

DLA, Doctoral Thesis Abstract

Gáspár Krasznai

## Giuseppe Verdi's Choir Management Innovations

Internal Dissertation Consultant: Dr. András Batta

External Dissertation Consultant: Dr. Judit Frigyesi

The Liszt Academy of Music  
28<sup>th</sup> Doctoral Course Classified as  
Art, Cultural and Historical Sciences

Budapest

2019

## I. Antecedent of the research

Countless studies of Giuseppe Verdi's oeuvre have been published worldwide in several languages, and probably one of the most significant of which is the three-volume 'The Operas of Verdi' about Verdi's operas is written in English by Julian Budden. The books and studies of various lengths discuss the dramaturgy of operas, the problems of the relationship between librettos and music, orchestration, character portrayal of the characters, and vocal technical difficulties. In the case of ecclesiastical works, their specific musical world is analyzed by text to music correlation just like in the case of operas. Unfortunately, however, choral instrumentation, choral sound, and Verdi's thematic revolutionizing of choral arrangement is almost completely absent from the literature. Obviously while analyzing the operas, the authors of the studies take into consideration the dramaturgical functions of the choir, their role in a given scene, or even in an entire opera, but this does not exceed the scope and depth of the analysis of a secondary character. Between the detailed analysis of two arias or duets within an act, even Budden, Parker or Petrobelli tend to handle a significant choral movement or ensemble in a single sentence without going into the same level of musical details as the

previously analyzed aria or duet. Péter Várnai's studies in Hungarian language are similarly short-spoken in this regard.

## II. Sources

During researching Verdi's choral management innovations, the primary sources are the music scores themselves, namely the vocal-piano extracts from his operas composed in the 1840s, within that the musical material of the choral scenes. In order for the fact of innovation to be proven in relation to anything, the antecedents and the perceived new phenomenon must be placed side by side. Having a thorough understanding of Verdi's works, I studied all the scores of all the operas performed at the Scala in Milan between 1832 and 1850, within that deeply analyzing the choral scenes, in order to find possible antecedents of Verdi's choral innovations of the 1840s. I was searching for an answer to whether the choral solutions that I consider new are really new, so can they be considered Verdi's inventions, or whether he adopted those procedures already used by others in the 1830s and incorporated them into the choral movements of his own operas. The long, but all the more exciting research work brought the expected result: the phenomena considered to be Verdi's innovations are either not at all, or merely in their rudimentary form, can be found in the

works of Ricci, Auber, Nicolai, Lillo, Mandanici, Mercadante, Bellini, Donizetti or Rossini. From 1778, the program of the Scala in Milan is accurately documented by Giampiero Tintori in *Cronologia opere-balletti-concerti 1778-1977*. From this book I collected all the titles of works that could be seen and heard in Milan from the time the young Verdi first arrived there in May 1832 until the end of his first creative period until around 1850, and from which the young composer could draw inspiration. A significant part of the scores by his works – partly in the form of manuscripts, and partly in the form of printed versions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in dusty condition – were preserved by the library of the Milan Conservatory, so with a very few exceptions, all works could be studied. As in the case of *Nabucco's* thanksgiving prayer in connection with Jewish liturgical chants, I also conducted research in the library of the Jewish religious community in Milan, but unfortunately they could not provide with any written documents that would have provided an insight into the world of synagogue music in Milan around 1840. They were only able to provide a CD recording, on which Elia Enrico Richetti, the retired assistant rabbi of Milan, talks about the order of the synagogue ceremonies by singing the melodies associated with the various holidays. From the material on the CD, it was possible to find a formal

and melodic affinity with *Nabucco's* prayer of thanksgiving, but for a broader explanation of the topic, it was necessary to get in touch again with Professor Judit Frigyesi, whose charts were presented at the master class on synagogue chants held in February 2014 at the Academy of Music's doctoral school where she showed formal correspondence with Verdi's scene in question. I personally visited Elia Enrico Richetti in his apartment in Milan, who provided me with new materials from his huge library, of which the processing of Judit Frigyesi provided invaluable help. The 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of the dissertation – including the demonstration of musical connections with *Nabucco's* thanksgiving prayer – could not have been completed in its present form without her added work.

### III. Method

During the course of writing my thesis titled "The interaction of ecclesiastical and stage works in the oeuvre of Giuseppe Verdi", I processed Verdi's entire life work, during which the logical, careful and often innovative handling of the choir, voice leading, and in short, the choir's orchestration appeared significant and drew my attention. After, as evidenced by remaining documents from the weeks before *Nabucco's* première in Milan in 1842, the Scala artistic ensemble spread

the word throughout the city about the new and special music they learned during rehearsals, I began to wonder why the music of *Nabucco* could still seem unique and especially novel to an artistic group of its time, which dealt with the most outstanding operas of the time on a daily basis. It was noticeable that the artists of the choir found the piece not only modern but also very difficult, which they enthusiastically learned despite its difficulty. After processing this information, I decided to personally travel to Milan and, through thorough research, get to know the antecedents from which Verdi could draw inspiration and which the Scala choir was familiar with, and in the light of these, point out Verdi's innovations in choir management. In the first round, I collected all the available data from 1832 to 1850 in the Scala archive, mainly the list of the performed works. In the second round, I looked through the scores of about forty operas in the library of the conservatory, focusing on their choral parts, taking pictures and detailed notes of the parts I thought I could discover the roots and slight antecedents of Verdi's supposed 'choral treatment' innovations. In the third round, I researched the musical life of Milan's synagogues around 1840 in the library of the Jewish community in Milan. Later, in addition to the large volume of recordings of Milanese synagogue chants, Richetti also

provided me with books from which I could gain insight into the centuries-old history of the city and Italian Jewish community. This was, among others, the work of Annie Sacerdoti: Tempio Centrale di Milano titled "Hechàl David u-Mordechai".

