

# Goldsmiths Research Online

*Goldsmiths Research Online (GRO)  
is the institutional research repository for  
Goldsmiths, University of London*

## Citation

Matsumoto, Naomi. 2015. Charles Marshall's "Dioramic" Scenery: Staging Verdi in Victorian London. In: , ed. Staging Verdi and Wagner. Turnhout: Brepols, pp. 53-80. ISBN 9782503564821 [Book Section]

## Persistent URL

<https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/24081/>

## Versions

The version presented here may differ from the published, performed or presented work. Please go to the persistent GRO record above for more information.

If you believe that any material held in the repository infringes copyright law, please contact the Repository Team at Goldsmiths, University of London via the following email address: [gro@gold.ac.uk](mailto:gro@gold.ac.uk).

The item will be removed from the repository while any claim is being investigated. For more information, please contact the GRO team: [gro@gold.ac.uk](mailto:gro@gold.ac.uk)

# CHARLES MARSHALL'S 'DIORAMIC' SCENERY:

## STAGING VERDI IN VICTORIAN LONDON<sup>1</sup>

*Naomi Matsumoto*

(London)

Without a doubt, I will write to Romani very soon, asking him to work for the *mise en scène*; [...] I must tell you too that, speaking to Sanquirico [the former chief scene painter for La Scala] a few days ago about *Macbeth* and revealing to him my desire to stage the third act with the apparitions effectively, he suggested various ways to me, but the most attractive is certainly [by employing] a *phantasmagoria*. [...] Within the week you will receive the entire third act, the beginning of the fourth, the completed libretto, and – I also hope – the *figurini* [i.e. illustrated costume designs]. I want the *figurini* to be executed well; you can be certain that they will be made well, because I arranged several [designs] to be sent from London, [and] I consulted scholars of the highest order concerning the epoch and the costumes. And they will be checked by Hayez and the others from the Committee [of La Scala on set and costume designs], *etc, etc*<sup>2</sup>.

Verdi's letter dated 21 January 1847 to Alessandro Lanari, the Impresario of the Teatro La Pergola, Florence, is concerned with the preparations for his *Macbeth*. It demonstrates that the composer was preoccupied with, and involved directly in, the staging and costumes of his operas already at this early phase of his career, and it also shows that Verdi respected the standard of theatrical work that was being done in London and the historical material that the city could provide. Modern scholarship has come to understand Verdi as one of the few amongst 19th-century Italian opera composers who possessed «an extraordinary understanding of the visual elements in the creation of

---

<sup>1</sup> My thanks to the staff of Theatre and Performance Archives, the Victoria and Albert Museum (London), the Mary Evans Picture Library (London), the Archivio Storico Ricordi (Milan), and The Bibliloteca Livia Simoni (Milan) for their help with my research. Also I am grateful to Francesca Vella (Cambridge) for her comments upon an earlier version of this article.

<sup>2</sup> See: CESARI, Gaetano - LUZIO, Alessandro. *I copialettere di Giuseppe Verdi*, Milan, S. Ceretti, 1913, p. 447: «Senza dubbio presto presto [sic.] scriverò a Romani, pregandolo anzi perchè s'adopri per la *mise une scène*; [...] Bisogna anche che ti prevenga che, parlando giorni fa con Sanquirico del *Macbeth* ed esternandogli il mio desiderio di montare assai bene il terzo atto delle apparizioni, egli mi suggerì diverse cose, ma la più bella è certamente la *fantasmagoria*. [...] Entro la settimana avrai tutto il terzo atto, il principio del quarto, il libretto terminato e spero anche i figurini. Io desidero che i figurini siano eseguiti bene; puoi esser certo che saran fatti bene, perchè ho mandato a prenderne diversi a Londra, ho fatto consultare da letterati di primissimo ordine l'epoca e i costumi, e poi saranno eseguiti da Hayez e dalli altri della Commissione *ecc. ecc.*».

an opera»<sup>3</sup>, and assesses him as being a «forerunner of Wagner's music drama uniting the resources of all the arts»<sup>4</sup>.

Recent research has uncovered a significant number of original scenic designs for Verdi's operas as well the names of various scenic painters who collaborated with him<sup>5</sup>, but not much has been done regarding those productions of Verdi's operas that took place in London. However, the British capital – the dramatic centre of Shakespearean traditions – presents an interesting case study, since, as Verdi himself makes clear in his letter above, the composer had an interest in London's dramatic activities. This is notwithstanding the fact his Shakespearean operas before *Falstaff* (1893) failed to make much of an impact in England: *Macbeth* was never performed in the British capital but only in provincial cities during the 19th century<sup>6</sup>, while his plan for *Re Lear* never came into fruition<sup>7</sup>.

This article investigates those London productions most directly concerned with Verdi's earlier operas. It also explores the traditions upon which they drew – together with their innovative practices – and examines the possibility that they might have influenced productions on the Continent.

---

<sup>3</sup> BAKER, Evan. 'Verdi's Operas and Giuseppe Bertoja's Designs at the Gran Teatro la Fenice, Venice', in: *Opera in Context: Essays on Historical Staging from the Late Renaissance to the Time of Puccini*, edited by Mark A. Radice, Portland, Oregon, Amadeus Press, 1998, pp. 209-40: 209.

<sup>4</sup> ROSSELLI, John. *The Life of Verdi*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 132.

<sup>5</sup> Those include, for example: PETROBELLI, Pierluigi. - DI GREGORIO CASATI, Marisa. - JESURUM, Olga. (Eds.). *Sorgete! Ombre serene! L'aspetto visivo dello spettacolo verdiano*, Parma, Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani, 1994; PETROBELLI, Pierluigi. - DELLA SETA, Fabrizio. (Eds.). *La realizzazione scenica dello spettacolo verdiano*, Parma, Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani, 1996; HEPOKOSKI, James. 'Staging Verdi's Opera: the single "Correct" performance', in: *Verdi in Performance*, edited by Alison Latham and Roger Parker, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 11-20; JESURUM, Olga. 'Le scenografie verdiane fra Ottocento e Novecento', in: *Il far musica, la scenografia, le feste: Scritti sull'iconografia*, edited by Francesca Zannoni, Rome, Nuova Argos, 2002, pp. 214-221; for the productions by Giuseppe Bertoja (the principal scenographer in 19th-century Venice) and his son, see: BAKER, Evan. *Op. Cit.* (see note 3); and MACOVEZ, Gianluca. 'I Bertoja', in: *Tra melodramma e proclama politico: scene dell'opera della fine del '700 a Verdi*, edited by Gilberto Ganzer and Gianluca Macovez, Treviso, Vianello, 2003, pp. 22-43; for Carlo Ferrario (the scenic designer for La Scala between 1851-81 and in 1887), see: COMPAGNUCCI, Francesca. *Le scenografie verdiane di Carlo Ferrario alla Scala*, unpublished Ph.D.Diss., Rome, Università degli Studi di Roma, La Sapienza, 1991; for Romolo Liverani (who worked for the theatres of Naples, Rome, Florence and Venice between 1830 and 1860) and his son, see: VITALI, Marcella. (ed.). *Romolo Liverani Scenografo*, Faenza, Lega, 1990; and JESURUM, Olga. 'Set designs for Italian Operas By Romolo and Tancredi Liverani', in: *Music in Art: International Journal for Music Iconography*, xxxi/1-2 (2006), pp. 51-61; for Girolamo Magnani (who worked for the Milan premiere of *Aida* in 1872), see: VIALE FERRERO, Mercedes. 'Aida à Milan: L'image de l'Égypte aux archives Ricordi', in: *L'Égyptomanie à l'épreuve de l'archéologie: Actes du colloque international organisé au Musée du Louvre par le Service Culturel les 8 et 9 avril 1994*, edited by Jean-Marcel Humbert, Brussels: Éditions du Gram; Paris, Musée du Louvre, 1996, pp. 531-550; for Filippo Peroni (the principal scenographer at La Scala between 1849 and 1867), JESURUM, Olga. 'Lo spazio del dramma: le scenografie di Filippo Peroni', in: *Pensieri per un maestro: studi in onore di Pierluigi Petrobelli*, edited by Stefano La Via and Roger Parker, Turin, EDT, 2002, pp. 211-226; and for Alessandro Prampolini (who designed the scenery for *Simon Boccanegra* in 1857), 'Prampolini scenografo verdiano', in: *La realizzazione scenica dello spettacolo verdiano* [above], pp. 109-126.

