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'. . . qualche cosa d'incredibile . . .': Hearing the invisible in *Macbeth*

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'Fu qualche cosa d'incredibile . . .': 'it was something unbelievable, something new, unprecedented'. Thus wrote Marianna Barbieri-Nini, the singer who created the role of Verdi's Lady Macbeth, in reference to the famous Act I duet between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.[1] Indeed, this duet seems to have been one of the most effective pieces in the opera for nineteenth-century audiences. Verdi himself wrote about it as one of the 'two principal numbers' of the opera, together with the sleepwalking scene, upon which the opera's dramaturgy depended.[2] The reception of this piece at the 1847 première was stupendous. Antonio Calvi cites it as one of the opera's three excellent pieces, in which 'maestro Verdi has arrived at Shakespeare's sublimity'.[3] The duet's opening section ('Fatal mia donna'), according to various press releases during the opera's first few runs, was regularly encored three, four, even five times an evening. Abramo Basevi waxed eloquent over the piece, calling it 'the culminating number of the opera', 'a true flash of Verdian genius'.[4] And by the time the revised version was premièred in Paris in 1865, this duet had become entrenched in the repertory in a way the entire opera had not: one reviewer noted that the Act I duet 'has always been considered the best duet Verdi has ever written'.[5]

This rhapsodic reception can be linked not just to the music and formal processes of the duet, but to its effect in performance. *Macbeth* is often noted for the turning point it represents in the development of Verdi's musical dramaturgy; Verdi's own often remarked-upon fondness for it, above all his early operas, helps support this

[1] Eugenio Checchi, *Giuseppe Verdi: il genio e le opere* (Florence, 1887), 64–8; quoted and translated in David Rosen and Andrew Porter, *Verdi's 'Macbeth': A Sourcebook* (Cambridge, 1984), 52. All the English translations here come from *Verdi's 'Macbeth'*.

[2] 'Note that there are two principal numbers in the opera: the duet between the Lady and her husband and the sleepwalking scene. If these numbers fail, then the opera is ruined'. Letter from Verdi to Salvatore Cammarano, 23 November 1848 (*Verdi's 'Macbeth'*, 67). Barbieri-Nini's recollections also point out that Verdi considered the duet one of the 'two climactic points' of the opera, together with Lady Macbeth's Act IV sleepwalking scene (*Verdi's 'Macbeth'*, 51).

[3] 'Prima rappresentazione del Macbeth del M. Verdi', *Il ricoglitore*, March 1847; *Verdi's 'Macbeth'*, 380.

[4] Abramo Basevi, 'Macbeth', in *Studio sulle opere di Giuseppe Verdi* (Florence, 1859); trans. Edward Schneider in *Verdi's 'Macbeth'*, 423: 'The duet for Macbeth and his wife is the culminating number of the opera . . . The *tempo d'attacco* of this duet, which begins ''Fatal mia donna'', is the finest part. It is a true flash of Verdian genius, and must be numbered amongst the most beautiful creations of the ''Swan of Busseto'' '.

[5] Paul Ferry, in *La Comédie*, 23 April 1865 (*Verdi's 'Macbeth'*, 405). A review in the *Journal des Demoiselles* from July 1865 lists Duncan's march, the dagger soliloquy, and the following duet as among the opera's best pieces, musically, alongside the sleepwalking scene (*Verdi's 'Macbeth'*, 412).

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critical attention. And yet it is less often emphasized how much Verdi's hopes for its success depended to a special degree on how the opera was mounted.[6] As he wrote to Ricordi in 1870, '*Macbeth* calls for a better staging and spectacle than all operas that are known'; and again, 'without good direction a successful *Macbeth* is impossible'.[7] One aspect of Verdi's concern for *Macbeth*'s staging focused on the depiction of its fantastic elements: not only was he anxious about the special effects in the Banquet scene in Act II (with Banco's ghost), and the apparitions and procession of Kings in Act III, but he felt that the depiction of the fantastic genre itself was particularly tricky, and its effectiveness determined largely by performance.[8] Moreover, Verdi's concerns about performance centred on those two scenes he considered to be the opera's dramatic lynchpins. Famously, in Barbieri-Nini's recollections (published long after the première, in 1887), the singer recalls Verdi going over the duet with her and the baritone '150 times'.[9] Verdi blamed the opera's lack of success in its revised version in 1865 in particular on the failure of three scenes: 'The duet in the first act, the finale of the second, and the sleepwalking scene did not make the impression they should have. Well! There must be something wrong in the performance'.[10]

In spite of Verdi's affection for this opera, *Macbeth* eventually languished in the nineteenth century; only with the gradual Verdi renaissance across the twentieth century has it achieved a more permanent position in the repertory. It is interesting to connect the problems it has had in performance to Verdi's concerns over the difficulties in staging the fantastic genre. In both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, stagings of the opera share with Shakespeare's *Macbeth* a certain discomfort with the supernatural elements of the story.[11] Even at the time of the opera's première, critics shied away from the seemingly unselfconscious portrayal of the ghosts and witches, commenting on how incongruous they appear in a

[6] Indeed, Verdi's attention to practical concerns surrounding *Macbeth*'s performance marks a crucial stage in the composer's relationship to his operas' staging and performance.

[7] Verdi to Giulio Ricordi, 15 December 1870 ('Il *Macbet* si presta poi ad una *mise en scène* e ad uno spettacolo superiore a tutte le opere che si conoscono'; 'senza una buona direzione non è possibile un successo al *Macbet*'). *Verdi's 'Macbeth'*, 124–5.

[8] See, for example, a letter from Verdi to the impresario Vincenzo Flauto, concerning a subsequent performance of the first version: 'attend the rehearsals [of *Macbeth*] yourself, too, and do not object to calling an extra one: it is an opera a little more difficult than my others, and important for the *mise-en-scène*. I confess to you that I hold this opera in greater regard than my others, and I would regret seeing it fall to pieces. Note that it belongs to a genre that generally either does very well or is a *disaster*. So, extreme care is needed with its execution'. 23 November 1848 (*Verdi's 'Macbeth'*, 66).

[9] *Verdi's 'Macbeth'*, 51.

[10] Verdi to Escudier, 3 June 1865 (*Verdi's 'Macbeth'*, 121).

[11] From the 1920s and 1930s, stage directors have worked on mitigating the work of the supernatural in the play, in favour of a more psychological focus. See Jon Whitmore's *Directing Postmodern Theatre: Shaping Signification in Performance* (Ann Arbor, 1994) for a discussion of the twentieth-century tradition of toning down the superstitious elements of the Shakespeare. For another discussion of the difficulties of staging the supernatural in modern productions of the Shakespeare play, see H. R. Coursen, 'Winter of the Scottish Play', in *Reading Shakespeare on Stage* (Newark, 1995), 155–72.

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nineteenth-century context.[12] And yet, as Verdi made abundantly clear, he had not conceived of the supernatural elements as any mere window dressing: rather, they were integral to his conception of the drama's core, and hence central to the opera's success or failure.[13] As Marcello Conati has asserted: 'to illuminate the relation that runs through the drama between the "human" and the "fantastic" is the major problem in the production of *Macbeth*'.[14] When we keep in mind that the interaction of the psychic and the psychological may also be key to a critical understanding of the opera, Verdi's focus on the *performance* of the Act I duet and the sleepwalking scene takes on a slightly different flavour. For in these two scenes the psychological depth of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's characterizations depend exactly on the interaction between the human and the fantastic, the visible and the invisible worlds of the drama. It is in these two scenes that the fantastic and the psychological become intertwined. In this article, I would like to explore how this melding of external and internal worlds occurs in the Act I duet between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, how depictions of the supernatural lead to the enactment of the psychological until they become the very condition through which we perceive the subjectivity of these characters.

