

## MARIA STUARDA by Gaetano Donizetti

### MUSICMAP NOTES by Lorenzo Mitchell with Sarah Schneider

Donizetti composed this opera for Naples in 1834. The libretto was by Giuseppe Bardari and based loosely on Friedrich Schiller's play Maria Stuart. Between Schiller and Bardari and the Catholic sensibilities being catered to, the results stray far from any sort of historical accuracy. Interestingly, Schiller's plays furnished inspiration for some other notable operas by Italian composers, among them Rossini's Guillaume Tell (Wilhelm Tell), and Verdi's Giovanna d'Arco (Die Jungfrau von Orleans), Luisa Miller (Kabale und Liebe) and Don Carlos.

#### Act I

Prelude: Despite the fact that Donizetti eventually wrote a full-scale overture in modified sonata form for the Milan production of 1835, this brief original prelude is to be preferred. While the overture is both attractive and effective, the earlier conception possesses a concise authority and manages, in not quite two minutes, to foreshadow the essence of the drama. The prelude is based on a stark musical polarity in which the implacable, corporate might of the entire orchestra is pitted against a vulnerable individual voice. It seems obvious that this must represent our titular heroine, as she faces her unforgiving predicament. It is well that "Maria" puts in a metaphorical appearance now, for afterwards there will be a whole first act to get through before we hear from the captive queen directly.

The prelude is in E-flat minor and begins *allegro vivace* with a solo timpani roll, establishing a tonic pedal followed by a vigorous 8-bar *tutti*, featuring galloping rhythms and stern harmonies. Then suddenly, the tempo switches to *lento* (very slow), and a solo clarinet sings an expressive recitative with only the sparsest of accompaniments. This starts out bravely, but towards the end there is a sudden drop down to the instrument's *chalumeau* register, with a suggestion of despair. So far, the contrast of material could not be greater, especially as we are then wrenched back to the opening *allegro vivace*, but now for only a couple of bars. Following this, the instrumental accompanied recitative resumes, and the clarinet is indisputably a diva, laying her heart bare in a considerably longer passage that is mostly *a capella*. Towards the end, the orchestral menace reappears, but now reduced to some loud dotted-rhythm chords that only punctuate the wind instrument's discourse. While none of this material reappears in the opera, it is perhaps noteworthy that in the last act, clarinet-dominated wind melodies will be associated with Maria's emotional states. With all three reference recordings, the prelude concludes differently than it does in the score, omitting a final few bars.

No. 1 Opening Chorus: *Qui si attenda* ("Here we are waiting. She is close by. From the jousting she will soon return. The British Queen is the joy of every heart. How happy will be that day that binds her to noble love. Yes, for us she will shine even fairer England's pure star, when we see it united to the glory of France. Celebrating, we will applaud the power of love.")

We encounter a bit of a mystery at this point because the chorus in E-flat major that appears in the score consists of entirely different music from the version used in all three recordings. The words however are still the same. Because of this it will not be easy to examine in much detail the chorus in B-flat major as actually performed. So, let's content ourselves with a few broad outlines. Starting an opera with a choral number of this sort is an extremely conventional move, and the music we hear is reflective of that. It certainly gives no indication of the striking, expressive use to which the chorus will be put over the course of the last act. After the suggestive drama of the orchestral prelude, this whisks us into a completely different atmosphere, evoking the festive gaiety and brilliance of the English court. The music is brisk and bustling and paints a picture of splendor combined with frivolity. There are plenty of brass flourishes and sweeping string scales. After the orchestra has previewed the material at some length, the voices of the courtiers join variously and altogether in celebrating Elisabetta and her glorious plans. Eventually, the music comes to rest with a closed cadence, and a solo voice heralds the arrival of the queen. Following this there is a contrasting B-section that starts with just the women in the relative minor. In the manner of a trio, this is more gentle in style and delicate in scoring. Soon however, the boisterous energy reasserts itself, as things build towards a climactic reprise of the opening material. When performed in full, as it is on both the Sills and Gruberova performances, this number lasts just under three minutes.