<sup>6</sup> The opera was performed in Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool in 1860. See: RODMELL, Paul. "'Double, double, toil and trouble": Producing *Macbeth* in Mid-Victorian Britain', in: *Verdi Forum*, xxx-xxxI (2003-2004), pp. 37-47.

<sup>7</sup> For Verdi's aborted plan for *Re Lear*, see, for example: CARRARA-VERDI, Gabriella. (Ed.). *Per il Re Lear*, Parma, Istituto Nazionale di Studi Verdiani, 2002.

A central figure in this regard is Charles Marshall (1806-1890) who worked between 1844 and 1858 as ‘Principal Artist’ in Her Majesty’s Theatre, London – the most established Italian opera house in the British capital<sup>8</sup>. Before his retirement in 1858, Marshall was in charge of visual designs for the British premieres of seven operas by Verdi – *Ernani* (on 8 March 1845), *Nabucco* (presented under the title *Nino* on 3 March 1846), *I Lombardi* (on 12 May 1846), *I due Foscari* (on 10 April 1847)<sup>9</sup>, *Attila* (on 14 March 1848), *La traviata* (on 24 May 1856), and *Luisa Miller* (on 8 June 1858)<sup>10</sup>. Additionally, Marshall also worked on the world premiere of *I masnadieri* (on 22 July 1847), the only opera Verdi wrote specifically for London<sup>11</sup>.

Despite the restrictions, – spatial, financial and otherwise – of Her Majesty’s theatre, Marshall created effective dramatic illusions for Verdi’s operas. It was he who recognized the full effects of light and shade on stage and who first introduced limelight. He also employed ‘panoramic’ and ‘dioramic’ techniques – entertainment effects particularly popular among the British public at that time. As we shall see, Marshall’s experience in creating panoramas depicting various exotic scenes enabled his work to take on a striking realism. When Verdi attended the London premiere of his own *Masnadieri* in 1847, Marshall’s skills seem to have satisfied the demanding composer. However, to appreciate fully Marshall’s achievements in scenic design, we need first to understand something of the traditions he inherited.

#### CHARLES MARSHALL'S CAREER AND SCENIC DESIGNS AT HER MAJESTY’S THEATRE

Charles Marshall was born on 31 December 1806 in London. He was a talented painter, and at quite an early age, he became an apprentice of Gaetano Marinari, the chief architectural scene artist at Drury Lane Theatre. Later in that theatre Marshall worked together with other famous scene designers such as Clarkson Stanfield and David Roberts. In the year 1827-1828, Marshall’s oil painting of a landscape was awarded the Gold Isis Medal from the Royal Society for the

---

<sup>8</sup> This theatre was called the King's Theatre before the accession of Queen Victoria in June 1837. However, I will call it ‘Her Majesty’s’ throughout my paper in keeping with its description during the years under review.

<sup>9</sup> The British premiere of *I due foscari* was prepared for 17 April 1847 but a singer's illness made impossible to perform *L'elisir d'amore* on 10 April so that Verdi's opera took place as a substitute.

<sup>10</sup> The dates of the British premieres are taken from: LOEWENBERG, Alfred. *Annals of Opera 1597-1940*, Cambridge, W. Heffer & Sons, 1943. Those dated are confirmed by MARVIN, Roberta M. ‘The Censorship of Verdi’s Operas in Victorian London’, in: *Music & Letters*, LXXXII/4 (2001), pp. 572-610: 607, Appendix I.

<sup>11</sup> For *I masnadieri*, see: MARVIN, Roberta M. *Verdi’s I masnadieri: Its Genesis and Early Reception*, unpublished Ph.D. Diss., Waltham (MA), Brandeis University, 1992; ID. (ed.). *Giuseppe Verdi: I masnadieri*, the Works of Giuseppe Verdi, Chicago, University of Chicago Press/ Milan: Ricordi, Full score, 2000/ Vocal score, 2004. Also see: ID. ‘The Censorship of *I masnadieri* in Italy’, in: *Verdi Newsletter*, XXI (1993[1995]), pp. 5-12; and ‘The Censorship of *I masnadieri* in London’, in: *Verdi Newsletter*, XXV (1998 [2001]), pp. 20-23.

encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce<sup>12</sup>. He pursued his artistic career further, working for the Surrey Theatre under the impresario David Osbaldiston and for Covent Garden under William Macready. Finally in 1844 upon the death of William Grieve, Marshall was appointed the Principal Scene Painter at Her Majesty's and remained in that position until his early retirement in 1858.

Marshall's profile demonstrates his artistic pedigree. However, researching the full extent of his work and the history of Her Majesty's scenic designs has not been easy. Among Marshall's scenic designs, only nine of them are surviving in the Folger Shakespeare Library, in the USA<sup>13</sup>. Formerly belonging to the collection of Charles Kean, the English actor who worked on presenting Shakespeare in a historically-informed manner, they are all in water-colour and seem to have been prepared for Drury Lane's production of *Merchant of Venice*, inaugurated on 20 December 1841. The paucity of his surviving scenic work is because, first, the visual elements of productions such as scenic devices, costumes and props customarily belonged not to each designer but to the theatre, and Her Majesty's theatre was completely destroyed by fire on 9 December 1867<sup>14</sup>. And even before the fire, all sets and scenic devices were auctioned following the theatre's closure between 1852 and 56 owing to financial difficulties instigated by the dispute between Lumley the impresario of Her Majesty's and Gye of Covent Garden over a contract involving Johanna Wagner, a niece of the German composer<sup>15</sup>. Secondly no 'production book' was ever produced in 19<sup>th</sup>-century London. Altogether 12 production books (3 French *livrets de mise en scène*<sup>16</sup> and 9 Italian *disposizioni sceniche*<sup>17</sup>) connected to Verdi's operas are surviving. Such staging manuals were initiated in

---

<sup>12</sup> The information concerning Marshall is taken from: CUST, L. H. - HYDE, Ralph. 'Marshall, Charles (1806–1890)', in: *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, edited by Lawrence Goldman, <<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.catalogue.urls.lon.ac.uk/view/article/18131>>; and an undated newspaper obituary possessed by the Victoria and Albert Theatre and Performance Archives in London. Also, a somewhat narrow discussion focusing upon the family lineage can be found in: MARSHALL, Philip. *Charles Marshall R. A. (1806-90): his Origins, Life and Career as a Panorama, Diorama, Landscape and Scenic Artist*, Cornwall, Aston, 2000.

<sup>13</sup> US-Ws: Prompt.Merch.18.

<sup>14</sup> NALBACH, Daniel. *The King's Theatre 1704-1867*, London, The Society for Theatre Research, 1972, p. 93. Also see: WHEATLEY, Henry Benjamin. *London Past and Present: Its History, Associations and Traditions*, edited by Peter Cunningham, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 199.

<sup>15</sup> For the court case, see: HEVIA, Martin. *Reasonableness and Responsibility: a Theory of Contract Law*, New York and London, Springer, 2012, pp. 135-7.

<sup>16</sup> See: COHEN, H. Robert. 'A survey of French sources for the staging of Verdi's operas: *Livrets de mise en scène*, annotated scores, and annotated libretti in two Parisian collections', in: *Studi verdiani*, III (1985), pp. 11-44. Also see: ID. - GIGOU, Marie-Odile. *The original staging manuscripts for twelve Parisian operatic premieres/Douze livrets de mise en scène lyrique datant des créations parisiennes*, Stuyvesant, NY, Pendragon Press, 1991.

<sup>17</sup> See: ROSEN, David. 'The Staging of Verdi's Operas: an Introduction to the Ricordi *Disposizioni sceniche*', in: *International Musicological Society Report to the 12<sup>th</sup> Conference Berkeley 1977*, edited by Daniel Hertz and Bonnie Wade, Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1981, pp. 444-453 (This article lists all the Verdi production books as well); PETERSEIL, Michaela Peterseil. 'Die '*Disposizioni sceniche*' des Verlag Ricordi: ihre Publikation und ihr Zielpublikum', in: *Studi*

France to make the librettist's staging intentions clear and evident, but then further uses were developed for them, especially so as to offer an exemplar for provincial theatres after the premiere of the work<sup>18</sup>. And with Verdi and Ricordi's collaboration, the *disposizione scenica* itself became something of aesthetically valuable object<sup>19</sup>.