To discuss the creation of subjectivity in an opera through a depiction of the metaphysical would seem to invoke a specifically Wagnerian context, especially in the wake of Carolyn Abbate's critical work.[15] And yet, as Gary Tomlinson has convincingly demonstrated in *Metaphysical Song*, the nineteenth-century fascination with unperceived realms, the desire 'to know the unknowable' and to explore the limits of subjective experience, is more central in early to mid-nineteenth-century Italian opera than we are accustomed to think.[16] Indeed, Tomlinson specifically

[12] As Marcello Conati has demonstrated, there is no evidence that Verdi was dissatisfied with his depiction of the fantastic elements, as he left those aspects of the score by and large unrevised in 1865. See his 'Aspects of the Production of *Macbeth*', in *Verdi's 'Macbeth'*, 231–8 (here, 238), in which he also describes nineteenth-century reactions to the opera's fantastic elements.

[13] See, for example, Verdi to Escudier, 8 February, 1865: 'The witches dominate the drama: everything derives from them . . . They are truly a character, and a character of the utmost importance' (*Verdi's 'Macbeth'*, 99).

[14] *Verdi's 'Macbeth'*, 237.

[15] See Carolyn Abbate, *Unsung Voices: Opera and Musical Narrative in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 1991). In her more recent *In Search of Opera* (Princeton, 2001), Abbate considers a wide range of operatic history, but still gives only a passing glance to the Italian operatic repertory.

[16] Gary Tomlinson, *Metaphysical Song: An Essay on Opera* (Princeton, 1999). Tomlinson responds to Carolyn Abbate's argument in *Unsung Voices* by redefining opera's noumenal quality as those moments when phenomenal song is introduced within the sound world of the drama, so that, as Tomlinson puts it, 'a character attains a special self-consciousness of the musical nature of his or her experience. It is the musical expression of a character's approach to the limit of phenomenal knowledge' (89). This post-Kantian subject is 'on the verge of envoicing a realm that is normally unperceived' (90). Following Abbate, Tomlinson suggests: 'The diegetic distance established by the irruption of the phenomenal voice forces the issue of the distinction between the two realms . . . This voice, like the modern subject it represents, is impelled towards the borderline that separates the phenomenal and the noumenal . . .' (92). Most crucially for my purpose here, he claims that

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considers the link between the external, supernatural worlds of Verdi's *Macbeth* and the operatic depiction of the main character's internal struggles. Central to his interpretation is that remarkable moment after Macbeth has murdered Duncan, in which the baritone sings 'Tutto è finito' to the famous D♭–C (♭6–5) motive, followed immediately by the beginning of the duet's *primo tempo*, 'Fatal mia donna', in which the motive Macbeth has just sung becomes the basis of the orchestral accompaniment figure.[17] Tomlinson writes: 'Verdi portrays in music, as explicitly as we would wish, the submerging of this force in Macbeth's psyche, a repression that results in a separation of his singing voice from his orchestral voice'.[18] This repressed voice, he proposes, derives its metaphysical force from the way that 'it can breach the surface in moments of introspection or altered awareness, but . . . cannot come into full and unimpeded visibility'. He then links this noumenal awareness to the sleepwalking scene, which he sees as the 'noumenal reaffirmation', a 'rehabilitation of uncanniness' that redeems 'the crudely objective forms that [the mysterious] forces assume – the witches, ghosts, and apparitions' across the opera. The sleepwalking scene is then, for Tomlinson, '. . . the noumenal limit towards which the whole opera – Macbeth, apparitions, and all – tends'.[19]

These terms for thinking about the collision of the external and internal worlds in relation to the sound world of opera are brilliantly suggestive, offering us a way to shift radically our understanding of how *Macbeth* and many other Verdi operas function. And yet these ideas are linked to the opera through an analytical framework that undermines the terms of the theoretical argument. For Tomlinson's reading rests on an abstraction – the functioning of a motive. On one hand, this ties his reading to a long tradition of Verdian analysis, which focuses on motivic appearances and tonal schemes. But it places that motivic analysis at the service of a distinctly Wagnerian conception of the sound world of opera: one that looks at a certain, fixed, relationship of the singing voice and orchestral accompaniment, in motivic terms. We end up with a Wagnerian analysis of Italian opera, which however intriguing, stands in stark contrast to the world of embodied experience and immediacy of enactment that so marks the Italian operatic universe. Moreover, as provocative as that reading is when looking at that particular moment from *Macbeth* in isolation, it is difficult to sustain as part of larger reading of the opera as a whole. Tomlinson uses the very saturation of these types of motivic expressions (the ♭6–5 motive functions as an intrinsic aspect of the opera's *tinta*, repeatedly crossing multiple boundaries between various voices and orchestral sounds) to bolster his point – that it signals the inner world of Macbeth. But attaching a particular meaning to the motive, and relying on a single instance of the motive to establish the interpretation, is problematic – especially since it is not the motive's originating instance. The slippery nature of Italian operatic language, its resistance

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'the music functions, more generally, to reveal the presence of hidden dimensions of the psyche or to project dimensions out as audible features of the external stage world' (93).

[17] See the Ricordi vocal score, 59/III/4-5–59/IV/1-2.

[18] Tomlinson, 96.

[19] Tomlinson, 97.

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to this type of analytical move, is precisely why this repertory continually gets left out of discussions of operatic metaphysics.

I would like to propose an alternative way of approaching these themes in *Macbeth*; one that focuses more directly on a nuanced play between the boundaries of the visible and invisible worlds in the Act I duet. When we think about the different dimensions that are invoked in this scene as a piece of staged music, we can see that the audible features of the stage world work to invoke a new psychic reality for the characters on stage; and that the invisible world is evoked powerfully through the interactions of the characters with a variety of sound worlds. Furthermore, the link between staged sound and the new musical experience of the operatic subject establishes the terms by which the audience can relate to the characters of both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.[20] In this way, the critical and the performative elements of *Macbeth* can illuminate and inform each other; thinking about the opera (in this case, a scene from the opera) through its enactment – how these elements function in a staged space – can lead us into a critical understanding of Verdi's vivid depiction of various levels of operatic reality.
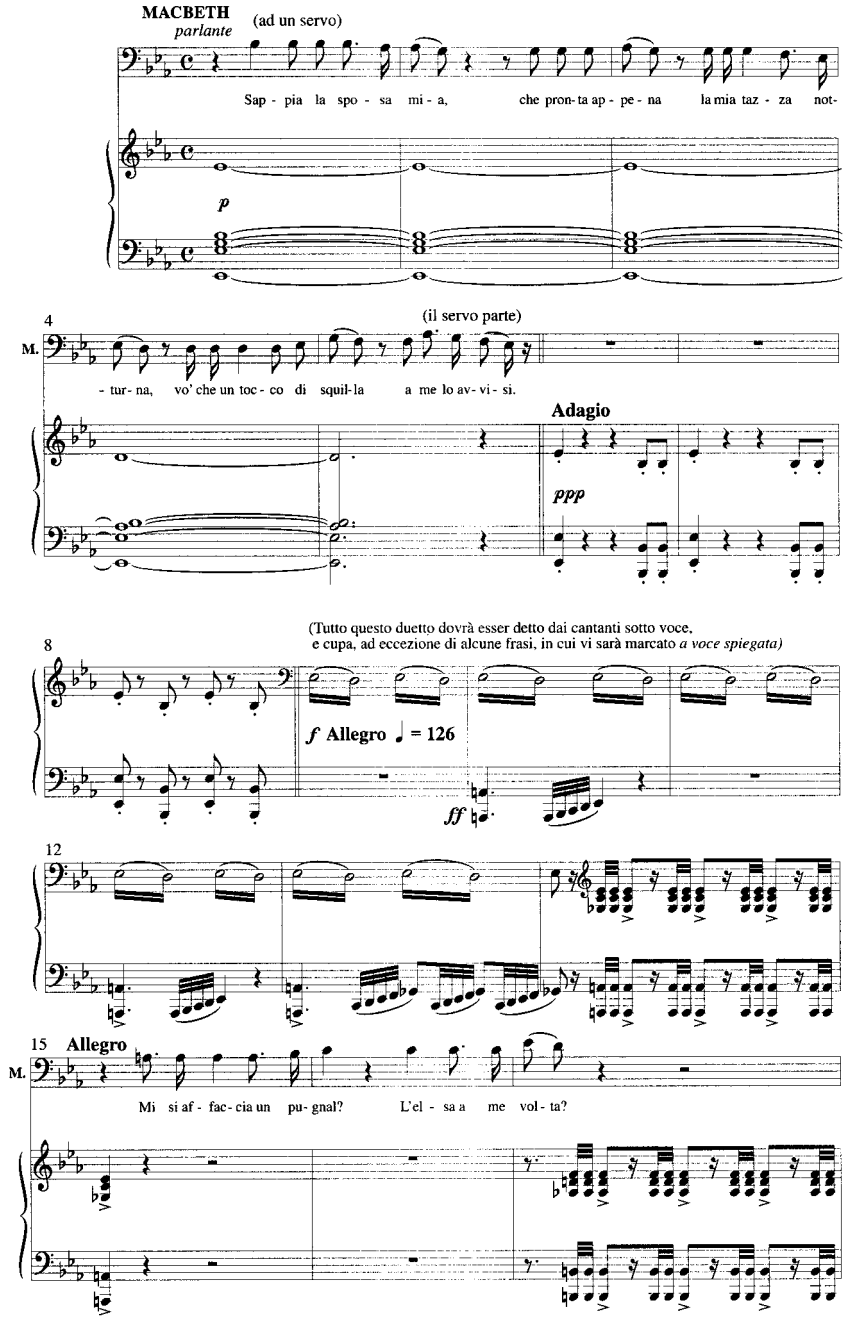
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The *scena* (or opening recitative) for the duet is Macbeth's famous dagger scene, which sets the musical and dramatic terms for the depiction of interiority and fantastic visions. The scene itself is sandwiched firmly between evocations of the 'real' stage world, which work for characters and audience alike to establish a stark contrast with the fevered visual imaginings of Macbeth in the dagger scene. The preceding scene ends with the most utilitarian stage music of the entire opera: the *banda* march that accompanies Duncan's royal procession, marking the king's sole (silent) appearance in the opera. The music is an unambiguous march in E♭ major – an evocation of musical presence marked by instrumentation, harmonic and rhythmic shape, and the clear spatial orientation of sound.[21] The duet's *scena* begins with the echoes of the E♭ major of Duncan's march, as Macbeth requests another kind of aural signal: a bell ('un tocco di squilla') is to sound when all is prepared (i.e., when Lady Macbeth has completed the preparations for Duncan's murder), he