#### No. 2 Recitative and Aria with Cabaletta for Soprano (Elisabetta)

WE MEET THE FIRST OF OUR TWO QUEENS AND LEARN OF HER ISSUES WITH THE OTHER ONE.

Recitative: *Si, vuol di Francia il Rege...* (17 bars)

A brief but florid and vocally athletic accompanied recitative that immediately characterizes Queen Elisabetta as a powerful and impressive personage. She soliloquizes on the subject of her potential marriage to the king of France. The orchestra's role is quite minimal, but imposing rhythms contribute to the aura of royalty.

Cavatina: *Ah! Quando all'ara scorgemi* (G major, 6/8 time, *Larghetto*)

4 bars of orchestral intro paint a strongly contrasting mood, starting with loud dotted-rhythm chords, answered by a gently elegant phrase for flutes in thirds and rounded off by a brief return to the imposing chords. Rather than anticipating the vocal melody to come, this serves as a miniature portrait of Elisabetta, the haughty monarch with a vulnerable woman's heart.

Part I: Elisabetta starts with an 8-bar (4+4) parallel period, phrase *a* ("Ah! When at the altar a chaste love from heaven singles me out, when it bids me take up my rose-colored wedding veil;"), followed by a mildly contrasting and freer 4 bars - phrase *b* ("then another heart steals from me my precious freedom!"). Though phrase *a* has a balanced antecedent/consequent structure, it is open-ended harmonically, leaving it to phrase *b* to effect the eventual closed cadence back in the tonic. The formality of the opening period is enhanced by regular subdivisions of both the antecedent and consequent, lending each a 2+2 feeling. The mood is simultaneously decorous and intimate. Throughout *a*, the unobtrusive accompaniment consists

of short, separated string chords in a simple rhythmic pattern. With *b*, the pulse becomes more active and nervous, and there are some wind contributions. Soon, however, most of the vocal line is unaccompanied, featuring cadenza-like vocal flourishes prolonged by fermatas. The following phrase *c* (“And meanwhile I see arise a fatal barrier between us.”) is highly contrasting and serves to illustrate the Queen’s emotional volatility. A dramatic pivot to the relative minor and an exciting bar of orchestral introduction signal the shift in mood. Elisabetta’s troubled and agitated continuation runs 6 bars with a feeling of 2+2+2, though the last part of this is notably prolonged by fermatas. Until this cadenza-like ending, the suddenly much more prominent orchestra, both winds and strings, is a very important contributor to the overall effect.

Part II (“My soul does not know how to smile upon another love.”) is relatively brief and starts with a return to the opening 2 bars of phrase *a* (with only minor variation), but then the melody diverges from its previous course and serves to set up the cavatina’s elaborate closing vocal cadenza, followed by softly reiterated tonic chords.

Transitional Scena for Talbot, Elisabetta, Cecil and chorus serving to set up cabaletta: The fate of Maria Stuarda is introduced and debated, with the first man advocating clemency while the other insists on punishment. *Allegro* throughout. After a brusque preparatory 4-bar unison orchestral phrase, Cecil sings a 16-bar (8+8) solo, supported by a fluent instrumental melody that mostly doubles the vocal line. The end of this is punctuated by a choral interjection, and then Elisabetta offers a parallel response, nicely varying the previous melody while following its same 16-bar (8+8) format. Then we get a marked contrast as Cecil’s entrance initiates a brief ensemble for the two men and chorus...stentorian, contentious and characterized by short exchanges reinforced by blaring brass chords. All of this generates considerable unresolved tension, which is further extended when Elisabetta reasserts control and resumes the spotlight for a slowed-down declamatory solo to set up her cabaletta. The sense of anticipation is pushed even further by a little woodwind lead-in before the winds start the cabaletta’s introduction proper.

Cabaletta: *Ah, dal ciel discenda un raggio* (G major, Common time, *Moderato mosso*)

As is her want, Elisabetta uses this last part of her introductory scene to yet again express contradictory impulses (that same tension we have observed before) between mercy and vengeance.