However, the necessity of publishing an aid to the 'authentic' dissemination of a work seemed slight in mid-19th century London. The city rarely hosted the premiere of a new work, despite the fact that the main musico-theatrical repertoire consisted of Italian operas of living or recent composers<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, the Italian opera industry in London was monopolist in most of the years during Marshall's career: up to 1847, Her Majesty's was the sole Italian opera theatre up to 1847 (when the Royal Italian Opera House Covent Garden was established), and even after that, the rivalry of the two theatres existed only intermittently due to Her Majesty's closure mentioned above – the whole situation was simply not comparable to that in the Italian peninsula, with its many local theatres all anxious to instigate as well as receive, new works.

In the absence of production books, the available research resources are largely confined to contemporary newspapers and journals containing theatre-season announcements, along with advertisements, reviews, and illustrations of the stage. Even so, before the second half of the nineteenth century, scenic designers were occasionally named in those advertisements<sup>21</sup>, and the appearance of 'new scenery' was frequently announced in order to attract audiences. Following those and other indications, it has been possible to track down several of the scenic designers working at Her Majesty's theatre prior to Marshall's appointment (See Table 1).

Given the fact that, as London's main Italian opera house, Her Majesty's frequently engaged Italian scene painters (a tradition that commenced with Marco Ricci in 1708)<sup>22</sup>, it is perhaps not surprising that Verdi felt an affinity with its practices. Italianate designs became a hallmark of its productions, and when the famous castrato Giovanni Velluti made his London debut at that theatre in 1825 in Meyerbeer's *Crociato in Egitto*, he felt confident enough in its conventions of taste to

---

*verdiani*, XII (1997), pp. 133-55. The earliest work by Verdi which saw its production book published is *Jerusalem* which was composed in 1847.

<sup>18</sup> FERRERO, Mercedes Viale. 'Theatrical Spaces and Designers', in: *Opera on Stage*, edited by Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli, translated by Kate Singleton, Chicago and London, the University of Chicago Press, 2002 (the History of Italian opera Part II/ Systems Volume 5), pp. 1-123: 42.

<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to Francesca Vella for indicating this to me.

<sup>20</sup> See: HALL-WIT, Jennifer. *Fashionable Acts: Opera and Elite Culture in London 1780-1880*, Durham, NH, University of New Hampshire Press, 2007, pp. 298, Table D4 which shows that the average 'age' of all operas between 1826 and 1860 is 10 to 20 years.

<sup>21</sup> FENNER, Theodore. *Opera in London: Views of the Press 1785-1830*, Carbondale, IL., Southern Illinois University Press, 1994, p. 254.

<sup>22</sup> ROSENFELD, Sybil. *A Short History of Scene Design in Great Britain*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1973, p. 61.

import the designs of costumes and scenery directly from Florence<sup>23</sup>. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the names of Italian scenographers associated with the Theatre included: Gaetano Marinari, Charles Ciceri, Augustine Aglio, and a certain Signor Zara. Those designers were employed by the season as full-time house-painters<sup>24</sup>.

We should note, however, that the interaction between the Italian and English scenic traditions was complex, and led to developments on both sides. In 18<sup>th</sup>-century England, the most elaborate scenic effects were presented for pantomimes. For example, Covent Garden, following the traditions set by John Rich (who established the genre during the 1720s)<sup>25</sup>, often made new scenery and even spectacular changes of scenery a central selling-point of its pantomimes<sup>26</sup>. A major turning point occurred in the late eighteenth century, when the scenery of spoken drama was markedly improved after Garrick put the notable artist Philippe Jacques de Louthembourg in charge at Drury Lane in 1771<sup>27</sup>. Drury Lane subsequently maintained through the work of William Capon, Gaetano Marinari and Clarkson Stanfield a very high standard of scenic art. When an English adaptation of Weber's romantic opera, *Die Freischütz* was performed at that theatre in November 1824, the Wolf's Glen scene created by Stanfield – Marshall's mentor – was considered as something of a sensation<sup>28</sup>. The scene was constructed by «lofty rock on each side surrounding the glen; stunted trees; torrents; a fragile bridge...at least 24-feet high from the stage»<sup>29</sup>. And after the machinists of the theatre transformed the torrent of real water into a cascade of fire,

...the gradual increase of terrific objects in various directions, and the horrific abruption, in which two gigantic figures...rose to the whole height of the stage, formed a phantasma never surpassed in the history of dramatic mechanism<sup>30</sup>.

By contrast, the stage designs of Italian opera were traditionally much simpler – the visual aspect was much less important than for presentations of those ballets which supplemented operas

---

<sup>23</sup> EBERS, John. *Seven Years of the King's Theatre*, London, W. H. Ainsworth, 1828, p. 266.

<sup>24</sup> For the different types of a scenographer's contract at that time, see: ROSENFELD, Sybil. *Op. cit.* (see note 22), p. 62.

<sup>25</sup> WEST, Shearer. 'Manufacturing Spectacle', in: *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre 1737-1832*, edited by Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 286-293: 293.

<sup>26</sup> The newspaper advertisements of John Rich's pantomimes sometimes warned the audience not to enter the stage at all costs in order to change the scenes smoothly and safely. For example, see: 'Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre', *Daily Courant*, 5 December 1715, unpaginated.

<sup>27</sup> BAUGH, Christopher. *Garrick and Louthembourg*, Cambridge, Chadwyck-Healey, 1990. Also see: BARUSH, Kathryn R. 'Painting the Scene', in: *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre 1737-1832*, edited by Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 265-285: 272-276.

<sup>28</sup> BURDEN, Michael. 'The Writing and Staging of Georgian Romantic Opera', in: *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre 1737-1832*, edited by Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 424-441: 438 (Figure 24.1 is an illustration of the Wolf's Glen scene from the 1824 production at Drury Lane.)

<sup>29</sup> STIRLING, Edward. *Old Drury Lane: Fifty Year Recollection of Author, Actor and Manager*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1881, vol. II, p. 109.

<sup>30</sup> RAYMOND, George. *The Life and Enterprise of Robert William Elliston Comedian*, London, G. Routledge, 1857, p. 347.

at Her Majesty's to form an evening's programme. Many scenes for opera were cobbled together from stock items in the theatre store and the main job for the designer was to adapt the existing models for the new work and to add new material where necessary. Italian opera houses – even La Scala – not infrequently employed such 'makeshift' practices for economic reasons up to the last quarter of the nineteenth century<sup>31</sup>.

The pioneering work in theatrical design at Drury Lane prompted, in the 1820s, similar developments at Her Majesty's Theatre. Between 1821 and 1828 when John Ebers, the manager of that theatre, employed the Italian artist Zara, Ebers made it clear that he wanted to make improvements in operatic scenic design with the expectation that Zara would draw up some of the innovations established in other theatres in London<sup>32</sup>. Zara's work did not meet his expectations, since it was criticised as having «a want of finish»<sup>33</sup>. And it was not until the 1830s, through the work of the Grieve Family, that the foundations were laid for the later achievements of Charles Marshall and his productions of Verdi.

An important source of evidence for these developments at Her Majesty's in the 1830s is the little explored collection of 655 original scene designs by John Henderson Grieve (1770/1-1845) and his two sons, Thomas (1799-1882) and William (1800-1844)<sup>34</sup> – the collection has been in the possession of the University of London since 1943<sup>35</sup>. The Grieve family was first associated mainly with Covent Garden, although they also did substantial work for other theatres. But from 1829 they became employed by Her Majesty's with William as the head of the scene room. It is also important to note that the Grieves developed their art not only in relation to musical theatre but also to the strong tradition of spoken theatre in England<sup>36</sup>. Figure 1 is an example of the Grieve's work: the design of the 'Temple of Irminsul' scene for the British premiere of Bellini's *Norma* at Her Majesty's in 1833<sup>37</sup>. The dramatically sculptured set, the impressionistic touch of water-colouring and the receding sliding flats used to create a sense of dramatic perspective were all designed to make atmospheric use of the new gas lighting, first introduced at Her Majesty's as early as 1818<sup>38</sup>.

