Macbeth

A glimpse into the Archivio Storico Ricordi
Greeting

At an international media company like Bertelsmann, the ideas and creativity of our artists, writers and journalists form the heart of our value creation. They are the ones who constantly reinvent our offers by continuing to tell new stories, every day, that inform, entertain and inspire people.

In this booklet, we tell you the story of Verdi’s Macbeth. To paint a complete picture, we delved deep into the treasure trove of the world-famous Ricordi Archive.

Like Verdi, Ricordi is a name of great resonance – in Italy, throughout the music world, and also at Bertelsmann. The Archivio Storico Ricordi in Milan, which provides near complete documentation of the rise of the music publisher Casa Ricordi and today gives us unique insights into the world of opera, is regarded as the most important privately owned collection of Italian opera history. Bertelsmann acquired Casa Ricordi in 1994, but later relinquished most of the company again. However, the associated Archivio Storico Ricordi remained part of Bertelsmann. For us, the extraordinary scope of the collection and its outstanding importance for the history of Italian opera were more than reason enough to safeguard the many thousands of scores, libretti, letters, and photographs and preserve them for posterity.

In Verdi Year 2013, we began to present the documents from the Archivio Storico Ricordi in a new form and make them accessible to all; whether in the form of international exhibitions, publications, or by digitally recording the exhibits. What’s more, for several years we have been increasingly involved in other areas of cultural history as well. Bertelsmann was the key sponsor of the digital restoration of the classic silent movies “The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari” (Robert Wiene) and “Destiny” (Fritz Lang), thereby sending a signal for the preservation of cinematic heritage in the digital media age.

We will continue to help shape the future of digital media in the years ahead. Meanwhile, we will also continue our work to preserve the history of media for future generations and make it accessible to as many people as possible.

In this spirit, I am delighted by your interest and wish you an enjoyable read!

Dr. Thomas Rabe
Chairman and CEO of Bertelsmann

Cover — A forest, Act II, Scene II, set design by Girolamo Magnani for the 1874 production of the revised version at La Scala, detail
(Paggio) Macbeth (Sicario)
da Re nell'Opera MACBETH del M'Verdi
The Archivio Storico Ricordi is a collection of the greatest importance for the study of the Italian opera repertory of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Formerly housed at the production offices of the Casa Ricordi in Milan, the entire archive is now stored at the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense.

Essential for the publication of the critical edition of Verdi’s operas (The Works of Giuseppe Verdi, a joint publication of the University of Chicago Press and the Casa Ricordi) is the Archivio’s collection of autograph full scores, the primary sources for the edition. The autographs of most of Verdi’s operas are housed there, along with the autograph scores of the Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Puccini operas that Ricordi published. The Archivio also contains a significant number of rare piano-vocal scores, some of which have proved very useful to the critical edition.

The Archivio’s large collection of printed librettos includes not only important generic librettos with standard texts from the period of the operas’ composition, but also librettos published for particular productions. The latter have proved useful in documenting not only variants in the sung text from political or religious censorship, but also the presence of arias sung by particular artists in place of the ones in the score. In the case of the original, 1847 version of Macbeth, for example, more than one primo tenore tried to upgrade the role of Macduff by substituting a different cabaletta for “La patria tradita,” the cabaletta for Macduff’s aria in Act IV, sung in unison by Macduff and Malcolm, with choral responses. As is apparent from the libretto of a Decem-

1 — Macbeth in his costume as King, Act II, with a page and an assassin; costume design by Roberto Focosi, after the costumes for the premiere, Teatro alla Pergola, 1847. This one was included as a supplement to the 8 December 1847 edition of Ricordi’s house journal La Gazzetta Musicale di Milano

2 — Giuseppe Verdi during the 1840s, portrait by Roberto Focosi, litograph by Vassalli, Milan
ber 1850 production at the Teatro comunale di Modena, in fact, the tenor Luigi Bernabei introduced Zamoro’s solo cabaletta “Non di codardi lagrime” from Alzira, in place of “La patria tradita.” He was neither the first nor the last to make this particular substitution.

Immensely useful to all the volume editors of The Works of Giuseppe Verdi are the libroni, manuscript registers that document the publication history of piano-vocal scores, vocal, choral, and orchestral parts by plate number. Typically these specify consignment dates (date di consegna) on which the engraver received the material to be engraved. These dates were very useful in reconstructing the dates of composition for Macbeth. For the critical edition of Il trovatore, the consignment dates for the first edition of the piano vocal score clarified why some late changes, which Verdi made in his autograph score during the rehearsals for the premiere, never made it into the published scores. The reason is that the engraving of most of the piano-vocal score was completed before the premiere on January 19, 1853.