#### IV. Results

During the research, it was proven that the vocal innovations that I attributed to Verdi's inventions, or at least that I thought were Verdi's innovations, were truly his. There are some antecedents, but they are only rudimentary attempts, and in some cases they are without any, such as the thanksgiving prayer of *Nabucco*, where the antecedents are to be found in the world of Jewish liturgical songs. I cannot compare my results with previous research, as to my inquiry the leaders of all the institutions in Milan that I visited testified that no one had investigated this area yet, not only the relationship between Verdi and Jewish songs, but not even the thematic theme of the choir. The director of Scala's archives, Matteo Sartorio, also encouraged me to write the doctoral dissertation as soon as possible and to translate it into Italian, because from his point of view it would fill up a gap in Italian Verdi-research.

V. Documentation of activities related to the subject of the dissertation

1. Lectures, radio talks, concerts, at which excerpts from the composers and works mentioned in the dissertation were presented:

October 23rd, 2012, 12:30 Hungarian State Opera "Tune to Freedom" introductory performance with the artists of the Opera House from Verdi's *Don Carlos*

May 25th, 2013, 17:00 Hungarian State Opera Verdi marathon "A couleur locale in the works of Giuseppe Verdi" performance

September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2013, 18:00 Hungarian State Opera Verdi: *Falstaff* première – Tuning performance

October 20th, 2013, 17:30 Erkel theater Verdi half-marathon performance "A couleur locale in the works of Giuseppe Verdi"

October 23rd, 2013, 12:00 Hungarian State Opera "Tune to Freedom" introductory performance with the artists of the Opera House from Verdi's *Don Carlos*

November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2013, 18:00 Erkel theater Verdi: *Giovanna d'Arco* première – Tuning performance

November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013, 18:00 Erkel theater Verdi: *I masnadieri* première – Tuning performance

December 1st, 2013, 18:00 Erkel theater Verdi: *Luisa Miller*  
première – Tuning performance

December 5th, 2013, 18:00 Erkel theater Verdi: *Rigoletto*  
première – Tuning performance

February 1st, 2014, 3:00 p.m. Hungarian Catholic Radio  
"Zene-közelben" with Előd Juhász: "Verdi's Sacred Scenes"  
piano illustration conversation

March 29th, 2014, 3:00 p.m. Hungarian Catholic Radio "Zene-  
közelben" with Előd Juhász: "Verdi's exotic musical  
representation" piano illustration discussion

October 27th, 2014, 18:00 Erkel theater Donizetti: *Lucia di  
Lammermoor* Edita Gruberova concert – Tuning performance

February 13<sup>th</sup>, 2015, 18:00 Erkel theater Verdi: *Nabucco*  
première – Tuning performance

April 4th, 2015, 17:00 Erkel theater Verdi: *Aida* première –  
Tuning performance

June 13th, 2015, 11:00 a.m. Academy of Music Solti hall "Ora  
pro nobis" doctoral student concert

September 26<sup>th</sup>, 2015, 17:00 Hungarian State Opera House  
Verdi: *Otello* première – Tuning performance

October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015, 15:30 Hungarian State Opera "Tune to  
Freedom" introductory performance from Verdi's *Nabucco*  
with the Opera Choir

November 6th, 2015, 19:00 Budaörs, Szent János Nepomuk Church "Ora pro nobis" memorial concert

March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016, 18:00 Erkel theater Verdi: *Il trovatore* première – Tuning performance

September 24<sup>th</sup>, 2016, 18:00 Hungarian State Opera House Verdi: *La traviata* première – Tuning performance

November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2016, 18:00 Erkel theater Donizetti: *Lucia di Lammermoor* première – Tuning performance

January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017, 3:00 p.m. Hungarian Catholic Radio "Zene-közéletben" with Előd Juhász: "Innovations in handling Verdi's choir" piano illustration discussion

November 16th, 2018, 7:00 p.m. Budaörs, Nepomuk Szent János Church "In memoriam Gioacchino Rossini" memorial concert on the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the master's birth

November 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017, 18:00 Erkel theater Rossini: *L'Italiana in Algeri* première – Tuning performance

May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019, 1:12 p.m. Erkel theater National Song Festival

## 2. Published studies:

"The couleur locale in Verdi's art". In: Zene Szó XXIII. volume number 5 2013

"SCHILLER-VERDI: LUISA MILLER Civic Tragedy and Romantic Opera". In: Zene Szó XXIII. volume number 9 2013