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# MICHAEL FINNISSY

## *Verdi Transcriptions*

### Ian Pace

Programme note for performance at Great Hall, King's College London, Friday December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2005.

#### 6:30 p.m.

##### **Book 1**

- I. Aria: 'Sciagatura! a questo lido ricercai l'amante infido!', *Oberto* (Act 2)
- II. Trio: 'Bella speranza in vero', *Un Giorno di Regno* (Act 1)
- III. Chorus: 'Il maledetto no ha fratelli', *Nabucco* (Part 2)
- IV. Chorus: 'Fra tante sciagure...', *I Lombardi* (Act 3)
- V. Septet with Chorus: 'Vedi come il buon vegliardo...', *Ernani* (Part 1)
- VI. Choral Barcarolle: 'Iace il vento, è queta l'onda', *I Due Foscari* (Act 3)
- VII. Aria: 'So che per via di triboli', *Giovanna d'Arco* (Act 1)
- VIII. Duet: 'Il pianto...l'angoscia...di lean mi priva', *Alzira* (Act 2)
- IX. Aria: 'Mentre gonfiarsi l'Anima', *Attila* (Act 1)

##### **Book 2**

- X. Duetto: 'Vanitosi! Che abietti e dormenti', *Attila* (Prologo)
- XI. Coro: 'Patria oppressa! Il dolce nome...', *Macbeth* (Act 4, 1847 version)
- XII. Duetto: 'Qual mare, qual terra...', *I Masnadieri* (Parte Terza)
- XIII. Récit et Duo: 'Non, ce bruit, ce ne'est rien...', *Jérusalem* (Act 1)
- XIV. Romanza: 'Non so le tetre immagini', *Il Corsaro* (Act 1)
- XV. Inno di Vittoria: 'Dall'Alpi a Caridi echeggi vittoria!', *La Battaglia di Legnano* (Act 4)
- XVI. Scena e Quartetto: 'Rea fucina d'empie frodi...', *Luisa Miller* (Act 2)
- XVII. Duetto: 'Opposto é il calle che in avvenire', *Stiffelio* (Act 3)
- XVIII. Scena e Coro: 'Vendetta del pazzo! Contr'esso un rancore', *Rigoletto* (Act 1)

#### 7:45 p.m.

##### **Book 3**

- XIX. Canzone: 'La donna è mobile', *Rigoletto* (Act 3)
- XX. Duo: 'Vivra! Contende il giubilo', *Il Trovatore* (Act 4, scene 1)
- XXI. Duetto: 'È nulla, sai?', *La Traviata* (Act 3)
- XXII. Boléro: 'Merci, jeunes amies, d'un souvenir si doux!', *Les vêpres siciliennes* (Act 5, scene 2)
- XXIII. Scena: 'Tradimento!', *Simon Boccanegra* (Finale dell'Atto Primo, 1857 version)
- XXIV. Coro, Burrasca e Finale: 'Allora che gl'anni', *Aroldo* (Act 4)
- XXV. Stretta: 'Ogni cura si doni al diletto', *Un Ballo di Maschera* (Act 1)
- XXVI. Romanza: 'Me pellegrina ed orfano', *La Forza del Destino* (Act 1)
- XXVII. Aria: (a) 'Trionfai! Securi alfinò' (1847), (b) 'La luce langue' (1864-5), *Macbeth* (Act 2)

**8:30 p.m.**

Talk by Michael Finnissy on the *Verdi Transcriptions*

**9:00 p.m.**

#### **Book 4**

- XXVIII. Chorus: 'S'allontanarono! N'accozzeremo', *Macbeth* (Act 1)  
XXIX. (a) Duo: 'Restez! Auprès de ma personne' (Acte II, Tableau II);  
(b) Duo: 'J'ai tout compris' (Acte IV, Tableau I), *Don Carlos* (1866-7)  
XXX. Romanza: 'O ceil azzuri...', *Aida* (Act 3)  
XXXI. String Quartet: (a) III. Prestissimo, (b) IV. Scherzo fuga  
XXXII. Aria: 'Cielo, pietoso, rendila', *Simon Boccanegra* (Act 2)  
XXXIII. Aria: 'Tu che la vanità conoscesti', *Don Carlo* (Act 5)  
XXXIV. (a) Ballet No. 3: 'Chanson Grecque' (Cancone Greca);  
(b) Scena: 'Una gran nube turba', *Otello* (Act 3, Finale)  
XXXV. 'Brava! Quelle corna saranno la mio gioia!', *Falstaff* (Act 3, Part 1)  
XXXVI. I. 'Requiem Aeternam', *Missa da Requiem*

#### ***Verdi Transcriptions***

Transcribing sound into a written form (notation) involves making significant choices. The choices can colour the ongoing exploration of that sound as 'composition'. All the written symbols chosen are potential material, though - in practice - some are prioritised, others overlooked. The processing of the material is, basically, repetition plus varying degrees of alteration (variation). These 'low level' processes accumulate into ever longer structures, also 'composition'. Other considerations, more or less aesthetic - perhaps also political in a broad sense, influence the progress of this accumulation. Some of these considerations (a lot of them learned and not challenged) are liberating others are confining, either can be useful. The eventual totality, concept and design, bear traces of a 'journey' (thought to page) - and will, itself, be experienced (by listening) as a sort of journey. All of this is relatively (less or more) free from intruding cultural influences and prejudices, limitations of self, knowledge and technique.

In transcribing Verdi it might seem as if half, or more, of the work had already been done - however, once it is found, or chosen, as 'material' the work (composition) becomes the same. None of these pieces assume the original dramatic (Verdian) context, nor is their sound world (voices and orchestra) overtly imitated by the piano. The rhetoric, musical logic and idiom, of nineteenth century opera occasionally surfaces - in a haze of nostalgia, corrupted, even satirised. The music is perhaps 'theatrical' in a general sense.

The main topics addressed by the composition are: transforming the found object; sampling as continuity-script; faking - since 'pastiche' might already be present.

A selective history of these topics - Marcel Duchamp, *Readymades aided* 1913-, initially by adding small dots to a pre-existing found print; the assemblage. The re-configured, alienated 'everyday' object becomes a totem. Signing your name - R.Mutt 1917. Duchamp photographed 'en travesti' as Rose Selavy in 1921 [MF as GV 1972-2005]. Duchamp as re-viewed (parodied?) by Julian Schnabel. Helmut Lachenmann, *Tanzsuite mit Deutschlandlied*, 1980, trace elements of a loved/despised culture. What's on T.V.? What used to be on the radio? What's out there? Verdi - and who else? "*F for Fake*" a film by Orson Welles. Picasso, *347 Gravures* - 16.3.68 to 5.10.68, a majority of them 'derived from' - fantasised out of and away from - Velasquez' *Las Meninas*, and forming an erotic circus where you watch the artist watching his model. Andy Warhol borrowing da Vinci's Last Supper, or Roy Lichtenstein appropriating the nineteenth century 'classics'.