---

<sup>31</sup> FERRERO, Mercedes Viale. *Op. cit.* (see note 18), pp. 20-21.

<sup>32</sup> EBERS, John. *Op. cit.* (see note 23), pp. 74-76.

<sup>33</sup> UNSIGNED, 'Music', in *New Monthly Magazine* vi (June 1822), pp. 247-9: 249.

<sup>34</sup> For the Grieve family, see: MERWE, Pieter van der. 'Grieve family (per. 1794-1887)', in: *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, edited by h. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition edited by Lawrence Goldman, Jan 2008, <<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.catalogue.urls.lon.ac.uk/view/article/76607>>.

<sup>35</sup> The Grieve Collection originally belonged to Jacob Isaacs, Lecturer in English at King's College, who purchased the paintings from a junk shop around 1939 and was then donated it to the university. See: UNSIGNED. *The Catalogue of the Grieve Family Collection of Stage Designs, the University of London* [unpublished].

<sup>36</sup> They worked many Shakespearean dramas at Covent Garden – see: *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> The first performance took place on 20 June 1833, with Giuditta Pasta as the title role.

<sup>38</sup> REES, Terence A. L. *Theatre Lighting in the Age of Gas*, London, Society for Theatre Research, 1978, p. 11. The main purpose of introducing gas lighting at Her Majesty's seems to have been to allow the audience to socialize better in the auditorium, though.

For the Grieves' 'Temple of Irminsul', more care was taken in order to make it specifically to represent the general setting of opera – the world of the Druids – than for the comparable design by Alessandro Sanquirico for the opera's premiere at La Scala in 1831 (Figure 2). Sanquirico's work represents a generic Roman temple based upon conventions thus 'reusable' for other similar settings such as those required by *Vestale* or *Virgina*<sup>39</sup>. Although skillful and original, the Grieves' design was nonetheless found to be inadequate, and some British critics decried the Grieves' work as «an ostentatious display of profound ignorance»<sup>40</sup> because it held «no difference between Stonehenge and a Corinthian peristyle»<sup>41</sup>. Several layers of confusion lie behind this review<sup>42</sup>, but in any case a concern for traditional and local accuracy was more important in British theatres than in Italian opera houses at that time since there was already an interest in 'antiquarian' and 'ethnic' verisimilitude in displaying the events of their national past or the remote realms to which imperialism had given them access<sup>43</sup>. It was from the background traditions of theatrical design such as these that Charles Marshall emerged and then enhanced when he began to produce his series of eight operas by Verdi in the 1840s and 50s.

#### MARSHALL'S WORK FOR VERDI'S OPERAS AT HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE

Marshall was engaged to produce new scenery for Verdi's *Ernani* in his first season (1845) at Her Majesty's. By that time, several factors attest to the importance of scenery in its productions. Not only do the designs begin to attract extensive comments from the reviewers, but also the theatre's announcements and playbills without fail mention the principal artists' names. Moreover, some of the title pages of the printed librettos for the theatre bear the relevant scenic artist's name alongside the composer's despite the glaring omission of the names of the librettists<sup>44</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> FERRERO, Mercedes Viale. *Op. cit.* (see note 18), p. 91.

<sup>40</sup> UNSIGNED. 'Theatrical Examiner', in: *The Examiner*, 23 June 1833, unpaginated.

<sup>41</sup> UNSIGNED. 'Theatrical Examiner', in: *The Examiner*, 7 July 1833, unpaginated.

<sup>42</sup> First, the critic seemed wrongly to believe that the designer was attempting to portray a Roman temple, but had simply confused its appearance with that of Stonehenge. Second the designer (together with his contemporaries) believed that Stonehenge was a temple of the Druids whereas it was built at least 3000 BC by Ancient Britons in the late Neolithic Period (The Druids are recorded as populating parts of the British Isles c. 50BC-c. 50 AD in various Roman sources). Third, if the temple was in honour of the 'Irminsul', then, that would most likely have placed it among the Saxons, since the first clear reference to 'Irminsul' occurs in the Frankish Annals under the date 772 AD when Charlemagne destroyed an idol with this name (see: SCHOLTZ, Bernhard Walter (ed.). *Carolingian Chronicles: Royal Frankish Annals and Nithard's Histories*, Ann Arbor, the University of Michigan Press, 1970, pp. 48-49). The idol in question seems to have been some kind of petrified or actual ash tree with religious significance – perhaps related to the Yggdrasil, the World Ash-Tree that provided the shaft for Wotan's spear in Wagner's *Ring*.

<sup>43</sup> O'QUINN, Daniel. Theatre and Empire, in: *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre 1730-1830*, edited by Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 233-246: esp. 242-245.

<sup>44</sup> For example, the title page of the *I masnadieri* libretto reads: I MASNADIERI: | A Tragic Opera, | IN FOUR PARTS. | THE LIBRETTO FOUNDED ON THE DRAMA OF | "THE ROBBERS", BY SCHILLER. | COMPOSED EXPRESSLY FOR | Her Majesty's Theatre, | BY | MAESTRO GIUSEPPE VERDI. | THE SCENERY (ENTIRELY NEW) BY | MR. CHARLES MARSHALL. | THE NEW

Marshall's actual work environment was not that easy. Her Majesty's Theatre where Marshall worked was rebuilt in 1791 after being burned down on 17 June 1789, and it remained in use up to 1867 when it again succumbed to fire<sup>45</sup>. When it was being rebuilt in 1791, its size was not increased, since the original theatre had been «too spacious for anything except opera and some forms of tragedy»<sup>46</sup>. The size in fact exceeded that of L'Academie Royale de Musique in Paris, and was comparable only to the Teatro San Carlo in Naples<sup>47</sup>. According to Michael Barron, the volume of the rebuilt theatre was 4550 cubic meters<sup>48</sup>, and within that space, the number of seats was ever increasing<sup>49</sup>. By 1828, the capacity went up to c.2500 seats<sup>50</sup>. The result was that the stage became relatively too small for the size of the audience, and the backstage was never spacious enough to accommodate the large chorus of the theatre and the maneuvering of stage-sets at the same time<sup>51</sup>. As can be imagined, this imposed upon the associated scenic designer various kinds of difficulty<sup>52</sup>.

Moreover, from the management's point of view, much rested on a new project to present works by Verdi at Her Majesty's. The 1845 *Ernani* was the first time for Verdi's work to be introduced to the British audience. Although the reaction from the British audience was not entirely positive, the Theatre's impresario Benjamin Lumley saw great potential in Verdi's work and, in the following year, he commissioned from the composer an opera for the 1846 season.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Verdi's operas bore particular importance for that theatre so strongly associated with Italian opera, because Verdi was the rising star of that tradition<sup>54</sup>. Unfortunately, in January 1846, prior to the opening of the British operatic season<sup>55</sup>, Lumley had a bitter fall-out with Michael Costa, the much-respected Director of Music of Her Majesty's, and the latter walked off with many of the singers

---

COSTUMES (FROM AUTHORITIES) UNDER THE SUPERINTENDENCE OF | MADAME COPERE, | BY. MR. WHALES AND MISS BRADLEY. | THE DECORATIONS BY | MR. EDMUND BRADWELL. | PRODUCED ON THURSDAY, JULY 22, 1847. | THE ONLY CORRECT EDITION. | LONDON: | PUBLISHED AND SOLD AT HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE. The practice of printing the scenic artist's name on the title page of the libretto occurs in the late 1830s, although only occasionally: one of the early examples is: [UNSIGNED]. *Anna Bolena... the music by Donizetti...the scenery and decorations by Mr W. Grieve...*, London, Her Majesty's Theatre, 1839.

<sup>45</sup> NALBACH, Daniel. *Op. cit.* (see note 14), p. 93.

<sup>46</sup> [WRIGHT, Hezekiah Hartley]. *Desultory Reminiscences of a Tour through Germany, Switzerland and France*, Boston, William D. Ticknor, 1838, p. 191.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> BARRON, Michael. *Auditorium, Acoustics, and Architectural Design*, Abingdon: Spon Press, 2010, p. 77.

<sup>49</sup> NALBACH, Daniel. *Op. cit.* (see note 14), p. 84.

