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# History Enchanted in Music – Historical Verism in Ruggero Leoncavallo’s *I Medici*

### Abstract

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My study of the historical opera *I Medici* focuses on an analysis of the work’s dramaturgy. In my opinion, the libretto is the key to understanding operatic dramas; it constitutes their primary foundation, on which the subsequent semantic layers of this naturally syncretic musical genre are constructed. In my paper I have therefore analysed the individual components of the libretto, with special emphasis on the persons of the drama, their personality traits, as well as their musical representations in Leoncavallo’s work. Analysis of the dramaturgical aspects of the opera is an essential first step to a consideration of the musical layer, which lies at the heart of my research. In my paper, I have followed the path mapped out by musicologist Luca Zoppelli; however, his work is only the starting point for a more detailed study of the opera’s expressive qualities and the procedures applied for the musical representation of veristic ideas. Verity – not only in the historical sense – becomes a leading category which unifies

the opera at every level, from its original source recorded in the chronicles to the composer's presentation of the story.

## Keywords

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Ruggero Leoncavallo, *I Medici*, Italian opera, veristic opera, *verismo*

When in the novel the affinity and cohesion of its every part will be so complete that the creative process will remain a mystery, like the development of human passions, and the harmony of its elements will be so perfect, the sincerity of its reality so evident, its manner of and its reason for existing so necessary, that the hand of the artist will remain absolutely invisible, then it will have the imprint of an actual happening; the work of art will seem *to have made itself*, to have matured and come into being spontaneously, like a fact of nature, without retaining any point of contact with its author, any stain of the original sin.

Giovanni Verga<sup>1</sup>

These words by Giovanni Verga, Italy's main *verista* writer, perfectly reflect the atmosphere of both literary *verismo* and its operatic version, which emerged as a natural consequence of the former. It seems unnecessary to give examples of how this concept, though formulated with literary works in mind, can also be applied to music. Veristic operas occupy, after all, an important place in the literature of this genre, and are among those most frequently staged in opera houses nowadays. At this stage, the literary provenance of the genre needs to be emphasised, though. As Krzysztof Żaboklicki observes,<sup>2</sup> *verismo*, which manifested itself most completely in the works of the Sicilian Giovanni Verga, may be considered as the Italian variant of the French naturalism. In the opera, however, veristic tendencies appeared much earlier than it has been suggested in popular publications, which list Pietro Mascagni, Ruggero Leoncavallo, and Giacomo Puccini as initiators of this trend. Let me but mention the world's

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<sup>1</sup> G. Verga, 'To Salvatore Farina', prefatory letter to 'Gramigna's Mistress', *The She-Wolf and Other Stories*, tr. G. Cecchetti (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1958), 86-88.

<sup>2</sup> K. Żaboklicki, *Historia literatury włoskiej* (2008), 288.

most frequently performed opera, Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, which exerted a strong impact on Puccini, and Stanisław Moniuszko's *Halka*, unknown to the wide international audience in the nineteenth century, but currently enjoying worldwide success.<sup>3</sup>

Operas drawing on historical events are a special category. In our view, historical verism may be considered as a crossover genre between the French *le grand opéra historique* and the Italian *verismo*. Examples of such works began to appear already in the 1850s (Giuseppe Verdi's *I Vespri Siciliani* and *Don Carlos*, Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser* and *Rienzi*; that latter opera will play a role in my discussion of *I Medici* that follows). Concerning the emergence of historical verism, one should start by emphasising both the continuity and the tendency to fuse trends and styles. Such an approach seems more appropriate in the case of verism than one that situates its beginnings as late as in Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*. This is important in the context of *I Medici* since Leoncavallo's historical opera, like other works, some of which were composed many years before the *Cavalleria*, illustrates the concept of verism as a progressive current developing from historical opera in the direction of *la verita* as the 'main' and 'proper' type of approach dominating among veristic composers.