I began writing this piece in 1972, whilst still teaching and accompanying at the London School of Contemporary Dance. I was attempting to more painstakingly, more obviously, isolate and explore an idea which dominates most of my music. This idea being the mixing, or synthesis, of different (perhaps even opposing) types of music - different modalities (tonal, atonal, pentatonic, microtonal) and different 'generic' or 'historical' styles.

This is not a particularly original idea. Bach was doing much the same in describing his Suites as English or French (his 'own' manner being German). Debussy mixes whole-tone, pentatonic and tonal elements in the same piece. A large amount of 'domestic' chamber-music re-creates operatic and orchestral rhetoric and repertoire, either by appropriation or imitation.

I also wanted to experiment with transcription - and chose what was, by convention, the most obvious material: nineteenth-century opera. I had already tried this once before with Donizetti, in an abortive Donaueschingen commission from Heinrich Strobel (*Re-Organised Elements of Opera*). This wasn't an original idea either - Busoni opens his *Die Brautwahl* by quoting Rossini. Pousseur (*Votre Faust*), Berio (*Sinfonia*) and Bernd-Alois Zimmermann had - more recently - written music in which 'citations' and 'memories' played a large part.

The first attempt was to START with pastiche Verdi and gradually become me. More or less the opposite of what finally happened - which was to CONCLUDE with him having begun with me. However the opening seven parodies of nineteenth-century operatic transcriptions that I wrote were too similar, they did not 'launch' what was obviously a rather grandiose conception very effectively. I abandoned these and put the piece on one side, working on it only fitfully.

In 1977 I wrote 'English Country-Tunes', arguably with much the same initial scenario, but with English folk music as material rather than Verdi.

I was also working on a set of piano studies at this time, trying always to broaden the scope (perhaps 'drama' and typology) of my work. I was also spending a lot of time travelling around Europe for concerts, and playing for the Royal Opera ballet (classes and rehearsals). This latter proximity to 19<sup>th</sup> century opera worked against, rather than for, my Verdi project - and it was only after I'd spent two extended periods in Australia, and when I started University teaching that I'd created sufficient distance and objectivity to proceed with it. In some ways the (Verdi) material was no longer the point. The point was the different sorts of thing one could do to transform it.

These 'transformations' are quite rudimentary. Firstly one can take the constituent notes of a Verdi line, adding two or three notes together (to make dyads and triads), and find oneself with very different compositional matter. One can isolate a single 'figure' from somewhere in the accompaniment, and bring it forward as a structural determinant. One can variously fragment and blow apart Verdi's texture by octave- and other sorts of transposition, shifting registers around in ways quite different to the original. Verdi's original can be used as a 'cantus firmus' in one hand, while the other hand superimposed contrasting, complimentary or contradictory material. A particular sequence of durations can be allied to different sets of pitches (a technique from isorhythmic motets of the late mediaeval period). Busoni as transcriber can be invoked - it was, after all his essay on Liszt's transcription which had bolstered my resolve to continue with this notion. Busoni's transcription of North American Indian music (*Indianisches Tagebuch*, erster teil) is the reference-point for the 8<sup>th</sup> transcription of this cycle, his 1<sup>st</sup> Sonatina the reference-point for the 17<sup>th</sup> transcription. The re-arrangement Busoni made of (fugato) material from the 1<sup>st</sup> Sonatina in his cycle *An die Jugend* informs the latter half of the transcription from *La Forza del Destino*, while the penultimate transcription (*Falstaff*) has as its template the first fugue from the *Fantasia Contrappuntistica* - itself a transcription of the first Contrapunctus in Bach's *Art of Fugue*.

It was always my intention to refer at least once to the entire canon of Verdi's operas, including the initial versions of *Macbeth*, *Simon Boccanegra* and *Don Carlo(s)*. But my energy and resourcefulness again collapsed after completing the first section (nine operas), with an assortment of other transcriptions (including the long *Don Carlo* one) fully or partially finished. I published this 'torso' in 1995.

In 2004 I had a sabbatical, my first ever from University teaching, and I decided to try to fully complete the work - having meanwhile learned a little from the experience of writing the *Gershwin Arrangements/More Gershwin*, a less overtly formalistic approach to found material and re-interpreting it, and the two other large cyclic pieces *Folklore* and *History of Photography in Sound*.

I had already decided that the cycle would be equally divided - 4 sections each treating 9 'operas' (the fourth set includes the String Quartet and the Requiem). Now I determined that the first two sections and the last two would be in the proportion 1+:1:2:2+ (more accurately 30:20:45:75 minutes). Also that the shape of each section would be the same - the 'cantus firmus' always fifth, the Busoni homage always eighth and so on. This repetitiveness would balance the diversity of the originals, though this diversity is perhaps already subsumed by similarities in Verdi's melodic and harmonic writing, slowly metamorphosing over the thirty-six pieces. The initial number of each of the four sets would gradually rise from the lowest to the highest notes of the piano, and the work as a whole would gradually reveal Verdi 'pure and simple' from fragmentation and distortion at the outset.

Michael Finnissy, December 2005

### *Verdi Transcriptions – Thoughts and Commentary*

The first book of the *Verdi Transcriptions* was the first work of Finnissy's that I learned; ever since then they have had a very special place in my affections, notwithstanding the rest of Finnissy's vast output for the piano, which I have performed in its entirety in the interim period. The work undergone various modifications and additions through the course of its history: for publication in 1995, three 'fragments' were added to the then six pieces comprising Book 2. I performed this newly complete set soon after its publication and later recorded it. In the last few years, Finnissy undertook a massive expansion and revision of the earlier work, reaching completion earlier this year. Book 1 is identical with its earlier version, but the earlier Book 2 is a different work to the current book of the same number. The earlier Book 2 contained transcriptions from *La Forza del Destino*, *Macbeth*, *Attila*, *Aida*, *I Masnadieri*, and *Don Carlo*, with the three 'fragments' from *Simon Boccanegra*, *La Traviata* and *Aroldo*. Practically all the original material occurs in the final cycle, but in various forms: the transcriptions from *Macbeth*, *Aida* and *Don Carlo* all remain in their original form, each appearing now in Book 4, while the transcriptions from *La Forza*, *Attila*, and *Masnadieri* have all been expanded with new material intercut into the pieces at various places. The material in the 'fragments' generally occurs in the later pieces on those operas (in the case of *Boccanegra*, the Book 4 transcription of the later version), but as a relatively small part of more diverse conceptions. One can hopefully assume that, give or take the odd possible future modification of detail, this version constitutes Finnissy's final word!