Orchestral introduction: 8 bars, but rests and a fermata near the end throw off the sense of meter. Over a regular ‘oom-cha-cha-rest’ 8<sup>th</sup>-note accompaniment, winds, sweetly harmonizing in thirds, sing a preview of the first 6 bars of phrase *a*. At this point the melody is briefly interrupted by a free run, leading to a loud V chord and pregnant silence extended by a fermata. The enjoyable suspense is finally broken by a cute, staccato bass lead-in, ushering in....

Verse One:

Phrase *a*: (“Ah! may some ray descend from heaven that will illumine my mind, perhaps then in this breast, mercy will speak.”) After a few vamping beats of the same ‘oom-cha-cha-rest’ rhythm, Elisabetta sings an 8-bar (4+4) balanced, parallel period, with almost ‘ditty-like’ catchiness and regularity. Not only are the antecedent and consequent parallel, but each of them

also breaks down into a 2+2 parallel, melodic structure. Brief wind solos add interest by doubling or embellishing the vocal line here and there.

Phase *b*: (“But if the impious woman has robbed me of every hope dear to my heart,”) 4 bars (2+2, but not parallel) provide mild and, by now, much needed contrast.

Phrase *a'*: (“the horrid day of vengeance will not be long in dawning!”) 4 bars (2+2). A fun, chromatic lead in, enhanced by a crescendo initiates a satisfying reprise of the opening of *a*, though this time we get a variant of just the first 2 bars which is then repeated and sequenced up a step. From here until the end of the verse the vocal line will be tellingly reinforced by almost continuous wind doubling. All of this serves as an effective setup to the climactic...

Phrase *c*: (More repetitions of the threat of vengeance.) Basically 8 bars (4+4) except that the last bar is truncated by the impatient intervention of the interlude. The jealous Queen sings an ecstatically soaring line leading to a deceptive cadence. The same idea is immediately given a varied repeat that now ends with a satisfying resolution. Phrase *c*, with its intensity and swing, offers an effective sense of culmination.

Interlude: *Poco piu allegro* (a little bit faster). All but Cecil express their hope that the Queen will show mercy. A 10-bar chunk of noisy and exciting action music offers the Queen a chance to catch her breath. Against a busy orchestral accompaniment, the chorus and Talbot harmonize in rhythmic sync, leading to a short, contrarian solo for Cecil. Elisabetta brings all of this to a close with an improvised, *a capella* vocal cadenza before launching into...

Verse Two: In the score, the words and music from verse one are literally repeated here, affording an opportunity for vocal improvisation.

Coda: *Piu allegro* (faster). Making abbreviated use of the words from the interlude. Another loud passage for all the assembled forces (this time prominently including Elisabetta), the coda is considerably longer than the interlude and based on new musical material. In addition to creating a satisfying commotion, the emphasis is on the repetition of cadence harmonies. After the vocalists have finished, there is even a rambunctious orchestral postlude leading to additional cadence chords.

No. 3 Brief Transitional Scene: Accompanied Recitative for Elisabetta, Cecil, and Leicester. Stylistically this is very straightforward with only minimal orchestral contributions. Upon Leicester’s arrival Elisabetta attempts to provoke his jealousy at the prospect of her accepting the King of France. However, his lack of reaction leaves her hurt and angry.

No. 4 Recitative/Scena and Aria with Cabaletta for Tenor (Leicester), though with such important *Comprimario* Baritone (Talbot) participation that it’s almost a duet.

THE TWO MEN WHO ARE MARIA’S CHIEF ALLIES SECRETLY CONFER. OUR ‘HERO,’ LEICESTER, DECLARES HIS LOVE FOR HER AND HIS DETERMINATION TO SAVE HER.

Recitative: 8 bars of gracefully understated, orchestral scene-painting allow for Elisabetta's exit and the shift in focus to Talbot and Leicester's private conversation. Their scene begins as simple accompanied recitative but incorporating some of the orchestra's introductory material. Most outstanding, however, is a moment of proto-Verdian pathos as Talbot rises to lyrical *arioso* while describing Maria as "An angel of Love, beautiful as ever, and always noble hearted." These few bars are marked *andante* and are enhanced by an accompaniment featuring plaintive winds and a two-against-three rhythm.

