

**Representations of Witches
In Nineteenth Century Music**

by

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Abstract

Portrayals of witches appear frequently in nineteenth-century music, either as supernatural characters as in folk tales, or as real persons (especially women) who are viewed by society as possessing the stereotype features of the witch. This thesis examines the musical characterizations of these witches, suggesting that their portrayals share a common vocabulary of musical features, and thus constitute what scholars such as Leonard Ratner, Kofi Agawu, or Robert Hatten call musical “topics.” The topics I have discerned include “noises and sounds ostensibly made by witches,” “the dance,” “sinister atmosphere” and an aesthetic of extremes which I have termed “aesthetic inversion.”

Definitions and terminology related to witches in relevant European languages are reviewed in Chapter One. There follows a history of witches and witchcraft in Europe with the hope that it will provide an historical context which will enhance the reader’s understanding of the character of the witch. Chapter Two provides musical analyses of the musical “topics” which the composers drew upon to communicate to the audiences their representations of witches. In Chapter Three I examine the implications of these depictions from ideological, political and gender standpoints. The thesis concludes with a summation of the “topics” and their uses.

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Table of Contents	iii
List of Tables	iv
List of Figures	v
Acknowledgements	vi
Chapter 1 History	1
Introduction.....	1
Defining the Witch	3
History of Witches and Witchcraft.....	7
Chapter 2 Musical Representations of Witches	15
Introduction.....	15
Noises and Sounds Produced by Witches.....	16
The Dance.....	36
Sinister Atmosphere.....	55
Aesthetic Inversion	66
Large Scale Topical Analyses.....	74
Chapter 3 Ideological, political and gender implications of witches in music.....	82
Conclusions.	88
Works Consulted	90

List of Tables

Table 1. Topical analysis of Berlioz, <i>Symphonie fantastique</i> , V – <i>Songe d’une nuit du sabbat</i>	78
Table 2. Topical analysis of Verdi, <i>Macbeth</i> , Act I, <i>Coro d’introduzione – Chi faceste? dite su</i>	81

List of Figures

Ex. 1: Humperdinck, <i>Hänsel und Gretel</i> , Act III, scene 3, mm. 95-99	18
Ex. 2: Dvořák, <i>Rusalka</i> , Act I, mm. 721-722	19
Ex. 3: Dvořák, <i>Rusalka</i> , Act I, mm. 414-419	19
Ex. 4: Verdi, <i>Macbeth</i> , Act I, Introduction, mm. 52-57	21
Ex. 5: Verdi, <i>Macbeth</i> , Prelude, m. 12	22
Ex. 6: Verdi, <i>Macbeth</i> , Act I, Introduction, m. 68.....	23
Ex. 7: Berlioz, <i>Symphonie fantastique</i> , V, m. 3.....	24
Ex. 8: Berlioz, <i>Symphonie fantastique</i> , V, mm. 7-9	25
Ex. 9: Musorgsky, <i>Night on Bald Mountain</i> , mm. 91-93	27
Ex. 10: Mendelssohn, <i>Die erste Walpurgisnacht</i> , V, mm. 17-22.....	32
Ex. 11: Mendelssohn, <i>Die erste Walpurgisnacht</i> , V, mm. 39-42.....	32
Ex. 12: Mendelssohn, <i>Die erste Walpurgisnacht</i> , V, mm. 54-57.....	33
Ex. 13: Clara Schumann, <i>Quatre pièces caractéristiques</i> , Op. 5, No. 1, <i>Impromptu 'Le sabbat'</i>	34
Ex. 14: Mozart, <i>Bastien und Bastienne</i> , Act I, scene 2, mm. 1-8.....	39
Ex. 15: Dvořák, <i>Rusalka</i> , Act I, mm. 881-884	40
Ex. 16: Dvořák, <i>Rusalka</i> , Act I, mm. 885-888	40
Ex. 17: Dvořák, <i>Rusalka</i> , Act I, mm. 894-898	40
Ex. 18: Verdi, <i>Macbeth</i> , Act III, mm. 249-252	42
Ex. 19: Verdi, <i>Macbeth</i> , Act III, mm. 306-311	43
Ex. 20: Puccini, <i>Le Villi</i> , Act II, <i>La tregenda</i> , mm. 1-3	44
Ex. 21: Dvořák, <i>Polednice</i> , mm. 312-315	45
Ex. 22: Dvořák, <i>Polednice</i> , m. 102	45
Ex. 23: Berlioz, <i>Symphonie fantastique</i> , V, mm. 241-248	47
Ex. 24: Berlioz, <i>Symphonie fantastique</i> , V, mm. 355-358	48
Ex. 25: Musorgsky, <i>Night on Bald Mountain</i> , mm. 452-455	50
Ex. 26: Boïto, <i>Mefistofele</i> , Act II, scene 2, mm. 326-331	51
Ex. 27: Boïto, <i>Mefistofele</i> , Act II, scene 2, m. 531.....	52
Ex. 28: Clara Schumann, <i>Quatre pièces caractéristiques</i> , Op. 5, No. 1, <i>Impromptu 'Le sabbat'</i>	53
Ex. 29: Tchaikovsky, <i>Children's Album: BabaYaga</i> , mm. 1-5	54
Ex. 30: Verdi's <i>Un ballo in maschera</i> , Act I, scene 4, mm. 1-4	57
Ex. 31: Verdi, <i>Il trovatore</i> , Act I, scene 1, mm. 223-231.....	59
Ex. 32: Verdi, <i>Il trovatore</i> , Act I, scene 1, mm. 312-319.....	60
Ex. 33: Ponchielli, <i>La Gioconda</i> , Act I, scene 4, mm. 187-190.....	62
Ex. 34: Musorgsky, <i>Pictures at an Exhibition, The Hut on Hen's Legs (Baba-Yaga)</i> , mm. 33-36	63
Ex. 35: Liadov, <i>Baba Yaga</i> , mm. 4-7	64
Ex. 36: Dvořák, <i>Polednice</i> , m. 265-268	65
Ex. 37: Berlioz, <i>Symphonie fantastique</i> , V, mm. 21-27	68
Ex. 38: C. Schumann, <i>Impromptu, Le Sabbat</i> , mm. 71-74.....	69
Ex. 39: Verdi, <i>Macbeth</i> , Act I, Introduction, mm. 64-67	70
Ex. 40: Verdi, <i>Il trovatore</i> , Act I, scene 1, mm. 263-269.....	71
Ex. 41: Boïto, <i>Mefistofele</i> , Act II, scene 2, <i>La notte del sabba</i> , mm. 329-333.....	72

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Chapter 1 History

Introduction

Somewhere every culture has an imaginary zone for what it excludes and it is that zone that we must try to remember today.

Catherine Clément¹

Alessandro Manzoni, the Italian writer and literary critic of the early nineteenth century, suggests in his famous letter in defence of Romanticism that, to some, Romanticism may consist of “an unimaginable muddle of witches, specters, systematic disorder, extravagant quests, and abuses of common sense.”² Indeed, the Romantics favoured the subject of witches in all areas of the arts – they appear in the Gothic literature of Horace Walpole, Anne Radcliffe, Friedrich Schiller, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Victor Hugo, and Balzac to name a few; they appear prominently in Goethe’s *Faust*, but also in paintings, notably by Delacroix and Rodin. Understandably, music too has its share of representations of witches, in a variety of genres encompassing, among others, opera, symphony, or programme music.

Witches that appear in music are of various kinds: they may be fantastic, supernatural characters, such as in fairy tales, as exemplified by the witch in Humperdinck’s *Hänsel and Gretel*, or in Musorgsky’s and Liadov’s *Baba-Yagas*;³ or they may consist of real, human characters (mostly female) to whom witch-like characteristics are socially assigned, because of superstition or reasons related to their behaviour. Such examples can be Ulrica in Verdi’s *Un ballo in maschera*, Azucena in

¹ Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, trans. Betsy Wing (London and New York: I. B. Tauris, 1996), ix.

² Alessandro Manzoni, “Letter on Romanticism,” trans. J. Luzzi, *PMLA* 119, no. 2 (March, 2004): 315.

³ I adhere to the spelling of “Musorgsky” as it appears in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., and is adopted by most current Musorgsky scholars, such as Taruskin and Emerson in Richard Taruskin, *Musorgsky* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993) and Caryl Emerson, *The Life of Musorgsky* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Verdi's *Il trovatore*, or Lady Macbeth in her various musical incarnations. Witches may also be depicted as distant, faceless characters participating in a witches' sabbat such as in Boïto's *Mefistofele*, Berlioz' *Symphonie fantastique*, or Musorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain*.⁴ It is the purpose of this thesis to investigate the musical representations of these various witch characters, and to assess whether or not these representations present common musical characteristics designating witches, and thus can be said to establish specific "musical topics" that belong to, and can be recognized within the conventional music vocabulary.

⁴ Modern witchcraft scholars customarily spell "sabbat" without the capital "S" and final "h" of "Sabbath," so I will adopt this spelling throughout my thesis except when quoting from other sources.

Defining the Witch

The *Oxford Dictionary of World Mythology* defines witches as:

The scapegoats of late medieval Europe. A witch was commonly, though not always, believed to be a female who practised *maleficium*, the art of doing harm by occult means. In league with the Devil and associated with wild and desolate places, she was thought to turn into a vampire or bird, or possess the power of flight, so as to attend a coven of her fellows, where they fed on the human flesh provided by one of their number. A delicacy was newly born babies.⁵

Aside from this generalized definition, it is important to recognize that there are meanings, usages and connotations of the terms that may potentially be different from today's, depending on the countries where the concept existed, on the language in which it was defined, and on the historical period during which a particular meaning was used. Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, discussing the differences in these terms, notes "how difficult it is in translations and international comparative research to do justice to the original meanings of certain terms."⁶

Dictionaries from the nineteenth century are helpful to investigate this terminology. Italian terms from the nineteenth century are numerous. Those translated as "sorceress, witch," include *maliarda*, *venefica* and *mága* and each of these has a male counterpart: *maliardo*, *venefico* and *mago*. *Strega* is translated as "witch, hag, sorceress" with male and female derivatives: *stregone* and *stregona*.⁷ In the Italian only *Dizionario universale critico-enciclopedico della lingua italiana* of 1835, *strega* is defined as *venefica* and *maliarda*. It goes on to say: "Dice che va di notte in tregenda colle streghe. Li volgari dicono che le streghe sono femmine che si trasformano in forma

⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of World Mythology*, in Oxford Reference Online, s.v. "Witches," <http://www.oxfordreference.com> (accessed October 16, 2005).

⁶ Bengt Ankerloo and Stuart Clark, eds., *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 164.

⁷ Baretto, Giuseppe Marco Antonio, *A Dictionary of the English and Italian Languages in Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed September, 12 2008).

d'animal.”⁸ (It is said that she goes to the witches' sabbat at night. Common people say that the witches are women who transform themselves into animals).⁹ It is the only definition which mentions the transformation into animals or the visitation to the sabbat, *la tregenda*. *Strega* is the term most closely associated with the hag-like witch of the stereotype described in the Oxford definition above.

As for the German word *Hexe*, it is translated into English in an English-German dictionary of 1800 as a “witch, hag, or sorceress.”¹⁰ Witch appears as *die Hexe, die Zauberinn*. “Warlock” does not appear. The male version of *Hexe* is *Hexer* or *Hexenmeister* both translated into English as “sorcerer, or wizard.” A *Zauberer* is a “magician, charmer, enchanter, necromancer, sorcerer, wizard, conjurer.”¹¹ The word *Zauber* encompasses a broader meaning than *Hexe*, which Keith Spalding translates simply as “witch” in his *Historical Dictionary of German Figurative Usage*. Spalding then clarifies the term with two definitions, first: “hag, a disagreeable old woman; the extension from real “witch” to any old woman whom one regarded with fear, contempt or hatred goes back to the 15th c. but did not become general until witches had ceased to be taken seriously, i.e. from the 18th c. onward,” and second: “bewitching woman, charming girl; current since the 18th c. (sic).”¹² Spalding's definitions illustrate how the sense of the word changed over time and how the term differs between languages, as in Italian, the word for witches—*strega*--does not connote “bewitchment,” and in English “bewitchment” is more precisely found in “enchantress” rather than in “witch.”

⁸ Francesco D'Alberti, *Dizionario universale critico-enciclopedico della lingua italiana* (Milano: Coi torchi Giovanni Silvestri, 1835), 6:510.

⁹ I am indebted to Italian native speaker Marco Miniaci, for his assistance with this translation.

¹⁰ *The new pocket-dictionary of the English and German languages* (Leipsic: printed for C. T. Rabenhorst; and sold by T. Boosey, London, 1800) in Eighteenth Century Collections Online, <http://galenet.galegroup.com> (accessed September 12, 2008).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Spalding, Keith, *Historical Dictionary of German Figurative Usage* (Oxford: Basic Blacknell, 1980), 1320.

In French there are fewer applicable terms. *Sorcier* and *sorcière* are the terms used as equivalent in English to sorcerer and witch. The sixth edition of the *Dictionnaire de L' Academie* of Paris, dated at approximately 1835 states “Sorcier, ière. Celui, celle qui, selon l’opinion des temps d’ignorance, a un pacte avec le diable, pour opérer des maléfices, et qui va à des assemblées nocturnes, qu’on nomme le Sabbat.”¹³ (“A witch, is one who, in the opinion of ignorant ages, has a pact with the Devil for practicing *maleficium*, and who would go to nocturnal meetings referred to as the sabbat.”)¹⁴ The perennial elements of the pact with the Devil, the practice of *maleficium* and the attendance at a sabbat are all there, but the definition includes also male witches.

The Czech word for witch is *čaroděj* in the masculine form and *čarodějnice* in the feminine. The masculine is translated as magician, sorcerer or wizard whereas the feminine form is translated into English as “witch, hag (with a broom).”¹⁵ The other distinction in terminology is that *čarodějnice* is a witch who is a real person as opposed to the character of *Baba Yaga* who is strictly supernatural.¹⁶

The witch of Slavic folklore could be either good or evil. The good witch was usually one who was born a witch identified by various characteristics at birth, whether she were the seventh daughter of seven daughters in a family, or were born with part of the amniotic sac on her head, or excess hair or teeth. This witch generally used her powers of witchcraft for good purposes. The evil witch was the one who learned the craft, often by making a pact with the Devil, and generally used it for evil or malicious purposes.¹⁷

¹³ L’Institute de France, *Dictionnaire de L’ Académie*, 6th ed. (Paris: Firmin-Didot Frères, 1835?), 2:760.

¹⁴ The translation is my own.

¹⁵ Oltur Velky Slovník, *Česko-Anglický* (Prague: J. Otto Ltd., 1933), 1:123.

¹⁶ Natalie Kononenko, *Slavic Folklore: A Handbook* (Westport, CT & London: Greenwood Press, 2007), 79.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

Clearly, there are differences in the uses and connotations of various terminology associated with witches. The terms encompass different aspects in different languages yet there seems to be a general definition applicable everywhere, as these differences get flattened in the stereotypical witch as defined in the *Oxford World Mythological* definition quoted above. There is enough evidence in composers' programme notes, personal letters and libretti to suggest that the stereotype was accepted and reflected by composers of the nineteenth century all over Europe. The stereotype became established as a result of the infamy of the witch, or the witch hunt, from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries as will be outlined in the historical discussion below. Familiarizing ourselves with the history of witches and witchcraft in Europe will enhance and expand our understanding of the witches' depictions in music.

The definitions of the term "witch" provide a starting point for the identification of these characters. Amongst these definitions are various categories of witches according to the sources where the character originates. The first is the supernatural witch of folklore and fairy tales, generally depicted as an old crone who lives in a hut in the woods and eats little children. Witches belonging to this category are those of Dvořák's *Polednice* and Humperdinck's *Hänsel and Gretel*. Next is the "demonic" witch – the supernatural one who flies on a broom to the sabbat to meet with the Devil and others of her kind, such as can be found in Goethe's *Faust* or Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Finally, there is the individual woman as witch or witch-like character: personages accused of witchcraft such as Cieca in Ponchielli's *La Gioconda*; gypsies who cast spells, such as Azucena from *Il trovatore*; or fortune tellers such as Ulrica from *Un ballo in maschera*. However, not all fortune tellers, gypsies or persons accused of witchcraft are in fact witches. A study of the historical background of witches in Western European society will help to clarify these distinctions.

History of Witches and Witchcraft

Among the many meanings the term “witch” has covered over the years, a number of elements converged into what we may call a stereotype of the witch. The stereotype is based in the long history of European witches and witchcraft. Examining this history provides valuable insights, especially since, as proposed in this paper, the musical portrayals of witches will be approached as “musical topics,” for whose meanings “the social and cultural history must be investigated” in order to make them fully understood.¹⁸ For these reasons I will endeavour to provide a historical view of witches over the centuries. I will pay particular attention to those items which manifest themselves in the stereotype of the witch exploited by the nineteenth-century composers whose works will be examined.

The image of the night-flying hag who had the power to turn herself into a bird and who would thief unprotected infants can be found in writings from the Roman times. Ovid describes *strix* or *striges* flying about at night “in search of babies unprotected by their nurses.”¹⁹ *Strix* is a Greek word meaning a flying, screeching bird, also used to describe a witch. Petronius describes a boy whose entrails were devoured by a *strix* and Apuleius relates the story of Pamphile, a “super-witch who by sorcery can subdue the elements, trouble the planets and even disturb the gods; and she too is accustomed to change herself into a bird on certain nights ... by means of a magic concoction.”²⁰ This character survives into medieval times. Evidence shows widespread belief in this character among the Germanic peoples in medieval times. Early laws cite punishment for cannibalism by *striga* or *stria* (witch) as well as fines for accusing someone of being a *stria* and not providing proof.²¹

¹⁸ Raymond Monelle, *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 30.

¹⁹ Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 162.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 162-163.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

Another popular belief in medieval times was the “ladies of the night” who were not associated with the *striga* but were followers of the goddess Diana. It was believed that Diana would lead women flying through the night over the farmland bringing fruitfulness to the land. Diana was associated with Hecate, goddess of magic. She and her followers were considered essentially good spirits who could bring prosperity to those she visited. Numerous stories of “the ladies of the night” originated in Germany, France and Italy. Some women actually professed to being her follower and claimed to go on the night flights. Others of course considered night-flying to be a dream or a delusion. The followers of Diana considered themselves to be exerting a positive influence, practicing magic on the land for good.²²

There were many practitioners of magic throughout the medieval period and later. Shepherds would utter words in an effort to bless and protect the sheep as would farmers for the land. These practices and beliefs were generally tolerated and accepted by the authorities. In fact, many magicians and astrologers could be found in the elites of society. Educated men wrote elaborate documents on the use of spells and the casting of the future. If a magician summoned a demon, the demon was under the power of the magician. The act of summoning a demon was only made possible however through the power of God and the magicians’ service to God. As late as 1563, in his famous *De Praestigiis Daemonum*, (On the Illusions of the Demons), Johann Weyer, a Dutch physician, “complained that these *magi infames* (“infamous sorcerers”)²³ got off scot free while deluded old women were convicted by the hundreds (sic).²⁴ The line between a magician, an authoritative and respected man, and a witch, a feared and despised woman, seemed thickly drawn.

²² Ibid., 168-175.

²³ Thanks to Dr. Alex Fisher for his help with this translation.

