

1-1-1993

Abstracts from the Belfast International Verdi Congress

Roy Johnston

Belfast

Roger Parker

Cornell University / Oxford University

James Hepokoski

University of Minnesota

Martin Chusid

New York University

Elizabeth Hudson

University of Virginia

See next page for additional authors

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/vf>



Part of the [Musicology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Johnston, Roy; Parker, Roger; Hepokoski, James; Chusid, Martin; Hudson, Elizabeth; Gossett, Philip; Hansell, Kathleen K.; and Kimbell, David R.B. (1993) "Abstracts from the Belfast International Verdi Congress," *Verdi Forum*: No. 21, Article 4.

Available at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/vf/vol1/iss21/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Verdi Forum by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

Abstracts from the Belfast International Verdi Congress

Keywords

Giuseppe Verdi, Il trovatore, Un ballo in maschera, Stiffelio, Aroldo

Authors

Roy Johnston, Roger Parker, James Hepokoski, Martin Chusid, Elizabeth Hudson, Philip Gossett, Kathleen K. Hansell, and David R.B. Kimbell

Abstracts from the Belfast International Verdi Congress

The Troubadour on the Fringe of Europe

Roy Johnston, Belfast

The reception of Verdi in an Irish provincial city; a consideration of the typical rather than the exceptional.

Like many another place in Europe and America, Belfast grew from a small market town of ten thousand in the 18th century to an industrial city

of half-a-million in the 19th. The reception of Verdi in one provincial or non-metropolitan town, in one part of the area of western music, has relevance, I suggest, to its reception in others, the differences as instructive as the similarities.

Insolite forme

Roger Parker, Cornell University/Oxford University

Fashion in analysis and criticism of Verdi's operas come and go. In recent decades we have seen waves (or, in some cases, merely ripples) of the motivic, the semiotic, the Schenkerian. Such changes of approach seem bound to continue and -- if literary criticism is anything to go by -- will probably accelerate as the millenium approaches.

This paper sets out to examine what is without doubt the dominant analytical mode of the last few years: the one in which Verdian musical drama is

dissected in light of its adherence to, or - much more commonly - its tendency to escape from or manipulate, various fixed forms. I should like, so far as possible "senza rancor", to place this current fashion within a broader context. In particular I want to explore the - often explicit - way in which a concentration on "la solita forma" is advanced as "authentic", as dealing with aspects of operatic discourse that communicated immediately and without mediation to contemporary audiences.

Il trovatore as Sociocultural Drama: Generic Mixtures and Clashing World-Views

James Hepokoski, University of Minnesota

In the later 1840s and early 1850s Verdi became increasingly concerned with expanding the repertory of essentially Italianate structural practices (generally ordered sets of non-strophic, dramatically embellished "lyric form" structures, which he was continuing to bring to a state of schematic, crystalline force and efficiency) through experimental intermixtures with strophic-song conventions that were probably perceived as more "French" or "chamber/salon-like." Indeed, it may be argued that the concentrated mid-Verdian style of the *Rigoletto-Trovatore-Traviata* period is characterized above all

by the pointedly dramatic use of such intermixtures.

The current presentation is an extract from a much larger interpretational study concerned especially with suggesting ways of uncovering the sociocultural implications of the overlay of "French" (strophic) and "Italian" ("lyric form") structures in *Il trovatore*. Briefly put, I would suggest that as a general rule the French-strophic concept plays into the emerging "demotic" or "modern" world view of the emerging bourgeoisie. We may take the supporters of this view (in practice comprising sympathetic individuals from varied social classes) to

be Verdi's principal targeted audience, one that seems to have viewed itself as favoring what was construed as "natural" or "spontaneous" emotional expression in opera. Conversely, the Italian structures, though by no means uninformed by issues and values of the "bourgeois-modern," more pointedly conjured up an inexorably dissolving vision of an older, "grander," more hierarchical world view. Just as Italian society was working through these social conflicts during the *Risorgimento* and subsequent periods, so Verdi's music was inscribed with significant features of that tension even at its most structural or "formalist" levels. If this hypothesis generally holds, one may further suggest

that recovering and perceiving that tension can drive to the socio-dramatic core of such a work as *Il trovatore*.