The process of preparing for this performance has involved listening or re-listening to all of Verdi's 28 operas in order to study them in detail, and pondering the meaning and relevance of his work not just in his own time but also today. Whilst there is no shortage of lavish productions of Verdi's operas with overpaid diva singers, shilling-shocker staging gimmicks for no particular reason, playing to haute-bourgeois audiences who chuckle on demand at the cynically calculated acting and think of the homeless as a terrible inconvenience that such 'cultured' people might have to step over on their way out of the opera house, there is still, in my opinion, much more to Verdi than such circumstances might suggest. Not least of the factors to be considered is the political dimension of the work of Verdi and his librettists, which despite some rather embarrassing moments, stands up reasonably well in the modern age (*much* better than that of Wagner, for example). Whilst all of Verdi's operas prior to *La Traviata* (with the arguable exception of *Il Corsaro*) have as most of their principal figures members of various ruling classes (Counts, Kings, Holy Roman Emperors, Barons, Dukes, Governors, Doges, noblemen and women, and their families and entourages), Verdi does not simply glorify such an exclusive class, nor necessarily present the particularity of their (privileged) situation as a metaphor for the concerns of all of humanity. On the contrary, both he and his librettists were acutely aware of the flaws, the petty vanities and jealousies, the greed, the hunger for power, that so many such people exhibited in ample measure. Verdi seems to have had little time for the then outdated *opera buffa* convention of presenting lower class people as figures of fun, for the aristocratic audiences to laugh at, secure in their own sense of superiority (such a convention even extends to some extent into Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'amore*, though

handled somewhat dialectically). On the contrary, those characters of lesser social standing are portrayed both dramatically and musically with great complexity and humanity (for all the vengefulness of Rigoletto, for example, one feels him to be a character of much greater tragic stature than the fickle and vacuous aristocrats he serves). Like Mozart before him, Verdi is rarely happy with idle stereotypes, bringing a markedly individual attitude to generic conventions practically from the outset of his career. The women in Verdi's early operas tend to exist primarily in terms of their relationships with men (with exceptions, not least the character of Abigail in *Nabucco* or obviously the title role in *Giovanna d'Arco*), but they are by no means idly subservient in this respect (not least Elvira, forced to fight off unwanted advances by two of her three suitors in *Ernani*). Again by the time of *La Traviata*, we are presented with a female lead role (based on the real life character of Marie Duplessis) whose independence of purpose (at least at the outset, when she desires not to abandon her life as a courtesan in favour of marriage) shocked the audiences and censors of the time, forcing the Teatro Fenice to reset the production in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century (rather than in modern times as originally intended) so as to make it seem more 'distant'.

It would be foolish to try and present Verdi as some sort of far-seeing socialist radical, of course; he was a bourgeois composer for a bourgeois audience, but at a time when before the situation of the bourgeoisie had been wholly consolidated and become complacent, at least in Italy; as a class the bourgeoisie retained some radical potential. Verdi had both a keen interest and passionate convictions with respect to contemporary events; many of those numerous operas set in distant times served as metaphors for contemporary political concerns. But it is worth looking at the more questionable aspects of the works as well. The rather sentimental nationalism to be found in arguably in *Nabucco*, *Giovanna d'Arco*, *La battaglia di Legnano* and *Les vêpres siciliennes*, which of course had a powerful meaning in the context of the lead-up to Italian statehood in Verdi's time looks at best somewhat quaint in light of the horrors of nationalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The tyrannical role assigned to the Muslim character Acciano in *I Lombardi*, or the Emir of Ramla in *Jérusalem*, both set at the time of Crusades, with Christian Crusaders as heroes (as is also the case in *Aroldo*), let alone the fact that in the former opera Acciano's wife Sofia and son Oronte are redeemed by the fact that they have secretly converted to Christianity, would surely be deeply offensive to any Muslim viewing the opera today. The 'Harem's Chorus' in both operas, as a dramatic device to give propagandistic support to the Crusaders, resonates eerily with contemporary propaganda associated with the 'War on Terror' and the associated imperial ventures undertaken by George W. Bush and his British and other allies. Such propaganda dates right back to the very time of the Crusades, if not before, and has informed Western portrayals of the Islamic world ever since (not least in Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*). Nor is another Muslim character in Verdi, Otello, portrayed in that much more of a favourable light. Also, one character that may in an early conception have been intended to be homosexual, Oscar in *Un Ballo in Maschera*, constitutes one of the most puerile and vacuous roles in the whole of Verdi's output.

Verdi's first sixteen operas were written between 1837 and 1850, a rate of productivity which, while not matching that of Rossini or Donizetti (who produced over 70 operatic works during his 51-year life), is nonetheless remarkable. Verdi would call this period his 'galley years'. He worked within the conventions of Italian operatic genres from the outset (never completely abandoning them, even in *Falstaff*), bringing together the achievements of Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti with other influences from Mozart or the French grand opera of Meyerbeer, Auber and Halévy. At the same time, his instrumental writing, especially in some of the more chromatically adventurous interludes and introductions, shows a clear debt to Beethoven. Later influences would include Offenbach (in *Un Ballo in Maschera*) and even Wagner at places in *Otello* and *Falstaff*. The earliest operas, while certainly sometimes patchy in quality, are almost never simply formulaic; each has its own very distinct identity. Characters and their musical portrayals demonstrate some common attributes, of course, but not in such a way that they become mere stock types. Verdi's musical language is extravagant without too many excursions into empty bombast (compare Verdi's French opera *Jérusalem* with much of Meyerbeer, for example). Many of the scenarios are very dark, dealing with motivations of revenge, covetousness, envy, lust for power, and other such human weaknesses. Somehow comic opera eluded Verdi for the most part: only two of his operas, *Un Giorno* and *Falstaff* are comedies, and each rely on a degree of stereotypical portrayal to make their point.

It is a commonly-held belief that Verdi made his most radical breakthrough with *Rigoletto*, in which he achieved a newly sophisticated relationship between operatic ‘number’ and dramatic pacing. The first act of *Rigoletto* is especially striking in this respect, managing to push the action forward at a quite bewildering pace through exploiting interactions between different characters’ material (especially in the ‘Vendetta del pazzo’ section which Finnis sets). This more intricate relationship between the ‘numbers’ and the sections connecting them was explored earlier in the final act of *Luisa Miller*; also Verdi’s gift for conveying dramatic motion is demonstrated from the very beginning in his signature pieces for vocal ensemble, where different characters express conflicting emotions and motivations, the resulting interplay similarly moving the drama forward. This is familiar in such landmark numbers as the famous Quartet from *Rigoletto* or the incomparable Septet with Chorus in Act 3 of *Otello*, but such possibilities can already be experienced as early as in the brilliant Quintet from Act 1 of *Un Giorno* or the Septet with Chorus in *Ernani*, which Finnis also sets.