This was also the direction in which Leoncavallo's own output developed. Under the influence of Professor Giosuè Carducci in the field of literature and of Richard Wagner in that of music, Ruggero made up his mind to create an operatic historical trilogy, an 'anti-tetralogy', as he called it himself. When exactly the idea of writing this monumental and mature work, albeit not devoid of youthful idealism, emerged in the young composer's head – we cannot say for sure. What is certain is that the concept must have been thoroughly thought out by 1876, when the extremely excited Leoncavallo presented it to Maestro Wagner on the occasion of the premiere of *Rienzi*

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<sup>3</sup> I am referring here not only to the production staged at Wiener Staatsoper (premiered in December 2019, dir. Mariusz Treliński), but also to the recording of the opera released by the Fryderyk Chopin Institute and nominated for the Opera Awards 2020 (NIFCCD 082-083, Moniuszko, *Halka*; performers: Tina Gorina, Monika Ledzion-Porczyńska, Matheus Pompeu, Robert Gierlach, Rafał Siwek, Karol Kozłowski, Krzysztof Szyfman, Mateusz Stachura, Paweł Cichoński, Podlasie Opera and Philharmonic Choir, cond. Violetta Bielecka, Europa Galante, cond. Fabio Biondi).

in Bologna.<sup>4</sup> As the key determinant of the work's shape, *la verità* required in-depth studies from the composer (who, following the example of Wagner, wrote the libretto himself). It therefore comes as no great surprise that the idea, though it already crystallised in much detail in the 1870s, only took its final shape in 1890. Those years were for Leoncavallo a time of exploration, of approximating not only that historical *verità*, but also *la italianità*, the Italian character essential to *I Medici*.<sup>5</sup>

It is then these two primary categories, *la verità* and *la italianità*, that we are going to consider with reference to the *dramatis personae* constructed by the author of *I Medici*. Their characterisation, words and behaviour, and, most of all, the musical representations of their personalities and the emotions they experience, will provide us with a key for the interpretation of this opera. Therefore, true to Verga's verist creed quoted in the opening of this paper, we will primarily focus on 'human passions' and 'the sincerity of [the work's] reality', though not in isolation from the musical content, which is equally important to an opera as its dramaturgical layer.

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<sup>4</sup> The authenticity of this event, as recalled by Leoncavallo, is sometimes questioned. Cf. *Appunti vari delle autobiografici di R. Leoncavallo*, 24 (Locarno, Biblioteca Cantonale, Fondo Ruggero Leoncavallo), quoted after: L. Zoppelli, 'I Medici e Wagner', in L. Guiot, J. Maehder, eds, *Letteratura, musica e teatro al tempo di Ruggero Leoncavallo: atti del 2. Convegno internazionale Ruggero Leoncavallo nel suo tempo: Locarno, Biblioteca Cantonale 7-8-9 ottobre 1993* (1993), 149.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Ruggero Leoncavallo's letter to Francesco Carlo Tonnolla of 14 October 1893, quoted after: Zoppelli, 'I Medici e Wagner', 151–152: 'I caratteri storici rispettati scrupolosamente e mi tenni fedele ai costumi, ai particolari storici e persino, per quanto era in mia possa, alla lingua del tempo. A parte, dunque, qualche trasposizione o ritardo delle date, impostomi dalla forma teatrale, io presenterò gli uomini ed i fatti quali ce li trasmisero gli storici. [...] Solo dirò che, fedele alle massime del sommo di Bayreuth, cercai di fare il poema nazionale e quindi volli che un gran sentimento d'italianità aleggiasse costante nell'aura musicale del poema.' ['I scrupulously followed the historical figures and remained faithful to the historical customs, details, and even, as far as possible, to the language of that age. Therefore, apart from a certain shift or delay in dates, imposed by the theatrical form, I have represented the people and facts as historians have transmitted them to us [...] Let me only say that, true to the highest ideals of Bayreuth, I have striven to create a national poem, and therefore I wanted the splendid sense of "Italianity" constantly to be present in the musical aura of the poem.'].]

