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Abstracts from the Belfast International Verdi Congress (pt. 2)

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Abstracts from the Belfast International Verdi Congress, Part II

Aspects of Tempo in Verdi's Operas

Roberta M. Marvin

Designating the precise tempo for his music was one of several vital musical principles of concern to Verdi during the composition and preparation of his operas. Verdi's tempo adjectives, in accordance with theoretical precepts of his time, served not only to indicate gradations of *movimento* or speed but also to suggest an appropriate *carattere* to the performers. Moreover, Verdi was one of the first composers in Italy to incorporate metronome markings into his scores as a routine matter. It is, therefore, surprising that no serious or comprehensive study of tempo in Verdi's operas has yet been undertaken. This paper takes a small step toward addressing the subject through a preliminary investigation of the documentary and musical evidence pertaining to Verdi's tempo choices in selected operas.

Drawing on theoretical writings the paper presents an overview of the meaning and usage of tempo adjectives in *ottocento* Italy. Within this context the few extant letters Verdi wrote expressing his tempo preferences are considered. The discussion then turns to the most illuminating, though previously overlooked, evidence preserved in the autograph scores. Notational peculiarities - erasures, variations in ink color or nib thickness, differences in the angle or slant of the handwriting, and oddities in underlining - reveal instances where Verdi refined or revised a tempo indication. Moreover, the physical appearance and variants in tempo indications in the autograph and other primary manuscript musical sources make it possible to outline Verdi's procedure for assigning tempo with a fair amount of certainty.

Being able to determine the stage when Verdi assigned or revised a specific tempo designation subsequently enables us to evaluate the factors affecting his choices. The paper, therefore, includes brief analyses of selected tempo designations from *I masnadieri*, *Il trovatore*, *Rigoletto*, *La traviata*, and *Un ballo in maschera*. These examples illustrate that a variety of aesthetic and practical reasons accounted for Verdi's tempo choices. ♣

Tempo, Meter, Structure, and *tinta* in Verdi's Middle Operas

David Rosen

In this paper I will address three questions stemming from an examination (in progress) of Verdi's meter and tempo indications:

1. The degree to which verbal tempo indications (e.g., *Andantino*) combined with metronome markings might offer a key to tempo markings lacking qualifying metronome indications, as in all Verdi's operas through *Alzira* plus *Il corsaro*, as well as isolated passages in works generally furnished with metronome indications. The method involves establishing the range of metronome indications associated with a given verbal indication for a particular meter and type of accompaniment (e.g., 3/4 meter with a polonaise pattern).

2. Verdi's preference for particular meters. For example, in Verdi's early operas 3/4 meter is quite common, while it becomes rather rare later on (e.g., there are no examples in the *Requiem*, only two or three in *Otello*). While this might seem to be connected to his growing pref-

erence for longer lines (e.g., rhymed *endecasillabi*, *doppi settenari*), that explanation will not hold for the *Requiem*, where the only rhymed text consists of the eight-syllable lines in the *Dies irae*. Whatever the explanation may be, this seems to be a long-range pattern that spans Verdi's career.

Some meters may have special affective significance. While C is "unmarked," an all-purpose, "default" meter - 3/8, 2/4, and perhaps 6/8 may have associations that could be revealed by an examination of the contexts in which they appear, within a single opera in particular, but also with respect to a larger group of Verdi's operas. An emphasis on a particular "marked" meter within an opera can play an important role in establishing its *tinta*.

3. The technique of linking passages, adjacent or separated, through the use of *lo stesso movimento* or other devices using "modular" tempos. Andrew Porter has pointed to instances of this technique in *Un ballo in maschera*, and it is frequently encountered in the later works. But when did it become established as part of Verdi's musical language? ♣

Orchestral Direction and Verdi's Middle Period Operas

Linda B. Fairtile

The conductor has been a fixture in German and French opera houses since the 1830's. However, many Italian opera orchestras were still being directed by the principal violinist as late as the 1860's. Did the Italian violin director exert more authority over an orchestra than is generally assumed? Or was a controlling musical presence simply not essential to the performance of Italian operas written in the 1840's and 50's? Verdi's compositions provide an excellent laboratory for studying the transition from violin director to conductor, since the American Institute for Verdi Studies possesses microfilms of over sixty performing parts used by violin directors throughout Italy. These parts are enlightening both for what they contain and what they omit, suggesting a type of orchestral direction far different from today's.

Compared to a full orchestral score, the typical violin director part provides only rudimentary information. In addition to the first violin line, it contains a skeletal representation of the complete musical texture, based on rhythmic, rather than harmonic, structure. This orientation enabled the violin director to perceive orchestral unity, or the lack thereof, without distracting him from his own instrumental performance. The fragmentary nature of the part suggests that many features of modern conducting, such as the indication of instrumental entrances, dynamics, and articulation were not practiced by the violin director.

