Michael Finnissy

PIANO WORKS

Ian Pace • Piano

Disc A

Verdi Transcriptions (1972-2005)*, **Book 1**

1.	I.	Aria: 'Sciagurata! a questo lido ricercai l'amante infido!', *Oberto* (Act 2)	5:17
2.	II.	Trio: 'Bella speranza in vero', *Un giorno di regno* (Act 1)	2:25
3.	III.	Chorus: 'Il maledetto non ha fratelli', *Nabucco* (Part 2)	1:25
4.	IV.	Chorus: 'Fra tante sciagure...', *I Lombardi* (Act 3)	2:09
5.	V.	Septet with Chorus: 'Vedi come il buon vegliardo...', *Ernani* (Part 1)	4:21
6.	VI.	Choral Barcarolle: 'Tace il vento, è queta l'onda', *I Due Foscari* (Act 3)	5:52
7.	VII.	Aria: 'So che per via di triboli', *Giovanna d'Arco* (Act 1)	2:46
8.	VIII.	Duet: 'Il pianto...l'angoscia...di lean mi priva', *Alzira* (Act 2)	3:19
9.	IX.	Aria: 'Mentre gonfiarsi l'Anima', *Attila* (Act 1)	7:05

Verdi Transcriptions (1972-2005)*, **Book 2***

10.	X.	Duetto: 'Vanitosi! Che abietti e dormenti', *Attila* (Prologo)	5:05
11.	XI.	Coro: 'Patria oppressa! Il dolce nome...', *Macbeth* (Act 4, 1847 version)	1:47
12.	XII.	Duetto: 'Qual mare, qual terra....', *I masnadieri* (Parte Terza)	4:07
13.	XIII.	Récit et Duo: 'Non, ce bruit, ce n'est rien...', *Jérusalem* (Act 1)	3:14
14.	XIV.	Romanza: 'Non so le tetre immagini', *Il Corsaro* (Act 1)	1:16
15.	XV.	Inno di Vittoria: 'Dall'Alpi a Caridi echeggi vittoria!', *La Battaglia di Legnano* (Act 4)	1:48
16.	XVI.	Scena e Quartetto: 'Rea fucina d'empie frodi...', *Luisa Miller* (Act 2)	1:12
17.	XVII.	Duetto: 'Opposto é il calle che in avvenire', *Stiffelio* (Act 3)	3:32
18.	XVIII.	Scena e Coro: 'Vendetta del pazzo! Contr'esso un rancore', *Rigoletto* (Act 1)	0:51

Five Yvaroperas (1993-95)*

19.	Yvaropera 1	3:33
20.	Yvaropera 2	2:37
21.	Yvaropera 3	3:29
22.	Yvaropera 4	3:21
23.	Yvaropera 5	4:04

Total Playing Time 75:28

Disc B

Verdi Transcriptions (1972-2005)*, **Book 3***.

1.	XIX.	Canzone: 'La donna è mobile', *Rigoletto* (Act 3)	1:03
2.	XX.	Duo: 'Vivra! Contende il giubilo', *Il trovatore* (Act 4, scene 1)	1:19
3.	XXI.	Duetto: 'È nulla, sai?', *La traviata* (Act 3)	3:05
4.	XXII.	Boléro: 'Merci, jeunes amies, d'un souvenir si doux!', *Les vêpres siciliennes* (Act 5, scene 2)	5:30
5.	XXIII:	Scena: 'Tradimento!', *Simon Boccanegra* (Finale dell'Atto Primo, 1857 version)	3:33
6.	XXIV:	Coro, Burrasca e Finale: 'Allora che gl'anni', *Aroldo* (Act 4)	8:25
7.	XXV:	Stretta: 'Ogni cura si doni al diletto', *Un ballo di maschera* (Act 1)	1:56
8.	XXVI:	Romanza: 'Me pellegrina ed orfano', *La forza del destino* (Act 1)	4:44
9.	XXVII:	Aria: (a) 'Trionfai! Securi alfino' (1847), (b) 'La luce langue' (1864-5), *Macbeth* (Act 2)	4:02

English Country-Tunes

10.	Green Meadows	9:32
11.	Midsummer Morn	4:30
12.	I'll give my love a garland	8:39
13.	May and December	6:14
14.	Lies and Marvels	3:59
15.	The seeds of love	4:19
16.	My bonny boy	6:35
17.	Come beat the drums and sound the fifes	4:12

Total Playing Time 80:14

Disc C

Verdi Transcriptions (1972-2005)*, **Book 4***

1.	XXVIII:	Chorus: 'S'allontanarono! N'accozzeremo', *Macbeth* (Act 1)	4:55
2.	XXIX:	(a) Duo: 'Restez! Auprès de ma personne' (Acte II, Tableau II); (b) Duo: 'J'ai tout compris' (Acte IV, Tableau I), *Don Carlos* (1866-7)	11:35
3.	XXX:	Romanza: 'O cieli azzuri...', *Aida* (Act 3)	1:10
4.	XXXI:	String Quartet: (a) III. Prestissimo, (b) IV. Scherzo fuga	5:06
5.	XXXII:	Aria: 'Cielo, pietoso, rendila', *Simon Boccanegra* (Act 2)	6:34
6.	XXXIII:	Aria: 'Tu che la vanità conoscesti', *Don Carlo* (Act 5)	22:39
7.	XXXIV:	(a) Ballet No. 3: 'Chanson Grecque' (Cancone Greca); (b) Scena: 'Una gran nube turba', *Otello* (Act 3, Finale)	3:03
8.	XXXV:	'Brava! Quelle corna saranno la mio gioia!', *Falstaff* (Act 3, Part 1)	4:55
9.	XXXVI:	I. 'Requiem Aeternam', *Messa da Requiem*	10:13

Total Playing Time 70:15

Disc D

1.	**Romeo and Juliet are Drowning** (1967)*	4:12
2.	**William Billings** (1990-91)*	4:01
	Beethoven's Robin Adair (2015)*	
3.	Beethoven's Robin Adair 1	7:35
4.	Beethoven's Robin Adair 2	1:45
5.	Beethoven's Robin Adair 3	3:16
6.	Beethoven's Robin Adair 4	3:43
7.	Beethoven's Robin Adair 5	1:21
8.	Beethoven's Robin Adair 6	2:34
9.	Beethoven's Robin Adair 7	3:19
10.	**Rossini** (1991)*	2:27
	Preambule zu "Carnaval", gefolgt von der ersten und zweiten symphonischen Etüde nach Schumann (2009-10)*	
11.	Preambule zu Carnaval	3:05
12.	Symphonische Etude 1	6:03
13.	Symphonische Etude 2	4:14
14:	**What the meadow-flowers tell me** (1993)*	2:20
	Brahms-Lieder (2015)*	
15.	1-	1:33
16.	2-	1:53
17.	3-	1:48
18.	4-	3:33
	Strauss-Walzer (1967, rev. 1989)	
19.	Wo die Zitronen blühn	4:11
20.	O, schöner Mai	2:50
21.	Geschichten aus dem Wienerwald	4:22

Total Playing Time 70:05

Introduction

This CD set is focused around Finnissy's second epic cycle for piano, the *Verdi Transcriptions* (the longest after *The History of Photography in Sound*, which I recorded complete for Métier MSV 77501), together with the second complete recording (after the composer's own) of *English Country-Tunes*, one of the composer's most notorious and iconic works. The recording of the *Verdi Transcriptions* should not be confused with my earlier recording (Métier MSV 92027) of the much shorter set such as existed at the time of recording (1998). In this, Book 1 was the same as in this final version, but the remainder entailed a few pieces or fragments which made their way later into Books 2-4, often in significantly modified form. The earlier version was around half the length of this, all the recordings here are new, and my approach to performing it has changed significantly over the intervening two decades. The remainder of the set is made up of a series of works mostly alluding to late-18th and 19th century music, to give a broad view of Finnissy's extensive output making use of reference, allusion, paraphrase, recomposition, but here as relates primarily to romantic aesthetics.

Verdi Transcriptions – Programme Note by Michael Finnissy

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

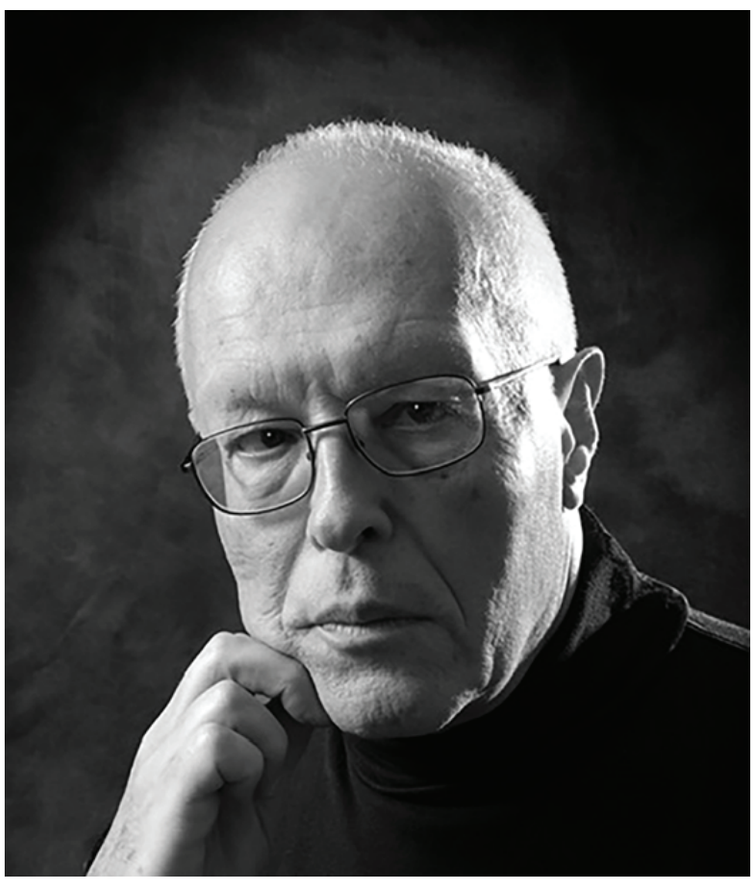
I was also working on a set of piano studies at this time, trying always to broaden the scope (perhaps 'drama' and typology) of my work. I was also spending a lot of time travelling around Europe for concerts, and playing for the Royal Opera ballet (classes and rehearsals). This latter proximity to 19th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

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

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

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

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



Michael Finnissy

Verdi Transcriptions

The first book of the *Verdi Transcriptions* was the first work of Finnissy's that I learned; ever since then these pieces have had a special place in my affections, notwithstanding the rest of Finnissy's vast output for the piano, the entirety of which I have performed during the interim period. The work underwent various modifications and additions through the course of its history: for publication in 1995, three 'fragments' were added to the then six pieces comprising Book 2. I performed this newly complete set soon after its publication and later recorded it. In 2004-2005, Finnissy undertook a massive expansion and revision of the earlier work. Book 1 is identical with its earlier version, but the earlier Book 2 is a different work to the current book of the same number. The earlier Book 2 contained transcriptions from *La forza del destino, Macbeth*, *Attila*, *Aida*, *I masnadieri*, and *Don Carlo*, with the three 'fragments' from *Simon Boccanegra*, *La traviata* and *Aroldo*. Practically all the original material occurs in the final cycle, but in various forms: the transcriptions from *Macbeth*, *Aida* and *Don Carlo* all remain in their original form, each now appearing in Book 4, while the transcriptions from *La forza*, *Attila*, and *I masnadieri* have all been expanded with new material intercut into the pieces at various places. The material in the 'fragments' generally occurs in the later pieces on those operas (in the case of *Boccanegra*, in the Book 4 transcription of the later version), but as a relatively small part of more diverse conceptions. One can hopefully assume that, give or take the odd possible future modification of detail, this version constitutes Finnissy's final word!

There are many other factors to consider with respect to Verdi's music. Not least of these are the explicitly political dimensions of the work of both Verdi and his librettists, which despite some rather embarrassing moments, stand up reasonably well in the modern age (in many ways better than those of Wagner, for example). Whilst all of Verdi's operas prior to *La traviata* (with the arguable exception of *Il Corsaro*) have as most of their principal figures members of various ruling classes (Counts, Kings, Holy Roman Emperors, Barons, Dukes, Governors, Doges, noblemen and women, and their families and entourages), Verdi does not simply glorify such figures, nor necessarily present the particularity of their (privileged) situation as a metaphor for the concerns of all of humanity. On the contrary, both he and his librettists were acutely aware of their flaws, petty vanities and jealousies, greed and hunger for power. Verdi also had little time for the then outdated *opera buffa* convention of presenting lower class people as figures of fun to be laughed at in a patronising manner by aristocratic and *haute bourgeois* audiences (such a convention even extends to some extent into Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'amore* (1832), though handled somewhat dialectically). On the contrary, those characters of lesser social standing are portrayed both dramatically and musically with great complexity and humanity (for all the vengefulness of Rigoletto, for example, one feels him to be a character of much greater tragic stature than the fickle and vacuous aristocrats he serves). Like Mozart before him, Verdi is rarely happy with idle stereotypes,

bringing a markedly individual attitude to generic conventions practically from the outset of his career. The women in Verdi's early operas tend to exist primarily in terms of their relationships with men (with some exceptions, not least the character of Abigaille in *Nabucco* or the title role in *Giovanna d'Arco*), but they are by no means idly subservient in this respect (not least Elvira, forced to fight off unwanted advances by two of her three suitors in *Ernani*). In *La traviata*, we are presented with a female lead role (based on the real life character of Marie Duplessis) whose independence of purpose - at least at the outset, when she desires not to abandon her life as a courtesan in favour of marriage - shocked the audiences and censors of the time, forcing the Teatro Fenice to reset the production in the early 18th century (rather than in modern times as originally intended) so as to make it seem more historically distant.

It would be foolish to try and present Verdi as some sort of far-seeing political radical, of course; he was a bourgeois composer for a bourgeois audience, but at a time when sections of the Italian bourgeoisie continued to adhere to some radical ideas. Verdi had both a keen interest and passionate convictions with respect to contemporary events; many of those numerous operas set in distant times served as metaphors for contemporary political concerns. But one should not overlook the more questionable aspects of the works as well. The rather sentimental nationalism arguably to be found in *Nabucco*, *Giovanna d'Arco*, *La battaglia di Legnano* and *Les vêpres siciliennes*, which of course had a powerful meaning in the context of the lead-up to the *Risorgimento*, looks at best somewhat quaint from a 20th or 21st century perspective. The tyrannical role assigned to the Muslim character Acciano in *I Lombardi*, or the Emir of Ramla in *Jérusalem*, both set at the time of Crusades, with Christian Crusaders as heroes (as is also the case in *Aroldo*), let alone the fact that in the former opera Acciano's wife Sofia and son Oronte are redeemed by the fact that they have secretly converted to Christianity, attain new meanings in a post-colonial era in which tensions between the Western and Muslim worlds have exacerbated. The 'Harem's Chorus' in both operas, as a dramatic device to give propagandistic support to the Crusaders, has a new immediacy (though not in the manner imagined at the time) in light of the propaganda accompanying the 'War on Terror', a form of propaganda which can be traced right back to the very time of the Crusades, and has informed many Western cultural constructions of the Islamic world ever since (not least in Mozart's *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*). Nor is another Muslim character in Verdi, Otello, portrayed in that much more of a favourable light. Furthermore, one character who may in an early conception have been intended to be homosexual, Oscar in *Un ballo in maschera*, constitutes one of the most puerile and vacuous roles in the whole of Verdi's output.

Verdi's first sixteen operas were written between 1837 and 1850, a rate of productivity which, while not matching that of Rossini or Donizetti (who produced over 70 operatic works during his 51-year life), is nonetheless remarkable. Verdi would call this period his 'galley years'. He worked within the

conventions of Italian operatic genres from the outset (never completely abandoning them, even in *Falstaff*), marrying the achievements of Rossini, Bellini and Donizetti to other influences from Mozart or the French grand opera of Meyerbeer, Auber and Halévy. At the same time, his instrumental writing, especially in some of the more chromatically adventurous interludes and introductions, shows a clear debt to Beethoven. Later influences would include Offenbach (in *Un ballo in maschera*) and even Wagner at places in *Otello* and *Falstaff*. The earliest operas, while certainly sometimes patchy in quality, are almost never simply formulaic; each has its own very distinct identity. Characters and their musical portrayals interact with generic conventions, but always with some degree of individuation. Verdi's musical language is extravagant without too many excursions into empty bombast (compare Verdi's French opera *Jérusalem* with much of Meyerbeer, for example). Many of the scenarios are very dark, dealing with motivations of revenge, covetousness, envy, lust for power, and other such human weaknesses. Somehow comic opera eluded Verdi for the most part: only two of his operas, *Un giorno* and *Falstaff* are comedies, and each rely on a degree of stereotypical portrayal to make their point.

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

The post-*Rigoletto* operas are generally well-known, *Il trovatore* for its melodic distinctiveness and fascinating opposition between the two female characters, one (Leonora) a lady-in-waiting to a Princess, the other (Azucena) a gypsy woman; *La traviata* for the radical nature of its subject matter and the underlying tragic qualities of its musical material (even in the more 'upbeat' moments); *Simon Boccanegra* for the seriousness and through-composed music to match the labyrinthine plot; *Un ballo in maschera* for its exuberance, French influences, and raw evil evinced in the characters of Samuel and Tom; *La forza del destino* for its many memorable elements within such an extended and multi-faceted story (though this work has had its detractors); *Don Carlos* for the subtlety of its characterisation and the channelled reserve of the French idiom; *Aida* for its blending of dignity with passion (such as in

the incomparably moving final scene); both *Otello* and *Falstaff* for their fusion of all Verdi's previous achievements and subtlety of music and characterisation, operas which can arguably stand their own alongside the works of Wagner, whose rival conception of music drama was rarely far from Verdi's thoughts as the German composer's reputation grew.

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

As Finnissy describes above, there is a commonality of structure between the four books, each containing a first piece that uses closely-backed chords to create a type of para-microtonal effect, shifting up register with each book (these are the transcriptions after *Oberto,* the second *Attila*, the second *Rigoletto* and the final *Macbeth*), a piece in the fifth position (actually in the fourth in Book 2 – the numbering is slightly altered in this volume) which combines a clearly identifiable tonal melody with a two-part canon in the other hand (the pieces after *Ernani*, *Jérusalem*, *Boccanegra* (1857), and *Boccanegra* (final 1881 version)), a scherzo-like staccato movement in the fourth position (*I Lombardi*, *I masnadieri*, *Les vêpres,* String Quartet), a more extended fantasia in the sixth position (not really in the short Book 2, but in the works after *Foscari*, *Aroldo* and *Don Carlo*), and a Busoni-based work in the eight position (*Alzira, Stiffelio*, *La forza del destino* and *Falstaff*). In other pieces, rhythmic, configural or other elements are mirrored in different books – for example, the rhythmic structure of the *Giovanna d'Arco* transcription is replicated in the works after *Luisa Miller*, *Un ballo* and *Otello*; elsewhere, the figurations at the beginning of the first *Attila* transcription are used at the beginning of the bipartite *Macbeth* work at the end of Book 3. In Book 2, each piece begins with a pitch a whole tone higher than that in the previous one – from F5 in piece X (after *Attila*) to A6 in piece XVIII (after *Rigoletto*); then continued with B6 in piece XIX from Book 3 (also after *Rigoletto*), after which the pattern is broken. Various other levels of cross-reference exist (I hear distant allusions to *Rigoletto* in the second *Attila* transcription, and to *Traviata* at the end of *Aroldo*, for example). In essence, most of the types

of writing are introduced within the first book, though of course subject to significant extension and modification as the cycle progresses. Through the course of the cycle, various musical 'archetypes' recur, including pairs of stepwise descending dyads, or passages in recurrent dotted rhythms which can be either jaunty or menacing, depending upon context and configuration.

The chronological structure obviously gives the work the sense of a traversal through Verdi's life and career, but the ordering also elucidates Finnissy's changing and deeply personal perspectives on Verdi and the nature of 'transcription' itself over an extended period of composition. In some pieces (not least the fifth pieces in each book mentioned above), the Verdi original is clearly audible, though generally presented in a more elaborately chromatic rendering in the manner of the transcriptions of Leopold Godowsky (Finnissy said in one interview that part of the appeal of Godowsky for him was the way the slippery inner parts blurred the sense of tonality). At the other extreme one has pieces such as that after *Foscari*, or the final *Macbeth* piece, where the original exists on 'deep background', with no clearly identifiable allusions or surface similarities; the first of these is taken primarily from the withdrawn *Piano Studies* (1977-79), the second from a withdrawn work for piano and ensemble, *Long Distance* (1977-78); Finnissy also uses material from another withdrawn work, *Guwark* (1982), for part of the transcription from *I masnadieri*. In these cases, Finnissy is pushing the conception of 'transcription' to its limits, capturing an individual perspective on the moment in the opera and all it entails rather than trying to remind the listener of the actual Verdi music in question. Other works (especially in Book 2) have fleeing allusions to recognisable material, but presented in extremely fragmented, disembodied and enigmatic forms (Finnissy once described his Verdi materials as like 'fish out of water').

