GIUSEPPE VERDI

MACBETH

Opera in four acts

Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave and Andrea Maffei, based on the play by Shakespeare

Saturday, October 11, 2014
1:00–3:55 PM

The production of Macbeth was made possible by a generous gift from
Mr. and Mrs. Paul M. Montrone

Additional funding was received from Mr. and Mrs. William R. Miller; Hermione Foundation, Laura Sloate, Trustee; and the Gilbert S. Kahn and John J. Noffo Kahn Endowment Fund
The Metropolitan Opera
2014-15 Season

The 103rd Metropolitan Opera performance of
GIUSEPPE VERDI’S
MACBETH

CONDUCTOR
Fabio Luisi

IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

MACBETH
Željko Lučić

BANQUO
René Pape

LADY MACBETH
Anna Netrebko

LADY-IN-WAITING TO LADY MACBETH
Claudia Waite

A SERVANT OF MACBETH
Christopher Job

DUNCAN, KING OF SCOTLAND
Raymond Renault

MALCOLM, DUNCAN’S SON
Noah Baetge

MACDUFF, THANE OF FIFE
Joseph Calleja

FLEANCE, BANQUO’S SON
Moritz Linn

A MURDERER
Richard Bernstein

A HERALD
Seth Malkin

A DOCTOR
James Courtney

APPARITIONS:
A WARRIOR
David Crawford

A BLOODY CHILD
Ashley Emerson*

A CROWNED CHILD
Jihee Kim

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Nadja Michael as Judith in Bluebeard’s Castle
PHOTO: KRAKOWSKI/TEATR WIELKI WARSZAWA
Synopsis

Scotland

Act I
SCENE 1 A battlefield
SCENE 2 Macbeth’s castle

Act II
SCENE 1 Macbeth’s castle
SCENE 2 Outside the castle
SCENE 3 The banquet hall in the castle

Intermission (AT APPROXIMATELY 2:25 PM)

Act III
The banquet hall

Act IV
SCENE 1 On the Scottish border
SCENE 2 Macbeth’s castle
SCENE 3 Birnam Wood

Act I
Macbeth and Banquo, leaders of the Scottish army, meet a group of witches who prophesy the future. They address Macbeth as Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland, and tell Banquo that he will be the father of kings. The two men try to learn more, but the witches vanish. Messengers arrive with news that Duncan, the current king of Scotland, has made Macbeth Thane of Cawdor. The first part of the witches’ prediction has come true.

In Macbeth’s castle, Lady Macbeth reads a letter from her husband telling her of the events that have just transpired. She resolves to follow her ambitions. A servant announces that Duncan will soon arrive at the castle, and when Macbeth enters, she tells him that they must kill the king. Duncan arrives. Macbeth has a vision of a dagger, then leaves to commit the murder. On his return, he tells his wife how the act has frightened him, and she tells him that he needs more courage. They both leave as Banquo enters with Macduff, a nobleman, who discovers the murder. Macbeth and Lady Macbeth pretend to be horrified and join the others in condemning the murder.

Act II
Macbeth has become king. Duncan’s son, Malcolm, is suspected of having killed his father and has fled to England. Worried about the prophecy that Banquo’s children will rule, Macbeth and his wife now plan to kill him and his son, Fleance,
as well. As Macbeth leaves to prepare the double murder, Lady Macbeth hopes that it will finally make the throne secure.

Outside the castle, assassins wait for Banquo, who appears with his son, warning him of strange forebodings. Banquo is killed, but Fleance escapes.

Lady Macbeth welcomes the court to the banquet hall and sings a drinking song, while Macbeth receives news that Banquo is dead and his son has escaped. About to take Banquo’s seat at the table, Macbeth has a terrifying vision of the dead man accusing him. His wife is unable to calm her unsettled husband, and the courtiers wonder about the king’s strange behavior. Macduff vows to leave the country, which is now ruled by criminals.

Act III
The witches gather again, and Macbeth visits them, demanding more prophecies. Apparitions warn him to beware of Macduff and assure him that “no man of woman born” can harm him, and that he will be invincible until Birnam Wood marches on his castle. In another vision, he sees a procession of future kings, followed by Banquo. Horrified, Macbeth collapses. The witches disappear and his wife finds him. They resolve to kill Macduff and his family.