The Archivio’s stunning collection of set and costume designs—many of which are reproduced here for Macbeth— offers a comprehensive visual record of the style of production during the composer’s lifetime. Finally, the Archivio’s vast holdings of correspondence between composers, librettists, impresarios and the Ricordi firm document essential information about the relations between Italy’s foremost opera composers and the powerful firm that published their works and promoted their distribution.

---

3 — Macduff, Act IV, costume design by Luigi Bartezago, La Scala, 1874

4 — O figli, o figli miei!, Act IV, Scena I, autograph score, folio 287r. This page is the opening of Macduff’s aria at the beginning of Act IV, about which Verdi wrote to Alessandro Lanari in 1847. “Macduff isn’t a big part, but he’s still an important character. Besides, […] he does have that aria, which, if it were sung by, say, [Carlo] Guasco, would cause a furor.”
Frontispiece of the printed libretto for the premiere of the first version of Macbeth, Florence, Teatro della Pergola, 14 March 1847; published in Florence by G. Galletti.

Frontispiece of the printed generic libretto for the first version of Macbeth, published by Giovanni Ricordi in 1847.

Andrea Maffei (1798-1885), poet, translator and librettist, portrait by F. Garibotti. Verdi called on him to revise certain parts of the libretto for the first version of Macbeth, in which the composer was dissatisfied with Piave’s work.
Verdi’s Two Macbeths

by David Lawton

Dearest Father-in-law,
For a long time it has been an intention of mine to dedicate an opera to you who have been to me at once father, benefactor, and friend. [...] Here now is this Macbeth, which I love in preference to my other operas, and thus deem more worthy of being presented to you. The heart offers it; may the heart receive it, and may it be a witness to the eternal memory, the gratitude, and the love felt for you by your affectionate

G. Verdi

Verdi to Antonio Barezzi, 25 March 1847

The original version of Macbeth (1847), Verdi’s tenth opera and his first encounter with Shakespeare, has long been considered a turning point in the composer’s early career. His deeply personal dedication of this work to his beloved father-in-law, Antonio Barezzi, reveals that he was fully aware of its importance. The care he lavished on the forging of the libretto, the composition of the music, and every aspect of production is strikingly evident in the correspondence that documents the genesis of this groundbreaking work.

Once Verdi and the Impresario Alessandro Lanari had agreed to the “fantastical genre” for the opera that he was to compose for the Teatro della Pergola in Florence, 1847, the composer set about choosing the subject. As usual, the selection of a subject was bound up with the availability of particular singers. When Lanari was unable to contract a suitable primo tenore, Verdi actively sought, and obtained the services of the baritone Felice Varesi for title role in Macbeth.

On 4 September 1846 Verdi sent the librettist Francesco Maria Piave a prose draft (“schizzo”) of the whole opera, which he characterized as “clear: unconventional, simple, and short.” He admonished Piave that in the poetic lines “there should not be one useless word: everything must say something, and you must adopt a sublime diction, except in the witches’ choruses, which must be trivial, yet bizarre and original.” He asked for the poetry for the opening scene as soon as possible, adding that he could wait longer for the rest of it, because “I know the general character and the tinta as if the libretto were already finished.”

As work progressed, Verdi grew increasingly dissatisfied with Piave’s poetry, and his letters became so harsh that it is a wonder that the friendship of the two men survived. At the height of exasperation, he even took the poor poet to task in capitals: “(ALWAYS BEAR IN MIND: USE FEW WORDS...FEW WORDS...FEW, FEW BUT SIGNIFICANT.)” In the end, Verdi turned to his friend Andrea Maffei for help in revising those parts of Piave’s libretto with which he was least satisfied. Many years later the composer stated that these included the witches’ chorus in Act III, and the sleepwalking scene, both rewritten by Maffei, who also made numerous small changes in Acts I and II.