[20] As Luca Zoppelli has observed, stage music played a crucial role in the development of new forms of expression in nineteenth-century Italian opera: stage music was 'geared towards ideals espoused by Italian opera's ''avant-garde'': dramatic and musical continuity, intense emotional identification, more profound character psychology . . .' See his ' ''Stage Music'' in Early Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera', *this journal*, 2 (1990), 29–39, here 38. Zoppelli also suggests that stage music might enhance the depiction of a character's interiority (see 34, n. 11), and can work as a kind of narrative focalization technique: 'The spectators identify completely with the character; the mimetic presence of stage music wrenches them from their position as outside observers and induces them to see with the eyes of the character, to identify with his or her reactions' (33).

[21] Julian Budden writes of this piece: 'As for the $\frac{6}{8}$ banda march which introduces the silent figure of Duncan, upholders of the ''*Macbeth* at all costs'' school perform wonderful mental acrobatics to justify its existence – "a suitably trivial expression of a trivial event" – and so on. Most of us will be content to call it trivial and leave it at that'. *Verdi*, Vintage Master Musicians (New York, 1987), 195.

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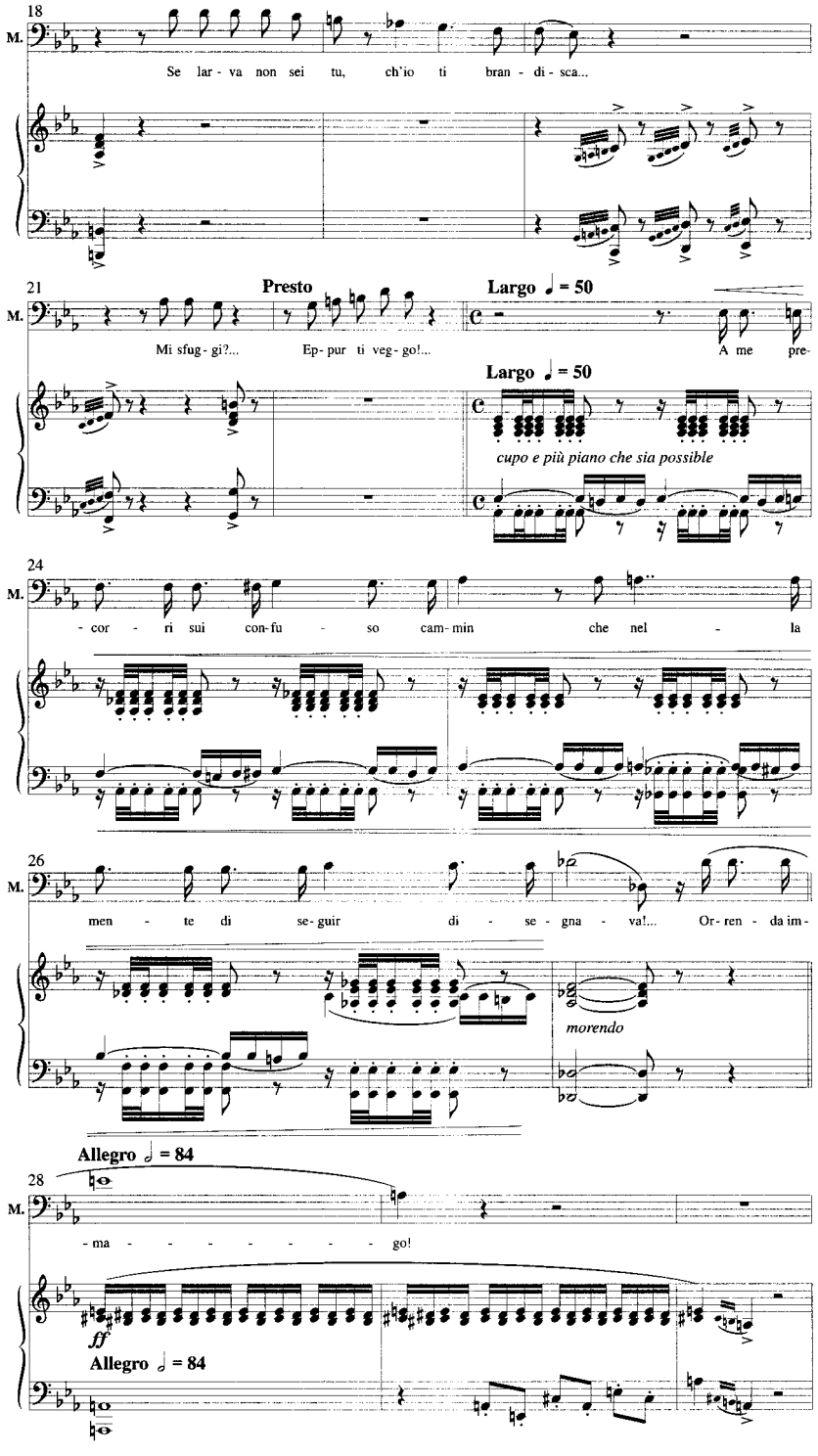


Ex. 1: *Macbeth*, Act I, scene 2.