Book 1 in particular is pronouncedly 'abstract' in nature, and most of it could be mistaken for totally 'original composition' (if such a thing exists) by a listener unfamiliar with the references. However, as the total work progresses, the tonal elements become clearer and are allowed a more extended exposition, culminating especially in the works after *Don Carlos*, *Aida* and the *Messa da Requiem*. This illuminates deep questions for the performer that exist to some extent throughout the cycle: to what extent should they foreground the allusive elements, thus emphasising the work's perceived rootedness in a nineteenth-century musical language, or conversely make more of the stranger, often atonal writing that generally accompanies such elements? The latter was once my general approach to this music; nowadays I have modified and relaxed my perspective a little, not least through greater recognition of the extent to which many of the more arcane elements have their own roots in 'tradition' as well. The works derived from *Ernani* and *Aida* always had a problematic status to me; the sheer profile and identifiability of the musical references contained therein would draw attention to themselves to such an extent as to dwarf much else that surrounds them, either in the pieces themselves or the neighbouring transcriptions. I cannot accept that this cycle (or other directly referential works

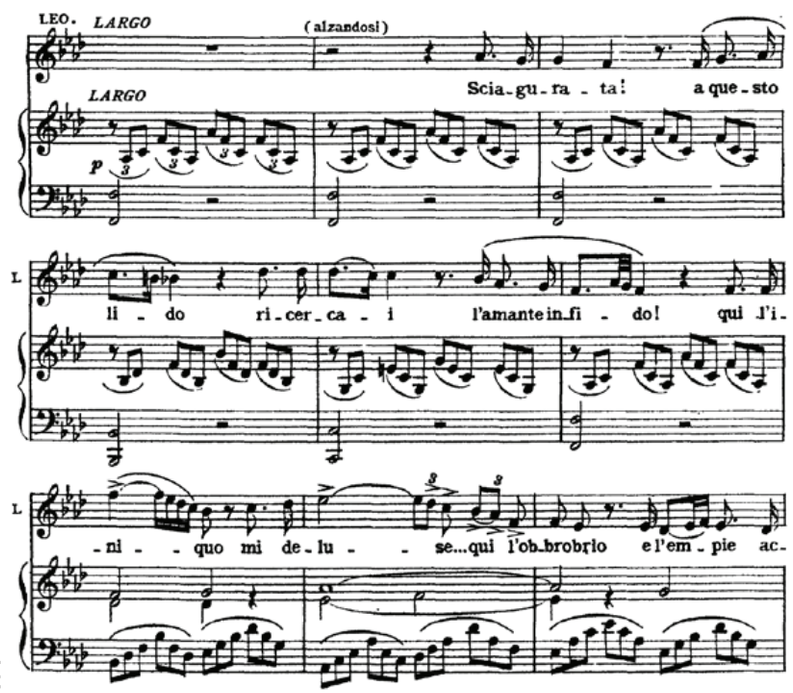
of Finnissy) constitutes a blandly affirmative nostalgia trip, but have devised distinct strategies (in particular trying to give much of the atonal material a stronger profile and sense of line, as opposed to playing the tonal material with a degree of detachment) with such considerations in mind. Many have pointed out the banality of playing a Bach fugue always with one voice as the *Hauptstimme*; the depth of the music comes from the interaction between the voices rather than just from individual voices in isolation. This situation applies equally to Finnissy's music, I believe.

Franz Liszt made seven important transcriptions from Verdi, while other transcriptions based on popular Verdi numbers emanated from the pens of Sigismond Thalberg, Joachim Raff, Hans von Bülow, Giuseppe Martucci and others. In more recent times both Luciano Berio and Dieter Schnebel have created more contemporary 'transcriptions' referring to Verdi works. Like much of his music, Finnissy's *Verdi Transcriptions* are informed both by the romantic and late-romantic history of piano transcription and its performance, as well as more recent musical histories. It is equally mistaken, I believe, to view such works either as an evocation of a late-romantic 'golden age' or as a supposedly modernistic rejection of the past. Neither a 'golden age' nor an era of 'pure modernism' ever existed in such an idealistic form; most of the romantic pianist-composers engaged in a forward-looking and dialectical manner with the conventions of their time in ways that can be seen as very 'modern', whilst most of the 'modernists' still drew upon musical traditions that preceded them.

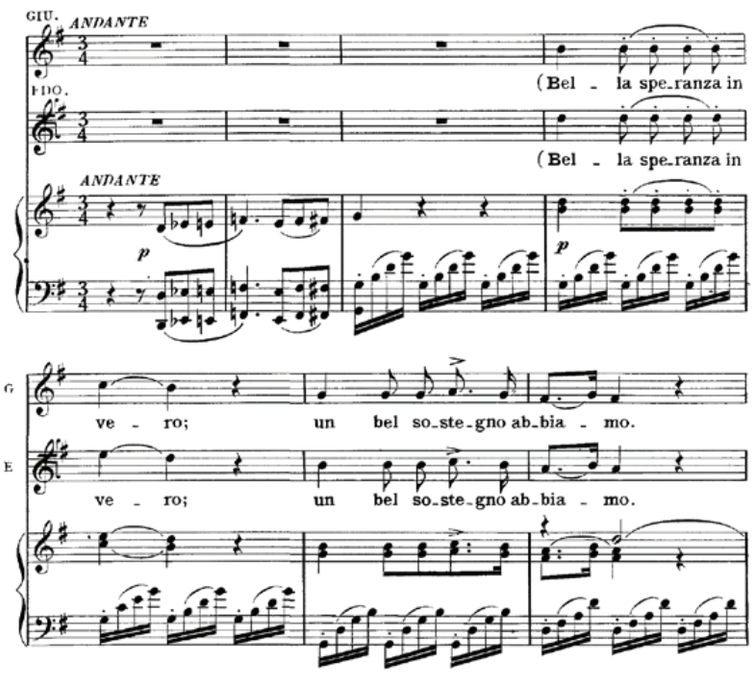
Verdi was not really a 'radical' composer in the sense usually meant by the term; he worked within conventions and developed them to the maximum (as did Brahms, say). To some extent he still adhered to the 18th century notion of 'affective' music (as opposed to the more austere and inwardly focussed ideals of 19th century German romantics, say) – for this reason Carl Dahlhaus questions whether we should really call Verdi a 'romantic' composer at all. Verdi wrote in a medium, opera, upon which huge expectations were placed in terms of entertainment and the like. He was a pragmatist in various respects, accepting the confines of certain frameworks that allowed him to compose whilst individuating them towards his own needs. This may make him a relatively conservative figure in many eyes (and is probably part of the reason why many of a modernistic persuasion seem relatively aloof from Verdi's music, indeed often from the medium of opera in general). However, to a greater or lesser degree such a situation was made necessary not just to Byrd or Monteverdi or Purcell or Bach or Mozart, but also to Beethoven or Schumann or Wagner as well, all of whom had ultimately to satisfy in one way or another the demands of either their patrons or the marketplace (which caused Schumann in particular no end of difficulties, as his publishers bemoaned the strangeness of many of his pieces, wishing him to write something more 'accessible' to the general public). But in the case of all these composers, as with Verdi, the genuinely subjective was still able to assert itself within their work.

The intense stylisation of the whole medium of opera (so deeply non-naturalistic even when taking on 'real' events) causes problems for many. Neither Finnissy nor Verdi exploits such stylisation to mask an underlying emptiness of content. Certainly the music of both exhibits a high degree of artifice: the emotions that are presented in characters' arias in Verdi's early operas are indeed concentrated, exaggerated and 'projected', but not necessarily lacking in intimacy as a result. And the same situation applies with Finnissy's more flamboyant writing (take the transcription from *Les vêpres*, for example); the contrivedly ornate writing here is accompanied by a sense of sickness and decadence within. Finnissy describes these works as most 'theatrical'; indeed they are, but from the position of a deep understanding of the possibilities of theatre and the concept of the 'theatrical'. The *Verdi Transcriptions* are stylised, flamboyant, dealing with 'archetypal' and possibly caricatured emotional worlds at times, but use these means to communicate something that is by no means simple.

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



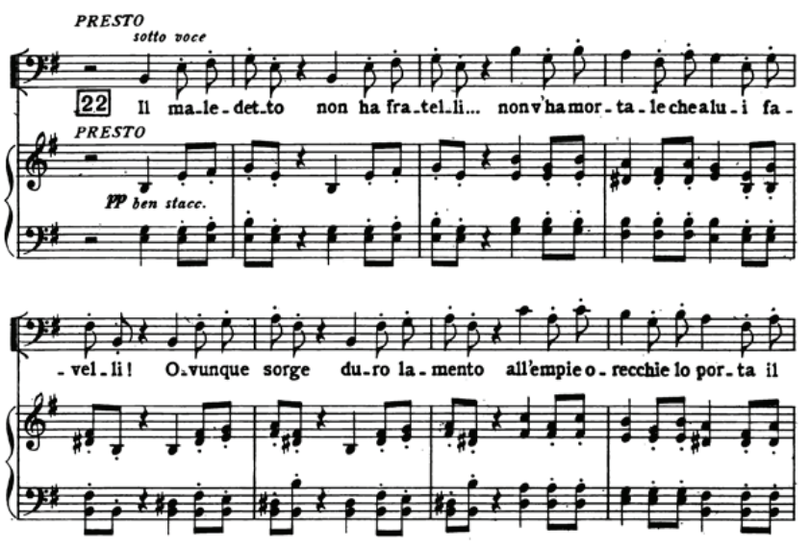
Verdi, Aria: 'Sciagurata! a questo lido ricercai l'amante infido!', *Oberto* (Act 2).



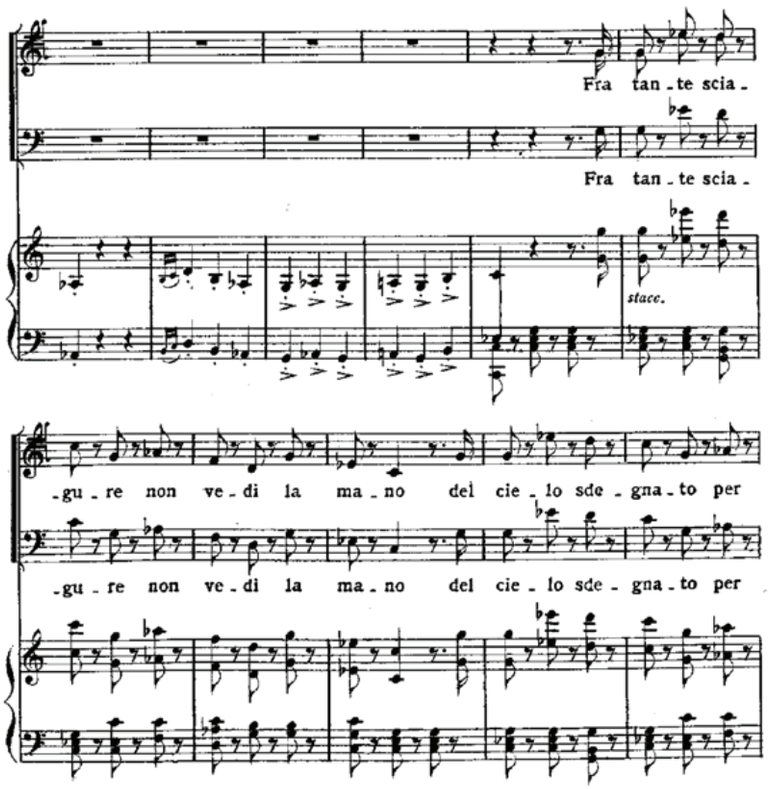
Verdi, 'Trio: 'Bella speranza in vero', *Un Giorno di Regno* (Act 1).

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

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



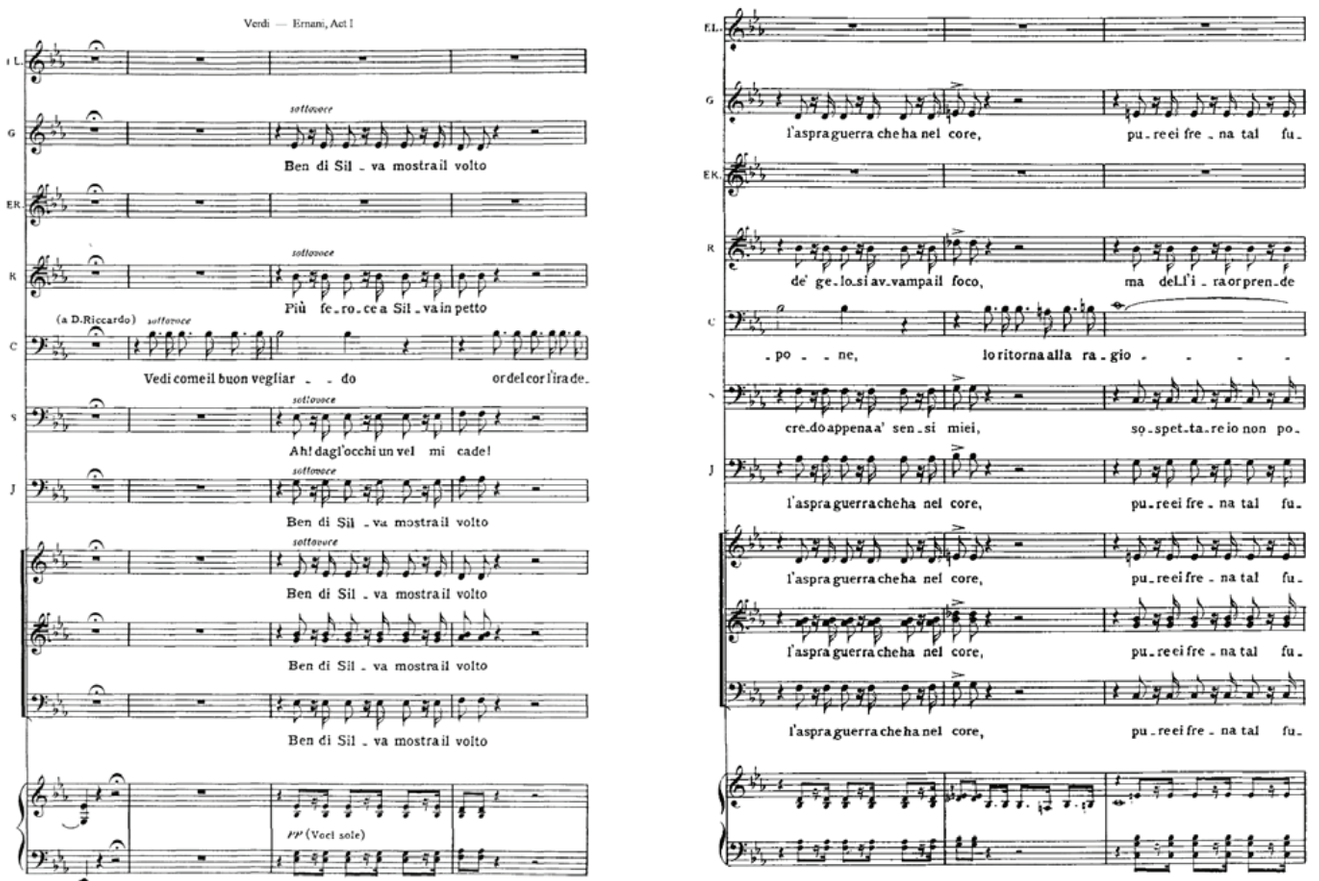
Verdi, Chorus: 'Il maledetto non ha fratelli', *Nabucco* (Part 2).



Verdi, Chorus:'Fra tante sciagure...', *I Lombardi* (Act 3).

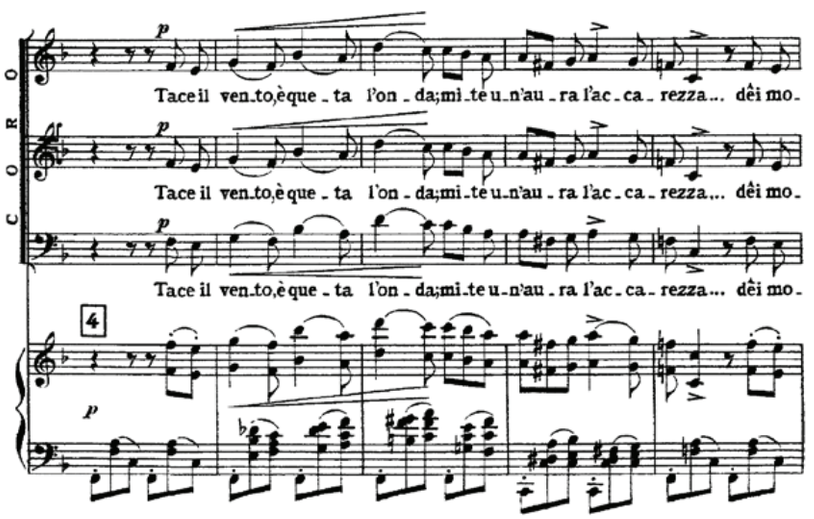
IV. *I Lombardi*. A chorus of Crusading Knights, attempting to march on Jerusalem, point out to the hero Arvino, that his brother Pagano has been seen nearby (actually he is in the disguise of a Hermit, and Arvino has already encountered him). Pagano is Arvino's rival for the same woman, Viclinda, and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

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

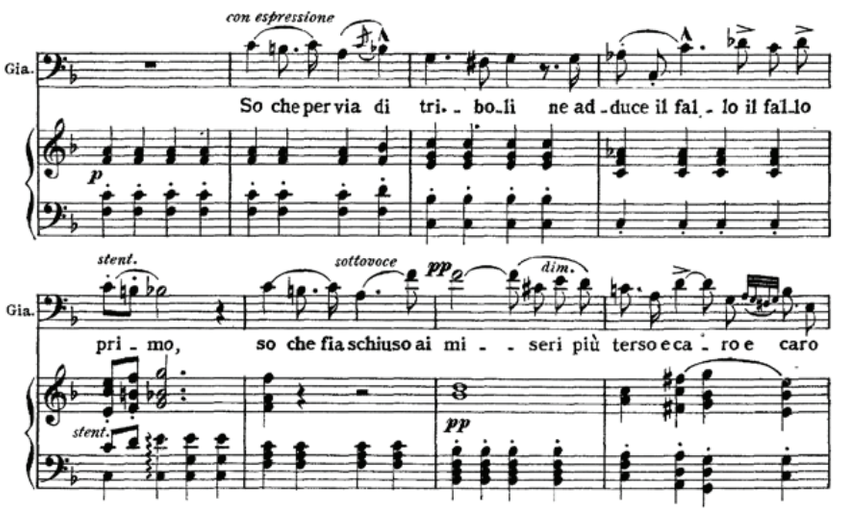


Verdi, Septet with Chorus: 'Vedi come il buon vegliardo...', *Ernani* (Part 1).

VI. *I Due Foscari*. Verdi's first opera after Byron deals with the plight of Jacopo Foscari, to be forced into exile at the behest of his own father the octogenarian Doge, much to the dismay of Jacopo's wife Lucrezia. Much action occurs in Act 3: after Jacopo's departure, it is announced that a dying man has confessed to the crime for which he was indicted. Lucrezia also announces that Jacopo has dropped dead at the moment of departure, causing the elderly Doge to retreat into further despair and guilt, and hastening the pressures for his abdication, leading to his death. The Choral Barcarolle is a light-hearted number that comes near the beginning of the opera when festivities are underway during carnival time. Finnissy's explosively violent piece would seem to portray the stormy events that are occurring simultaneously with the festivities. Only at the very end of the piece is there a glimpse of something resembling the Verdi original; all the earlier section of the piece is derived from material in the third of the now-withdrawn *Piano Studies* (1977-1979).



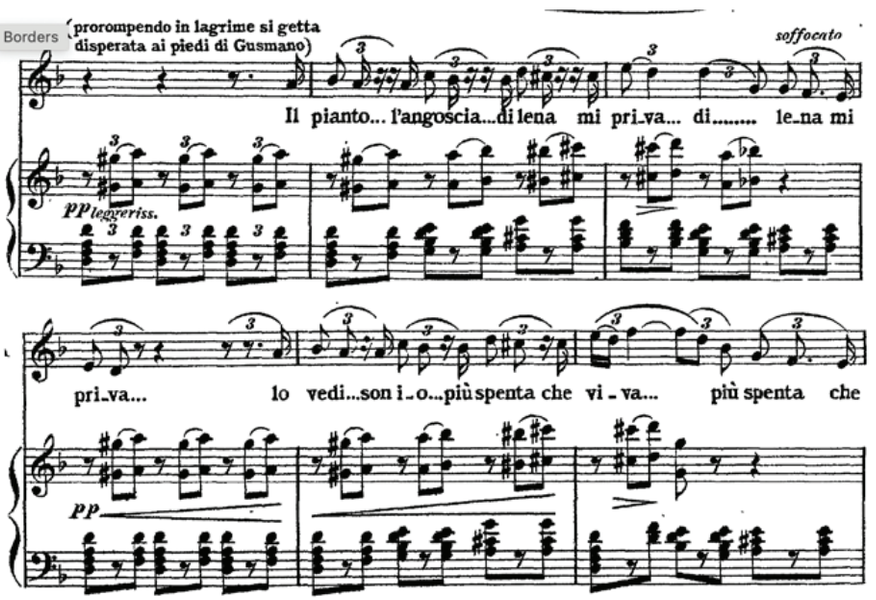
Verdi, Choral Barcarolle: 'Tace il vento, è queta l'onda', *I Due Foscari* (Act 3).