²⁴ Quoted in H.C. Erik Midelfort, “Heartland of the Witchcraze,” in *The Witchcraft Reader*, ed. D. Oldridge (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 113.

Practicing magic for the purposes of doing good was in direct contrast to the practice of harmful magic or *maleficium*. Records describing *maleficia* are plentiful from the Middle Ages. The common factor amongst these records is that they originate from the common people and the person accused was practically always a woman.²⁵ Examples of *maleficia* were physical afflictions that could not be explained. Difficulties with childbirth including miscarriages, stillbirths or even lack of breast milk were often accounted for by *maleficia*; the midwife was often accused in those circumstances of being a witch. Another common complaint accredited to *maleficium* was impotence, as it was an inexplicable illness. Arguments between neighbours followed by sudden misfortune for one of them often resulted in the victim of the misfortune blaming the neighbour for the trouble. An animal that suddenly died or took ill without apparent cause was often thought to be a victim of witchcraft. Unnatural weather patterns were seen as evidence of witchcraft as well. But as historical records show, the peasant class often made the accusation of *maleficia* against a woman, usually elderly, often a widow, from the same social class.²⁶

The practice of magic for a common or private good or *maleficia* for evil was generally tolerated by the authorities until the time of the Inquisition. By the end of the thirteenth century the Pope had chosen Inquisitors to combat heresy in specific locales over most areas of continental Europe.²⁷ The Inquisition saw the implementation of a legal process based on inquiry as opposed to the Roman model based on an accusatorial procedure.²⁸ In the accusatorial procedure, a public trial was held where the accuser brought charges against an individual, then if the accusation was not proved, the accuser could be assessed a fine or be imprisoned.²⁹ It is understandable why few official

²⁵ Cohn, 165.

²⁶ Ibid., 226-227.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Cohn, 215.

²⁹ Ibid.

charges of witchcraft were made under this type of system. Under the other type – the inquisitorial procedure – a trial was carried out in private and the state brought the charge against the accused. In this process, torture, which was thought to elicit truth, could be used as a means of gathering evidence in the form of a confession, including the names of other witches.³⁰ If a confession was not extracted, even under torture, the suspect would be released. The secretive forum allowed for an accusation to be made in private, and therefore the numbers of accusations of *maleficia* increased significantly.³¹

The practice of *maleficia* presupposed a relationship with the Devil and was considered heresy and therefore Inquisitors were particularly motivated to prosecute its practitioners. In addition, secular courts presided over by judges and magistrates were actually invited in 1484, by Pope Innocent VIII, to prosecute witchcraft as well.³² To assist those involved in prosecution, in 1486, two Dominican inquisitors Heinrich Krämer and Jacob Sprenger compiled a handbook for other inquisitors entitled, *Malleus Maleficarum*, or *The Hammer of Witches*. The book detailed elements of witchcraft and “became the chief source of information about witches’ activities ... [thus] those characteristics of witchcraft to which the *Malleus* paid most attention ... appeared all over Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. All later handbooks of witch-theory ... looked back to the *Malleus* as their chief inspiration.”³³ The wide dissemination of and reliance on this encyclopedia contributed to the stereotyping of the witch recognizable today.

The *Malleus* is an overwhelmingly misogynist text and solidified the identification of a witch as a woman. Common folk generally accused women of their own social class, often a widow, usually elderly, of witchcraft. As stated by Kors and Peters, “in Europe, the image of the witch as a woman,

³⁰ Midelfort, 115.

³¹ Cohn, 215.

³² Pope Innocent VIII, “*Summis desiderantes* - The ‘Witch-Bull,’” in *Witchcraft in Europe: 1100-1700*, Alan Kors and Edward Peters, eds. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 112.

³³ *Ibid.*, 105.

and especially as an elderly woman, is age-old, indeed archetypal.”³⁴ Many reasons for this have been suggested. The roles assumed by women in society involved healing, midwifery and cooking; cooks had the means to create and circulate poison. Food is a means to life but can also be the cause of sickness and death. The image of a woman cooking over a fire is akin to the witch concocting spells and potions in a caldron over open flame. A healer’s knowledge was based often in folklore and traditional uses of herbs or natural compounds. The healer was known to use spells to enhance healing which begs the question, if the healer used a spell for healing, could she not use one for inflicting harm? Most of the populace could not afford to see a physician with formal training so the need for and use of healers using traditional methods was widespread. Midwives were involved in the mysterious processes of birth and death. The common loss of life in childbirth could easily be blamed on the midwife. In fact, so clear was the connection between witches and midwives, that the *Malleus* devoted a whole chapter to the issue. The title of this chapter, “That Witches who are Midwives in Various Ways Kill the Child Conceived in the Womb, and Procure an Abortion; or if they do not this Offer New-Born Children to Devils (sic),” does more than suffice to portray this connection.³⁵ Women cooks, healers and midwives were in a tenuous position, vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft, by virtue of their professions.

Witchcraft connoted lust and lurid activity with the Devil. Women were the purveyors of lust and sex: “All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable,” according to the *Malleus*.³⁶ Women were considered morally and intellectually weaker than men and therefore “it is

³⁴ Cohn, 230.

³⁵ H. Krämer and J. Sprenger, “*Malleus Maleficarum*,” in Kors and Peters, 127. The English translation in Kors and Peters is from George Burr, ed., *The Witch-Persecutions*, vol. III, bk. 4 of *Translations and Reprints from the Original sources of European History* (Philadelphia: The Dept. of History of the University of Pennsylvania, 1897).

³⁶ Ibid.

not surprising that they should come more under the spell of witchcraft.”³⁷ This was considered particularly true for unmarried or widowed women. The children of someone accused or convicted of witchcraft were in a very dangerous position of being accused themselves. The child would be suspected as being the offspring of the Devil. Another chapter title from the *Malleus*, “How in Modern Times Witches perform the Carnal Act with Incubus Devils, and how they are Multiplied by this Means,” confirms the point.³⁸ So entrenched was the belief that those children may be witches themselves and were to be feared, that, as some of the records indicate, many of those burned at the stake were actually children.

The widow or woman alone became the perfect target for the witch-hunt. The *Malleus* instructs that “when a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil.”³⁹ Many widows were unable to provide for themselves and therefore were poverty stricken beggars, considered a burden by society. While it may have been hard enough for a woman to feed and clothe herself without means provided by a husband, the hardship that could befall a widowed or single woman accused as a witch during this time was grave indeed. Witchcraft was a malleable concept that could take on many forms. Death, illness, fire, storms causing shipwreck, indeed any type of misfortune was believed to have been caused by witchcraft. Its practitioners became a perfect scapegoat on which to blame personal and public ills.

While the commoners’ concerns were the results of the practice of *maleficia*, the “witches’ dance or sabbat ... worked its way into the obsessions of the learned and the imagery of the artists” some 75-100 years later than the year the *Malleus Maleficarum* was published.⁴⁰ The Devil appeared at this sabbat and was worshipped at the gathering. Therefore, attending the sabbat was automatically

³⁷ Ibid., 120.

³⁸ Ibid., 141.

³⁹ Ibid., 117.

⁴⁰ Midelfort, 116.

a renunciation of God and considered heresy. The sabbat was located in a churchyard, the foot of the gallows or at the summit of a mountain at night, usually at midnight or at the latest by dawn. Flying on a broomstick or an animal was the means of travel to the night-time meeting where the Devil would also appear often in the form of an animal. The witches glorified the Devil, kneeling down to him, kissing him on his left foot or anus. Witches would confess their sins and were punished for not performing enough *maleficia*. There was a service, a parody of the divine service, and then a meal followed by “an orgiastic dance to the sound of trumpets, fifes and drums.”⁴¹ The participants at the sabbat were thought to consume the flesh of babies. The Devil would have sexual relations with the participants, and he would then dismiss the group.⁴²

When an inquisitor or other magistrate running a trial was convinced of the existence of the witches’ sabbat, a witch on trial was forced under torture to name others seen there, as well as confess the proceedings of the sabbat. Those named were tortured and made to confess under the same procedure, resulting in large numbers being burned at the stake for punishment. The development of printing in the later fifteenth century allowed for the quick reproduction and dissemination of these accounts. They were used widely by those involved in witchcraft prosecutions and therefore developed homogeneity in style and content. The roots of the sabbat stereotype are found in these confessions.

The fight against heresy started by the Inquisition gained momentum over Western Europe over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Apprehension over the dangers of witchcraft became a palpable fear of Satan and his witches who were considered to be involved in a conspiratorial attack on humanity.⁴³ A widow or a single woman with power subverted the family order and in particular, male authority. The power of a witch as midwife or healer threatened the power of the patriarchal

⁴¹ Cohn, 147.

⁴² Ibid., 145-147.

⁴³ Kors and Peters, 105.

society. Massive witch hunts were undertaken from approximately 1450 to 1680 across Western Europe.⁴⁴ It is difficult to calculate the total number of people who lost their lives to this hysteria as many records are incomplete or have been lost.⁴⁵ This number is not important for our purposes, however; what is important is that out of this phenomenon grew a stereotype captured by the popular imagination and portrayed in the arts and music throughout the centuries and continuing today.

This gruesome history is not only a tragedy but a blight on the record of Western civilization. And while I have provided some of the practical points of law, social structure and religious trends which set the scene for this tragedy to occur, there is a deeper undercurrent involved. This is the concept of the “world upside-down” or “inversion,” whereby “most social, religious and political conventions were defined in terms of their negative mirror images.”⁴⁶ Therefore, “establishing in exact detail what occurred at a witches’ sabbat was not arid pedantry or intellectual voyeurism but a (logically) necessary way of validating each corresponding contrary aspect of the orthodox world.”⁴⁷ Witches changing themselves into animals or having the power to interfere with the climate opposes the natural order of things. Elements of the witch craze emphasized disorder. Shakespeare’s witches’ creed that “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” is a motto of the “world upside down.”⁴⁸ And this “inversion” and disorder can be found in the aesthetics of musical depictions of witches as will be discussed later.

⁴⁴ Cohn, 232.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 232-233.

⁴⁶ Oldridge, 111.

⁴⁷ S. Clark, “Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft,” in Oldridge, 153.

⁴⁸ For further information on the concept of the “world upside down” and “misrule,” see the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin, such as *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

Chapter 2 Musical Representations of Witches

Introduction

The following is a discussion of “topics” found in musical works that presumably depict or refer to witch characters or witchcraft in general. The term “topics” is adopted from Leonard Ratner’s definition: a “thesaurus of *characteristic figures*, which formed a rich legacy for classic composers. Some of these figures were associated with various feelings and affections; others had a picturesque flavor. They are designated ... as *topics* – subjects for musical discourse.”⁴⁹ The categories of topics I have discerned in connection with witches include: “noises and sounds produced by witches;” the “witches’ dance;” musical representations of the “sinister atmosphere” complementing the appearance of the witch or witches; and the musical representation of the “aesthetics of the extreme” or “aesthetic inversion,” a term I devised combining the “world in inversion” or “world upside-down” as described in the previous historical survey of witches, and its musical parallel, which involves extremes in terms of musical means. I have observed that composers employ all of these topics for the generic supernatural or fairy tale witch, but not for the actually human, individual woman accused of being a witch. For the latter, that is, for a specific person who is believed to have witch-like traits, but really exists as a human being, they only use the topic of the “sinister atmosphere” and “aesthetic inversion.” I will discuss each topic separately, with the respective musical examples, and at the end I will provide a full analysis of two pieces incorporating all of the topics unfolding in succession, by indicating where each of these appears in the music, thus trying to understand how a kind of a “narrative of topics” is used in pieces at a larger scale.

⁴⁹ Leonard G. Ratner, *Classic Music: Expression, Form and Style* (New York: Schirmer, 1980), 9.

Noises and Sounds Produced by Witches

Composers often depict musically noises and sounds ostensibly made by witches. These noises include shrieks, laughter, cackling, chatter, gossip or sound in general. The association of these noises and sounds with witches can often be demonstrated and enforced through composers' explicit verbal indications that appear either in the text or in the score of the work, in the stage directions, in a composition's programme, or sometimes in letters discussing the work. Dvořák indicates in the score of *Rusalka* that Ježibaba "cackles satanically," while Humperdinck's witch in *Hänsel & Gretel* "laughs shrilly."⁵⁰ Musorgsky, in his programme to *Night on Bald Mountain*, refers to the witches' "chatter and gossip," and Berlioz refers to "strange sounds, groans, outbursts of laughter, [and] distant shouts" in *Dream of a Witches' Sabbath* of the *Symphonie fantastique*.⁵¹ Verdi, in a letter to Escudier, his French publisher, refers to his witches in *Macbeth* as "coarse and gossipy."⁵² And Mendelssohn in letters to his family, discusses how best to represent the commotion of his witches in *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*.⁵³

When verbal indications are available, this is the most direct and safest way in which we can identify a composer's musical representation of witch-related noises. Witches' laughs and cackling seem to be the noises most often portrayed. I have not found an historical explanation of the association between witches and a crude, vulgar, coarse, shrieking kind of laughter, but surmise that it reflects the idea that these women were mentally deranged and therefore produced uncontrollable,

⁵⁰ Antonin Dvořák, *Rusalka* (Prague: *Narodni Hudebni Vydavatelstvi*, 1952), 64; Engelbert Humperdinck, *Hänsel und Gretel: Märchenspiel in drei Bildern* (London, New York: Ernst Eulenburg, n.d.), 394.

⁵¹ Modest Moussorgsky, *A Night on Bald Mountain* (New York: Dover, 1999), iii; Hector Berlioz, *Fantastic Symphony: An Authoritative Score*, ed. Edward T. Cone (New York: Norton, 1971), 25.

⁵² David Rosen and Andrew Porter, *Verdi's Macbeth: A Sourcebook* (New York and London: Norton, 1984), 99.

⁵³ Douglas Seaton, "The Romantic Mendelssohn: The Composition of *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*," *The Musical Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (July 1982): 406.

primitive, animal sounds. Discussions on this topic can be found particularly in modern feminist writings such as those of Diane Purkiss, who designates the sixteenth century witchcraft skeptic Reginald Scot as the initiator of “the long process of recuperating women’s supernatural power as hysteria and madness.”⁵⁴ Others include co-authors H el ene Cixous and Catherine Cl ement, who devote a large section of their book to the topic of “Sorceress and Hysteric.”⁵⁵ Even Musorgsky, in a letter to Rimsky-Korsakov, refers to a woman who was accused of being a witch and burned at the stake as a lunatic.⁵⁶ Demonic laughter can suggest madness, which is certainly a portrayal in keeping with the perspective that a woman who thought she was a witch was simply mad. Laughter can also be used for mockery; as the witch laughs, she mocks the discomfort of those around her, both of the characters she plays against in the performance but also of the audience.

In her article “Hexen in der Musik,” Veronica F ancsik argues that the most common witch noise represented in music is the witches’ laughter, most commonly depicted by the grace note.⁵⁷ She cites a number of examples of the depiction of laughter, some made explicit by the composer and others which are a result of her own interpretation. I will address each of her examples, in some cases with a more rigorous analysis, in an attempt to clarify what noise exactly is being depicted and how. I believe F ancsik’s conclusion is too limited and narrow in its scope, for when composers desire to describe witches in their compositions, other noises than laughter can come into play. I provide my own examples where it is clear that it is laughter being depicted, and I make suggestions where this is only a possibility.

Most commonly the laugh and cackle noises are represented musically by *staccato* lines, with grace notes or grace note-like figures. These signs are iconic or mimetic in nature in that they mimic

⁵⁴ Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 65.

⁵⁵ Cixous and Cl ement, 3.

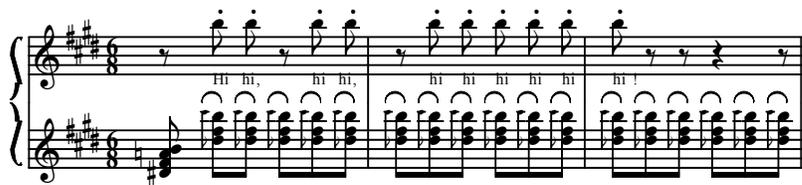
⁵⁶ Jay Leyda, *The Musorgsky Reader* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1947), 87-88.

⁵⁷ Veronica F ancsik, “Hexen in der Musik,” *Musik &  sthetik* 29 (January 2004): 34-39.

the actual sound purportedly being made by the witch. Such noises frequently incorporate the piccolo into the orchestration, presumably because of its shrill, eerie, uncanny high sound. Another technique used by composers to refer to a witch is by depicting the sound of a bird, particularly the owl, which, as mentioned in the first chapter, is historically associated with witches. The owl, as a creature of the night, was mysterious and worthy of being feared, akin to the most of the populace's conception of a witch.

The most obvious example of witches' laughter, which can therefore serve as our starting point, appears in Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel* (1893) in Act III, scene 3, mm. 95-99, where both the children and the witch laugh. The text makes abundantly clear that laughter is being depicted. The children laugh on *Ha, ha, ha*, in mm. 95-97, to repeated eighth notes, but there is no grace note accompanying them in the orchestra. The witch laughs on *Hi, hi, hi*, in mm. 97-99, to a repeated *staccato* note, accompanied by a grace note figure in the winds. At mm. 149-151, Humperdinck depicts the witch's *grell lachend* or "laughing shrilly," accompanied by the same grace note figure with winds adding piccolo this time (see Ex. 1 below):

Ex. 1: Humperdinck, *Hänsel und Gretel*, Act III, scene 3, mm. 95-99



The mimetic nature of the laugh is clear: separated, short individual notes for each expression of "hi" are an obvious imitation of the laughter. The addition of the grace notes, particularly when

Humperdinck adds the piccolo, lends a very shrill quality to the laugh. Fácsik provides this example as well.⁵⁸

Fácsik mentions that Ježibaba in Dvořák's *Rusalka* (1901) is instructed to laugh, but offers no musical example to support this idea. It is a less obvious example than the previous and warrants detailed investigation if we are to gain a complete understanding of tools used by composers to depict laughter. In Act I of *Rusalka*, at m. 721, Dvořák gives the stage direction that Ježibaba's *d'ábelským smíchem* that is, "cackles satanically" reproduced below in

Ex. 2.⁵⁹

Ex. 2: Dvořák, *Rusalka*, Act I, mm. 721-722



A diminished seventh chord in first inversion without its fifth is heard, setting a sinister tone with its symbolically devilish tritone dissonance. The rising F#-G# to the repeated As followed by the big octave jumps down, changing the register for the semitone oscillation, now having slipped one half-step down to F-natural-Gb, together form a motive that is a representation of a vulgar cackle, partly because of its mimetic quality, and largely because the same type of oscillating motive appears when Ježibaba is next instructed to laugh, specifically in Act III at m. 414. Here the direction is *Ježibaba se rozchechta*, meaning specifically Ježibaba "begins to cackle or chortle meanly." Mm. 414-419 are quoted below in Ex. 3:

⁵⁸ Ibid., 35.

⁵⁹ I thank my husband, Tomáš Čapek, for all of the Czech translations in this paper.

