

MACBETH

Music by Giuseppe Verdi

Libretto by Francesco Maria Piave & Andrea Maffei

Based on the play by William Shakespeare

First performed on March 14, 1847 in Florence

Characters

Macbeth (baritone), Thane of Cawdor

Lady Macbeth (soprano)

Banquo (bass), A General

Macduff (tenor), A Nobleman

Malcolm (tenor), son of King Duncan

Lady-In-Waiting to Lady Macbeth (soprano)

A Physician (bass)

A Murderer (baritone)

Three Apparitions:

A warrior (baritone)

A bloody child (soprano)

A crowned child (soprano)

A manservant (Bass)

King Duncan, Fleance (son of Banquo), Attendants, Messengers, Soldiers, Assassins, Witches, Lords and Ladies, Refugees

Act 1

Macbeth and Banquo, both generals under King Duncan, come upon a group of witches who foretell their futures: Macbeth will become the Thane of Cawdor, and then King; Banquo will become father of kings. Soldiers bring the news that Macbeth has been named Thane of Cawdor. Amazed by the truth of the prophecies, Macbeth begins to imagine himself as the King (“Due vaticini..”).

At Dunsinane, Macbeth’s estate, Lady Macbeth reads a letter she received from her husband recounting his meeting with the witches and the outcome of their predictions. Exulting in this news, she waits impatiently for his arrival and makes plans to pressure Macbeth to act, rather than wait for events to take their course (“Vieni! t’affretta!” -- Come, then! Hasten!). A messenger brings news that King Duncan will be their guest that evening. When Macbeth arrives, she urges him to kill the king that night. In his extended arioso “Mi si affaccia un pugnale?!” (Is this a dagger that appears to me?), Macbeth sees a vision of a bloody dagger and gathers his courage to perform the deed. After Duncan retires, Macbeth creeps into Duncan’s room and stabs him to death. Afterwards, Macbeth is paralyzed by the sight of the bloody dagger; Lady Macbeth takes it from him and smears the blood on the guards, who have been drugged. Macduff and Banquo arrive to waken the King as he had requested, and they discover his dead body. Their cries of “Murder! Treason!” arouse the court and the act ends with an ensemble calling for God’s wrath to strike the murderer.

Act II

Macbeth broods over the past day’s events. Lady Macbeth tries to persuade him that since Duncan’s son, Malcolm, has fled, he has made himself the scapegoat for his father’s death and has left the throne to Macbeth. Macbeth’s fears are not allayed; he remains obsessed with the prophecy that Banquo would be the father of kings. In order to secure the throne, Macbeth decides Banquo and his son must also die; he departs to arrange their assassination. In a highly

dramatic aria "La luce langue" (The light wanes), Lady Macbeth regrets the bloodshed, but affirms that the deaths are necessary. She revels in her acquisition of the throne.

Later that night, assassins gather under orders from Macbeth to kill Banquo and his son, Fleance. Struck by the similarity of this night to the night in which King Duncan was murdered, Banquo has a premonition of evil and warns his son to be careful ("Studia il passo, o mio figlio!" -- Be careful of your steps, my son!). They are attacked and Banquo is murdered, but Fleance escapes. At court, Macbeth is presiding at a celebration marking his rise to the throne. As toasts are made for the new King and Queen, one of the assassins arrives at the door. He tells Macbeth privately that Banquo has been killed but that his son has escaped. Lady Macbeth insists that her husband rejoin the festivities, but he is overcome by a vision of the late general's ghost. Macbeth's sudden strange behavior draws the courtiers' attention; his wife orders him to take command of himself, but he is consumed by guilt. He manages to calm himself, and the toasts resume, yet the vision continues to haunt him. Lady Macbeth berates him for his cowardice. The courtiers begin to suspect that Macbeth may be responsible; Macduff, refusing to live in a land "ruled by a cursed hand," resolves to leave the country.

In a nightmare Macbeth confronts the witches, demanding to know his future. They summon three apparitions; the first is a warrior who warns Macbeth to beware Macduff. The second is a bloody child who proclaims that no one born of woman will harm Macbeth; the third is a child crowned as a king who predicts that Macbeth will be invincible until Birnam Wood moves on Dunsinane Hill. Assuming these things to be impossible, Macbeth feels more confident, yet when he asks the witches if Banquo's son will ever ascend his throne, they warn him not to ask. When he presses them, a vision of eight kings pass before him, all the offspring of Banquo. Macbeth faints; the witches vanish. Lady Macbeth finds him and demands to know what has happened. Together they decide that Macduff's family and Banquo's son are threats to their rule and must perish.

Act III

Refugees from Macbeth's reign gather, despondent over his oppressive rule ("Patria oppressa! -- Oppressed homeland!). Macduff grieves for his dead wife and children, who were killed while he was in self-imposed exile ("Ah, la paterna mano" -- Ah, this father's hand [was not there as a shield]). Malcolm enters with a troop of soldiers. Malcolm comforts Macduff and explains his plan of attack: carrying tree branches as camouflage, they will storm Dunsinane.

That night, Lady Macbeth, observed by her attendant and physician, is walking in her sleep. Haunted by her guilt, she imagines her hands to be covered with blood which she can never wash away ("Una macchia è qui tuttora" -- There is still a spot there).

Meanwhile, Macbeth is outraged over the desertion of his countrymen, but he reminds himself of the prophecy that nothing can unseat him from his throne ("Perfidi! All' Anglo contro me v' unite!" - - Traitors! To unite against me with the English). He is so despondent that he is unmoved when the Queen's attendant runs in to announce the Queen's death. Soldiers enter to announce that Birnam Wood is moving toward them. Remembering the third prophecy, Macbeth arms himself and goes to meet his attackers. When Macduff confronts him, Macbeth pushes him aside claiming he cannot be harmed by anyone born of woman; however, to Macbeth's dismay, Macduff reveals that he was not born, but torn prematurely from his mother's womb. A fight ensues and Macbeth is fatally wounded; he dies, cursing his ambition. Malcolm enters and is hailed as the king; everyone joins in the majestic Victory Hymn, "Macbeth, Macbeth ov'è?"