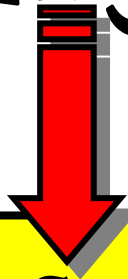


Created to comfort and encourage consumers cautiously considering a song-filled sojourn at the Des Moines Metro Opera's 2010 Festival Season.

An



Operaphobic's Guide For Enjoying:



Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*



Verdi's **MACBETH**

Floyd's *Susannah*



Acknowledgements

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**Constructive criticism of
the *Guide* will be accepted,
(but, not always graciously).**

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*J.P. Cooney and
Sondra S. Cooney*

***An Operaphobic's Guide
For Enjoying:***

***The DES MOINES
METRO OPERA'S
38th FESTIVAL SEASON***



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OPERAPHOBIC GUIDES
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Des Moines Metro Opera



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Greetings!

For the third year, the Des Moines Metro Opera is pleased to again partner with J.P. and Sondra Cooney in offering offbeat, amusing and informative roadmaps to the operas of our Summer Festival Season! For the three great operas of the 2010 Season, the Cooneys have captured their essence in a way that entertains, educates and enlightens.

Many people are involved with the creation of an opera production, from the conductor to the singers to the backstage technicians, all to create a magical experience for you in the theatre. A great deal of thought and consideration have gone into each of the elements you will see and hear on the stage. It is our hope that this Guide will help you to appreciate and enjoy these works of art, and that it makes your experience with us this summer even more memorable.

Thank you for showing your interest in these Operaphobic's Guides for Enjoying the Festival's productions, and as always, thank you for your continued support of Des Moines Metro Opera.

Sincerely yours,

Robert L. Larsen
Founder and Artistic Director

Le Nozzi

MACBETH

Susannah



**Des Moines Metro Opera 2010:
An Overview of the
Commonalities and Not-so Commonalities
Among the Festival's 38th Season
Productions.**

The productions of the Des Moines Metro Opera always are an elegant, yet well-balanced and nutritious operatic banquet. Not an easy task to continuously and successfully perform for 37 years! Year 38 looks to be no exception to that tradition.

The evolution of opera from its late 16th century inception to the “end” of the romantic opera in the early 20th encompasses more than three centuries. The original premiere dates of the three operas appearing in the 2010 Festival bracket 2/3rds plus of that operatic gestation period. As a result, we will hear three very different musical styles in operas created by three compositional masters.

Le Nozzi is the oldest of the three, originating in the late 18th century and musically very much in the style of that period. However, it is almost the last (#17) of Mozart's long string (22) of operatic masterpieces. We therefore will hear that master composer at the height of his considerable compositional skills, and as we know his sounds are unique as compared to those of his peers. *Le Nozzi* also gives us the first of the three memorable joint ventures between the Austrian genius and his equally gifted poet-librettist, Lorenzo da Ponte.

Macbeth premiered more than fifty years (original production) and then seventy years¹ (revised production) after *Le Nozzi*. Originally, it was very much early Verdi, not the Maestro at the height of his mature musical powers. It also was created at a transitional period of operatic musical style, the evolution of bel canto into early music-drama; a transition from a meal of white wine and fish to one of red wine and red meat. Even in its revision, *Macbeth* shows the transition seams where the two styles were non-politically, gerrymandered. Shakespeare obviously provided the original plot line. However, one of Verdi's most frequent (and most frequently abused) librettists provided the poetry of the libretto in both versions, Francesco Maria Piave.

Susannah, the youngest of the trio--- barely over a half a century old, is all-American in both composition and setting. This alone would set it apart from its other two Festival companions. However added to these not so commonalities, its composer, Carlyle Floyd, alone among the three, creates his own librettos. *Susannah* was his third opera, but his first major success. represents his first performed opera;² measured by number of performances since its premiere, it is said to be one of the most popular of American operas, second only to *Porgy and Bess*. Lest an audience be wary due to *Susannah*'s appearance in the modern era of opera,³ Floyd's music is as accessible as the other two members of the Festival trio.

The plot lines of all three operas emerge from literature. *Le Nozzi* from a wildly successful 18th century play; the reasons for that

¹ Verdi extensively revised his original *Macbeth* almost twenty years after its debut. The rationale and results of that will subsequently be summarized.

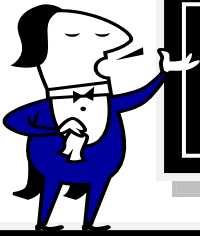
² Floyd's operatic catalogue depending how you count, currently contains ten to twelve works.

³ A period perhaps overly-notorious for atonal and twelve-tone operas.

popularity certainly gave an additional boost to the Mozart-da Ponte masterpiece. *Macbeth*, as we all learned in high school, was the product of Shakespeare's fertile creativity. It should be noted in staged productions, the play is notorious more for failures than successes. Its track record is such that superstitious theater folk only refer to it as "The Scottish Play."

Verdi's opera, even after revision, never achieved the level continuous success of many of his other works. Critics have speculated that the play's flaws more than Verdi's music contributed to the opera's problems. *Susannah* has an obvious Biblical source, although Floyd states he did not reread the Biblical passages as he was creating his libretto. Further, he had a larger, more modern political message in the work than the intent of the Bible's verses.

Finally, when compared to their male counterparts, all three operas present to us very remarkable women, albeit for different reasons. *Le Nozzi's* Countess and Susanna are extremely intelligent, quick-thinking and with a fascinating capacity to out-manuever their male counterparts. The men are clearly out-classed; all this in an era when woman's traditional role was to be subservient. With Lady Macbeth, what can we say? The penultimate template for one tough woman. This, in spite of (or perhaps, because of?) being martially saddled with a vacillating, vacuous partner. Floyd's Susannah, likable and admirable in the beginning, undergoes an amazing transformation in the face of untruth and persecution. Her strength and resolve as the opera ends are exceptional, especially given the future she faces.



TRUTH IN ADVERTISING.

The material in each of this **Guide's** three operas contains:

- A non-technical, seriously stripped-down synopsis of the operatic opus and its major musical moments [a.k.a **Tersely Telling a Tuneful Tale (Often) Through Alliterative Analysis and (Always) Musical Musings**].

"Alliteration!" You ask, "Why use this ancient and somewhat arcane poetic style?" Well, it is fun to manufacture and judging from its "rah, rah" readership reception, it must be fun to read; or maybe we are all a bit weird. Whatever!

Why only "often" alliteration? Well, it all depends on where I was the night before composing the copy. That stuff requires a reasonably clear head. Capisce?

- A **Background** piece has also been developed for each opera and sets forth, albeit slightly, the sociology and perhaps, anthropology of the opera under the microscope. Why you ask? Opera as any art form is a product of its society and culture at a specific point in time. As that point regresses into history, the on-stage and off-stage circumstances creating the opera frequently vanish into an archival dustbin. We argue that such absence is a loss to the understanding and **enjoyment** of an older piece when heard in contemporary times. Therefore, the individual *Backgrounds* are designed to enhance your opera viewing pleasure through an understanding of how another time, place and circumstances probably influenced an operatic product. Enjoy!

Consumer Advisory

If you are looking for the **Guide** to be staid and sterile read, you have bet on the wrong horse. The material is liberally larded with at least chuckles, if not laughs. It was optimistically constructed to be entertainingly informational.



VERDI'S

MACBETH

LIBRETTO:

FRANCESCO
MARIA
PAÏVE

BASED ON SHAKESPEARE'S
PLAY

PREMIERE
(ORIGINAL VERSION):
TEATRO DELLA PERGOLA,
FLORENCE, 14 MARCH 1847

LANGUAGE: ITALIAN



Making the Murderous Macbeths Musical. (58)
(a.k.a. Background).

**Who are these kilt-clad, clansmen, killing kith and kin
in tones of a Scottish-burred Italian? (71)**
(a.k.a. the Cast in order of first vocal venturing.)

**A Fulsome Folio Filled with Facts and Memorable
Musical Memos, Often Alliteratively Arranged. (76)**
(a.k.a. the Opera!)

**Act I, Mostly Macabre Meadows and Low Roads,
Meandering by the Macbeths' Medieval Motel.³⁴ (79)**

**Scene 1. A Woeful Woodland Warren, Writhing
with a Raft of Wrathful Witches. (79)**

**Scene 2. In the Macbeths' Medieval Motel, a
Copious Corridor Conveniently Constructed for Conspiring
and Killing. (83)**

Act II. Still the Macbeths' Eerie Environs. (88)

Scene 1. A Room in the Macbeths' Motel. (88)

³⁴ "For the departure of your dreams, do drop in!"

Scene 2. Near the Macbeths' Motel, a perilous pathway known as assassins' alley. (89)

Scene 3. The Chow-Down Center of our Killer Couple's Castle. (90)

Act III. The Crones' Cavernous Cave, close-by the Woeful Woodland Warren. (93)

A Pause in the Proceedings for an Arabesque Aside. (94)

Act IV. Bordering the English-Scottish Border. (99)

Scene 1. Birnam Woods.³⁵ (99)

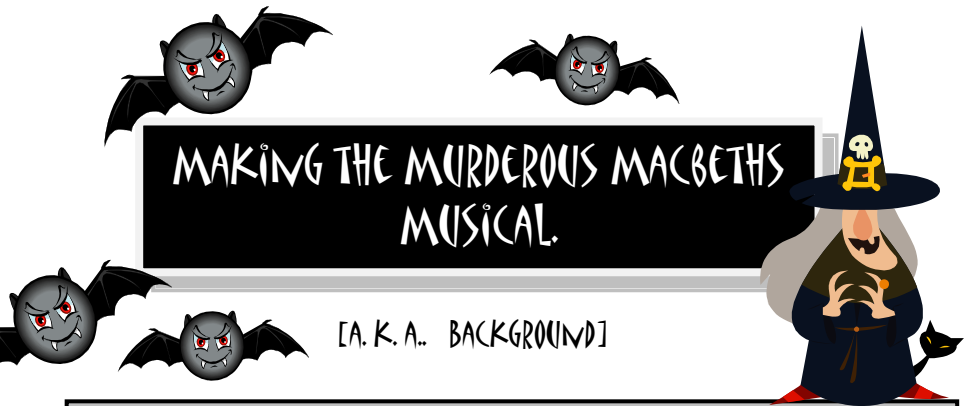
Scene 2.³⁶ A corridor in the Scottish Somnambulants' Sleep Center. (101)

Scene 3. An Interior Hall of Dunsinane. (103)

Scene 4. The Battlements (literally). (104)

³⁵ If you were paying close attention in high school English, you know that shortly, these trees are due for a transplant.

³⁶ Shortly after Macbeth's Bar-B-Q melt down, the killer couple moved into Dunsinane Digs, a princely perk of the Leading Laddie of the Land. The final scenes play out in that domain.



MAKING THE MURDEROUS MACBETHS MUSICAL.

[A. K. A.. BACKGROUND]

VERDI LIKED *MACBETH* BEST

Very shortly after the successful 1847 premiere of the original version of *Macbeth*, Verdi wrote to his former father-in-law and long time supporter, "I have long intended to dedicate an opera to you, who have been father, benefactor, and friend to me. It was a duty I should have fulfilled sooner if imperious circumstances had not prevented me. Now, I send you *Macbeth* which I love in preference to all my other operas, and therefore deem more worthy to be presented to you. The heart offers it; may the heart receive it, and my it be a witness to the eternal memory, the gratitude, and the love felt for you. "

In addition to the very personal dedication of the opera, it is a work the Maestro continually reworked throughout his career and also produced a major revision. It was his one opera throughout his career, in which he maintained a constant demonstrated affection and continual production oversight, if not outright control.

