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# The Danville Congress

**Abstract**

Recap of the Fifth International Verdi Congress held at the University of Danville (Kentucky) in 1977, with a focus on the opera *Macbeth*.

**Keywords**

Giuseppe Verdi, Macbeth, opera, University of Danville

## The Danville Congress

The widespread international attention to the study of Verdi's music—close, serious study such as Josquin's, Mozart's, Beethoven's, and Wagner's music has long received—can probably be dated from the first International Verdi Congress organized, in Venice, by the Istituto di studi verdiani in 1966. Before that, there had been general studies, and biographies that lifted no more than corners of the veil in which Verdi liked to wrap the facts of his life; there had been a few penetrating theses and articles; and there was a mass of material—letters, memoranda, rehearsal schedules, scores, instrumental and vocal parts, scenic designs—lying unexamined in public libraries and private collections.

At that first congress and its successors (in Verona, Parma, and Busseto, in 1969, devoted to *Don Carlos*; in Milan in 1972; and in Chicago in 1974, devoted to *Simon Boccanegra*) the existence of this material was signalled and its importance began to be assessed. Meanwhile, keen minds played upon every aspect of Verdi's creation: his use of harmonically organized structures on scales small and large; his melodic formulas, and their significance; his orchestration; the relation between verse-forms and musical forms; his ideas about staging; his ideas about singing.

The exchange of ideas at these international congresses—the cross-fertilization of differing national approaches to and techniques of musicology, music history, and music criticism (three inseparables); the friendships, rivalries, and shared special enthusiasms; the casually dropped clues that led others to discover treasures—all these transformed Verdi study.

The Istituto was a seedbed. Its archive in Parma amassed under one roof what could otherwise be examined only after many tedious journeys. In *Atti* and *Quaderni* it disseminated what had been thought and said. In this new climate, serious works like Julian Budden's *The Operas of Verdi* (1973) and Martin Chusid's *A Catalog of Verdi's Operas* (1974) and many studies on particular aspects of Verdi were published (those since 1974 have been listed in successive issues of the *Newsletter*), and the way was prepared for the complete critical edition

that is to be published by Casa Ricordi and the University of Chicago Press.

Verdi studies flourished most especially in America. In 1976, with the enthusiastic blessing of the Parma Institute, the American Institute for Verdi Studies was founded, to provide on this side of the Atlantic, as well, both an archive and a forum. And with the further aim—one that is also the Istituto's but, as performances at the *Carlos* and *Boccanegra* congresses made clear, has so far been but imperfectly realized—of bringing Verdi scholarship to bear on Verdi performances, and vice versa, since musicology is a sterile pursuit until its results are put into practice. Hence the large number of performers and directors of performances on the Advisory Board. They *do* advise, and they *do* come to the Institute for advice.

That is the background of the Danville congress—the Institute's first, and the fifth in the international series. *Macbeth* was the theme. The Regional Arts Center of Centre College, Danville, Kentucky, was our generous host. The congress was supported in part by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

This is an informal and personal report. The papers that were read at the congress are being edited for publication in a 'Macbeth Sourcebook' that will also contain complete documentation on the genesis, creation, and early performances of the opera, in both its forms, including the mass of new material that was brought to light in Danville. Only their titles are listed below. A few other things may informally be put on record here. When, at an executive-board meeting of the AIVS, Mary Jane Matz told us of a splendid new theater set in a small Kentucky town, and of its enthusiastic managing director Floyd Herzog—just the place for a *Macbeth I* performance and an international congress around it, and just the person to bring it off—her fellow members smiled indulgently, in a "Yes, wouldn't it be nice" way, without much conviction.