<sup>50</sup> See: FOOTES, Horace. *A Companion to the Theatre*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, London, W. Marsh and M. Miller, 1829, p. 90. Also see: ERMELJANOW, Victor. 'Britain', in: *Romantic and Revolutionary Theatre 1789-1860*, edited by Donald Roy, Theatre in Europe: a Documentary History 8, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 3-260: 95.

<sup>51</sup> NALBACH, Daniel. *Op. cit.* (see note 14), p. 148.

<sup>52</sup> See: EBERS, John. *Op. cit.* (see note 23), p. 75.

<sup>53</sup> BUDDEN, Julian. *Verdi*, New York, Prentice Hall, 1985, p. 36.

<sup>54</sup> LUMLEY, Benjamin. *Reminiscence of Opera*, London, Hurst and Blackett, 1864, p. 142. Also see: UNSIGNED. 'The Two Italian Opera Houses: Retrospect', in: *London Daily News*, 23 August 1847, unpaginated.

<sup>55</sup> Traditionally, the season opening was sometime between November and January but Laporte (the impresario of Her Majesty's between 1828-41 with a gap between 1831-3) moved it to February and then to March to attract more members of 'fashionable society' who would not arrive in town until after Easter. See: HALL-WIT, Jennifer. *Op. cit.* (see note 20), p. 158.

and orchestral members<sup>56</sup>. In the meantime, Verdi's new work was also delayed due to the composer's illness. The fortune of the theatre was in peril; consequently, in 1846, Lumley instead put on at Her Majesty's the British premieres of two earlier operas – *Nabucco* and *I Lombardi* – by the composer, who was beginning to become a box-office draw. Hence, when, in 1847, Costa set up a rival opera company also focusing on Italian opera at Covent Garden Theatre<sup>57</sup>, Verdi's works at her Majesty's emerged as the major attraction. Not only did Her Majesty's present the British premieres of *I due Foscari* in April 1847 and *Attila* in March 1848, but it also became the first English opera house to produce a world premier of a work by Verdi – *I masnadieri* in July 1847. By contrast, Covent Garden produced very few of Verdi's operas with the notable exception of *Nabucco* in 1850 under the title *Anato*<sup>58</sup>. They did create the British premiere of *Rigoletto* (14 May 1853) and *Il trovatore* (10 May 1855) but these were later developments and occurred only while Her Majesty's was closed<sup>59</sup>. When Her Majesty's reopened in 1856 it produced *La traviata* in March of that year and *Luisa Miller* in June 1858.

Marshall was responsible for the scenery of all those performances at Her Majesty's. Although Marshall's original sketches for the designs seem to be lost, we can reconstruct some aspects of his work through illustrations of scenes from those operas found in either *the Illustrated London News* (henceforth *ILN*, the world's first illustrated weekly news magazine, published from 14 May 1842 to July 2003)<sup>60</sup>, or the programme booklets of the productions. The Verdi operas attracted varying degrees of media coverage<sup>61</sup>, and (usually) we have some illustrations of the

---

<sup>56</sup> MATSUMOTO, Naomi. 'Michael Costa at the Haymarket: the Establishment of the Modern Role of the Director of Music', in: *Orchestral Conducting in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Roberto Illiano and Michela Niccolai, Turnhout, Brepols, 2014, pp. 25-60: 42-43.

<sup>57</sup> For Verdi's strategies to avoid being involved in the friction between the two theatres when he visited London in 1847, see: BUDDEN, Julian. *Op. cit.* (see note 53), pp. 42-44.

<sup>58</sup> ZITER, Edward. *The Orient on the Victorian Stage*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 136.

<sup>59</sup> The seeming reluctance shown by Covent Garden under Costa towards Verdi's operas may have been the reason why Costa has been sometimes regarded as Verdi's 'enemy'. See: GATTI, Carlo. *Verdi*, Milan, Edizione Alpes, 1931, vol. II, p. 153.

<sup>60</sup> For the English press's coverage of Italian opera, see: LANGLEY, Leanne. 'Italian Opera and the English Press, 1836-56', in: *Periodica Musica*, VI (1988), pp. 3-10, where illustrations of 2 scenes from *i masnadieri* and another from *I Lombardi* found in *ILN* are reproduced.

<sup>61</sup> Surviving illustrations are: for *Ermani*, Act I, Scene 2 (Elvira's apartments) in the printed programme booklet, and II, 1 (a magnificent hall in Silva's castle) in *ILN*, 15 March 1845; for *Nino*, I (inside of the temple of Isis ([in the original *Nabucco*, the temple of Solomon]) in the programme booklet and IV, 1 (the royal apartments) and the design of Abigail's head dress in: *ILN*, 14 March 1846; for *I Lombardi*, III, 1 (Oronte's conversion inside a cave) in *ILN*, 23 May 1846; for *I due Foscari*, II, i (Jacob's delirium in the state prisons) in the programme booklet; For *i masnadieri*, I, 6 (Massimiliano's bedroom) and IV, the last scene (the forest), *ILN*, 31 July 1847; for *Attila*, III, the last scene (Odalba stabs Attila in a wood) in *ILN* 8 April 1848; *La traviata*, II, 2 (Flora's salon), and the main costume for Violetta, *ILN*, 31 May 1856. Also, Alfred Crowquill (1804-1872) left 3 etchings of *La traviata* scenes – I, 1 (the first encounter of Violetta and Alfredo); II, 1 (confrontation between Violetta and Germont); II, 2 (Alfredo's denouncement). Scene divisions here are according to: SADIE, Stanley. (ed.). *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, London, Macmillan, 1992, 4 vols.

scenes. However, no illustration of the *Luisa Miller* production has been found so far, though the reviews of its British premiere were not particularly negative<sup>62</sup>.

The complications of the surviving evidence and what it tells us about the practices of theatrical production will be demonstrated in the following section on Marshall's contribution to the staging of Verdi's *I masnadieri*.

#### MARSHALL AND VERDI: *I MASNADIERI*

It was only on one occasion that Verdi had first-hand experience of working together with Her Majesty's staff; that is when he came to London to direct the premiere of *I masnadieri*<sup>63</sup>. The composer's constant companion Emmanuele Muzio reported from London to Verdi's patron Antonio Barezzi, that Verdi was, after their arrival in London in June 1847, still manically finishing the opera. He also reported that Verdi frequently went to the theatre to supervise rehearsals<sup>64</sup>, and so, he was clearly sanctioning how the production was to be staged. The set Marshall created for *I masnadieri* was «greatly admired and applauded» on the day of the first performance under Verdi's own baton<sup>65</sup>.

We can get some idea of the division of labour at Her Majesty's in a production such as this from a newspaper report published in 1851<sup>66</sup>. According to the description, the staging activity was divided between four departments – Painting, Property, Carpentry and Wardrobe – as is shown in Table 2. Marshall was responsible for the overall design of all the scenery and for painting the main parts of backgrounds, drops (to fall from a roller above), and flats. A three-walled and roofed setting (the so-called 'box set') which was allegedly introduced to British theatres in 1841 seems to have been used rarely at Her Majesty's<sup>67</sup>. The method used by Marshall in painting those objects was described in the report – another indication of the burgeoning interest in matters of scenic construction and design:

---

<sup>62</sup> UNSIGNED. 'Her Majesty's Theatre', in: *The Morning Post*, 9 June 1858, unpaginated.

<sup>63</sup> The composer visited the British capital also in 1854 to secure the rights of *Il trovatore* and in 1855 to do the same with *Les vepres siciliennes* but Her Majesty's was closed. He again visited the city again in 1875 to conduct his *Requiem*.

<sup>64</sup> KIMBELL, David. *Verdi in the Age of Italian Romanticism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 201-202.

<sup>65</sup> UNSIGNED. 'Her Majesty's Theatre: *I masnadieri*', in: *The Morning Post*, 23 July 1847, p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> UNSIGNED. 'Her Majesty's Theatre', in: *The Morning Chronicle*, 20 March 1851, unpaginated.

<sup>67</sup> The precise date of the introduction of the box set is still debated. See: EMELJANOW, Victor. *Op. cit.* (see note 50), p. 243.

His canvas is not usually fixed against the wall...but is laid upon the floor and he thus paints from above it; while, from a light bridge, which crosses the apartment at a considerable height, he can obtain a general view of his work<sup>68</sup>.