Ex. 3: Dvořák, *Rusalka*, Act I, mm. 414-419

The indication that the witch *starts* to chortle is both clear and significant. The conjugation, *rozchechta*, of the verb, *chechtat*, to chortle, indicates the *beginning* of her laughing, i.e., her laughing should continue further. Several figures common to the previous example and this one seem to constitute for Dvořák the musical representation of laughter: the chords that contain half-step staccato parallel oscillations, the figure in the violins with its dance rhythmic figure, the prominent “devilish” tritone between the C# and the G in the bassoon and cello, and the two-octave jump from the upper Db in the flute down two octaves to Bb in the violins, making the effect of shrill laughing even stronger. Even in the absence of libretto text in these situations, given that these figures occur in both places where it is indicated that Ježibaba laughs, it is safe to assume that Dvořák is relying on some conventional musical representation to depict her laughter. Moreover, these figures bear some resemblance to the repeated grace note figure in Humperdinck’s opera as the repeated *staccato* notes and the oscillating figure, Db to C, are similar to the repeated grace note descending to its note of resolution in Humperdinck. Beginning a cackle or chortle with *sforzando* is a realistic replication of such a laugh, which likely would start with a strong exhalation. The similarities between the two examples suggest that a topic for depicting witches’ laughter exists, and that the motive analyzed above can be seen, with the help of the verbal designator “witches,” as a musical representation of laughter. Yet this analysis confirms that a more refined understanding of this topic is necessary.

Earlier in the century, but still within the operatic repertoire, are Verdi’s witches of *Macbeth*

(1847) whose noises and sounds probably include laughter. These peculiar women are, as Verdi describes them, characters unto themselves. In a letter to his French publisher Escudier, he remarks,

Above all, bear in mind that there are three roles in this opera and three is all there can be: Lady Macbeth, Macbeth and the chorus of witches. The witches dominate the drama; everything derives from them - coarse and gossipy in the first act, sublime and prophetic in the third. They are truly a character and a character of the utmost importance.⁶⁰

That he wishes the witches to be “coarse and gossipy” is demonstrated by his direction at their entrance, *staccato e marcate assai: ne dimenticarsi che sono streghe che parlano* (“very *staccato* and marked: don’t forget that these are witches who are speaking”) (see Ex. 4 below):⁶¹

Ex. 4: Verdi, *Macbeth*, Act I, Introduction, mm. 52-57

The musical score for Verdi's *Macbeth*, Act I, Introduction, mm. 52-57, is presented in a two-staff format. The upper staff is for the vocal line, and the lower staff is for the piano accompaniment. The vocal line is marked with the lyrics "M'e fru-lla - ta nel pen- sier" and "la mogliera d'un nocchier m'e frullatta nel pensier". The piano accompaniment is marked with "staccato e marcate assai" and features a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and rests. The score is in 2/4 time and features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment.

As in the previous examples, the short, *staccato* phrases incorporating *appoggiaturas* are references to the sounds of witches, which are coarse, vulgar and choppy, representing here a noisy gaggle of women. The lines of verse “It has crossed my mind that the wife of a sailor ...” are also jarring and disjointed and contribute to the coarseness of character.⁶² The rhythmic intensification created by the omission of the rests in the second part of the motive is even more mimetic of chatter than the first

⁶⁰ Rosen and Porter, *Verdi's Macbeth*, 99.

⁶¹ Verdi, *The Works of Giuseppe Verdi: Macbeth*, vol. 10, no. 1 (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press and Milan: Ricordi, 2005), 21. The translation is my own.

⁶² All of the translations of Verdi's libretti are from Nico Castel, *The Complete Verdi Libretti*, vols. 1-4, (Geneseo, N.Y.: Leyerle, 1994) unless otherwise indicated. This one is from Castel, 3:155.

part. Clearly Verdi's conception of witches is tied to his concept of how they sound; that distinct sound is revealed in his music.

Another short, *staccato* figure identified with the witches is heard in the Prelude to the opera, at m. 12 (Ex. 5) and repeated one tone higher in m. 14.

Ex. 5: Verdi, *Macbeth*, Prelude, m. 12



Verdi scholar Julian Budden refers to this figure as the “devilish chuckling of the ‘weird sisters,’” and for good reason.⁶³ The two grace notes rising to an accented sixteenth followed by three *staccato* sixteenths outlining a diminished seventh chord can be heard as a mimetic representation of chucking; one can almost hear a snarling “ha-ha-ha-ha” with this figure. And the diminished seventh chord, with its devilish tritone, is an apt musical signifier for the character of a witch. While this figure, in its grouping of three, is heard twice in the Prelude, an almost identical version appears four times in the Introduction to Act I. The only change is that the falling sixteenth notes become eighth notes in the figures of in the Prelude. The harmony of the diminished seventh and the orchestration of winds including bassoon, clarinet, oboe, flute and piccolo are the same.

Yet another similar figure follows, in the Introduction at m. 68, quoted in Ex. 6. In this figure, the grace notes rising to an accented *staccato* note are left intact, but the descending figure is shortened to three *staccato* eighth notes outlining a minor third; this time the figure is played only by the bassoon and strings. So, the overall shape is similar to the previous figures but with a change in the harmony and orchestration.

⁶³ Julian Budden, *The Operas of Verdi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 1:281.

Ex. 6: Verdi, *Macbeth*, Act I, Introduction, m. 68



There is no text at this point in the music, but listening closely to the 1952 La Scala recording of *Macbeth*, one can hear the chorus cackling with a repeated “Ha-ha-ha” along with these grace note and *staccato* figures.⁶⁴ The 1959 Metropolitan Opera recording of the opera directed by Erich Leinsdorf also interpolates the “Ha, ha, ha, ... ha, ha, ha,” of the chorus with the *staccato* notes of the example above.⁶⁵ I have not heard the interpolation of this laughter in any more recent recordings, which is not surprising in these days of musical authenticity, but the fact that the La Scala and Metropolitan Opera companies’ productions made the association with the witches’ laughter explicit, shows the prevalence of this musical figure as a musical topic. Clearly, whether apparent in the performance or not, this grace note and *staccato* figure can be interpreted as a witches’ laugh.

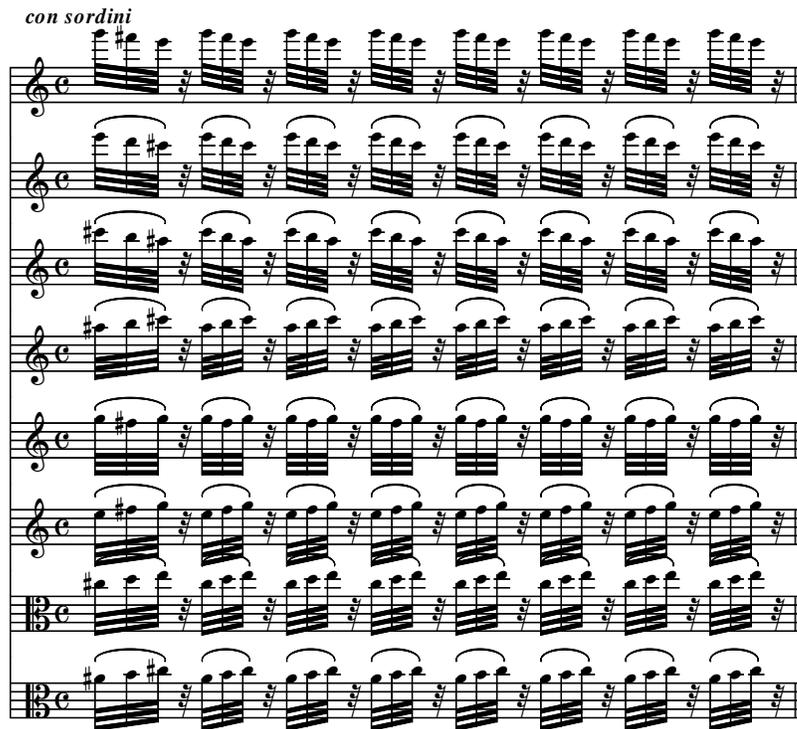
Moving to the orchestral repertoire where there is no text to aid interpretation, one can find a potential depiction of laughter in Berlioz’ *Symphonie fantastique*, in the fifth movement, *Songe d’une nuit du sabbat* (1830). Fánicsik argues that the figures in the third measure and following are akin to grace notes and are mimetic representations of the laughter of witches, as seen in Ex. 7 below:

⁶⁴ Verdi, *Macbeth*, Victor de Sabata, conductor, La Scala (EMI-CMS 7 649442, 1952).

⁶⁵ Verdi, *Macbeth*, Erich Leinsdorf, conductor, Metropolitan Opera (RCA Victor 4516, 1959).

Ex. 7: Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, V, m. 3

con sordini



In Fánicsik's estimation, the rapid repetition of the 32nd notes creates the same *staccato* 8th-note effect as seen in the Humperdinck example quoted above in Ex. 1. She therefore concludes that it is representative of witches' laughter. There is some similarity here to the Humperdinck score with the repeated top note and a *staccato* effect in the separation between the motives. Of course here the effect of the successive 32nd notes slurred together and the diminished seventh chord spelled out in the divided eight parts of the strings is quite different: the sliding 32th notes and the diminished seventh suggest more strongly a sinister atmosphere, while the exaggerated *divisi* suggest multiple voices. The example could well be the laughter to which Berlioz refers in his programme for the fifth movement of the Symphony, *Dream of a Witches' Sabbath*, which describes the artist

at the sabbath, in the midst of a frightful troop of ghosts, sorcerers, monsters of every kind, [who have] come together for his funeral. Strange noises, groans, bursts of laughter, distant cries which other cries seem to answer. ⁶⁶

As for the myriad of other noises, Berlioz creates some novel effects. Mm.7-9, quoted below in Ex. 8, have repeated triplet Cs in the flute, piccolo and oboe, ending with a distinctive and conspicuous slide descending one octave, over a diminished seventh chord held in the strings, played by bassoons, trombones and tuba.

Ex. 8: Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, V, mm. 7-9

The image shows a musical score for three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a common time signature (C). It contains a melodic line consisting of three groups of triplet eighth notes, each starting on a C. The first group is marked *mf* and the second *dim.*. The bottom two staves are bass clefs. The first of these staves is marked *arco* and *sf > p*. The second of these staves is marked *sf > p*. Both bottom staves show a diminished seventh chord (C, E-flat, G, B-flat) held for the duration of the triplet figure above. The notes are connected by a slur and have accents (>) above them.

The strings cease after two beats while the bassoons, trombones and tuba continue for the duration of the figure in the upper winds. The superimposition of the low sonority sounding below the flute, piccolo and oboe in the upper register creates a distinctive effect. While the piccolo, used often for the representation of sounds of witches, is a common sign, the low sounding chord adds a sinister atmosphere to the upper figure which is a mimetic representation of the sound being made. The figure is then repeated in a muted cornet accompanied only by a drum roll. The emptying of the orchestral texture and the muted repeat by one instrument gives the effect of an echo. This figure is no doubt one of the distant cries, which other cries seem to answer, as mentioned in Berlioz' programme.

⁶⁶ Hector Berlioz, *Fantastic symphony: An Authoritative Score*, ed., Edward T. Cone (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 24-25.

Another mimetic noise in Berlioz' work that can be included in the topic of "noises and sounds" is the upper strings playing *col legno* at m. 444. They are to play not only six eighth notes per bar, but two sixteenths as well, making it virtually impossible for the rhythm to be played exactly, as according to the instruction in the score (*frappez avec les bois de l'archet*), the players "hit with the wood of the bow." The "resultant rhythmic chaos contributes an especially macabre flavor."⁶⁷ The sound has often been interpreted as mimetic of the rattling bones of skeletons and although this is not a noise generated by a witch specifically, it shares the same function of the witches' noises in this context in that it adds to the sinister and macabre atmosphere.

Related to the effect of *col legno*, is that created by the use of the xylophone in Saint-Saëns' *Danse macabre* (1872) and Liadov's *Baba Yaga* (?1891-1904). *Danse macabre* is a symphonic work based on a poem by Henri Cazalis.⁶⁸ A line in the poem: "the clacking of the dancer's bones," is depicted by the xylophone.⁶⁹ The unique timbral effect is further enhanced by its figuration of *tremolando*. This piece, from 1872, is one of the earliest and best known uses of this instrument in orchestral music. Saint-Saëns used the xylophone in *Carnaval of the Animals*, for the section entitled "Fossils," again suggesting bones.⁷⁰ There are no witches in *Danse macabre*, but the noise effect created by Saint-Saëns is related to that of Berlioz. The xylophone makes many appearances in Liadov's *Baba Yaga*. Sprinkled over the course of the work, the xylophone adds a unique colouring to the orchestral palette of the sections in which it appears, a percussive sound that contributes to the effect of a sinister, macabre atmosphere.

⁶⁷ Su Lian Tan, "Hector Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique* Op. 14: An Exploration of Musical Timbre" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1997), 79.

⁶⁸ Daniel Fallon, "The Symphonies and Symphonic Poems of Camille Saint-Saëns" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1973), 302.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 305.

⁷⁰ Lois Ann Anderson, "Xylophone," *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (September 21, 2008).

Musorgsky mentions the “gossip and chatter” of witches in his programme to *Night on Bald Mountain* (1866-7). Fánicsik asserts that the listener will understand that it is specifically witches’ laughter being depicted, but she does not indicate the moment in the score where this occurs.⁷¹ I am not sure that chatter and gossip are laughter, although the latter often overlaps with the former. The fact is that Musorgsky makes no reference to witches’ laughter in any of his correspondence of which I am aware. In a letter to Rimsky-Korsakov, dated July 5, 1867, he tells his friend that he has finished his score to *St. John’s Night on Bald Mountain*, which he describes as “a musical picture with the following program: (1) assembly of the witches, their chatter and gossip; (2) cortège of Satan; (3) unholy glorification of Satan; and (4) witches’ Sabbath.”⁷² He gives further details about parts one and two of the programme. In part one, which he calls “introduction,” he distinguishes two main events: the “assembly of the witches” and a “d minor theme with a slight development (the gossip).” He also specifies that “the cortège of Satan” is in Bb major. In looking for D minor themes we find one at m. 91 (m. 67 in Rimsky-Korsakov’s version) and therefore it could signify the gossip. It constitutes one of the main themes of the piece, repeated and varied in this introduction and then returning for the witches’ sabbat (see Ex. 9 below):

Ex. 9: Musorgsky, *Night on Bald Mountain*, mm. 91-93



The theme has a simple folk dance-like character with its steady rhythm and repetitive nature. From this point of view we can see it as a dance topic (see next section). Yet, this overlaps also with the

⁷¹ “Das von Musorgsky selbst erwähnte ‘Geschwätz’ der Hexen dürfte der Hörer problemlos ausmachen können. Auch in diesem ‘Hexengeschwätz’ lassen sich die Merkmale des Hexenlachs dingfest machen.” Fánicsik, 37.

⁷² Letter quoted in Leyda, 85.

noise topic through the ubiquitous grace note figure and the *staccato*. Moreover, as typical in most representations of witches, the grace notes are heard in the shrill sound of the piccolo. The whole section unfolds on a tonic/dominant pedal in open fifths, thus suggesting the coarseness often associated with witches.

Musorgsky told Rimsky-Korsakov that this first theme in D minor was also the theme for the sabbat.⁷³ This detail is significant in that he assigns the same theme for the gossip of the witches as for their sabbat. Musorgsky added that “In the sabbath there is a rather original call on a trill of the strings and piccolo in Bb” and that the sabbat’s “form of scattered variations and calls is ... the most suitable for such a commotion.”⁷⁴ By looking through the D minor theme in the sabbat section, we definitely can identify grace notes, grace note-like figures and trills which constitute part of the commotion of which Musorgsky speaks. Although Fánicsik identifies these noises as laughter, in light of Musorgsky’s comments, it is more likely that that they would represent the calls in the commotion. Musorgsky allows the theme to stand for the two functions, which is a reminder that when investigating the significance of musical materials, they may represent two or more different concepts. Musorgsky uses the same musical materials, albeit with alterations, to stand for the witches’ gossip and for the commotion of their sabbat.

Moving away from the purely orchestral repertoire, but back in time, we find Mendelssohn creating a great commotion, a din, in his depiction of witches in *Die erste Walpurgisnacht* (1830-32), his cantata for soloists, choir and orchestra. *Walpurgisnacht*, or Walpurgis Night, refers to

the night of April 30 (May Day's eve), when witches meet on the Brocken mountain and hold revels with the Devil. It is named after St *Walburga*, an English nun who in the 8th century helped to convert the Germans to Christianity; her feast day

⁷³ Ibid., 86.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 86-87.

coincided with an ancient pagan festival whose rites were intended to give protection from witchcraft.⁷⁵

The Brocken is the tallest of the Harz Mountains of northern Germany, known for the phenomenon of the *Brocken spectre* and as a locale for the witches' sabbat which was to have taken place on Walpurgis night."⁷⁶ Mendelssohn's piece, composed in 1830-32 and revised in 1842-43, is a nine-movement musical realization of Goethe's poem of the same title. Goethe's poem, written in 1799, depicts Druids who relocate to Germany's remote Harz Mountains to escape oppression from invading Christians. Druid guards disguising themselves as witches and devils frighten the Christians away. In this light, the ballad examines the theme of religious freedom in the face of intolerance and oppression, no doubt significant given Mendelssohn's Jewish identity in a predominantly Christian society. Goethe was hopeful that his text be set to music and provided it to Berlin composer Carl Freidrich Zelter for this purpose. Zelter never managed the musical rendering himself, but Mendelssohn, his student, was successful at the task.⁷⁷

The fifth and sixth movements of Mendelssohn's cantata are of particular interest to our discussion of witches in music. It is in these movements that the Druid guards prepare to outwit the Christians by creating an uproar and thus frightening the invaders away. They arm themselves with prongs and pitchforks, inviting the owls to join them with their noisy howls, to add to the din, as described in the text below:

⁷⁵ *A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, ed. Elizabeth Knowles (Oxford University Press, 2006) in *Oxford Reference Online*, s.v. "Walpurgis Night," <http://www.oxfordreference.com> (accessed June 13, 2008).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, s.v. "Brocken," <http://www.oxfordreference.com> (accessed June 13, 2008).

⁷⁷ Meredith Lee, "Poetic Intentions & Musical Production: *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*" in *Goethe Yearbook 12*, ed. Simon J. Richter (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2004), 81.

*Kommt! Mit Zacken und mit Gabeln
Und mit Glut und Klapperstöcken
Lärmen wir bei nächt'ger Weile
Durch die engen Felsenstrecken.
Kauz und Eule
Heul in unser Rundgeheule!*

Come! With prongs and pitchforks,
And with embers and clappers
Let's make a racket during our night-watch
In the narrow rocky stretches.
Hoopoe and owl,
Howl along with us! ⁷⁸

In the eighth movement of the cantata we learn that the Druids' disguises and racket are successful as the Christian Guards flee in terror, thinking that hell has broken loose upon them. They describe flaming, bewitched corpses, wolf-men and dragon-women flying overhead and they flee at the sight and sound of the disguised Druids, as described in the following text:

*Hilf, ach hilf mir, Kriegsgeselle!
Ach, es kommt die ganze Hölle!
Sieh, wie die verhexten Leiber
Durch und durch von Flamme glühen!
Menschen-Wölf' und Drachen-weiber,
Die im Flug vorüber ziehen!
Welch entsetzliches Getöse!
Laßt uns, laßt uns alle fliehen!*

Help! oh help me, my comrades in war!
Ah, all hell is coming toward us!
Look how the bewitched corpses,
Glow all over with flame!
Wolf-men and dragon-women,
Fly about overhead!
What a terrible ruckus!
Let us – let's all flee! ⁷⁹

Mendelssohn wrote fondly about “his witches” to his family on April 27, 1831, and from this letter we can gain insights into his concerns over how he should portray these characters, especially through orchestration:

I must get back to my witches, however; forgive me if I quit for today. The whole letter is actually wavering in uncertainty, or rather I am, as to whether I should use the bass drum for them or not. *Zacken, Gabeln und wilde Klapperstöcke* actually incline me toward the bass drum; but moderation counsels me against it. I am also certainly the only one who has composed the Brocken without the piccolo; but I should be sorry to do without the bass drum, and before Fanny's advice arrives, the *Walpurgisnacht* will be finished and packed away.... A great commotion must be made in any case. ⁸⁰

His comments bear a twofold significance for our purposes. Not only does Mendelssohn make the disclosure that the piccolo was conventionally used in a composition concerning the Brocken, but also

⁷⁸ J. M. Cooper, *Mendelssohn, Goethe, and the Walpurgis Night: The Heathen Muse in European Culture, 1700-1850* (Rochester, New York: University of Rochester Press, 2007), 76-77.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 76-77.