Act IV
On the Scottish border, Macduff has joined the refugees. His wife and children have been killed. Malcolm appears with British troops and leads them to invade Scotland.

Lady Macbeth is sleepwalking, haunted by the horrors of what she and her husband have done.

Macbeth awaits the arrival of his enemies and realizes that he will never live to a peaceful old age. Messengers bring news that Lady Macbeth has died, and that Birnam Wood appears to be moving. English soldiers appear, camouflaged with its branches. Macduff confronts Macbeth and tells him that he was not born naturally but had a Caesarean birth. He kills Macbeth and proclaims Malcolm king of Scotland.
In Focus

Giuseppe Verdi

Macbeth

**Premiere:** Teatro della Pergola, Florence, 1847
**Revised version:** Théâtre Lyrique, Paris, 1865

Verdi’s opera is a powerful musical interpretation of Shakespeare’s timeless drama of ambition and its personal cost. Raising questions of fate, superstition, guilt, and power, it marks an important step on the composer’s path from his more conventional earlier efforts to the integrated musical dramas of his mature years. *Macbeth* is different from many operas in other ways as well, including those by Verdi himself. Instead of the tenor–soprano love interest that forms the core of most romantic operas, *Macbeth* uses a baritone and dramatic soprano to depict a married couple whose relationship is dominated by the desire for power.

**The Creators**

Giuseppe Verdi (1813–1901) composed 28 operas during his 60 active years in the theater, at least half of which are at the core of today’s opera repertory. His role in Italy’s cultural and political development has made him an icon in his native country, and he is cherished the world over for the universality of his art. Francesco Maria Piave (1810–1876), one of the two librettists for *Macbeth*, collaborated with the composer on ten works, including *La Traviata*, *Rigoletto*, and *La Forza del Destino*. Additional portions of the libretto for *Macbeth* were provided by Verdi’s friend Count Andrea Maffei (1798–1885), a cosmopolitan literary amateur who also wrote the libretto for Verdi’s *I Masnadieri* and introduced the work of many great foreign writers, including those of Shakespeare, to Italians. The plays of William Shakespeare (1564–1616) have provided much excellent source material to opera composers for four centuries. But when the opera *Macbeth* premiered, Shakespeare was not well known in Italy and was considered to have been a daring choice.

**The Setting**

The historical Macbeth (Mac Bethad mac Findlaích) was king of Alba from 1040 to his death in 1058, but Shakespeare departs so far from history in his play that the facts are of little concern. This production of *Macbeth* places the action of the opera in a non-specific post-World War II Scotland. This is not the mythic land popular among Romantic artists (as in earlier operas such as Donizetti’s *Lucia di Lammermoor*), but a barbarous place in a constant state of warfare with only the slightest hint of civility.
The Music

The score of *Macbeth* features little of the melodic abundance that made Verdi famous. In fact, the composer went out of his way to avoid making this score too pretty, insisting that the drama was not served by lyricism. The duet between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth after Duncan’s murder, for example, is more about breathy suspense than standard operatic tuneful flow. (For the premiere performance Verdi famously rehearsed this duet an astounding 150 times with the leading singers so they would understand entirely what he was trying to express.) Lady Macbeth, as the true protagonist of the story, has the most commanding of the great solos, notably her first aria, “Vieni, t’affretta!,” as she responds to Macbeth’s letter and sets her mind on a course of crime, and the eerie and intensely difficult “La luce langue,” partly sung, partly declaimed in Act II as the murder is committed offstage. Her famous sleepwalking scene in Act IV is a study of guilt unlike any other. The final phrase, rising up to a high D-flat, is to be sung with “a thread of voice,” according to Verdi’s directions in the score. Macbeth has solos, yet many of his most arresting moments are, appropriately, in response to the words and actions of others. His music varies from jaunty and imperious with the witches in Act I (represented in the opera by a three-part chorus) to madness in the banquet scene in Act II. Throughout the opera, the score makes as much of an effect in its striking details as in its grand gestures. The fading string chords that form a musical depiction of silence as Macbeth enters the room to murder Duncan in Act I and the weird wind orchestration for Macbeth’s vision of Banquo’s descendants in Act III (six clarinets, two oboes and bassoons, and one contrabassoon, all intended to be under the stage) are only two examples of the haunting individuality of this remarkable opera.