It sounded like a pleasant dream. But she was in earnest. Floyd Herzog was in earnest. And Martin Chusid soon discovered that, with much hard work, the dream could be made to come true. As it did. On behalf of all Verdians I thank them here, and thank

Centre College and its president, Thomas A. Spragens, and thank NEH, for bringing about a congress that was so rewarding, interesting, valuable, and enjoyable. Many other people worked, too, to insure the success of the event; a gratitude list would grow long. Our new friends at the Regional Arts Center must be forgiving if they are not all named here. The cast, chorus, and orchestra of the Kentucky Opera Association learned music that was new to them, just for this Danville and for two Louisville performances. All *congressisti*, I am sure, would wish the gentle, unflurried efficiency of Rena Mueller, AIVS administrative assistant, dealing with missed flights, mislaid tickets, and sudden changes of plan, to be remembered.

The opening event, on Wednesday, November 9, was a reception at the home of President and Mrs. Spragens, followed by dinner in the College's dining commons—the scene of subsequent lunches, of animated discussions, and even of AIVS boarding meetings over the buffet, during the busy days that followed. On Thursday morning, welcomes were spoken by President Spragens, by Mario Medici, director of the Parma Institute, and by Martin Chusid, and the following papers, four in the morning and four in the afternoon, were read:

**Jonas A. Barish** (UC Berkeley): Hallucination, sleepwalking, and madness

**William Weaver**: 1847: The Shakespeare Verdi knew

**Paul Cantrell** (Centre College): The two *Macbeths*: 'We look before and after'

**Leonardo Pinzauti** (Florence Conservatorio): *Macbeth* a Firenze e i critici fiorentini

**Mary Jane Phillips Matz**: The Cavallipiatto family of Sissa and the biography *José Verdi* by Hercules Cavalli

**Francesco Degrada** (Milan University): Note sulle genesi del *Macbeth*

**Giuseppe Vecchi** (Bologna University): L'analisi del libretto del *Macbeth*

**Frits Noske** (Amsterdam University): *Macbeth*: romanticism or realism.

In the last issue of the *Newsletter*, Martin Chusid described the general setting of congress, in 'an area of rolling hills, beautiful waterways, large and attractive horse farms, black tobacco barns, and picturesque stone fences reaching for miles.' The specific meeting place was Newlin Hall in the Regional Arts Center—a 1500-seat opera

house, beautifully equipped, wrapped in spacious, airy foyers. It opened in 1973 with a performance of *Otello*. After the first day's work, the *congressisti* ('congresspersons') were entertained in the most beautiful, harmoniously proportioned house I have seen in America, the bare white lodging house in the Shaker village of Pleasant Hill, ten miles north of Danville, and then to a Shaker meal in the village refectory. On Friday morning, the following papers were read:

**Martin Chusid** (NYU): The supernatural in *Macbeth*

**R.M. Longyear** (Kentucky University): Instrumentation, orchestration, and sonorities in Verdi's *Macbeth*

**Gary Tomlinson** (UC Berkeley): *Macbeth*, *Attila*, and Verdi's self-modelling.

**(Marilyn Somville** (Centre College): Vocal gesture in Verdi's two *Macbeths*

**Daniel Sabbeth** (Mellon Fellow): On the tonal organization of *Macbeth*

**John Knowles** (Brandeis): The second-act finale of *Macbeth* and Verdi's large scenic complexes.

After lunch, a group of indefatigable *congressisti* used an otherwise unscheduled hour or two to meet and discuss points raised in the papers read thus far. Harmonic structures and their significance claimed the lion's share of attention, and tempers were almost beginning to run high when we had to break off; at 4 o'clock, Centre College had called a Festival Convocation. To the strains of the Assyrian march from *Nabucco*, played by members of the Centre College Community Orchestra, the senior members of the College in full regalia marched in to take their places. The anthem was Verdi's *Ave Maria* on the enigmatic scale. A Doctorate of Fine Arts was conferred on Moritz Bomhard, conductor of the *Macbeth* performance, and Doctorates of Humane Letters were conferred on Martin Chusid, Mary Jane Phillips Matz, Mario Medici, Joseph Duffey (newly-appointed head of NEH), and Alexander Heard (Chancellor of Vanderbilt University, who earlier had given an address on 'The importance of liberal education'). The triumphal march from *Aida* was the recessional. That night, *Macbeth*, the 1847 score, was performed, with the following cast:

*Macbeth*: Adib Fazah

*Lady Macbeth*: Alexandra Hunt

*Banquo*: Ferenz Gaal

*Macduff*: Vahan Khanzadian  
*Malcolm*: Michael Sylvester  
*Lady-in-waiting*: Mary Curtis  
*Doctor*: Frank Heller  
*Apparitions*: Connett Ahart, James DeLotel, Barbara Gugliotta  
*Assassin, Servant*: James DeLotel  
*Conductor*: Moritz Bomhard  
*Stage Director*: David Morelock  
*Set and lighting design*: David Gano

The Kentucky Opera Association Orchestra and Chorus.

The 1847 score had been newly edited by David Lawton; the opera was sung in an English translation, commissioned from Andrew Porter by the Kentucky Opera Association. (Elsewhere in this issue, the performance is reviewed by William Weaver.) After the show, a midnight supper-breakfast-banquet of Kentucky fare was laid on for the performers and the congress participants, in the dining commons.

On Saturday morning there were five papers:

**Marcello Conati** (Parma Conservatorio): *La messa-in-scena del Macbeth*: appunti storici e considerazioni

**H. Robert Cohen** (Laval University): *Macbeth* in Paris: new iconographical documents

**Ursula Günther** (Göttingen University): The Paris revision of *Macbeth* in the light of correspondence between Verdi and Léon Escudier, 1864-65

**David Rosen** (Wisconsin University, Madison): Some observations on the revision of *Macbeth*

**Philip Gossett** (Chicago University): Editions, critical editions, performing editions: some observations on editing Verdi.

In the afternoon there were two papers—

**Andrew Porter**: Translating *Macbeth*

**David Lawton**: Problems in editing *Macbeth* for performance

—which led into a panel, and then a general discussion of the performance we had seen the previous night. Moritz Bomhard, Hans Busch, Walter Ducloux, Jan Popper, and the two speakers formed the panel; Martin Chusid was moderator. The final congress event was a candlelit dinner in the grand foyer of the theater. Danville may be in a 'dry' county, but at this closing dinner wines flowed freely and the toasts were fervent.

When Verdians are gathered together,

there is always business to be done. The next morning there were two meetings that, although not part of official congress business, deserve mention as indicating the extra-curricular usefulness of congresses. Six of those who read papers are editors for the Verdi complete edition; on Sunday morning, they met informally for, and invited others to attend, a discussion of the draft editorial guidelines that have been drawn up for that edition. And then the editorial committee that is to help David Rosen in his formidable task of preparing the proceedings and the sourcebook for publication snatched a last meeting before it was time for Rena Mueller to round up any stragglers and make sure that everyone left Lexington airport properly ticketed and heading in the right direction.

One very important part of the congress has still to be mentioned: the large, exhibition that was mounted in the ample foyers of the theater. The typewritten catalogue (copy in AIVS Archive) fills many pages, and is in itself a mine of information about the closeknit network of families—the Verdis, Uttinis, Barezzis, Carraras, Cavallis, Piatitis, Strepponis—linked by ties of blood, bed, marriage, godparenthood, friendship, and liberal and patriotic beliefs both to one another and also to so many prominent statesmen, writers, poets, painters, and sculptors of the time. Many of these people gathered in Florence for the première of *Macbeth*; in paintings, portraits, letters, and other documents they were brought to life, and their connections with Verdi were traced. (This part of the exhibition was assembled from Italian sources by Mary Jane Matz.)

There were copies of the Italian Shakespeare editions that Verdi knew; pages in facsimile of that heavily-corrected *Macbeth* libretto partly in Piave's hand, partly in Maffei's, partly in Verdi's—a new document in Verdi studies—and of the autograph score; early printed scores and a selection of early librettos; early costume designs, probably for the première; a sepia drawing, from Sant'Agata, of the witches' cavern scene in that première; early scenic designs; the contemporary reviews of the Florence and Paris performances; portraits and letters of the singers concerned in them; more letters; photographs; posters—far too much to list.