The post-*Rigoletto* operas are generally well-known, *Il Trovatore* for its melodic distinctiveness and fascinating opposition between the two female characters, one (Leonora) a lady-in-waiting to a Princess, the other (Azucena) a gypsy woman, *La Traviata* for the radical nature of its subject matter and the underlying tragic qualities of its musical material (even in the more ‘upbeat’ moments), *Simon Boccanegra* for the seriousness and through-composed music to match the labyrinthine plot, *Un Ballo in Maschera* for its exuberance, French influences, and raw evil evinced in the characters of Samuel and Tom, *La forza del destino* for the great many memorable elements within such an extended and multi-faceted story (though this has had its detractors), *Don Carlos* for the subtlety of its characterisation and the channelled reserve of the French idiom, *Aida* for its blending of dignity with passion (such as in the incomparably moving final scene), both *Otello* and *Falstaff* for their fusion of all Verdi’s previous achievements and their ability to create levels of sophistication, for both music and character, that can stand their own alongside the works of Wagner, whose rival conception of music drama was rarely far from Verdi’s thoughts as the German composer’s reputation grew.

Finnis’s transcriptions encompass all of Verdi’s 28 operas in chronological sequence (the precise number of Verdi’s operas is debatable, for *Jérusalem* is a reworking of much of *I Lombardi*, *Aroldo* has a similar relationship to *Stiffelio* (though in both cases the changes are quite substantial), whereas *Macbeth*, *Simon Boccanegra*, *La forza del destino* and *Don Carlo(s)* exist in multiple versions, sometimes with very significant changes (especially with respect to *Don Carlo(s)*), as well as the String Quartet and *Messa di Requiem* to conclude the cycle. *Attila*, a favourite opera of the composer, receives two different transcriptions, as does *Rigoletto*, whereas *Macbeth* receives three, or one might almost say four as that at the end of Book 3 is a bipartite structure using both equivalent arias from the 1847 and 1865 versions of the opera. The Book 3 *Boccanegra* transcription sets the whole of a scene at the end of Act 1 that was omitted from the later version, whilst the *Don Carlos* transcription uses a selection of little-known material from more obscure versions of the opera.

As Finnis describes above, there is a commonality of structure between the four books, each containing a first piece that uses closely-backed chords to create a type of para-microtonal effect, shifting up register with each book (the transcriptions after *Oberto*, the second *Attila*, the second *Rigoletto* and the final *Macbeth*), a piece in the fifth position (actually in the fourth in Book 2 – the numbering is slightly altered in this volume) which combines a clearly identifiable tonal melody with a two-part canon in the other hand (the pieces after *Ernani*, *Jérusalem*, *Boccanegra* (1857), and *Boccanegra* (final 1881 version)), a scherzo-like staccato movement in the fourth position (*I Lombardi*, *I Masnadieri*, *Les vêpres*, String Quartet), a more extended fantasia in the sixth position (not really in the short Book 2, but in the works after *Foscari*, *Aroldo* and *Don Carlo*), and a Busoni-based work in the eighth position (*Alzira*, *Stiffelio*, *La Forza del Destino* and *Falstaff*). In other pieces, rhythmic, configural or other elements are mirrored in different books – for example, the rhythmic structure of the *Giovanna d’Arco* transcription is replicated in the works after *Luisa Miller*, *Un Ballo* and *Otello*; elsewhere, the figurations at the beginning of the first *Attila* transcription are used at the beginning of the bipartite *Macbeth* work at the end of Book 3. Various other levels of cross-reference exist (I hear allusions to *Rigoletto* in the second *Attila* transcription, and to *Traviata* at the end of *Aroldo*, for example). In essence, most of the types of writing are introduced within the first book, though of course subject to significant extension and modification as the cycle progresses.

The chronological structure obviously gives the work the sense of a traversal through Verdi's life and career, but also the ordering elucidates Finnissy's changing and deeply personal perspectives on Verdi and the nature of 'transcription' itself. In some pieces (not least the fifth pieces in each book mentioned above), the Verdi original is clearly audible, though generally presented in a more elaborately chromatic vaguely Godowskian rendering (Finnissy said in one interview that part of the appeal of Godowsky for him was the way the slippery inner parts made the sense of tonality more blurred). At the other extreme one has pieces such as that after *Foscari* or the final *Macbeth* piece where the original exists on 'deep background', with no clearly identifiable allusions or surface similarities. In these cases, Finnissy is pushing the conception of 'transcription' to its limits; whilst in some sense deriving his music from pitch or rhythmic cells extrapolated from the original and subject to complex processes, he is capturing an individual perspective on the moment in the opera and all it entails rather than trying to remind the listener of the actual Verdi music in question. Other works (especially in Book 2) have fleeting allusions to recognisable material, but presented in extremely fragmented, disembodied and enigmatic forms (Finnissy once described his Verdi materials as like 'fish out of water').

Book 1 in particular is pronouncedly 'abstract' in nature, and most of it could be mistaken for totally 'original composition' (if such a thing exists) by a listener unfamiliar with the references. However, as the total work progresses, the tonal elements become clearer and are allowed a more extended exposition, culminating especially in the works after *Don Carlos*, *Aida* and the *Messa di Requiem*. This illuminates deep questions for the performer that exist to some extent throughout the cycle: how much to foreground the allusive elements, so as to attempt to privilege the work's perceived rootedness in 19<sup>th</sup> century musical tropes, or how much to make more of the stranger, often atonal writing that generally accompanies such elements? The latter used to be my general approach to this music; nowadays my perspective has changed somewhat (not least because of acknowledging that these seemingly more arcane elements have their own roots in 'tradition' as well). The works derived from *Ernani* and *Aida* always had a problematic status to me; the sheer profile and identifiability of the musical references contained within seemed to draw attention to themselves to such an extent as to dwarf much else that surrounds them, either in the pieces themselves or the neighbouring transcriptions. I still reject wholeheartedly the notion that this cycle (or other directly referential works of Finnissy) constitutes some blandly affirmative nostalgia trip, but have devised distinct strategies (in particular trying to give much of the atonal material a stronger profile and sense of line, as opposed to playing the tonal material with a degree of detachment) to provide what I hope is a deeper interpretation. Many have pointed out the banality of playing a Bach fugue always with one voice as the *Hauptstimme*; the depth of the music comes from the interaction between the voices rather than just from individual voices in isolation. This situation applies equally to Finnissy's music, I believe.