Macbeth at the Met

*Macbeth* came to the Met in 1959 as part of a trend of rediscovering the lesser-known works of Verdi. The Met premiere was a spectacular occasion, featuring Leonard Warren and the house debut of the riveting Austrian soprano Leonie Rysanek (substituting for the originally scheduled Maria Callas), as well as Jerome Hines and Carlo Bergonzi, with Erich Leinsdorf conducting. Martina Arroyo and Grace Bumbry shared the role of Lady Macbeth in a 1973 revival featuring Sherrill Milnes in the title role, a part he would perform 38 times until 1984. Peter Hall’s first production at the Met was a new *Macbeth* in 1982 featuring Milnes and Renata Scotto, with Ruggero Raimondi and Giuseppe Giacomini, and James Levine conducting. The current production by Adrian Noble had its debut on October 22, 2007, with Željko Lučić as Macbeth, Maria Guleghina as Lady Macbeth, and Maestro Levine conducting.
In 1846, following his first successes at La Scala with *Nabucco* (1842) and *I Lombardi* (1843), Verdi was engaged to compose a new opera for Antonio Lanari, the impresario at Mantua. But the contract was reassigned, by mutual agreement, to Antonio’s father, Alessandro, himself an important impresario and manager and director of Florence’s Teatro della Pergola. Florence deemed itself the intellectual capital of Italy, so this was a prestigious commission for the 33-year-old composer, who had already proved himself in Milan, Venice, Rome, and Naples. Now he had to meet a new challenge. Florence had recently seen the Italian premieres of two foreign operas, Weber’s *Der Freischütz* and Meyerbeer’s *Robert le Diable*, both of which featured plots involving diabolical forces. Verdi had two possible subjects in mind: the drama *Die Ahnfrau* by the Austrian poet and playwright Franz Grillparzer, which demanded a very strong tenor, and Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, which demanded a very strong baritone. Since Lanari’s company could provide only the latter, Verdi chose *Macbeth*.

**Bold choice!** Shakespeare’s play had not yet been staged in Italy, though it had been translated. Since Florence was also the center of liberal thought, Verdi was able to treat scenes of supernatural interference in political events, of regicide and political tyranny, that censors elsewhere in Italy would never have permitted. When *Macbeth* was staged in Rome, the supernatural elements were excised and the witches became fortune-telling gypsies. In Naples and Palermo, it was not King Duncan who was murdered, but merely his head-of-staff; and in Austrian-occupied Milan, the “patria oppressa” (“oppressed fatherland”) of the exiles’ chorus became a “patria amata” (“beloved fatherland”), and the phrase “vil corona” (“despicable crown”) was removed.

*Macbeth* was in every way a bold opera, and what matters most to us today is that it was musically and dramatically bold. It was a pioneering piece—not the first opera based on a Shakespeare plot, but the first that can truly be described as Shakespearean, the first that altered operatic conventions to serve the play rather than converting the play into traditional operatic formulas. As Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s speeches were composed, Verdi sent them out to his principals, with repeated injunctions that they should study and declaim the text, and serve the playwright rather than the composer. This was a new kind of opera, he said. And it was.

Here and there, however, it compromised with tradition. Lady Macbeth began Act II with a virtuoso showpiece, “Trionfai,” that Verdi did not compose until he got to Florence for rehearsals and could hear exactly how his prima donna most liked to display her particular specialities. And Act III ended with a cabaletta for Macbeth in a somewhat similar vein. These were numbers that Verdi pounced on when in 1864 he was invited to revise *Macbeth* for a Paris production at the Théâtre Lyrique. He found them “either weak, or lacking in character, which is worse still,” and rewrote them. But this Paris commission was another challenge—in fact, a double one. The Théâtre Lyrique was considered a
“progressive” house; Gounod’s Faust and Roméo et Juliette, Bizet’s Les Pêcheurs de Perles, and Berlioz’s Les Troyens à Carthage had had their premieres here. The management decided to mount Macbeth in deliberate and conscious rivalry to the Opéra’s production of L’Africaine by Giacomo Meyerbeer. The revised Macbeth was a round in Verdi’s long battle with this composer, which was not decisively won until the triumphant Opéra production of Aida in 1880. Back in Italy, however, the young Milanese intellectuals were declaring, in effect, that Verdi was a back number, and that the future lay with such progressive operas as Franco Faccio’s Amleto—featuring a libretto by Verdi’s future collaborator Arrigo Boito—which was put on in Genoa, shortly after the revised Macbeth. (It flopped, and Verdi was not displeased.)