On 15 October 1846, the composer also sent a copy of the “schizzo” to Lanari to ad-
dress the production challenges: “In short, the things that need special attention in this work are: Chorus and Machinery.” For the former, he was thinking of the excellent women required for the two witches’ choruses, and for the latter, the appearance of Banquo’s ghost in the Banquet scene in Act II, as well as the apparitions and the “shew of Kings” in Act III. He also noted that he would need “dancers for a graceful little ballet at the end of Act III,” and offered to have the set and costume designs made for the production. In a letter of 21 January 1847, Verdi proposed to have a machine called the “fantasmagoria” constructed in Milan for the scene of the apparitions. Although this primitive projector was indeed built and shipped to Florence, in the end it could not be used, because the management refused to allow the total darkness in the theatre required for its effective operation. Letters Verdi wrote years later offer possible solutions to the staging of the apparition scene, one with an elaborate drawing. Concerning the appearance of Banquo’s ghost, Verdi wrote Léon Escudier in 1865: “I had Banquo appear (with a large wound on his forehead) through a trapdoor from underground, precisely in Macbeth’s place. He did not move, but only raised his head at the proper moment.”

Well before the rehearsals were to begin in Florence, Verdi sent Felice Varesi (Macbeth) and Marianna Barbieri-Nini (Lady Macbeth) their complete vocal parts so they could learn them before the rehearsal period. The letters accompanying their music are full of detailed instructions, including this astonishing recommendation to Varesi: “I’ll never stop urging you to study the dramatic situation and the words well; the music will come by itself. In a word, I’d rather you served the poet better than you serve the composer.”

The premiere of the original version of Macbeth, originally planned for 12 March 1847, had to be postponed by two days because of Varesi’s indisposition. The production had a run of nine performances, and was a triumphant success. From 1847 to 1865 this version continued to be produced every year in Italian theaters, as well as in numerous international houses on the Italian circuit.
Lady Macbeth in the Sleepwalking scene, 1847, observed by her lady-in-waiting, and a doctor; costume design by Roberto Focosi, after the costume designs for the premiere of the first version in Florence, Teatro della Pergola, 14 March 1847.

In her memoire, Marianna Barbieri-Nini, the first Lady Macbeth, wrote about the rehearsals for this scene: "I tried to imitate those who talk in their sleep, uttering words (as Verdi would say to me) while hardly moving their lips, leaving the rest of the face immobile, including the eyes."
[...] I have looked through Macbeth with the aim of writing the ballet music, but alas!, on reading through this music I was struck by things that I would not have wished to find. To say it all in a word, there are certain numbers that are either weak or lacking in character, which is worse still [...]  

Verdi to Léon Escudier, 22 October 1864

The impetus to revise Macbeth came from Léon Escudier, who had asked the composer to add a few “airs de ballet” to his score (above and beyond the dance in which water spirits and sylphs revive Macbeth in Act III), and compose a new choral finale for the end of the opera, for the Théâtre-Lyrique in Paris, 1865. As the above letter indicates, the task turned out to be far greater than Verdi had anticipated. It is not surprising that at the distance of eighteen years and fifteen operas from 1847, the composer would find much in his score that no longer satisfied him. In the end, he revised or retouched some eight out of the fourteen musical numbers of the opera. Three of them required new texts and music: a new aria for Lady Macbeth at the beginning of Act II (“La luce langue”), a duet for Lady Macbeth and Macbeth (“Ora di morte”) at the end of Act III to replace Macbeth’s original cabaletta, and the new choral ending of the opera, instead of Macbeth’s death scene. For the new texts Verdi turned again to Francesco Maria Piave. He added the ballet, obligatory for Paris, after the witches’ chorus in Act III, and considered it of great importance, insisting on its inclusion in Italian productions as well. At the beginning of Act IV Verdi retained the original words of the chorus of Scottish refugees, but replaced its original musical setting with a completely new one. Many of the other alterations to the 1847 score preserve the original overall structure, but alter numerous details, including changes to the orchestration to meet the demands of the Parisian public for more sophisticated orchestral writing.

Verdi did not attend the premiere of the new version at the Théâtre-Lyrique in 1865, although he sent Escudier numerous detailed letters with suggestions for its musical and
Photograph of Francesco Maria Piave (1810-1886), the librettist for Macbeth. For Verdi Piave also wrote the librettos of Ernani, I due Foscari, Attila, Il Corsaro, Stiffelio, Rigoletto, La Traviata, Simon Boccanegra, and La forza del destino.

Piave to Giovanni Ricordi, 23 January 1847: letter in which the librettist yields to Giovanni Ricordi the exclusive rights to the libretto of the first version of Macbeth, which he had originally granted to Antonio Lanari in a contract dated 4 March 1845.
theatrical realization during the rehearsal period. The premiere of the new version —sung in French to a translation by Charles Nuitter and Beaumont— took place at the Théâtre Lyrique on 21 April 1865. The production ran for 13 performances, but the box office receipts were unfavorable, and the critical response negative.