Franz Liszt made seven important transcriptions from Verdi, and other transcriptions based on popular numbers emanated from the pens of Thalberg, Raff, Bülow, Martucci and others). In more recent times both Luciano Berio and Dieter Schnebel have created more contemporary 'transcriptions' referring to Verdi works. Like much of his music, Finnissy's *Verdi Transcriptions* are informed both by the romantic and late-romantic history of piano transcription and by more recent histories as well. It is a mistake, I believe to see such works either as a hearkening back to a late-romantic 'golden age' (much beloved of pianophiles who tend to come equipped with hugely reactionary political views as well), nor as a supposedly modernistic rejection of the past. Neither a 'golden age' nor an era of 'pure modernism' ever existed in such an idealistic form (most of the romantic pianist-composers engaged in a forward-looking and dialectical manner with the conventions of their time in ways that can be seen as very 'modern', whilst most of the 'modernists' still drew upon musical traditions that preceded them). Those who wish to slot both Finnissy in general and these works in particular into either 'New Complexity' or 'Neo-Romantic' pigeonholes are taking a simplistic and de-individualising view not only of Finnissy, but of Verdi as well. To set up musical 'romanticism' as a cosy and gratifying alternative to the present, a haven for those who desire musical 'comfort food', is reification of the first order, doing little justice to the complex interaction between the personal needs and convictions of composers of the 'romantic era' and the demands that were placed on them, creating inner dialectics that are a primary reason why such work is still able to project into the present day.



Verdi was not really a 'radical' composer in the sense usually meant by the term; he worked within conventions and developed them to the maximum (as did Brahms, say). To some extent he still adhered to the 18<sup>th</sup> century notion of 'affective' music (as opposed to the more austere and inwardly focussed ideals of 19<sup>th</sup> century German romantics, say) – for this reason Carl Dahlhaus questions whether we should really call Verdi a 'romantic' composer at all. Verdi was writing primarily for a medium, opera, upon which huge expectations were placed in terms of entertainment and the like. He certainly didn't work to directly confront and challenge these expectations head-on in some type of proto-Situationist manner; like most pre-19<sup>th</sup> century composers (and many after then) he took a pragmatic approach, accepting the confines of certain frameworks that allowed him to compose whilst achieving new levels of sophistication within such frameworks. This may make him a relatively conservative figure in many eyes (and is probably part of the reason why many of a modernistic persuasion seem relatively aloof from Verdi's music, indeed often from the medium of opera in general). As a strategy for the present day, where the culture industry is pervasive to an unprecedented extent, this approach maybe doesn't recommend itself easily (though Finnissey himself has shown what is possible when writing for amateurs, a local church, or other less heavily commercialised musical groups). However, to a greater or lesser degree such a situation was made necessary not just to Byrd or Monteverdi or Purcell or Bach or Mozart, but also to Beethoven or Schumann or Wagner as well, all of whom had ultimately to satisfy in one way or another the demands of either their patrons or the marketplace (which caused Schumann in particular no end of difficulties, as his publishers bemoaned the strangeness of many of his pieces, wishing him to write something more 'accessible' to the general public). But in the case of all these composers', as with Verdi, the genuinely subjective was still able to assert itself within their work. Under capitalism it is practically impossible for any artist to opt out entirely from some social and aesthetic framework that pre-dates their own work and is coloured by the social and economic context from which it emerges - perhaps every artist is to some degree compromised in this respect. This situation is perhaps more serious in the present day than ever before, as the forces of the global market find ways to appropriate and render practically everything betokening the individual into a commodity form. So, the marketed 'subject', in the form of the artistic creator, is increasingly little more than a tissue of fabrications and lies, in the form of hype and PR, to help sell a slickly packaged but ultimately anonymous subject. Many today (including many in the fields of composition and performance) embrace this situation with that odious combination of conformity and arrogance bred from the benefits such conformity brings, in a way that it is no exaggeration to describe as being at the heart of the fascistic personality. Viewing Finnissey's work nowadays, I will never cease to be deeply impressed by the extent to which his work exhibits such a degree of authentically subjective vision notwithstanding all the bullying pressures of commercialisation and institutionalisation that remain ominously all around. And this is one of the factors that draws me to Verdi as well (and countless other composers from the past), much more important than the particular stylistic or generic contexts his work inhabits (which nonetheless he was able absolutely to 'make his own', a different but positive form of appropriation). Musical history is not a museum; those who will make it into that, or an array of pre-packaged 'styles' to be picked up and used in an unmediated fashion like any other consumer goods (as with the worst sorts of consumer-aesthetic post-modernists) are *against* history and *against* tradition. At the same time, the past only exists from our vantage point of the present, and is most productively used, in my opinion, when viewed in terms of what it illuminates about the present. This is what I believe the *Verdi Transcriptions* achieve.

The intense stylisation of the whole medium of opera (so deeply non-naturalistic even when taking on 'real' events) causes problems for many; when such stylisation is used to mask an emptiness of content, this is indeed a real problem (and many contemporary operas suffer from this problem, drawing upon such a very partial reading of operatic tradition). But neither Finnissey nor Verdi is like this, I think. Heavy stylisation does indeed create a quality of artifice, but this can be put to positive use. The emotions that are presented in characters' arias in Verdi's early operas are indeed concentrated, exaggerated and 'projected', but not necessarily lacking in intimacy or honesty as a result. And the same situation applies with Finnissey's more flamboyant writing (take the transcription from *Les vèpres*, for example); the contrivedly ornate writing here is accompanied by a sense of sickness and decadence within. Finnissey does not at any time simply celebrate a world of empty surfaces, by any means; his work is not at all like the utterly vacuous and cynical careerist compositions of Thomas Adès or Olga Neuwirth in this respect. Finnissey describes above these works as most 'theatrical'; indeed they are, but from the position of a deep understanding of the possibilities of theatre, not so as to turn music into easily-digestible and diverting light entertainment as is deeply the fashion in both composition and performance today. The *Verdi Transcriptions* are stylised, flamboyant, dealing with 'archetypal' and

possibly caricatured emotional worlds at times, but use these means to communicate something that is by no means simple.

I. *Oberto*. Verdi's first opera deals with the trials of Leonora, daughter of the defeated Count Oberto, whose lover Riccardo betrays her for the sister of her father's enemy. The aria used here is sung by Leonora after she returns from the woods where she has witnessed her father's death at the hands of Riccardo. She calls for death at the height of her despair. Finnissy sets the main part of this piece in three voices, all in the bass register in a way that is both writhing and funereal. The top voice resembles the melody, but presented in close-packed trichords (derived from the pitch cells that make up the Verdi original). This is preceded by a series of rapid progressions in the bass that gradually settle down towards the main melody.

II. *Un Giorno di Regno*. Verdi's first comedy (of only two) has a massively contrived scenario in which the Cavalier Belfiore masquerades as Stanislaw, King of Poland, so the real king can travel back to Poland and seize the throne. In the meantime, two unhappy marriages are to proceed, one of which is between the Cavalier's daughter Giuletta and the Grand Treasurer, the other between his niece, the Marchioness of Poggio and Count Ivrea. Guilietta is in love with the young Edoardo. The Marchioness wishes to help them, but has plenty of other problems of her own. In this trio, Guilietta and Edoardo bemoan this unhelpful friend in still writing, whilst the Marchioness sings more rhapsodically about her own predicament (with dotted rhythms). Considering the comic nature of the opera, this is actually one of the most austere and harsh pieces in the cycle. Finnissy reworks Verdi in an extremely chromatic manner that emerges out of the *Oberto* material, continuously interrupted by dotted-rhythm passages before an explosively violent conclusion.