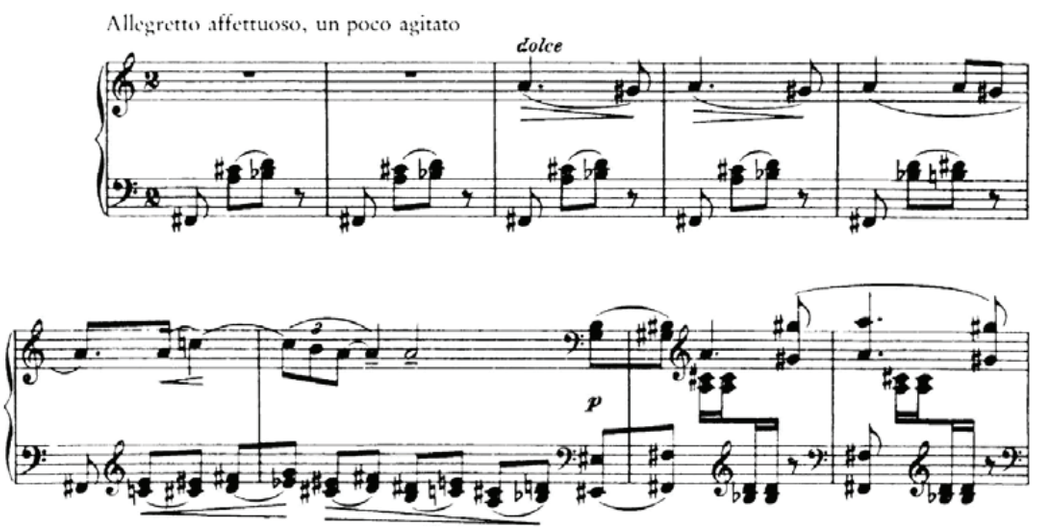
Verdi, Aria: 'So che per via di triboli', *Giovanna d'Arco* (Act 1).

VII. *Giovanna d'Arco*. Joan of Arc has a mythical status in France. The opera deals with both the battles with the English and (unusually for Verdi) the supernatural beings who speak to her. The aria Finnissy sets is sung by a shepherd, Giacomo, who is French but wishes to join the English, believing King Carlo VII to have brought shame upon his country (as well as wishing to cleanse the memory of a daughter who has betrayed him). Finnissy's barren opening monophonic melody (emerging from the storm of the previous piece) is gradually brought into a two-part aperiodic counterpoint, then a short sumptuous passage which echoes the music of Scriabin and Szymanowski.

VIII. *Alzira*. One of Verdi's least-known operas, *Alzira* is set in Peru in the mid-16th century. A power struggle is going on between the Spanish colonial forces and the native Inca population, who kidnap the Governor Alvaro, but freed soon afterwards. Alzira is the betrothed of the Incan warrior, Otumbo, and she and her father are prisoners of the Spanish. She is being coerced into marrying the Spaniard Gusmano, the mortal enemy of Zamoro, the Chief of a Peruvian tribe, who had rescued Alvaro. Gusmano captures Zamoro, and holds his life in his hands. In this duet, Alzira pleads with Gusmano to save Zamoro's life (he has been sentenced to burn at the stake). Finnissy uses the first piece from Busoni's *Indianisches Tagebuch* (1915) as his basic matrix for this work, thus alluding to another composer's setting of Native American folk melodies.

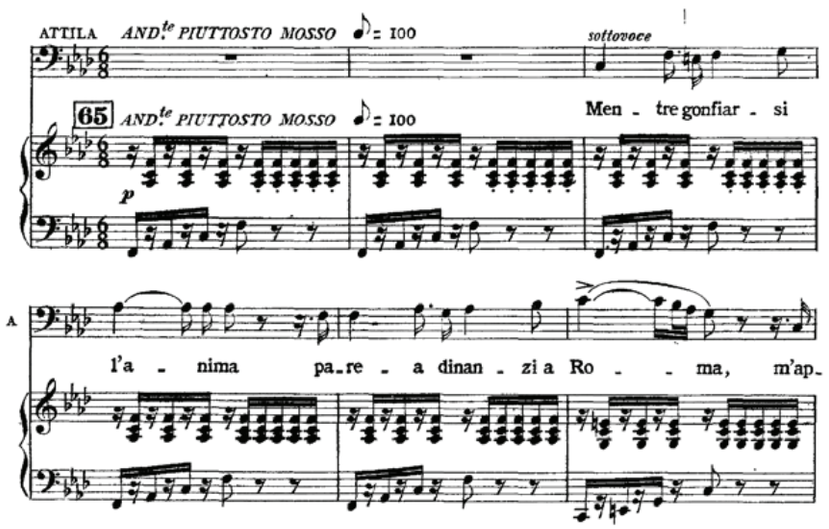


Verdi, Duet: 'Il pianto...l'angoscia...di lean mi priva', *Alzira* (Act 2).

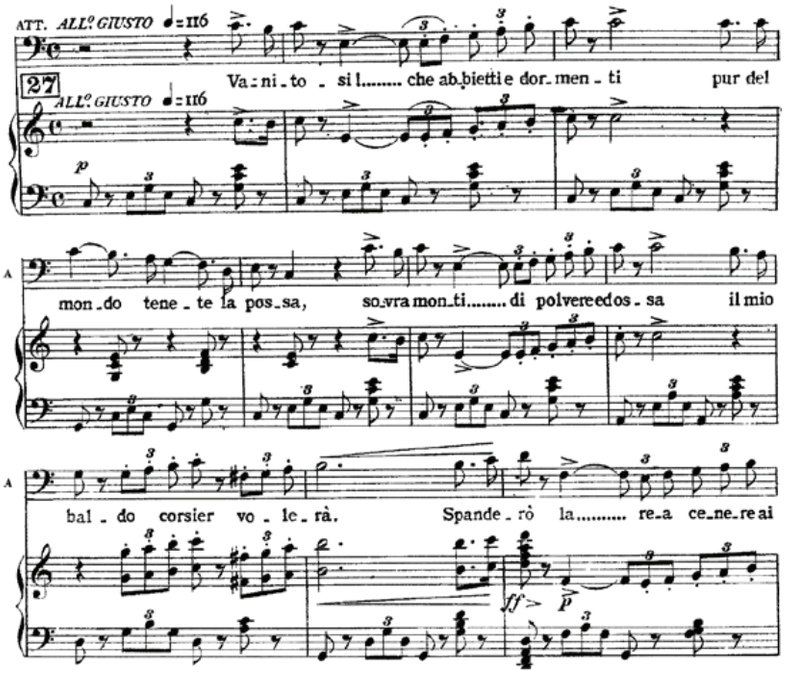


Ferruccio Busoni, *Indianisches Tagebuch*, No. 1.

IX. *Attila*. Attila, King of the pagan Huns, has invaded Italy and sacked Aquileia. The envoy from Rome, Ezio, wishes to make a pact by which they will divide Italy between them, whereby Ezio will keep Rome, but this is rejected by Attila. Meanwhile, the Aquilieian knight Foresto bemoans that his beloved Odabella, daughter of the Lord of Aquileia, is held prisoner by Attila. Finnissy constructs a free fantasy around the aria in which Attila recounting a dream, in which an old man appeared to warn him that he is doomed unless he turns back; the composer incorporates short reminiscences of various earlier pieces in this book. The melody appears in a relatively recognisable form towards the end in the left hand, recalling the *Ernani* transcription; earlier it is transformed into a type of imaginary folk music in line with Finnissy's other compositions from the time of writing.



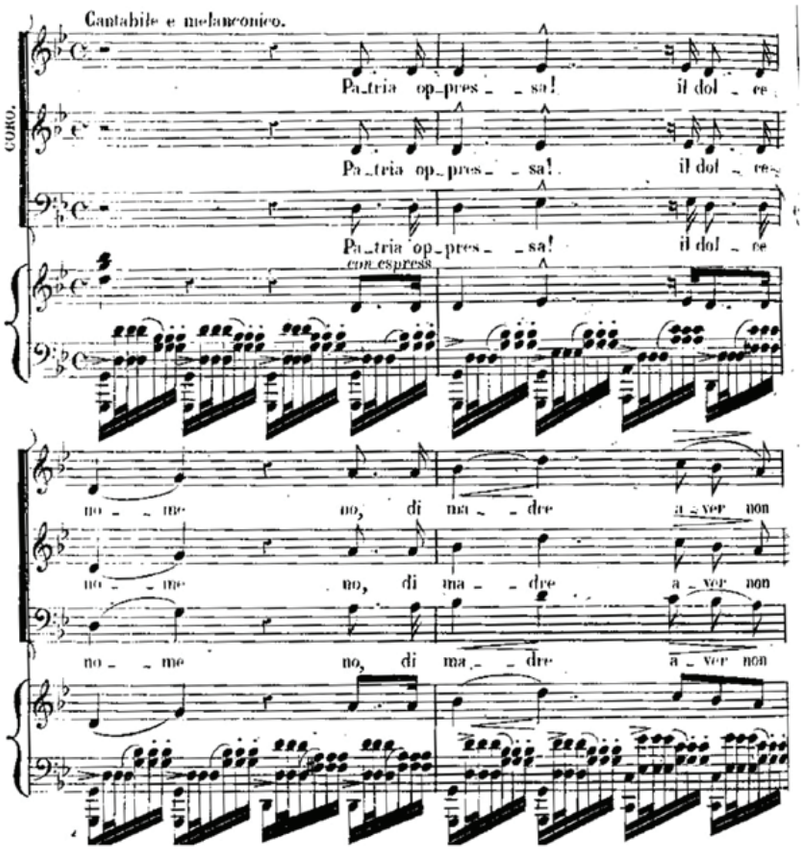
Verdi, Aria: 'Mentre gonfiarsi l'Anima', *Attila* (Act 1).



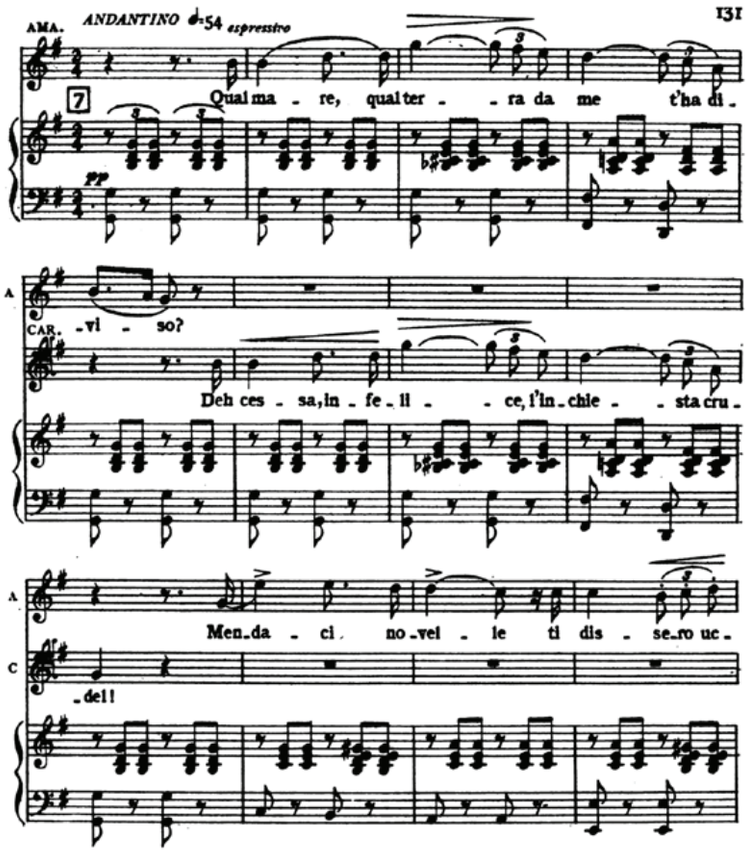
Verdi, Duetto: 'Vanitosi! Che abietti e dormenti', *Attila* (Prologo).

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

XI. *Macbeth* (1847). The story of Macbeth is familiar. This first transcription from the work is of the chorus of the exiles from Macbeth's tyrannical rule in Scotland. A subdued but dignified number in the early version of Verdi's opera, assembled from a series of disconnected fragments (some alluding to elsewhere in the cycle), from which a rendition of the melody gradually emerges.



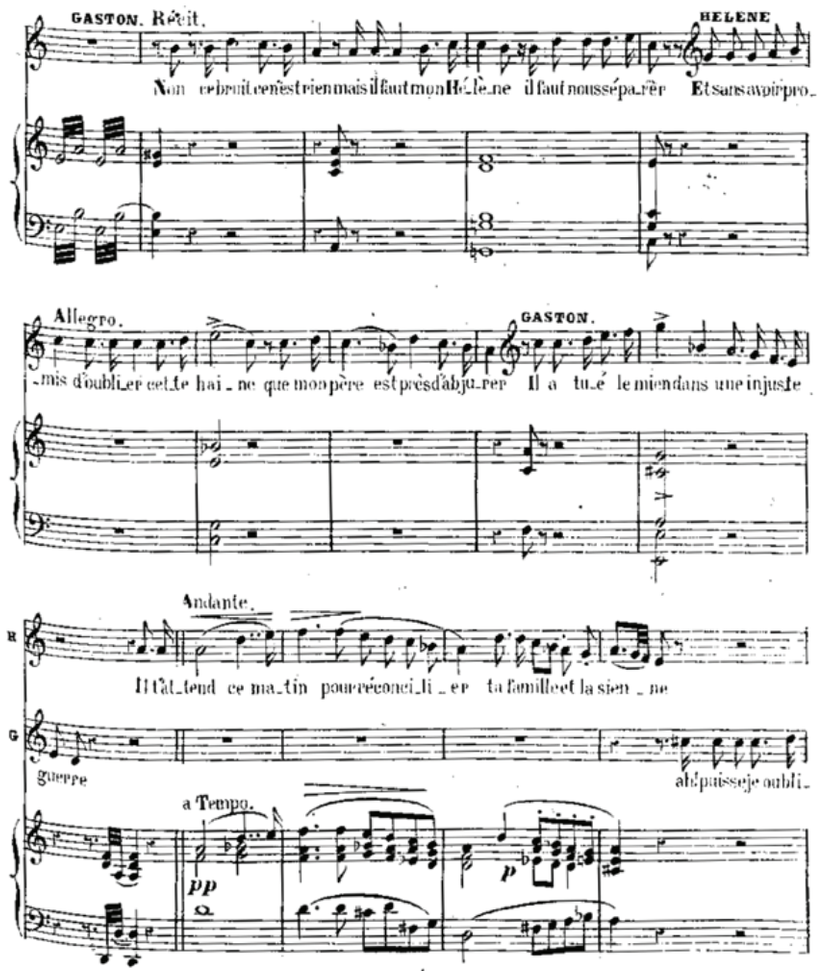
Verdi, Coro: 'Patria oppressa! Il dolce nome...', *Macbeth* (Act 4, 1847 version).



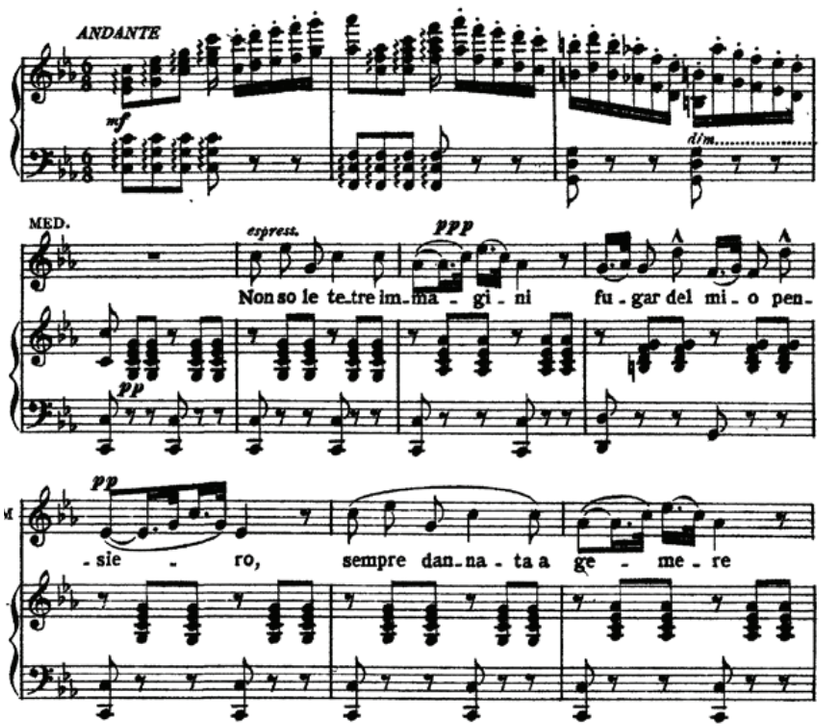
Verdi, Duetto: 'Qual mare, qual terra....', *I masnadieri* (Parte Terza).

XII. *I masnadieri*. The first of Verdi's operas after Schiller centres around the disaffected figure of Carlo, son of Count Massimiliano, who renounces his background and joins a group of brigands. His unscrupulous brother Francesco has fabricated a letter, purportedly from their father, stating that if Carlo returns home, he will be kept in solitary confinement and fed bread and water. This stiffens Carlo's resolve and opens the way for Francesco to inherit his father's title and land. Carlo's cousin Amalia is in love with him, but after a contrivance from Francesco, she is led to believe that Carlo has been killed in fighting, and she should marry Francesco instead. The Count in reality longs to see his favourite son again. After various things are properly revealed to Amalia, she escapes from Francesco and encounters Carlo in the forest. When Carlo reveals his identity, she is overjoyed, and also recounts the ways in which she has been ill-treated by Francesco. Carlo sings in this duet of how she is safe with him, but she secretly expresses worries about what Carlo's new life entails. Finnissy intercuts the idiom of the *I Lombardi* transcription with mystical and aloof writing in the treble registers (derived from the earlier withdrawn work *Guwark* (1982)), contrasting a representation of young recklessness with another of sensitivity and fear, the latter demonstrated by two short outbursts of reckless grace notes saturating the compass of the keyboard, in the manner found in the earlier piano works *Ives* (1974) and *all.fall.down* (1977).

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



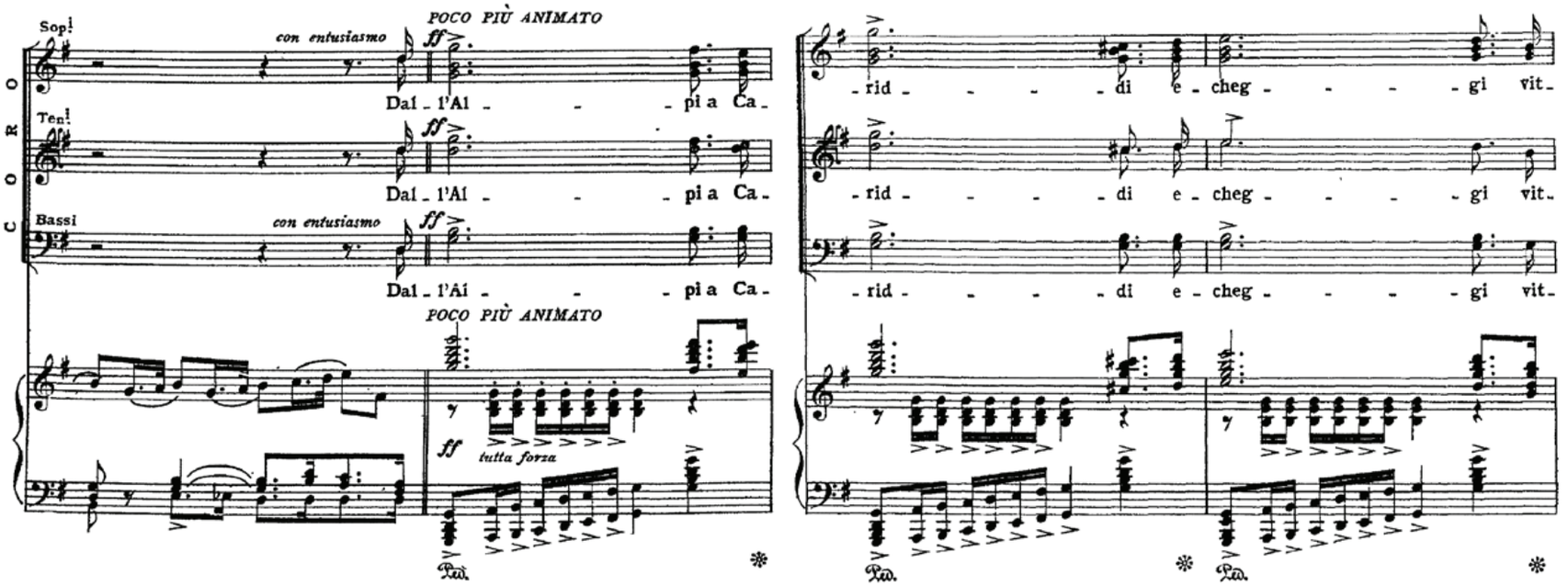
Verdi, Récit et Duo: 'Non, ce bruit, ce ne'est rien...', *Jérusalem* (Act 1).