Verdi clearly and consistently demonstrated his affection for *Macbeth*. The curiosity here is why, among all his musical "offspring," was *Macbeth* the favorite?



In the Beginning. Comparatively, Verdi's operatic composition started later in life than Rossini and Donizetti, his two major musical peers of the mid-19th century.³⁷ However, Verdi's successful productivity ran considerably longer.

Verdi's first two operas were so unsuccessful that he decided to abandon operatic composition "forever." However, he was tempted to try one mo' time when he read the libretto for *Nabucco*. Subsequently, the composer's musical working of that Biblical tale put him seriously on the operatic map, both in Italy and internationally.

³⁷ Rossini (1792-1868) began opera composition at age 18 and retired from that effort at age 37; over those two decades, he composed some 35-37 operas. Why he retired at such an early age is a continual source of speculation, as his work was quite successful and lucrative. Given his reputation as a gourmand, he probably just wanted to have more quality chow time.

Donizetti (1797-1848) only slightly younger than Rossini, began his composition at age 18 also; unfortunately, he died young from advanced syphilis at age 46. During his compositional life, he produced some 75 operas. However, his most enduring output began in 1830 and produced approximately half of his catalogue.

Verdi ((1813-1901) composed his first opera at age 26, but continued to successfully compose until age 80; over that more than half century period, he composed some 30 operas.

{Calculating the number of operas produced by a productive 19th century composer is always somewhat speculative. In that era (and to some extent today), composers were prone to seriously rework their earlier operas. Do those efforts count only as one (after all it is sort of the same opera); or does it count as two operas (it is a lot of work, and both versions appear periodically)? Your call, but watch out for shifting sands!

A Sudden Surfeit of Success! Why? The simplest answer is probably, “Timing is everything!” When *Nabucco* appeared in 1842, two events were on-going throughout Europe; one political and one musical. Verdi’s operatic work fortuitously facilitated the needs of both, albeit almost accidentally.

At that time, most of Europe was restive politically, seeking governmental reform if not outright revolution;³⁸ Also, many areas were seeking release from foreign domination and the right to govern their own lands. Italians were especially proactive, seeking freedom from outsider domination of their peninsula (e.g. French, Austrian) and its unification under one government of native development.³⁹

Musically, opera was in a period of major stylistic transformation from bel canto to music drama and/or romantic opera.

Verdi’s *Nabucco* electrified the Italian operatic world (and subsequently, strongly influenced the European). He introduced audiences to sounds and forms they had never heard. Musically and theatrically, his work was a revolutionary revelation.

In addition to its new generation of musical forms, the subject matter of *Nabucco* was unification of a nation and freedom

³⁸ The revolts and revolutions of 1848 were not too far in the future.

³⁹ Within the peninsula’s territories, there was a political and social movement to unify the different states on the “boot” into the single state of Italy. This effort, termed Il Risorgimento (the resurgence), began in 1815 triggered by the Congress of Vienna and successfully ended with unification in 1871.

from foreign oppression, all achievable by the action of individuals dedicated to their homeland.⁴⁰

As a consequence of the peninsula's radical evolution politically and operatically, the Italian Risorgimento⁴¹ movement and theater audiences took Verdi's work to the heart of their musical and political change efforts.⁴² The composer became the poet of the Italian unification and somewhat secondarily, the instrument for operatic sound changes.⁴³

All told, during his early period,⁴⁴ Verdi produced multiple operas with a generally Risorgimento sub-text.⁴⁵ *Macbeth*, the last of that operatic line, is especially full of political themes, as

⁴⁰ In addition to Verdi's musical forms and operatic topics, the role of opera per se in social/political transformations of that time, should not be overlooked. In Italy especially, opera was the major and most democratic entertainment form--literally, the only show in town. No movies, TV, sports events, and so forth, at least yet. As a consequence, opera had somewhat of a monopoly and a tremendous potential for widely affecting public opinion and action. The heavy hand of governmental censorship at this time was a recognition of the potential for civil unrest to emerge from the opera house.

⁴¹ See reference **#33**.

⁴² During the height of the Risorgimento, it was popularly rumored the name "Verdi" was actually a "code" acronym for "Victor Emmanuel, Re d'Italia,," the king-yet-to-be of a unified Italy.

⁴³ Several of Verdi's operatic choruses became revolutionary anthems (e.g. *Nabucco's* "Va Pensera" and *Macbeth's* "Patria Oppressa.")

⁴⁴ Generally Verdi's compositional career is divided into three phases roughly allocated on the basis of his compositional/subject matter evolution: 1839-1850 the early period; 1853-1859, the middle period; and, 1867-1887, the final period. Quantitatively the number of operas across the periods, declined; however, qualitatively they significantly increased. He referred to his early period as his "operatic galley slave period."

⁴⁵ (e.g. *I Lombardi*, *Ernani*, *I Due Foscari*, *Giovanna d'Arco*, *Alzira* and *Atilla*.)

well as the composer's interest in exploring such themes in "new" musical forms.

***Macbeth* Materializes.** After *Nabucco's* success, Verdi seemed to slip into compositional doldrums.⁴⁶ In the three years following *Nabucco's* triumph, he developed six operas. They all suffered by comparison to his subsequent work, then and even today.⁴⁷ However, all was not lost---

In 1846, Verdi received a contract to develop an opera (his tenth)⁴⁸ to be premiered during Florence's pre-Lenten Carnival season of the next year.⁴⁹ The composer considered three possible subjects, all of which existed as plays: Shakespeare's *Macbeth*; the 18th century German poet and playwright, Friedrich Schiller's *Die Rauber*;⁵⁰ and, a work by Grillparzer, an Austrian playwright and poet of the early 19th century.

⁴⁶ Tactfully referred to as a "creative crisis."

⁴⁷ While reappraised as "better than originally thought," they now generate only small excitement among the opera going-public and impresarios.

⁴⁸ To those of us uninitiated and unskilled in composition, operatic development and/or production, it is hard to believe as "real," the consistent grinding out of operas at the rate of one to two a year and the short period of time subsequently required to translate the written words and music into a full-blown productions. But---believe!

⁴⁹ A somewhat fluid period of pre-Lenten whoop-di-do. It is usually (but not always) the weeks between Twelfth Night and the beginning of Lent. When it starts varies from culture to culture, but it always ends on Ash Wednesday. FYI, "Carnival" is thought to have evolved etymologically from the Italian "carne vale" meaning "without meat" (e.g. Lent).

⁵⁰ At the time of the contract, Verdi was already at work on the Schiller piece. It would premiere four months after *Macbeth* under the title of *I Masnadieri*. To say the least, it was not a resounding success, but that's another story.

Out of his three operatic options, *Macbeth* was selected to fulfill the Florence contract. However, the selection was not an artistic decision. It was pure, unromantic business acumen. Specifically, the singer that was Verdi's choice for the tenor lead in either the contemplated Schiller or Grillparzer operatic re-workings was unavailable. However, a baritone (Varesi), favored by both the public and Verdi, would be available during the contractually dictated time. In Verdi's compositional plan, *Macbeth* called for a baritone; it therefore won the toss rather than either of the two that called for tenor leads.⁵¹

Apart from the baritone's availability,⁵² Verdi also felt the time was ripe for a dramatic "prima donna" opera, one with a strong leading woman's role; now, if Lady Macbeth doesn't qualify for that sobriquet, who does?⁵³

There was a to-be-fourth Verdi-Shakespeare opera, *Il Re Lear* (King Lear). Circa 1850, Verdi commissioned a libretto to be developed from the play. With Verdi's on and off assistance, and the death of one poet working on the piece, the libretto was thought to have been completed about 1857. Verdi continually talked about developing the opera, but never composed the music. Although a detailed *Lear* scenario survives, the reasons for Verdi's ambivalence are unknown. Some thirty years later, during the development of *Otello*,

⁵¹ It has been an on-going operatic tradition, more honored in the observance than the breach that scores of those times were written with particular artists' voices in mind. Operas in their subsequent performances also would be re-tailored to fit other voices.

⁵² Varesi also was the baritone of choice for the first *Rigoletto* and *Ernani*

⁵³ The Lady Macbeth role went to Barbieri-Ninè who had created the heroine's role in Verdi's *I Due Foscari*. More of her later.

Verdi had the libretto material readily accessible and was still talking of its development into an opera.⁵⁴

As his initial Shakespearean operatic outcome,⁵⁵ *Macbeth* was not as successful as Verdi's efforts with *Otello* and *Falstaff*. In the composer's defense, it should be noted that there was a thirty year gap between the first version of *Macbeth* and *Otello*. A great deal of Verdian musical and theatrical maturity occurred during that gap period. It also should be recognized that in the Shakespearean cannon, *Macbeth* (as a play) has a notorious historical track record of failed productions.

Spinning *Macbeth* from Play Into Opera. Verdi and the librettists he treated as galley slaves followed Shakespeare's lead in translating the play into opera. However, it would be simplistic to assume that they cloned the work into opera. The play's general argument and development are followed, although economically by the composer and his librettist. Extraneous characters and scenes disappear with Verdi versus Shakespeare.⁵⁶ Not all operatic composers using Shakespeare were so considerate as Verdi of the Shakespearean source.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Some Verdi scholars observed that the Maestro did not like to repeat himself. They speculated that since he had already dealt with a dysfunctional family once (*Nabucco*) he could not bring himself to swim in those waters again. There is no disagreement that Lear's family is state-of-the-art dysfunctional.

⁵⁵ A subsequent revision of the original 1847 opera in 1865, some eighteen years after the first version, was not considered a success either at that time.

⁵⁶ For an understanding of the composers and librettists art, it becomes instructive to track changes (or lack thereof) between the spoken drama and the operatic version. But not right now!

⁵⁷ Ambrose Thomas, as example, in his operatic *Hamlet*, left the Prince alive at the end, reigning as the new King of Denmark

For obvious reasons, the operatic *Macbeth* lacks the intimacy found in other Verdi works. Its hero is not warm and fuzzy. The opera exhibits the play's almost continuous violence and other terrible happenings. Its vocal and orchestral material provide a feeling of terror that is consistent with the play. Verdi saw Macbeth and his Lady as crude political conspirators, not husband and wife and/or lovers. As characters, the Macbeths fascinate, but we surely do not identify with them.⁵⁸ They are a demented pair of primitive anarchists, and the music reflects that demeanor.

Verdi's Macbeth is pale, and unlike Shakespeare's Macbeth, he is not independent of Lady M. All his actions throughout the work are governed by either the Lady or the Witches' and their predictions. Macbeth tends to "react" rather than "act,"⁵⁹ Only in his two final arias does Macbeth display his own independent will. Lady M, in contrast, displays her independence of will throughout the opera.

One interesting character aspect of Verdi's *Macbeth* was dictated by a custom of Italian opera---- the "hero" does not "ponder" his actions! On that country's musical stage, characters did not speculate or ruminate on actions; they moved forward decisively. Hamlet's indecisiveness would not have been an acceptable subject for an Italian opera of that time.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Poet Mathew Arnold's observation of the fun couple is that, "They lack sweetness and light."