From the first, Macbeth was regarded as an unusually spectacular opera. For the Florence premiere, a special fantasmagoria, a kind of projector, was ordered from Milan. In the end it was never used, since it only worked effectively in a darkened theater, and in those days the house lights were not extinguished during performances. In early programs for Macbeth, one can also find a special credit for “the inventor of the chemical smoke,” and Verdi’s concern for scenic effects is well documented. He was very impressed when the Genoa Opera installed a Ferris wheel under the stage that brought the apparitions of the eight kings magically and motionlessly into view. Designs for the Théâtre Lyrique Macbeth survive and reveal a very large, sumptuous, and elaborate production.

When Verdi revised Macbeth, he did not merely replace Lady Macbeth and Macbeth’s cabalettas—with, respectively, the extraordinary monologue-aria “La luce langue” and the duet “Ora di morte.” The exiles’ chorus, “Patria oppressa,” formerly a largely unison lament similar to the famous numbers in Nabucco and I Lombardi, was rewritten, to the same text, as a wonderful study in advanced choral sonorities. And a brief ballet was added. Verdi devised the scenario himself, describing it as “a little action that fits very well with the drama”; it involves Hecate’s visit to the witches, to instruct them how to receive Macbeth (an idea based on the play). In several other places, the original music was significantly tightened or retouched, but much was left unchanged: the first scene; Lady Macbeth’s first aria, brindisi, and sleepwalking scene; Banquo’s aria; and Macbeth’s “Pietà, rispetto, amore.” The finale was entirely rewritten. Originally, after some lively battle music, Macbeth had a dying speech (“Mal per me”), which was followed by a choral cry of acclamation for Malcolm. Verdi rewrote the battle as a fugato, and Macbeth and Macduff now “exeunt fighting,” as in Shakespeare. While the sounds of battle die down, first women and children gather, then the victorious forces with their prisoners, a chorus of bards, and the Scottish populace. They all join in a triple chorus in praise of Macduff, the hero who has saved them, and of Malcolm, their rightful king.

—Andrew Porter
The Cast

Fabio Luisi
CONDUCTOR (GENOA, ITALY)

THIS SEASON  Macbeth, Cavalleria Rusticana, Pagliacci, The Merry Widow, and the National Council Grand Finals Concert at the Met; I Capuleti e i Montecchi, Norma, Die Frau ohne Schatten, and Martinu’s Julietta at the Zurich Opera; and Lulu at the Dutch National Opera.

MET APPEARANCES  La Cenerentola, Madama Butterfly, Un Ballo in Maschera, Les Troyens, Aida, Don Giovanni, Manon, La Traviata, Le Nozze di Figaro, Elektra, Hansel and Gretel, Tosca, Lulu, Simon Boccanegra, Die Ägyptische Helena, Turandot, Ariadne auf Naxos, Rigoletto, Don Carlo (debut, 2005), and Wagner’s Ring cycle.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS  He is Principal Conductor of the Met, General Music Director of the Zurich Opera, and Principal Conductor Designate of the Danish National Symphony Orchestra (taking up that position in 2017). He was formerly Chief Conductor of the Vienna Symphony, and made his La Scala debut in 2011 with Manon, his Salzburg Festival debut in 2003 leading Strauss’s Die Liebe der Danae, and his American debut with the Lyric Opera of Chicago leading Rigoletto. He also appears regularly with the Vienna State Opera, Munich’s Bavarian State Opera, and Berlin’s Deutsche Oper and Staatsoper.

Anna Netrebko
SOPRANO (KRASNODAR, RUSSIA)

THIS SEASON  Lady Macbeth in Macbeth and the title role of Iolanta at the Met, the title role of Manon Lescaut at Munich’s Bavarian State Opera, Lady Macbeth in Rome, the title role of Anna Bolena at the Vienna State Opera and in Zurich, and Mimi in La Bohème at Covent Garden.

