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Macbeth

Music by Giuseppe Verdi, libretto by Francesco Piave and Andrea Maffei after Shakespeare
Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona
Released 4 April 2025

Verdi was already a dominant figure when he composed his tenth opera, *Macbeth*. The patriotic sentiments of *Nabucco* and *I Lombardi* had already won the hearts of Italians, and there was still something of that feeling in the wonderfully moving lament of Scottish refugees in the final act of his latest work.

For the first time, however, there is a real depth of characterisation in the libretto, adapted from Shakespeare, reflected in the score, and here in an insightful and appropriately sombre production by director Christof Loy.

Apart from a few tiny specks of colour in the candles and flowers for Macbeth's victims, the costumes and props are uniformly monochrome, delivering the intensity of a film noir classic, while the action takes place entirely within the thane's great hall, which bears a striking resemblance to that in Hitchcock's *Rebecca*.

I have sometimes complained about dark stagings that condemn to the shadows singers and any clear understanding of what is going on, but in this 2016 performance, the claustrophobic gloom is entirely effective thanks to the meticulously directed lighting by Bernd Purkrabek.

The subtlety of Loy's vision and the mellifluous Ludovic Tezier in the title role is evident throughout, perhaps most clearly in Macbeth's reflection on all he has lost. Lady Macbeth does not die offstage as is usual, but holding her husband's hand, so his words "expect no gentle words at your funeral" are not only for himself but also sung, in pity, for her. Then, as he himself expires, the figure of a younger, loving Lady Macbeth gently strokes his head.

Tezier is a twitchy, sullen Macbeth, seeming to melt in the embrace of Martina Serafin's resolute Lady Macbeth when they are first reunited after the witches' prophesy in act one. In contrast to his hesitancy, she comes across as an indomitable force, with a delicious portamento in "La luce langue" that betokens a slithering, sly intent.

Verdi employed a magic lantern to project the ghost of Banquo, and most productions I have seen bring back a gore-smeared figure for the banquet scene. Loy dispenses with any representation, which makes Macbeth's imprecations against thin air seem less effective, although there is a nice twist in his being similarly distracted at the moment of Macduff's fatal assault.

A first class chorus of witches comprise Macbeth's servants—all female, but some in incongruous beards and moustaches, presumably on the basis that there would not be enough housemaids to make up the numbers. They, not their masters, may be the ultimate winners, running riot as the Macbeth fortunes falter, quick to hail the new King Malcolm, but who knows for how long?

The production is based on Verdi's revision for the 1865 Paris revival, including the short but often omitted ballet scene, which includes a couple of be-skirted blokes among the nymphets—don't ask me why. The orchestra and chorus of the Gran Teatre del Liceu are sensitively conducted by Giampaolo Bisanti, and a booklet has helpful background information in English, German and French.

Reviewer: [Colin Davison](#)