⁵⁹ As examples, in the Duncan murder, banquet and apparition scenes.

⁶⁰ Excessively indecisive characters were more than acceptable on the French stage however; see Thomas' successful operatic *Hamlet*. What a difference a common border makes.!

Despite all Verdi's excessive care and cleaning, the 1847 *Macbeth* production had a mixed reception. This was partly due to the mixing of musical styles and the not yet full public acceptance of music-drama as opposed to bel canto. However, more specific criticism gives some insight to the Italian operagoer of this period: the opera lacked an Italian "theme;" too Nordic in its concept; no love affairs and/or romantic couples; and, Lady Macbeth was "too masculine," in addition to which, she had "demonic" impulses. The Italians evidently had not read the play.⁶¹

Spinning the Operatic *Macbeth* (a.k.a. updating the 1847 Kilt-Killer into a 1865 model.) In 1863, the Impresario of Paris' Theatre Lyrique indicated to Verdi he would like to produce *Macbeth* if the composer would add a ballet and a final chorus.⁶² Verdi tentatively agreed to the terms of the Paris revival, pending his review of the original score.

The Maestro's reaction to his review of the 1847 score, has been described as "horrified." In his view, the quality of the writing was not up to his current standards—eleven years after the original production.⁶³ He agreed to the ballet and chorus additions, but he also requested somewhat free rein in revising any part of the score. Verdi being Verdi, the Opera

⁶¹ Basically, the Maestro made too many textual waves and was musically too far ahead of his audience.

⁶² In the original work, Macbeth was mortally wounded on-stage, sang a "dying aria," died and the opera ends, bloodily but quietly. The Theatre felt a blast of Verdian chorus would be more appropriate aesthetically and more traditional for the tastes of Parisian opera-goers.

⁶³ It must be remembered that Verdi's compositional skills developed very quickly and continuously. As a consequence, his work in the 1860's was light years ahead of his compositional work in the 1840's.

management sensibly agreed, even though that delayed the premiere until 1865.

With the same abused librettist⁶⁴ in tow as the 1847 original, the revisions were begun. This time the relationship was less stressful. There was considerable orchestration tinkering; however, the more notable set pieces (e.g. arias etc.) added (or deleted) were:

1. In Act II, Scene 1, a rather pedestrian aria for Lady Macbeth was cut and the magnificent and powerful “La Luce Langue” (The light is fading) replaced it. In this new piece, Lady M declaims for herself the necessity of Banquo’s murder.

2. In Act III, the requested ballet was added; also, the original apparitions’ scene and Macbeth’s aria were extensively rewritten.

3. In Act IV, there were revisions to the Scene 1 exiles’ chorus; in Scene 4: Macbeth’s death aria (“Mal per me che m’affidai”) was cut and the associated stage business was changed; Macbeth was killed off-stage, and a final “Verdian chorus” (Salut, o roi) was added.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Verdi’s whipping boy librettist was Francisco Piave who all told developed the poetry for nine Verdi works. Verdi treated him with extremes of affection, verbal abuse and continual acrimonious conflict usually expressed through voluminous correspondence. Further, Verdi never did trust Piave’s judgment. However, improbable as it seems, art overcomes (or comes from) irrational conflict. Together the two men produced some of opera’s more memorable works (e.g. *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata*). Verdi’s correspondence to Piave is literally filled with insulting and abusive observations throughout the creation of *Macbeth*. In the end, Verdi threatened not to pay the librettist, although later he did. However, he had Piave’s name removed from the title page of the first edition of the opera. Later they did “kiss and make up” in time for the *Macbeth* revisions--- Piave was a slow learner.!

⁶⁵ Critically and in the composer’s view, the death aria was extremely powerful. Verdi cut it because he thought the revised ending overall and especially with the

Always the micro-manager, Verdi prepared very detailed instructions for the Paris production. Unfortunately, the management ignored most of them. The result was the production was generally considered a failure. However, time and both public and critical reassessment rescued the 1865 version from the dust-bin of mediocre Verdi. It is now the standard performance version and certainly well on the second tier of operatic repertoire, clawing its way upwards into the first.

Macbeth: Words (Librettist) versus Music (Composer)?

To give greater dramatic effect to the *Macbeth* libretto, Verdi wanted brief verses, short with no superfluous words. Part of Verdi's problem with the development of the libretto dealt with the basic operatic problem of what is most important: the words or the music?⁶⁶ In this instance, Verdi felt the form of the words would define the function of the music in *Macbeth*. Consequently, he paid unusually close attention to the "words" much more so than with any of his previous works. He wrote to Piave, "The words must be sufficient unto themselves." and later, "In *Macbeth*, music serves the poet rather than composer." Given the nature and substance of the piece under development, Verdi's artistic instinct was correct. However, it led to a reversal of the traditional opera dictum of that day: "words to serve music". As a result, a considerable amount

chorus was much better. In many productions today, we both get our cake and eat it too; the 1847 aria is inserted before the 1865 final chorus. The 1965 Leonard Warren recording of the complete opera features both the aria and the final chorus.

⁶⁶ Richard Strauss, in fact, composed an entire opera *Capriccio* around this conundrum.

of the libretto creation was caught up in the length of lines, the number of syllables in words and the sound of words.

Further, in performing *Macbeth*, Verdi wanted, “rough, hollow, stifled (singing) voices;” “voices with a talent for declamation rather than beauty of tone.” The arias should be more spoken than sung. He was especially intent that Lady M’s music should be almost totally declaimed. He was especially concerned that the dramatic soprano playing the Lady was too beautiful as was her voice. Verdi wanted Lady M to be a singer of “deformed even ugly vocal quality” (and appearance). An interesting and perhaps on target concept, but ultimately a self-defeating paradox. Further, it definitely was not in keeping with the public operatic fashion a la mode ----bel canto was only slowly being dragged off-stage kicking and screaming.

In the end, singers may sacrifice physical appearance to the grotesque, but few will sacrifice their musical delivery to the equivalency of a croaking frog.

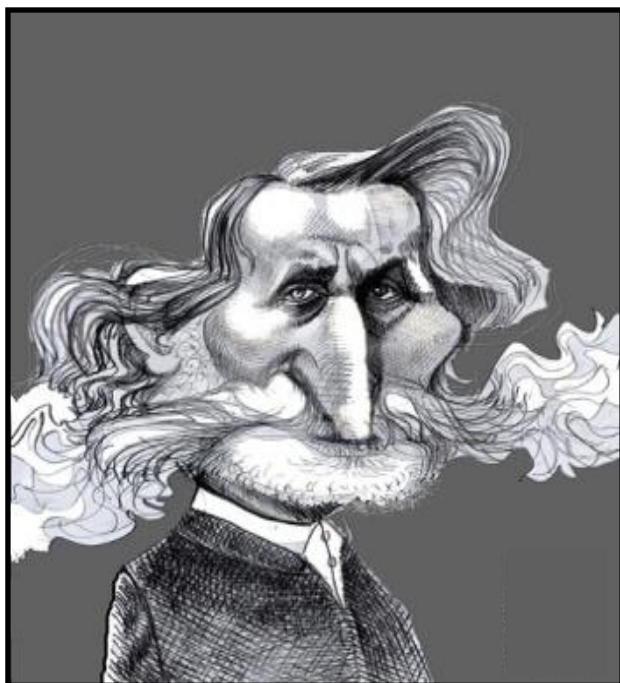
Afterthought. In the operatic *Macbeth*, we see the meeting of two great artistic titans: Shakespeare and Verdi.⁶⁷ The very fact of translating *Macbeth* into another language and into another art form raises basic questions about the relationship between words and music both as vehicles of emotional communication and the enhancement of one with the addition of the other.

Further, as has been implied, Verdi and Piave (or whomever) only sporadically used Shakespeare’s words and in those

⁶⁷ It should be noted however, their individual artistic development was at a very different stage (again, no pun intended) when their spins on *Macbeth* appear: Verdi very early in career, Shakespeare very late.

instances translated them into another language of different sounds and stresses. Therefore, does Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (and his linguistic genius) lie at the base of Verdi's opera, giving it an additional artistic quality beyond musical? --- Or do we only see and hear the same basic story told through two different media?

The effect of such interplay (no pun intended) between the sung theater and the spoken theater can be a fun discussion among friends or professional colleagues on a long winter's night, but not resolvable (nor perhaps, should it be). The crux of that debate really is do we gain enjoyment and other emotional stimulation from both? Whatever, with Verdi's *Macbeth* we see and hear the composer's only opera that is a concentrated case history of a political man caught in a convulsive struggle for political ascendancy. Compared to other Verdi operas, it is very macho--- especially considering Lady Macbeth as an added feature. Finally, it sets the dramatic and musical foundation (and stylistic direction) of the composer's masterpieces to come. Enjoy!





WHO ARE THESE SCHEMING, SKITTISH
SCOTSKILLING KITH AND KIN
IN TONES OF SCOTTISH-BURRED ITALIAN?
(AKA: THE CAST IN ORDER OF FIRST VOCAL VENTURING.)

WITCHES. As *Macbeth's* MacGuffins, these peculiar persons produce perplexing prophecies⁶⁸ and also, "trick or treat" travelers trekking through the Highland's heather. Their prophecies create considerable collateral killing, plunging a passel of persons to perdition. However, other persons wary of the witches words, perceive the peril of the prophecies. These leery lairds boldly breech the border, scooting from Scotch-swilling, killer kilties to bucolically boozing Beefeaters.⁶⁹

MACBETH (baritone). His day job is optimistically, upward-mobile general in the Kilt King's corps. However, he also moonlights (in more ways than one) as our operatic opus's murderous main man. (continued)

He is clearly a conflicted kiltie; when he contemplates killing a Kilt King or court courtier, his conscience kicks in

⁶⁸ Think of them as an eleventh century Gallup pollers with a really mean steak.

⁶⁹ As we all remember from high school, Shakespeare had only three of these weird sisters. However that's too few to fill an opera stage. Therefore Verdi expanded the speaking trio into a trio of choruses, each one with 8 or 9 members. How's that for artistic inflation?

and confounds his quietus quest. Put another way, he morphs into a mewling milquetoast. Luckily wed to a termagant for all seasons, Lady M contributes the cohones to their chase-the-crown causes. Cruelly, his demise is delivered 'cause he was a duffer in drendology!

BANQUO (bass). Our murderous main man's best buddy and also a general in the Kilt King's corps--- but only as our opera opus opens. He is soon swiftly slain. Seems he may queer the main man's kingdom quest by seeding highland highness heirs. Now, that is caldron conjecture communicated by the crone's coven; so, it may be mere mythology. But our Mac "beths" that the buddy is a barrier, so he's bloodily bumped. As a consequence the bloody buddy's subsequent operatic appearance is only apparent. Although that is adequate to louse up our louche lady's luncheon for the land's Lairds and their ladies, not to mention moving our main man into a maniacal melt-down.

LADY MACBETH (soprano). This louche lassie may have a loser laddie (our main man) for a lover, but she is one terrific termagant. Her tongue is the tool of terror to motivate her milky-toasty mate. Concurrently, she slays smoothly and conspires coolly. Unfortunately, her fingers figure fatally in her future. Hand hygiene is not her forte!

LADY MACBETH'S ATTENDANT (mezzo-soprano). As things turn out, she attends too attentively. She duets up diagnostically with the

Doctor (see below) as they watch Lady M wash while she wanders wakelessly. During that spying session, the dirty deeds of Duncan's (see below) demise are dreamily dribbled out.