III. *Nabucco*. The opera that brought Verdi his first major success is notorious for the richness of its choral writing, to the extent that the part for the chorus rivals that of any individual character. Ismaele, nephew of the King of Jerusalem, attempts to address a crowd of Levites, whose land is being seized by the Babylonian king Nabucco. But the crowd denounce him as an accursed traitor. Finnissy transforms the line into a two-part canon, both parts chasing each other, with startling interruptions, reinventing the Verdi as a type of rather amusing high camp.

IV. *I Lombardi*. A chorus of Crusading Knights, attempting to march on Jerusalem, point out to the hero Arvino, that his brother Pagano has been seen nearby (actually he is in the disguise of a Hermit, and Arvino has already encountered him). Pagano is Arvino's rival for the same woman, Viclinda, and who had tried to kill Arvino when Viclinda accepted. This regular staccato chorus appears in semi-staccato polyrhythmic interludes, again in a two-part canon, surrounded by more abstract staccato material that will set the basis for subsequent numbers in the cycle.

V. *Ernani*. The heroine Elvira is in love with the bandit Ernani, but is betrothed to her uncle Don Silva, a Spanish grandee, and pursued by Don Carlo, King of Spain and future Holy Roman Emperor, who Ernani blames for his father's death. She is faced by all three figures in her apartment. Don Silva picks a furious argument with Don Carlo when he discovers him in Elvira's room, without realising who he is. When he realises he is in the presence of his King, suddenly deference takes over. In this beautiful septet, all the various characters express their differing responses to the situation at hand. Finnissy rewrites Verdi in a left-hand version reminiscent of Godowsky, whilst adding a two-part canon of abstract atonal material in the right, which interacts with and clashes with the left in an Ivesian manner.

VI. *I Due Foscari*. Verdi's first opera after Byron deals with the plight of Jacopo Foscari, to be forced into exile at the behest of his own father the octogenarian Doge, much to the dismay of Jacopo's wife Lucrezia. Much action occurs in Act 3: after Jacopo's departure, it is announced that a dying man has confessed to the crime for which he was indicted. Lucrezia also announces that Jacopo has dropped dead at the moment of departure, causing the elderly Doge to retreat into further despair and guilt, and hastening the pressures for his abdication, leading to his death. The Choral Barcarolle is a light-hearted number that comes near the beginning of the opera when festivities are underway during carnival time. Finnissy's explosively violent piece would seem to portray the stormy events that are occurring simultaneously with the festivities.

VII. *Giovanna d'Arco*. Joan of Arc has an almost mythical stature in France. The opera deals with both the battles with the English and (unusually for Verdi) the supernatural beings who speak to her. The

aria Finnissy sets is sung by a shepherd, Giacomo, who is French but wishes to join the English, believing King Carlo VII to have brought shame upon his country (as well as wishing to cleanse the memory of a daughter who has betrayed him). Finnissy's barren opening monophonic melody (emerging from the storm of the previous piece) is gradually brought into a two-part aperiodic counterpoint, then a short sumptuous passage which echoes the music of Scriabin and Szymanowski.

VIII. *Alzira*. One of Verdi's least-known operas, *Alzira* is set in Peru in the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. A power struggle is going on between the Spanish colonial forces and the native Inca population, who kidnap the Governor Alvaro, but freed soon afterwards. Alzira is the betrothed of the Incan warrior, Otumbo, and she and her father are prisoners of the Spanish. She is being coerced into marrying the Spaniard Gusmano, the mortal enemy of Zamoro, the Chief of a Peruvian tribe, who had rescued Alvaro. Gusmano captures Zamoro, and holds his life in his hands. In this duet, Alzira pleads with Gusmano to save Zamoro's life (he has been sentenced to burn at the stake). Finnissy uses the first piece from Busoni's *Indianisches Tagebuch* as his basic matrix for this work, alluding to another composer's setting of Native American folk melodies.

IX. *Attila*. Attila, King of the pagan Huns, has invaded Italy and sacked Aquileia. The envoy from Rome, Ezio, wishes to make a pact by which they will divide Italy between them, whereby Ezio will keep Rome, but this is rejected by Attila. Meanwhile, the Aquileian knight Foresto bemoans that his beloved Odabella, daughter of the Lord of Aquileia, is held prisoner by Attila. Finnissy constructs a free fantasy around the aria in which Attila recounting a dream, in which an old man appeared to warn him that he is doomed unless he turns back, incorporating short reminiscences of various earlier pieces in this book.

X. *Attila*. From earlier in the opera, a very heated exchange between Attila and Ezio, in which the former declares that 'I will scatter to the winds the guilty ashes of your proud cities' while Ezio proclaims that he will continue to hold the city of Rome. After a whirlwind introduction suggesting inflamed passions, Finnissy intersperses material contrasting violent dissonance with hushed moments of sensuousness, also with playful and perhaps rather petty exchanges between the hands.

XI. *Macbeth* (1847). The story of Macbeth is familiar. This first transcription from the work is of the chorus of the exiles from Macbeth's tyrannical rule in Scotland. A subdued but dignified number in the early version of Verdi's opera, which Finnissy presents in highly fragmented form.

XII. *I Masnadieri*. The first of Verdi's operas after Schiller centres around the disaffected figure of Carlo, son of Count Massimiliano, who renounces his background and joins a group of brigands. His unscrupulous brother Francesco has fabricated a letter, purportedly from their father, stating that if Carlo returns home he will be kept in solitary confinement and fed bread and water. This stiffens Carlo's resolve and opens the way for Francesco to inherit his father's title and land. Carlo's cousin Amalia is in love with him, but after a contrivance from Francesco, she is led to believe that Carlo has been killed in fighting, and she should marry Francesco instead. The Count in reality longs to see his favourite son again. After various things are properly revealed to Amalia, she escapes from Francesco and encounters Carlo in the forest. When Carlo reveals his identity, she is overjoyed, and also recounts the ways in which she has been ill-treated by Francesco. Carlo sings in this duet of how she is safe with him, but she secretly expresses worries about what Carlo's new life entails. Finnissy intercuts the idiom of the *I Lombardi* transcription with mystical and aloof writing in the treble registers, perhaps contrasting a representation of young recklessness with another of sensitivity and fear.