Scena: Providing a gradient towards Leicester's upcoming Cavatina, the music shifts briefly to scena-style material. This acts to enhance the sense of a quasi duet, especially as Talbot initiates this new section. Nonetheless, it is clear that he is still limited to *comprimario* status in the context of the entire scene. Introduced by a brass heavy *fp* unison C and a stealthy succession of pizzicati, Talbot's pronouncement is impressive and imposing while essentially limited to declamation on a fixed pitch. After Talbot continues with a varied repeat, the two men engage in a freer exchange in which Leicester's greater effusiveness provides the setup for his...

Cavatina: *Ah! Rimiro il bel sembiante* (C Major, Common time, *Piu Allegro*)

After a short but ear-catching orchestral set up, Leicester launches into an infectiously melodic paean to his love. The faster-than-usual tempo and lively accompaniment lend this solo a particularly ardent and ebullient air.

Part I: Phrase *a*, a 16-bar (8+8) parallel period. ("Ah! Again I see her beautiful face that I adored, that I cherished. It seems to me sparkling as on the day it touched me to the heart.") The very regular phrase structure of this opening period breaks down further, so that the antecedent and consequent each have a 4+4 feeling, and even the 4-bar bits subdivide into 2+2, except for the final one. As the tenor unfolds a melody, spiced with some delicate chromaticism, the colorful accompaniment features a regular alternation between short, off-beat wind figures and low pizzicati.

Phrase *b*: 8 bars. A contrasting, transitional phrase, this is more irregular and consists of a series of brief exclamations. ("It still seems to me that on that face, gently dawns a smile,")

Phrase *c*: 8 bars (4+4). Like phrase *a*, this is also a parallel period, but only half as long and introducing a compelling, new melodic idea, charged with the passion of its rising 6<sup>th</sup>s. ("that once so endeared her to me, it bound my fate to hers.")

Phrase *d*: 8 bars (4+ 4), but slightly extended at the end, including a fermata, serves as a loud and heroic sounding codetta. As the vocal part describes two insistent, rising lines (the second climaxing on a high A) the orchestra shifts to martial-sounding, galloping rhythms.

Part II: After Part I has cadenced in the tonic C major, Talbot re-enters and reasserts the semi-duet character that interestingly complicates this number.

Phrase *e*: (“Her life is at its ending, and she has sought help from you.”) Basically 8 bars (4+4). In his earnest, declamatory style, the baritone sings a downward sequencing, modulatory phrase that delivers us to the exotically remote key of E major.

Phrase *a'*: 8 bars (4+4). With the added brightness resulting from singing a 3<sup>rd</sup> higher than before, Leicester launches this abbreviated reprise by singing a gracefully varied and ornamented version of the first half of his original phrase *a*.

Phrase *b'*: At this point Talbot joins in with a simple, independent harmony part, as Leicester jumps to a modified but full length return of *b*.

Phrase *c'*: 8 bars (4+4). Both men are still singing, but the high melodic profile of Leicester’s *c* material asserts itself strongly here.

Coda: 6 bars (2+2+2), plus an extra bar of closing chords for orchestra alone. Instead of revisiting the heroic phrase *d* codetta, Leicester and Talbot share a brief, new, and entirely conventional-sounding coda. Note that these robust cadential harmonies bring us to a close in the new key of E, far from our original C major tonic.

Transitional Scena to set up cabaletta: For 24 bars Talbot and Leicester engage in a vigorous dialogue dramatically punctuated by dotted-rhythm orchestral chords and dominated by Leicester’s repeated, ringing assertions that he will liberate Maria. Though short and relatively simple, this passage is admirably exciting and effective. Harmonically, it also serves the function of returning us to C major, so that the Cabaletta can round off this number in the tonic key.

Cabaletta: “*Se fida tanto colei mi amò*” (C major, Common time, *Andantino*)

Leicester further affirms his determination to see Maria free, in a charming Cabaletta that progresses from quiet lyricism to heroic machismo.