MACDUFF (tenor). Labeled the Lord of Fife, this white-bonneted kiltie does most of the heavy hitting after the Macbeths and their black-bonneted kiltie brigands bloody this Lord's lassie, their little bairns and a considerable count of kiltie kith and kin. Macduff memorably memorializes those massacres when his tree-trundling, marching minions make mincemeat of Macbeth and his mob. P.S. He also gets a terrific lachrymose aria.

MALCOLM (tenor). Not much of a macho model, this son of Duncan (see below) barrels for the British border when the blood-letting begins. Maybe a prudent ploy on the part of the boy? While south of the border down Manchester way, must have been given a spinal transplant by the British National Health Service, as shortly this formerly-callow kid beats it back over the border to bloody black-bonnets. He ends up as Kiltie King. His platform pledge, pitched cacophonously, change! Where have we heard that before?

DOCTOR (bass). A medieval medic like the kiltie-kith is busily blood-letting. However, his gore gushing is more leach-loosed, than axe-activated. Attended by the overly-attentive attendant, the dirt on Duncan's (see below) deliberate demise is deduced by the Doctor as Macbeth's

wrath of a wife sets forth that seamy story while spookily somnambulating. Subsequently, he is last seen heading to hide his head in the highlands attended by the attendant. Sensible!

MACBETH'S ATTENDANT (bass). He aptly attends and comments cautiously.

ASSSAN (bass). This killer-for-cash and his choraling corps are as cleverly competent as Keystone Kops or perhaps, Penzance pirates. Their death-dealing deal ends in a debacle that will donate to the downslide our murderous main man and his mate.

HERALD (bass). He heralds. What else?

THREE APPARITIONS. For Macbeth's musing, three spirits serially smoke forth from a concoction cooking in the crones' caldron:

- **A Helmeted Head** (baritone). This bodiless banshee babbles, "Maduff will make mischief. Beware!"
- **A Bloody Child** (soprano) calms our Caledonian chieftain by cooing, "Cool it Kahuna! No man born by a woman can consign you to a casket."
- **A Crowned Child** carrying a tiny tree (soprano) conveys to our main man that Mac will carry the Caledonian crown until a tract of trees come castle calling. .

KING DUNCAN (mute). For all the damage Duncan's departure does, he should have dialogue to declaim! But no, this Kiltie

King quickly is on, then offed--- off-stage. No cacophonous communication to his credit.

FLEANCE (mute). This feckless fellow, Banquo's boy, flees from his father's fate (see Banquo above). As is surmised, and as the cackling crones communicated,⁷⁰ he subsequently successfully sows the seeds to create Kiltie Kings-to-come,

CHORUS. Cacophonous Caledonians of several social strata including most of the hoi polli and oligoi. Very democratic!



⁷⁰ Remember? Act I, Scene 1.



READER'S CHOICE!

Over the years, many of the *Guides* indiscriminate readers have been non-violently vocal in commentaries. The standard gripes seem to be: "Too long; just give me the facts!" or "Cut to the chase, I haven't all day!"

In an attempt to be responsive to the petulant pursuers, we created "Pap for the Impatient." Designed for and dedicated to those of our audience self-designated as "Type A;" too trammled by time or cowed by circumstance, to leisurely learn. For them, a frantic, few facts were forged. To this severely stripped down, alliterative analysis of the opus under analyses, there was deafening dissent. To wit, "Too terse; tell me more! etc."

It seems like there is no pleasing---either too terse or too long, somewhat like Goldilocks's gripe. So we have taken a Mozartian operatic solution * and offer both! Specifically:

***A Fulsome Folio Filled with Facts and
Memorable Musical Memos, Often Alliteratively Arranged.***

It follows forthwith. Enjoy!

*For further details see WAM's *Ariadne auf Naxos*.

THE OPERA

(FINALLY!)



Macbeth was originally designed (both the 1847 and 1865 versions) in four acts with ten scenes. However, an opera company's budget and a director's "concept" can facilitate a great deal of variation on those numbers, usually truncating the design. The **Operaphobes Guide's** synopses follow the original design, but with no guarantee that it is what you will see on stage.

So, Scottish wishes for **Piseach!** (Good Luck) and
Turas math dhut! (Bon voyage)



Place: In Scotland near the English border.

Time: Circa 1050 A.D.

Prelude^{71/72}. The *Macbeth* prelude begins with slow brooding and then a trumpet blast, followed by an interchange with strings and reeds (a.k.a. the Witches' "cackle music"). A pause then occurs followed with some bars of scary "movie music;"⁷³ then the sound becomes pensive, moody and finally, it takes

⁷¹ In the 1865 version for both the Prelude and Act 1, Verdi made little change from his original 1847 score

⁷² The function of both a prelude and an overture was to signal the performance was about to start. In the early days there was no proscenium curtain; this music therefore was functional in getting the audience to their seats and quieted down. While "canning the chatter" was a necessary role for this music, not every opera originally or even today had an overture/prelude—the performance just started. The traditional musical differences between a prelude and overture seem more honored in breach than observance today, but---. Originally, the overture contained actual music from the opera, was brief, ended softly and then there was a break between the overture's music and that of the first act. The prelude was to be longer, did not have to contain music from the opera and continued thru the curtain's raising and stage action starting.

N.B. Some composers under the pressure of time, simply took music they had previously written (and even perhaps used publicly before) and called it "the" Overture or Prelude. Rossini was especially noted (pun?)for recycling.

⁷³ Think *Psycho*, *Jaws*, etc.

on an almost band-like rhythm and sound. Gradually it fades out as if it were creeping off-stage and then--- one final blast.

The prelude is short as such pieces go. It does contain themes from the “grimmer” parts of opera: the shrill evil of the Witches chorus (Act III – *Tre volte miagola/Thrice the brindled cat has mewed---*);⁷⁴ the fanfare from the apparitions scene (Act III), the Act 1 Witches’ devilish clucking and excerpts from the sleepwalking scene (Act IV). However, running against the “no break” tradition between prelude and first act, *Macbeth*’s music usually breaks between the two.⁷⁵

Act I: Mostly Macabre Meadows and Low Roads, Meandering by the Macbeths’ Medieval Motel.⁷⁶

Scene 1. A Woeful Woodland Warren, Writhing with a Raft of Wrathful Witches.

- **Set on Scottish soil, our specific scene is an Italian iteration of the Bard’s blasted heath.**⁷⁷ Horrid, but it’s home to a cacophonous coven of crones.

⁷⁴ In referencing arias, duets and ensembles, the opening words of the piece will be given in Italian, followed by an English translation.

⁷⁵ Don’t ask. It’s “operatic logic.”

⁷⁶ “For the departure of your dreams, do drop in!”

⁷⁷ The opening action of both opera and play is identical, Macbeth meeting the witches on a “blasted heath.” In England/Scotland a heath is usually unplowed land taken over by scrub shrubs and trees. It also can mean a battlefield after blood-letting (literally “blasted”). Unfortunately, there is no such topographical concept in Italy. As a consequence, Verdi had no frame of reference and pragmatically substituted Hansel and Gretel-like woods. Verdi was not the only composer to be caught with his geographic experience down. Puccini had the same type of problem with *Manon Lescaut*. Therefore, that opera’s last act is set in a desert outside New Orleans, rather than a Louisiana bayou. Why not!

- Currently, these crone creatures⁷⁸ are casting curses at a Caledonian lassie who carelessly crossed them.⁷⁹

M'e frullata-/ I am thinking of ---.

The Witches' opening musical lines delivered in a childish malevolence, quickly change to a rather merry dance rhythm as they develop a tale of insult by and punishment of a sailor's wife¹ The crones' cooperative punishment plan to sink (literally) the wife's sailor husband. includes, "I'll drown him with his ship; " I'll give you the north wind to assist (the drowning):" I'll raise the wind. etc."

- Coincidentally with the crones' curse-casting, weary warriors are heard hiking toward the heath, halting the cursing 'mid cast.

Le sorelle vagabonde--/The wandering sisters--

An off-stage drumbeat, announces that Macbeth and Banquo are coming. That prompts the covens into a merry upbeat circle dance as they "fly though the air."⁸⁰ The men enter commenting on the foul weather and then, greet the Witches.⁸¹

- These back from bloody battle boys are really big kahunas, (a.k.a. Macbeth, our main man and Banquo, his best buddy--- albeit briefly), in the Kiltie King's (a.k.a. Duncan) battling brigade.

⁷⁸This being "grand" opera, three individuals would be lost on stage physically and musically. Verdi resolves the paradox by substituting three covens of Witches (each with a recommended six to eight members). Their musical lines alternate among the three groups.

⁷⁹ "A sailor's wife told me to go to the devil, so I plan to drown her husband and destroy his ship while he is at sea! Hee! Hee!"

⁸⁰ Depending on the size of the production budget and the intestinal fortitude of the singers, the Witches may or may not fly through the air, disappear and reappear as dictated in the original stage directions. Keep flexible expectations.

⁸¹ The greeting gives Banquo one of those infrequent but "great" operatic lines that are missed in translation: "I should address you as women, but your filthy beards prevent me."

- Our weird but wise witches recognize them as VIPs to be valued.
- “Welcome warriors! Sheath your swords, stay a spell, we’ll foretell your future--- for free!” These guys are Scotch, so that price is right!
- For Macbeth, these funky females foretell a fast track future.⁸² A rapid rise in peerage position(s) and then quickly--- Kiltie King!
- For best buddy Banquo, ‘pears he’ll not be promoted, prior to his Perdition purveyance! No crown for his clan? Not quite. He’ll seed sire sovereigns!

The delivery of the prophecies for both men⁸² is very slow and oracle-like. The coven then hails the two in a mock military-like salute and vanish.

- Their seeing said, the strange sisters segue into smoke, leaving the dumbfounded duo to contemplate their kiltie karmas.
- As the men muse, messengers materialize with a missive: Macbeth has been moved up the Caledonian court’s corporate ladder.⁸³
- Those writhing witches were right--- so far!

The messengers’ arrival is accompanied by a brash orchestra “tune,” musically more appropriate to a Sunday afternoon in the town square than a blasted heath or dark woods. Though musically inappropriate to our ears, critics have commented that this is the type of “band” sound Verdi had ingrained from his youth. As he musically matures, such youthful compositional sounds will disappear.[For the “grand” model of of such mature Verdian processional music, see *Aida*, Act II, Scene 2.] For the moment though, they remain!

- Macbeth mulls the meaning of the missive and meditates, “What are my methods to “my” majestic mantle? He’s not a “let nature take its course” kinda guy! But---?”

⁸² For Macbeth, first, Thane of Glamis, then, Thane of Cawdor.

⁸³ This sequence is a graphic illustration of opera’s advantage over spoken theater: different thoughts from different people(s) can be sung simultaneously with great musical effect. In spoken language, it would be a garble of words. Of course, the words get lost in opera too, but the musical variations and harmonics don’t!

- Banquo behaves blithely 'bout his potential of a premature passage to perdition. But he is bothered 'bout his buddy's potential passage to control of the kiltie kingdom. What manipulative means might Macbeth engage to earn an empire?