Verdi, Romanza: 'Non so le tetre immagini', *Il Corsaro* (Act 1).

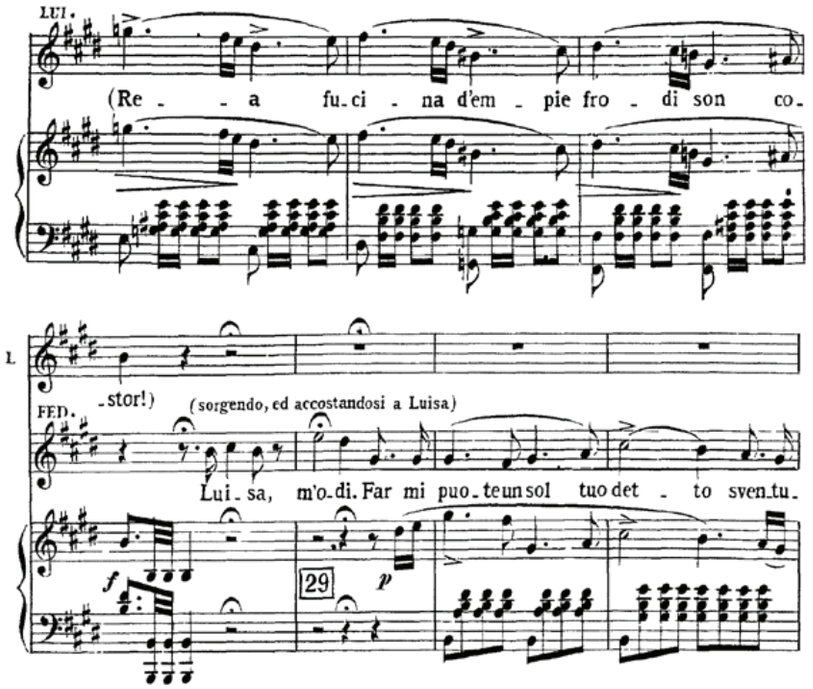
XIV. *Il Corsaro*. Set at first on a pirates' island in the Aegean, the character of Medora sings of her love for pirate chieftain Corrado, who is meanwhile making plans to attack the city of Corone, in the control of the Pash Seid. Her aria is ornate and almost claustrophobic in its inward focus. Finnissy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

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



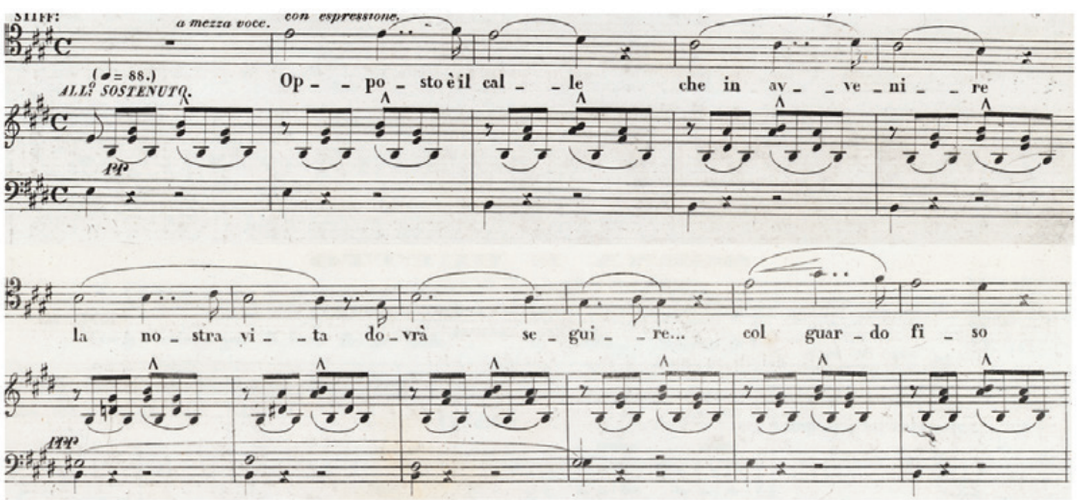
Verdi, Inno di Vittoria: 'Dall'Alpi a Caridi echeggi vittoria!', *La Battaglia di Legnano* (Act 4).

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



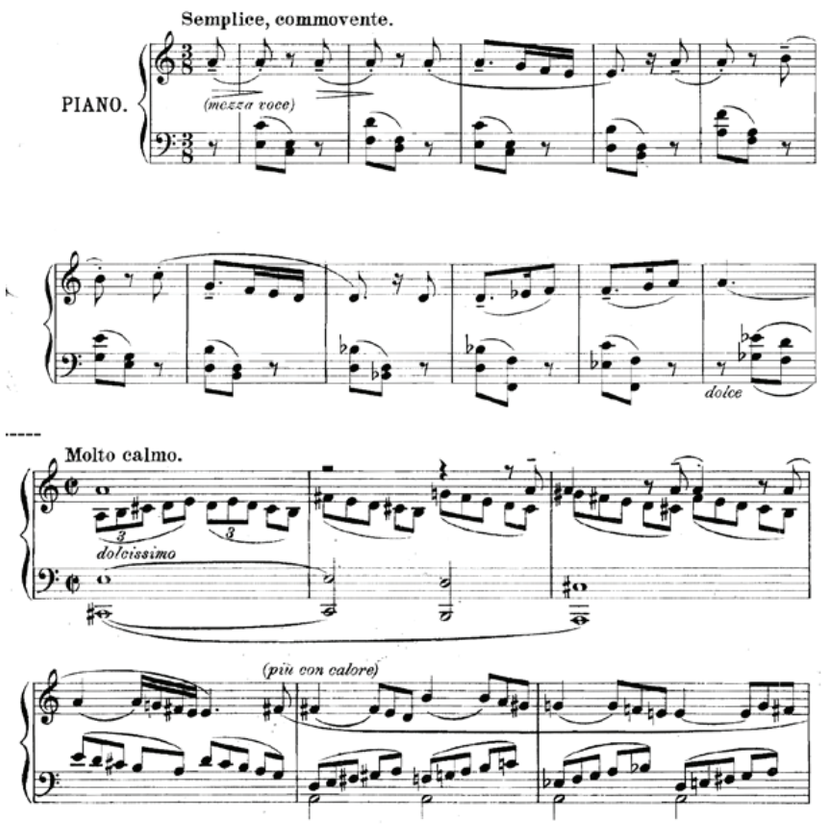
Verdi, Scena e Quartetto: 'Rea fucina d'empie frodi...', *Luisa Miller* (Act 2).

XVII. *Stiffelio*. The evangelical minister Stiffelio discovers, through the course of the opera, how he has been betrayed by his wife Lina, who is having a secret liason with nobleman Raffaele. Lida's father Stankar is furious and vengeful at Raffaele, vowing to kill him. The aria in question is a rare case of a 'divorce aria', in which Stiffelio hands divorce papers to Lida, saying from now on he will devote himself exclusively to the church. Stiffelio's calmness and stoicism, combined with definitiveness of purpose, are contrasted with Lida's frantic despair (later in the opera he agrees to forgive her). Finnissy uses as his matrix the First Sonatina of Busoni (1910) (not least its polyrhythms) in a calm piece which nonetheless suggests some brooding beneath the surface.

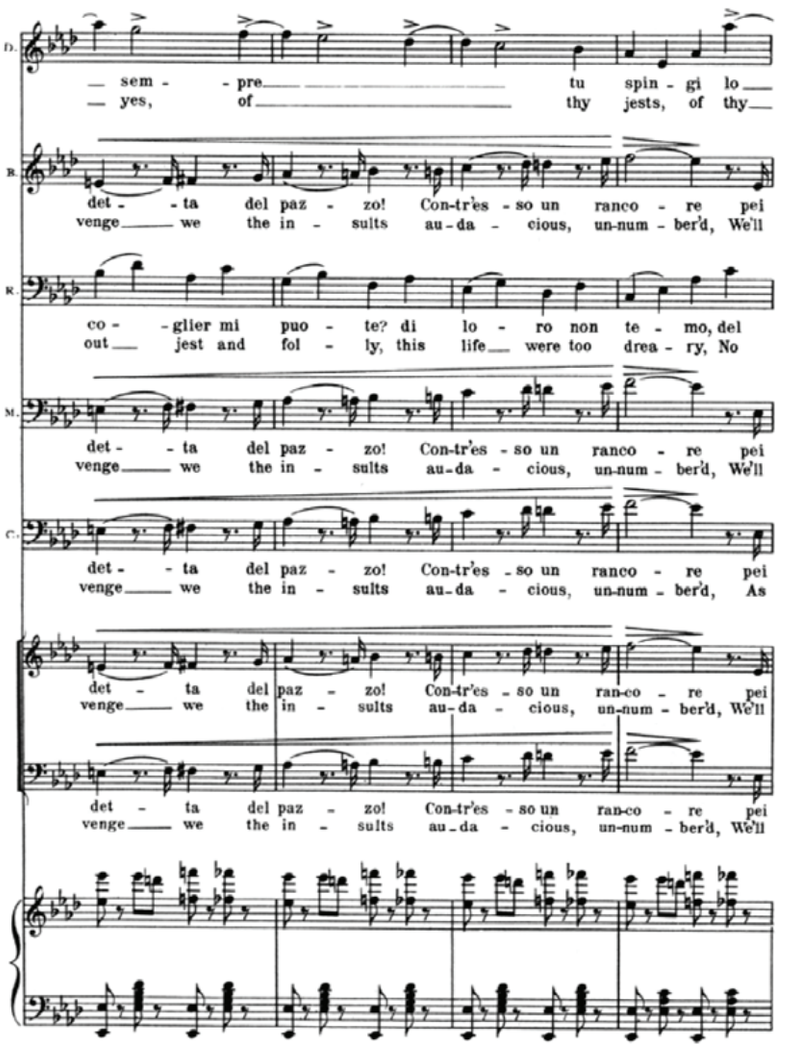


Verdi, Duetto: 'Opposto é il calle che in avvenire', *Stiffelio* (Act 3).

XVIII. *Rigoletto.* The utterly empty and self-serving character of the Duke is asking Rigoletto jestingly how he can get rid of the Count of Ceprano, in order that the Duke can woo the Countess, with whom he has been flirting. In characteristic fashion Rigoletto suggests prison, exile or otherwise decapitation. This arouses the fury of the Count, who is listening nearby, proclaiming revenge against Rigoletto. In a horrifying and quick passage (much nastier than Monterone's curse later in the scene), the Count's line disseminates amongst much of the rest of the assembled company, declaring in ominous rising chromatic figurations (amidst the festivity and the sound of the *banda*) how they will meet to decide how to deal with Rigoletto. The way in which hatred is presented as so infectious evidently impressed Finnissy, who rewrites this in a brash and bare-knuckled manner (once again fragmented) with a brief bizarre allusion to Stockhausen's *Klavierstück I* (1952)!

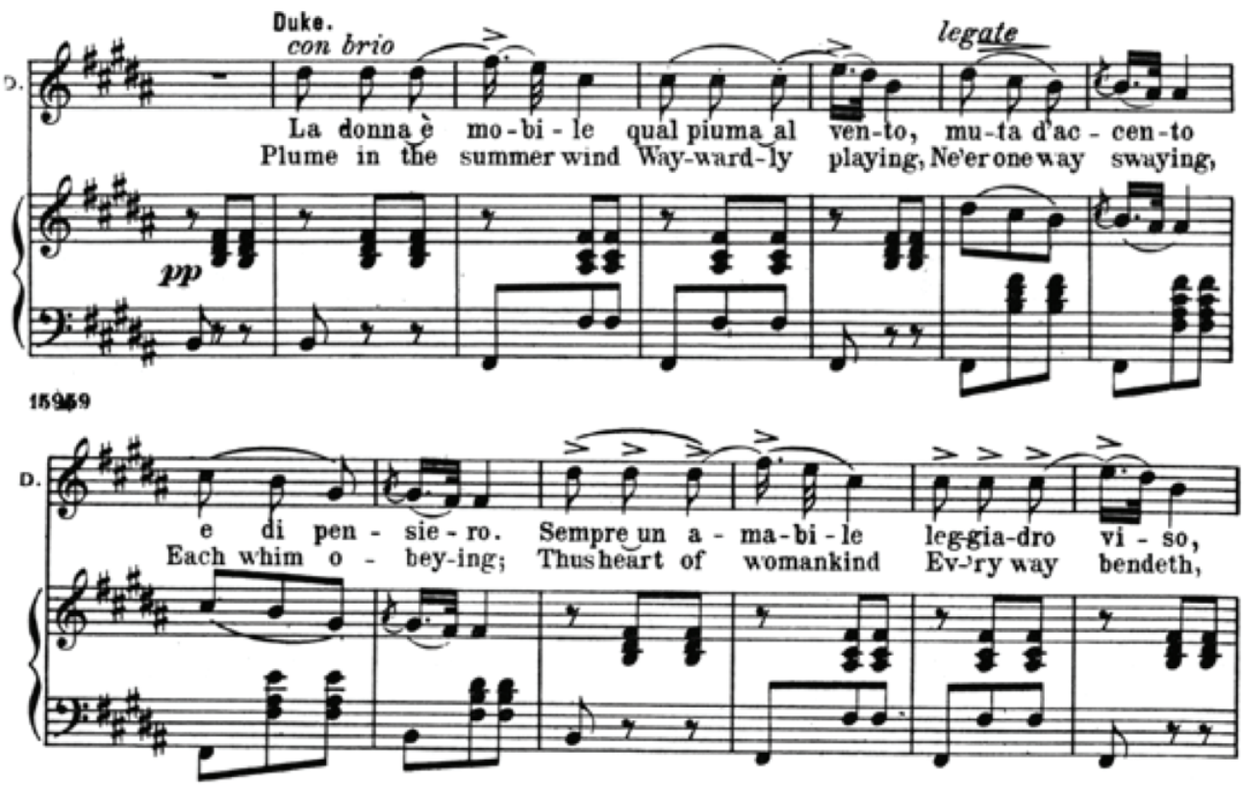


Busoni, Sonatina No. 1.



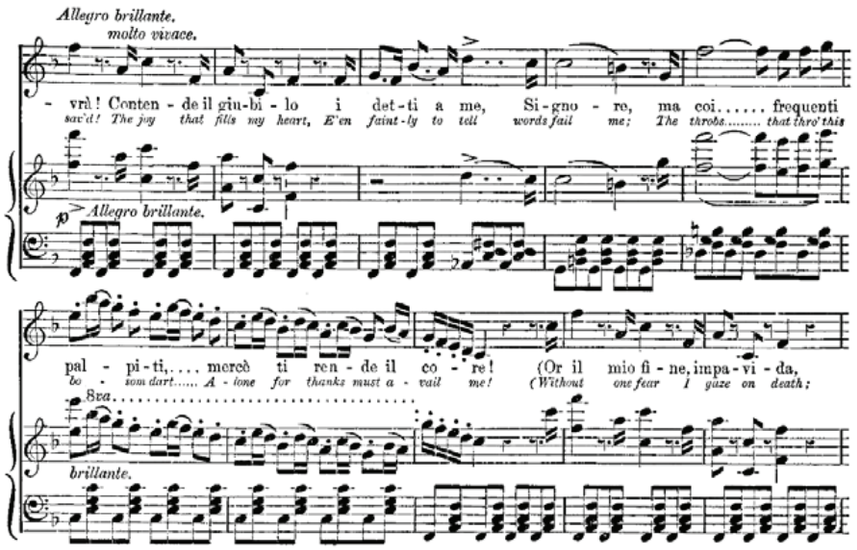
Verdi, Scena e Coro: 'Vendetta del pazzo! Contr'esso un rancore', *Rigoletto* (Act 1).

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

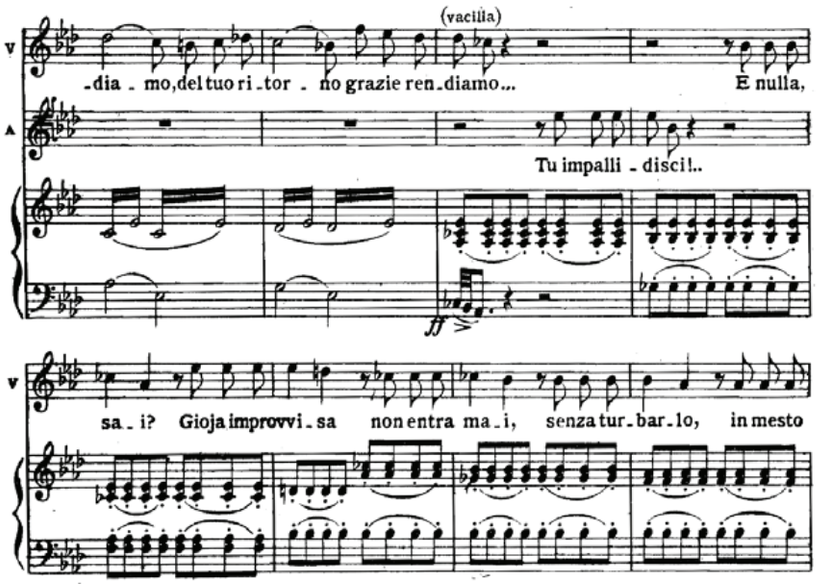


Verdi, Canzone: 'La donna è mobile', *Rigoletto* (Act 3).

XX. *Il trovatore*. The passage being transcribed is so over-the-top in its melodrama that it is hard to watch/hear with a straight face. Leonora, lady-in-waiting to the Princess of Aragon, is pursued by the Count di Luna, in whom she has no interest whatsoever; instead she is in love with the troubadour Manrico, possible son of the gypsy woman Azucena. The Count's baby brother was supposedly bewitched when the Count himself was a child, and the mother of Azucena was burnt as a witch in response. But the daughter kidnapped the brother and then later a skeleton was found in the place where her mother was burnt (which she recounts in horrific detail). But Azucena had inadvertently killed her own son, not the Count's brother, and so she brought him up as her own. This is Manrico, who is vengeful towards the Count. Eventually he is captured when trying to save his mother and sentenced to death. Leonora pleads with the Count to spare Manrico – he agrees only on condition she will give herself to him. Repulsed by the Count, Leonora secretly takes poison, then pledges herself to the Count. The aria set here is her ecstatic number when she knows that Manrico will be freed, even though she will die from the poison. Finnissy's setting removes much of the emotional intensity and turns it into a very silly, somewhat fragmented number with jarring dissonances.



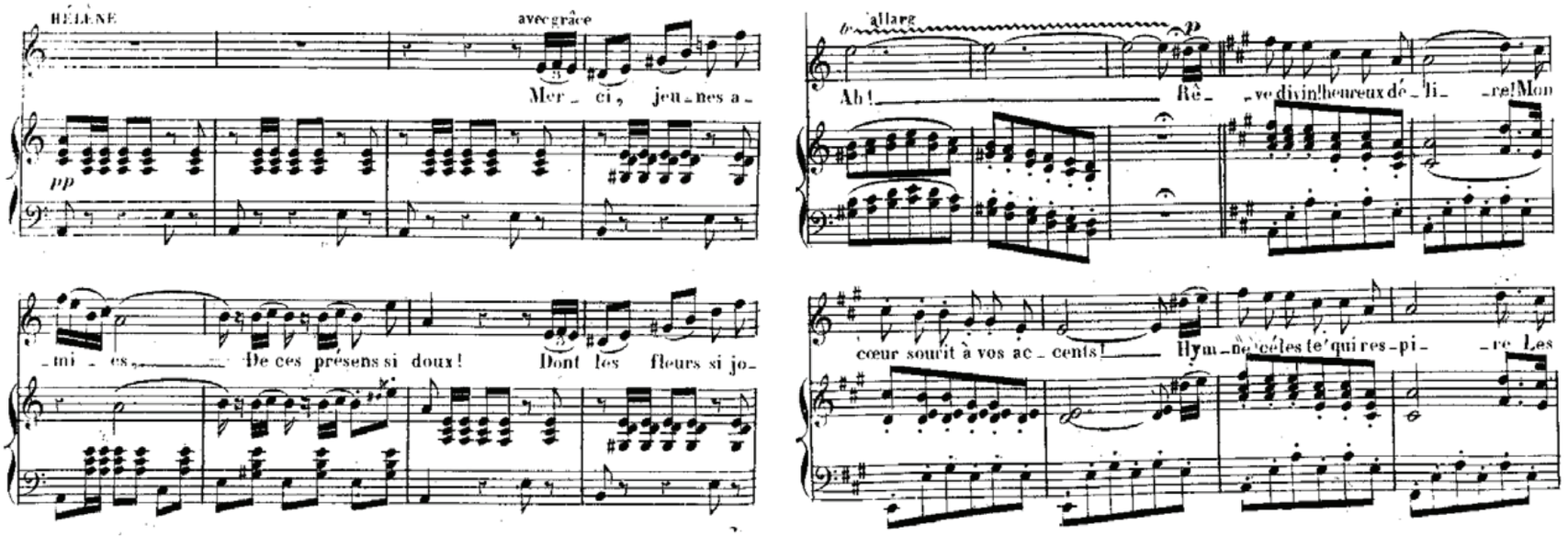
Verdi, Duo: 'Vivra! Contende il giubilo', *Il Trovatore* (Act 4, scene 1).



