udò di Duncano le sante virtù.
LADY
(Quell'animò tremo, combatte, delira...
Chi mai lo direbbe l'invito che fu?)