The two men muse over their very different prophesied futures. Consequently, their individual thoughts and music reflecting them are also quite different. Banquo's music tends to be quiet and lacks a crescendo build. Macbeth's initially is quite pensive and then becomes excited and does build to a crescendo climax. He is rising to the possibilities! Simultaneously, Banquo begins to recognize the potential problems inherent in Macbeth's advancement and its consequences to their friendship and Scotland.

- As is a peculiarity often of operatic opuses, the main men and the messengers muse much, but musically.⁸⁴

"Due vaticini compiuti"--- / Two truths are told---

A duet between Banquo and Macbeth follows and basically implies there is only trouble ahead. The duet merges into a trio-like commentary with the messengers specifically wondering why Macbeth is not more excited about his promotion—in truth he's already worrying about how to become king.⁸⁷

- Then, their concerns unconcluded, they quick-step off stage.
- As the guys go, the grim girls (?) gather again, gleefully. They got their guy into their ghoulish game! They will soon (re)see the Scottish sucker.

S'allontanarono. / They have gone.

The Witches' waft on with a cacophonous cry of triumph (Yes! We got him – the evil seed has been planted, let's watch it grow). Then, Neapolitan street music, the Witches in a jaunty tarantella-like tune, agree to meet again shortly. They know Macbeth will return and they will again, prophesy for him. Ah, ha!

⁸⁴ This sequence is a graphic illustration of opera's advantage over spoken theater: different thoughts from different people can be sung simultaneously with great musical effect. In spoken language, it would be a garble of words. Of course, the words get lost in opera too, but the musical variations and harmonics don't.

Scene 2: In the Macbeths' Medieval Motel,⁸⁵ a Copious Corridor Conveniently Constructed for Conspiring and Killing.

- Our scene now shifts to the Stonehenge-styled shelter of the **machinating Macbeths**
- **The Missus, a true termagant for all time, is introduced casing correspondence couriered to the castle from her conspirator-in-crime(s) to-be.**
- **The Thane's document details his rapid royal rise and---eventual residence in the royal roost.**

Lady M enters reading a letter from Macbeth telling her of the “weird sisters” encounter. Initially, she quite literally reads the letter; it was the custom of Italian opera of the time that letters in opera were read aloud, not sung---- like everything else* _____

*Don't ask “why!” It's opera, not rocket science!

- **In a waltz-like rhythm, the Lady croons. “Laddie come home hastily; let's get to killing! We can boost your biography by bumping off the big guy!”**

Vieni! T'affretta! / “Come, hurry----”

The letter is verbally finished quickly and she begins an aria wishing Macbeth home so she can “screw up his courage to the sticking point,” ---- she really knows her guy! She melodiously ends with the phrase ---“accept the gift (of the prophecy), mount the throne and reign.” The word “*reign*” (*regnar*) is repeated several times at the climax, with an obvious sinister connotation. Despite its potentially murderous content, the aria's musical tone appears quite light and its rhythm is almost waltz-like.

- **Coincidentally, a courier comes to confirm the King is coming to our conniving couple's castle for hooch and other highland hospitality.⁸⁶**

A servant informs Lady M. musically, King Duncan is arriving to spend the night. Macbeth is with him. The Lady, always quick with the double meaning, instructs the servant to assure that the King will find “the reception he deserves.”

⁸⁵ They are very popular hosts in the highlands,---also the lowlands..

⁸⁶ As we know from Shakespeare, that will be a big mistake on the King's part!

- **YES! Mac's mate is exultant. The King comes in a-kickin', but will go out a corpse!**

"Or tutti sorgete-- / Arise, all the agents of hell-- .

Left alone Lady M launches into the final half of the aria. This sequence* is Verdi's musical transposition of the Lady's most powerful and terrifying Shakespearean speech.⁸⁷ The point of all that emotion is: give me the fortitude to give Macbeth the fortitude to kill the king!"

* In this sequence, there are pattern parallels which can be traced backwards five years to some of Abigail's music from *Nabucco*, the same type of in-charge character, the same concerted passion, swooping octaves, etc. However, the musical effect here is much more dramatic and sophisticated. --- Verdi hones his artistic skills very quickly!

- **Mac marches on, the couple quickly kiss-kiss and then, commence to construct their killing career.**

After the briefest of "Hi! How are you?," and in the shorthand of a long-married couple (in this case a very short text and musical lines), our killing couple agree almost obliquely, to kill the king.

- **The Duncan demise plan plotted, Mac becomes mealy-mouthed.⁸⁸ "That murder may miss us Michelin stars," he mewls!**
- **The Missus not to be culled from her coronation, meanly motivates her milk toasty man, "Get with it goofball; you are going to gash the guy!"**
- **Backstage, a band bleats blaringly.⁸⁹ That cacophony quickly concludes the Caledonian couple's semantic set-to with the dame definitely dominating.**

⁸⁷ "Come you spirits that tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, and fill me from the crown to the toe-top full of direst cruelty---."

⁸⁸The equivalent plot development in Shakespeare encompasses parts of two scenes and is much more protracted and detailed. This operatic truncation illustrates Verdi's genius at communicating complex conversation in the briefest of musical lines and melodic phrases.

- The King comes on,⁹⁰ quickly calls it a day and, dashes off for a doze on what will be demonstrated to be, a deadly divan.
- A baleful bell bongs--- a signal for slaughter.⁹¹ Our boy begins to begat his bloody business, but first--- an aria (what else?).

Mi sfuggi--- / Is this a dagger---

With a sinister orchestral introduction, Macbeth begins the dagger apparition aria slowly and reflectively. In it he imagines the murder and its after-moments. Its lines parallel in intent the Shakespearean text. He is interrupted by the bell and moves towards the King's room singing the Italian equivalent of the Shakespearean line: "Do not hear it Duncan. It is a knell that summons you to heaven or to hell!"

- The chatelaine of the castle creeps on seeking slaying sounds, but also afraid the hectoring hoots of an attic owl will awaken with alarm, sleeping servants before Duncan's done dead.

⁸⁹ The sequence offers an opera company an opportunity for some spectacle, depending on its budget and the director's "artistic vision."

The jarring problem of the sequence, is the music --- it sort of tootles along as a jaunty John Phillip Sousa ersatz-march in the hands of a small high school's band complete with a prancing, but clumsy drum major---- which is not quite the sound (or sight) for 11th century Scotland. More like River City, Iowa before Harold Hill came to town.

One analyst while criticizing the music, excuses it by saying that it wasn't supposed to be listened to! It was purely functional - king on, king off quickly. There may be some justification for that piece of illogic as Verdi had the opportunity to rescore it in the 1865 revisions and chose not to take it. It is also speculated that his *Macbeth* (and *Nabucco*) band sounds simply replicate the typical sound of Italian village bands of that period of which he was very familiar. However, listen to it! It's fun.

⁹⁰ The King's procession is basically a housekeeping maneuver to get the King into the castle and into an off-stage room quickly. Everyone else heads off also. This leaves Macbeth alone for an aria (what else?), Verdi's operatic equivalent of Shakespeare's soliloquy, "Is this a dagger I see before me?"

⁹¹ Earlier, Macbeth has informed a servant to have Lady M ring a bell when his nightly drink is ready. That is her signal for him to truncate Duncan's career.

- **Coming back from King killing, our main man is miffed. "The King's a corpse but I am gowned in gore," he gripes. "My hands have a henna hue!"⁹²**

The couple's brief musical lines are exchanges about the circumstances of the murder. This terse exchange matures into a solo and duet sequence commenting on the murder's aftereffects. Macbeth is beginning to regret his actions. Lady M again takes charge of his morale and also to clean up the evidence as he should have already done. He refuses to go back into the King's chamber to smear blood on the attendants. So, she sings the Italian equivalent of, "Oh give me the damned bloody knife, I'll go do it myself,"--- and stomps off.

- **The complexity of their cover-up is further compounded when a clanging at the castle causeway announces, "Company's coming!"**

Macbeth in song, sensibly worries about washing his hands. So much blood may bother the Kilties that are a-comin'. To complicate, the Lady bounces back also with bloody hands. Always armed with an answer, she assures her wimpy warrior that water will take care of the problem for both of them. "The causeway clang encores, so Lady M drags Macbeth off to "remove them from suspicion."

*A somewhat ironic and foolhardy statement given her hygiene problems in the later sleepwalking scene, "All the perfume of Araby etc.---."

- **Murderous Mac's (best but not for long) buddy Banquo and our main man's menace-to-be, Macduff, file in to fetch the King to court.⁹³**

⁹² Lady M always the pragmatist, slyly sings the Italian equivalent of, "So, don't look at them!"

⁹³ Considering that technically the King has been in bed 15 or 20 minutes, at the most--- this really was an early wake-up call! I guess this is part of that "suspending disbelief" thing.

- **Macduff departs to call the Kiltie King while Banquo bandies a brief ballad about the wrathful weather.**
- **Macduff bursts back bellowing, "Bummer! Duncan's been done in!"⁹⁴ The old boy's been sent to that Chivas-cellar in the sky!"**

Schiudi, inferno ---Open your mouth, hell—.

Now begins one of those great Verdian choral sequences,* but in this instance, brief. The first few lines very loudly call on heaven and hell to bring the murderer to justice. Then, with alternating lines between the principals and the chorus, the music becomes prayerful – “help us oh Lord” and finally builds to brilliant climax with all asking repetitively that God (*O gran Dio---*) bring the murderer to justice as He did with the world's first murder.

Sure---, but not bloody likely in Scotland under present management!

- **The congregated Caledonian chorus now cacophonously complains in fulsome Verdi-volume, “Our king is killed. How can we watchfully “wake” him? We hate Haggis and by British brigands, the Scotch supply's been stolen.”**
- **With that conundrum, the curtain closes!**

⁹⁴ Bits of random information scattered throughout the end of Act I and parts of Act II indicate the Macbeths planned to finger the attendants sleeping in the king's chamber as the culprits. It is also made known that Malcolm, the king's son was sleeping in the next room. Later when Malcolm realizes the Macbeth “problem,” he heads for the border and is consequently tarred with his father's murder. Thank you, Lady Macbeth.

Act II: The Macbeths' Macabre Motel⁹⁵ and Eerie Environs.

A brief, but agitated prelude precedes the Scene.

Scene 1: A Room in the Macbeths' Castle.

- The Scene is set, still in the Stonehenge-styled shelter, but in its misnamed Master Suite. This is clearly Lady M's lair. She is seen (and certainly heard) alternatively nagging her nerdy naïf to keep killing for the Caledonian crown and/or continually criticizing his morose moaning of murders he's already managed. The message is mean, but the music, melodic.
- To hush a horrid harangue, her husband announces, "I'm off to arrange assassins.⁹⁶ Their assignment? To bump-off Banquo and his boy breeder-to-be." Our main man then directly departs to draw down the drawbridge, trot into town and hire a hit man.⁹⁷
- "Way to go, guy!" Our gal now gloats, "With Banquo and his bairn buried, I'll be queen bee of this kiltish kingdom!"

La luce langue / The light is fading---

Lady M's obvious delight gives vent to her bloody ecstasy in (what else?) an aria She gloats over the pooping-out of the prophecied probability of Banquo fathering kings—since Fleance, Banquo's son, is also on her guy's hit list of the day.

The aria is considered one of Verdi's finer efforts and was a creation for the 1865 production replacing the not too distinguished 1847 original.

For *La luce*, Verdi himself wrote the words. Musically, it somewhat foreshadows vocal lines given to *Otello's* Desdemona.