Verdi, Duetto: 'È nulla, sai?', *La Traviata* (Act 3).

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

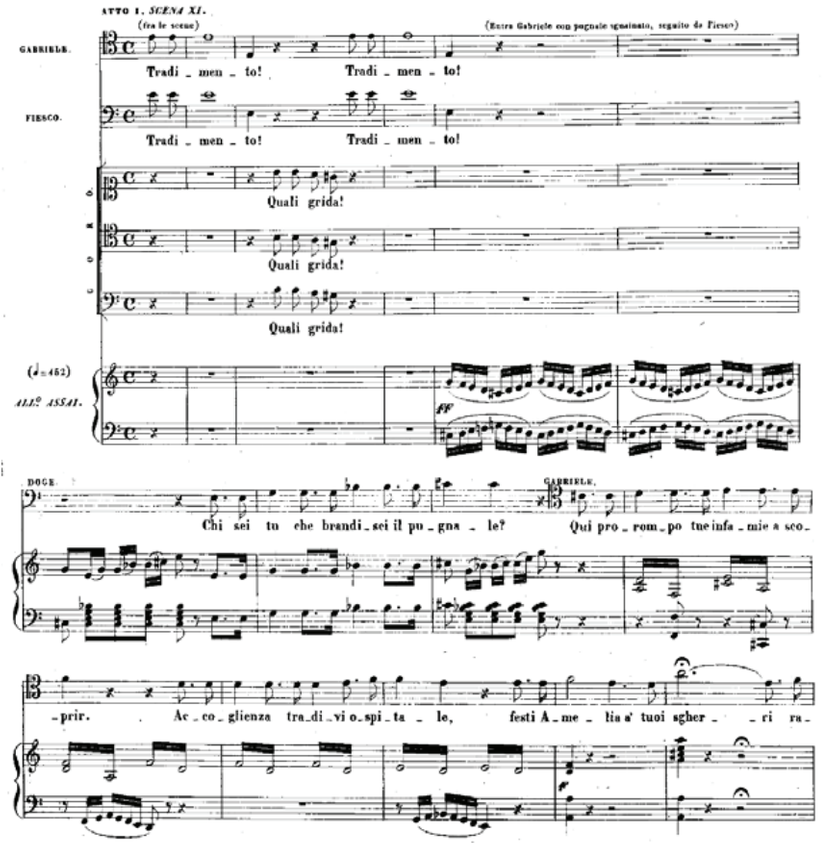
XXII. *Les vêpres siciliennes*. Finnissy sets the famous Bolero (referred to in the score as a Siciliana) from Act 5 of this opera, sung by the Duchess Elena. She sings her thanks for the flowers her guests have given her. Finnissy, in between the pizzicato-like writing familiar from *I Lombardi* and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



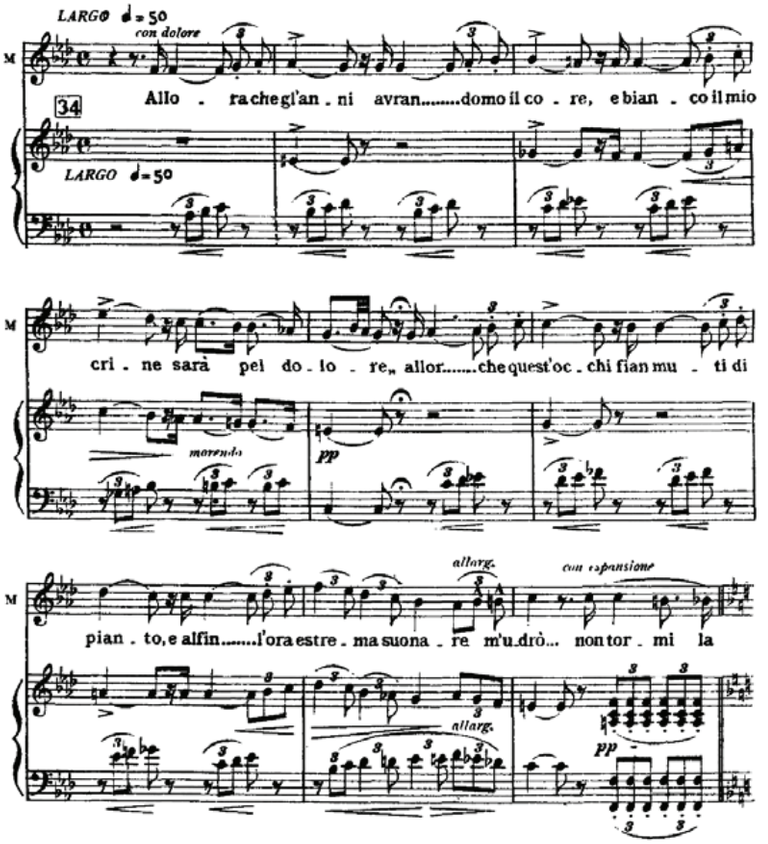
Verdi, Boléro: 'Merci, jeunes amies, d'un souvenir si doux!', *Les vêpres siciliennes* (Act 5, scene 2).

XXIII. *Simon Boccanegra* (1857). The labyrinthine plot of Boccanegra is too intricate to summarise here. Using the idiom established in the *Ernani* work, with the melody in chromatically embellished form in the bass, together with two angular parts in the treble, Finnissy sets all four sections of the final scena in Act 1 of the earlier version of the opera. The scene takes the form of a confrontation between the Doge Boccanegra and nobleman Gabriele Adorno, interrupted by Amelia, the Doge's daughter, who describes how she was kidnapped and managed to escape, while maintaining the Doge's innocence. The scene ends with cries for retribution.

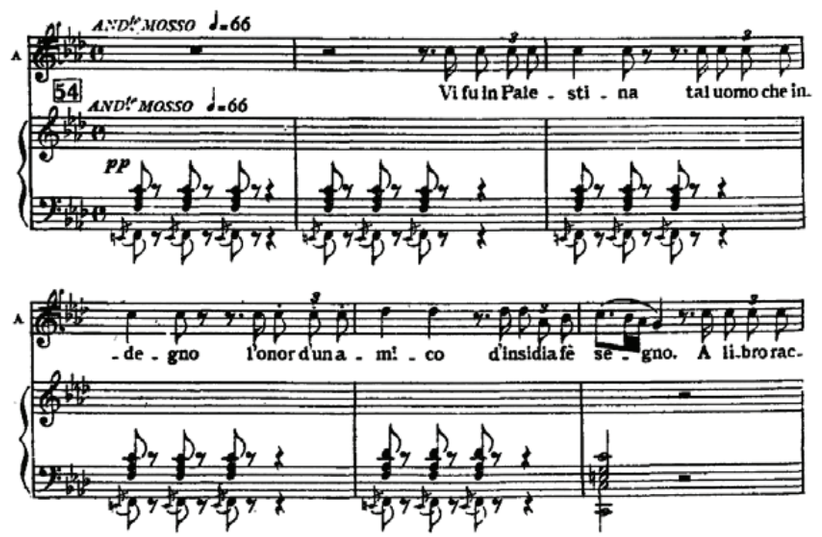
XXIV. *Aroldo*. Verdi composed a new final act when revising *Stiffelio* to become *Aroldo*. This is commonly known as the 'Loch Lomond Act'. The character of Aroldo is not a gentle evangelical minister as in *Stiffelio*, but instead a Saxon knight who has returned from the Crusades. The equivalent scenario occurs, but Aroldo's forgiveness of his wife Mina comes somewhat later than that of Stiffelio for Lida. Aroldo is living with holy man Briano in seclusion in Scotland, and encounters Mina and her father Egberto (who has killed her lover) when their boat washes up on the shore. With pleas for mercy, Aroldo ultimately forgives her. Whilst the transcription is based on the Finale where Aroldo is torn between conflicting emotional forces and ultimately relents, Finnissy also works in passages from elsewhere in the opera, including Aroldo's Act 1 tale of a man in Palestine who concealed a paper in a book that would betray secrets, 'Vi fu in Palestina' (a similar scenario is occurring in Aroldo's household at the time), evocations of the *cornimuse* as played by shepherds (drawing upon the opening chorus, 'Cade il giorno', from Act 4) and of the contrapuntal prayer 'Angiol di Dio' sung in the same act. All of these are combined in another free fantasia which also alludes back to the *Foscari* transcription, and to the Busoni First Sonatina and *Fantasia Contrappuntistica* (1910).



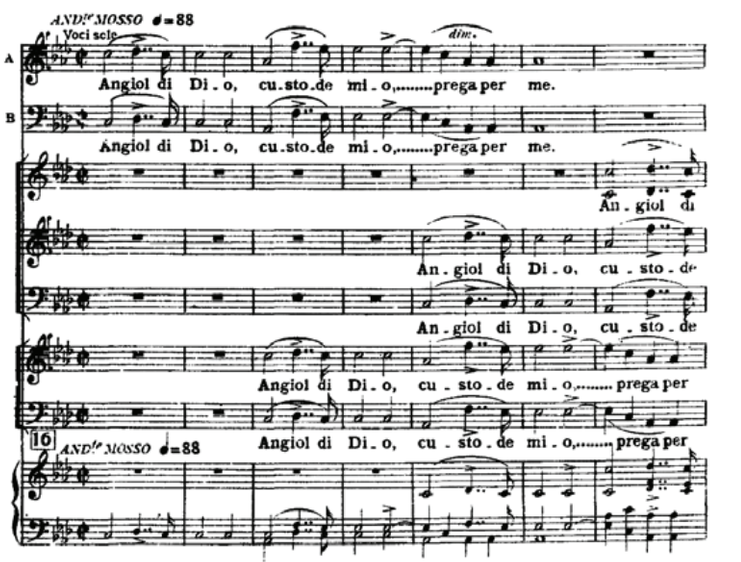
Verdi, Scena: 'Tradimento!', *Simon Boccanegra* (Finale dell'Atto Primo, 1857 version).



Verdi, Coro, Burrasca e Finale: 'Allora che gl'anni', *Aroldo* (Act 4).

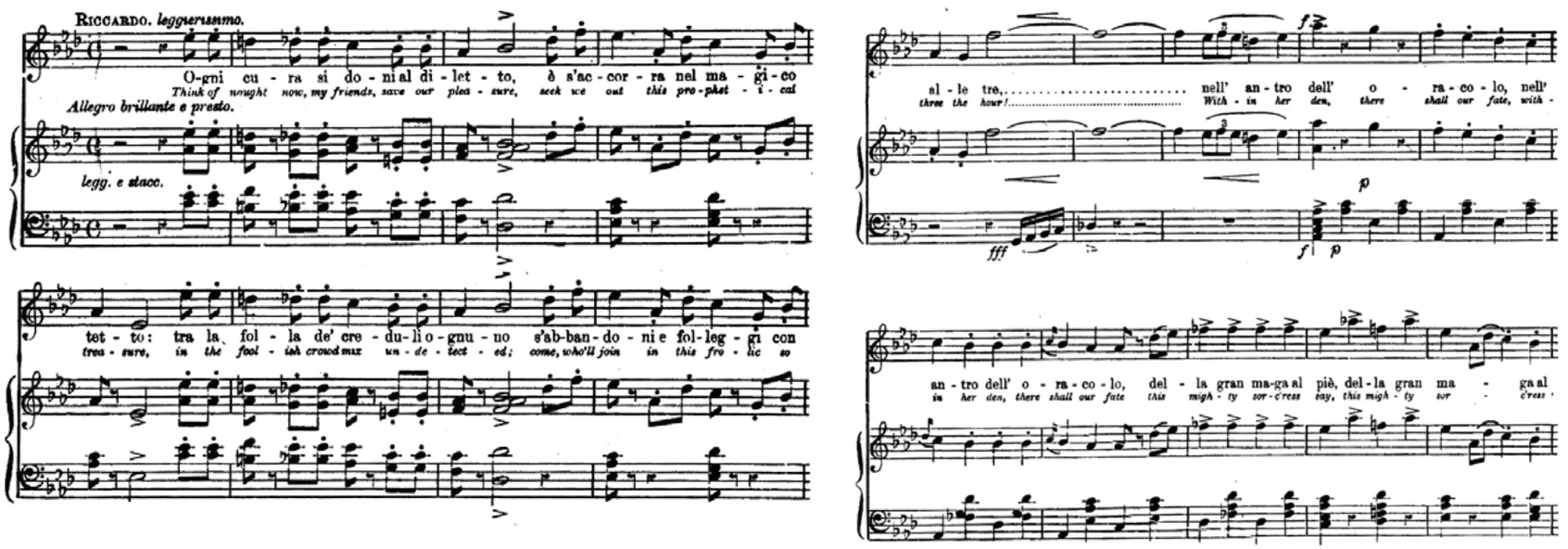


Verdi, 'Vi fu in Palestina', *Aroldo* (Act 1).



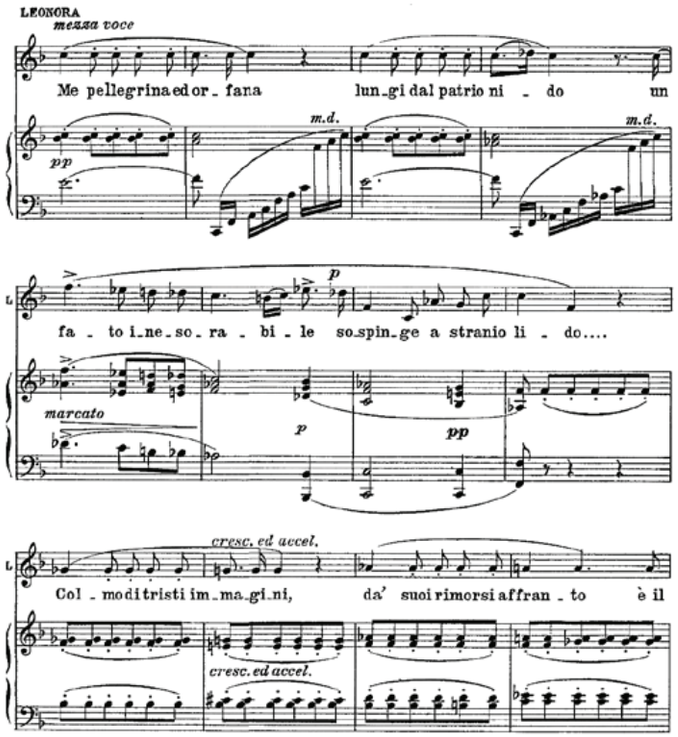
Verdi, Preghiera: 'Angiol di Dio', *Aroldo* (Act 4).

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

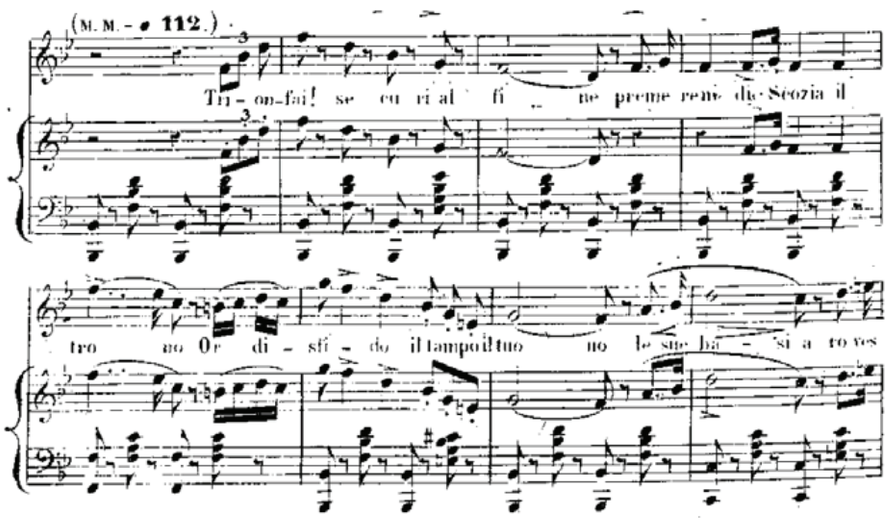


Verdi, Stretta: 'Ogni cura si doni al diletto', *Un Ballo di Maschera* (Act 1).

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

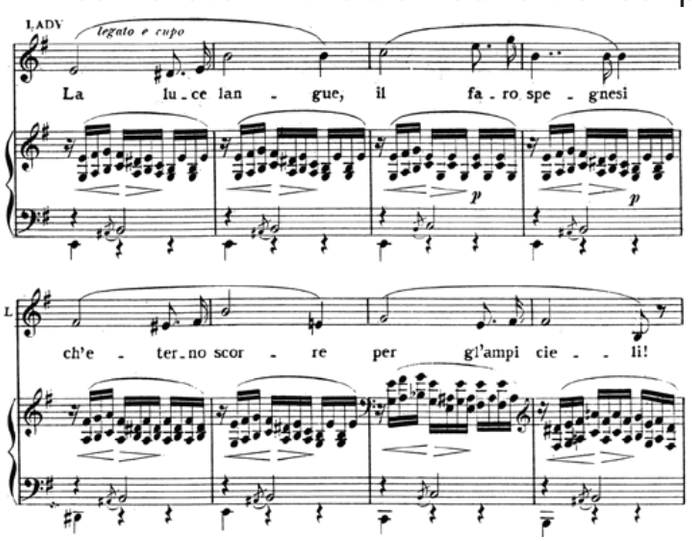


Verdi, Romanza:
'Me pellegrina ed orfano', *La Forza del Destino* (Act 1).



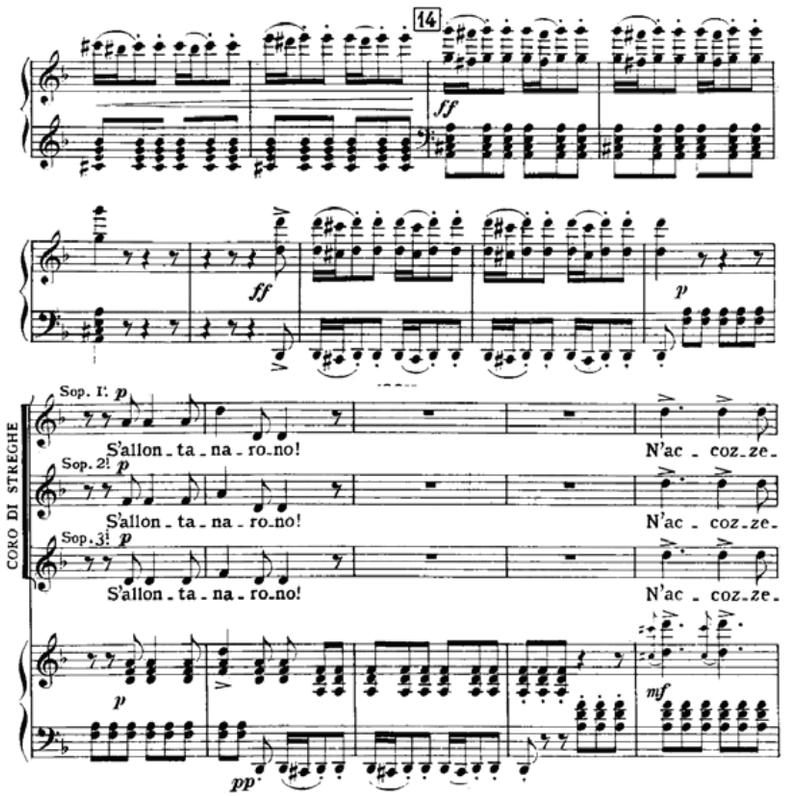
Verdi, Aria: 'Trionfai! Securi alfino'
Macbeth (Act 2, 1847 version).

XXVII. *Macbeth* (1847 and 1865). Verdi replaced his brash original 1847 aria for Lady Macbeth (sung after Macbeth has gone out to arrange Banquo's murder) with the superb 'La luce langue', quite hallucinatory in both text and music. Finnissy sets the two different arias one after another, presenting the first (after a short recitative) somewhat in the manner of the first *Attila* transcription. The second half places the melody accompanied by descending languid chromatic arpeggios, a look back to his early piano piece *Romeo and Juliet are Drowning* (1967, rev. 1973) and forward to the titanic descending lines which will came later in the *Don Carlo* transcription.