The larger paper examines in some detail three somewhat parallel pieces from the first two *parti* of *Il trovatore*. Time constraints prohibit a discussion here of the first two pieces: Ferrando's "Di due figli vivea padre beato"/"Abbieta zingara" and Leonora's "Tacea la notte placida." Following some introductory remarks, the Belfast presentation will focus on the third piece - a composite extract, the Chorus's "Vedi! le fosche notturne spoglie" [Anvil Chorus] and Azucena's embedded "Stride la vampa!"

A Suggested New Source for *El trovador* and Its Implications for the Tonal Organization of *Il trovatore*

Martin Chusid, New York University

More than 80 years ago Regensburger showed in convincing fashion that, for his play *El trovador*, Antonio García Gutiérrez modeled his ill-fated courtly lovers on the plot and characters of Larra's drama *Macías*. This paper suggests a possible source for the second, and certainly for Verdi, more important strand of the plot: vengeance achieved through one family member causing the death of another.

The two strands of plot in the drama by the Spaniard lead both the librettist, Cammarano, and

the composer, Verdi, to shape the opera *Il trovatore* symmetrically. There are four acts, each divided into two parts, and until Act IV a strict alternation in story line. Part one is assigned to the story of the gypsies and the lost child, Part two to the drama of the ill-fated lovers.

When it came to setting the libretto to music, Verdi followed the implications of the two lines of plot closely, and he assigned different tonal regions to each.*

Musical Masks/Masking Music: Light and Shade in *Un ballo in maschera*

Elizabeth Hudson, University of Virginia

Verdi is not known for his comedic efforts: his one youthful attempt at comic opera, *Un giorno di regno*, was a resounding failure, and he did not return to the genre until his old age, with *Falstaff*. He did resort to comedy in other operas, but perhaps in

none with such consummate mastery as in *Un ballo in maschera*. In this opera, lightheartedness becomes intrinsic to the drama, even though the focus is never on comedy as an end in itself: rather, in *Ballo* the lighter moments serve mainly to highlight the

* The second part of this abstract is drawn from a paper read at the *Trovatore-Trouvère* day held at New York University's Casa Italiana in May 1991.

darkness of the developing tragedy. Yet in this sense the shifts between comic and tragic lie at the core of *Ballo's* drama; they create a surface of changing masks, a play of appearance that becomes reified at the masked ball itself in the third act.

One musical aspect of this interplay of contrasting light and dark perspectives is portrayed in terms of modal color. This is established most obviously at those moments in which the mood switches abruptly from tragic to comic; pivotal moments in the drama, when the tragedy seems to overwhelm the characters, only to dissolve unexpectedly in mirth. In each of these cases, the music seems to move towards a minor key until the laughter breaks out, when it turns to the major. Not only do the masking of tensions with comic relief correspond to turns to the major, but the turn to the minor (especially the tonic minor, but also the relative) comes to be associated with an undercurrent of impending doom that is never completely dis-

persed by the laughter. Thus, in each of the cases outlined above, the minor key hinted at before the shift in mood returns later, in the context of the newly established major key, injecting a tragic undertone.

Interestingly enough, this shifting between major and minor modes extends to the smallest level of harmonic and melodic detail throughout the opera, so that touches of the tonic minor occur even when no overt change of mood is indicated in words or action - but because of the large-scale associations established, the minor color adds a tone of ambivalence to the superficial appearance of carefree elegance. These shifts in color, the play of light and dark, are indicative of the sophistication of the musical language that Verdi employs throughout *Un ballo in maschera*; the interplay of contrasts so central to the drama is also one of the keys to his expressive language, and pervades the score at every level.