The Scene and aria end with Lady M reveling vocally in the fact, "The man (Banquo) will soon fall lifeless." **Whatta gal!**

⁹⁵ That's the neighborhood's reference to the Macbeth domicile since Duncan's dusting off.

⁹⁶ In the play, he keeps her out of his bumping-off Banquo business so she will applaud him when the deed is done. Throughout, Verdi makes her much more of a partner in crime than Shakespeare does.

⁹⁷ As we shall see in the next scene, he appears to have hired the entire male chorus.

Scene 2: A Park outside Macbeth's Castle.⁹⁸

A sinister orchestral prelude appropriately sets the mood for the forthcoming murder(s?), as does the Scene's setting: a fearsome forest paralleling a perilous pedestrian pathway

- **Our scene has now shifted to a bloody byway, appropriately appellationed, "Assassins' Alley."**
- **A crowd of chorusing killers clomp on. The bunch is boldly big and brassy enough to disturb the dearly departed! They tell us who, why and when they are wired to whack.⁹⁹**

Chi V'Imdpose Uvirvi A Noi! / Who Commanded You To Join Us?

The murderer's chorale, is similar in design and purpose to the Scene 1 witches' chorus. One or two assassins will not fill up an opera stage, but a whole chorus will. In delivery, the chorus is divided into two groups, with one responding to the queries of the other. Their back-and-forth conversation tells us what we already know.* Their music is vintage tippy-toe, men-in-tights and if logic intrudes, promotes snickers and their exit line is a real grabber: "*Trema Banco, Nel Tuo Fianco Sta La Punta Del Coltel.*" / "*Tremble Banquo, the point of a dagger is stuck in your side!*" Their reminder role done, these highland hoods hide.

* Happens a lot in opera as the audience is notorious for Attention Deficit Disorder.

- **Banquo and his boy amble on. "Pick up the pace, this is no place to hike hesitantly! Make tracks, my son!"**

⁹⁸ The action of this Scene could have been quite effective except to those of us exposed to "Monty Python and the Holy Grail" and/or Gilbert and Sullivan. To amplify: Shakespeare used two hired murderers to dispose of Banquo et. al. However, as with the three Witches, two is too small a number to fill a grand opera stage. The solution is to add a lot more murderers--- in fact a whole chorus. Now it is somewhat improbable that twenty to thirty men can effectively (or need to) conceal themselves in a dark wood to dispose of a man and a boy. That is subsequently rendered even more improbable when the boy escapes.

⁹⁹ No surprise there, opera's a staunch believer in redundancy!

- Sensibly said, but papa inappropriately pauses to lengthily lament (musically), "Duncan was done in a nocturnal miasma like this."¹⁰⁰ It must mean I am next on Macbeth's "to do" document."

Studia Il Passo O Mio Figlio / Hurry my son!

- Then the pair pitty-pat past the proscenium. The Assassins attack. Banquo is bested, BUT his boy (Fleance) flees! Oops! and Uh oh!

Scene 3: Banquet hall in the Macbeths' Castle.

- The scene is shunted to the Kiltie King's castle designated as Dunsinane. It is now the Macbeth mansion. They sure have moved up!¹⁰¹

Brisk music opens the Scene, somewhat inappropriately for our scenario as it sounds like the party music from *La Traviata*.

- A big, bonnie Bar-B-Q and booze banquet is beginning; it's celebrating the Macbeth's moving-in day!¹⁰²
- Macbeth's minions, no fools they, toss a tasteful toast to their main man.

Salve, o Re! / Hail, King!

- Mac motions to Lady M to greet their guests with a carousing Caledonian chug-a-lug chorus. As an old choral custom for downing drink; the slurred singing is sustained for several servings of scotch.

¹⁰⁰ These highland types seem preoccupied with the weather. However given that it is mostly bad, maybe that's just human nature.

¹⁰¹ Proving crime does pay, at least for the present.

¹⁰² The Macbeths are entertaining both the hoi polloi and hoi oligo---they seem to be governing with a very democratic "bread and circuses" philosophy.

Si colmi il calice" / "Fill the cup.

Our now First Lady of the Land, complies with a brindisi* a drinking song This set piece with its rather deliberate march-like rhythm is not in the class of the brindisi from *Traviata* with its waltz-like cadences. However, it is functionally and musically a good, but youthful "nice-try" version. The characteristic of the brindisi, at least in Verdi's hands, is a continual musical exchange between the singer and the chorus.

*A brindisi is a drinking song with solo-sung verses, but crowd-crooned choral responses. The term originated from a German phrase "(ich) bring dir's / (I) offer it to you," which was a traditional introduction to a toast. The *brindisi* name is identical to the name of an Italian city which is often credited as the source of this drinking song type. Nice story, but not true. Verdi used brindisi in several operas; *Traviata*s is probably the most familiar. In that opera and in its societal setting and time, the song takes the form of a rhyming game as verse-creation. Responsibility is tossed from one participant to others; the choraling chorus however, remains de rigueur.

- During the sustained song, a gore-grimed slayer slips in.¹⁰³ Selected by a short straw from the singing slayers of the previous scene, this sad sack's mission to the main man is to boast of Banquo's bump-off, merely mumble that Fleance fled and run like hell into the heather!¹⁰⁴
- When queried,¹⁰⁵ the assassin anxiously answers the Kiltie kahuna with his good news and bad. "Banquo's buried, but the boy beat us to the British border. Now, safe in sanctuary. Bummer!"
- Mac mumbles, "Bully! Banquo's bye-bye. Brood not 'bout the boy; he's still a lad lacking in loving ways, so he'll not sire a son soon. We have time to tread 'fore his termination!"
- Our now comforted king, calls to the chorusing crowd still belting the brindisi, "Banquo has bypassed our banquet."¹⁰⁶ His chair at chow is now claimed by this Caledonian King!¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ During the exchange between Macbeth and assassin, the brindisi will continue to be sung in the background. However, its rhythm changes from the boisterous to the sinister.

¹⁰⁴ Kiltie kings kill bearers of bad business.

¹⁰⁵ Another great operatic line lost in translation occurs when Mac sidles over to see the assassin. In greeting, the Caledonian King's sings. "You must be bringing me good news as you have blood on your face!"

- But, the big boy's buttocks are barred from that bench. Banquo is there, at least in spirit, if not substance. Whoa!
- As the Caledonian king communicates with the couched corpse,¹⁰⁸ the crowd becomes concerned. They all observe only an unoccupied chair.
- The amazed audience agree their guy's gone ga-ga, and is ready for the rubber room. "Let's depart directly from this debacle and save ourselves from seeing his sanity sink into Loch Lomond," they say (lyrically).
- Before they dash for the door, Lady M mollifies the consternated kilties. She also quickly and quietly, but cruelly counsels her King, "You're defecating on my debut! Pipe down your pie hole or you'll be sleeping with the sheep!!
- Rapidly our ranting ruler recovers as the ghost has gone. Macbeth makes mirth about those "mad" moments. "A bad oyster," he banters. "Back to our debauch," he begs. "Encore, the toasting tune!"
- Blimey! Before the bagpipes can bleat, the bloody Banquo is back! Our big Mac goes into massive mental meltdown, musically.
- Lady M makes maniacal as her debutant debut as the Doyene of Dunsinaine is destroyed. The party spirit is down the porcelain potty. A castle-crashing specious spirit, apparently apparent only to her musically mouthy mate, has silenced the carousing Caledonian crowd.
- The unapparent apparition however has caused the killing couple to uncover a bit of their bloody riff on the royal roster--- and clues the crowd in, too.
- During all this denouement, Macduff swiftly scarfs some supper and scotch, sufficient to sustain him while he barrels for the border. He's betting his body is next in line for a Macbeth murder.
- Most of the Caledonian company are coming to the same killer conclusion. Better to be bored in Britain, than hacked in the heather highlands!

¹⁰⁶ In more ways than one.

¹⁰⁷ Bad move!

¹⁰⁸ Another "lost in translation" line is Macbeth's greeting to Banquo, "Do not shake your bloody locks at me!"

- As the people begin to plan for packing and passports, Verdi contributes to the chaos, a choral climax full of powerful prayer for protection, personal and patriotic. Interspersed, the Lady lambastes her Lord for lousing up their first Scottish state supper.

Sangue a me quell--- / That shadow demands---

A final ensemble begins with Macbeth vowing to do a counseling encore with the witches. He is vocally joined by Macduff now planning to bolt for the border, "Now that this land is ruled by a cursed hand only the wicked can remain." The remaining cowed kilties chorally comment, "This land has become a den of thieves." All the finale exchanges among the principals and the chorus are overlapping and play off each other as the music builds to an agitated but powerful peak. The last sung lines of Lady M berate her husband ("cowardly spirit--- the crime is done, the dead cannot return!") The Scene ends in a forceful musical climax with all participating; some more enthusiastically than others

- The curtain quickly closes on the Caledonian cacophony.

Act III: A Witches' Cavern (complete with boiling caldron).

Act III contains a single long scene, loaded with a great deal of information delivered fairly rapidly and in very short bursts. Its musical form tends to be declamatory, especially in the first half of the act.¹⁰⁹ It is also loaded with technical effects: thunder and lightening, apparitions and ballerinas appearing and disappearing etc. However, the number of such effects and their effectiveness is dependent on available funds. Be flexible, therefore, in your visual expectations.

- **Act III's a longie. So lay back listeners!**

Act III begins with an agitated Prelude announcing a storm in progress; that is followed by general purpose creepy music.

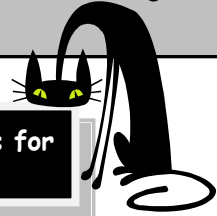
¹⁰⁹ Remember Verdi's original wishes about the presentation of the musical lines.

- Action commences in the crone coven's cave (again). It contributes cretaceous cover from the currently, crummy Caledonian climate. A curse cookery class is being conducted by the crones.

Tri volte miagola la gatta. / Three times the cat has mewed.

We find the Witches performing a chorus on incantation with the triplet musical exchanges. Additionally, they are busily preparing in the manner of Julia Childs, a potent brew (“poisonous toad, tongue of viper, finger of child, etc.”). A bouncy rhythm is introduced to accentuate the “kettle boil” lines (*bolli / boil*). While waiting for “boli,” some balletic bopping begins.

A Pause in the Proceedings for
an Arabesque Aside.



Dance has always been integral to most operatic “works,”¹¹⁰ one part of the traditional artistic components comprising an opera.¹¹⁰ While not found in all operas in the standard repertoire, it is found in a large number, especially those from the earlier period of opera’s evolution as an art form.

In the original 1847 version of *Macbeth*, Verdi had planned a ballet. However, dancing was not permitted on the Italian stage during Lent, the scheduled time for the original production. One of the raging battles he and the librettist had was over the inclusion of a ballet. The poet kept reminding Verdi a ballet could not happen during Lent, but Verdi kept pulling rank. The Church won, but all **Piave** got was a lot of verbal abuse!

¹¹⁰ “Opera,” the plural of “opus” literally translates as “the works.” At its 16 th century inception and its subsequent evolution over the years, opera was viewed as ultimately containing all known art forms (singing [solo, ensemble, choral], dance, acting, art in the form of scenery and special effects, etc----. somewhat analogous to the philosophy of a Chicago hot dog. .

