

How to NOT embarrass yourself and others (i.e. that wicked phrase, opera etiquette):

1. First, relax. Opera doesn't bite; well, except for maybe this one (see #5).
2. With opera, all clapping rules that apply to symphony performances disappear; you can pretty much clap whenever you want. In fact, after a particularly fabulous aria, it used to be common for the singer to reward applause with an encore from an entirely different opera. Clapping is encouraged!
3. Keep coughing and sneezing to a minimum. If necessary, place duct tape over your mouth.
4. If you carry ANYTHING that may beep, emit light, glow, vibrate, or burst spontaneously into a musical rendition of your favorite tune (wrist alarm, pager, cell, a long-lived Giga Pet), TURN IT OFF AND PUT IT AWAY!
5. Refer to the opera's title as "the Scottish Play", "MacBee", "Macdaddy", or "Mackers" whilst in the theatre, otherwise you might curse us all, and the production. Seriously.

Giuseppe Verdi's Macbeth (1847) / Duration: 3 hours 15 minutes

Verdi the Man

Giuseppe Fortunino Francesco Verdi was born on October 9th or 10th, 1813 and died on January 27th, 1901 of a massive stroke. His name was recorded as Joseph Fortunin Francois Verdi of which the famous Verdi biographer George Whitney Martin said, "so it happened that for the civil and temporal world Verdi was born a Frenchman." The irony of that statement will be apparent to those familiar with Verdi's association with the Italian *Risorgimento* (aka the national unification of Italy; supporters often shouted "Viva VERDI!" where VERDI stood for *Viva Vittorio Emanuele Re d'Italia*). His parents were innkeepers and landowners; he began to study the organ at seven, and composition as an adolescent. Verdi moved to Milan at the age of 20 to study at the Conservatory of Music but they rejected him (much to their chagrin later no doubt!). He received early patronage from the merchant Antonio Barezzi who eventually became Verdi's father-in-law; however Verdi's wife and their two children later passed away while Verdi was composing his second opera. Verdi nearly gave up composition, but was persuaded to compose the Biblical opera *Nabucco*. Legend has it that the words of the famous "Va pensiero" chorus from said opera inspired him to go on to write a total of 26 operas, 9 song cycles, a handful of sacred works including the famous Requiem (which Utah Symphony will perform April 9 – 10), 1 string quartet, 1 patriotic hymn, and 1 cantata. You know his music as you've heard it in *Twilight*, *Bratz: The Movie*, *Rocky Balboa*, *Save the Last Dance 2*, *The Queen*, *A Prairie Home Companion*, *The Pink Panther*, *Match Point*, *The Rules of Attraction*, *Rat Race*, *Pretty Women*, and countless other film and TV shows. Verdi is so big that he even has an IMDB page!

Odd fact: Verdi's name translates into English as Joseph Greens. Music comedian Victor Borge (if you don't know his name, go check out his acts at the library or YouTube) often referred to the composer as "Joe Green," saying that "Giuseppe Verdi" was purely a stage name. Apparently, the utterance of this same joke gives the fictional detective Poirot the answer to the crime in *Evil Under the Sun*.

Macbeth: the Curse

All great stories come with an accompanying curse. The *Macbeth* curse is probably the most famous of all superstition curses surrounding a narrative, which makes it 100% more awesome. According to legend, saying the word "Macbeth" inside a theatre causes Disaster with a capital D. Everything from death on stage to the presenting theatre going out of business to forgotten lines could happen. Indeed (according to legend), at the premiere, an actor died on stage because a real dagger was accidentally used instead of the prop knife. Hopefully that props master was fired! Why these horrific results, you may ask? Explanations include claims that 1) authentic spells are cast on stage by the witches and that Shakespeare stole the lines from actual covens who thereafter cursed the play (lesson: never plagiarize, especially from witches), 2) the original props master stole an authentic cauldron from a coven and they then cursed the play (of course it was the same props master who was the source of the real dagger incident...), and 3) it has even been postulated that Shakespeare cursed the play himself so that he would be the only person ever able to direct it. How kind of him to consider posterity. Regardless of the original source, it has clothed the work in a shroud of mystery. To avoid saying the name of the play, check out etiquette tip #5 above. If you mistakenly uttered the Cursed Word inside the theatre before you read this award-winning primer, never fear! There are two cleansing rituals: A) Turn three times, spit over your left shoulder, swear (yes, we give you permission), and/or recite a line from another Shakespeare play ("Angels and ministers of grace defend us" from *Hamlet* l.iv is most popular, but if that doesn't come immediately to mind, at least everyone knows, "to be or not to be"). B) Leave the theatre, spin around while brushing yourself off, and say "Macbeth" three times. How either of those actually cleanse the theatre is rather beyond rational thought but at least it should make for some great entertainment tonight! Despite whether or not you believe in the curse, even we at Utah Opera have experienced our share of oddities during this production!

Macbeth: the Plot and other Various Sundry

Hopefully you're at least semi-familiar with the plot of *Macbeth*. Even if you haven't made it through all the thou's and thee's in Shakespeare's play, it has been adapted into 100s of movies and TV shows. There's even a Bollywood version (*Maqbool*) as well as the Hollywood favorite *Scotland, Pa*. Even the curse has made it into pop culture through episodes of *Slings and Arrows*, *Jimmy Neutron*, *Blackadder*, *The Simpsons*, *Mystery Hunters*, and *Never Say Macbeth*, to name a few.