## Lorenzo de' Medici

The opera is set in the years 1471–1478 (the plot ends on 26 April 1478, with the final events related to the Pazzi conspiracy, around which the spectacle's action revolves). This was the heyday of both the Medici family and Florence as the city they ruled. The years of Lorenzo's rule (as one of the most prominent representatives of the Medici family, he need not be separately introduced here) were undoubtedly an important chapter in modern Italian history. He has come down in history not only as an eminent politician, but also as an outstanding poet. Over the centuries, he has come to be viewed as a stately, statuesque figure. This is the image consistently built by the composer on all the levels of his work: verbal, musical, and dramatic – as perfectly illustrated already in the opening scene of the score, that of a hunt attended by the Medici brothers and, among others, by Poliziano. This scene is the first example of operatic poets speaking with the words of their real, historical counterparts. In Lorenzo's part (baritone), this statuesque quality is reflected from the start by the rhythmical, declamatory shape of the melodic line, a *canzona* which is the first out of several settings of Renaissance poetry in this score.

The figure of Lorenzo is put into sharp focus in Act Two, during the tournament taking place in Piazza di Santa Trinita. While listening to his first entry in this act, in *tempo di gavotte*, we should remember that the earliest sources comprising gavottes come from France from a period nearly a century after Lorenzo's death.<sup>6</sup> The use of a stylisation of this courtly dance in *I Medici* might therefore be interpreted as a result of the composer's insufficient historical knowledge. However, considering his in-depth studies, it is also possible that he invoked this dance on purpose, as part of the consistently formed image of Lorenzo as an enlightened man of multiple talents: an eminent politician, as well as an innovative poet<sup>7</sup> and one of history's greatest patrons of the arts. By making him sing in a much later genre derived from foreign (French)

<sup>6</sup> M.E. Little, 'Gavotte', in *Grove Music Online*, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000010774?rskey=Xw4omS&result=1>, accessed 18 June 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Importantly, Lorenzo de' Medici and Angelo Poliziano together played a key role in the emancipation of Italian as a literary language.

lands, the composer may be hinting at the young ruler's genius. This, however, should only be taken as a hypothesis.

The image shows a page of a musical score for the opera *I Medici* by Ruggero Leoncavallo. The score is for Act I, Scene (Lorenzo), measures 8-17. It is in G major and 4/4 time, marked 'Cantabile. ♩ = 42'. The score includes a vocal line with lyrics in Italian and piano accompaniment for Violini I and piano. The lyrics are: 'a l'om - bra tu - a, del tuo ru - scel - lo al mur - mu - re scen - de so - a - ve u - na tri - stez - za a l'a - ni - mo e par che in cor'.

Ex. 1. Ruggero Leoncavallo, *I Medici*. *Azione storica in quattro atti*. Act I, Scene (Lorenzo), mm. 8-17.

Mov<sup>to</sup> di Gavotta. ♩ = 126

A - scolta el canjo mio che ti fal - vel - la E

Mov<sup>to</sup> di Gavotta. ♩ = 126

dal sonno ti seu - te, o gen - til da - ma, o gen - til da -

*poco rit.* *a tempo*

*rit. col canto* *a tempo*

Ex. 2. Ruggero Leoncavallo, *I Medici...*, Act II, *Scena e serenata* (Lorenzo), mm. 6–14.

In our discussion of Lorenzo, we must not omit the last words of this opera, which are also sung by this figure: ‘Del trono a me spianato hanno il cammin, / tu mi vendica, o Plebe!... Io regno alfin!’ [‘My throne has been confirmed for me this way, / o People, you will avenge me!... I reign at last!’]