XIII. *Jérusalem*. Finnissy sets the very first recitative and duo after the overture of Verdi's first French opera. The Count of Toulouse, before departing for the Crusades, gives his daughter Hélène in marriage to Gaston Viscount of Béarn. Gaston believes the Count killed his father. The two debate these matters in the recitative, then Gaston vows he could forget old rivalries if he was her husband (though Finnissy tellingly omits this line). The duo is a deeply romantic short vignette in which each declare the importance of the other to them before having to part. Soon afterwards other rivalries will emerge and a rival for Hélène's affection will attempt to have Gaston killed and succeed only in murdering the Count. Finnissy uses the same type of means as in *Ernani*, but here with the melodic material in the treble rather than the bass.

XIV. *Il Corsaro*. Set at first on a pirates' island in the Aegean, the character of Medora sings of her love for pirate chieftain Corrado, who is meanwhile making plans to attack the city of Corone, in the control of the Pash Seid. Her aria is ornate and almost claustrophobic in its inward focus. Finnissy presents a rather more 'sea-sick' version of fragments, which occasional brief moments of expansiveness.

XV. *La Battaglia de Legnano*. The citizens of Milan have formed the Lombard League to fight German king Federico Barbarossa. However, they are being betrayed by politicians who wish to make a deal with the king, leading to numerous reprisals and vendettas. The Veronese warrior Arrigo has by Act 4 killed Barbarossa, and the Italians' country is safe. The Inno di Vittoria is a triumphal hymn to celebrate freedom 'from the Alps to Charybdis'. Finnissy boisterous transcription gives a rather more jagged picture.

XVI. *Luisa Miller*. This very short piece would seem to try and crystallise a whole scene and quartet in under a minute's music (derived in part from the *Giovanna* transcription). Luisa Miller is in love with the man she knows only as Carlo, who is actually Rodolfo, son of Count Walter. The jealous Wurm, on the Count's retainers, reveals this to Luisa's father in a bid to stop the marriage, asserting that such a man would never marry a village girl. Meanwhile, Count Walter wishes Rodolfo to marry the wealthy Duchess Federica, but Rodolfo cannot bring himself to love her. As the result of Wurm's machinations, a feud begins between the Count and Miller. Rodolfo brings this to a temporary end by threatening to reveal how the Count came to power. In the beginning of the second act, Wurm tricks Luisa, whose father is in prison awaiting execution, saying that she can get him released if she writes a letter saying that she never loved Rodolfo, only his money and position, and really wants to elope with Wurm. Luisa agrees to this 'punishment'. In the second scene of Act 2, which Finnissy sets from mid-way through, Luisa is presented to the Duchess, whilst being reminded by Wurm of the danger her father is in. Luisa sings to herself of the deceitful way she has been treated, whilst forcing herself to lie to the Duchess about her love to Rodolfo.

XVII. *Stiffelio*. The evangelical minister Stiffelio discovers, through the course of the opera, how he has been betrayed by his wife Lina, who is having a secret liaison with nobleman Raffaele. Lida's father Stankar is furious and vengeful at Raffaele, vowing to kill him. The aria in question is a rare case of a 'divorce aria', in which Stiffelio hands divorce papers to Lida, saying from now on he will devote himself exclusively to the church. Stiffelio's calmness and stoicism combined with definitiveness of purpose is contrasted with Lida's frantic despair (later in the opera he agrees to forgive her). Finnissy uses as his matrix the First Sonatina of Busoni in a calm piece which nonetheless suggests some brooding beneath the surface.

XVIII. *Rigoletto*. The utterly vacuous character of the Duke is asking Rigoletto jestingly how he can get rid of the Count of Ceprano, in order that the Duke can woo the Countess, with whom he has been flirting. In characteristic fashion Rigoletto suggests prison, exile or otherwise decapitation. This arouses the fury of the Count, who is listening nearby, proclaiming revenge against Rigoletto. In a horrifying and quick passage (much nastier than Monterone's curse later in the scene), the Count's line disseminates amongst much of the rest of the assembled company, declaring in ominous rising chromatic figurations (amidst the festivity and the sound of the *banda*) how they will meet to decide how to deal with Rigoletto. The way in which hatred is presented as so infectious evidently impressed Finnissy, who rewrites this in a brash and bare-knuckled manner (once again fragmented) with a brief bizarre allusion to Stockhausen!

XIX. *Rigoletto*. The Duke's cynical aria about the fickleness of women needs no introduction. Finnissy places this, partially harmonised, in the bass, whilst using rhythms from the opening of the *Oberto* transcription, and similar close-packed trichords in the right hand.

XX. *Il Trovatore*. The passage being transcribed is so over-the-top in its melodrama that it is hard to keep a straight face. Leonora, lady-in-waiting to the Princess of Aragon, is pursued by the Count di Luna, in whom she has no interest whatsoever; instead she is in love with the troubadour Manrico, possible son of the gypsy woman Azucena. The Count's baby brother was supposedly bewitched when the Count himself was a child, and the mother of Azucena was burnt as a witch in response. But the daughter kidnapped the brother and then later a skeleton was found in the place where her mother was burnt (which she recounts in horrific detail). But Azucena had inadvertently killed her own son, not the

Count's brother, and so she brought him up as her own. This is Manrico, who is vengeful towards the Count. Eventually he is captured when trying to save his mother and sentenced to death. Leonora pleads with the Count to spare Manrico – he agrees only condition she will give herself to him. Repulsed by the Count, Leonora secretly takes poison, then pledges herself to the Count. The aria set here is her ecstatic number when she knows that Manrico will be freed, even though she will die from the poison. Finnissy's setting removes much of the emotional intensity and turns it into a very silly, somewhat fragmented number with jarring dissonances.

XXI. *La Traviata*. In Act 3 of *Traviata*, Violetta Valéry is seriously ill – her doctor has admitted to her maid Annina that she has only a few hours to live. She had thought her lover Alfredo had gone abroad, but he returns in her last hours. After promising that they will leave Paris together to live the rest of their lives, he realises how ill she actually is. This is the point where the duet that Finnissy sets begins. Dramatic interchanges between Alfredo and Violetta give way to a hymn-like passage in which Violetta sings of the cruel injustice that she should die so young. Finnissy intercuts this music with sections from an earlier *Traviata* transcription, forming a three part canon from one of the principal motives of the opera.

XXII. *Les vêpres siciliennes*. Finnissy sets the famous Bolero (referred to in the score as a Siciliana) from Act 5 of this opera, sung by the Duchess Elena. She sings her thanks for the flowers her guests have given her. Finnissy, in between the pizzicato-like writing familiar from *Lombardi* and *Masnadieri*, rewrites the Bolero as grotesquely over-ornate parody, a little in the style of Sorabji.

XXIII. *Simon Boccanegra* (1857). The labyrinthine plot of *Boccanegra* is too intricate to summarise here. In the manner of the *Ernani* work, Finnissy sets all four sections of the final scena in Act 1 of the earlier version of the opera. The scene takes the form of a confrontation between the Doge Boccanegra and nobleman Gabriele Adorno, interrupted by Amelia, the Doge's daughter, who describes how she was kidnapped and managed to escape. The scene ends with cries for retribution.