⁸⁰ Seaton, 406.

that a convention actually existed for such a depiction. Ultimately, he did use the bass drum and the piccolo to create his din, despite his misgivings that they would exceed the parameters of good taste. Of note is that he used the bass drum and piccolo only in the fifth, sixth and introduction to the seventh movements, those dedicated to the witches' commotion.

In an earlier letter to his sister Fanny, Mendelssohn describes the order of appearance of the cast of characters indicating where his witches were to appear:

At the beginning there are plenty of songs of spring and such things – then, when the watchmen with their pitchforks and spikes and hoot owls make a commotion, the witches are added, and you know that I have a particular *faible* for them; then come the sacrificial druids in C major with trombones; then again the watchmen who are afraid.⁸¹

The Druid watchmen with spikes and pitchforks, mentioned above, enter in the fifth movement. A Druid watchman, a solo bass, opens the movement with a thirteen measure recitative, then begins the movement proper with the first four lines of text:

*Kommt! Mit Zacken und mit Gabeln
Und mit Glut und Klapperstöcken
Lärmen wir bei nächt'ger Weile
Durch die engen Felsenstrecken.*

His theme, in G minor, is based on a dotted eighth- and sixteenth-note anacrusis to repeated *staccato* notes accompanied by a *staccato* figure in the low strings over a thirteen measure phrase (mm. 17- 22, Ex. 10). This figure in the bass is repeated throughout the whole movement, its rising characteristic and relentless repetition giving the sense of continuous advancement which suits the programme well.

⁸¹ Ibid., 405-406.

Ex. 10: Mendelssohn, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*, V, mm. 17- 22

Kommt! Kommtmit Zack-en und mit Gab-eln und mit Gluth und Klap-per-stock-en larmen wir bei nacht'ger

The chorus of the watchmen repeats the bass' music and text over the next eleven measures, bringing us to m. 37. At m. 38, the tenors enter with the same theme a fifth below, but with a new trill-like *staccato* figure introduced in the flute and echoed by the clarinet, hallmarks of musical materials used for witches (Ex. 11). The basses and bass solo sing a modified version of the same phrase one measure later thereby thickening the texture with staggered entries. Programmatically the effect is that of increasing numbers of people, again, exactly the effect the text and drama demands (see Ex. 11 below):

Ex. 11: Mendelssohn, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*, V, mm. 39-42

fl
cl

Kommt! Kommtmit Za-cken und mit Ga-behn und mit Gluth und Klap-per

Kommt!
Kommtmit Za-cken und mit Ga-behn

vlc, bas

The tenor's phrase concludes at m. 48, then all the voices sing in a homophonic texture the final line of verse: *Kauz und Eule, Heul in unser Rundgeheule!* Meanwhile numerous instances of the flute/clarinet figure quoted in Ex. 11 are passed from wind instrument to wind instrument until the

end of this movement. The text is repeated with the word *Eule* falling on the first and second beats of m. 54. On the third beat of m. 54, grace note figures are introduced in the piccolo and repeated in the flute (see Ex. 12 below):

Ex. 12: Mendelssohn, *Die erste Walpurgisnacht*, V, mm. 54-57



It is safe to assume that these grace note figures are symbolic of the hooting of the owls in that Mendelssohn places them carefully and conspicuously after the word *Eule*. They bear a resemblance to an owl's hooting sound, which we would assume to be quick, repeated and could be imitated by such a grace note figure.

If we map what Mendelssohn says in his letter onto the score, then we expect now to hear the witches, as he stated that “When the watchmen with their pitchforks and spikes and hoot owls make a commotion, the witches are added... then come the sacrificial druids in C major with trombones; then again the watchmen who are afraid.” Each of the characters he refers to above appears in a new movement: the watchmen and the owls in No. 5; then the witches would be in No. 6; the trombones in a C major choir appear in No. 7; and then the Christian watchmen, who are indeed afraid and fleeing, appear in No. 8. To reiterate, the seventh movement, with the trombones, is the Druids' prayer for assistance for their cause; the eighth movement is the flight of the frightened Christian watchmen. So the most likely interpretation of Mendelssohn's comments is that the witches appear in the sixth movement.

The sixth movement is a raucous *Allegro molto* in 6/8 time, beginning with an introduction on the dominant of A minor which lasts until the tonic is reached at m. 59. This introduction features a variety of figures and characteristics which can be considered hallmarks of witches: a *staccato*

figure in the winds with the characteristic grace note is followed by swooping grace note-like figures in the violin. Consistent with so many other musical witch portrayals, short unexpected bursts of 2/4 are interjected into the overall 6/8 rhythm. The *staccato* figure in the winds and violin appears throughout the work but does not constitute a main theme, which only enters with the tonic at m. 59. This main theme is not particularly witch-like but its accompanying figures definitely are. The grace note figures for the owls that we heard in the fifth movement (Ex. 12) appear throughout the sixth movement as well. All of these figures common to witch depictions are heard throughout the movement as various repetitions and iterations of the main theme appear.

Lines ornamented with grace notes and *staccato* are ubiquitous in the music of witches, and after observing the examples above, where the various composers have made it clear that noises and sounds of witches, or owls as associates of witches, are being represented, I am inclined to believe that similarly-styled lines in compositions without detailed explanations of a text or programme are representations of witches' noises as well. A case in point can be found in Clara Schumann's *Impromptu 'Le sabbat'* from *Quatre pièces caractéristiques* for piano, Opus 5, Number 1 (1833-6). The grace note appears as a fundamental building block of the piece. The first two measures in Ex. 13 are repeated in various forms approximately fifty times throughout the piece.

Ex. 13: Clara Schumann, *Quatre pièces caractéristiques*, Op. 5, No. 1, *Impromptu 'Le sabbat,'* mm. 1-2



Aside from the word “le Sabbat” in the title, there are no programmatic notes or letters that I am aware of that may give a clue as to the intention behind the use of the grace note, marked *sforzando* and highlighted by a two octave jump in register. However, given the musical evidence

examined above of the many uses of such figures, it is very likely that by relying on sounds conventionally belonging to the existent topics of noises and sounds attributed to witches, Schumann expected her listeners to conjure up those images or concepts.

Grace notes and grace note-like figures in combination with *staccato* figures feature prominently in the music of witches. Verbal designators provided by composers have alerted us to the fact that they may be representing noises and sounds ostensibly made by witches. From the many examples of laughter, shrieks and gossipy chatter found in nineteenth-century musical representations of witches, we can consider these musical signs as part of an established repertory of topics from which composers drew, creating a “vocabulary” that could also be understood by the public. We should emphasize, however, that this particular reading of the music’s meaning is helped, if not even determined, by the verbal designators accompanying the works (texts, programs, titles). That is, one should not consider any appearance in music of these specific formulas as definite signs for witches, rather a refined and discriminating topical analysis is necessary to establish the reliability of these signs.

The Dance

Whether stemming from the connection between the witch and the Devil and by extension the Devil's "Dance of Death," or from the requisite dance at a witches' sabbat, composers regularly create a dance or incorporate dance-like characteristics into their pieces depicting witches in music. Just for clarification, dance music is characterized by "strong pulses and rhythmic patterns that are organized into repeated metric groupings synchronizing exactly with those of the dance. Rhythmic accents and phrase lengths normally coincide with those of the dance also, as does the mood of the music."⁸²

The time signatures for the witch dances tend to be 3/8 or 6/8 with tempo markings such as *presto* or *vivace*, with repetitive rhythms in a clearly defined phrase structure. In most cases the dance figures will also be accompanied by the other musical signifiers of "witch noises" observed above, such as grace note figures; a profusion of *staccato* figures or trills; the use of the piccolo; exposed tritones or repeated open fifths; and hemiola and/or sudden rhythmic shifts. In some cases the dance will build to a frenzied, fevered climax.

Dance has played an important role in rites and rituals of many cultures throughout the world, the idea being that "sympathetic magic expressed in the dance is to bring about the help of propitious demons."⁸³ There is in fact a biological explanation for this in that "dance, by its rhythm and exclusion of other external stimuli, induces brain behaviours (often leading to trance or ecstasy) which underlie claims to shamanistic or divine possession."⁸⁴ Therefore, a ritual dance done by a witch while enacting a spell or during the proceedings of the sabbat is wholly appropriate.

⁸² Julia Sutton, "Dance," in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed April 22 2008).

⁸³ Paul Nettl, *The Story of Dance Music* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1947), 7.

⁸⁴ "Dance," *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, ed. John Bowker, *Oxford Reference Online*, <http://www.oxfordreference.com> (accessed April 22 2008).

An example of the use of dance for the purpose of magic was the dancing of the *khorovod*, a Russian folk dance, one of whose uses was to bring about a good harvest of flax and hemp through magic.⁸⁵ Another example of a ritual dance to bring about magic is the tarantella dance which was thought to cure “tarantism,” a bite of a tarantula or other spider which caused illness, madness, even death. Dancing as a cure was considered vital: “Once bitten, victims of tarantism were known to have died within an hour or a few days if music [for dancing] was not available!”⁸⁶ A correlation may exist between the tarantella dance and many witch dances in frenzied tempo and triple meter; despite the fact that the tarantella resurged in popularity as a concert piece in the nineteenth century, I have not found any specific rhythmic pattern that can be discerned in the dances of witches which would make this connection conclusive.⁸⁷

Other relevant background information concerning this topic of the witch’s dance includes the connection between the witch and the Devil and, by extension, the “Devil’s Dance” or “*Danse macabre*.” As we saw in the historical survey of witches and witchcraft, the connection between the witch and the Devil was assumed in the common lore, the witch deriving her power from her service to the Devil. This relationship became included in the witch stereotype. Therefore, it is not surprising to see the witch depicted with a characteristic Devil’s dance. This dance can be traced to medieval times when

great waves of mass hysteria swept the lands in which the fear of death, a subject so central to medieval thought, expressed itself in the eruption of a dance-madness. From the 11th century to the 15th, according to the chronicles ... people were prone to this affliction which made them dance and leap, turn and twirl in an ever-

⁸⁵ Timothy Rice, James Porter, and Chris Goertzen, eds., *Europe*, vol. 8 of *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 769.

⁸⁶ Izumi Ririko, “The Tarantella; Its Iconography and Franz Liszt” (DMA diss., Manhattan School of Music, 2001), 12. See also Luisa Del Giudice and Nancy Van Deusen, *Performing Ecstasies: Music, Dance and Ritual in the Mediterranean* (Ottawa: Institute of Mediaeval Music, 2005).

⁸⁷ Erich Schwandt, “Tarantella,” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed November 1 2008).

increasing frenzy that could last for hours and days and was likely to end in complete exhaustion if not in death.⁸⁸

Many examples of witch music can be found where the dance builds to a frenzied climax or where a person is danced to death or into a faint.

This subject was particularly popular in the visual arts during the sixteenth century owing to the threat of epidemics such as the Black Death which had decimated so much of Europe's population in the fourteenth-century and whose memory still remained. For example, the artist Hans Holbein executed a series of woodcuts depicting the figure of Death leading people to their death in dance. His woodcuts were reproduced prolifically in the nineteenth century and may have been a catalyst for the popularity of the dance of death during that century.⁸⁹ Robert Samuels, in his book on semiotics in Mahler's Sixth Symphony, identifies the "masked ball and the waltz" as two "musical images which became strongly attached to the figure [of Death] in its nineteenth century manifestation."⁹⁰ Thus the convention of using dance and dance-like music in connection with witches seems to be another manifestation of the *Danse macabre*.

The common element in the majority of these dances or dance-like pieces is their triple metre, most commonly 6/8. Wye Allanbrook, in her book *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart*, addresses clearly the long history of how various metres can suggest a spectrum of high vs. low classes or base vs. noble characters: triple metres of 6/8 and 3/8 suggest the "terrestrial passions," which in turn convey a lower class and a base character, whereas 2/4 and 4/4 represent the exalted or ecclesiastical passions, or a noble character.⁹¹ The gigue and musette, for example, are both in 6/8 and are peasant

⁸⁸ Sutton, "Dance," in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed April 22 2008).

⁸⁹ Robert Samuels, *Mahler's Sixth Symphony* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press), 119-121.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

⁹¹ Wye Allanbrook, *Rhythmic Gesture in Mozart* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 22.

dances. In light of Allanbrook's analysis, it is conceivable that the quick triple-metre dance is used for the witch because she represents the lowest class and is considered to be of the basest nature.

Allanbrook gives an example from Mozart's opera *Bastien und Bastienne* that might be pertinent, insofar as we can connect sorcerers with witches. Mozart "announces the approach of the village sorcerer with a musette in 6/8 in the rhythms of a gigue ... the musette, not only being a type of dance but also the French version of the bagpipe."⁹² The sorcerer's approach occurs in Act I, scene 2, mm. 1-8 (see Ex. 14).

Ex. 14: Mozart, *Bastien und Bastienne*, Act I, scene 2, mm. 1-8



The pedal note, D, and the repeated open fifths create a rustic effect, particularly in the context of the 6/8 time signature.⁹³ The tritones created by the G# in the upper voice against the D in the lower (6th and 8th measures of Ex. 14) further enhance this rustic effect. Perhaps we are looking here at an incarnation of the connection between the dance and sorcery – a predecessor of what will develop much further in the nineteenth-century into a characteristic dance for witches in music, more carefully delineated as such with the addition of other “witch signs” incorporated into the dance.

Just as Mozart uses open fifths for the introduction of his sorcerer, Dvořák employs open fifths for Ježibaba in *Rusalka* (1901) and, significantly, the witch performs a dance when she casts her spell. In Act I, Ježibaba has agreed to make Rusalka human and leads Rusalka to her hut for the spell. Opening the scene, at mm. 881-884, are repeated open fifths in the bassoon as seen in Ex. 15 below:

⁹² Ibid., 53.

⁹³ Ibid., 52-53.

Ex. 15: Dvořák, *Rusalka*, Act I, mm. 881-884



Following this introduction, on repeated notes over an ominous oscillating figure at mm. 885-888, Ježibaba begins her spell with her magic words “čury mury fuk,” the Czech equivalent of ‘abracadabra’ (see Ex. 16 below):

Ex. 16: Dvořák, *Rusalka*, Act I, mm. 885-888



She continues her spell, then the dance begins at m. 894 in 3/4 time, with regularly repeated phrases interrupted at intervals by 2/4 portions of the spell until m. 960 (Ex. 17 below):

Ex. 17: Dvořák, *Rusalka*, Act I, mm. 894-898



Ježibaba lists here her macabre ingredients: “droplet of dragon’s blood, ten droplets of bile, warm heart.” The dance-like character of the section is unmistakable with its regularly repeated rhythmic patterns and lively, rustic quality. Also, here the diminished fifth between G# and D and

the resulting half diminished chord in m. 895, as well as the raised fourth degree of B minor (E#) in m. 896, enforce the interpretation of the tritone as *diabolus in musica*. The A-natural, the subtonic 7th degree of the B minor natural scale, contributes to a modal, “folkish,” sound, which is very likely representative of the lowbrow character of the witch. That Dvořák would incorporate a dance into Ježibaba’s spell lends strong support to the idea that using a dance topic for the depiction of witches in music spread widely across Europe during the late nineteenth century.

Verdi, too, in his portrayal of the witches of *Macbeth* (1847/1865) exploits the topic of the dance, incorporating many of the musical materials associated with witches that we have already encountered. There were two versions of *Macbeth*, the first for Florence in 1847, and the second revised version for Paris in 1865.⁹⁴ The main difference for our purposes is the inclusion of a ballet for Paris in keeping with the traditions of French opera of the time. That is not to say that a dance idiom was omitted in the first version. Already here Verdi incorporated what Budden refers to as the witches’ “round dance” at the end of their introduction in Act I, scene 1, before the entry of Macbeth and Banquo.⁹⁵ After a ternary meter introduction of the witches on storm music, with “shrill orchestration, grace-notes, [and] irregularity of bar structure,” follows part two, the “round dance” *Le sorelle vagabonde*, a rapid 2/4 dance-like passage, with similar witch-type ornamentation of grace notes and trills.⁹⁶ Budden praises the first section more, while finding in this one “all the deliberate vulgarity of its predecessor, without any of the fantasy.” As he points out, this faster section can be seen as written “strictly according to the rules of Italian opera in 1847... just [as] any chorus of gipsies or peasants, and no amount of piccolo and trumpet or decoration by violins can make it

⁹⁴ Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, 1:269.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

otherwise”(sic).⁹⁷ Verdi’s witches are often more goofy than ghoulish and this is a case in point; they are a curious hybrid of theatricality that one cannot take seriously on one hand and are sinister and evil on the other. That Verdi would use such light-heartedness for this dance is an example of the former characterization.⁹⁸ The atmosphere builds to a frenzy, another characteristic of the witch dance, with the shortening of the phrases causing increased energy and tension, similar to Dvořák’s treatment.

More emphatic witch-like materials are those Verdi incorporated for the added ballet of the 1865 Paris version of *Macbeth*. The ballet takes place in Act III for an appearance of Hecate, a later addition to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, which Verdi believed to be part of Shakespeare’s original play. After Hecate leaves the stage, there is a quick waltz for the witches, “unmistakably a *danse macabre*,” according to Budden, who points out “‘devilish’ open fifths” beginning at m. 249 of the ballet (see Ex. 18).⁹⁹ This section continues in the same manner as that shown in Ex. 18, with grace notes, *staccato* and mostly open fifths continuing for a length of sixteen measures.

Ex. 18: Verdi, *Macbeth*, Act III, mm. 249-252

These figures give way to a trilled *staccato* chromatic line, providing even richer connotations associated with the music of witches. The waltz features regularly repeated phrases such as one would

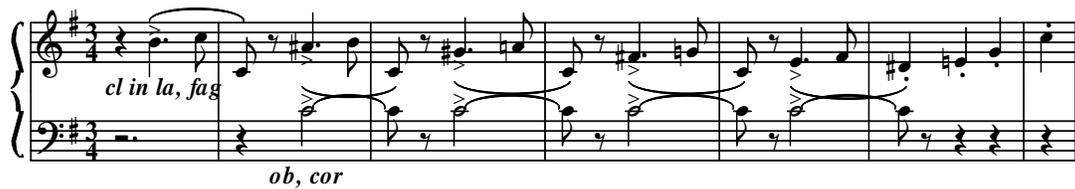
⁹⁷ Ibid., 283.