Then, a show of scenes from *Macbeth* productions all over world, from 1847 to today; and a table laden with all the editions

and recordings currently available (and all Verdi books in print in this country). Masses to look at, masses to read. The bare list of lenders' names filled two pages of the congress brochure. Much of the photographed material, as noted elsewhere, is now in the Washington Square AIVS archive.

The value of a congress can be fully assessed only after some time has passed. (Most of the new work on *Don Carlos*, for example, was done only after the *Carlos* congress had been held, although it came about as a result of it.) That there is still new work to be done on *Macbeth* became clear; some signposts pointed down promising paths along which only the first steps had been taken. But, as the published proceedings will reveal, much exciting new work has already been done. This was the most sharply focused, the meatiest, the least gassy, and the most musical musicological congress I have ever attended. Leonardo Pinzauti, writing about it in *La nazione*, spoke of being 'enormously struck by the climate in the air during these days, by being in contact with an array of American scholars, almost all of them between 30 and 45, some of them disciples of German émigré musicologists yet quite free of the heavy Teutonic brand of erudition, extremely curious about music itself, about its interpretative problems and traditions, to a point where in many of them one could not distinguish between the musician and the musicologist, the interpreter and the researcher.' Which is as it should be.

All the various, complementary, mutually illuminating ways of looking at Verdi were in evidence. Still, in the light of my fifth paragraph, and lest I seem to be claiming too much, one small disappointment should perhaps be registered here. (I'm not writing a review; the point was generally made at the discussion on the performance.) Although on the musical side the relation between scholarship and performance was closer than at previous congresses—David Lawton's work had insured that the music before the performers was music that Verdi had written—the staging of this *Macbeth* was on occasion further from Verdi's staging than it need have been.

How far a director should follow in detail Verdi's detailed instructions is a matter that has been and is still being argued. But that he should know them (although there is no published *disposizione scenica* with Verdi's

authority for *Macbeth*, there is so much evidence about the staging that Marcello Conati was able to concoct one, and present it at the congress), and that he should depart from those instructions only when, say, to represent the appearance of the bloodbolter'd Banquo or the 'Shew of Kings' he has devised something even more effective, are hardly open to dispute. When the '*Macbeth* Sourcebook' is published, there will be no excuse for future directors' not knowing what Verdi wanted.

It was a scholarly congress. It was a thoroughly enjoyable one. And it was also practical.

A.P.

## *New Light on Verdi (and Verdi Research)!*

'His talent was recognized by a rich wine-merchant who took him into his home, nurtured his talent and sent him at the age of 18 to study in Milan. That very first year, in 1831, he had a one-act opera produced at La Scala; but it was withdrawn after one performance. . . and he returned to Busseto and married his patron's daughter. The marriage did not last long; in 1837 his wife died at the same time as both his children.'—Nigel Gosling in *Nadar* (New York: Knopf, 1976)

'Two years ago . . . when [Sarah Caldwell] mounted Giuseppe Verdi's sprawling, melodramatic *Don Carlo*, she went to Italy, ferreted around in Verdi's original manuscripts, and dug up a whole act, plus half-a-dozen other musical fragments that the composer had been obliged to delete because of their length. Without these sections, the opera had never made complete sense; yet, the Met and most other companies had let these pages gather dust. It was Caldwell who blew off the dust, and revealed *Don Carlo* as a masterpiece for the first time.'—Alan Rich in *Sky* (the magazine of Delta Air Lines), Vol. 6 No. 11 (November 1977)

'Verdi's letters to [Giuseppina Strepponi] are equally scarce, perhaps because Strepponi outlived him and with a widow's care for history winnowed through their correspondence.'—Donal Henahan, reviewing William Weaver's *Verdi* in the *New York Times* Book Review, November 6, 1977

'The son of an illiterate innkeeper' (Gosling); 'a farm boy from Busseto' (Henahan).