Appearing just a moment after the death of his younger brother, these words define Lorenzo as a cynic and a person blinded by his desire for power.<sup>8</sup> His unconcealed satisfaction is emphasised by the use in the finale of the joyful, merry, festive and loud key of E major,<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ruggero Leoncavallo’s letter to Francesco Carlo Tonnolla of 14 October 1893, quoted after: Zoppelli, ‘I Medici e Wagner’, 152: ‘Ed, accanto a questo seguito di cronache, un’idea filosofica: il processo dell’uomo di stato Rinascimento, che, riconosciuta la frivolezza del popolo in cui vivea fidente, cerca un baluardo nel potere della Chiesa: questa a sua volta lo tradisce ed egli, pieno il core d’un’idea gigantesca ed ambiziosa, diffidando alla fine di tutto e di tutti, addiventa Cesare Borgia.’ [‘Besides, apart from following the chronicles, [I was motivated] by a philosophical idea: the [formative] process of a Renaissance statesman who, recognising the careless nature of the people in whom the faith resides, looks for support in the power of the Church; the latter betrays him in turn, and he, filled with gigantic and ambitious ideas, turns into Cesare Borgia.’].

<sup>9</sup> P. Ertel, ‘Die Charakter der Tonarten bei Wagner’, in R. Wrede, ed., *Die Kritik, Wochenschau des öffentlichen Lebens* (Berlin Kritik-Verlag: Berlin, 1896);



which Schubart also associates with loud cries,<sup>10</sup> uttered in the final scene of *I Medici* by the chorus representing the bloodthirsty people of Florence who wish to avenge the Medicis.

The image shows a page of a musical score, page 359, from Ruggero Leoncavallo's *I Medici*. The score is for Act IV, *Morte di Giuliano e finale*. It features a vocal line for Lorenzo and a four-part choir (Soprano, Tenor, Basses, and Contraltos). The tempo and mood are marked "Meno, solennemente.  $\text{♩} = 66$ ". The lyrics for Lorenzo are "Del tro - no a me..... spian." and "na - to hanno il cam. min!... Tu mi ven - di. ca o ple. be,". The choir parts are marked "Pal. le!". The score includes piano accompaniment for the vocal lines and a grand piano accompaniment. The page number "359" is in the top right corner.

Ex. 3. Ruggero Leoncavallo, *I Medici*..., Act IV, *Morte di Giuliano e finale* (Lorenzo, choir), mm. 30–39.

F.A. Gevaert, *Traité Général d'Instrumentation* (J.B. Katto: Paris, 1863), F.G. Hand, *Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, 1 (Hochhausen & Fournes: Leipzig, 1837), A. Lavignac, *La musique et les musiciens* (Librairie Delagrave: Paris, 1895), E. Pauer, *The Elements of the Beautiful in Music* (Novello: London, 1877), Ch.D. Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik der Tonkunst* (J.V. Degen: Wien, 1806). Quoted after: J. Mianowski, *Semantyka tonacji w niemieckich dziełach operowych XVIII–XIX wieku* (2000), 36–47.

<sup>10</sup> Mianowski, *Semantyka tonacji*, 36–47.



## Simonetta Cattaneo

The young lyrical soprano Simonetta Cattaneo, would-be wife of Amerigo's cousin Marco Vespucci, muse of Sandro Botticelli, and the nymph from Poliziano's *Stanze*<sup>11</sup> – is represented as the embodiment of beauty and goodness. The simplicity of her soul is reflected in her vocal part, drawing in many passages on Tuscan folk music. References to a traditional Italian poetic form and a genre of folk music at the same time accompany the protagonist's first appearance on the stage. She performs a *rispetto*, a stylisation of a Tuscan hendecasyllabic form of folk poetry, examples of which can be found among the works of Poliziano and Lorenzo de' Medici. Notably, she sings in the key of A-flat major, associated with death and the grave<sup>12</sup> (she will meet her death in Act Three), but also possibly suggesting the suprasensual element<sup>13</sup> introduced in Simonetta's part by Poliziano's poem.<sup>14</sup>

This melancholy *rispetto* is followed by a *ritornello toscano*, which brings a change of mood. The composer's use of this name for a fragment which is not a *ritornello* in terms of musical genre may be puzzling. In this context, however, a *ritornello* should be understood as a poetic form made up of three-line stanzas in which the first and last lines are connected by rhyme:

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<sup>11</sup> NB. *Stanzas Begun for the Tournament of the Magnificent Giuliano de' Medici* (It. *Stanze cominciate per la giostra del Magnifico Giuliano de' Medici*) were an important source for Leoncavallo since they served him to construct the plot of Simonetta and Giuliano's courtly love.

