

On this week's WCPE Opera House we'll hear Giuseppe Verdi's *Macbeth*, his tenth opera and the first of three plays by William Shakespeare that he adapted for the operatic stage. Verdi would later collaborate with Arrigo Boito on *Otello* and *Falstaff*. Written in collaboration with Francesco Maria Piave for the Teatro della Pergola in Florence, it was premiered on March 14, 1847.

The opera takes place in Scotland and begins in a forest. Macbeth (baritone **Leonard Warren**) and Banco (bass **Jerome Hines**), two Scottish generals in King Duncan's army, stop to visit with a coven of witches. The witches tell Macbeth that he'll eventually become the King of Scotland. They apparently don't want Banco to feel left out, so they say his heirs will be kings, as well.

In Macbeth's castle, Lady Macbeth (soprano **Leonie Rysanek**) has learned about the witches' prophecies, and when Macbeth returns home that night, King Duncan will be accompanying him. After Macbeth has arrived, and the king has retired for the night, Lady Macbeth persuades her husband that Duncan should die. Macbeth immediately has a vision of a bloody dagger.

Late at night, Macbeth takes a real dagger, sneaks into the guestroom, and murders the king in his sleep. Afterward, Macbeth has a guilty conscience — much to his wife's disgust. The crime is discovered when Banco and the nobleman Macduff (tenor **Carlo Bergonzi**) go to attend the king. To protect her husband, Lady Macbeth incriminates the king's own guards. The assassination is announced to the people as the act ends.

As Act 2 begins, Duncan's son Malcolm has fled to England. Lady Macbeth remembers the witches' prediction that Macbeth would become king. But she also recalls their prediction that Banco would father future kings. This could make Banco's heirs a threat to Macbeth. In Scene 2, Banco and his son are attacked by Macbeth's assassins. Banco is murdered, but his son escapes.

Back at the castle in Scene 3, the Macbeths are hosting a party. One of the assassins returns and quietly tells Macbeth what happened in the park. Macbeth is guilt-stricken, and has a vision of Banco's ghost, sitting at the banquet table. Lady Macbeth acts as though nothing's wrong. When the ghost appears to Macbeth again, he's even more terrified and the crowd begins to grow suspicious.

Act 3 opens in a gloomy cavern, where the witches are casting spells around a glowing caldron. Macbeth appears looking for more predictions. The witches tell him to watch out for Macduff, who has left the country. But they also reassure Macbeth, telling him he'll remain in power until the Birnam Wood rises against him. They also predict that he won't fall victim to "any man born of woman." Then the witches conjure a procession of fearsome apparitions, all of them kings. The parade of ghostly sovereigns ends with the murdered Banco himself, carrying a mirror. Seeing this, Macbeth faints in terror.

When he comes around, the witches have disappeared, and a herald announces Lady Macbeth, who demands to know what the witches had to say. Hearing about the vision

of Banco, Lady Macbeth renews her call for the death of Banco's son. She wants Macduff and his entire family dead, too.

The first scene of Act 4 takes place on the border of Scotland and England, Macduff has joined Duncan's son Malcolm, along with an English army and a band of Scottish refugees. Macduff's family has been massacred, and he's out for revenge. The band advances to Birnam Wood, where they all pick branches from the trees to use as camouflage as they approach Macbeth's castle. Meanwhile, inside the castle, Lady Macbeth appears, sleepwalking. Her doctor and lady-in-waiting listen aghast as she reflects, in her sleep, on the murders she and her husband have committed.

In the final scene, with Macduff's forces camouflaged by tree branches, Macbeth is told that the Birnam Wood itself is striding toward the castle. Macbeth is confronted by Macduff, who reveals that he was not "born of woman" in the usual way but was "untimely ripped" from his mother's womb. As Macbeth curses the witches and their misleading prophecies, a battle begins. Macbeth is killed by Macduff, and Malcolm is declared King.

Erich Leinsdorf conducts the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and Chorus in this 1959 RCA Victor recording.

From a 1975 La Scala production, bass **Nicolai Ghiaurov** anticipates Banco's death in the Act 2 aria "Come dal ciel precipito": <https://youtu.be/yHuGuMvSiqM>.

As a bonus, we'll celebrate the life of Spanish soprano **Victoria de los Angeles** with works by Massenet, Puccini, Serrano, and Verdi.

Please join us next Thursday, October 18th, for an encore broadcast of Charles Gounod's 1864 opera *Mireille*, hosted by the late **Al Ruocchio** (1937-2007). This 1979 recording features **Mirella Freni**, **Alain Vanzo**, **Gabriel Bacquier**, and **José Van Dam**. **Michelle Plasson** conducts the Orchestra and Chorus of the Capitole du Toulouse.

The WCPE Opera House is heard every Thursday evening at 7 o'clock in the Eastern time zone on 89.7 FM in central North Carolina. We're also streamed "live" online at <http://www.theclassicalstation.org>, or you can listen on WCPE's Android or iPhone apps.

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