XXIV. *Aroldo*. Verdi composed a new final act when revising *Stiffelio* to become *Aroldo*. This is commonly known as the 'Loch Lomond Act'. The character of Aroldo is not a gentle evangelical minister as in *Stiffelio*, but instead a Saxon knight who has returned from the Crusades. The equivalent scenario occurs, but Aroldo's forgiveness of his wife Mina comes somewhat later than that of Stiffelio for Lida. Aroldo is living with holy man Briano in seclusion in Scotland, and encounters Mina and her father Egberto (who has killed her lover) when their boat washes up on the shore. With pleas for mercy, Aroldo ultimately forgives her. Whilst the transcription is based on the Finale where Aroldo is torn between conflicting emotional forces and ultimately relents, Finnissy also works in passages from elsewhere in the opera, including Aroldo's Act 1 tale of a man in Palestine who concealed a paper in a book that would betray secrets, 'Vi fu in Palestina' (a similar scenario is occurring in Aroldo's household at the time), and evocations of the *cornimuse* as played by shepherds and of the prayer 'Angiol di Dio' sung earlier in the act. All combine to make another free fantasia which also alludes back to the *Foscari* transcription.

XXV. *Un Ballo in Maschera*. Verdi's tale of the homosexual King Gustavus III of Sweden, who was murdered at a masked ball, had to be substantially modified to placate the censors. The events are instead set in Boston in 1700 (though it's hard to perceive anything other than nominal link to America). The Governor of Boston, Riccardo, is being secretly plotted against by his enemies Sam and Tom. At the same time, he is in love with Amelia, the wife of his Creole secretary Renato. Riccardo's page Oscar introduces the Chief Justice, who wishes Riccardo to banish a black fortune-teller, Ulrica. After a (rather too!) high-spirited defence of her by Oscar, Riccardo summons the crowd of various officials and citizens to go and visit Ulrica. In wild can-can-like fashion he and the assembled company sing of their intentions. Finnissy once more uses the *Giovanna d'Arco* rhythmic model, but the music is much more animated in this case.

XXVI. *La Forza del Destino*. At the outset of this opera, Leonora, daughter of the Marquis of Calatrava, has persuaded her father that she has abandoned a foreign lover he believes unworthy of her. But secretly, she is planning to leave her home and family and elope with him. 'Me pellegrina' expresses her sorrows when about to part. One of the most conventionally romantic of the *Verdi Transcriptions*, Finnissy added a Busoni-derived coda to the earlier version, which forms in part a bridge to the next number.

XXVII. *Macbeth* (1847 and 1865). Verdi replaced his brash original 1847 aria for Lady Macbeth (sung after Macbeth has gone out to arrange Banquo's murder) with the superb 'La luce langue', quite hallucinatory in both text and music. Finnissy sets the two different arias one after another, presenting the first (after a short recitative) somewhat in the manner of the first *Attila* transcription. The second half places the melody accompanied by descending languid chromatic arpeggios.

XXVIII. *Macbeth* (1865). The witches chorus from Act 1 of *Macbeth* is in no way identifiable in this piece set at the very top of the keyboard. Finnissy constructs an alternative and modern vision of witchcraft.

XXIX. *Don Carlos*. A deeply personal take on the French version of Verdi's opera (Finnissy's personal favourite), this consists of a melange of different versions of two duets between the King of Spain, Philip II and Rodrigo, Marquis of Posa. Rodrigo attempts to convince the King to be less harsh on the citizens of Flanders, whilst the king reveals his private doubts about his wife, who is secretly in love with Don Carlos. After a short interlude relating to the introduction to Act 3, Finnissy sets an early version of the duet between the Queen, Elizabeth, and Princess Eboli, who has had an affair with the King. Finnissy intercuts the Verdi material (presented in very recognisable form) with moments derived from the *Un Giorno* transcription.

XXX. *Aida*. Radamès, a young captain in the Egyptian army, is secretly in love with Aida, who is the slave of Amneris, daughter of the King of Egypt. Amneris is also in love with Radamès, leading to bitter rivalry between the two women in vastly different positions of power. Aida is torn between her love and the fate of her people. The beginning of Act 3 is set on the banks of the Nile, where Aida awaits Radamès, who she believes is about to say farewell to her. She contemplates drowning herself in the Nile, then In 'O ciel azzurri' she sings of her homeland and how she will never see it again. Finnissy takes the vocal and oboe lines from the Verdi original and modifies them into a more fragile relationship, occupying the same tessitura (as in Verdi) but creating harmonic and rhythmic disturbances with each other.

XXXI. String Quartet. Finnissy intercuts three groups of material, each derived in an abstracted way from the scherzo and trio of the third movement, and the finale. In this order they consist of a rapid and brilliant four-part 3/8 passage (somewhat more tonal than the others), a continuous singing melody surrounded by pizzicati, and a four-part slightly mad fugue.

XXXII. *Simon Boccanegra*. Gabriele is feeling vengeful, believing Amelia to be the Doge's mistress. He pleads to heaven for her heart to be restored to him. The transcription combines an elaborated right-hand *cantus firmus* with a left-hand two-part atonal canon in the manner of the *Jérusalem* transcription.

XXXIII. *Don Carlo*. Much the longest of all the Verdi transcriptions. Taking as its starting point Elizabeth's long aria at the beginning of Act 5 where she reflects on the sadness of her life, her love for Carlos, her native land of France, and how dreams are vanquished by sorrow. Initially using the notes of the melody in a drastically expanded form (very much slower than in the original), Finnissy eventually interrupts this with stark dissonant gestures, and builds over a long period towards a rapid and brilliant texture, which culminates in a set of parallel descending scales in both hands covering the whole compass of the keyboard.

XXXIV. *Otello*. Both this and the *Falstaff* transcription are relatively brief affairs – perhaps after the lacerating *Don Carlo* piece it seemed impossible to create extended fantasias on these two works. Finnissy first alludes briefly to the *Chanson Grecque*, which is rarely heard in performances of the opera, then towards the crucial moment towards the end of the act, where Desdemona questions why Otello is now so contemptuous towards her (he believes her, falsely, to be secretly in love with Cassio, thanks to the trap laid by Iago).

XXXV. *Falstaff*. Whilst plotting revenge against Falstaff, Ford reveals his jealousy and is teased about it by Alice. Verdi's melody is worked into a slightly austere passage from Busoni's *Fantasia Contrappuntistica*.

XXXVI. *Messa di Requiem*. The cycle ends with a relatively faithful setting of the opening of Verdi's *Requiem*, though never quite totally stable, culminating with a wispy, enigmatic conclusion a little like that to Finnissey's other large-scale cycle *The History of Photography in Sound*.

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