⁹⁸ For an in-depth discussion of the Verdi’s *Macbeth* witches, see Daniel Albright, “The witches and the witch: Verdi’s *Macbeth*” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 17, no. 3 (2005): 225-252.

⁹⁹ Budden, *The Operas of Verdi*, 1:301.

expect in dance music. But in the dance music of witches some rhythmic displacement suggesting clumsiness or tripping on the part of the characters would be typical, and Verdi does not disappoint. At m. 306, a figure is introduced in the A clarinet and bassoon upsetting the established rhythm (see Ex. 19: Verdi, *Macbeth*, Act III, mm. 306-311:

Ex. 19: Verdi, *Macbeth*, Act III, mm. 306-311



The sudden and jarring rhythmic change, with the syncopated second beat, and with the final eighth-note of each three note figure falling on the downbeat of the next measure, suggests a displacement to the second beat of a typical waltz formula that would normally appear on the first beat. The short eighth notes, rather than a longer quarter, make both the melodic resolution of each dissonance and the rhythmic resolution over the bar line sound incomplete. Not only does the rhythm jar, but the dissonance between the voices is startling. The raised tones of the clarinet and bassoon (the A#, G#, F#, and D#) sounding against the repeated Cs of the oboe and horn clash, creating a harsh dissonance, which adds to the *bizarrerie* and reminds us that these are witches we are hearing and watching, not just any group of dancers. Verdi shows that he also knew the conventional “witch topics” well.

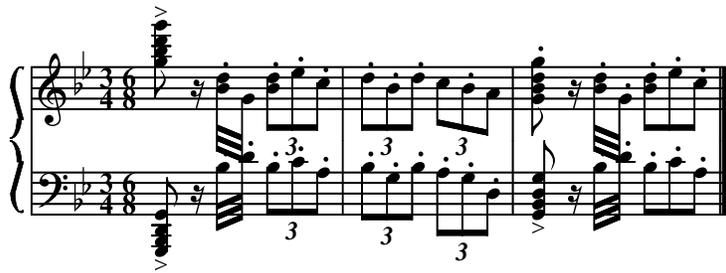
Another frenzied *danse macabre* from the operatic repertoire can be found in Puccini’s opera *Le Villi* (1883) in a scene entitled *La tregenda*. *La tregenda* means in Italian “an assembly of witches,” and *Le Villi* are the ‘Willis’ who

according to Slavic legends ... are spirits of girls who have died of heartbreak. They rise out of their graves at midnight in their bridal dresses and lie in wait for the

careless men to venture into the woods. When one happens by, they perform witches' dances during which they literally "dance to death" the faithless male offenders.¹⁰⁰

In this opera, the male protagonist, Roberto, is unfaithful to his beloved, who, as a result, dies of a broken heart. The Willis then dance the faithless Roberto to his death in *La tregenda*, a form of *danse macabre*. The time signature is 3/4 or 6/8. The piece features repeated patterns in a regular phrase structure, with a driving rhythm as can be seen in its first three measures, quoted in Ex. 20 below:

Ex. 20: Puccini, *Le Villi*, Act II, *La tregenda*, mm. 1-3



Musical materials found often in the music of witches are seen throughout this piece, in the form of *staccato*, hemiola, and ascending/descending chromatic lines. The atmosphere of the dance becomes agitated and grows to a frenzy culminating in a giant cymbal crash no doubt signifying the death of the faithless lover. This dance clearly has its origins in the *danse macabre* and shows many examples of "witch signs."

Moving away from opera, but comprising another *danse macabre* which builds to a frenzied climax is Dvořák's tone poem *Polednice*, or *The Noon Witch* (1896). The piece is based on a poem by the Czech poet Karel Erben and portrays the domestic scene of a child whose mother threatens to call the Noon Witch when he misbehaves. Much to the mother's dismay, the Noon Witch does appear and demands the child from the mother, who is then chased by the witch. The mother faints; the father returns to the house and revives her, only to find the child dead in her arms. In a letter to the Vienna

¹⁰⁰ Nico Castel, *The Complete Puccini Libretti*, vol. II (New York: Leyerle Publications, 1994), 407.

critic Dr. Hirschfeld, Dvořák makes explicit comments about the means by which he depicts this narrative.¹⁰¹ He provides examples for the specific characters and occurrences in the poem that he represents musically, such as the child playing quietly, the mother giving the child a toy to play with as a diversion, the mother scolding the child, the entry of the witch, the mother fainting, and so on.

For the moment in which the witch demands to have the child, Dvořák mentions that “The music now develops more and more; the witch seizes hold of the mother who shrinks back . . .”¹⁰² He quotes the music from mm. 312-315, stating that these measures are “a description of the witch” (see Ex. 21 below):

Ex. 21: Dvořák, *Polednice*, mm. 312-315



Dvořák’s textual evidence provides an important confirmation that the “dance topic” as described above is used precisely in connection with witches. The original version of this motive appears at m. 102 (see Ex. 22) in the A clarinet and bassoon, and according to Dvořák’s letter is the mother telling her child that she is going to fetch the noon witch.¹⁰³

Ex. 22: Dvořák, *Polednice*, m. 102



¹⁰¹ John Clapham, “Dvořák’s Unknown Letters on His Symphonic Poems,” *Music & Letters* 56, no. 3/4 (July-October 1975): 282-285.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 283.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

The very way in which Dvořák manipulates the thematic transformation of this theme when representing the witch shows that he lends it the features we have seen in previous examples conforming with dance topics for the depiction of witches: he changes the time signature to 3/8, giving it a triple metre dance-like character; and he incorporates a trill within the motive. Moreover, Dvořák reserves the piccolo for consistent and exclusive use with the witch figure thereby establishing a firm connection between the use of that instrument and the depiction of a witch. The shrill sound of the piccolo is intensified by the triangle which accompanies the upper winds and strings for the trill portion of the theme, which for the depiction of witches in music is almost as conventional as the grace note. Finally, he has the dance built on this motive develop “more and more” into a frenzy reminiscent of the *danse macabre*, for an entire section from mm. 312 to 456, corresponding programmatically with the struggle between the witch and the mother.

Otakar Šourek, editor of the Complete Edition of Dvořák’s works, refers to this section as a “bizarre scherzo [where] the witch dances round her victim with grotesque steps.”¹⁰⁴ With the time signature in 3/8, the “grotesque steps” can be accounted for by the rhythmic placement of the theme’s component parts: there is no downbeat, only a sixteenth rest, then the figure with four sixteenth notes begins on the first upbeat and ends on the third downbeat, leaving one last sixteenth rest to complete the measure. The subsequent two-beat trill falls on the first beat of the next bar, only to resolve all too briefly on the weak third beat. The whole effect is one of rhythmic imbalance or displacement. This is no graceful dance; it is more akin to tripping, but then we would expect nothing different: the witch cannot be seen to be graceful or gentle – she must be portrayed as crude and uncouth.

Dvořák’s treatment of this dance to increase the frenzy is also interesting. The theme in Ex. 21 is repeated within a regular phrase structure throughout this section, first with an eight-measure phrase repeated twice, then shortened to a four-measure phrase, also repeated. He builds the

¹⁰⁴ Antonin Dvořák, *The Noon Witch* Op.108, ed. Otakar Šourek (Boca Raton, Florida: Kalmus, 1988), iv.

momentum by further shortening the phrase to two measures only to divide its motives into separate elements, repeating the four sixteenth notes as one motive, measure by measure. It is through this technique of shortening the phrase lengths that the energy of the dance builds to a frenzied climax, reminiscent of the crazed dancing of the *danse macabre*. That Dvořák incorporates a dance for the witch right in the middle of stalking her prey lends credence to the theory that the dance is a vital component of the way that composers depict witches in music. Dvorak's deployment of this means of witch portrayal at this point shows his awareness of these conventions.

A whole sub-category of witches' dance could be identified as the dance presumed to occur at the witches' sabbat. Every composition I encountered depicting a witches' sabbat incorporates a dance into its fabric. But this has an historical explanation in that the events presumed to occur at a witches' sabbat and even the sequence of those events became as stereotyped as the character of the witch herself. That these events became common knowledge is extraordinary considering that the witches' sabbat is generally accepted by witchcraft scholars to have been fictional.¹⁰⁵

One such dance is Berlioz' *Ronde du sabbat* which is the central focus of the *Songe d'une nuit du sabbat*, or *Dream of a Witches' Sabbath*, the fifth movement of his *Symphonie fantastique* (1830). The theme of this 6/8 dance, in mm. 241-248 (Ex. 23), is subjected to a rigorous fugal treatment, complete with countersubject and episodes. More importantly for our purposes, Berlioz transforms this theme to include "witch signs" such as appoggiaturas and the squeaky sound of the Eb clarinet.

Ex. 23: Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, V, mm. 241-248



¹⁰⁵ Oldridge, 7.

Berlioz introduces a chromatic version of the theme from mm. 355-358 (Ex. 24) that lends it more witch-like qualities. In addition to the chromaticism, he adds the piccolo in an extreme high register to the already shrill winds carrying this theme.

Ex. 24: Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, V, mm. 355-358



The section gives way, in m. 386, to a repeated syncopated diminished seventh chord (F#, A, C, Eb) over the leading tone B, to the returning tonic C with a shrill high A sounding repeatedly in the piccolo. This chord resolves to C and follows with a recapitulation in C major of the original theme subject. The *appoggiaturas*, chromaticism, shrill Eb clarinet and piccolo, diminished seventh and syncopation contribute to the witch-like quality and characteristics of this witches' round dance.

According to a letter Musorgsky wrote to Rimsky-Korsakov on July 5, 1867, the sabbat scene in his *Night on Bald Mountain* (1867) originates in his reading of a book on witchcraft by V.V.

Khotinsky:

There is a book, *Witchcraft*, by Khotinsky containing a very graphic description of a witches' sabbat provided by the testimony of a woman on trial, who was accused of being a witch, and had confessed love pranks with Satan himself to the court. The poor lunatic was burnt – this occurred in the sixteenth century. From this description I stored up the construction of the sabbat.¹⁰⁶

He provides even more detail of his reading to Vladimir Nikolsky in a letter dated July 12, 1867:

If memory has not played me false, the witches used to assemble on this mountain ... gossiping, playing lewd pranks, awaiting their superior – Satan. Upon his arrival, they, the witches, would form a circle around the throne, where he sat in the guise of a he-goat, and

¹⁰⁶ Leyda, 87-88. This book, according to Edward Reilly, is by Matvei Khotinsky, entitled *Witchcraft and Mysterious Phenomena of Modern Times*, and published in 1866. See Edward Reilly, "The First Extant Version of *Night on Bald Mountain*," in *Musorgsky; In Memoriam 1881-1981*, ed. Malcolm H. Brown (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press), 138.

would carol glory to their superior. When Satan became frenzied enough at the witches' glorification, he would order the start of the sabbat, whereupon he would select the witches that caught his fancy to satisfy his needs.¹⁰⁷

Musorgsky told Rimsky-Korsakov in the letter of July 5, that the sabbat was the last event in his programme and occurred with the return of the "first theme in D minor."¹⁰⁸ We examined this D minor theme in the section on "Noises and Sounds" of witches (see Ex. 9, p. 27). The return of this theme occurs at m. 387 where the work's recapitulation begins coinciding with the return of the tonic, D minor. We can assume therefore that the sabbat begins here, at m. 387, as described in Musorgsky's letter. We have already observed that a standard set of events were thought to take place at a sabbat, so much so in fact that a stereotype of a typical sabbat developed (see pp. 12-13) whereby the witches assembled, the Devil appeared, was glorified by the participants who then engaged in a dance. Musorgsky depicts the assembling of the witches, the appearance of the Devil and his glorification elsewhere, so it is a dance-like treatment of the D minor theme's return at m. 387 which Musorgsky uses for the purposes of his sabbat.

The theme has a dance-like quality but differs from other dances we have seen, in that it is in a duple metre, a 2/2 pattern, perhaps owing to its roots in Russian folk dance.¹⁰⁹ From this point on, for the next one hundred measures approximately, the theme is repeated and varied significantly. There are six different variations each with its own character and quality, so it is no wonder Musorgsky refers to the form of the sabbat as "scattered variations."¹¹⁰ One of these so clearly calls to

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 89-90.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 86.

¹⁰⁹ I have not been able to locate a specific written source discussing the meter of Russian folk dances, but make this observation through my own knowledge of and experience in listening to the genre.

¹¹⁰ Letter to Rimsky-Korsakov of July 5, 1867, quoted in Leyda, 86-87.

mind Russian folk dance that it begs examination here.¹¹¹ It is the third variation comprising mm. 422-461. The theme first appears in the flute and clarinet accompanied by *staccato* figuration in the bassoons. It is repeated in the first and second violins in octaves, accompanied by tambourine in a twelve measure iteration whose dance-like quality is particularly apparent. A portion of these twelve measures is reproduced in Ex. 25 below:

Ex. 25: Musorgsky, *Night on Bald Mountain*, mm. 452-455

The musical score for Ex. 25 consists of two staves. The top staff is for Violins I and II (vln. I, II) in 4/4 time, marked *sf* and *cresc.*. The bottom staff is for the tambourine in 4/4 time, marked *mf cresc.* and featuring four triplet patterns. The key signature is one flat (Bb major) and the time signature is 4/4.

The effect Musorgsky creates is a very rustic and exuberant folk dance and being that the dance is a requisite component of the sabbat one is not surprised to see it here. Furthermore, its rustic, “folk-like” character is well-suited to the supposed lowbrow character of the witch.

Another substantial portrayal of a witches’ sabbat is found in Act II, scene 2 of Boïto’s opera *Mefistofele* (1868/1875), for which he also wrote the libretto, based on Goethe’s *Faust*. The scene entitled *La notte del sabba* features elements consistent with the musical portrayals of witches we have seen thus far, although other aspects diverge from this mould. The scene opens with Mefistofele and Faust climbing through a mountain pass to attend the witches’ sabbat, followed by witches and warlocks making their way to the site. This is the first time we have encountered warlocks in this repertoire, but their presence does not provide us with new fodder for discussion – Boïto does not make any distinction the men’s and women’s music; they sing exactly the same material. The witches and warlocks make their way to the sabbat with music in Bb major in 6/8 time, marked *veloce*, the

¹¹¹ It should be noted here that this Russian folk dance character is much more pronounced in the original, over the Rimsky-Korsakov version.

high speed of which is consistent with other portrayals of witches. Once all have arrived at the site, Mefistofele addresses the group.

A new section ensues entitled *Danza di streghe* (*Witches' Dance*) which is the first of two dances that occur during this sabbat. Boïto's libretto and stage direction inform the audience that the witches and warlocks dance around a cauldron, first presenting Mefistofele with a scepter and a cloak, then with a glass globe. The dance, in E Major and marked *Allegretto danzante*, lasts a mere 28 measures and then is repeated in its entirety in Db major after a 20-measure interlude. The whole dance is based on two regularly repeated phrases, the first three of which are quoted in Ex. 26 below:

Ex. 26: Boïto, *Mefistofele*, Act II, scene 2, mm. 326-331



This short instrumental dance is surprising in that it features dotted rhythms in 2/4; it is one of the few dance or dance-like sections I examined that has this characteristic. In accounting for this departure from the norm, I suggest that Boïto may have been creating a distinct reprieve from the previous section which is in the usual 6/8 with groupings of three eighth notes, more customary for witches' music. It is a jaunty, light-hearted dance, which, as seen in the example, features a grace note-like figure and a dotted rhythm in *staccato*. It is strictly instrumental with triangle and piccolo figuring prominently throughout, both instruments' use consistent with other representations of witches. E major is clearly defined and then is abruptly interrupted by a shocking iteration of the theme in the distant key of Ab major. This abrupt harmonic shift is also consistent with witch portrayals and can be categorized under the topic of "aesthetic inversion" (see p. 66). The twenty measure interlude begins at m. 354, then the entire dance returns and is repeated in Db major at m. 374.

After this dance, Mefistofele sings of the trivial nature of the world and mockingly smashes the glass globe to the ground which serves to introduce the next section, entitled *Ballata del mondo*. The witches and warlocks then enter following Mefistofele's solo, singing in unison on the text *riddiamo!* translated by Castel as "dance in wild circles," beginning at m. 531.¹¹² This section of dance is hallmarked by a driving rhythm repeated throughout, with a tempo marking of *Allegro focoso* (see Ex. 27 below):

Ex. 27: Boïto, *Mefistofele*, Act II, scene 2, m. 531



The music progresses with regularly repeated phrases in four measure groups. Boïto reiterates his intention that this is a dance through the text, which includes the line, *s'intrecci la ridda infernal*, translated by Castel as "weave the witches' dance infernal."¹¹³ Momentum is built as the chorus adopts the same driving rhythm of Ex. 27. Both the chorus and the orchestra cycle through the circle of fifths on diminished seventh chords. The dance is interrupted momentarily by Faust seeing a vision of Margherita, then resumes at m. 600 with a new sub-title *Ridda e Fuga infernale*, in 6/8, with the repeated words *Riddiamo, saboe* and *sabba* ("Let us dance," "Witches' sabbath" and "sabbath").¹¹⁴ The music builds into a frenzy with increasing tempo, culminating in a shift to 2/4 and a tempo marking of *prestissimo* 21 measures before the end of the scene. The dynamic level continues to increase too, from *pianissimo* to triple *fortissimo* with accented repeated chords at the *fortissimo* level, even marked *violentissimo* at m. 823. This compositional approach is consistent with the *stretta* of Italian opera where the shift to a duple metre is done to accommodate the increase in speed and

¹¹² Nico Castel, *Italian Verismo Opera Libretti: in two volumes* (Geneseo, N.Y.: Leyerle, 2000), 490. *Riddare* is to dance in a ring and laugh.

¹¹³ Ibid. *La ridda* is a round dance and *intrecciare* is to weave or intertwine.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

energy culminating in an exuberant climax.¹¹⁵ Chromatic ascending and descending lines and diminished sevenths, musical materials seen often in musical portrayals of witches, dominate this wild dance which builds to a frenzied climax suggestive of the ecstatic, orgiastic dance believed to occur at a witches' sabbat.

Another sabbat piece but on a much smaller scale is the dance-like impromptu *Le sabbat* by Clara Schumann (1833-6). The time signature is 3/8 with a tempo direction of *Allegro furioso*. The first two measures, (quoted as Ex. 13, but repeated here for ease of reference) comprise the antecedent phrase and are repeated in various forms approximately fifty times throughout the short piece.

Ex. 28: Clara Schumann, *Quatre pièces caractéristiques*, Op. 5, No. 1, *Impromptu 'Le sabbat,'* mm. 1-2



Repeated lively rhythmic patterns and regular phrase structure give the piece its dance-like quality. The extensive use of grace notes, rhythmic shifts, the use of the *sforzando*, and step-wise ascending and descending chromatic lines are all musical materials associated with witches.

Another solo piano work depicting a witch that features a dance-like character is Tchaikovsky's *BabaYaga*, from his *Children's Album*, Opus 39 (1878). The first five measures are quoted below in Ex. 29:

¹¹⁵ Julian Budden, "Stretta," in *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (New York: Grove's Dictionaries of Music, 1992), 4:593.