informs a servant. And at the end of the scene, an actual bell then rings, right at a brief reappearance of E♭ major.
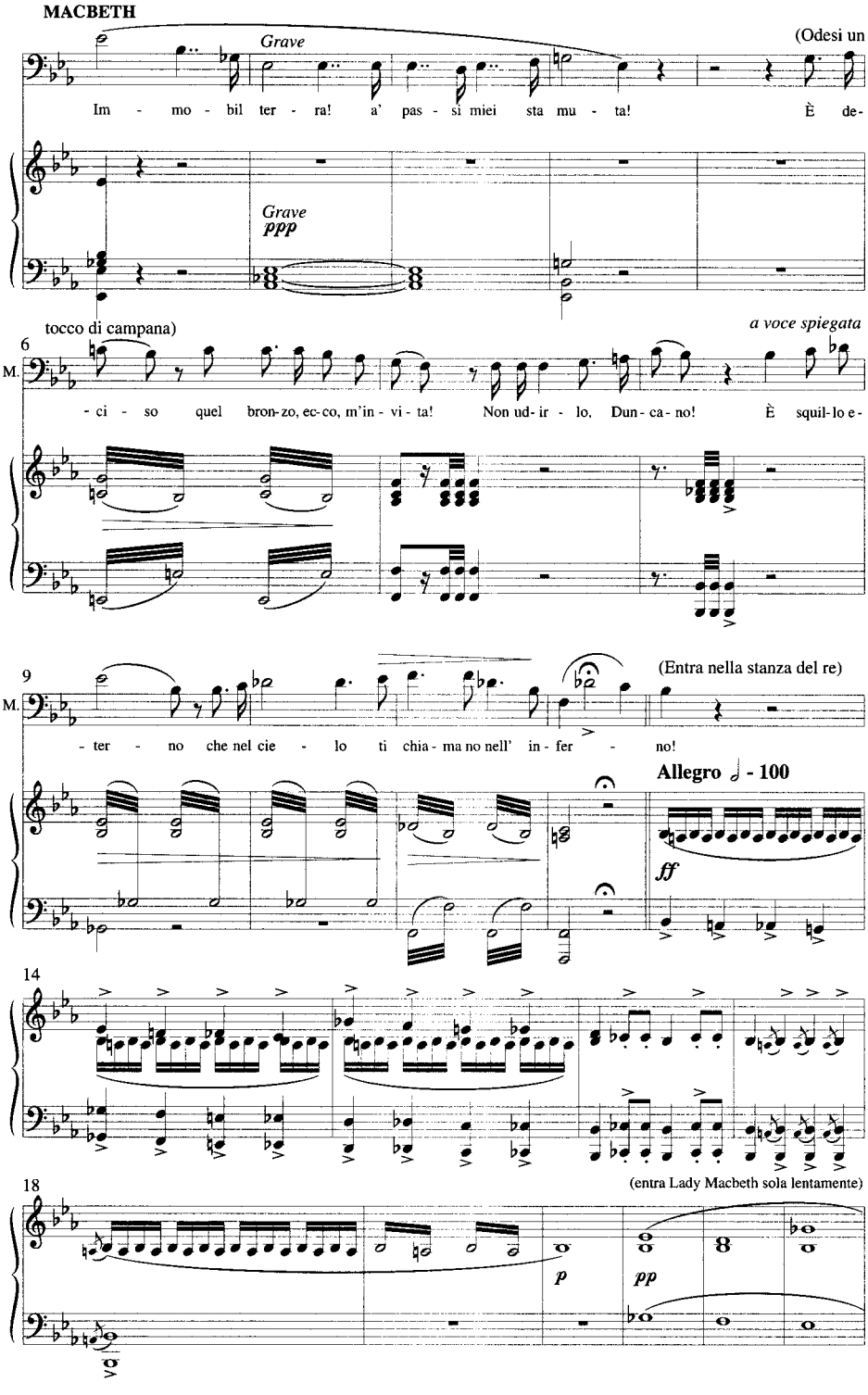
As we shall see, though, our relationship to stage reality has itself shifted by the time the bell rings, transformed by Macbeth's psychic experiences. The *scena*

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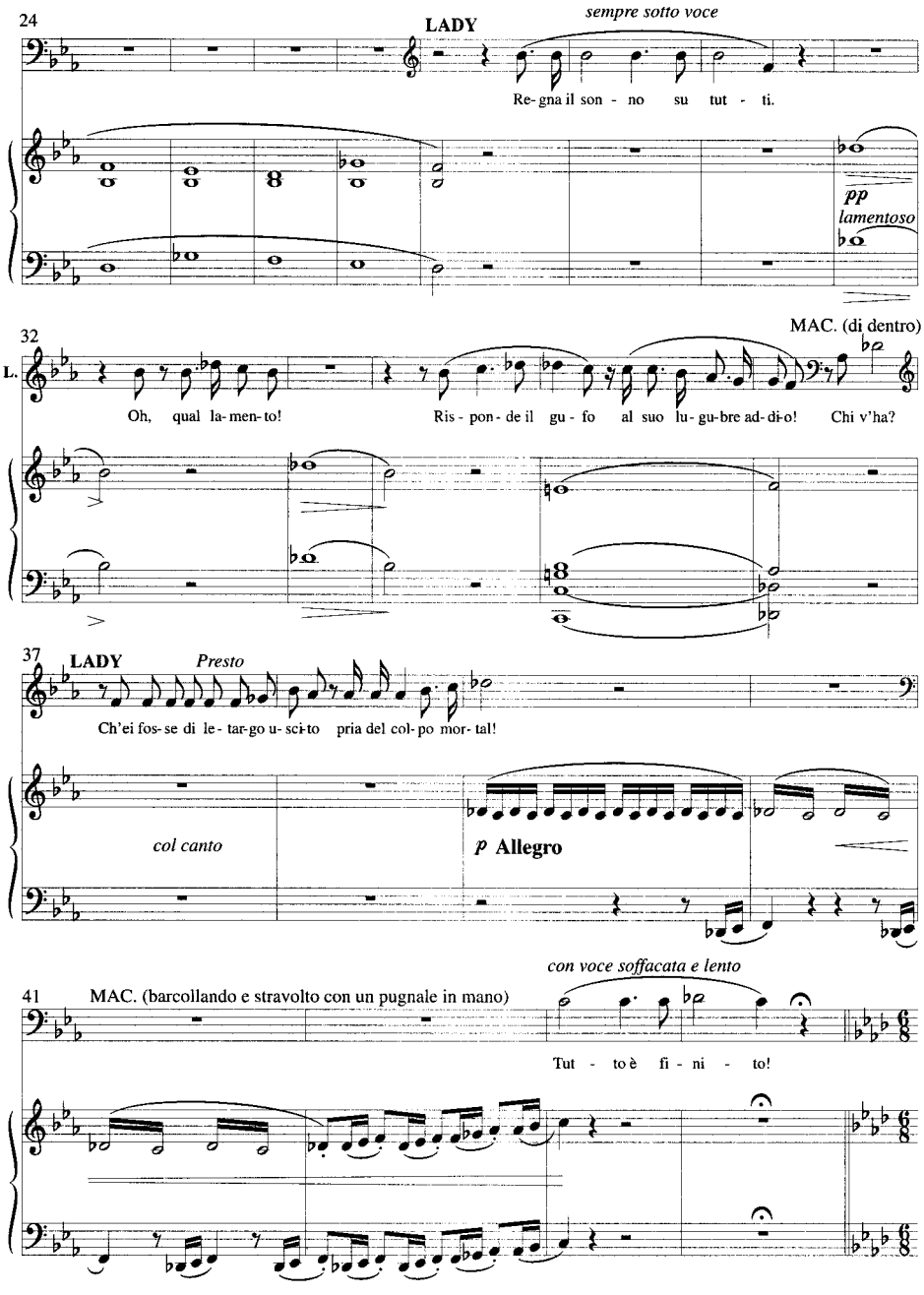


Ex. 1 *continued*

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Ex. 2: *Macbeth*, Act I, scene 2.

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Ex. 2 *continued*

unfolds, focused on the visions evoked by his 'bloody thoughts'. Immediately, at 'Mi si affaccia un pugnal?' [Is this a dagger before me?], Macbeth's turn away from the E♭ vision of diegetic stage space towards an inward world is invoked both by

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strong harmonic distance (an A♮ diminished-seventh chord, sounding as a heavily marked tritone against E♭), and instrumentation (a strong woodwind chord over the strings – here, English horn, clarinet, bassoon, horns and timpani) (see Ex. 1). The woodwind chord and harmonic disjunction have already worked to signal Macbeth's 'bloody thoughts': both elements mark the first appearance of these thoughts, in the wake of the witches' prophecies, at the beginning of his Act I duet with Banco, 'Due vaticini'. In this earlier passage, the *Macbeth tinta* for the fantastic is evoked, with woodwinds, diminished chords, and moves to a ♭VI harmony.[22] These same elements are clearly marked off in the *scena* of the duet as existing *only* in his mind, because of the sharp differentiation between diegetic stage sounds and the music that excites Macbeth's fantasies. We have, then, a musical evocation, through harmony and instrumentation, of Macbeth's inward world.