Stiffelio: The Autograph Scores

Philip Gossett, University of Chicago

It has long been known that Verdi disassembled the autograph manuscript of his 1850 opera *Stiffelio* when he revised the score as *Aroldo* in 1857. Some scholars were aware that portions of the *Stiffelio* autograph survived in the manuscript of *Aroldo* at the Ricordi Archives in Milan, but no edition of the earlier opera attempted to separate the layers in the resulting palimpsest. Nor did the task seem of primary importance as long as the deleted sections of Verdi's original autograph remained inaccessible.

Thanks to the patient efforts of the director of the Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani, Pierluigi Petrobelli, and the generosity of the Carrara-Verdi family, the deleted sections of the original autograph of *Stiffelio* have now been made available to the Istituto and to the *Complete Works of Giuseppe Verdi* for use in the preparation of the critical edition of *Stiffelio*, which is being edited by Kathleen Hansell. Access has also been granted to Verdi's complete

sketches for both *Stiffelio* and *Aroldo*.

My paper will discuss these materials, a copy of which is now on deposit at the Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani. I will describe the contents of the manuscripts and offer a preliminary assessment of their significance for Verdi studies and for our understanding of *Stiffelio*. Practically the entire autograph manuscript of *Stiffelio* is now available. It offers important new information about the opera, including the original text set by Verdi: previous information about censored passages from the libretto has been incomplete. The sketches are in a form similar to those for *Rigoletto*. In a number of cases they provide multiple versions of the same passage. There are also a few sketches in the *Stiffelio* manuscript that pertain to *Rigoletto*: one melody marked *Le Roi s'amuse* and another to the words "Veglia, o donna, questo fiore."

Compositional Techniques in Verdi's *Stiffelio*

Kathleen K. Hansell, University of Chicago Press

The autograph sources now available for *Stiffelio*, described in Philip Gossett's paper, provide important new evidence corroborating and expanding what has previously been known about Verdi's composing techniques at mid-century. The full autograph score for all but the brief closing "Preghiera; Scena finale" -- still to be located -- together with complete sketches for all ten vocal numbers allow one to trace the stages in the opera's gestation. Additionally, with those parts of *Stiffelio* that Verdi reused in *Aroldo*, the preliminary materials aid in deciphering and reconstructing the definitive original version of passages scraped away or written over.

For the lengthy Sinfonia a sketch survives of the first 23 measures only. On the other hand, for some of the vocal pieces we now have access both to one or more preliminary as well as full sketches, and in one case in particular a sizable portion in a well-developed "skeleton" score. These materials reveal that in composing some sections of *Stiffelio* Verdi

proceeded with practically no hesitation from the initial idea to the final score: the correspondence between them, with few changes of note, is striking. Other pieces or portions of pieces demanded considerably more drafting and subsequent revision: the process that began with sketches drafted and rejected continued in the full score, which in some areas presents still other settings, differing from the previously sketched versions.

My paper will discuss and illustrate instances of both the linear as well as the more tortuous paths to the final score of *Stiffelio*. I will also attempt to distinguish, on the basis of the source materials, the kinds of settings which appear to have demanded more rethinking on Verdi's part to achieve a satisfying solution. Finally, I will note how in those sections adapted for *Aroldo* the sketch materials can sometimes establish Verdi's intention for *Stiffelio* when the contemporary secondary sources of *Stiffelio* are inaccurate or misleading.

Verdi on the "Bonnie, Bonnie Banks": Ruminations on the Fourth Act of *Aroldo*

David R. B. Kimbell, University of Edinburgh

Julian Budden has remarked that "niceties of local colour meant no more to Verdi than to most Italians of his generation." That is surely a fair comment: but the combined influences of "Ossian" and Scott had made Scotland one of the more fashionable settings for romantic opera, and it is

difficult to believe that this fact had absolutely no effect on Verdi's Scottish or part-Scottish operas. An examination of the fourth act of *Aroldo* will be taken as the starting point for some more general reflections on the image of Scotland in Italian romantic opera.