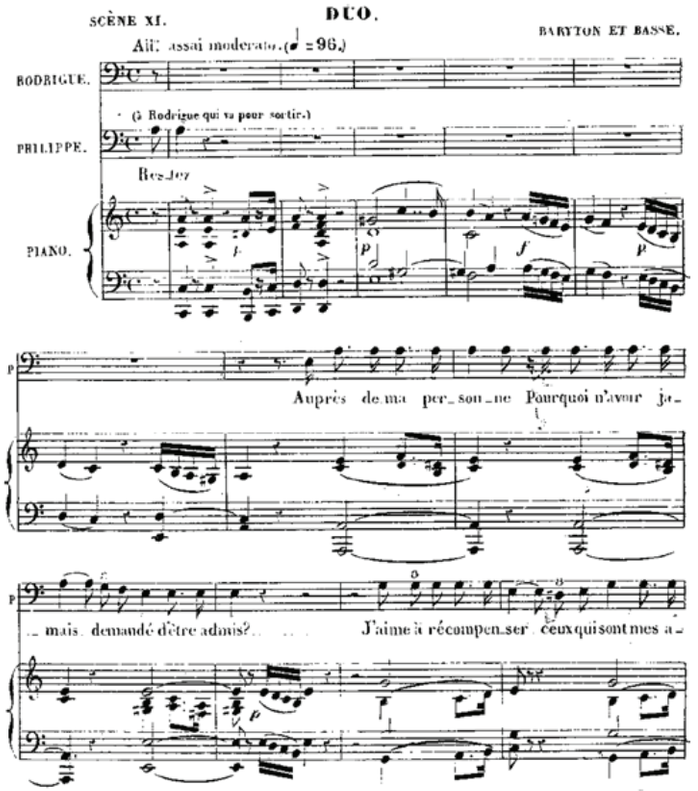


Verdi, Aria: 'La luce langue', *Macbeth* (Act 2, 1864-5 version).

XXVIII. *Macbeth* (1865). The witches chorus from Act 1 of Macbeth (which Finnissy used to rehearse at the Royal Opera House) is in no way identifiable in this piece set at the very top of the keyboard, drawing almost entirely upon material from *Long Distance*. Finnissy constructs an alternative and wholly modern representation of witchcraft. Verdi's melody appears submerged within dense chromatic surrounding parts only in the last few seconds.

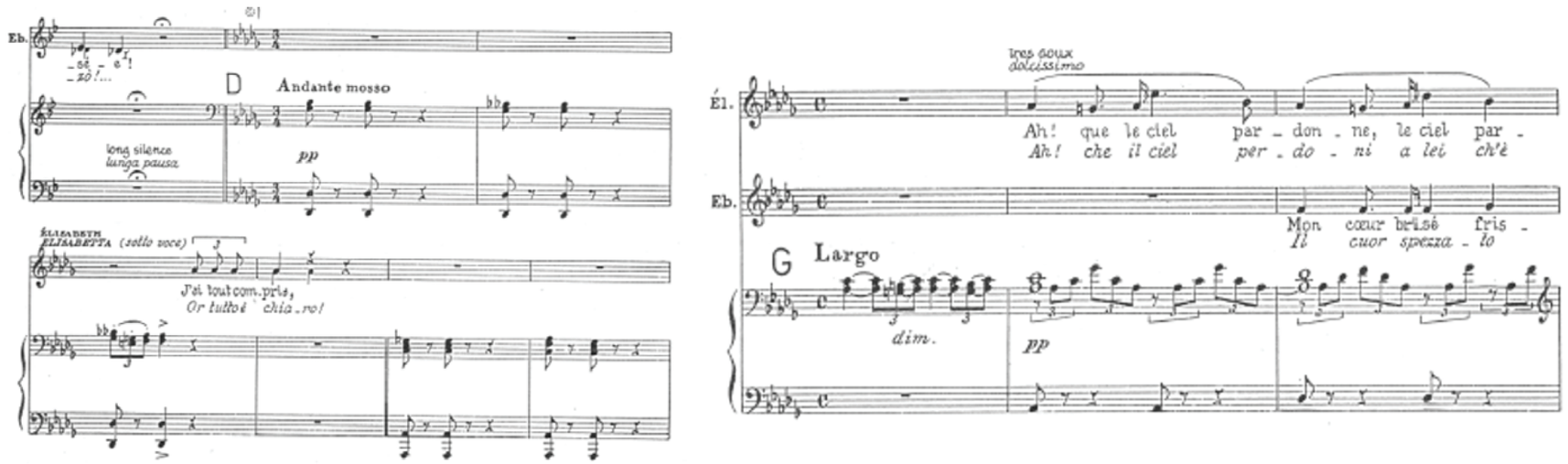


Verdi, Chorus: 'S'allontanarono! N'accozzeremo', *Macbeth* (Act 1).



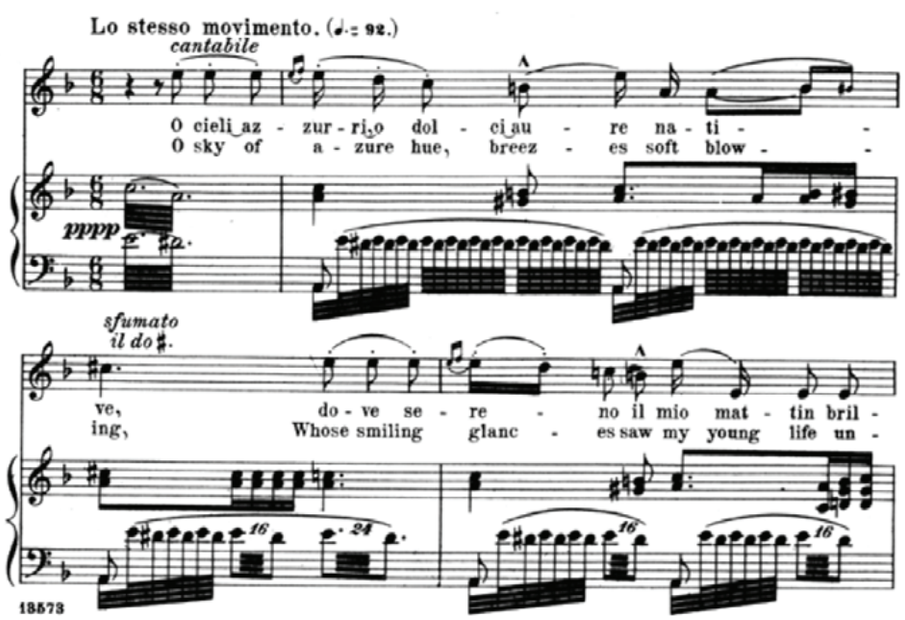
Verdi, Duo: 'Restez! Auprès de ma personne' *Don Carlos* (Acte II, Tableau II, 1866-7).

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



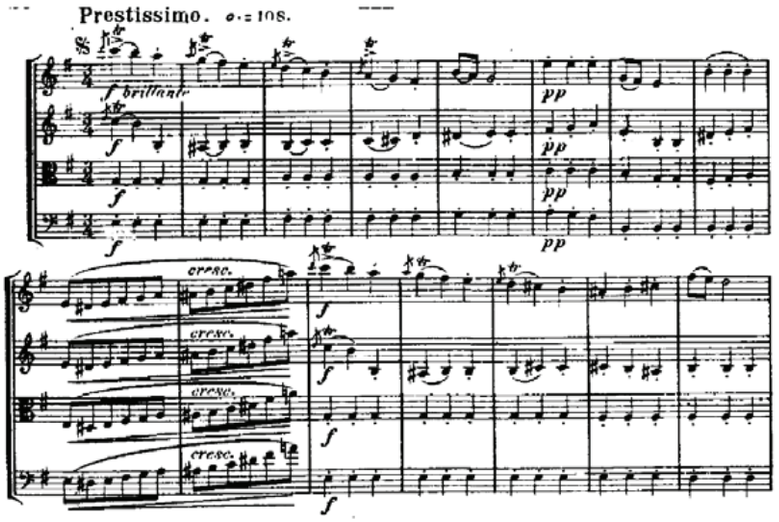
Verdi, Duo: 'J'ai tout compris', *Don Carlos* (Acte IV, Tableau I, 1866-7).

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

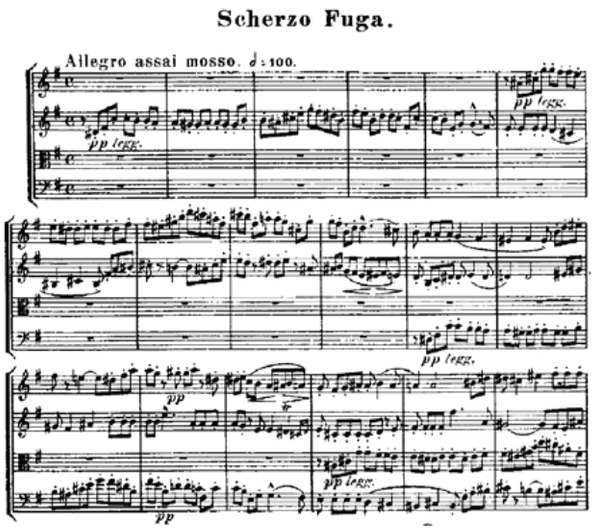


Verdi, Romanza: 'O cieli azzuri...', *Aida* (Act 3).

XXXI. String Quartet. Finnissy intercuts three groups of material, each derived in an abstracted way from the scherzo and trio of the third movement, and the finale. They are a rapid and brilliant four-part 3/8 passage (somewhat more tonal than the others), a continuous singing melody surrounded by pizzicato (which alludes back to the other 'staccato' pieces in this cycle), and a somewhat mad four-part fugue.

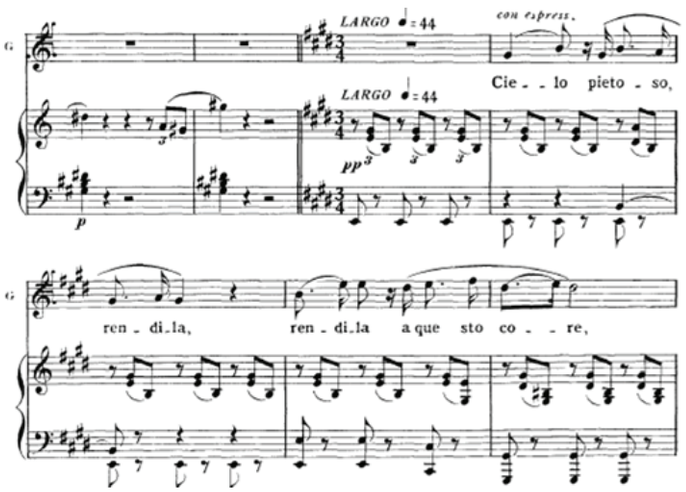


Verdi, String Quartet III: Prestissimo.

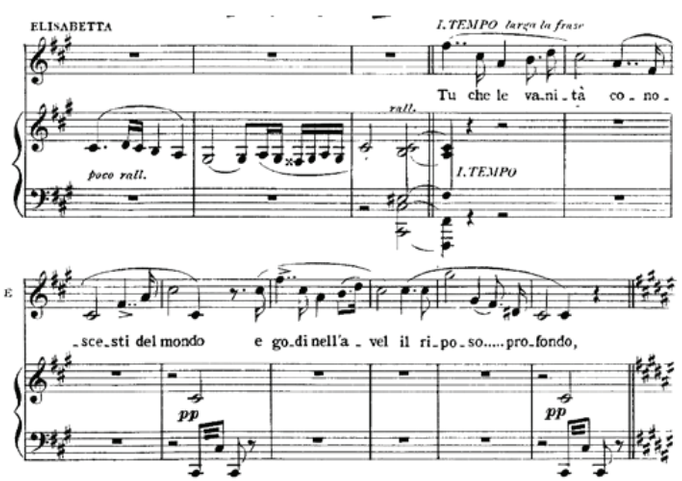


Verdi, String Quartet IV: Scherzo Fuga.

XXXII. *Simon Boccanegra*. Gabriele is feeling vengeful, believing Amelia to be the Doge's mistress. He pleads to heaven for her heart to be restored to him. The transcription combines a elaborated right-hand *cantus firmus* (directly referring back to the setting from *Ernani* at the outset) with a left-hand two-part atonal canon in the manner of the *Jérusalem* transcription (but here evoking a Venetian lagoon), with some recitative-like material from an earlier version of this piece.



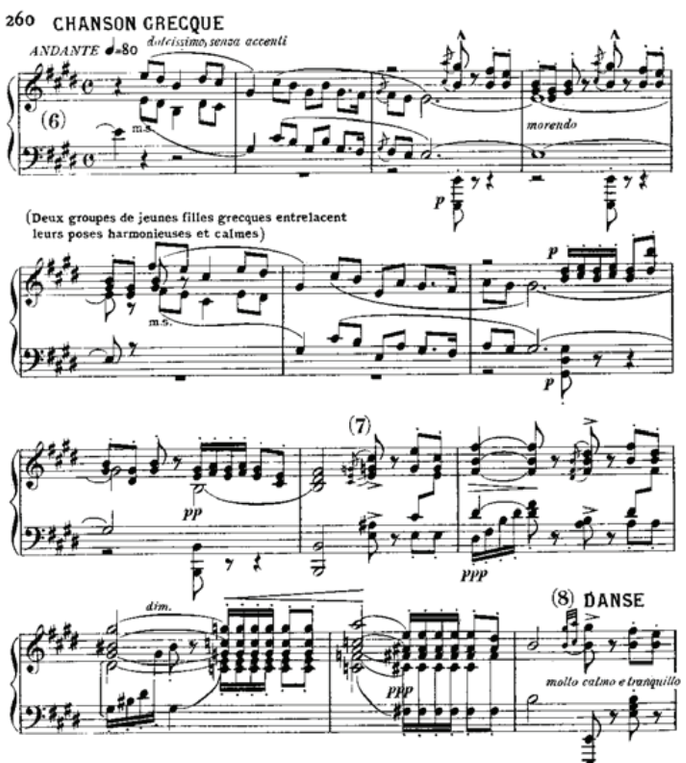
Verdi, Aria: 'Cielo, pietoso, rendila',
Simon Boccanegra (Act 2)



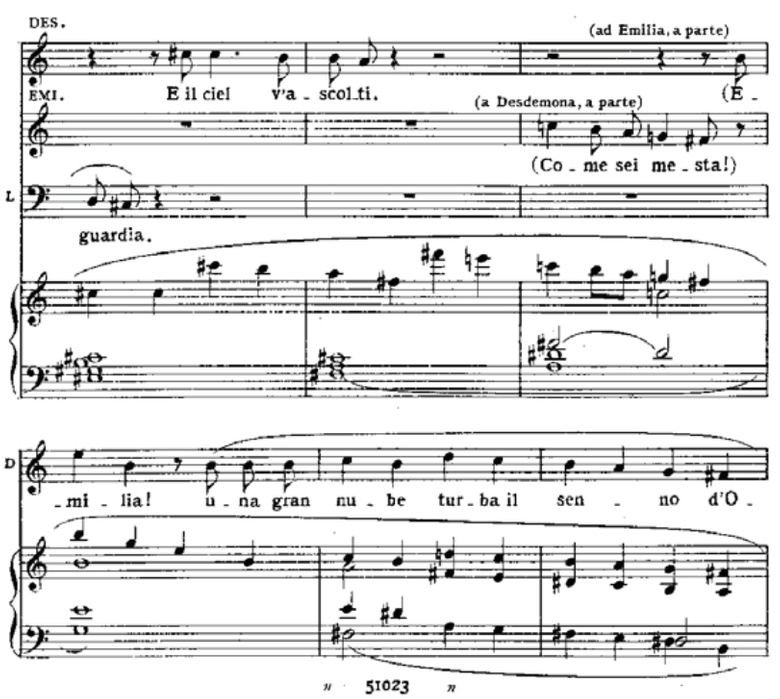
Verdi, Aria: 'Tu che la vanità conoscesti',
Don Carlo (Act 5).

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

XXXIV. *Otello*. Both this and the *Falstaff* transcription are relatively brief affairs – perhaps after the lacerating *Don Carlo* piece it seemed impossible to create extended fantasias on these two works. Finnissy first alludes briefly to the *Chanson Grecque* from the Act 3 ballet which is usually omitted from performances of the opera, then towards the crucial moment towards the end of the act, where Desdemona questions why Otello is now so contemptuous towards her (he believes her, falsely, to be secretly in love with Cassio, thanks to the trap laid by Iago).

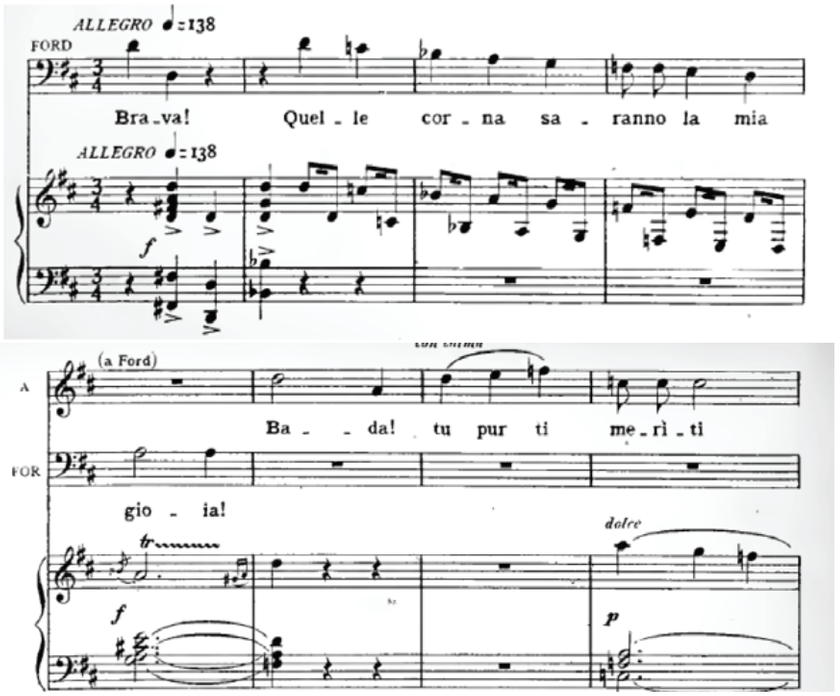


Verdi, Ballet No. 3: 'Chanson Grecque' (Cancone Greca)', *Otello* (Act 3).

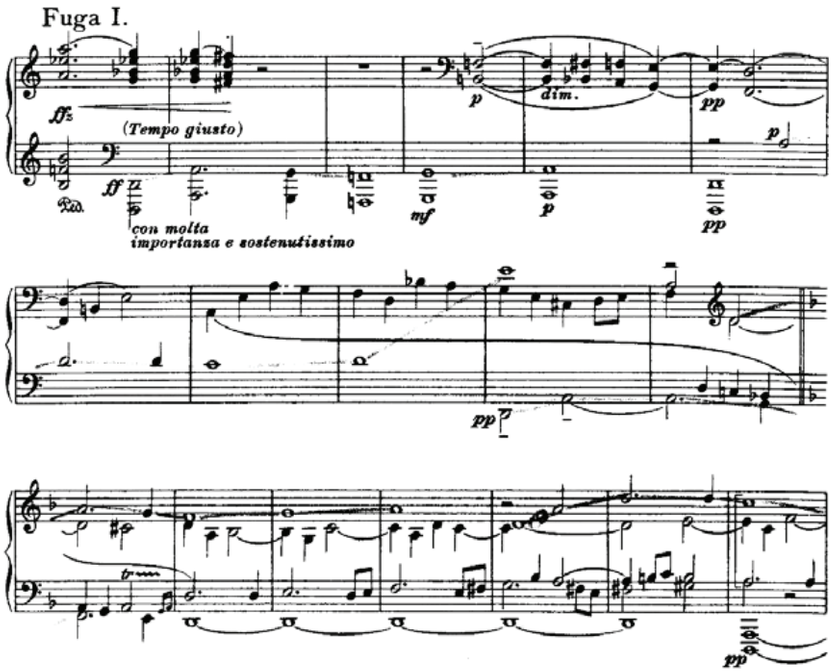


Verdi, Scena: 'Una gran nube turba', *Otello* (Act 3, Finale).