[...] One [critic] states that I didn’t know Shakespeare when I wrote Macbeth. Oh, in this they are very wrong. It may be that I have not rendered Macbeth well, but that I don’t know, don’t understand, and don’t feel Shakespeare — no, by God, no. He is a favorite poet of mine, whom I have had in my hands from earliest youth, and whom I read and reread constantly.

Verdi to Léon Escudier, 28 April 1865

Elsewhere I have suggested that there were three reasons for the failure of the new Macbeth in Paris: the hostility of the French press towards the music of Verdi, competition with the premiere of Meyerbeer’s last opera L’Africaine at the Opéra, and unauthorized alterations to Verdi’s score. The opera fared no better in Italy; in fact, only two productions have been documented in Italy during Verdi’s lifetime. The first opened at La Scala, Milan, on 28 January 1874 (scene and costume designs for it are displayed in this booklet), and the other at the Teatro Comunale in Modena a year later. For the remainder of the 19th century, Italian and international opera companies performed only the original, 1847 version. Not until after World War I did the revised version take its rightful place in the operatic repertory, gaining the esteem that it now enjoys among operagoers.

David Lawton is Professor of Music at Stony Brook University. A freelance opera conductor and noted Verdi scholar, he edited the critical editions of Il trovatore and both versions of Macbeth in The Works of Giuseppe Verdi, a joint publication of the University of Chicago Press and the Casa Ricordi.

All of the English translations of Verdi’s letters in this essay are from David Rosen and Andrew Porter, editors, Verdi’s ‘Macbeth’: A Sourcebook, (New York, W. W. Norton & Company, 1984).
12 — Tito Ricordi (1811-1888), Giovanni Ricordi’s son, portrait by Vespasiano Bignami. Tito took over the firm in 1853 after his father’s death; Verdi dealt with him for the revised version of Macbeth.

Contract, dated 14 September 1865, in which Verdi yields to Tito Ricordi the exclusive rights to the score and libretto of revised version of Macbeth as performed in Paris, 1865. The operative clause is in the first paragraph, which stipulates an exception for France, Belgium and England. Verdi insisted on this clause because his French publisher Léon Escudier wanted to publish and distribute the new version in those countries.
Water spirits, Act III, Scene I, costume design by Luigi Bartezago, La Scala, 1874. Macbeth faints after hearing the prophecies in the witches’ cave; water spirits and sylphs dance around him to revive him.

Air spirits, Act III, Scene I, costume design by Luigi Bartezago, La Scala, 1874.

Spirits, Act III, Scene I, costume design by Luigi Bartezago, La Scala, 1874.

Hecate, Goddess of the Night, Act III, Scene I, costume design by Luigi Bartezago, La Scala, 1874. Hecate appears in the ballet, as Verdi wrote Escudier in 1865: “The appearance of Hecate, goddess of night, is good because it interrupts all those devilish dances and gives way to a calm and severe adagio. I don’t need to tell you that Hecate should never dance, but only assume poses.”

Atrium in the castle, Act I, Scene II, set design by Girolamo Magnani for the 1874 production of the revised version at La Scala.
Verdi’s letter of 29 December 1846 to Giovanni Ricordi, in which he approves the contract with the publisher for Macbeth. Remarkable is his insistence that Ricordi not allow any performance of this or any of his other operas at La Scala, until he determines that the theatre has sufficiently improved its standards of production. Macbeth was not produced at La Scala until February 24, 1849.

Giovanni Ricordi (1785-1853), portrait by Antonio Bignoli. Ricordi founded the powerful Milanese music publishing house in 1808, and served as its proprietor until his death. The firm published the operas of Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi. Verdi dealt with him for the first version of Macbeth.
19

Macbeth as a warrior,
Act I, Scene I, costume
design by Luigi Bartezago,
La Scala, 1874

The witches’ cave, Act III,
Scene I, set design
by Girolamo Magnani,
La Scala, 1874

22 — Macbeth as a warrior,
   Act I, Scene I, costume
design by Luigi Bartezago,
   La Scala, 1874

23 — The witches’ cave, Act III,
   Scene I, set design
   by Girolamo Magnani,
   La Scala, 1874
Witches, costume design by Luigi Bartezago, La Scala, 1874. As Verdi wrote to Escudier in 1865, “[...] there are three roles in this opera, and three is all there can be: Lady Macbeth, Macbeth, and the chorus of witches.” Instead of Shakespeare’s three witches, Verdi uses a chorus of witches divided into three parts: Soprano 1, Soprano 2, and Alto.