<sup>12</sup> The key of A-flat major was associated with the grave already in the early eighteenth century by Johannes Mattheson in J. Mattheson, *Das Neu-Eröffnete Orchester* (Benjamin Schillers: Hamburg, 1713). Several decades later, Joseph Vogler and Justin Heinrich Knecht interpreted A-flat major as 'a black key', cf. G.J. Vogler, 'Ausdruck (musikalisch)', in *Deutsche Enzyklopädie*, 2 (Varrentrapp und Wenner: Frankfurt am Main, 1779), 384–387). In the nineteenth century, this key was related to death and the grave by successive theorists, cf. Ertel, 'Die Charakter der Tonarten...' and Schubart, *Ideen zu einer Ästhetik*. Quoted after: Mianowski, *Semantyka tonacji*, 24–47.

<sup>13</sup> Hand, *Ästhetik der Tonkunst*, 1. Quoted after: Mianowski, *Semantyka tonacji*, 43.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Żaboklicki, *Historia literatury włoskiej*, 107–108.

Fiorin di prato!  
Sento fuggir dal cor lenta la vita,  
eppur non ho vissuto e non ho amato.  
Fior d'erba amara!  
Forse le rose della primavera  
son destinate a ricovrir mia bara!<sup>15</sup>

[Flower of the meadow!  
I can feel how life is fleeing from my heart,  
though I have neither lived nor loved.  
O bloom of bitter herbs!  
It may be that these roses of the spring  
are destined to cover my coffin!<sup>16</sup>]

28 **RISPETTO.**  
**Andantino mesto. ♩ : 69**  
SIMONETTA (esce dalla sinistra scendendo un piccolo praticabile cantando un *rispetto*)  
FIGIURETTA (la segue raccogliendo qua e là dei fiori)  
**Andantino mesto. ♩ : 69**  
*poco rit. dolce*  
Co.me.a.ma.va il suo da.mo! El.la.ten.  
*a tempo*  
*dolce legato*  
*p col canto*  
*a tempo*  
*ben cantato*  
de.a Sul pra.toa se.ra.e.al.lor.che lo scor.ge.a.....

Ex. 4. Ruggero Leoncavallo, *I Medici...*, Act I, *Rispetto* (Simonetta), mm. 1–11.

<sup>15</sup> R. Leoncavallo, *I Medici. Azione storica in quattro atti* (1893), XII.

<sup>16</sup> The protagonist's terrifying thoughts have their justification in illness (tuberculosis), which killed the historical Simonetta at a very young age (unlike her operatic counterpart, who was murdered by one of the conspirators).

Based on a scale with an augmented fourth degree, this *ritornello* was scored economically but in a telling manner. The melismatic solo flute part perfectly represents a shepherd's pipe of the kind that may well have accompanied the historical Simonetta.

Also of note are the veristic connotations of the *ritornello* in the operas of Giacomo Puccini and Pietro Mascagni. The *ritornello toscano* genre mentioned here apparently served the former as an inspiration for the *stornello* that opens Act Three of *Tosca*.<sup>17</sup> Mascagni also makes use of a *stornello* (a form akin to the *ritornello*) to introduce the figure of Lola: 'Fior di giaggiolo, / Gli angeli belli stanno a mille in cielo, / Ma bello come lui ce n'è uno Solo'<sup>18</sup> ('Iris flower, / there are thousands of pretty angels in heaven, / but there is only one as beautiful as he'). As in Mascagni, Leoncavallo's *ritornello* begins, typically of this genre, with an invocation to a flower.