No such arabesque absence for the Paris 1865 production of a radically revised *Macbeth*. A ballet was mandated for the French production.¹¹¹ Verdi complied not with one ballet, but two. Both of these appear in Act III, safely beyond Act I as required by tradition, not to mention compositional prudence.

Today, the two *Macbeth* ballets appear to be as frequently exorcised from a performance as presented. The DMMO 2010 production, following that “tradition,” will appear sans ballets. However, to let you know what you missed, a brief summary of both follows. To prepare you for either contingency, the **Guide** will very briefly, describe both ballets.

The first Act III ballet occurs immediately after the crones’ opening chorus. There is a balletic first section in which Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft¹¹² is invoked by “spirits of the air.” In the second section, the goddess appears and warns the coven of Macbeth’s approach. Then she instructs them how to bring about his doom.¹¹³ (This is done in pantomime, which makes her messages a little fuzzy in

¹¹¹ In Paris, especially for “grand” operas, a ballet was required originally by Napoleonic Code. Apart from its story-telling contribution to the opera, ballet in Paris played an additional role. It was to showcase the dancing lady “friends” of the wealthy “men only” members of the Jockey Club. Also, because that group always arrived fashionably late for a performance, the ballet could not appear before the second act. Hanky-panky prevails over art!

Wagner’s *Tannhauser* famously came a critical and public cropper at its Paris Opera premiere. The imperialistic composer refused to put the Venusberg ballet in Act II as required by Parisian custom. It appeared defiantly in Act I right after the curtain went up.

¹¹² In a Sarah Caldwell Boston Opera production of many years ago, she introduced Lady Macbeth as Hecate. Never clear what that symbolized, it confused the devil out of the audience.

¹¹³ Shakespeare makes Hecate’s directions implicit by advising the witches to make Big Mac feel, through the coming prediction, that he is safe from death. “Security is mortals chieftest enemy.”

translation) Hecate then hikes off. In the third and final section, the spirits waltz (honest!).

The second Act III ballet occurs (if at all) when Big Mac faints after the final apparition. It simply involves the spirits of the air reviving our unconscious main man. The spirits dance to the accompaniment of a harp and occasional other strings. To a very plucky melody (not a pun!), the witches sing tip-toe music about dancing nymphs. The dance ends with a piping flute. Then, the spirits hie back to from whence they came.



- Macbeth marches in out of the mist and mud. He puts a kibosh on the cookery class by demanding the demonic dames describe his destiny.¹¹⁴
- The dames demur, "Don't go there, Big Mac. Could be deathly detrimental to your dynastic drive!"
- "Don't delay. Do it," he demands! The crones comply, but caution, "No questions!" (no demande!).

As apparitions appear summoned by the witches, the crones' initial musical tones of bratty, childish evil are replaced with oracle-like tones similar to the prophecy sequence of Act I.

- Arising amid some really hokey Hollywood hocus-pocus, a helmeted head shoots shoulder-high from the soil. "Beware Macduff," it declares and drops back into the dirt.

Da Macduffo ti guardo prudente! / Beware, Macduff
The apparition's warning is sung delicately and musically pianissimo. Then a burst of noise from the brass section. When Macbeth attempts to question the head, it disappears.

¹¹⁴ This sequence very much follows Shakespeare's lead.

- A trumpet blast and then a second smoke and mirrors moment, a bloodstained bairn who babbles, "No man born of woman will harm you!"
- "Ha! Ha!," howls our highland head guy. "That cuts available assassins to an absolute nada! My long career as Kiltie King is confirmed!"¹¹⁵
- Then a third thunder thing. A crowned kid is conjured carrying a tiny tree. "Macbeth will be our main man 'till Birnam wood wanders his way!"
- Home free the foolish fellow figures. Dutch elm ick will eliminate that enemy! (A foolish and feckless fantasy.)
- Sated with signs of a successful future ("*lieto augurio*" - *cheering prophecy!*), our fantasy-fooled fellow flings one further, but imprudent inquiry. "Will Banquo's bairns bear a continuous chain of Kiltie Kings?"
- Once again the demonic dames demur!¹¹⁶
- A big boom, black smoke and all that stuff as the witches waft away. A chain of eight crowned Kiltie Kings come into the cave--- the last being that blasted Banquo bearing a pier-glass.

¹¹⁵ With the first two prophecies, Macbeth thinks he is untouchable, especially if he kills Macduff. In the opera, Macduff slips into prominence without much exposition. In Shakespeare, his importance is more clearly presented: he was senior advisor, friend to King Duncan and chief among the clansmen. He never was a big fan of Macbeth's becoming king, and Macduff becomes a leader of the rebel forces to force Macbeth off the throne and replace him with the King's son, Malcolm. As will be seen in Act 4, Macbeth incurs Macduff's enmity big time by murdering his wife and children.

¹¹⁶ However, Macbeth demands to know of his "sword will fall upon them (the Witches)." This guy really had a problem with anger-management! At the threat, the boiling cauldron disappears in a burst of sound, then ominous quiet as the Witches call up apparitions ("apparite") to appear! Then, the witches disappear--- - "vanish like mist".

Fuggi, regal fantasima” / “Away, royal phantom

The procession of kiltie kings is accompanied musically with a slow funeral-like march. Macbeth in **his first proactive aria of the opera**, addresses each phantom as they appear—alternating lines of aria with the processional music. Finally, when Banquo makes it clear in pantomime that his descendents will rule in Scotland, Macbeth attacks the apparitions with his sword, but realizes they have no life. (“*Che non hai to vita*”). In panic and a burst of music, he asks “*Will they (the phantoms) live?*” The response is “*Vivranno*” / *They will live.*”

- **One peer is plenty for our principal to perceive his fast-track to Perdition. “Bummer! I’m bested,” bleats our current king now certainly consigned to a short reign. He goes comatose.**
- **Called on by the crones to administer aid to the comatose king, the EMS spirits of the air appear. (Another bloomin’ ballet in the offing? Maybe yes, maybe no.) Hope for the best!**
- **Their (seen or unseen) care concludes as the collapsed King comes to, only to be welcomed by another witch-type. Lady M materializes bent on browbeating our boy.**

Ove Son Lo? / Where am I?

As Big Mac slowly reorients to the witches’ world, the music reflects his mental confusion. The Missus however is in no mood for TLC and demands repeatedly (*Segui! /What else?*), a recitation of the prophecy pictures. While his perception of a lengthy future is depressed, she becomes quite elated. Always at the ready with a way ahead. The musical mood begins to shift into one of triumph. Mac perceives her pathway of promise; one that advocates assassination! A powerful duet will soon ensue.

- **When Big Mac’s redundant recitation of the witch’s “show and tell” quits, the duo duets, determined to deliver a decimation of all crown competitors’ kith and kin. “Who can then compete with this Kiltie couple,” they coyly conclude?**

Ori Di Morte E Di Vendetta / Hour of Death and Vengeance.

In a musically powerful anthem of blood and butchery, the couple plan to depopulate their domain of all possible regime opponents.. The music exultantly follows their macabre mood. All existing generations will go! We will leave no unfriendly heirs! The music reaches an anthem-like triumph as our killing couple prepare to solidify their power-base on buckets of blood!

- **“Vendetta,” is vowed viciously. They waltz wildly into the wings, ready to begin their bloody beguine.**

Act IV, Back and Forth across the Scottish and English Borders.

Prelude

The final Act begins with a brief, strident Prelude, heavy on percussion and brass. The melody is repetitive with a galloping, warlike tempo. It gradually lightens and as the first Scene is revealed, the melody has segued into a plaintive, minor key dirge.

Scene 1: A Deserted Place on the border, near Birnam Wood.

- **Our Act activates on the British border of the Caledonian kingdom. The Brits have become battle buddies with kiltie refugees and rebels.**
- **This melded mess-with-Macbeth mob masses stage left.¹¹⁷ Stage right is Scottish soil and specifically serendipitously, Birnam Woods.**
- **To abate inaction, the refugees and rebels reflect ruefully on the sorrowful shape of the Scottish state.¹¹⁸ Macduff in mourning**

¹¹⁷ Prudent positioning, as that’s British soil.

¹¹⁸ Outside the operatic world, this Caledonian chorus quickly joined an earlier Verdi chorus. *Va Pensiero* from *Nabucco*, as hymns of the Italian Risorgimento and Verdi, one of its heroes. .

for his Macbeth massacred family stands by himself, listening to the refugees.

Patria oppressa! / Oppressed land of ours!

The chorale opens softly, prayerfully and with almost in-unison voices* It subsequently splits into parts and rises in crescendo. Overall it paints a tragic picture of the death, destruction and just general misery of their “homeland.” It ends with the mournful words and anguished music: “Patria mia, oh Patria.”

*Verdi often used unison choral singing at least during introductions to emphasize the people as a united group--- again a Risorgimento tenet.

- **[Beneficial background.** When Macduff bounded for the border after the bloody Banquo banquet (Act II, Scene 3), his kin were killed by the Kiltie king's kith—but, all off our operatic stage.]
- **Macduff, a major member of the mob moving on Macbeth, movingly memorializes his household's murder; he also agonizes that his absence allowed it and appeals to the Almighty, “Allow a face-to-face with Macbeth.”**

O Figlia, O Figlia miei! / Oh, my children!

Macduff's major aria (“O figli---“ Oh my children, you have all been killed) reflects on the murder of his family and his regret at not being there to protect them. The aria as traditional is in two parts, the second coming with a faster beat. He ends prayerfully that the Lord will let him be brought face-to-face with Macbeth.

The Malcolm Minions March

A sound of quick step drums and a march melody is heard. It's more than reminiscent of the “Lone Ranger” theme from *William Tell's* overture. Malcolm enters with his mess-with-Macbeth minions.

- Malcolm, son of the killed Kiltie King and self-exiled to England, unfortunately utters at his entrance utterance, a querulous unctuous inquiry, "Where are we?" ¹¹⁹
- "We need to cover up this cohort," the former King's kid comments. "Collect cuttings of Birnam branches and bedeck them to your blouses and breeches." The cohortees comply.
- As the crowd camouflages, a cacophonous choraling commences. It is vintage Verdi. All vocally vow to vanquish the villain and restore Scottish soil to only loving and loyal lads and lassies.

La Patria Tradita / Oh, betrayed homeland!

Now the chorus takes up another hymn much more upbeat (no pun) and march-like than their previous dirge. In the exposition, there is a back and forth of musical lines between principals and chorus. The piece all told, is stridently march-like and militaristic, promising destruction of the villain and rescue of the homeland. It builds to a unison finale.

- All breech the border and march to manfully mess with Macbeth.
- The truth's been told! Birnam trees are traveling. Dunsinane is their destination.

Scene 2: Dunsinane Castle - a Hall.

Prelude

A lengthy musical introduction appropriately sets the eerie mood of this sleepwalking scene. It begins in a light bel canto-like music but with a soulful and whispering tone. It is not unlike the Prelude to Act I of *Traviata*. That music finally trills off. It then gradually assumes a more melodic atmosphere with an ambulation tempo.

¹¹⁹ This really doesn't seem, like a very intelligent question for a wartime leader and new kid on the throne to ask. In any event it does permit the audience to be told, "Birnam Woods." Convenient, especially if they haven't been paying close attention.