It should not be surprising that one of history's greatest composers of opera was also obsessed with one of history's greatest playwrights. What is surprising is that Verdi had actually never seen the play performed live and had only read an Italian translation before choosing to set this play to music. What's even more surprising is that posterity only gets to enjoy this genius work because of the availability of the baritone Felice Varesi to create the role of Macbeth. Had a tenor been available, *Macbeth* might never have been turned into an opera! *Macbeth* is the first of three Shakespeare-inspired works written by Verdi. *Otello* and *Falstaff* were completed much later in life, however. Verdi was quite the little dictator with both the librettist and singers. He had his friend Maffei completely rewrite sections of the libretto and forced the original Lady M to study the sleepwalking scene for three months. He even had M and Lady M rehearse the major duet over 150 times including in the lobby during the final dress rehearsal while the overture was playing. Verdi was not quite the dictator with other works; it must have been the story working on him. Or just blame it on the curse. Curses make excellent scapegoats.

Unlike 99% of all operas, boy does not meet girl, fall in love and then after various hysterical hiccups or tragic escapades, either one or more die or they live happily ever after. Nope, in this opera, boy and girl are already married although who knows if they're actually in love? **ACT I:** The opera opens with a scary gang of witches (in the opera, Verdi expanded the role of the 3 witches into a female chorus comprised of three voice parts). Macbeth (M) and his homey Banquo arrive having just won a battle. The witches hail M as "Thane of Cawdor and king hereafter" and Banquo, who is the current king's son, is heralded as the father of future kings. Miraculously, messengers show up RIGHT. THEN. hailing M as Thane of Cawdor. Don't you wish your fortune cookies were fulfilled that quickly! Next, we find Lady Macbeth (Lady M) reading a letter from her hubby about the witch episode and decides on the spot to take matters into her own hands and decides that M should kill the King that night when M returns from battle. M decides that he doesn't have it in him to commit the murder so Lady M takes it upon herself like any good wife would do. [Random trivia: the super playing King Duncan in Utah Opera's production is actually a real Scottish Duncan!] Macduff, some random noble who becomes pivotal to the ending, shows up and discovers the murder. **ACT II:** M is now king, but is bothered by the witches' prophecy that his descendents won't be king, rather his homey Banquo gets that honor. So, like any good friend, M decides he'd better murder both Banquo and his son that night because that's what best friends do. Again, he doesn't do the act himself but hires a death squad of murderers to do the dirty deed. Banquo is murdered, but his son somehow escapes. While at a party that night, M is haunted by the ghost of Banquo, yells at the ghostie, and then runs off leaving everyone else at the party thinking M has gone mad. Which is probably true. **ACT III:** M decides to visit the witches again to see if they can take care of his ghostie problem. They tell him three things: to beware of the random Macduff guy, that he can't be harmed by a man "born of woman", and that he won't be conquered until Birnam Wood marches against him. All lovely things for M to hear: who isn't born of a woman and how is a forest going to march against him? After all, this isn't exactly *Lord of the Rings*. Then, instead of solving his ghostie problem, the witches show M Banquo's ghost again and on top of that, the un-born ghosties of Banquo's descendents and tell him that an heir survived the death squad. He goes crazy again, collapses, and somehow wakes up in the castle. However, in our production, Lady M finds M at the witches' cave. Together, Lady M and M plot to take down Banquo's son, Macduff, and all of Macduff's family. Lovely couple bonding time. They succeed in killing off Macduff's wife and children at some point between Acts III and IV (this is the infamous duet that Verdi forced the original cast to rehearse over 150 times). **ACT IV:** A chorus of Scottish refugees lament M's despotism. Macduff, aka "random noble", resolves to avenge the deaths of his family. King Duncan's other son Malcolm decides to join the uprising, and together they and their soldiers grab branches from Birnam Wood as they march against Macbeth's army. We interrupt this battle scene with a brief word from the sponsor and perpetuator of this opera's plot, Lady M, who sings her famous mad scene ("out damn spot!") which is all the more spooky and cool when sung. Says New York Times critic Anthony Tommasini, "[upon this scene's conclusion] you can almost hear Verdi saying, 'Take that, Shakespeare!'" Following much hand-washing, the plot returns to the battlefield. M learns of the coming army, but remembering the words of the witches, feels pretty confident. However, when he sees Malcolm and Macduff's army carrying the branches of Birnam Wood, he begins to quiver in his kilt. To add insult to injury, while fighting Macduff, he learns that Macduff was not born of woman but ripped from his mother's womb. It's all in the semantics. The opera ends in one of 2 ways depending on the version (you will see ending #1 tonight). Ending #1: M is fatally wounded, and like many men, blames women: saying it was the "prophecies of hell" (aka the witches) for causing his ending rather than his own ambition. He dies, and Macduff's men proclaim Macduff the new king rather than King Duncan's son or grandson. Ending 2: Macduff kills M off-stage, returns triumphantly, and the scene ends with a victory chorus sung by bards, soldiers, and Scottish women who are apparently always present at battle scenes. No matter which ending you see, you'll never know how Banquo's escaped son eventually fathers a line of eight kings until Hollywood gives us *Macbeth: The Sequel*.

After-party @ The New Yorker

Join Vivace, the cast and crew of Utah Opera's *Macbeth*, and members of the Utah Symphony for an after-party at one of Salt Lake City's most elegant restaurants, The New Yorker. Enjoy food & non-alcoholic drinks, cash bar. Feel free to take New Yorker's shuttle to-and-from the performance. The New Yorker is located at 60 West Market Street (350 South). You must present your ticket stub to enter, so keep it handy!

Remaining Vivace Events

- 1.30.10: Shostakovich's 10 with Thierry Fischer, Utah Symphony's new Music Director
- 2.27.10: Van Cliburn Gold Medalist (Also: Stravinsky's Symphony in C)
- 4.24.10: *Scheherazade* (Also: Mackey's Percussion Concerto & Vivace's 5th Birthday)
- 5.15.10: Puccini's *Suor Angelica* & *Gianni Schicchi*

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