Ex. 29: Tchaikovsky, *Children's Album: BabaYaga*, mm. 1-5



This short piece for children in 6/8 time, with a tempo marking of *presto*, regular rhythms, and distinct phrases, clearly has a dance-like spirit, which combined with the glaring tritones, extensive use of *staccato*, and modal mixture render these musical materials recognizable as topics in music for witches.

By now, one may discern the prevalence of the dance or dance-like characteristics in the depiction of witches in music. This convention can be considered a “topic” at a composer’s disposal for a portrayal of a witch or witches, which could be understood by the public. Just as with the topic of “noises and sounds” made by witches, the understanding of the dance as a reference to a witch is usually aided by a verbal indicator such as a programme, text or title.

Sinister Atmosphere

That witches in music are portrayed with musical materials suggesting a sinister atmosphere will come as no surprise. Composers create this atmosphere through a common vocabulary of musical materials whose use is certainly not limited to depictions of witches, but is generally deployed when an ominous, frightening mood is sought. In the case of music depicting witches, it is used for an introduction setting a sinister tone for the appearance of a witch, or it appears when a witch performs a spell or incantation, or merely when another character describes a witch. In some cases, these materials will saturate the texture of a piece designated as an overall depiction of a witch, but, generally speaking, it sets the stage for an appearance of or a description of the witch. Based on a style from the Baroque and Classic periods referred to as *ombra*, the use of specific musical formulae is consistent to such a degree that a musical topic for the depictions of such scenes can be identified.

The origins of this topic can be found in the Baroque affect of the *ombra* scene. These are “scenes set in hell with oracular voices and choruses of infernal spirits [which] were obligatory in the sixteenth century *intermedios*.”¹¹⁶ *Ombra* is a descriptor for “a body of music with an expressive intent so obviously suggestive of man’s terror and awe of hell that it cannot be overlooked.”¹¹⁷ The style was carried over into the eighteenth century, often incorporating a chromatic ascending or descending line in the bass, a minor key, full strong harmony, *concitato* style, and/or tremolo.¹¹⁸ Well known examples occur in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni* and Gluck’s “Air de Furies” from *Orphée et Eurydice*.¹¹⁹ Elements of this topic continued into the nineteenth century and can be found in the topic of the sinister mood that I have discerned in numerous nineteenth-century depictions of witches.

¹¹⁶ Allanbrook, 361.

¹¹⁷ Brigitte Moyer, “*Ombra* and Fantasia in Late 18th Century Practice,” in *Convention in 18th & 19th Century Music*, ed. Allanbrook, Levy and Mahrt (Stuyvesant, N.Y.: Pendragon Press, 1992), 288.

¹¹⁸ Moyer, 293-301.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 298-299.

This topic encompasses a variety of musical materials, falling mainly under the categories of timbre and harmony. Examples include the tritone in the ubiquitous diminished seventh chord or Italian augmented sixth, often in *tremolando* or in some other pattern including grace notes, trills or figures oscillating between two notes. Another manifestation may be an uncertain key scheme, which might then be accentuated by ascending or descending chromatic lines. Russian composers seem to favour the whole tone scale for suggesting the supernatural, which generally falls under the category of the sinister. Low sonorities, such as the bassoon, bass clarinet, or low strings in an orchestra, or the casting of a witch as a contralto or mezzo-soprano, may also suggest a sinister atmosphere.

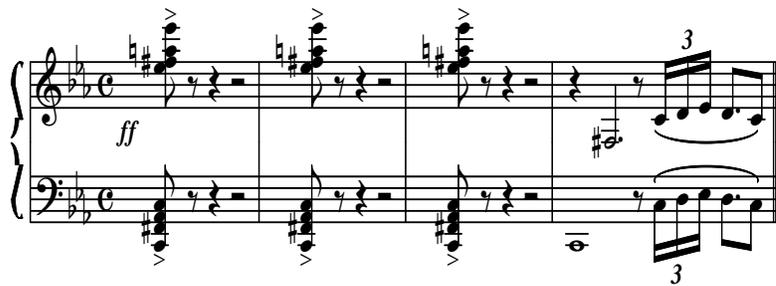
One such contralto is Ulrica, in Act I, scene 4 of Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera* (*A Masked Ball*, 1857-58). The setting is described as

The dwelling of the sorceress Ulrica:
There is a door to one side and implements of the magic arts can be seen everywhere including a smoking cauldron set up on a tripod. Men and women are gathered around Ulrica. Nearby a young boy and a young girl are asking her their fortune.¹²⁰

Verdi begins with a diminished seventh chord repeated three times by the entire orchestra on accented eighth notes followed by rests. Cellos then sound and hold the tonic, C, and the clarinets play F# in the low, chalumeau register creating a prominent tritone. A grace note-like figure in the low register of the violin and viola follows, establishing the key of C minor. The passage from measures 1-4 is quoted as Ex. 30 below:

¹²⁰ Castel, 1:253.

Ex. 30: Verdi, *Un ballo in maschera*, Act I, scene 4, mm. 1-4



The static, low sonorities, the diminished harmony, tritone, uncertain harmony and slow tempo set the stage for Ulrica's incantation to the Devil to come and assist her with fortune-telling.

It may be useful at this point to examine the portrayal of Ulrica and the question of her designation as a witch. In the opera, she is never referred to as *strega* (witch), but rather is referred to by a number of names related to witches, e.g., *Divinitrice* (fortune teller), *oracolo* (oracle), *maga* (sorceress), and *Indovina* (fortune teller).¹²¹ She is referred to as *Sibilla immortale* (immortal Sibyl, a seer) and *Figlia d'inverno* (daughter of hell) and Oscar advises Riccardo that Ulrica *e con Lucifero d'accordo ognor* (she has a pact with the Devil). In Ulrica's dwelling there is a *caldaia magica fuma* (a magic cauldron smoking) and Ulrica herself addresses *Re dell'abisso* (King of the depths), connoting her acknowledgement of the Devil's place and position. She refers to an owl sighing three times, a salamander hissing, and that the grave has spoken to her. She supplies Amelia, the opera's heroine, with the recipe for *arcane stille conosco d'una magic'erba* ("mysterious drops, I know, of a magic herb"). So Verdi and the librettist, Antonio Somma, give all of the indications that she is a witch, without actually calling her one. Yet, when one peruses Verdi's letters discussing the opera, he repeatedly refers to her as *strega* (witch).¹²² The reason for this discrepancy lies in Verdi's difficulties with the censors. The libretto for *Masked Ball* was based on the true story of an assassinated Swedish

¹²¹ Castel, 1:248-256.

¹²² See letters of Nov 6, 1856 and Nov 26, 1857 to Somma, quoted in Franco Abbiati, *G. Verdi* (Milan: Ricordi, 1959), 2:454 and 458.

King Gustave III. It was first written as a libretto, in French, by the poet, Eugene Scribe, and then set by Daniel Auber as an opera in 1833. Mercadante set the same story on a libretto by Salvatore Cammarano in 1843.¹²³ Antonio Somma created the libretto for Verdi's opera, which was first performed in 1859. The subject matter of a King's assassination was so controversial with the censors that he was compelled to shift the opera's setting to North America for the production.¹²⁴ I surmise that Ulrica was not referred to as a witch in order to avoid further difficulty with the censors. It is clear from Verdi's letters that he considered her to be a witch. But what does Ulrica's music indicate?

Except for the use of the topic for the "sinister atmosphere" created for her incantation and that she is cast as a contralto, her music does not make use of the topics I have discerned for the depiction of witches. She has no dance, no strange noises or laughing riddled with grace notes and trills, and no aesthetic extremes. Ulrica's depiction is much more complex; she is an individual and Verdi portrays her that way. This observation suggests that the topics used for the depictions of witches in music are mostly for portrayals of generic supernatural witches who are fairy tale or folklore characters as opposed to individual witches who are singular and real people. An examination of another of Verdi's witch characters, Azucena, will test this observation.

Azucena, from Verdi's *Il trovatore* (1853), is accused of being a witch but is not actually given this title; we are told she is a gypsy. She is the daughter of a woman believed officially to be a witch and who was burned at the stake for giving the son of the Count the evil eye, thereby making him ill. Azucena is an outlaw, believed to have stolen the Count's son after he had recovered from the evil eye. She is supposed to have kidnapped the baby to avenge the death of her mother, intent on consigning him to the flames in the spot where her mother was burned. In a turn of events one might only find in opera, Azucena manages to toss her own infant son into the fire, and then raises the

¹²³ Benedict Sarnaker, "A King Restored: Structure and Music in *A Masked Ball*," in *English Nation Opera Guides* 40, ed., Nicholas John (London: Calder Press, 1989), 15.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

Count's son as her own. Verdi does not make it explicit that she is a witch; rather, he makes it explicit that the other characters consider her a witch.

In Act I, scene 1, the soldier Ferrando recounts the tale of Azucena stealing the Count's baby boy, and in doing so, accuses her of being a witch. He sings: "È credenza che dimori / ancor nel mondo l'anima perduta / dell'empia strega, e quando il cielo è nero / in varie forme altrui si mostri." That is, he tells his retainers that it is believed that the wicked witch's damned soul still lives in the world and that when the sky is black she shows herself in various shapes, such as an owl.¹²⁵ This accusation bears the hallmarks of musical depictions of witches: it is incorporated into a musical vocabulary suggestive of a sinister atmosphere—an oscillating figure followed by a chromatic ascending/descending line from mm. 223-231, quoted in Ex. 31 below:

Ex. 31: Verdi, *Il trovatore*, Act I, scene 1, mm. 223-231

The image shows the first system of a musical score. The top staff is a vocal line in bass clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a common time signature (C). The lyrics are: "E credenza che dimori ancor nel mondo l'anima perduta dell'empia strega,". The bottom staff is a piano accompaniment in bass clef with the same key signature and time signature. The lyrics continue: "quando il cielo nero in varie forme altrui si mostri. E". The piano part features a prominent oscillating figure in the lower register, alternating between E and D# on the accented beats. The dynamic marking is *ppp legato e sotto voce*.

The repeated movement from E-B-G to D#-B-A in the strings (the first four measures of the lower staff of Ex. 31) creates an oscillation between the E and D#. The fact that the E and D# are quarter notes, placed on the accented beats in 4/4, and are voiced highest in the figure, draws attention to this

¹²⁵ Castel, 4:337-338.

oscillation. This figure has a hypnotic quality, reminiscent of spells and their associated rituals. The chromatic rising/falling figure in thirds, following in the fifth measure of the example, continues the hypnotic effect. Its chromatic rising and falling enhances the dark and sinister atmosphere. Ferrando sings on a single note, reminiscent of a declamatory recitative or ritualistic chant, adding to the ominous mood. Ferrando continues his dramatic story, engaging his audience to such a degree that when the midnight bell rings, it startles the chorus of soldiers and retainers who yell out, to comical effect, *Ah! Sia maledetta la strega infernal! Ah!* (“Ah! May she be cursed, the infernal witch!”)¹²⁶ The music cadences in A major with this line.

The orchestra then shifts immediately to A minor, cadencing over eight measures. This is followed by a rising chromatic scale in the cello in mm. 312-319, also accompanied by triplet figures in the bassoon and viola, which act as the characteristic grace-notes depicting witches. These, together with the low and ominous sonority of the bassoon and the many dissonances between the chromatic line and the upper voice, create a sinister mood suggesting the presence of evil (Ex. 32).

Ex. 32: Verdi, *Il trovatore*, Act I, scene 1, mm. 312-319

¹²⁶ Ibid., 340.

This leads to the still unanswered question as to whether Azucena's own music comprises the topics so commonly used to depict witches in music. And to this question, I would answer, no: like Ulrica, Azucena has a much more individualistic portrayal because she is a real person. Only in Ferrando's portrait of her as a supernatural and stereotypical character are the musical topics of witches found. This supports the conclusion that with the exception of the "sinister atmosphere," the topics found in nineteenth-century musical witch portrayals are not for real persons who are witches, but for the supernatural or fantastical characters only.

Another instance in opera where one character describes another as a witch using the topic of "sinister atmosphere" is in Amilcare Ponchielli's opera, *La Gioconda* (1876). The character Barnaba, who is a spy for the Inquisition, publicly accuses La Cieca of being a witch. For this accusation Ponchielli uses musical materials to create a sinister atmosphere in conjunction with specific formulae commonly associated with witches, such as grace notes and trills. In Act I, scene 4, Barnaba tells the ship captain, Zuàne, that La Cieca has given his ship the evil eye and in the midst of a crowded game of dice set to a light-hearted B major, Barnaba makes his accusation. The key then switches to B minor (at m. 187) and an Italian augmented sixth chord appears in the low strings, its characteristic tritone sounding between the B in the bass against the trilled E# which briefly resolves by way of a grace note figure, characteristic of witches, to F# (Ex. 33). During this passage, from mm. 187-190, Barnaba engages the interest of the crowd with his description of the witch's home: *Suo covò è un tugurio laggiù alla Giudeca* (Her lair is a hovel down there in the *Giudeca*).¹²⁷ He continues by saying she is blind, but that she can actually see, all the while laughing that people would believe him.

¹²⁷ Nico Castel, *Italian Verismo Opera Libretti* (Geneseo, N.Y.: Leyerle, 2000), 2:600. *Giudeca* is an "ancient island ghetto of the Jews in Venice."

Ex. 33: Ponchielli, *La Gioconda*, Act I, scene 4, mm. 187-190

Misterioso

co - vo e in gu - rio lag - giu al la Giu - de - ca,

For Barnaba’s accusation and description of La Cieca as a witch, Ponchielli casts a variety of musical materials associated with witches into elements of the topic of the “sinister atmosphere.” Yet none of these materials appears in the music she sings herself, of course, because they represent only the imagination of the accuser. Although her role is sung by a mezzo-soprano, which is characteristic of witches, her music is lyrical and melodic. Clearly in this case, the “sinister atmosphere” created with the help of symbolic witch figures is meant only to create a mood, or an instigation to think that La Cieca is a witch. She is not, and therefore her own music bears no relation to any of the witch topics and compositional tools discussed above.

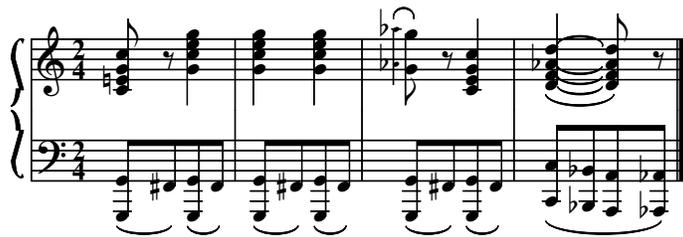
The topic of “sinister atmosphere” incorporating materials commonly associated with witches can be found in all genres; moving away from Italian opera, we find an illustrative example in Musorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1874) for solo piano. Musorgsky based this group of piano pieces on paintings and drawings made by his friend Victor Hartmann.¹²⁸ The ninth movement is titled, *The Hut on Hen’s Legs (Baba-Yaga)*, as a hut built on chicken’s legs is traditionally the home of Baba-Yaga, the witch of Slavic folklore.¹²⁹ Vladimir Stasov, the artistic director and influential

¹²⁸ Michael Russ, *Pictures at an Exhibition* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 15-18.

¹²⁹ *A Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*. s.v. “Baba Yaga,” [http:// www.oxfordreference.com](http://www.oxfordreference.com) (accessed September 27, 2008).

force behind Musorgsky and his colleagues, added comments to the pieces that were included in the first published edition. He commented: “This piece is based on Hartmann’s design for a clock in the form of Baba-Yaga’s hut on hen’s legs to which Musorgsky added the ride of the witch in her mortar.”¹³⁰ This piece is in C major although there is some equivocation between C and G as tonic. Diminished and augmented harmonies often in *tremolando* also create “tonal ambiguity and an atmosphere of spookiness.”¹³¹ The spooky atmosphere is enhanced by oscillating figures as well, such as in mm. 33-36, reproduced in Ex. 34.

Ex. 34: Musorgsky, *Pictures at an Exhibition, The Hut on Hen’s Legs (Baba-Yaga)*, mm. 33-36



The left hand features an oscillating figure, which, along with the repetitive rhythm, creates an hypnotic atmosphere, itself associated with the supernatural.¹³²

Another method for depicting the supernatural, at least amongst Russian composers, is through the use of the whole tone scale. Glinka and Rimsky-Korsakov, in their operas, “treat their principal supernatural catalysts with similar musical means: “artificial” scales are employed when these characters are on stage.”¹³³ Glinka uses the whole tone scale for the character of Chernomor in *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, as does Rimsky-Korsakov for his Astrologer in the *Golden Cockerel* and

¹³⁰ Russ, 46.

¹³¹ Ibid., 47.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ William A. Everett, “Chernomor the Astrologer and Associates; Aspects of Shadow and Evil in *Ruslan and Lyudmila* and *The Golden Cockerel*,” *Opera Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (Winter 1995): 31.

Dargomyzhsky incorporates it into music suggesting the supernatural in *The Stone Guest*.¹³⁴ As discussed previously, Musorgsky uses the scale in *Night on Bald Mountain*. In Liadov's tone poem *Baba Yaga* (?1891-1904), the scale appears prominently in the first four to seven measures of the piece (Ex. 35) patterned in three grace-note-like figures:

Ex. 35: Liadov, *Baba Yaga*, mm. 4-7



There are other instances of the whole tone scale in the work suggesting the supernatural and a sinister atmosphere. Its appearance would not automatically signify the sinister and supernatural for certainly there are many instances of its use outside this purview. But when it appears with a text or verbal indicator suggesting the supernatural realm, it becomes, at least in Russian music, a sign, known by convention, for its depiction of a foreboding, threatening, or demonic setting.

Another tone poem, Dvořák's *Polednice*, or *The Noon Witch* (1896), contains illustrative examples of the topic of "sinister atmosphere." The witch is introduced by the low sonority of the bass clarinet and oscillating figures in muted strings at m. 252, which is entirely fitting for her entrance. This figure then gives way at m. 265 to a menacing motif consisting of a bizarre chord progression (see Ex. 36). Dvořák advised in the letter previously quoted that a version of this motif (at m. 273) is the witch demanding the child from the mother.¹³⁵ This chord progression, in the bassoon and bass clarinet, is full of strange dissonances, which is consistent with musical witch portrayals.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Reilly, 147.

¹³⁵ Clapham, 283.

¹³⁶ This example is reminiscent of the bizarre chord progression used in Dukas' *Sorcerer's Apprentice* for the magical incantation at m. 23, as discussed at length by Carolyn Abbate in her article, "What the Sorcerer Said," *19th Century Music* 12, no. 3 (Spring 1989): 221-230.

Ex. 36: Dvořák, *Polednice*, m. 265-268



Any discussion of the “sinister atmosphere” of witch music would be incomplete without mentioning Berlioz’ *Dream of a Witches’ Sabbath* from the *Symphonie fantastique* (1830). The first twenty measures with the strings moving upwards in a diminished fifth, the diminished sevenths in the winds, the curtain of sound in the strings — all of these contribute to setting a sinister tone preceding the distorted *idée fixe*. The noises and calls in his piece, identified earlier in this paper, create an eerie atmosphere as does the diminished seventh chord spelled out by *divisi* strings, in Ex. 7.