- The Sleep-less Center of Dunsinane's Dispensary is now displayed.
- A doctor licensed to loose leaches and a not totally loyal lady-in-waiting are waiting for Lady M to meander in, mumbling.
- This duo has been hopefully hiding here for two nocturnal terms. Why you wonder?
- Well, the lady-in-waiting has previously perceived a nightly promenade by a seemingly sleeping Lady M. There is peril here as the Lady had loose-lipped the crimes of the Kiltie King and her, his consort.
- The waiting lady, no fool she, wants a witness and designated the Doc as that dupe. The duo is definitely not delighted with the duty; it could be decidedly deadly.

Una Macchia E Qui Tuttora / There's Still a Spot Here!

The operatic version of the sleepwalking scene follows Shakespeare's text quite closely. Musically however, Verdi changes the character of Lady M's music in this scene. Up to this point in the opera, her music has been quite forceful. However, as the situation worsens, her music becomes soft and deteriorates. Macbeth's, however moves in the opposite direction. His music becomes quite forceful as will be heard in the next scene.

In this sleepwalking scene you can hear Verdi transiting from the bel canto style into a more powerful vocal style of the late eighteenth century. Both styles are present in the Lady's final music, effectively married. However, both are softened in deference to the other.

The whispery vocal tone of the Scene is first established by the physician and lady-in-waiting as they enter and await Lady M's promenade. When she arrives, her tones are soft-sung as you would expect if talking to yourself. The three singers on stage throughout the Scene, intermingle their observations and/or concerns almost conspiratorially. In the end, the Scene reaches its high drama softly without crashing chords. However, it is all the more powerful and memorable through such musical understatement. The quiet terror being experienced by all three participants is clearly established. Enjoy!

- The, Lady M materializes lit with a lamp, tiring her tongue with song-talk about Persian perfume. Further, since she has multi-tasking talent, she's wringing or perhaps, washing her hands.
- Her odd action and articulation is observed, but not understood by our wary witnesses.
- But then--- our babbling, bedless babe blabs the bloody business of the considerable killings of Kiltie kith!
- The duo are dumbfounded and directly depart, perhaps prudently for the British border.
- Lady M also trundles out looking for a towel.¹²⁰

Prelude.

A brief, very warlike prelude introduces the Scene. The music clearly indicates swords are being sharpened, the oil is heating on the stove, longbows are being strung and so forth.

Scene 3:¹²¹ An Interior Hall of Dunsinane.

- In a corner of the castle, Macbeth is morosely moaning. No one loves him! The Brits are beating at his back door; rebel refugees are running up the road toting his treasury. No one will cry when this Kiltie King's a corpse. Only witches and wraiths will "wake" him---- and sadly so forth.

Perfidi! / Traitors

The aria, Macbeth's first proactive moments in the opera, begins with angry defiance, a warlike challenge to the Scotch rebels and English who have joined with them against the Kiltie king. It then musically transits into a more quiet and plaintive rhythm as it moves towards its climax. Macbeth is now feeling very sorry for himself---no one will praise or love him after death; only curses will be his funeral hymn.

¹²⁰ Part of her final exit song is, "Sfar non puoi la cosa fatta," ("What's done cannot be undone!")

¹²¹ Scene 3 and 4 are frequently blended into each other with no change in setting. Prepare yourselves!

- Offstage observers opine an obituary. That loitering lady-in-waiting seen in the Sleep Center scene, slips on-stage to sing, "Lady M has met her maker!"
- That message moves Macbeth to a more manic mode. So, he sings something Shakespearean, citing life as a fool's tale, full of sound, but signifying nada!
- Woe upon woe! The Woodland Warden warns, "The trees are tramping up the trail towards these towers!" To axe! To axe!
- "The witches did warn of walking woods, but I waved it off! This Kiltie King's been conned." complains the cornered Kahuna.
- "But I laugh at those louche ladies and their Ponsi promises! "Let's beat those Brits and rout the refugees!" Mac trumpets to his troops as they shoulder their shields and set forth to slay or be slain.

Scene 4: A Plain outside Dunsinane.

The final scene opens with a really cheesy (but brief) march tune. The music builds with more sophisticated sounds– the confusion of battle. Macduff enters ordering his men to throw away the branches and take up arms. Seems like a good idea, considering.

There is an extended musical passage with the sounds of combat and people rushing hither and yon. Macbeth enters chased by Macduff who is still holding a grudge. Macbeth laughs – no man born of woman can kill me. Macduff responds with, "Surprise! I was delivered by caesarian section." Macbeth knows he is now in deep do-do.

At this point one of two (or three) things may happen on stage:¹²²

¹²² The alternatives outlined occurred from changes made by Verdi between the original Florence version and the Paris version.

- Macbeth decides to make a run for it to off-stage. He is then followed by Macduff and killed off-stage----- in some productions Macduff will bring his head back on-stage, Nice touch! **OR**

- They will fight on-stage. Macduff will mortally wound our hero who then operatic-like will sing a long aria (while he dies): (*Mal per me che m'affida* – “*Evil the day when I did trust—*”).¹²³

This piece somewhat echoes Macbeth’s sentiments from the previous aria¹²⁴ and Scene, “ – no one will love me after I’m gone”. He dies singing, “Vile crown, it was all for thee!” This guy really never learns to take responsibility for his own actions. **OR**

- Another alternative: you could get a little bit of both depending on the baritone’s stamina and the director’s “vision.”¹²⁵

Whatever from above, Macbeth dies and the women rush on and prudently observe: “*unhappy day*” – *Infausto giorno.*” But then-----the warlike music gradually softens and quiet ensues.

¹²³ This aria takes on a tale of its own. It was cut and replaced with the current final chorus at the time of the original Paris production. It was then forgotten until the early 1930’s when the director of a Berlin production became convinced that Verdi never would have let Macbeth die without a final aria. He mounted a search, and the score for the missing aria was found in the library at Verdi’s Italian estate.

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¹²⁵ For the DMMO 2010 festival production, we will get Macbeth killed on stage (whoopie, but no beheading business), the “dying” aria and the final chorus.

The chorus from off-stage shouts “*Vittoria!*” and it is echoed by the women on-stage.

Everybody still alive now rushes back on stage; they take a deep breath and one of Verdi’s great choral finales ensues:

Salve, o Re!/ Hail King!

Macduff is hailed by the chorus as the hero that has saved both king and country. The choral music has a very distinctive march beat of victory that alternates with the women’s prayer of thanksgiving. All this is subsequently joined by the men and interspersed with choral melodic backs and forths.

Macduff hails Malcolm, the new king who now indicates, “*Scotland trust in me. The tyrant is dead. I shall make everlasting the joy of such victory.*”—*per noi d itaI vittoria.*

Probably an empty political promise, but ---what the hell! As long as the scotch holds out, we don’t care!

Lang may yer lum reek!

[Long may your chimney smoke!]



About the Authors

So our indiscriminate readership is aware which member of **An Operaphobic Guide's** "creative" team (JP or Sondra Cooney) is responsible for which gaffs, the division of work between the pair is, he writes them, but she makes them readable.

J.P. Cooney, while holding a PhD, definitely was not educated as a musicologist. He is many years retired from a long, but probably questionable professorial career in university-based graduate health care education and research. However, most important for current purposes, he is a long-standing opera enthusiast about that art form's wacky, but rewarding wonderments. He claims naturalized Iowan status by way of family lineage, marriage and education.

Sondra S. Cooney is a native-born Iowan and does have a musical background by virtue of education and training. She holds a graduate degree from UCLA and though (semi-) retired, she has had a long successful career in teaching, educational research and policy-development. She is a knowledgeable and fanatic lover of a wide range of musical types. Opera does make that list--- somewhat. She is also a formidable master bridge player

For their (to-date) fifty-four years of marriage, equipped with a flaming red, felt-tipped pen, Sondra Cooney has diligently pursued and purified JP's errant and "gone missing" commas, grungy syntax and banally baroque sentence structures. She perpetually persists in her quixotic editorial quest, as he never learns.

The Cooneys currently are long-tine, happy residents of a small island off Hilton Head (SC), breachable only by boat or Michael Phelps. In this idyllic but eccentric existence, the grumpy ghost of their formerly long-lived, liver-spotted Dalmatian companions them.

Major additional enjoyment to the island's idyllic atmosphere is provided by frequent forays onto and most importantly, off the island by other immediate family members. That traveling road show now touts up twenty- second and third generational members¹⁵¹--- most of whom are at least willing to tolerate the opera, and some actually love it.

Encouraged by several regional opera company directors,¹⁵² the Cooney's initiated **The Operaphobic's Guide**¹⁵³ series seven years ago. To date **Guides** for more than forty operas have been produced. The majority of these were done pro bono for the companies to use in their educational and/or fund-raising programs. The rest were done for unsuspecting, slower running family members, friends and even, strangers in the street.

¹⁵¹ Their first fourth generational member is now preening for her anticipated May 2010 debut.

¹⁵² Who probably should have known better!

¹⁵³ Originally named, **Irreverent Guides to Enjoying Opera**.

An Operaphobic's Guide: the Series

COMPOSER	OPERA	ISSUE	DATE
Bernstein*	Candide	#20	4.08
Bizet	Carmen	#35	3.10
Bizet*	Carmen (Encore! Love is better the second time around?)	#36	4.10
Bizet	Les Pêcheurs de Perles	# 7	10.05
Blitzstein***	Regina	#24	6.08
Britten*	Albert Herring	# 8	4.06
De Falla	La Vida Breve	# 13	1.07
Donizetti***	L'Elisir d'Amore	#22	6.08
Donizetti	Lucia di Lammermoor	# 2	5.04
Floyd**	Susannah	#39	6.10
Gilbert & Sullivan	The Pirates of Penzance	# 15	4.07
Gounod**	Faust	#25	9.08
Gounod**	Roméo et Juliette	#17	10.07
Leoncavallo	Pagliacci	# 12	1.07
Mozart**	Le Nozze di Figaro	#27	3.09
Mozart***	Le Nozze di Figaro (Factotum fun, redux!)	#37	4.10
Mozart	Die Zauberflöte	# 6	5.05
Mozart**	Don Giovanni	#19	3.08
Offenbach*	Les Contes d' Hoffmann	# 16	4.07
Poulenc*	Dialogues des Carmélites	#28	4.09
Puccini	La Bohème	#34	1.10
Puccini	Madama Butterfly	# 11	7.06
Puccini	Tosca	# 5	3.05
Puccini***	Tosca (a déjà vu view)	#30	6.09
Puccini**	Turandot	#29	4.09
Rossini**	Il Barbiere di Siviglia	#26	1.09
Rossini***	Il Barbiere (Once more with feeling!)	#31	6.09
Rossini	La Cenerentola	# 10	3.06
Saint-Saëns	Samson et Dalila	# 4	2.05
Strauss**	Die Fledermaus	#21	4.07
Verdi**	Aida	#18	1.07
Verdi	La Traviata	# 9	1.06
Verdi	Macbeth	# 3	10.04
Verdi***	Macbeth (A kilt-kicking encore!)	#38	4.10
Verdi	Nabucco	# 1	10.03
Verdi	Otello	#33	10.09
Verdi	Rigoletto	# 14	3.07
Verdi***	Un Ballo in Maschera	#23	6.08
Weber***	Der Freischütz	#32	6.09

Developed for: *Atlanta Opera Theater at Georgia State University

**Opera Carolina

*** Des Moines Metro Opera