It was Verdi that seems to have chosen to compose a new opera for London on the subject of Schiller's drama *The Robbers* (*Der Räuber* published first in 1781) after his ill health prevented him from developing the requested subject of King Lear<sup>69</sup>. Schiller's drama was certainly well known to Londoners as a standard text for German learners although it was only occasionally performed in a theatre<sup>70</sup>. Perhaps, for opera-goers, a better-known work was *I briganti*, Mercadante's opera based upon the same drama, shown at Her Majesty's on 30 June 1836<sup>71</sup> after the impresario Laporte secured the rights after seeing the premiere in Paris<sup>72</sup>. Comparing the required scenery of Mercadante's work and that provided for Verdi's is difficult since only one scene illustration survives for *I briganti* (Figure 3) and two for *I masnadieri* (Figures 4 and 5). However, the descriptions in the libretti give us some idea of the general types of scenery employed. Mary Ambrose has categorised the standard settings of 19th-century Italian opera as follows:

an *esterno* representing a piazza surrounding by noble buildings,  
an *interno*, showing splendid or royal apartments,  
a *luogo sotterraneo*, which might be a sepulchral vault, a subterranean church or prison,  
a *scena di maniera*, a natural setting, usually a woodland for the clandestine meeting of lovers or conspirators;  
*scena rustica*, a rustic interior<sup>73</sup>.

The scenes of both *I briganti* and *I masnadieri* largely follow Ambrose's scheme (see Table 3); therefore it would have been possible for their stage sets to have been made from 'stock' items. In fact, *I briganti* which was never advertised for its new scenery, was almost certainly produced in such a manner, since critics referred to its staging only with clichéd expressions: 'very pretty' and 'picturesque', and a critic cast doubt on the historical accuracy of the costumes<sup>74</sup>. However, the

---

<sup>68</sup> UNSIGNED. *Op. cit.* (see note 66).

<sup>69</sup> LUMLEY, Benjamin. *Op. cit.* (see note 54), p. 192. However, it may well have been the librettist Maffei that chose the subject since he had just translated Schiller's drama into Italian. see: MARVIN, Roberta M. 'Andrea Maffei's "Ugly Sin": the Libretto for Verdi's *I masnadieri* and Scholarly Inquiry in Historical Musicology', in: *Historical Musicology: Sources, Methods, Interpretations*, edited by Stephen A. Crist and Roberta M. Marvin Rochester, Rochester University Press, 2004, pp. 280-301: 281.

<sup>70</sup> The drama was translated into English by Alexander F. Tytler in 1792. It was performed under the title of *Red-cross Knights* at the Haymarket theatre on 25 August 1799.

<sup>71</sup> Loewenberg's annals refers to the British premiere of *I briganti* as 2 July 1836. However, this seems erroneous. LOEWENBERG, Alfred. *Op. cit.* (see note 10), p. 394.

<sup>72</sup> UNSIGNED. 'Her Majesty's Theatre', in: *The Morning Post*, 29 March 1836, p 5.

<sup>73</sup> AMBROSE, Mary. 'Walter Scott, Italian opera, and Romantic Stage-Setting', in: *Italian Studies*, xxxvi (1981), pp. 58-78: 63.

<sup>74</sup> UNSIGNED. 'The Theatre: the King's', in: *The Morning Post*, 1 July 1836, unpaginated: «... the costume would have suggested some doubts as to the accuracy of this chronology, but these matters, as proved in the annals of theatrical management, are unimportant».

scenery of *I masnadieri* was specifically made<sup>75</sup>. And two scenes – Act III, Scene 1 and IV, 5 – make use of one and the same scenery but with different lighting so as to represent different times of the day. This use of lighting is one of the important techniques Marshall developed to make his scenery more than just ‘pretty’ and ‘picturesque’ as we will see shortly. Moreover, there is some (rather complicated) evidence to suggest that the staging team in Her Majesty’s headed by Marshall set the prototype for presentations on the Continent of *I masnadieri*, which would have been in keeping with the Italian practice of taking the premiere production supervised by the composer as the exemplar for later performances. As an illustration of the issues involved we might, for example, look at the interesting array of evidence concerning the transmission of the costumes of *I masnadieri*.

Following the premiere of *I masnadieri* in London, the Italian publisher Francesco Lucca published illustrations of the characters wearing costumes (so-called *figurini*) together with background scenery as insertions for five successive issues of his weekly magazine, *L'Italia musicale* between 24 November and 22 December 1847 (see table 4). At first glance, the figures may seem authoritative since, prior to the opera’s premiere, Lucca advertised in the 7 July issue of his journal that he had acquired the «exclusive, absolute and general» right to publish the libretto, the music and other material concerning *I masnadieri*<sup>76</sup>. He followed up that claim by also publishing details of the plot and characterisations of the protagonists of the opera in the ‘Critica’ section of successive issues of the journal<sup>77</sup>. Eventually, in the 12 January issue of the magazine, he advertised «12 *figurini* distributed among 5 prints» to be sold «in colour 7.50 francs in black and white 5 francs»<sup>78</sup>.

The publication of the *figurini* followed in the wake of a growing concern about effective staging of operas – a concern shared by composers and audience alike. Indeed, Verdi demonstrated a keen interest in producing *figurini* as we have seen in his 1847 letter quoted at the beginning of this article. Moreover just a week before Lucca issued (also in 1847) the first set of the *Masnadieri figurini*, Ricordi announced the sale of *figurini* of Verdi’s *Macbeth* – five of them in lithograph were included later in that year in Ricordi’s magazine, *Gazetta musicale di Milano*<sup>79</sup>. Those five published *Macbeth figurini* seem to have been taken as authoritative, and used as exemplars for a

---

<sup>75</sup> See: note 44.

<sup>76</sup> LUCCA, Francesco. ‘Avviso musicale’, in: *L'Italia musicale*, I, 7 July 1847, reverse of the title page. For the journal's coverage of Verdi, see: CAPRA, Marco. ‘L'Italia musicale’, in: *Cambridge Verdi Encyclopedia*, edited by Roberta M. Marvin, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, Kindle edition.

<sup>77</sup> ID. ‘Critica: *I masnadieri* di Schiller’, in: *L'Italia musicale*, XXI, 24 November 1847, pp. 165-166; XXII, 1 December 1847, pp. 175; XXIII, 8 December 1847, p. 182.

<sup>78</sup> ID. ‘Avviso musicale’, in: *L'Italia musicale*, XXIX, 12 January 1848, reverse of the title page: «Figurini teatrali: Numero dodici figurini divisi in cinque tavole, componenti l'opera *I masnadieri*. In colore, franchi 7.50 - in nero, franchi 5.»

<sup>79</sup> ROSEN, David. - PORTER, Andrew. (ed.). ‘Five *Figurini*’, in: *Verdi's Macbeth: a Sourcebook*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984: pp. 413-419, p. 414.

later production, even if there is some doubt about whether they reflected the premiere<sup>80</sup>. Five hand-drawn and coloured ‘copies’ of the Ricordi *Macbeth figurini* can now be found amongst 23 costume designs for *Macbeth* in the possession of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris. The copies seem to have been made to assist the costumier at the Théâtre-Lyrique when the theatre planned to produce *Macbeth* in 1858<sup>81</sup>.

Interestingly, the *Masnadieri figurini* published in *L'Italia musicale* seem to have been copied and treated with a similar degree of authority to that operating in the Ricordi *Macbeth figurini*. The Archivico storico Ricordi possesses 19th-century, hand-drawn and coloured images of the *Masnadieri* characters, wearing the identical costumes to those depicted in the *I masnadieri figurini* in Lucca's *L'Italia musicale*<sup>82</sup>, but they are differently posed. According to the archive, the hand-drawn images are derived from the *figurini* of *L'Italia musicale* not the other way around. If that is the case, someone probably hand-copied the lithographed figures with the intention of using them as the models for the Milan production of *I masnadieri* on 20 September 1853<sup>83</sup>.