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

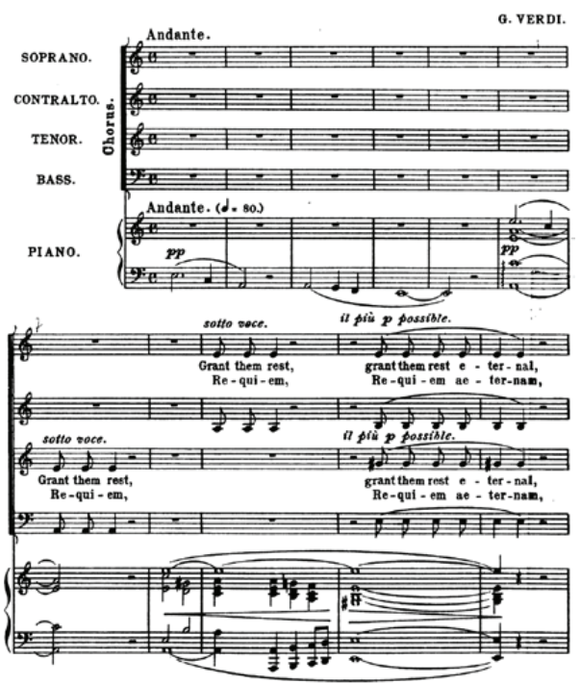


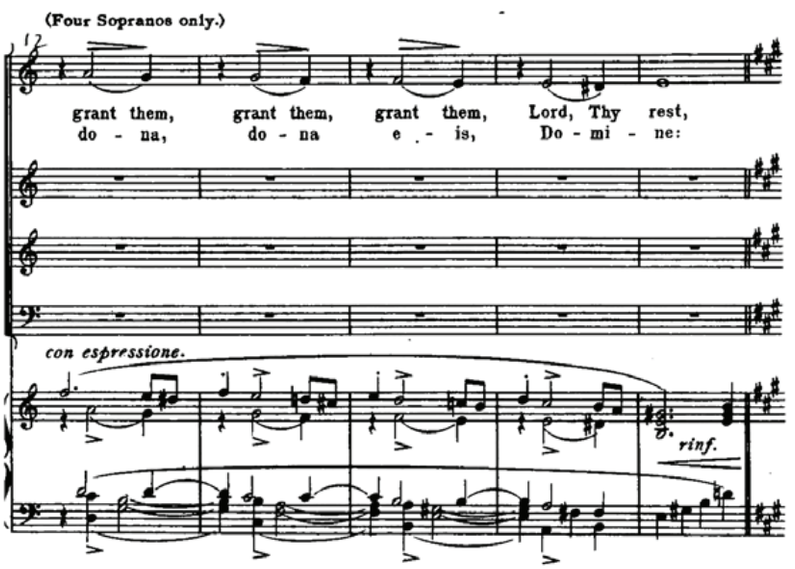
Verdi, 'Brava! Quelle corna saranno la mio gioia!', *Falstaff* (Act 3, Part 1).



Busoni, from *Fantasia Contrappuntistica* (after J.S. Bach, *Die Kunst der Fuge*).

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





Verdi, 'Requiem Aeternam', *Messa da Requiem*.

Other Works

Finnissy's *English Country-Tunes*, written in 1977 and originally indicated 'written in celebration of the Silver Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II', is one of the most coruscating statements about 'Englishness' ever written. Quite different to the various musical expressions of 'pastoralism' that were written earlier in the century by such composers as Vaughan Williams, Finzi, Bliss or Moeran (though not lacking some allusions to that sort of musical world), Finnissy's musical and psychological trajectory is bleak, raw, unstable, excitable, violent and passionate (as Finnissy himself once said, 'passion can entail a certain amount of violence'). As a comment on the time in British history at which it was written (a time dominated by flag-waving patriotism, bunting, street parties, and the rest of the trappings of Jubilee Year, which would now seem quaint but then seemed ominous), Finnissy's work shares some underlying attitudes with the then relatively nascent punk movement, and films such as Derek Jarman's *Jubilee* and *The Last of England*.

Yet the work is still unmistakeably that of an 'English' composer, not least through its portrayal of an idealised vision of a lost 'England', through modal melodies and lines that do not directly reference any actual English folk songs, but are constructed from archetypes derived from such music. This type of music forms one of the three fundamental categories of material to be found in the work, the others being a tempestuous writing (which Finnissy had developed in earlier piano works, and has some roots in the piano music of Stockhausen and Bussotti) in which the pianist practically traverses the whole keyboard simultaneously, and another type of material concentrated on one or both of the extreme registers (also highly characteristic of Finnissy's piano writing of the time).

From the first movement, 'Green Meadows', in which there is a continuous interplay between all of these types of material, the categories become progressively more polarised as the work proceeds, The second movement, 'Midsummer Morn', begins with an idyllic modal melody (anticipated in the first movement) which seems almost 'outside-time', until a few chromatic pitches sews the seed for a violent outburst, after which a return to the original material is heavily coloured, and after another outburst the music settles into a more abstract chromatic interplay of lines across the breadth of the keyboard which continues into the third movement, 'I'll give my love a garland'. After an even longer and mysterious opening section, from which a quasi-modal melody emerges, there is a further explosion, giving way to an extended section in rapid groups of gnarled grace notes in the third movement, inspired by a performance of Boulez's *Structures II* by Katia and Marielle Labéque (who also premiered Finnissy's two piano work *Wild Flowers*). The fourth movement, 'May and December', begins and ends with unsettled and somewhat explosive material, in between which Finnissy sets a long passage in the low treble region made up of two simultaneous murmuring lines made up from

close-packed chords, hushed but somewhat brooding. The fifth, 'Lies and Marvels' begins with thundering and boisterous gestures at the very lowest end of the keyboard which gradually decrease in intensity, until a few ultra-quiet *spettrale* chords and gestures serve as an up-beat to a manic (and pianistically transcendental) staccato canon between the two hands, with one part continuously rising to the upper extremes of the keyboard before returning to the low registers. The terse and wrenched gestures of the sixth movement, 'The seeds of love' serve as the denouement of the fifth, then are suddenly replaced by three short sections, one dream-like arpeggios but in the central registers, then a polymetric canon of staccato close-packed chords which serves as a counterpart to the central section of the fourth movement, then an even more dreamy passage in arpeggios and closer lines, but now at the top of the keyboard.

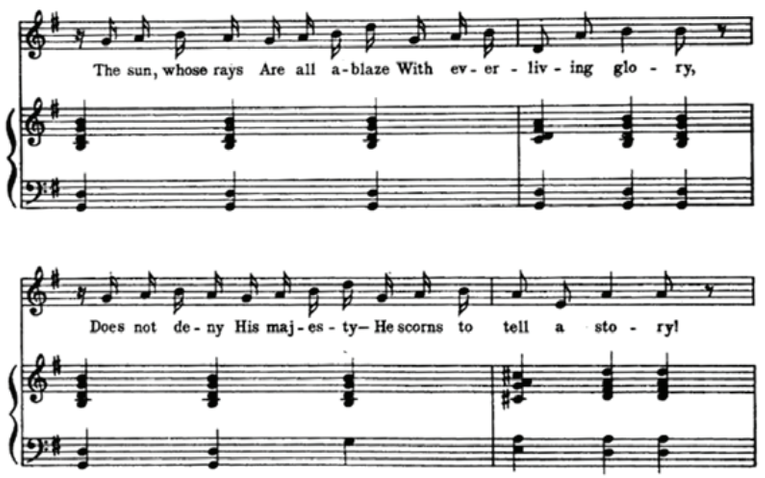
The last two movements represent the extreme of polarisation. The seventh movement, 'My bonny boy' is an extreme of stasis, with the type of modal melodies found in the second movement now reduced to a single line, as in the first, with smoothly changing key centres. The last movement, 'Come beat the drums and sound the fifes', is on the other hand a terrifying *Totentanz* set exclusively in the extreme high and low registers of the instrument, made up once again of close packed chords, gradually interspersed with trills, with a continuous structure of groups of three bars of 6, 6 and 7 semiquavers respectively. Finnissy has rarely written anything as bleak and uncompromising (but also exhilarating) as this.

The work was intended as a reflection on the hypocrisy of English culture, especially with respect to issues of sexuality, forever repressed but ever-present beneath the surface. The title, whilst in one sense looking sideways at Percy Grainger's setting of the old folk tune for Morris dancing, 'Country Gardens', is also a pun on the first syllable of the second word, as in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 2:

Hamlet: Lady, shall I lie in your lap?
Ophelia: No, my lord.
Hamlet: I mean, my head upon your lap?
Ophelia: Ay, my lord.
Hamlet: Do you think I meant *count*ry matters?

The pianist Yvar Mikhashoff died of an AIDS-related illness in 1993 at the age of just 52; Finnissy had performed with him in the premiere of Cage's *Europera 3* (1990), so wrote the series of five *Yvaroperas* in memoriam. These pieces mediate between different modes of operatic referentiality, including Cage's own, and also attempt to capture aspects of Mikhashoff's particularly style of

playing, with fantastic subtlety and variety of touch and colour. The first and third pieces juxtapose medium-size disfigured fragments derived from nineteenth-century operatic repertoire and their transcriptions by pianist-composers (with greater consistency of texture in the third) An example is in the first piece, where pairs of ascending scales on alternate beats, combined with an arpeggiated melody, recall Liszt's transcription of the overture to Wagner's *Tannhäuser*. The second and fourth pieces, however, use a single line as a continuous thread, in the second Yum-Yum's aria 'The sun, whose rays...' from Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado* (1884), Act 2, in the fourth Nadir's soliloquy' Je crois entendre encore' from Bizet's *Les pêcheurs de perles* (1862-63), Act 1.

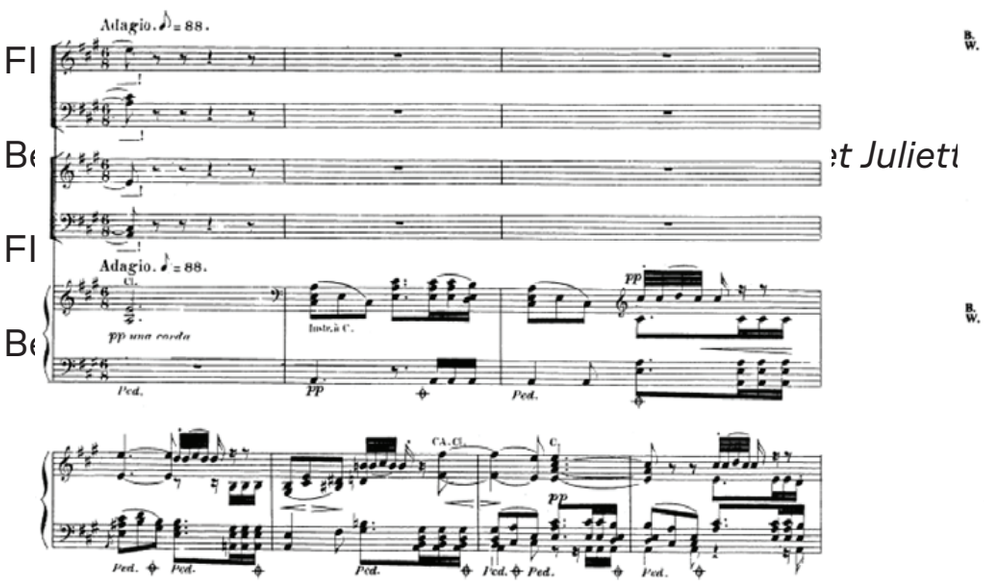


Arthur Sullivan, 'The sun, whose rays....',
from *The Mikado*, Act 2.

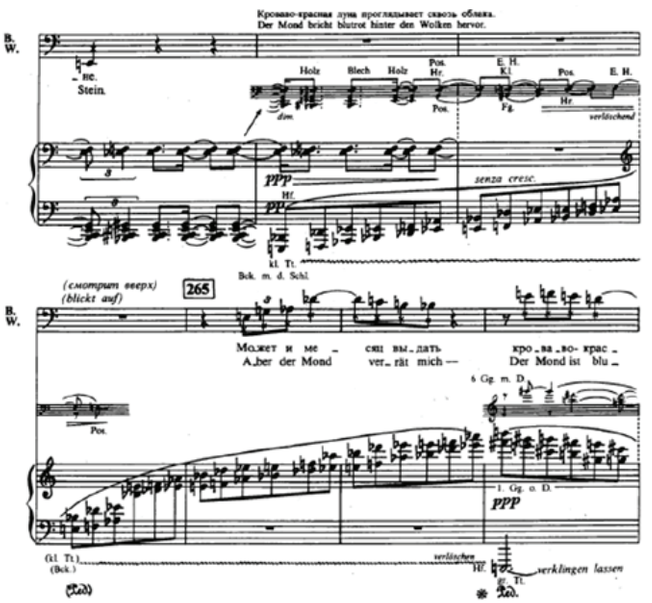
In both cases the melodies, which are generally recognisable in terms of their sources, are overlaid at various points by more chromatic material which varies in the extent to which it blends or clashes with the main line. Both thus present different perspectives on a type of communion with voices from the past; in the second, the more chromatic material (essentially in the form of a melody with accompaniment) is *ppp* whereas the main line is *pppp*, so the melody seems to appear in gaps within the texture. In the fourth piece, however, the melody is more rhythmically regular, and in the bass, with much less overlap of tessitura with the other material, so that it assumes a much more foregrounded position; this also recalls Finnissy's transcription of the sextet from *Ernani* in the *Verdi Transcriptions*. By the fifth piece, written over a year later than the other four, memories have become hazy, the music conveys a sense of a struggle to recall something ever-more remote with the passing of time.

Romeo and Juliet are Drowning is the first of Finnissy's adult works which can be called a 'transcription', in the sense of explicitly alluding to named pre-existing musical material. It is based upon the 'Scène d'amour' from Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* (1839), which would later occupy a pivotal role in Finnissy's *The History of Photography in Sound* - though there Finnissy predominantly references the music customarily taken to represent Juliette; here he focuses primarily on that for Roméo. Whilst this music

is presented in a relatively recognisable form, albeit with chromatic elaboration, around half-way through he begins to 'submerge' this within a series of descending notes and chords derived from an inverted form of the drowning music from Berg's *Wozzeck*, until ultimately all trace of the Berlioz has disappeared.

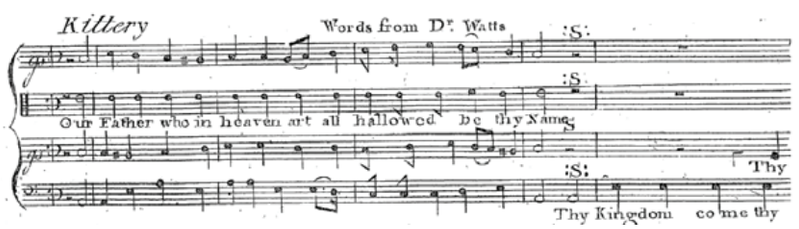


Berlioz, opening of *Scène d'amour* from *Roméo et Juliette*.



Berg, 'drowning music' from *Wozzeck*.

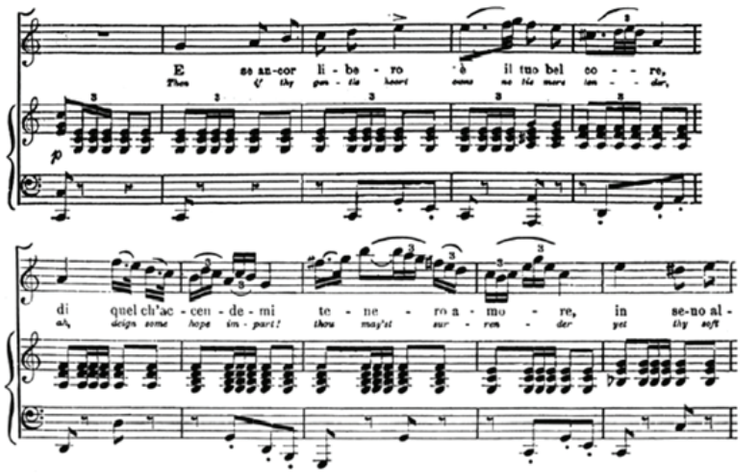
William Billings was written for the 22nd birthday of James Clapperton, one of several young pianists who were championing Finnissy's work at the time of its composition. Clapperton was then studying at the State University of New York in Buffalo, with the pianist Yvar Mikhashoff; this location likely influenced Finnissy's choice of source materials. He took a selection of four hymns by the American composer and choral teacher William Billings (1746-1800), specifically 'Kittery', 'Bethlehem', 'Boston' and 'Glad then, America', from which he extracted short fragments, and also elaborated upon particular melodic material which took his interest. A more recent precedent can be found in John Cage's *Apartment House 1776* (1976) written for the bicentennial anniversary of American independence; the 'Harmonies' material to accompany the singers in this work draws upon Billings and others.



William Billings, setting of the Lord's Prayer.

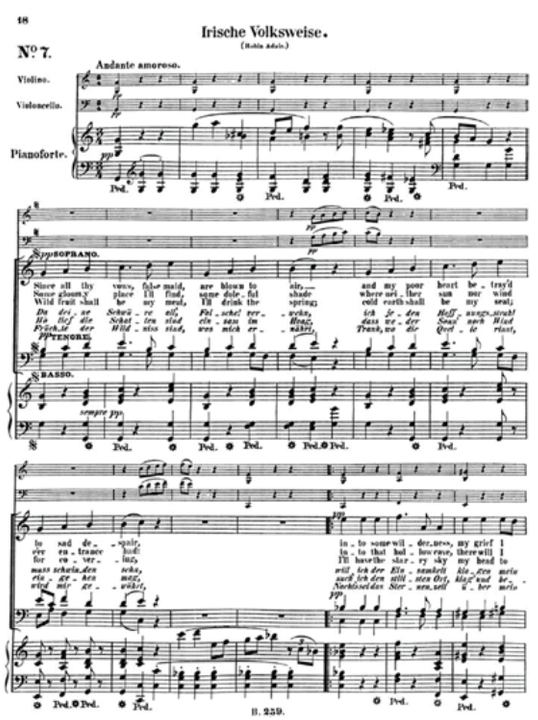
Finnissy would go on to make extensive reference to Billings' hymns (and compositional techniques) in *North American Spirituals* (1997-98) and elsewhere in the cycle *The History of Photography in Sound* (1995-2000).

The pianistically treacherous *Rossini* is a relatively straightforward transcription of Idreno's Aria 'E se ancor libero' from Act 1 of *Semiramide* (1823), in which the Indian King expresses his desire for the princess Azema. Finnissy presents a free rhapsodic version of Rossini's melody, shifted into the soprano register, which was accompanied by rhythmically regular, somewhat militaristic, passages in chords in the original, and turns the aria into a duet with a tenor line very loosely relating to the main melody. It was written for Father Gordon O'Loughlin of Saint Paul's Church, Brighton.



Rossini, 'E se ancor libero', from *Semiramide*, Act I.

Beethoven's Robin Adair was written over a four-year period, culminating in a co-commission by the York Late Music Concert Series for the first two pieces, dedicated to myself and Steve Crowther (artistic director of the series). It takes as its starting point Beethoven's *Irische Volksweise* WoO 157, Nr. 7, 'Robin Adair' (1815-20), an innocuous melody given a parlour-room style arrangement. Nonetheless, Finnissy transforms this material drastically in a set of seven extended fantasias (rather as Beethoven did with an unremarkable waltz by Diabelli in his monumental set of variations), which range between pensive quasi-expressionist ruminations, acerbic waltz-like writing, Arcadian lyricism, and mysterious, unmeasured, other-worldy *spettrale* writing in the high registers. Parts of the cycle were written for the composer Andrew Toovey on his 50th birthday (No. 3), for Andrea Rauter, then Music and Special Projects manager for the Austrian Cultural forum London, commissioned by the Forge Camden (No. 4), for pianist and pedagogue Thalia Myers, commissioned by the ABRSM for the collection *Spectrum 5* (no. 6), and for composers Leo Grant and Chris Sarantis (No. 7).



Beethoven, *Irische Volksweise* WoO 157, Nr. 7, 'Robin Adair'

Finnissy provided the following note for the first performance, which I gave at the York Late Music Concert Series on May 7th this year:

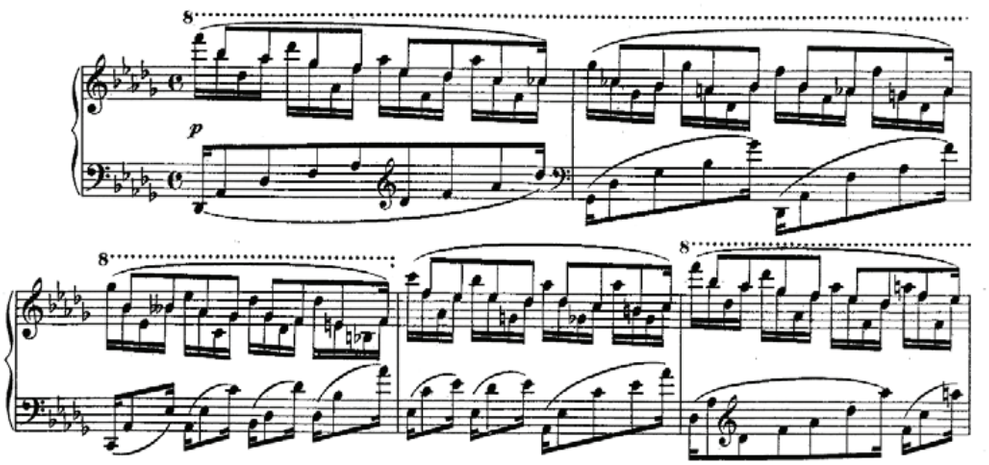
Part of my ongoing project to visit and compositionally re-claim the entirety of Music, including the darker corners, and - of course - mostly my eccentric enthusiasms: Beethoven's folksong arrangements, the 'objet trouvé' of folk music, not field-work and slowed-down wax-cylinder recording, but the paper transcription. A conversation of sorts between Western European intellectual training (or just intelligent and curious listening, if the word 'training' seems too sinister) and the rigorous (often secretive and closely-guarded) conventions of traditional folk performance. Dislocation, re-contextualisation, aesthetic corruption - and, put like that - who doesn't have any amount of this going on all the time? 'Robin Adair' might be an Irish tune (as Beethoven thought), maybe Scots. Basic gestalt - a rising scale, tiny rhythmic syncopations. I am not excited by the notion of re-cycling this and tidying it up, polishing and veneering for the concert-hall, but engaging with it as raw (?) compositional-matter which is heavily-laden with socio-political significance (from the circumstances of the song's original inspiration, to the current view of folk music). Seven different versions (2012 - 16).