As Macbeth pursues his mental vision, the specific link between his invisible thoughts and these musical elements persists. Particularly, at his second verbal reference to the dagger, 'Eppur ti veggo' [Again I see you], the woodwinds reappear, and the harmony turns to ♭VI (an evaded cadence in C minor is taken into A♭ major at b. 23 of Ex. 1). Furthermore, Macbeth's vocal line begins to double the chromatic rising line marked by woodwinds (clarinet, bassoon and cello) (bb. 23–7). And in a third instance – his third verbal reference to his vision, 'Orrenda immago!' [Dreadful spectre!] – the full woodwind chord reappears, together with another turn to ♭VI (A major, in the context of D♭ major; see b. 28). As Macbeth's visions fade, the most striking interventions of harmony and woodwinds also gradually subside; up to this point, the inner visions have consistently been musically marked as separate from external reality. But at the words 'Immobil terra! A' passi miei sta muta!' [Immobile earth! Let my footsteps be silent], Macbeth's inner world meets the external stage world: his psychic imaginings begin to be willed into being. From this moment, Macbeth (and the audience) hear stage sounds, but those 'real' sounds now also figure in his imaginative world. And as stage sounds and musical sound begin to interact, the audience's experience of stage 'reality' also must shift. This crucial transformation is not instant: rather, it is signalled by a series of musical/dramatic events, each of which marks a further stage of the transformation. First, at the end of the phrase ('A, passi miei sta muta'), E♭ major makes a fleeting appearance, but over a sustained woodwind chord (clarinet, bassoon, timpani), replacing the sustained strings in E♭ major marking Duncan's steps, with which Macbeth began the scene (see Ex. 2, b. 4). Fleeting as this moment of transformed return may be, the connection to the opening is strengthened by the text: the reference to Macbeth's own footsteps (footsteps had most likely been a clearly audible aspect of the staging of the procession). Just at this fleeting moment of a transformed return, with its confused reference to internal (woodwind) and external (E♭ major) worlds, external reality intrudes dramatically into the scene, and the prearranged signal sounds – the bell rings (b. 5).

[22] The two chords come at the text 'Ma perchè sento rizzarsi il crina?' [But why do I feel my hair stand on end?] and 'Pensier di sangue, d'onde sei nato? . . .' [These bloody thoughts, from what do they stem? . . .]. The two phrases function to move us from the opening key of F major to a tonicization of D♭major (i.e., ♭VI).

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Macbeth's response to that bell, in his altered state, turns the musical world of the opera upside down – for Macbeth, and for the audience. Up to this point, the fantastic woodwind and ♭VI elements have served as a kind of commentary on his inner world, almost like a straightforward projection of his inward thoughts, almost always anticipating his vocal utterance. But as he responds to the sound of the 'real' bell, he invokes a figurative bell – the 'squillo eterno' that signals Duncan's death; woodwind chords – which hitherto have indicated the figurative, not the real – mark the passage (Ex. 2, bb. 8–9). From the moment the bell rings, the orchestral sounds enter a strange space, at least partially situated in the sound world of the characters: both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth now begin to hear and interact not just with stage sounds, but with *operatic music*; they become conscious of their musical contexts, in a classic Abbatean moment. It is no accident, of course, that this occurs exactly at the turning point of the drama – the moment of Duncan's murder.[23] At Macbeth's moment of decision to turn thought into action, the *possibility of thought* has been transformed in operatic terms into the *action of sound*.[24] This new sound world continues at Lady Macbeth's entrance, when the woodwinds sound their famous lamenting figure (English horn, bassoon, cello); and Lady Macbeth *hears* and responds – first to a lament, then to the owl call (see Ex. 2, bb. 31–5).[25] That is, the woodwind colour and the hints of ♭VI harmony would seem to indicate non-diegetic orchestral commentary on the invisible; but Lady Macbeth reacts to the musical sounds as if they were 'real'. Not surprisingly, then, Duncan's murder acts as a pivotal musical and dramatic moment, played out for the audience solely through the reactions of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Through these dramatic depictions of a new kind of musical 'reality', the audience itself hears the invisible: the inner worlds of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

Only then does the famous *primo tempo* of the duet begin; and in the ensuing sections of the duet, this new state of reality is explored in different ways. As the duet begins, the libretto's earlier language of visions and thought is almost entirely taken over by the language of sounds, listening, voices. The first six lines of 'Fatal mia donna!' focus on a confusion of hearing:

[23] According to Marina Favila, the shift in perspective evoked here is also suggested by the play:
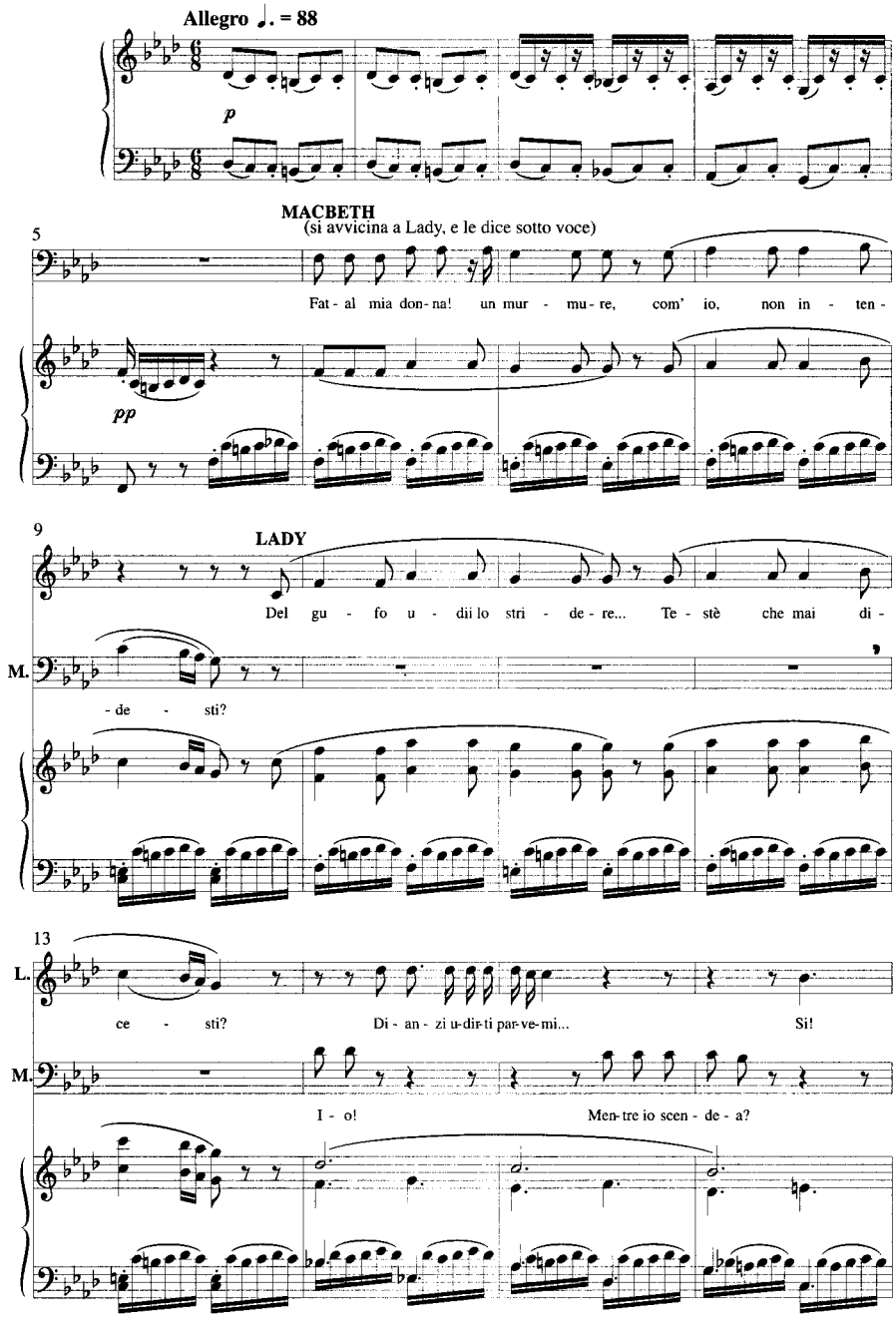
> Strangely enough, the murder itself creates for the audience the same illusion of magical thinking. We experience through Macbeth his hallucination of the murder, his hallucination of the dagger, but we do not see the murder, only the after effects, the consequences of the act. Like the earlier Macbeth, we vault over the 'doing' and only see the anticipated murder as a memory in Macbeth's mind . . . Our inability to see the murder in some small way allows us to share the same imaginative space as the hero.