The apparitions, the King, costume design by Luigi Bartezago, La Scala, 1874.

Una macchia è qui tutt’ora, Act IV, Scene IV, autograph score, folios 310v-311fr. In a letter of 11 March 1865 Verdi wrote his French publisher Léon Escudier: “—And so we reach the sleepwalking scene, which is always the high point of the orchestra. [...] [Adelaide] Ristori employed a rattle in her throat—the death rattle. In music that must not and cannot be done [...] Here there is an English-horn lament that takes the place of the death-rattle perfectly well, and more poetically.”
29 — King Duncan (a supernumerary in Verdi’s opera),
costume design by Luigi Bartezago, La Scala, 1874

30 — Malcolm, King Duncan’s son and heir to the throne of Scotland, costume design by Luigi Bartezago, La Scala, 1874

31 — Banquo as a warrior, Act I, Scene I, costume design by Luigi Bartezago, La Scala, 1874
Concerning the performance of this scene, Verdi wrote to Léon Escudier in 1865: “Anyone who has seen [the actress Adelaide] Ristori knows that it should be done with only the most sparing gestures, even being limited to just about a single gesture, that of wiping out a bloodstain that she thinks she has on her hand. The movements should be slow, and one should not see her taking steps; her feet should drag over the ground as if she were a statue, or a ghost, walking. The eyes fixed, the appearance corpse-like; she is in agony, and dies soon after.”

32 —Lady Macbeth in the sleepwalking scene, Act IV, costume design by Luigi Bartezago, La Scala, 1874

33 —Birnam Wood, Act IV, Scene I, set design by Girolamo Magnani, La Scala, 1874
The Archivio Storico Ricordi: a Bertelsmann project

In 1808, Giovanni Ricordi founded a music publishing firm in Milan that would significantly shape the cultural history of Italy and Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries: Casa Ricordi. It published the works of the “big five” composers of Italian opera – Gioachino Rossini, Gaetano Donizetti, Vincenzo Bellini, Giuseppe Verdi and Giacomo Puccini. From the beginning, all of the company’s documents were meticulously archived. The former business archives of the Casa Ricordi publishing company, which was acquired by Bertelsmann in 1994, have since become a historical archive: the Archivio Storico Ricordi, one of the world’s foremost privately held music collections, which is now housed in the Biblioteca Nazionale Braidense in Milan.

The original scores of many operas of the 19th and early 20th century stored here, along with those of many other compositions, are highlights of European music history. In 2006, Bertelsmann sold its former music rights business to Universal, but retained the rights to the Ricordi brand and the publisher’s famous archives. The Archivio Storico Ricordi is under the special protection of the Italian Ministry of Culture. As a national heritage, the Archivio must remain in Italy.

After having been an integral part of Casa Ricordi for decades and being used primarily for commercial purposes such as the publication of “critical editions,” the archive has recently been undergoing an accelerated transformation into a historical research archive.

Since February 2011, a project group at Bertelsmann and the Ricordi team in Milan have been developing a sustainable concept for indexing the archival material and preserving it for posterity. Together, they are working on the continuous restoration and digitization of the archive. The idea is to develop the Archivio Storico Ricordi into a best-practice case in the field of communicating cultural and historical archive materials in the digital era, and to make its resources accessible to a wider audience besides the academic community.

Bertelsmann is aware of the great responsibility associated with owning this unique cultural asset, and continues to cultivate the tradition associated with the Ricordi name.

Bertelsmann is a media, services and education company that operates in about 50 countries around the world. It includes the broadcaster RTL Group, the trade book publisher Penguin Random House, the magazine publisher Gruner + Jahr, the music company BMG, the service provider Arvato, the Bertelsmann Printing Group, the Bertelsmann Education Group, and Bertelsmann Investments, an international network of funds. The company has 117,000 employees and generated revenues of €17.1 billion in the 2015 financial year. Bertelsmann stands for creativity and entrepreneurship. This combination promotes first-class media content and innovative service solutions that inspire customers around the world.
Publishing Credits

Publisher:
Bertelsmann SE & Co. KGaA
Corporate Communications
Carl-Bertelsmann-Strasse 270
33311 Gütersloh
Germany

Concept and contents: David Lawton
Iconographic research: Maria Pia Ferraris
Design: Alessandro Marchesi
Printing: Impresor Ariane, Bruxelles

Copyright: Bertelsmann SE & Co. KGaA, 2016

Picture credits:
All pictures © Archivio Storico Ricordi

www.bertelsmann.com
www.archivioricordi.com