At first glance, then, this seems to be a case of the London costumes appearing in print in Italy and hence being taken as ‘authentic’ representations of Verdi's intentions, and then being used as the basis of the Milan production. However, in spite of Lucca's claims, his original printed *figurini* do not seem to be faithful to the London premiere. Clearly the costumes that the figures of Massimiliano and Amalia wear in *L'Italia musicale* (an image of Act I, Scene 7 also with Arminio; see Figure 6) are different from those published just a week after the premiere in the *ILN* (see Figure 5). Moreover, the Massimiliano figure ‘reproduced’ from the London version in *L'Italia musicale* is surely not a portrait of Luigi Lablanche – the first Massimiliano at Her Majesty's – who was famously portly but not bald as is the performer in the Italian picture. *L'Italia musicale* shows altogether two images of the role of Amalia – the aforementioned one from Act I, Scene 7 and the other with Francesco (Act II). In those two images, curiously, Amalia wears dresses almost identical in design but in different colours (Amalia is supposed to be wearing a mourning dress in Act II). This might have been because Lucca did not have access to all the costume designs for Her Majesty's production but only those for Act II; he then constructed a make-shift dress design for Amalia for Act I, based upon the one used in Act II – therefore, the figures in *L'Italia musicale* are different from those in *ILN*<sup>84</sup>. The fragmentary nature of the information from both the English and

---

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>81</sup> COHEN, H. Robert. ‘*Macbeth* in Paris: New Iconographical Documents’, in: *Verdi's Macbeth: a Sourcebook*, edited by David Rosen and Andrew Porter, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984: pp. 182-198, pp. 192-194.

<sup>82</sup> I-Mr:B4211C01-08. They are also deposited in: *Internet culturale* <<http://www.internetculturale.it>>.

<sup>83</sup> The date of the Milanese performance is taken from: LOEWENBERG, Alfred. *Op. cit.* (see note 10), p. 441.

<sup>84</sup> As if to support this hypothesis, it is only Amalia's second dress-design (from Act II) that seems to have been hand-copied and circulated as the exemplar. No hand-copy image of her dress of Act I is surviving.

Italian sides, it is difficult to reconstruct the whole process of copying and adaptation. Furthermore, the designs in Francesco Lucca's *L'Italia musicale* do not seem to have been accepted as exemplars in the way he had hoped. When the Teatro San Carlo produced *I masnadieri* in 1849, Filippo del Buono – *pittore pe' figurini*<sup>85</sup> – designed the costumes quite differently from those recorded in the Lucca pictures<sup>86</sup>.

Given the gaps in our knowledge concerning the detailed design elements of the London production, it is just possible that the surviving drawings by Bertoja for the Venetian production of the opera in May 1851<sup>87</sup> and those by Romolo Liverani for Teatro Ventidio Basso Ascoli Piceno in October 1851<sup>88</sup> contain certain elements derived from Marshall's original work for the premiere, though perhaps in adapted form, since this was often the method those particular artists employed when they revived works premiered elsewhere<sup>89</sup>. If so, we could say that Verdi's quest for an integrated musical dramatic and scenographic edifice in his works might well have employed more English bricks in its foundations than we have hitherto suspected. Further research should enable us to see into these foundations much more clearly.

#### MARSHALL'S ACHIEVEMENTS

Marshall's scenery was based upon two-dimensional paintings to represent wide vistas in perspective, a method very similar to that used to create the 'panorama' genre. A theatrical 'panorama' is «a 360° view painted on the inside of a larger cylinder and viewed from a platform at its centre»<sup>90</sup> to create an illusion as if the viewer were in that very place. The term was coined and patented by Robert Baker in 1787<sup>91</sup>. From then on, Panoramic displays became a public entertainment and several panorama-shows representing landscapes (domestic as well as exotic) were held.

The vogue for panoramas generated a number of variant genres, not all of them involving 360° perspectives. One such was 'moving panorama' consisting of a series of opaque or transparent

---

<sup>85</sup> Del Buono's name is listed as *pittore pe' figurini* in: MAFFEI, Andrea. *I masnadieri melodramma in quattro atti da rappresentarsi nel Real Teatro San Carlo*, Naples, Flautina, 1849, p. 5.

<sup>86</sup> Verdi was not present in Naples for this production. Cammarano who supervised the production reported to the composer how things were progressing. See: MOSSA, Carlo Matteo. *Carteggio Verdi - Cammarano 1843-1852*, Parma, Istituto nazionale di studi verdiani, 2004, pp. 111-112. Del Buono's *figurini* are surviving at: I-Nc.

<sup>87</sup> Those are currently in the possession of I-Vmc. Images can be seen: <<http://correr.visitmuve.it>>.

<sup>88</sup> Those are currently in the possession of I-Rn. Images can be seen in: JESURUM, Olga. 'Set designs for Italian Operas By Romolo and Tancredi Liverani', in: *Music in Art: International Journal for Music Iconography*, XXXI/1-2 (2006), pp. 51-61: 55-56.

<sup>89</sup> FERRERO, Mercedes Viale. *Op. cit.* (see note 18), pp. 98-99.

<sup>90</sup> WILCOX, Scott. 'Panorama'. *Grove Art Online. Oxford Art Online*, Oxford University Press, accessed August 28, 2014, <<http://www.oxfordartonline.com/subscriber/article/grove/art/T065087>>.

<sup>91</sup> COMMENT, Bernard. *The Panorama*, London, Reaktion Books, 1999, p. 23.

flats to create an effect of representing the change of scenery<sup>92</sup>. Another popular type was the ‘diorama’. The original ‘diorama’ consisted of a flat or slightly curved canvas viewed through an opening with gradual changes in the lighting to «transform the painting in such a way that the same landscape would be seen by night and then by day»<sup>93</sup>. The technique was developed in France and the term was introduced to Britain in 1823 but the meaning was very quickly corrupted; by 1829 it could be applied to mean any series of paintings<sup>94</sup>.

Within the restrictions of a theatre, Marshall’s predecessors – in particular Stanfield and the Grieves family – applied the techniques of the panorama and diorama genres and Marshall built upon their techniques. Marshall had first-hand knowledge of these techniques because, in the 1820s and 30s, he had been engaged in a number of panorama exhibitions, and on 23 March 1841, he opened a new exhibition entitled ‘kineorama’ in London’s Pall Mall, combining both panorama and diorama to present scenes of Turkey, Syria and Egypt<sup>95</sup>. Tragically, however, the venue caught fire on 20 July of that year, resulting in a fatality, which caused enormous trouble to Marshall who had not insured the event<sup>96</sup>.

The accuracy and attention to detail required for panorama-making and the knowledge of the effects of lights for diorama, must have prepared Marshall to produce theatrical scenes which evoked a strong degree of realism (if not the actual ‘reality’) of particular times and places. His work for *I Lombardi* of 1846 was highly acclaimed by a newspaper critic who reported:

...in the second act, we are transported to Palestine, and some of the scenes are perfect chef d’oeuvres of this branch of art, and are, moreover, characterized by a remarkable fidelity, being copied from the best authenticated sketches of the localities they represent. .. The next remarkable scene is a beautiful and most interesting view of Jerusalem, which we see ...at the last act, but under a different aspect – the foreground which before was quite deserted, being then covered with detachments of Lombards. This change is quite *dioramic* [my own italics]<sup>97</sup>.

It seems that Marshall created the settings for *I Lombardi* by painting cloths on brackets to use as back-drops, and for the scene in which the Lombards on their crusade pine for their distant homeland (Act IV, Scene 2), there appeared a sculpted drop depicting their vision of the city. This is

---

<sup>92</sup> ALTICK, Richard Daniel. *The Shows of London*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, pp. 198-9.

<sup>93</sup> COMMENT, Bernard. *Op. cit.* (see note 91), 57.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 174.

<sup>95</sup> UNSIGNED. ‘Kineorama’, in: *Morning Post*, 24 March 1841, unpaginated.

<sup>96</sup> UNSIGNED. ‘Singular and awful death of a gentleman’, in: *Morning Post*, 21 July 1841, unpaginated. Despite this regrettable experience, Marshall continued to work for similar exhibitions. The synopsis and newspaper cuttings of his ‘great moving diorama illustrating the grand routes of a tour through Europe’ (1851) are surviving. See: *Synopsis Historical and Statistical of Mr Charles Marshall’s Great Moving Diorama*, London, F. Shephard, 1851. And for an illustration of the event, see: *ILN*, 22 Feb 1851.