Marina Favila, ' "Mortal Thoughts" and Magical Thinking in *Macbeth*', *Modern Philology*, 99 (August 2001), 6.

[24] Of course all of the sound elements stem from Shakespeare: the bell, the owl, the knocking. But their significance is altered when positioned within the sound world of the opera.
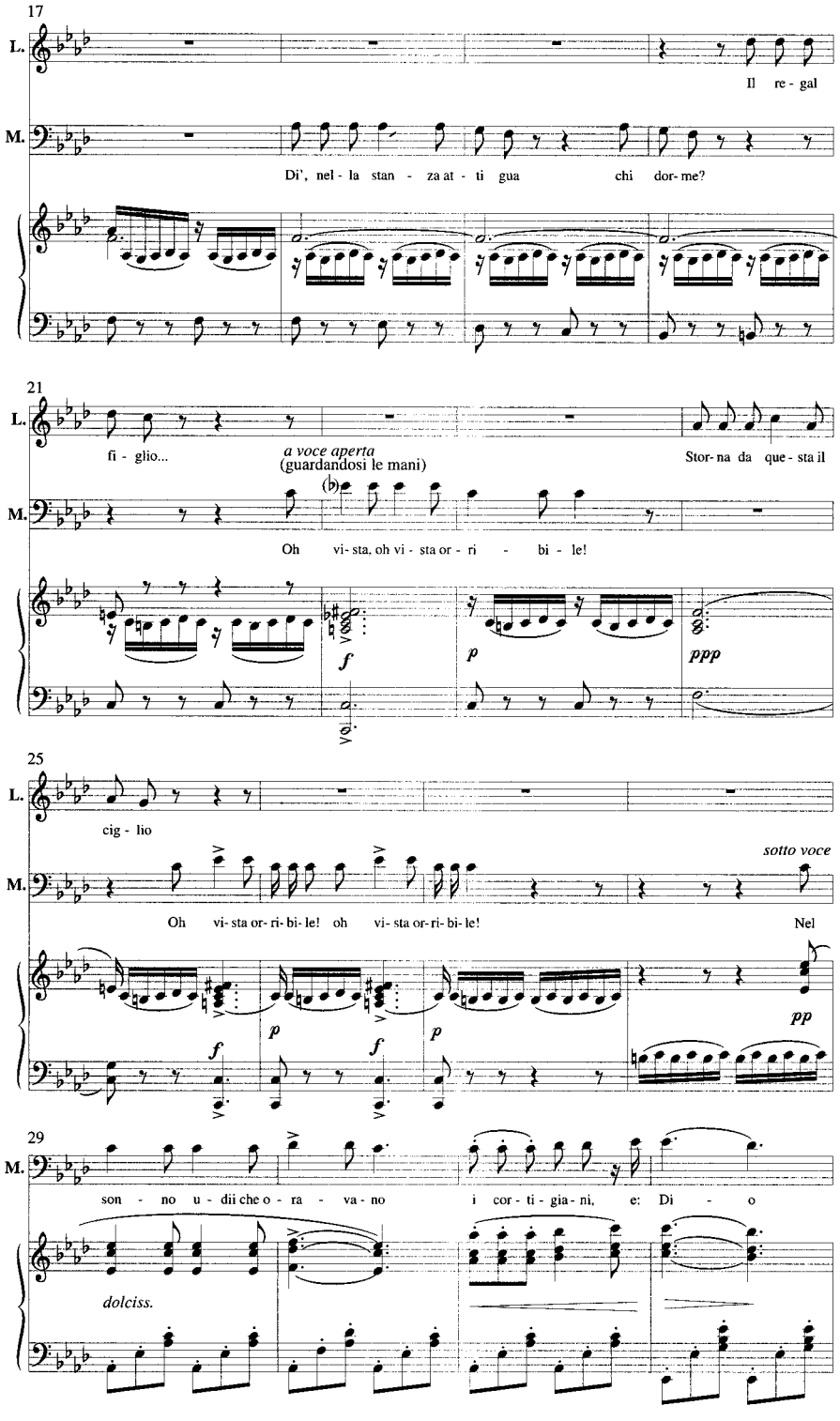
[25] Lady Macbeth's second response and Macbeth's backstage cry together form an extended pause on ♭VI (D♭) of the new key (F minor): Macbeth's 'Tutto è finito' motive (D♭–C) is the condensed melodic version of the previous seven bars (from 'Chi v'ha?').

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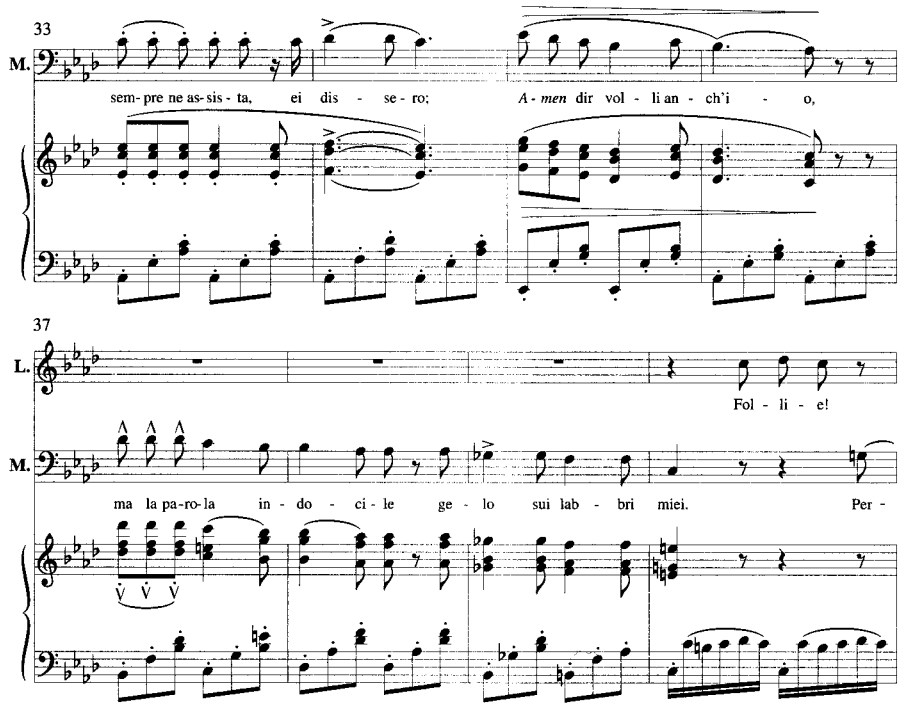


Ex. 3: *Macbeth*, Act I, scene 2.

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Ex. 3 *continued*

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Ex. 3 *continued*

Macbeth: Fatal mia donna! Un murmure
Com'io non intendesti?
Lady Macbeth: Del gufo udii lo stridere . . .
Testè che mai dicesti?
Macbeth: Io?
Lady Macbeth: Dianzi udirti parvemi.
Macbeth: Mentre io scendea?
Lady Macbeth: Si!