Aesthetic Inversion

Catherine Clément reminds us, as quoted at the outset, that “Somewhere every culture has an imaginary zone for what it excludes.”¹³⁷ The fantastic world of witches resides in this “imaginary zone,” equivalent to the “world upside-down” or “world in inversion” that we examined in the historical survey of witches and witchcraft (see p. 7). From a societal standpoint, the theory of the “world in inversion” suggests that the examination and identification of the fantastical or “unacceptable” is society’s way of defining and validating the conventional or “acceptable.” From an artistic standpoint, that “imaginary zone” or “world in inversion” holds a compelling allure for composers (and other artists) and their audiences owing to the “liberating potential of the fantastic.”¹³⁸ There is strong appeal in exploring the world where usual conventions are completely disregarded!

So what framework of representation exists for composers to exploit this “liberating potential” while depicting this “upside-down world”? Not only in the depiction of witches, but for other “fantastic” situations, composers use exaggerated musical effects or elements of the grotesque resulting in an aesthetic approach which I have coined as “aesthetic inversion.” In fact, they not only exploit exaggerated effects but deliberately flout conventional and accepted aesthetic principles as the following discussion will demonstrate.

One such effect is identified and named as the *Ornamentalästhetik des Dämonischen* (“ornamental aesthetic of the demonic”) by Veronica Fánicsik in her article “Hexen in der Musik.”¹³⁹ Fánicsik observes that in witch-related music, composers use extensive ornamentation which therefore can be seen as a form of *musikalische Extremismen* (“musical extremism”).

¹³⁷ Cixious and Clément, ix.

¹³⁸ Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales & The Art of Subversion* (New York: Routledge Press, 2006), 169.

¹³⁹ Fánicsik, 40.

Fáncsik's analysis offers a useful starting point, but I would argue that the approach of nineteenth-century composers to the subject of witches in music can be better understood through the topic of "aesthetic inversion," because it encompasses many more elements. These include the various exaggerations employed by composers that have the potential of being perceived as total reversions of the categories of "normality" that they exaggerate. For example, extremes in timbral ranges of instruments or voices, not usually appearing in orchestral music; unusual melodic and harmonic formulas that "distort" the expectations of conventional music (such as exposed tritones and open fifths), unexpectedly large intervallic leaps; distortions in rhythm and tonality; or extensive use—or overuse—of articulations are gestures that are so unusual that they can be perceived as music representing elements that are "upside down" with regard to the world of nineteenth-century music, just as elements of the witch's world are "upside down" with regard to the real world.¹⁴⁰

One of the nineteenth-century's earliest examples of "aesthetic inversion" in the music of witches can be found in Berlioz' *Symphonie fantastique*. For example, the sounds realized in Berlioz through the *col legno* technique, besides their quality of "noises," create a timbre that is an inversion of the beautiful melodic, legato sounds expected from the violin – especially in the context of an early nineteenth-century symphony. And although Berlioz was not the first to use it – it was known as early as the seventeenth century – it was not commonly used until the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.¹⁴¹ Other examples of "inversion" are both Berlioz's subjection of the *Dies irae* plainchant

¹⁴⁰ The use of such elements is not limited to the musical depictions of witches; individually and in other settings, they have been characterized as musical grotesquerie. See Rodney Stenning Edgecomb, "The Musical Representation of the Grotesque in Nineteenth Century Opera," *The Opera Quarterly*, 16, no. 1 (2000): 46.

¹⁴¹ David D. Boyden, "Col legno" in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed December 3, 2008).

to a trivializing musical treatment, in itself an irreverent statement, and its scoring with an unusual combination of instruments: bassoon and ophicleide.¹⁴²

“Aesthetic inversion” is also exemplified by Berlioz’ treatment of his *idée fixe*: in mm. 21-28, and again in mm. 40-64, he adds grace notes and trills to the theme and speeds it up to an exaggerated tempo. The first of these examples, a portion of the *idée fixe* with this treatment from mm. 21-27, is quoted below in Ex. 37: Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, V, mm. 21-27

Ex. 37: Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, V, mm. 21-27



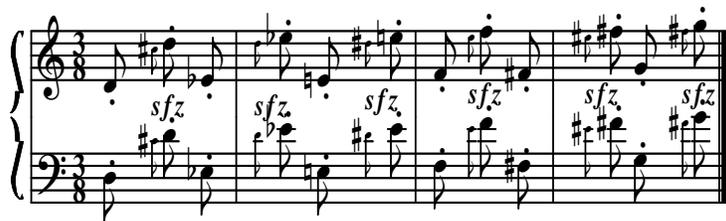
Berlioz further trivializes the theme by re-orchestrating it for the extreme sound of the shriller Eb clarinet accompanied by the C clarinet. At m. 47, he adds a piccolo to the mix, thereby transforming the timbre to a display of a grotesquerie totally inverting the aesthetically accepted norms. The symphony’s shocking aesthetic was certainly perceived in its day. This was particularly so of the fifth movement, which prompted nineteenth-century critic François-Joseph Fétis to write: “the fifth part,

¹⁴² The ophicleide is a brass wind instrument with a tonal quality that can be likened to that of a mix of saxophone and euphonium. Used primarily in brass military bands of the day, the ophicleide has been replaced by the euphonium or tuba and is now obsolete. The instrument has been greatly disparaged by musical historians, probably due to the fact that it was a difficult instrument to play in tune. See Reginald Morley-Pegge, et al., "Ophicleide" in *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online*, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> (accessed September 17, 2008).

the *Dream of a Witches' Sabbath* mingles the trivial, the grotesque, and the barbarous; it is a saturnalia of noise and not of music.”¹⁴³

Another piece with an exaggerated approach to ornamentation as one of its forms of “aesthetic inversion” is Clara Schumann’s *Impromptu, Le sabbat* (1833-6). In addition to its profusion of grace notes, extensive use of articulations such as *sforzando*, and sudden shifts in register, the piece is characterized by exaggerated dynamics and hemiola. The following example, from m. 71, portrays a number of these characteristics, including hemiola, as it is based on rhythmic pairs rather than the expected three. In addition, it is overtly and profusely ornamented with grace notes, some of which are marked *sforzando*. The four-measure excerpt (mm. 71-74) in Ex. 38 is drawn from a section of ten similar measures. Together, they comprise an ascending and then descending chromatic line, a musical material associated with witches. The extended length of this chromatic scalar passage relative to the overall length of the work (116 measures) suggests that Schumann is ignoring a standard approach to formal structure. That is, one might expect short bursts of chromatic movement, but such a lengthy passage in a short piece is aesthetically inverse.

Ex. 38: Clara Schumann, *Impromptu, Le sabbat*, mm. 71-74



Another short work for solo piano employing similar effects is the ninth movement of Musorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition*, entitled *The Hut on Hen’s Legs (Baba-Yaga)* (1874). This work has much to recommend it to the topic of “aesthetic inversion” with its unsettled tonality

¹⁴³ François-Joseph Fétis, “Critical Analysis,” in *Hector Berlioz: Fantastic Symphony; An Authoritative Score*, ed. Edward T. Cone (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1971), 220.

wavering between tonal centers C and G leaving the listener grasping to find its harmonic centre. The piece features numerous rhythmic shifts, as well as sudden changes in register, a profusion of grace-note figures, extensive use of *marcato* and *sforzando*, and extensive use of chromatic ascending and descending step-wise motion, all of which suggest a distortion of usual aesthetic practice resulting in an unsettled composition with a strong sense of the bizarre.

More exaggerated and abrupt articulations as examples of its inverted aesthetic, are found in the witches' material in Verdi's *Macbeth* (1846-7). As previously noted, Verdi advised his French publisher that he intended the witches in *Macbeth* to sound "coarse and gossipy."¹⁴⁴ Witches are directed to sing *staccato e marcate assai: ne dimenticarsi che sono streghe che parlano* ("very *staccato* and marked: don't forget that these are witches who are speaking").¹⁴⁵ Their parts are marked *staccatissimo* and *staccato* throughout; their music is disjunct and ungainly, utterly lacking the lyricism or grace of the "normal" operatic singing.

Witch-related portions of Verdi's *Macbeth* feature another potent element of aesthetic inversion: unexpectedly large intervallic leaps. For example, in the introductory witch scene in the opera's first act, the witches' vocal line features abrupt jumps, such as the drop of a diminished seventh from C to D# at m. 64 or the minor ninth from E to D# at m. 66 as in Ex. 39 below:

Ex. 39: Verdi, *Macbeth*, Act I, Introduction, mm. 64-67

The musical score for Verdi's *Macbeth*, Act I, Introduction, mm. 64-67, is presented in a two-staff format. The top staff is the vocal line, and the bottom staff is the piano accompaniment. The vocal line is in a soprano clef and the piano accompaniment is in a bass clef. The key signature has one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The lyrics are: "ma lo spo - so, ma lo sposo che sal- po col suo le - gno,". The piano accompaniment features a series of chords and trills, with a trill marked "tr" in the bass line. The vocal line features a series of notes, including a drop of a diminished seventh from C to D# at m. 64 and a minor ninth from E to D# at m. 66.

¹⁴⁴ Rosen and Porter, 99.

¹⁴⁵ My own translation.

The jarring effect is compounded by yet another element of aesthetic inversion: unexpected rhythmic shifts. In m. 64 of Ex. 39: Verdi, *Macbeth*, Act I, Introduction, mm. 64-67, the rhythmic emphasis shifts onto the third beat of the bar with the half note sixth F#-D# getting a strong accent, a rhythmic formula that is repeated two measures later in m. 66. This unruly dance-like step out of sync with the surrounding music produces a halting, ungraceful rhythm, which attracts attention to itself as an “odd,” abnormal event.

An inverted aesthetic is also used by Verdi in Act I, scene 1 of *Il trovatore* when Ferrando recounts the tale of the witch. The passage is in A minor and built on a diminished seventh chord, but its treatment is noteworthy. Ferrando sings “Mori di paura un servo del Conte, che avea della zingara percossa la fronte!” (“A servant of the Count died of fright because he struck the gypsy’s forehead”).¹⁴⁶ The chorus echoes, “Ah! Mori di paura!” (“Ah! He dies of fright!”) Ferrando repeats the word “mori” three times, starting at m. 263, and on each occasion its short syllable, “-ri” is echoed by the chorus answering “Ah!” over large intervallic leaps and dissonances (Ex. 40). Both are effects typical of “aesthetic inversion” and are accentuated by the arrangement of voices.

Ex. 40: Verdi, *Il trovatore*, Act I, scene 1, mm. 263-269

Another operatic witch scene is found in Boïto’s *Mefistofele*, (Act II, scene 2), entitled *La notte del sabba* or *Walpurgis Night*. This scene contains numerous audacious musical materials that suggest “aesthetic inversion.” For example, a significant tonal shift occurs in the midst of the section of dance in E major. This E major passage has already been considered in Ex. 26: Boïto, *Mefistofele*,

¹⁴⁶ Castel, 4:338.

Act II, scene 2, mm. 326-331 in the section on “Dances of witches,” but at m. 331, a shocking interjection of a figure in the very distant key of Ab occurs (Ex. 41).

Ex. 41: Boïto, *Mefistofele*, Act II, scene 2, *La notte del sabba*, mm. 329-333



This striking juxtaposition is further emphasized by exaggerated articulations: *fortissimo* with accented, then *staccato*, notes marked *ruvidamente* (coarsely). The abrupt appearance of the Ab figure is made all the more jarring by the sudden introduction of the bassoon, accompanied by triangle. In keeping with musical materials associated with witches, everything in the figure has been crafted to disturb listeners, who through the “aesthetic inversion” outlined in the music feel displaced in a world totally opposed to theirs—an “upside-down” witches’ world.

At this point, we must acknowledge that there is a degree of subjectivity in the establishment and evaluation of topics in general, and this one of “aesthetic inversion” in particular. The boundaries of good taste shift over time, and from the time of Mendelssohn to that of Wagner they had shifted dramatically – as they have in our own. It is also worth reiterating here that the typically boundary-violating approach of aesthetic inversion is not limited to musical depictions of witches. The world of music is replete with examples of individual instances of hemiola, sudden harmonic shifts, large intervallic leaps, extensive use of articulations such as grace notes, trills, *sforzando* and the like. But while these musical materials do not automatically signify the presence of witches, their persistent usage in the music of witches shows an interesting connection between a more general topic known

even in music without programs as “the uncanny,” on which composers from Haydn to today have relied to express horror and fright of a world that cannot be understood in conventional ways.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ See especially Richard Cohn, “Uncanny Resemblances: Tonal Signification in the Freudian Age,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 285-324.

Large Scale Topical Analyses

After reviewing the itemized topics and their exemplifications from various repertoire, one might well ask whether and how the topics work in conjunction with one another, and, further, how the topics interact with the overall harmonic and structural framework within a given composition to outline a longer narrative. To explore these questions, I have provided an overall analysis of two pieces identifying the topics as they occur through the piece, in conjunction with the basic harmonic and formal structure as well. I then draw conclusions with respect to characteristics of the topics themselves, the interplay between topics, and how they operate within the harmonic functions and structural framework of the pieces.

I will begin with an examination of the fifth movement of Berlioz' *Symphonie fantastique*, *Songe d'une nuit du sabbat*, or *Dream of a Witches' Sabbath* (exemplified in Table 1). The piece opens quite clearly with the topic of the "sinister atmosphere:" repeated grace note-like figures in the strings outlining rising diminished fifths, A#-E in the low strings, accompanied by the *tremolando* diminished seventh chord A#-C#-E-G in the divisi violins convey this topic, used to suggest an ominous opening. The musical materials are limited – that is, a tonic is not established, nor is any particular theme stated, thus, syntactically, the opening can be seen as an introduction. Materials in mm. 3-11 continue the "sinister atmosphere" topic by combining "noises and sounds" topics (especially in m. 7) with some "aesthetic inversion" topics (see especially the fast descending chromatic lines in m. 4). Here the topics overlap to a certain degree, as these materials for "noises and sounds" also contribute to the "sinister atmosphere." Their relation to the topic of "noises and sounds" is more prevalent, however, as they bear a mimetic relationship to the sound of laughter. This series of events is repeated through mm. 12-20, beginning one semitone higher, on the tritone B-F.

The tonic of C minor finally arrives at m. 21 with the transformation of the *idée fixe* theme and a new topic. The listener is well acquainted with the theme, of course, having heard it in the previous movements, and recognizes that it is greatly and grotesquely transformed. This

transformation, occurring in mm. 21-28 and repeated in a new key (Eb) in mm. 40-64, can be categorized as the topic of “aesthetic inversion” with its grace notes, trills, shrill Eb clarinet and piccolo trivializing the theme. Here the change of topic from the previous ones corresponds to the introduction of a new character, the establishment of the tonic key and a move to another key, showing how the topic works in conjunction with the harmonic shifts of the piece.

The piece moves to a new key centre (Ab) at m. 69, followed at mm. 76-78 by more noises and sounds in the form of grace note-like figures which are an inverted form of those heard at m. 3. A shift to the dominant at m. 82 includes a shift of time signature to 6/8. Following closely in mm. 84-85 is a hint of the dance theme to come. The arrival of the tonic, C, at m. 102 brings with it another shift in topic and the introduction to the *Dies irae* through the ringing of bells on pitches C to C to G. While bells might merely suggest the church in another context, here, akin to a funeral knell, they suggest the church and death which hints at the sinister. The *Dies irae* follows at m. 127. The march of the dead has inherent death-like connotations, but it is made more sinister, particularly with this low sonority of bassoon, ophicleide, and bells. Moreover, at m. 147, Berlioz subjects the march to a rhythmic treatment of eighth and quarter notes that is a clear parody, signaling another appearance of the topic of “aesthetic inversion.” Variations of this parody continue to m. 221.

This long section leads to what turns out to be its climactic goal—the witches’ dance, *la Ronde du sabbat*, beginning at m. 241, in conjunction with a shift to C major. It is as if at this point the movement has finally begun after what seemed to be an interminable introduction. Naturally this section highlights the topic of the dance, which continues until m. 305, yet the way in which Berlioz introduces the supposedly frolic dance is twisted, as he presents the theme fashioned as a fugue, thus combining the dance topic with a “learned” topic. The two topics seem at first totally incompatible, except that we know from Berlioz’s writings that he tended to scorn traditional fugal procedures, which he used with comic effect, so in fact the learned topic adds an extra sense of irony to the devilish dance.

A move to Eb major (m. 306) signals the beginning of what might be called a development section. Chromatically descending chords in the winds are indicative of a “sinister atmosphere” (mm. 306-327). *Sforzando* calls which quickly diminish to *pianissimo* are indicative of the topic of “noises and sounds” at mm. 339-340 and mm. 342-343. These cells, or fragments of previously heard material, are in keeping with the spirit of a development section, while the topic remains prevalently that of “sinister atmosphere,” with occasional moments when the musical fabric moves in and out of the topic. Specifically, the topic can be recognized with the diminished sevenths spelled in the string section with upper strings playing *tremolando* over a continuous diminuendo from mm. 331-346, and then again for the *Dies irae*’s appearance from mm. 347-355. Throughout these sections, we witness a mixture of topics, as the “dance” topic, with its 6/8 meter and dance-rhythm formulas, comes in and out superimposed upon the existent topics (see, for ex., mm. 331-346, 355-358, etc.) The dominant appears at mm. 364-395 which brings a chromatic version of the fugue theme, highlighting not only the topic of “dance,” but also that of “aesthetic inversion.” Again a shift in key coincides with a shift in topic, showing how embedded topics are into the fabric of the music.

The tonic arrives at m. 407 signaling the recapitulation and the “dance” topic, with the reappearance of the original dance theme, this time not as a fugue, but presented homophonically. At m. 414, Berlioz combines the *Dies irae* with the sabbat round dance as the sixteenth-note figuration of the flute, piccolo and upper strings creates a sense of whirlwind activity accompanying this strange combination of themes, which in itself can be considered an example of the topic of “aesthetic inversion” combined with that of the “dance.” This gives way to an oscillating figure in the basses combined with *tremolando* in the viola from mm. 435-440, clear indicators of the topic of a “sinister atmosphere.” Grace note-like figures indicate “noises and sounds” made by witches from mm. 440-444, then more “noises” in the form of the strange *col legno* of the strings from mm. 444-460. More trills, grace notes and staccato manifest themselves in the trivialization of the dance theme again, from mm. 448-467. A brief *tremolando* diminished seventh in the strings suggests the “sinister

atmosphere” from mm. 474-477. More “noises” can be heard from mm. 480-484, followed by another statement of the *Dies irae* from mm. 486-493. The speed with which the shifts in topic occur saturate this last section with all of the topics for a cumulative effect which creates the frenzied atmosphere that Berlioz no doubt wanted for a climactic end of the symphony as a whole, but also for a climatic frenzied conclusion of this witches’ sabbat at the extra-musical level. This cumulative effect can be seen clearly in Table 1 as can the integral relationship between the topics and the harmonic and structural events.

Besides showing how interconnected the musical and topical elements are, this analysis reveals another implication: that the sequence of these topics, particularly with the suggestive title of Witches’ Sabbat, suggests the existence of a plot. The “sinister atmosphere” suggests the setting; “noises and sounds” suggest the arrival of characters which interact within the setting; the “dance” certainly suggests the activity of the participants, and the “aesthetic inversion” makes a comment about the specific quality and character of the participants and their activities. That is, the “aesthetic inversion” suggests the “world upside-down” that is so freely explored in a witches’ sabbat. The culmination of all of the topics, appearing together in the final thirty measures of the piece, suggests the frenzied atmosphere which is another requisite characteristic of the sabbat.