<sup>97</sup> A newspaper cutting at the Theatre and Performance Archives, the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The bibliographical details lost.

evidenced by the fact that various scenic props for *I Lombardi* along with painted depictions of Arvino's palace, St Ambrose's Cloister, the tomb of Rachel and other locations are found in an auction catalogue issued when the bankrupted theatre had to sell everything in 1853<sup>98</sup>.

What gave Marshall's work more nuance and depth seemed to be his clever usage of light<sup>99</sup>. It is usually asserted traditionally that Limelight (originally known as 'phoshelioulamproteron' and later called 'Drummond light' named after the inventor) was introduced first to the theatre on 26 December 1837 at Covent Garden under the management of Macready<sup>100</sup>. However, already in 1834, the Royal Gardens at Vauxhall made use of a similar device for a beam of light (the Oxy-hydrogen microscope) for an entertainment entitled *Grand Juvenile Fete*<sup>101</sup>. Three years later, on 23 November 1837, the Surrey Theatre where Marshall was in charge of staging produced an exhibition called *The sculptor's workshop* which presented the stage under limelight – a month before the Covent Garden episode<sup>102</sup>. Thus, Marshall seems to have been the one who first introduced the limelight device on a stage in a theatre.

Marshall's ability to make the best of the effects of light and shade was demonstrated, for example, in the 'sunrise' scene from *Attila* in which «the sunlight supersedes the dark atmosphere on the marshy bank of the Adriatic»<sup>103</sup>. Marshall employed «copper and iron gas pipes» to bring about the effect<sup>104</sup>. Verdi had a particular concern for this sunrise scene of *Attila*, requiring it to be «particularly well done», since he had carefully depicted the scene in his music<sup>105</sup>, a correlation that

---

<sup>98</sup> UNSIGNED. *A Catalogue of the 1<sup>st</sup> portion of the Valuable Properties of Her Majesty's Theatre*, London, Alfred Robins, 1851, p. 39. The auction started on 14 March 1853 and lasted several days. In addition to the Lombardi items, the auction catalogue recorded: backdrops of the Mountain of Aragon (for *Ernani*); the Column of Nino; Nino's Royal Apartment, Jerusalem Garden, and the Hanging Garden (all for *Nino* [*Nabucco*]); the Doge's palace for *Due Foscari* and so on. All these stage-sets were preserved in the Theatre's storage room as well as the 'painting loft' – and amongst them, some bore Marshall's signature.

<sup>99</sup> CUST, L. H. - HYDE, Ralph. *Op. cit.* (see note 12).

<sup>100</sup> GOODMAN, Lawrence P. 'More Light on the Limelight', in: *Theatre Survey*, x/2 (November 1969): pp. 114-120, p. 114. Also see: BERGMAN, Gösta M. *Lighting in the Theatre*, Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977, p. 273.

<sup>101</sup> UNSIGNED. 'Royal Gardens Vauxhall', in: *Morning Chronicle*, 15 July 1834, unpaginated. Also, in June of 1837, the Vauxhall Garden held at the Rotunda an entertainment entitled *L'Atelier de Canova* in which seems to have used a proper limelight. See: BAUGH, Christopher. 'Scenography and Technology', in: *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre 1730-1830*, edited by Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 43-56: 53.

<sup>102</sup> UNSIGNED. 'Royal Surrey Theatre', in: *Morning Post*, 23 November 1837, unpaginated. Also see: LAMBERT, M. Lindsay. 'New Light on Limelight', *Theatre Notebook*, XLVII/ 3 (1993), pp. 157-163.

<sup>103</sup> UNSIGNED. 'Her Majesty's Theatre', in: *Morning Chronicle*, 15 March 1848, unpaginated.

<sup>104</sup> UNSIGNED. *Op. cit.* (see note 98), p. 37.

<sup>105</sup> Verdi's words are recorded in a letter from Lanari to the 'President of the Spectacles' of Teatro La Felice. See: CONATI, Marcello. *La bottega della musica: Verdi e La fenice*, Milan, Il Saggiatore, 1983, p. 159: «... sia ben fatto l'alzare del Sole, che io voglio esprimere colla musica». Also see: GOSSETT, Philip. *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 2006, p. 464. For a discussion of the Sun-rise scene in *Attila* in relation to musical conventions at that time exemplified by Félicien David's *Le Désert* and others, see: GREENWALD, Helen M. 'Son et lumière: Verdi, *Attila*, and the sunrise over the lagoon', in: *Cambridge Opera Journal*, XXI/3 (2010), pp. 267-277.

was not always achieved as we know from an account of the sunrise scene in *Attila* at La Scala in 1846, when the sun came up before the music for it arrived<sup>106</sup>.

Other problems arose from the depiction of domestic interiors. Living spaces such as those found in Verdi's *La traviata*, were inadequately represented by the traditional use of painted backdrops alone. It became common at Her Majesty's to deploy real furniture (including tables, chairs, sofas, ottomans and imitation pianos) across the stage. Some items were 'made to measure' by the property department of the theatre (headed by Mr Bradwell) in order to accommodate somewhat capacious opera singers such as Lablanche who played Massimiliano in *I masnadieri*<sup>107</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

There seem to have been several respects in which Her Majesty's scenographic practices were in accord with Verdi's staging aesthetics. First, it was stipulated that, for each of Verdi's operas the scenery would be constructed «expressly by Mr Charles Marshall», specifically for that particular work, rather than cobbled together from items used in previous productions. Also, as the auction catalogue for Her Majesty's from 1853 demonstrates, that theatre (unlike, for example, La Scala) took the trouble to keep the scenery in storage for revival performances<sup>108</sup>, thus maintaining the dramaturgical integrity of the different elements of the presentation. Moreover, this meticulous control ensured that the job of constructing scenery and the like was always finished promptly by the first performance – unlike, for example at La Fenice in 1844 which produced Verdi's *Ernani* on the stage before the scenery and costumes were even completed<sup>109</sup>. Again, the technical experience at Her Majesty's allowed innovations and experiments to take place, and to be properly prepared, unlike the debacle with the sunrise music in Verdi's *Attila* at La Scala in 1846, which we have already mentioned. Finally, as we have seen, Marshall's expertise was given equal status with the other 'artistic' accomplishments (musical, orchestral *etc*) that contributed to the production. Moreover, he strove to provide sets in keeping with Verdi's concept of dramaturgy – which he referred to as the *Dramma* – thus, combining all elements of the staging, text, music, vocal display, and the visual appearance in effective harmony<sup>110</sup>. Charles Marshall's sets range from rustic events in the open countryside (*I Ernani* and *I masnadieri*), to the domestic inner dramas of *Luisa Miller*

---

<sup>106</sup> BAKER, Evan. *Op. cit.* (see note 3), p. 217.

<sup>107</sup> UNSIGNED. *Op. cit.* (see note 66).

<sup>108</sup> Her Majesty's Theatre had storage rooms within the site as well as in a separate building in St James Street. See: UNSIGNED. *Op. cit.* (see note 65).

<sup>109</sup> See: ROSSELLI, John. 'Opera Production, 1780-1880', in: *Opera Production and Its Resources*, edited by Lorenzo Bianconi and Giorgio Pestelli, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998 (The History of Italian Opera, Part II/system, volume 4), pp. 81-164: Figure 16.

<sup>110</sup> HEPOKOSKI, James. *Op. cit.* (see note 5), p. 15. Cf: CESARI, Gaetano - LUZIO, Alessandro. *Op. cit.* (see note 2), p. 441.

and *La traviata*, the exoticism of remote Antiquity (in *Nabucco* and *Attila*) and the carefully constructed historical scenes of *I Lombardi* and *I due Foscari*.

Marshall and his contemporaries were at the centre of a crucial shift in scenic art, moving away from ‘the picturesque’ (with its concern for harmonious proportion between visual elements on the stage) and towards ‘the realistic’ which eventually eschewed the use of painted backdrops altogether. This transition inevitably altered the expectations and perceptions of those who viewed and received the new theatrical realism – as well as those who composed operas. In so doing, it played an important part in lessening the need for ‘a willing suspension of disbelief’ in the theatre, and thus formed an essential background for a general shift from ‘entertainment’ to a more profound ‘art’, as artifice gave way to the depiction of the starker realities of the world outside the theatre, and as ‘beauty’ was replaced by the pursuit of ‘truth’. Charles Marshall’s engagement with Verdi’s operas played no small part in this theatrical revolution.