With respect to the music of Robert Schumann, which explicitly informs Finnissy's *Preambule zu "Carnaval", gefolgt von der ersten und zweiten symphonischen Etüde nach Schumann*, Finnissy says the following:

I was initially put off Schumann by trying, and failing, to play his music well for college exams. I initially got to grips with his world via the Second Symphony, the opera Genoveva *and piano-duet* Bilder aus dem Osten *(early on), the Violin Sonatas (when I had a regular duo with Roger Garland),* Waldszenen *(working with the great American choreographer Jane Dudley) and, more recently, the songs.*

A pianist named Ben Binder commissioned the Preambule *to head up a series of new* Carnaval *pieces written by young Americans (Jason Eckhardt among them) and the composers had asked for me to 'introduce' them. I have no idea what (if anything) came of the project, but the act of 're-imagining' the* Preambule *- which is more direct in some places than many of my previous transcriptions - was instructive. The two Symphonic studies, and the third for 2 pianos are a bit later, but continue 'experiments with displaced (?) tonality'. Nic Hodges commissioned the solo studies for a concert he was doing at Radio Luxembourg, and they paid for them. He wasn't specific, so far as I remember, but the Schumann pieces have always been favourites to listen to, and I was thinking of maybe making a set of pieces (effectively variations)... the idea of 'veränderungen' (literally 'alterations') comes from Bach's Goldbergs, and I take the word to mean something deeper and more thoroughgoing than a typical 'variation' (along the lines of Beethoven's Prometheus set, or at least the opening of it).*

The *Preambule* presents Schumann's opening gesture from *Carnaval* (1834-35), a little modified and overlaid with *pp* material as type of ghostly overlay (as found back in his early *Songs* for piano and other instruments, and before that in Ives' *Concord* Sonata). Schumann's brilliant passage work is transformed into unmeasured complexes of grace notes, intercut with allusions to the double-dotted rhythms also in the Schumann. The two *Symphonische Etüden* (a third also exists, for two pianos), allude to the fragmentary nature of Schumann's cycle (1834-37) the first with a clear allusion to the fifth of Schumann's 'supplementary variations', not published until 1861, after Schumann's death, the second dissolving a melody within the type of unmeasured figurations also found in the *Preambule*.



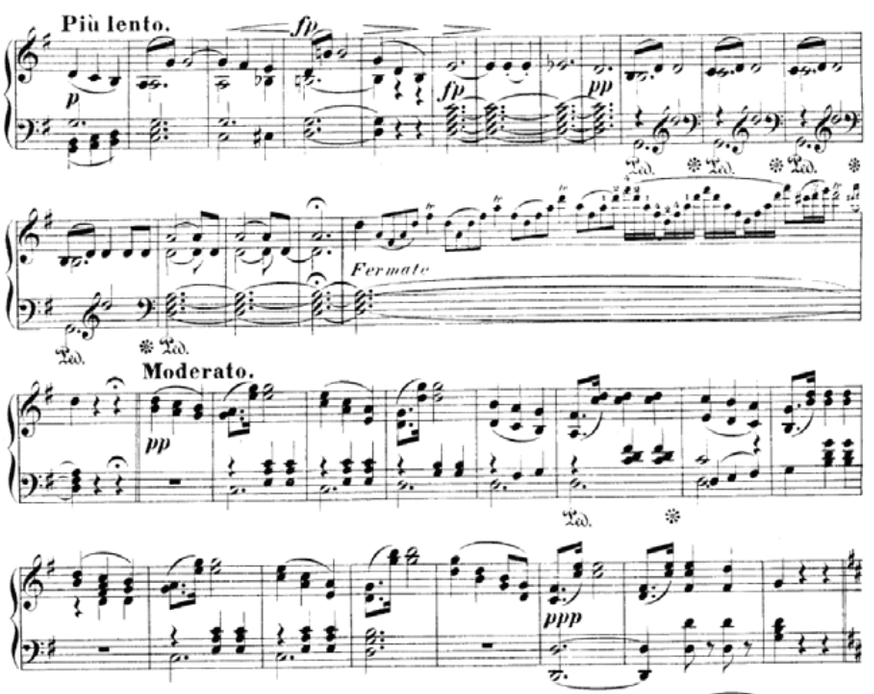
Robert Schumann, *Symphonische Etüden*, from supplement, Variation V.

What the meadow-flowers tell me, is one of Finnissy's occasional pieces written as gifts for birthdays, anniversaries or other special occasions, in this case written as a Valentine's Day present for Finnissy's partner Philip Adams. It is made up of a series of superimposed fragments selected from the second movement of Mahler's Third Symphony presented in a warm, sensuous, shimmering fashion mostly in the central registers of the piano.

The *Strauss-Walzer* began as some of Finnissy's first mature transcriptions at the time of their early version in 1967. Johann Strauss II's waltzes are a staple of the transcription literature; arrangements by Carl Tausig, Moriz Rosenthal, Ignaz Friedman, Adolf Schulz-Elver, Edouard Schütt, Leopold Godowsky, Ernst von Dohnányi and Abram Chasins were for a long time favourites of late romantic pianists (and some have recently been revived by new generations of performers curious about this literature). The most obvious precedents for Finnissy's transcriptions are the four transcriptions by Godowsky, quasi-symphonic works in which the original melodies are surrounded, sometimes almost overwhelmed, by a range of chromatic elaboration and contrapuntal overlays, in a hyper-virtuosic manner. Godowsky's works, three of which were written between 1905 and 1912 (a fourth for left hand alone dates from 1928) make explicit a quality of decadence implicit in the Strauss originals.

Strauss's work - originally a form of *Unterhaltungsmusik* which would later be considered part of a 'higher' artistic realm - responded to the decaying world of mid- to late-nineteenth-century Vienna with a music which mixes charm, sentimentality and unforced mild pathos, employing some melodic and harmonic devices which overlap with other forms of nineteenth-century popular musics (such as leading notes which resolve down rather than up). Some of his best known works come from a painful period in Viennese history, from the stock market crash of 1873 through the subsequent six-year depression, a period which saw a marked increase of suicides. The Emperor Franz Josef said that 'When Vienna gets gay, things are really serious', while satirist Karl Kraus is alleged to have commented that 'In Berlin, things are serious but not hopeless. In Vienna, they are hopeless but not serious.' (both of these quotes are cited with relish in Terry Eagleton's satirical novel *Saints and Scholars* (1987)). Godowsky's arrangements, written during the period of the final decline of the Habsburg Empire, respond to a changed cultural environment, one which in the Germanic world had also bequeathed Richard Strauss's *Salomé* and the art of the *Jugendstil* and the *Wiener Secession*, and re-create Johann Strauss II in a manner which is brilliant but almost at breaking point through the relentlessness of its detail and ostentation. Kaikhosru Shapurji Sorabji's *Valse-Fantasie (Hommage à Johann Strauss)* (1925) dissolves Strauss's harmonic language even further in a clangorous texture frequently employing parallel dissonant chords and mannered devices for evoking exoticism and sensuousness.

In Finnissy's *Strauss-Walzer*, the world of Strauss's Vienna is viewed through the lens of the late twentieth-century, with increased use of fragmentation, disorientation, and lack of musical closure. The first two waltzes set - *Wo die Citronen blüh'n!* op. 364 (1874), *O schöner Mai*, op. 375 (1877) – both originally date from the period of the depression. Whilst maintaining a basic 3/4 waltz pulse, Finnissy's writing is texturally and harmonically discontinuous, shifting between blocks of material. In the first of these, Straussian (and Strauss-Godowskian) harmonies are a regular presence (though the Strauss originals are only obliquely recognisable in places), Finnissy goes even a stage further than Godowsky in terms of elaboration, whilst featuring Sorabjian top-heaviness, though with much more refined and imaginative use of pitch. Ultimately, a series of

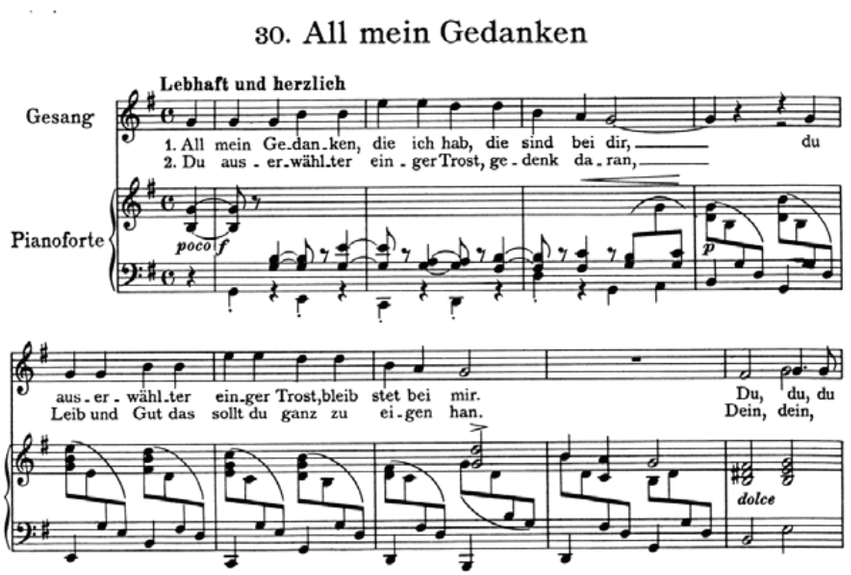


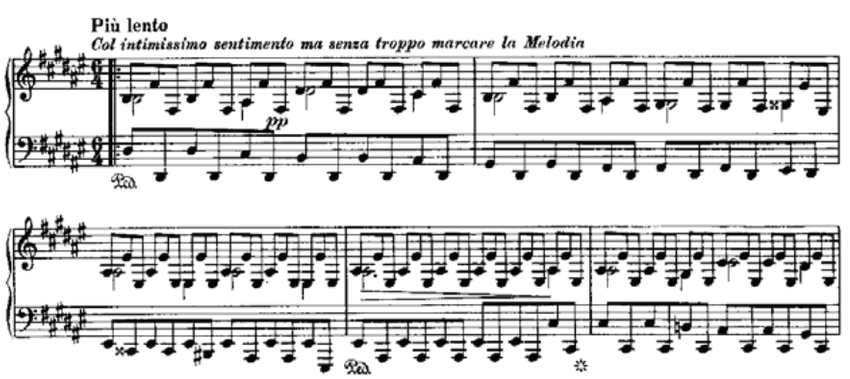
Johann Strauss, from *Geschichten aus dem Wienerwald*

flourishes coalesce into longer patterns which serve to smudge and 'wipe out' the clearer lines, though a melodic fragment remains at the conclusion. The second waltz is calmer and more measured, but uses similar flourishes which do ultimately obliterate the material at the end. In Finnissy's setting of the slightly earlier *Geschichten aus dem Wienerwald*, op. 325 (1868) (notable for its use of a zither), Straussian/Godowskian sentimentality is more explicit, though offset by more chromatically dense and harmonically blurred responses, as well as moments of drastic thinning of texture, almost as if the music is drawing to a halt, and an overloading of texture which exceeds both the previous pieces. By the end of this work, Finnissy appears to be approaching some ultimate tonal resolution, but stops short of this at the very end, leaving the music in a state of suspension.

The three pieces are dedicated to three pianists, all young at the time of the composition of the final version, who like Clapperton (and myself, from a few years later) were part of a new generation championing Finnissy's work: Jonathan Powell, Nicolas Hodges, and Ben Morison.

Finnissy's four *Brahms-Lieder*, written for the American pianist August Arnone, return to a composer with whom Finnissy has had a recurrent fascination but something of a love-hate relationship. Here, characteristically, Finnissy makes use of Brahms's folk song arrangements, specifically Nos. 29- 35 from the *Deutsche Volkslieder* WoO 33. The first piece based upon No. 30 from this collection, 'Alle meine Gedanken'.





Johannes Brahms, from *Ballade*, op. 10. No. 4.

Finnissy's setting is configured in a manner somewhat resembling the veiled middle section of Brahms's Ballade op. 10 no. 4 (at the suggestion of Arnone). The folk melody, whilst rhythmically modified, is clearly audible in the alto part at the outset, and returns in amongst rhapsodic elaborations upon the basic material, drawing upon the flowing quaver accompaniments of parts of the original song.

The other three songs are more oblique in their relationship to the Brahms originals. The second features a discursive structure, between light *scherzoso* material in a moderately transparent setting, and some more close-packed *sostenuto* writing, culminating in a series of inverted fragments from Brahms's No. 35, 'Soll sich der Mond nicht heller scheinen'. The racuous third piece uses Brahms's characteristic setting of a melody in sixths, fifths and thirds, as found in the piano parts of No. 31, 'Dort in den Weiden steht ein Haus', and No. 33, 'Och Moder, ich well en Ding han'. The fourth setting relates to Brahms's No. 29, 'Es war ein Markgraf überm Rhein', with the melody appearing in the tenor line. As in all of the songs, however, the material (in all parts) is in a continual state of flux, as Brahms's type of 'developing variation' is reconfigured in a much later post-tonal context.

Programme notes © Ian Pace 2025 (based upon notes written in 2016 for the series of the complete piano music to celebrate Michael Finnissy's 70th birthday).

Ian Pace, piano

Ian Pace is a pianist of long-established reputation, specialising in the farthest reaches of musical modernism and transcendental virtuosity, as well as a writer and musicologist focusing on issues of performance, music and society and the avant-garde. He was born in Hartlepool, England in 1968, and studied at Chetham's School of Music, The Queen's College, Oxford and, as a Fulbright Scholar, at the Juilliard School in New York, later completing his PhD, on the origins of post-war German new music and its infrastructure under occupation, at Cardiff University. His main piano teacher, and a major influence upon his work, was the Hungarian pianist György Sándor, a student of Bartók.

Based in London since 1993, he has pursued an active international career, performing in 26 countries and at most major European venues and festivals. His absolutely vast repertoire of all periods focuses particularly upon music of the 20th and 21st Century. He has given world premieres of over 350 piano works, including works by Patrícia de Almeida, Gilbert Amy, Julian Anderson, Richard Barrett, Konrad Boehmer, Luc Brewaeys, Aaron Cassidy, James Clarke, James Dillon, Pascal Dusapin, Richard Emsley, James Erber, Brian Ferneyhough, Michael Finnissy (whose complete piano works he performed in a landmark 6-concert series in 1996, and then again in an 11-concert series in 2016-17), Christopher Fox, Sam Hayden, Volker Heyn, Wieland Hoban, Evan Johnson, Maxim Kolomiiets, André Laporte, Hilda Paredes, Alwynne Pritchard, Horatiu Radulescu, Lauren Redhead, Frederic Rzewski, Thoma Simaku, Howard Skempton, Michael Spencer, Gerhard Stäbler, Yuji Takahashi, Serge Verstockt, Hermann Vogt, Marc Yeats, Alistair Zaldua and Walter Zimmermann. He has presented cycles of works

including Stockhausen's *Klavierstücke I-X*, and the piano works of Ferneyhough, Fox, Kagel, Ligeti, Lachenmann, Messiaen, Radulescu, Rihm, Rzewski and Skempton. He has played with orchestras including the Orchestre de Paris under Christoph Eschenbach (with whom he premiered and recorded Dusapin's piano concerto *À Quia*), the SWF Orchestra in Stuttgart under Rupert Huber, and the Dortmund Philharmonic under Bernhard Kontarsky (with whom he gave a series of very well-received performances of Ravel's Concerto for the Left Hand). He has recorded around 40 CDs; his recording of Michael Finnissy's five-and-a-half hour *The History of Photography in Sound* (of which he gave the world premiere in London in 2001) was released by Métier in October 2013 to rave reviews. Recent recordings have included piano music of Marc Yeats, the complete piano works of Sam Hayden, and the complete works of Brian Ferneyhough. Forthcoming recordings include the complete piano works of Horatiu Radulescu, and new recordings Volker Heyn. Recent concerts have included appearances in Paris, Lisbon, Zürich, at the Ruhrtriennale in Duisburg (giving the German premiere of *The History of Photography in Sound*), Oslo, Prague, Kiev, São Paolo, Florianapolis, a tour of Japan, and around the UK. In 2018, BBC Radio 3 broadcast a special two-hour issue of the programme *Here and Now* devoted to his work, the first time this had been done for a single artist.

He is Professor of Music, Culture and Society at City University, London, and University Advisor – Interdisciplinarity, and was Head of the Department of Music from 2020 to 2021. In 2023 he moved to the Department of Sociology and Criminology in the School of Policy and Global Affairs. He previously held positions at the London College of Music and Media, University of Southampton, Trinity Laban Conservatoire and Dartington College of Arts. His research interacts with musicology, performance studies, history, politics, sociology and wider realms of culture; areas of academic expertise include the breadth of 19th, 20th and 21st century art music, 19th century performance practice (especially the work of Liszt and Brahms), musical historiography, contemporary performance practice and issues, music and culture under fascism and communism, the post-1945 avant-garde, in particular in West Germany issues of music and society (with particular reference to the work of Theodor Adorno, the Frankfurt School, and their followers), critical musicology, and music education at secondary and tertiary levels. He also teaches areas including classical social theory, cultural sociology, urban sociology and popular music.

He co-edited and was a major contributor the volume *Uncommon Ground: The Music of Michael Finnissy*, which was published by Ashgate in 1998, and authored the monograph *Michael Finnissy's The History of Photography in Sound: A Study of Sources, Techniques and Interpretation*, published by Divine Art in 2013. He has also published many articles in *Music and Letters, Journal of the Royal Musical Association, Contemporary Music Review, TEMPO*, *The Musical Times*, *The Liszt Society Journal, Musiktexte*, *Musik & Ästhetik, The Open Space Magazine*, as well as writing for a

wider audience in the *Telegraph*, the *Spectator*, *London Review of Books, Times Higher Education Supplement*, *The Conversation*, *International Piano* and *Music Teacher*, as well as making a series of podcasts. He is currently working a new biography of Karlheinz Stockhausen for Reaktion Books.

He also contributed chapters to *The Cambridge History of Musical Performance*, edited Colin Lawson and Robin Stowell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), *Collected Writings of the Orpheus Institute: Unfolding Time: Studies in Temporality in Twentieth-Century Music*, edited Darla Crispin (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009), *The Modernist Legacy*, edited Björn Heile (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2009), *Beckett's Proust/Deleuze's Proust,* edited Mary Bryden and Margaret Topping (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), *The Oxford Handbook of Musical Performance*, edited Gary McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022) and *The Oxford Handbook to Spectralism in Music*, edited Amy Bauer, Liam Cagney and William Mason (New York: Oxford University Press, 2025). The volume *Critical Perspectives on Michael Finnissy: Bright Futures, Dark Pasts*, co-edited with Nigel McBride, was published in 2019, and another on *Researching and Writing on Contemporary Art and Artists: Challenges, Practices, and Complexities*, co-edited with Christopher Wiley, in 2020. Forthcoming edited collections, which will be published in 2023-24, include *Writing on Contemporary Musicians: Promotion, Advocacy, Disinterest, Censure*, also co-edited with Christopher Wiley, and *Rethinking Contemporary Musicology: Perspectives on Interdisciplinarity, Skills and Deskilling*, co-edited with Peter Tregear. Other forthcoming publications include monographs on music in Weimar and post-war Germany, a book on Brahms Performance Practice, and a history of specialist musical education in Britain. He also worked with the director Bettina Ehrhardt on the film *Wir fangen ganz von vorn an: Neue Musik für ein Deutschland nach dem Krieg* (2020). He is also a twice-elected trustee of the Society for Music Analysis, for which he is current Awards Officer. He is also co-convenor of City Academics for Academic Freedom, and a founder member of the London Universities' Council for Academic Freedom, for which he acts as Secretary.

He is also a composer; recent works include *Das hat Rrrrasss…* for speaker and piano (2018); the piano pieces *Thirty for Grace* (2019), *Clothcomposers* (2019) and *Schneeriss* (2020); the cycle for singer and ensemble *Matière: Le palais de la mort* (2021); and *Lancashire Rock* (2022) for clarinet, percussion and piano.

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