[*Macbeth*: Fateful wife! Did you not hear a sound, as I did? *Lady Macbeth*: I heard the cry of an owl . . . But what did you say? *Macbeth*: I? *Lady Macbeth*: I thought I heard you say something. *Macbeth*: As I came down the stairs? *Lady Macbeth*: Yes!]

The text briefly returns to the register of sight, as Macbeth responds in horror to the actual sight of his bloody hands as opposed to the phantom sight (his bloody thoughts) that had occupied him earlier. Lady Macbeth recommends not looking:

Macbeth: O vista, o vista orribile!
Lady Macbeth: Storna da questo il ciglio.

[*Macbeth*: What a sight, what a horrid sight! *Lady Macbeth*: Turn your eyes away from it.]

The next lines centre again on hearing – on what Macbeth heard, on the loss of his voice, and on Lady Macbeth's refusal to hear:

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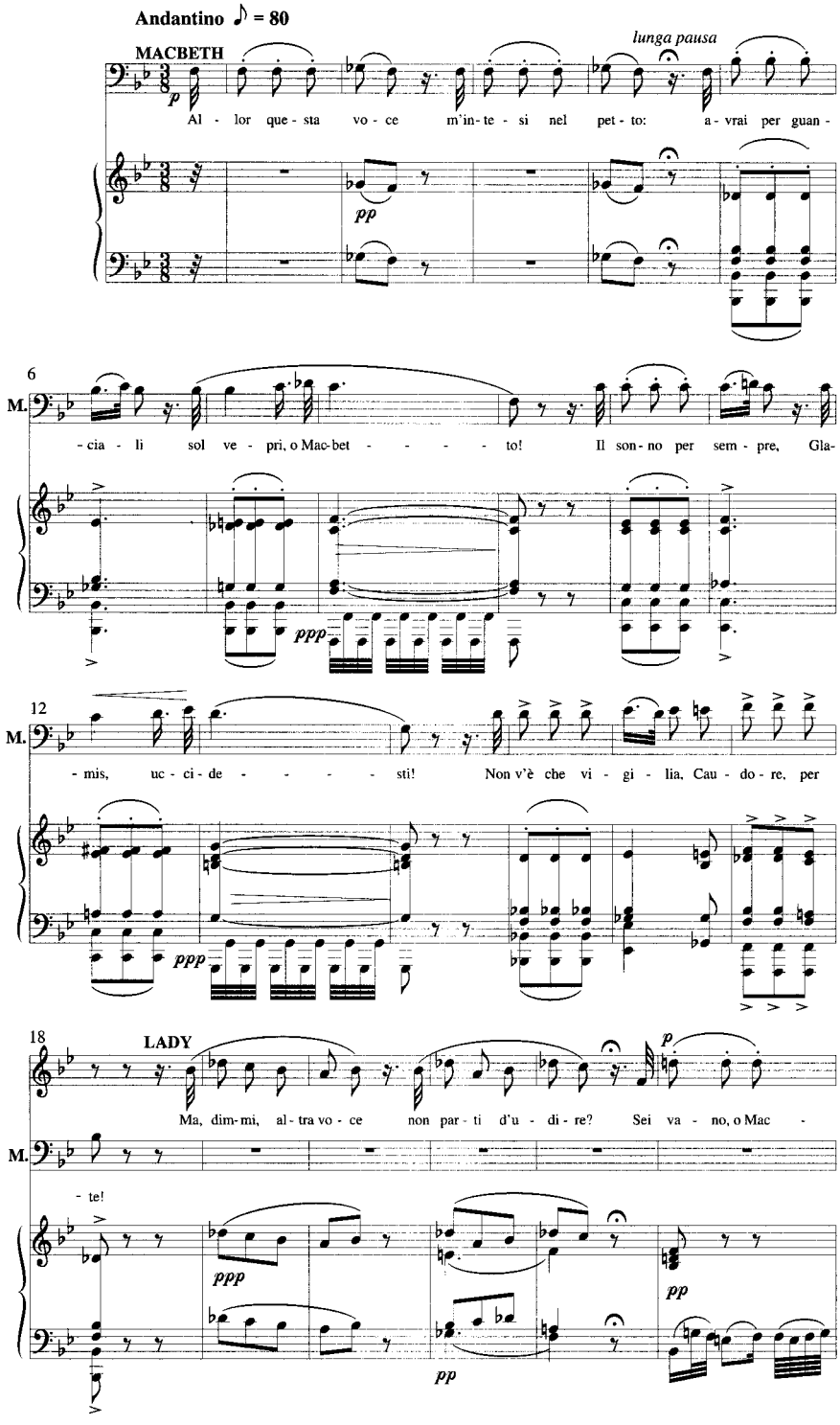
Macbeth: Nel sonno udii che oravano
I cortigiani, e: *Dio*
Sempre ne assista, ei dissero; *Amen* dir volli
anch'io,
Ma la parola indocile
Gelò sui labbri miei.
Lady Macbeth: Follie!
Macbeth: Perchè ripetere
Quell' *Amen* non potei?
Lady Macbeth: Follie, follie che sperdono
I primi rai del dì.

[*Macbeth*: I heard the courtiers praying in their sleep; and they said *May God protect us always*. I wanted to say *Amen*, but the stubborn word froze on my lips. *Lady Macbeth*: This is madness! *Macbeth*: Why couldn't I pronounce that *Amen*? *Lady Macbeth*: Madness, this is madness that the dawn's first sun will dispel.]