MET APPEARANCES  The title roles of Anna Bolena, Manon, and Lucia di Lammermoor, Tatiana in Eugene Onegin, Adina in L’Elisir d’Amore, Norina in Don Pasquale, Antonia in Les Contes d’Hoffmann, Juliette in Roméo et Juliette, Natasha in War and Peace (debut, 2002), Donna Anna and Zerlina in Don Giovanni, Mimi and Musetta in La Bohème, Gilda in Rigoletto, and Elvira in I Puritani.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS  Violetta in La Traviata and Mimi at the Salzburg Festival, Vienna State Opera, Bavarian State Opera, and Covent Garden; Susanna in Le Nozze di Figaro at the Salzburg Festival and Covent Garden; the title role of Giovanna d’Arco at the Salzburg Festival; Ilia in Idomeneo and Gilda with Washington National Opera; Lucia and Juliette with Los Angeles Opera; Micaëla in Carmen, Mimi, and Manon with the Vienna State Opera; and numerous roles with St. Petersburg’s Mariinsky Theatre.
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**The Cast** CONTINUED

**Joseph Calleja**

**TENOR (ATTARD, MALTA)**

**THIS SEASON** Macduff in *Macbeth* and Edgardo in *Lucia di Lammermoor* at the Met, the Duke in *Rigoletto* and Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* at Munich’s Bavarian State Opera, Riccardo in *Un Ballo in Maschera* and Rodolfo in *La Bohème* at Covent Garden, and Ruggero in *La Rondine* and Edgardo at the Deutsche Oper Berlin.


**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS** He has sung Nadir in *Les Pêcheurs de Perles* and Edgardo at the Deutsche Oper Berlin, the title role of *Roberto Devereux* at Munich’s Bavarian State Opera, and the title role of *Faust* at Covent Garden. Additional performances include the Duke for debuts at Covent Garden, the Bavarian State Opera, Deutsche Oper Berlin, Netherlands Opera, and Welsh National Opera; Elvino in *La Sonnambula*, Arturo in *I Puritani*, *Roberto Devereux*, Rodolfo, Nemorino, and the Duke at the Vienna State Opera; Nicias in *Thaïs* and Gabriele Adorno in *Simon Boccanegra* at Covent Garden; Alfredo with the Los Angeles Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago; and Arturo and Faust with the Deutsche Oper Berlin.

**Željko Lučić**

**BARITONE (ZRENJANIN, SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO)**

**THIS SEASON** The title role of *Macbeth*, Amonasro in *Aida*, and Alfio in *Cavalleria Rusticana* at the Met and Gérard in *Andrea Chénier* at Covent Garden.


**CAREER HIGHLIGHTS** He has recently sung Renato in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, Amonasro, and Germont at La Scala; Scarpia in *Tosca* and *Nabucco* at the Vienna State Opera; Scarpia with Munich’s Bavarian State Opera; Iago in *Otello* in Zurich; the title roles of *Falstaff* in Frankfurt and *Simon Boccanegra* in Dresden; *Rigoletto* at the San Francisco Opera, *Lyric Opera of Chicago*, and La Scala; and *Simon Boccanegra* and *Macbeth* at the Bavarian State Opera. He has also sung *Macbeth* at the Salzburg Festival, Miller in *Luisa Miller* at the Bavarian State Opera, Germont at the Vienna State Opera and Covent Garden, Don Carlo in *Ernani* with the San Francisco Opera, *Nabucco* with the Dallas Opera, Iago with the Deutsche Oper Berlin, and Count di Luna and *Rigoletto* with the Paris Opera.
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The Cast CONTINUED

René Pape
BASS (DRESDEN, GERMANY)

THIS SEASON Banquo in Macbeth, Sarastro in Die Zauberflöte, and a recital at the Met, and King Marke in Tristan und Isolde, Méphistophélès in Faust, and Sarastro at the Staatsoper Berlin.

MET APPEARANCES Nearly 200 performances of 22 roles, including the title role of Boris Godunov, Gurnemanz in Parsifal, Méphistophélès, King Philip in Don Carlo, King Marke, the Speaker in Die Zauberflöte (debut, 1995), Pogner in Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg, Escamillo in Carmen, King Henry in Lohengrin, Leporello in Don Giovanni, Orest in Elektra, Ramfis in Aida, and Rocco in Fidelio.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS He appears frequently at all the world’s leading opera houses, including La Scala, Covent Garden, the Paris Opera, Vienna State Opera, Munich’s Bavarian State Opera, and Lyric Opera of Chicago, as well as the festivals of Glyndebourne, Bayreuth, and Salzburg. He also appears regularly with the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Berlin Philharmonic, and Boston Symphony Orchestra, among others.
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