In theory, Verdi's operas of the 1840's do not seem unsuited to this type of orchestral direction. Passages in which the composer relied on rhythmic and orchestrational formulas do not appear to be beyond the capability of a largely self-regulated orchestra. The rhythmic variety and orchestrational novelty which mark Verdi's operas of the 1850's may have strained the prevailing system of orchestral direction: sections of a violin director part for *Rigoletto* seem to require actual conducting, while a part for *Un ballo in maschera* represents the first and last known example of an entirely new format. ♣

Italian Patriotism and French Forms in *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*

Mary Ann Smart

It is almost a commonplace of Verdi biography that the early operas treat historical and political subjects, a focus best represented by the famous patriotic choruses of the 1840s, while in the 1850s, the composer turned to more private concerns, relationships between lovers and among family members. *Les Vêpres siciliennes* (1855) offers a partial exception to the generalization: it sets the familiar triangle of love and family within the highly-charged political arena of the Sicilian Vespers uprising, attempting a synthesis of personal and political themes.

An impetus for the return to public themes in *Vêpres* might be sought in the successful grand operas of Auber and Meyerbeer, which were strong influences on this, Verdi's first work to be expressly composed for Paris. In keeping with the innovations demanded by the confrontation with French opera, the profile of patriotism in *Vêpres* differs from that of the early operas. Of the three principal moments of nationalistic sentiment in the opera, only one, the unison patriotic hymn, "O noble patrie," builds on the model of the choruses of the 1840s. The other two, Procida's "Et toi, Palerme" and Hélène's "Viens A nous Dieu tutelaire," present new facets of nationalism informed by French models.

The French-influenced form of Procida's soliloquy "Et toi, Palerme" is reminiscent of other private statements of love for the homeland in French opera. The generic character of the air will be examined in light of Procida's position as a problematic character - as the heroic leader of the Sicilian revolt, but, as Verdi complained to Scribe, nevertheless not an entirely sympathetic character, his humanity obliterated by his political fervour.

The most unusual articulation of patriotism in the opera, however, is Hélène's "Viens a nous Dieu tutelaire," not only because it is delivered by a female character, but because it represents Verdi's attempt to merge the opera's public and private concerns. Unlike Procida's, Hélène's patriotism is personally motivated, by desire to avenge her brother's death. The rapprochement between public and private in "Viens a nous Dieu tutelaire" emerges when it is contrasted with Hélène's Act V bolero, "Merci, jeunes amies." The two numbers could be regarded as mirror images of each other: both present Hélène in the typically French (and perhaps typically feminine) context as the focus of an elaborate scenic tableau, but their subjects are diametrically opposed - the fierce incitement to rebellion is transmuted into the docile public celebration of a bride. This difference is reflected in the musical forms: the fluid slow movement of "Viens A nous Dieu tutelaire" might be said to represent the best of the freedom French opera offered to Verdi, while the bolero's couplet form is redolent of the world of *opéra comique*. The contrast of form and content within a similar scenic frame in these two numbers hints at the larger musical and dramatic problems Verdi was confronting in Paris: new forms, simultaneously offering freedom and new constraints, and an unfamiliar political climate that demanded to be merged with the personal focus of Verdi's preferred subjects. ♣

Verdi's Property

Mary Jane Phillips-Matz

The dynamics of income, indebtedness and debt repayment in Verdi's life, with particular emphasis on the years 1844-57.

This is a study of Verdi's transactions with impresarios and publishers; of his income from his music, including his income from staging operas that had already had their premieres; of his and his father's purchases of real estate (land, houses); of their management of debt, including personal loans and installment payments on them, mortgage loans and repayments; and of loans from Ricordi against future earnings.

This paper stresses the relationship between debt and payment schedules and mortgage repayment schedules and his operas from 1844 to 1857, and shows the extent to which his acceptance of commissions was powered by debt repayment delinquency, conflicts within his family and even the threat of foreclosure. ♣

A Monk and New Things/ *Un frate almeno cose nuove**

Carlo Matteo Mossa

Four significant documents are presented and discussed concerning a projected opera by Verdi based on Guerrazzi's historical novel *l'Assedio di Firenze*. Designed to further the cause of the Italian risorgimento, the subject was proposed by Verdi to the librettist Salvatore Cammarano for an opera to be performed at Naples in 1849. But it was decisively rejected by the censors and *Luisa Miller* was written instead. The documents consist of letters by Verdi and the summary outline of the libretto (the *programma*) by Cammarano. ♣

* Abstract by the editor.

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