As the musical sound world seems to portray the characters' inward states, they simultaneously seem to be able to hear and respond to the music. Macbeth, in particular, seems to have entered the world of sounds and voices, while Lady Macbeth (in spite of her dramatic portrayal during the murder) still shows signs of resistance. A couple of musical events mark the *primo tempo* (see Ex. 3). First the pair of four-bar phrases that open the movement are striking not only for the accompaniment figure (which elaborates the 'Tutto è finito' motive), but for the woodwinds' doubling of the vocal lines (Macbeth is doubled by English horn and violin; Lady by flute, English horn and violin). As vision intrudes, the accented woodwind chords return on the diminished-seventh chord at 'Oh vista orribile!' (Ex. 3, bb. 22–7). Last, we get again the woodwind doubling of Macbeth's vocal line at 'Nel sonno udii che oravano' (flute, English horn, clarinet; bb. 28–32). That is, the same types of sonic events that marked the *scena* reappear here; but in the wake of the transformation around Duncan's murder, the characters' response to that sound, and the text that describes listening/hearing, music now seems to sound simultaneously for us and for the characters. This effect is further emphasized by all those '*sotto voce*' directions in the score (which Verdi spent so much time instilling in his singers), because they help bring out the instruments that double the voices, help them sound as voices that speak to Macbeth as well as the audience. I can only imagine in this context how these effects would be magnified by nineteenth-century performance conditions, with the orchestra not in a lowered pit.
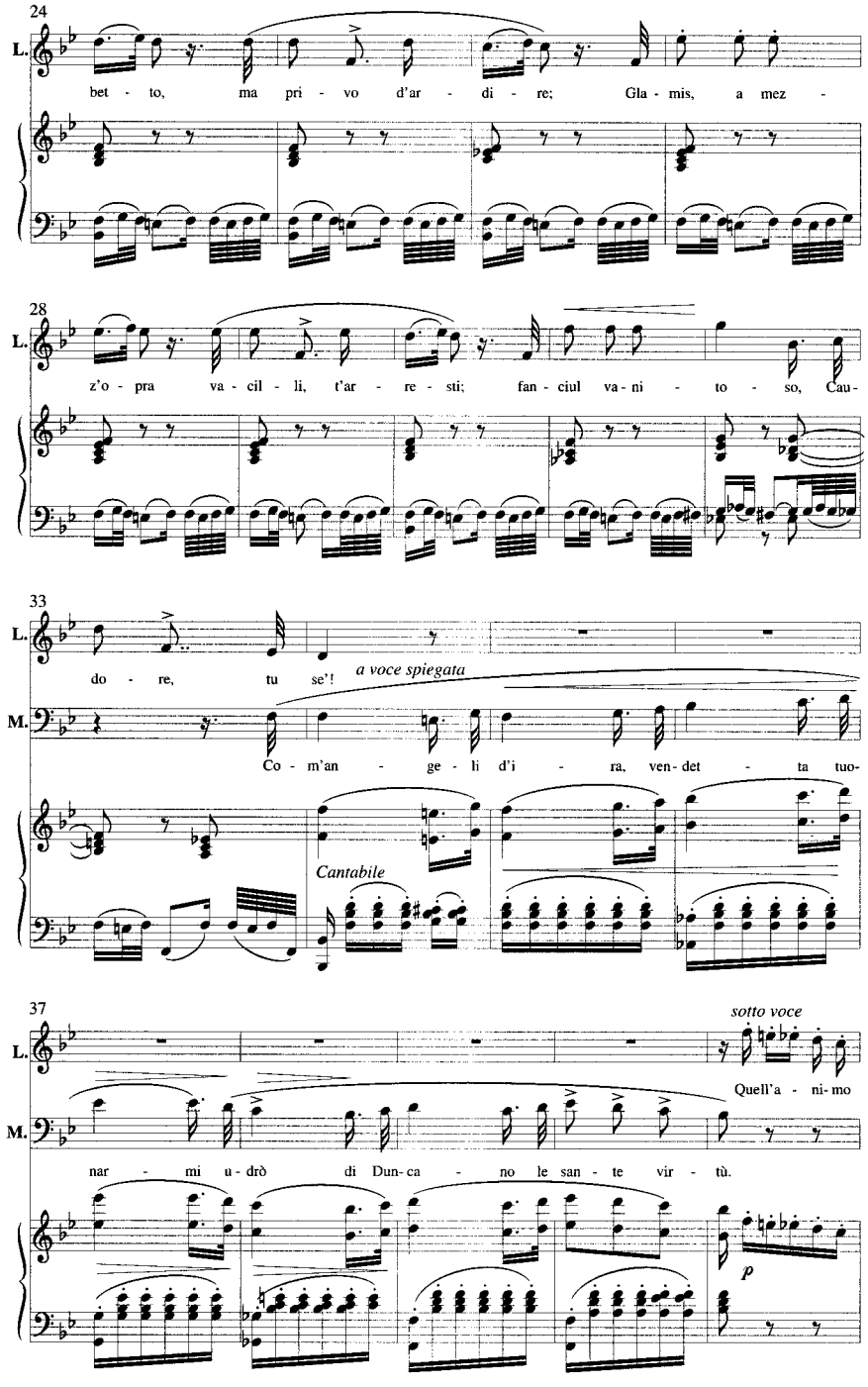
The *secondo tempo* only further intensifies these effects, as well as lending them further dramatic meaning. In this section of the duet, instead of listening and responding to other voices and sounds, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth set out their own competing voices. Macbeth's opening line, 'Allor questa voce m'intesi nel petto' [And then I heard this voice within my chest] is an unaccompanied statement of the 5–♭6–5 motive in the new key of B♭, with a striking doubling of the 6-5 motion in the English horn and clarinet (see Ex. 4, bb. 2 and 4). In the context though, two aspects stand out: the strange inversion of the 'follie' motive

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Ex. 4: *Macbeth*, Act I, scene 2.

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Ex. 4 *continued*

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with which Lady Macbeth ended the previous movement (F–E♮–F; now F–G♭–F), which seems specifically, musically, to override Lady Macbeth's protests; and the woodwind doubling, on the words 'voce' and 'petto' – another striking collision of external sound effects and internal expression, just at the moment that Macbeth turns to a direct evocation of his own inner voices. In the three phrases that follow, he manages to create a new voice: an emphatic voice of prophecy on a declaimed rising melodic line, enforced by the woodwind doublings punctuated with woodwind chords, and with a clear harmonic progression.

Lady Macbeth's mocking reply, with its ironic twists on Macbeth's musical figures, simply cannot speak with the same kind of force (Ex. 4, b. 19 ff.) Although her first phrase, 'Ma, dimmi, altra voce non parti d'udire?' [But tell me, didn't you hear another voice?], elaborates the all-important motives that launched the duet (the falling third lament of the owl's cry, D♭–B♭, and the D♭–C of 'Tutto è finito'), these abstract motivic relations lack the explicit conflation of internal expression with the musical sound world of the opera. Lady Macbeth is accompanied only by strings; in her alternative narrative, which mimics and softens Macbeth's declamatory rising line, her voice is not doubled but simply underscored with strings and an odd little commenting figure in clarinet and cello. Her projected voice, which she offers her husband as an alternative way of responding to Duncan's murder, if musical is certainly not vocal; and it is immediately drowned out by Macbeth's powerful evocation of Duncan's voice, crying for vengeance – doubled by a full complement of woodwinds ('Com'angeli d'ira, vendetta tuonarmi, udrò di Duncano le sante virtù' [Like angels of wrath, the saintly virtue of Duncan cries out for vengeance]; see b. 34). The impact of Lady Macbeth's sarcastic interjections here lies not just in the musical contrast, but in the quality of voice they invoke, together with the instrumentation: her interjections sound in isolation, without support from those aspects of the orchestra that have been granted in this scene the (temporary) force of external/internal reality.

The momentary conversion of operatic and staged sound worlds that has been achieved in this remarkable scene is given simple emphasis in the *tempo di mezzo* (beginning at 'Il pugnal là riportate' [Take back the dagger]). As Lady Macbeth enters the King's room to replace the dagger, Macbeth hears loud knocking at the castle gates. The sound path that has been traversed is vividly illustrated: unlike Lady Macbeth, who, when Macbeth was in the King's room, heard the orchestral evocation *as* the owl's lament; and unlike Macbeth himself who first heard a bell and then evoked the sound of a bell, now stage sound and orchestral sound unite, are heard together: the knocking and the accented woodwind chord coincide. What is more, the actual and figurative sound incites Macbeth's horror at the actual sight of his bloody hand, the externalization of his earlier thoughts, as Macbeth sings the famous line 'Oh questa mano . . . /Non potrebbe l'Oceano/Queste mani a me lavar' [Oh these hands . . . The ocean would not be able to wash these hands for me].

This evocation of sound worlds and Macbeth and Lady Macbeth's relationship to them serves, at least at one level, as a vivid illustration of the dramatic action: of the

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move from imagined sound and action in the opening section of the duet, to actual sound and irreversible deed. In this process, the audience is drawn in to experience Macbeth's reality; Lady Macbeth's attempts to silence him, to ridicule him, to displace his (accurate) prophecy, to assert that the deed can be obliterated as easily as the washing of hands – all are experienced by the audience as ineffectual and false because of our identification with Macbeth. Of course, a central aspect of Macbeth's overall characterization is his ability to see and, most particularly, to hear apparitions and prophecies. They lead him astray; and the doubling of this psychic reality in music draws us in to experience *his* psychic reality, his internal world. But at the same time, he seems to have some control over the division between the visible and invisible worlds, to enter the metaphysical by an act of will, however tragically he is overwhelmed by his deeds in the end. As powerful a character as Lady Macbeth is, she lacks this power: instead she herself gets trapped in that psychic world of music, we watch her, like the nurse and doctor in the fourth act, from without.[26]

I believe that addressing sound itself as it occurs in a staged context alters how we can think about Verdian dramaturgy. I would like to suggest that the conscious interaction of music and sound that was so prevalent in Italian opera in this period led Verdi, in moments such as these, to blur boundaries within the stage and orchestral space; and that those blurrings had a profound impact on the audience's relationship to operatic drama, on a possible blurring between individual audience members' bodily presence and the fictional/not-so-fictional musical sounds coming from the stage. The effect was, indeed, 'qualche cosa d'incredibile . . .'

[26] And in that final scene, she displays how profoundly *Macbeth*'s visions and voices affected her psyche.

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