Table 1. Topical analysis of Berlioz, *Symphonie fantastique*, V - *Songe d'une nuit du sabbat*

Key	Sinister Atmosphere	Noises & Sounds	Dance	Aesthetic Inversion
Intro.	1-20 intro. to tonic	3-11 / 14-20 shrieks, calls, laughter		4 chromatic lines
I (21) (Cminor)				21-28 transformation of <i>idée fixe</i>
III (29) (Eb)				40-64 transformation of above
bVI (69)		76-78	76-78 hint of dance	
V (82) 6/8			84-85 hint of dance	
I (102)	102 intro to <i>Dies irae</i> : bells			
	127-146 <i>Dies irae</i>			147-221 parody <i>Dies irae</i>
I theme (241)			241-305 Round dance: fugue	
bIII Dev. (306)	305-406 intermittent 331-346 dim7 / <i>tremol.</i> 347-355 <i>Dies irae</i>	306-327 339-340 342-343	331-346 355-358	
V (364)			364-395	364-395 chromatic version of fugue (dance) theme
I Recap. (407)			407-414 414-422	414-422 combination of <i>Dies irae</i> and fugue theme
	435-440 474-477 dim 7/ <i>tremol.</i> 486-493 <i>Dies irae</i>	440-444 444-460 <i>col legno</i> 480-484	448-467 dance theme w/ trills and <i>staccato</i>	448-467 dance theme w/ trills and <i>staccato</i>

Another piece of music which encompasses all of the witch topics as delineated in Table 2 is Verdi's *Macbeth*, in the Act I Introductory Chorus ushering in the three groups of witches. The scene is set with materials belonging to the topic of the "sinister atmosphere" with *tremolando* in octaves on the tonic A in the viola, cello and timpani. Grace note figures grouped in threes are heard in the violin followed by flutes and piccolo with a grace note/*staccato* figure rising to a semitone oscillating in *tremolando* over a diminished seventh in the strings and bassoon. All of these materials fit into the

category of “sinister atmosphere” while also incorporating the grace notes and *staccato* so common to music of witches. The whole pattern is repeated twice with slight variations to accommodate more diminished sevenths and a move towards B minor.

The “sinister atmosphere” topic continues in B minor at m. 15 and as indicated in the score *lampi e tuoni: apparisce il primo crocchio di streghe* (lightning and thunder: the first group of witches appears).¹⁴⁸ Rapidly rising and falling grace note-like figures, signs for the thunder and lightning, appear in violin, flute and piccolo (mm.15-19) over a consistent B minor harmony. The B minor chord switches to a diminished seventh and a move toward E minor with a grace note/*staccato* figure, heard three times (mm. 19-23) over a diminished seventh and the dominant of E minor — a mimetic representation of laughter (see pp. 21-23). The topic switches with this new harmony, showing how topics often correspond to changes within the harmonic framework.

The resolution to the E minor tonic at m. 23 coincides with the score’s indication that more thunder and lightning appear with the second group of witches. The whole pattern is repeated: thunder/lightning figures (mm. 23-27) are followed by the cackling (mm. 27-31). As expected the third group of witches is introduced, accompanied by a variant of the thunder and lightning. There is no cackling this time as a descending chromatic scalar passage belonging to the category of “sinister atmosphere” appears concluding this introductory section comprised of 42 measures.

All of the witches are now on stage to sing their opening phrase (m. 52), *M’e frullata nel pensier* (“It has crossed my mind”) to repeated phrases marked *staccate e marcate assai*.¹⁴⁹ The witches are coarse and vulgar and their music, belonging to the category of “aesthetic inversion,” reflects this with its choppy and disjointed character (see p. 70). The flutes and piccolo accompany this line with more *appoggiaturas*, another use of “noises and sounds” topics. Jarring intervals, also signifying “aesthetic inversion” appear through this section. (see p. 70).

¹⁴⁸ My own translation.

¹⁴⁹ Castel, 3:155.

As a transition to the next line of text, Verdi interpolates a brief grace note/*staccato* figure (mm. 68-69) which is similar to that identified as cackling. The new section begins with three distinct entries of the witches, who then sing together on *staccato* notes. They sing entirely different texts, however, so even though they are singing together, the words are virtually unintelligible. Although this is common in opera, it usually occurs when each character has his/her own musical line. Here the blurring of the words seems purposefully done to enhance the gossipy flavour of the group of witches. This section continues to m. 89 with the interruption of a drum signaling the advance of Macbeth. The witches remark on his approach and then launch into their concluding “round dance” which continues to the end of the scene (mm. 116-182). This section naturally fits into the topic of “dance” and although it lacks a strong witch-like character, as remarked on previously (see pp. 41-42), it still reveals how important the dance is to musical portrayals of witches. This dance builds into a frenzy in the manner we expect of a witches’ dance, with repeated phrases becoming faster and shorter and building to a climax.

Table 2 outlines the above materials, which in their entirety show how Verdi uses topics as structural devices within the overall form of the piece. That is, materials of the “sinister atmosphere” are the introduction; the “noises and sounds” are interpolated often to demarcate phrases or used as transitional devices; and switches in topics add a musical semantic dimension to the structural functions of the respective sections, thus drastically enriching the dramatic aspects of the plot.

Table 2. Topical analysis of Verdi, *Macbeth* Act I, *Coro d'introduzione – Chi faceste? dite su*

Key	Sinister Atmosphere	Noises & Sounds	Dance	Aesthetic Inversion
Intro. A minor (1-42)	Vla/vlc <i>tremol.</i> 1-14			
B minor (V of V) 1 st grp witches (15-19)	Thunder /lightening 15-19			
(E minor) (V) (19)		grace note cackling 19-23		
2 nd grp witches (23)	Thunder /lightening 23-27			
Modulates to A minor		grace note cackling 27-31		
A minor 3 rd grp witches (31)	Thunder /lightening 31-34	<i>tremol.</i> 33-34		
V of A minor (34-43)	Chromatic scalar descent 34-43			
Main (I) A minor (43-89)		grace notes 52-53		<i>M'è frulata:</i> Staccato/marcate 52- 63
II				<i>ma lo sposo:</i> jarring intervals 64-68
III		grace notes 68-69		simultaneous text 69- 88
		grace notes 76-77 79-80		
transition to dance with drum (90-106)				
Dance A major Cut time – <i>brillante</i> (106)			<i>Le sorelle vagabonde</i> 106-182	

Chapter 3 Ideological, political and gender implications of witches in music

Traditionally, the character of the witch resides in the “world upside-down,” or the “world in inversion.” More specifically, the witch embodies “the opposite of the male Christian God.”¹⁵⁰ Whereas the male Christian God represents morality, order and authority, the witch represents evil, disorder and chaos.

Clearly, this male/female dichotomy was based in a misogynistic double standard. Although witchcraft or sorcery was practiced by some men in the time period we have examined, it was rare for charges to be brought against them. When practiced by women, witchcraft posed a threat to God because supposedly it was made possible through service to the Devil; when engaged in by men, it morphed into the high art of sorcery under the auspices of God.¹⁵¹ Interestingly, a rare voice of skepticism from the sixteenth century, Reginald Scot identified in his *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) “the tyrannicall crueltie of witchmongers and inquisitors” who targeted “the toothless, old, impotent, and unweldie woman [who was thought] to flie in the aier” (sic).¹⁵² This disconcerting misogyny was embraced not only by male authority figures, but by society as a whole.

In general, those perceived as a threat to society were feared, excluded and hated; anything opposing the status quo was suspect. As seen in history, the witch was typically elderly and often widowed. Alone and without means, she was a burden to the community – marginalized and ostracized to the outskirts of society. It was probably easier to get rid of her than to assist her. By ascribing to her the powers of witchcraft, her elimination became possible.

¹⁵⁰ Jack Zipes, *Happily Ever After: Fairy Tales, Children and the Culture Industry* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 47.

¹⁵¹ Midelfort, 113.

¹⁵² Reginald Scot, “Discoverie of Witchcraft,” in Kors and Peters, 318-319.

This thesis offers numerous musical examples of characteristics associated with witches and the nature of the witch's relationship to society. And while these can be inferred in instrumental music with little or no programme or text, they are made explicit in operatic repertoire.

In the operas we have reviewed, the witch typically is cast as an outsider. Verdi's witches, Azucena, Ulrica and the witches of *Macbeth*, definitely fit this mould, as do Dvořák's Ježibaba, Ponchielli's Cieca as defined by Barnaba, and Humperdinck's witch. Physically, they inhabit remote locales; ethnically, they are identified with groups outside of the dominant society. Azucena is a gypsy; Ulrica is said to be black; and Barnaba describes La Cieca, whom he has accused of being a witch, as living in a hovel in the Jewish quarter. Both Ježibaba and the witch of *Hänsel and Gretel* live in huts far removed from any society.

The character of a witch is defined by contrasts: the old, ugly, hag-like witch is the mezzo-soprano or contralto, which clearly differentiates her from the young, beautiful and fertile woman as heroine soprano. This points to the ingrained vocal convention of privileging the soprano voices over the contralto, by giving them, respectively, to desirable versus undesirable characters. In addition, the character of a witch acts as a foil to the other characters: their actions and attitudes toward her reveal much about the society in which all of the opera characters function, and about society as a whole.

Azucena's character illustrates all of these observations. As noted above, she is a gypsy; according to the libretto, she lives in a "ruined hovel in a fold of the Biscay mountains." Naturally, this spot is isolated from town and relegated to gypsies – but Azucena is doubly marginalized, in that she is segregated even from them. Seated by the requisite fire, she is depicted by music that is completely at odds with that of her people. Whereas they sing the exuberant *Anvil Chorus*, Azucena contemplates the flames with her dark and hypnotic *Stride la vampa*. As a widow or a woman who never married, she is dangerously single. Lacking a man to dominate her, she represents a threat to the social order of male dominance. Worse, she is the daughter of a suspected witch – which suggests she could well be the offspring of the Devil. Verdi's Azucena is no ordinary gypsy, and her character

is best understood within the historical context of witches and witchcraft.

Azucena stands in marked contrast to Leonora. She is pious, naïve and gentle; she even removes herself to a convent. Verdi makes the dichotomy of these two characters even more compelling, by assigning opposing tonal areas to each. Leonora's music lies in the tonal centres of A major, whereas Azucena's stays in E and B. Leonora is a soprano and although Azucena is designated in the score as a mezzo-soprano, Verdi admits in his letters that she is actually a contralto.¹⁵³ Both women love Manrico and vie for his attention: one as a mother, the other as a lover. They never appear on stage together, except very briefly at the conclusion of the opera. By depicting the two women as polar opposites, Azucena's darkness and purported connection to witchcraft become accentuated, while Leonora's radiance and virtue are heightened.

Ulrica, the witch of Verdi's *Un ballo in maschera*, also has typical witch characteristics. Like Azucena, she inhabits the outskirts of society. Ulrica's blackness defines her as an outsider. She lives alone in a cave, complete with the expected cauldron hanging over the fire. This cave inspires the sense of darkness; it is a place to which one would dread going, but would nevertheless be tempted to visit. The audience is made to understand that as a woman alone, Ulrica is worthy of suspicion.

In *Ballo*, Verdi uses Ulrica's character as a foil to heighten the comparative morality and respectability of Amelia. Amelia visits Ulrica to ask how she can rid herself of her illicit love for Count Riccardo, her husband's friend. Ulrica gives Amelia specific instructions on an herb she can pick, characteristically at midnight at the site of the gallows. In prescribing herbal remedies, Ulrica is consistent with historical images of the witch. The strangeness of the situation – a woman of nobility consulting a witch – makes clear to the audience just how desperate Amelia must be to rid herself of her passionate feelings of love. It makes her distress over her predicament that much more palpable.

¹⁵³ See Verdi's letter to Vincenzo Torelli of May 16, 1856 in Charles Osborne, *Letters of Giuseppe Verdi* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1971), 110.

Just as with the contrast between Azucena and Leonora, that between Ulrica and Amelia serves to emphasize the heroine's feminine aspects.

Compared to the hardened characters of the witch, the heroines become more aligned with innocent children, such as Hänsel and Gretel. To them are ascribed youth, innocence and virginity, whereas the witches are associated with age, wisdom and experience. The dichotomy reveals that youth, innocence and virginity are seen as desirable qualities in women, while age, wisdom and experience are not. In a woman, particularly one who is alone, wisdom could even be viewed as treacherous. This view harkens back to Krämer and Sprenger, who state in their 1486 witchcraft treatise *Malleus Maleficarum*: "When a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil."¹⁵⁴ In keeping with representations of witches in these operas, the solitary woman is viewed as a potential threat, to be feared and suspected.

The response of the crowd to Ulrica in *Ballo* reveals still more about historical attitudes toward witches and hints that attitudes are changing in society as a whole. In the cave, the crowd is in awe of Ulrica, and holds her in frightened esteem. During Ulrica's dark and sinister incantation to the Devil, in which she prophesies riches for the crowd, they cheer and sing, "Long live the sorceress" and "Long live our immortal Sibyl who spreads riches and joy to all."

Verdi's portrayal of Ulrica is worth noting: through the "sinister atmosphere" created for her entrance, it reflects the historical imagery of witches. But the crowd's response also suggests the skepticism that was emerging around witchcraft in the nineteenth-century. Had the opera been written in a period prior to the Age of Enlightenment, when a level of rationalism dispelled some of the fears associated with witchcraft, and had the "immortal Sibyl" been prophesying a less than desirable outcome, it is unlikely that Ulrica's incantation would have been so agreeably received by the crowd.

The same observation may be made of other characters in the opera. The threat to society that is associated with the witch is made explicit by the character of the Judge. At the drama's outset, he

¹⁵⁴ Krämer and Sprenger, 117.

applies to Count Riccardo to have Ulrica, a woman “of unclean Negroid race” who “is said to be in league with the Devil,” banished from the area. That the request is being made by a Judge is significant. He is the symbol of authority, reminiscent of the Inquisitors and the judiciary who, in former centuries, sought to rout out witches from society. A more enlightened perspective is exemplified by Riccardo himself, and serves as a testament to the psychological depth found in Verdi’s operas. Riccardo makes light of the Judge’s recommendation. He sets out to personally investigate the case of the witch, but does so with a cavalier spirit, treating the matter as though it were parlour-game entertainment. This is reinforced when Riccardo arrives to light-hearted music, incongruent with that of Ulrica. So while Verdi creates a “sinister atmosphere” around Ulrica, he does not depict all characters as convinced of her authenticity as a witch. The audience is tempted to side with Riccardo but remain wary of her predictions. Through a later twist, Ulrica’s prophecy regarding the murder of Riccardo actually comes true – with the result that the audience must re-examine its disregard for Ulrica’s power.

Societal attitudes toward witches are also revealed by the crowd in Ponchielli’s *La Gioconda*. Representing the proverbial gullible masses, the crowd is quick to pass judgement on La Cieca and call for her execution without evidence, trial or cause. Barnaba, the character who falsely denounces her as a witch, laughs privately at the crowd’s gullibility.

In Verdi’s *Il trovatore*, the same attitudes are displayed. The soldiers and retainers, listening to Ferrando’s tale of the witch, are no less gullible than the crowd in *La Gioconda*. Nothing in the opera would lead the audience to believe that Azucena’s mother had cast an evil eye upon the Count’s son, thereby causing his illness. What does become clear is that burning her at the stake is abject cruelty, based on the superstition of an unenlightened age. Azucena herself represents a victim of society’s cruelty: orphaned by the cruel death of her own mother, she has gone slightly mad by the accidental killing of her own son and by her mother’s demand to be vindicated.

I will conclude by reminding the reader of Clément’s exhortation that today we must

remember that “imaginary zone” containing that which society excludes. And while that zone or the “world in inversion” contains those repellent beliefs, such as eating the flesh of babies, poisoning neighbours and having sex with the Devil, it also contains unfair beliefs about women, relegated to the “world of inversion” by the mere fact that they are all women alone, of another race like Ulrica, elderly like La Cieca, or just a child of one of these women like Azucena. Flushing out these attitudes in an historiographic context reveals concepts untenable by our society, so it is vital for us to examine and learn from them.

Conclusions

By now, certain conclusions concerning the musical depictions of witches will be obvious. Nineteenth-century composers made use of topics, that is, subjects of musical discourse, to depict witches and the world they were thought to inhabit. These topics include “noises and sounds ostensibly made by witches;” incorporation of “dance or dance-like music” to evoke witches; musical representations to create a “sinister atmosphere;” and the use of an extreme approach to aesthetics, which I have termed “aesthetic inversion.”

Just as these topics are readily discernable in nineteenth-century musical portrayals of witches, it is also clear that composers used them in accordance with particular conventions. For example, the topics are mainly used for depictions of supernatural witches or those associated with the stereotype. When individuals are portrayed as witches (even when merely accused of being witches), the topics of “sinister atmosphere” and an “inverted aesthetic” are used; the topics of “noises and sounds” or “dance” are not. In contrast to the supernatural witch with human-like attributes, but who is more of a stereotypical generalization, distinct individuals associated with witchcraft, such as Azucena or Ulrica, are actual persons with a particular history and their music reflects a more personal approach.

The topics we have identified are strongly associated with gender. They were not used for male sorcerers, such as Schubert’s *Erlkönig* or Dukas’ Sorcerer in the *Sorcerer’s Apprentice*. Such characters were of entirely different order. In contrast to the hag-like old woman most typically cast as a witch, male sorcerers are powerful and revered.

We have also seen that these topics were used widely, by composers of diverse national origin. They can be found in German, French, Russian, Italian, and Czech music of the time. Although terminology describing witches varies widely by language, stereotypes of the witch and the witches’ sabbat were consistent around the Continent. With the notable exception of Russian

composers' singular use of the whole-tone scale to invoke the supernatural, musical portrayals of witches are consistent across national boundaries.

Within the topics discussed, we have identified the common use of certain musical materials. As records left by composers and critics show, overt use of the piccolo is strongly associated with the presence of a witch. Vocally, a witch is portrayed by an alto or a mezzo-soprano. Grace notes, trills and *staccato* figures litter her depictions, and are often meant to invoke noises ostensibly made by her. Exaggerated articulations, such as *sforzando* and *marcato*, abound. Harmonies become strained through frequent use of diminished-seventh chords and tritones; or the texture becomes coarse with open fifths or jarring shifts in register; rhythmic disorder is created through hemiola, rhythmic displacement and unexpected shifts of strong and weak beats. While the topics often overlap in the actual music, it is important to identify them separately, as some of them have specific functions.

The topics we have identified, and the musical materials used therein, underscore the potent stereotypes surrounding witches. Pervasive and persistent well into the nineteenth-century, these stereotypes can be traced directly to historically documented fears and beliefs about witches that culminated in the murderous effort to rout out this perceived threat across Europe. And while I wish the witch's prolific appearance in the arts would signify an attempt by society to exculpate its guilt for attempting to expunge the world of countless unfortunate women, I fear this is not the case. More likely, the exploration of the witch's "world in inversion" represents the attempt to validate the "normalcy" of our own world and our own self-concept. It is a function of needing to know who we are not, in order to understand who we are.

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