RITORNELLO TOSCANO. 49

And.<sup>te</sup> quasi Recitativo.

Fio - riu di pra - to!

And.<sup>te</sup> quasi Recitativo.

Sen - to fug - gir dal cor len - ta la vi - ta, Ep -

- par non ho vis - su - to e non ho na - to!

*dulciss.*

Ex. 5. Ruggero Leoncavallo, *I Medici...*, Act I, *Ritornello toscano* (Simonetta), mm. 1–6.

<sup>17</sup> Zoppelli, 'I Medici e Wagner', 158, note 12.

<sup>18</sup> G. Targioni-Tozzetti, G. Menasci, *Cavaleria rusticana* (1890), 19.

Apart from references to and stylisations of Tuscan folklore, abounding also in Act Two, which successfully render the spirit of fifteenth-century Italy, Simonetta's appearances are also accompanied by reminiscences of the Tristan chord. The presence of this combination in the scene of Giuliano and Simonetta, at the moment when their relationship starts (the chord points to its tragic doom) foreshadows the motif of the *Liebestod*<sup>19</sup> that will befall the two protagonists.

The image shows a musical score for a duet between Simonetta and Giuliano. Simonetta's part is in the upper system, marked 'And. Sostenuto. <math>\text{♩}</math>:48' and '(confusa)'. Giuliano's part is in the lower system, marked 'Poco più. <math>\text{♩}</math>:56'. The lyrics are: Simonetta: 'Io, si!...'; Giuliano: 'Tu sof . fri? È nul . la...'. The score includes piano accompaniment for both parts.

Ex. 6. Ruggiero Leoncavallo, *I Medici...*, Act I, *Scena e duetto* (Simonetta, Giuliano), mm. 102–109.

## The Conspirators

In the context of the conspirators' theme in Leoncavallo's opera one can hardly fail to mention the leitmotif that accompanies these four.

<sup>19</sup> M. Gmys, 'Między Wagnerem a Verdim: *I Medici* Ruggiera Leoncavalla', *Res Facta Nova*, 12 (21) (2011), 153.

Such a suggestively developed leitmotif is only introduced in this work in the context of this particular group of figures.



Ex. 7. Ruggero Leoncavallo, *I Medici...*, Act II, *Introduzione e quartetto*, the leitmotif of the conspirators, mm. 1–9.

The four organisers of the coup (Francesco de' Pazzi, Bernardo Bandini Baroncelli, Archbishop Francesco Salviati, and Giambattista da Montesecco) seem to have nothing in common. Their social origins and status, as well as the motives which attracted them to the Pazzi conspiracy, are quite different. Gianbattista da Montesecco stands out from the other three. He is a captain of the papal guard, a soldier and a man of honour, loyal to his superior, who wishes to benefit St Peter's State, then ruled by Pope Sixtus IV.<sup>20</sup> He hopes to avoid bloodshed, however, and his honour does not let him accept the plan of assassination carried out during Easter mass in the cathedral. Montesecco's bass competes with the other three in a quartet sung by the conspirators at the beginning of Act Two. Eventually, however, they unite in a hymn-like march: 'Iddio di Fiorenza vuol libero il suol. / Ordita e la trama. Fallire non puo!' ['God of Florence, we wish to liberate this land. / Our action and our scheme can hardly fail!'].

<sup>20</sup> Sixtus IV (born Francesco della Rovere) was elected pope in 1471 and nearly immediately came into conflict with Florence. The Medici brothers converse about it in the opera's opening scene.

The image shows a musical score for a quartet. It consists of four vocal staves (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 3/4. The lyrics are: "li - be - ro il suol. Or - di - ta è la tra - ma. Fal -". The piano accompaniment features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand.

Ex. 8. Ruggiero Leoncavallo, *I Medici...*, Act II, *Introduzione e quartetto* (Bandini, Salviati, Montesecco, Pazzi), mm. 180–183.

The septet at the end of Act Three is a crucial point of the musical and dramatic action. This extremely sophisticated finale, distinctly drawing on the famous quartet from Verdi's *Rigoletto*, testifies to the young composer's exceptional sense of dramatic construction. The scene brings together three different threads: the conspirators planning the coup in Montesecco's house, Simonetta eavesdropping on these



four, as well as Giuliano and Fioretta meeting in secret in Fioretta's chamber. Though such a densification of texture leads to a blurring of the verbal layer, its main construction principle is notable: The melodic action takes place on two planes, and the individual solo voices are not assigned once and for all to either of them. These melodic layers are not, however, identical with the three planes of dramatic action:

The image shows a page of a musical score for Act III, Scena e settimino of *I Medici...* by Ruggero Leoncavallo. The score is written for four vocal parts and a band. The lyrics are in Italian and are as follows:

sol ch'io lo sal - vi, e poi..... fammi mo - rir!.....  
 - si - a, la ge - lo - sia pos - sen - - - - te!.....  
 - ga il tuo fu - ro - - - re.  
 BAND.  
 Sì, no - stro Dio è l'o - nor.....  
 L'o - nor par - la!  
 mai il pu - gnal in un tem - pio snu - de -  
 L'o - - nor par - la!

The score features complex melodic lines with many accidentals and rests, and a dense accompaniment in the lower staves.

Ex. 9. Ruggero Leoncavallo, *I Medici...*, Act III, *Scena e settimino* (Simonetta, Fioretta, Giuliano, Bandini, Salviati, Montesecco, Pazzi), mm. 211–212.



To conclude the above discussion of historical verism as represented by *I Medici*, let me refer once again to Verga's statement quoted in the opening of this paper. 'The imprint of an actual happening', seemingly obvious in a work inspired by real historical occurrences, resides in Leoncavallo's opera not merely in the presented events. The verity is consistently constructed in this composition by means of language stylisation and the choice of musical language. The numerous instances of stylisation that I have quoted above are only examples of how tools of this kind were applied by the composer. Despite evident influences from Wagner, Verdi, and Carducci, Leoncavallo built his own style of composition, which, though eclectic (as his later works demonstrate), was nevertheless distinguished by an uncommon deftness in the use of stylisations, that is, in representing historical styles. It was this ability that allowed the artist to create a composition so close to truth, perfectly corresponding not only to Verga's veristic manifesto but also to Leoncavallo's own artistic creed.<sup>21</sup> This was definitively confirmed by the composer himself. I will therefore let him express his intentions in his own words:

In order to find inspiration, I need subjects, people of flesh and blood, like myself, who feel and think humanly, who weep with their own tears, who sometimes tremble and suffer because of exaggerated passions, which nevertheless always remain human and proper to our hearts and senses.

This is why I had to introduce my own tale into this story; not in order to use history as a pretext, as it was once done in melodramas, but for the sake of intact, virgin history, with its chronicles, dates, characters, intimate passions, and the weaknesses of my protagonists. [All this] in order to bring the whole era back to life.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. footnote 9.

<sup>22</sup> Quoted after: Zoppelli, 'I Medici e Wagner', 151: 'Per ispirarmi adunque, ho d'uopo di soggetti che siano uomini di carne ed ossa come me, che sentano e pensino umanamente, che piangano le mie lacrime istesse, che palpitino e soffrano per passioni esagerate talvolta, ma umane sempre, che son proprie del nostro cuore e dei nostri sensi. Era adunque alla storia che io dovea chiedere la mia epopea. E non alla storia per pretesto, come altra volta si usava nei melodrammi, ma a la storia vergine, intatta, con le sue cronache, le date, i caratteri, le passioni intime e debolezze dei miei eroi. Far rivivere tutta un'epoca.'

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