Orchestral Introduction: After a vamping bar establishing a steady, ***p***, staccato 8<sup>th</sup>-note pulse in low strings, we are treated to a woodwind preview of the upcoming vocal opening (phrase *a*) eight bars (4+4). The first half of this corresponds directly to the vocal line, while the parallel continuation deflects the harmony to maintain a sense of anticipation, heightened by an additional bar of silence with a fermata.

Verse One:

Phrase *a*: (“If she trusts so much, then she loved me. The tears from her eyes I will dry away.”) ***p***, 8 bars (4+4), again preceded by a bar of vamping accompaniment.

Antecedent: With beautiful simplicity, the tenor’s voice rises gracefully up the scale from the dominant to the dominant, followed by a downward sequence of two descending 5<sup>th</sup>s. This last bit constitutes a striking motive that is enhanced by echoing wind imitations.

Consequent: With classical symmetry, the answering 4 bars are very parallel, and the vocal line itself is unchanged. This opening period provides the quiet and dreamy romanticism that acts as such an effective foil to the following masculine chest-pounding. In addition to the low throbbing and woodwind touches, the delicate mood is enhanced by the warmth of soft, sustained horn parts.

Phrase *b*: (“And if a victim I must fall...”) *f*, 4 bars (2+2). This brief transitional phrase starts the gradient towards louder and ever more stirring, emphatic expression.

Phrase *c*: (“proud of my fate I shall go.”) *Più mosso*, also 4 bars (2+2). From here until the end of the verse, the tenor’s voice gains strength from intermittent instrumental doubling. Also, the accompaniment switches to the type of thrilling, gypsy guitar-like rhythms, characteristic of assertive male Cabalettas. Vocally, this feels like the musical climax of the verse, and the ensuing phrase *d* (8 bars) feels like a more conventional and somewhat less interesting continuation for all its strenuous bluster.

Interlude: *Allegro vivace*, 12 bars. Loud and bustling, this breaks in immediately and maintains the intense mood from the end of verse one. Like a good *comprimario* foil, Talbot interjects some words of caution during a fast, contrasting episode which serves to set up...

Verse Two: As printed, this is a literal repeat of verse one except for the important change that Talbot now contributes a harmony line starting partway into phrase *c*.

Coda: *Più allegro*. This rousing conclusion is more than twice the length of the interlude and based on new material, featuring both men harmonizing loudly together, mostly in rhythmic sync. Even after the tenor and bass’ lusty final notes, the momentum continues an extra 6 bars into a bumptious orchestral postlude, featuring noisy trumpet fanfares.

No. 5 Recitative/Scena and Duet for Soprano & Tenor (Elisabetta & Leicester)

A TENSE ENCOUNTER DURING WHICH LEICESTER ATTEMPTS TO PLEAD MARIA’S CAUSE TO ELISABETTA BUT INSTEAD SUCCEEDS IN FURTHER AROUSING THE MONARCH’S JEALOUSY AND SUSPICION.

Recitative: Elisabetta initiates a dialogue in conventional, accompanied recitative, dramatically effective but without memorable melodic content. She interrogates Leicester about his conversation with Talbot and expresses her distrust of Maria. The hapless and disconcerted Leicester eventually presents the Queen with a letter containing Maria’s request for a meeting with her captor.

Scena: As she reads the letter, an exciting orchestral crescendo initiates a transition to scena style. The heightened emotions of this episode, as Elisabetta accuses and Leicester offers desperate denials, will serve as an effective gradient leading to the more formal part of the duet.

Less than a minute into this, the orchestra starts a regular ‘oom-cha-cha-cha’ accompaniment heralding a particularly catchy melody that seems like it must be the start of the duet proper. This

impression is heightened by the fact that at first the tune is suavely sung by Leicester. However, within bars Elisabetta interrupts, and the melodic continuity is thereafter entrusted to the winds. What this ultimately amounts to is an 8-bar (4+4) parallel period that provides a framework for continued, tense exchanges between the vocalists. The sequel to this melody is more free and declamatory in style, building tension and expectation for the actual formal slow part of the duet. Elisabetta has been badgering Leicester and finally manages to get him to admit that Maria is beautiful.

Quasi-Cavatina Section: *Era d'amor l'immagine* (B major, 6/8 time, *Larghetto*)

Opening statement: (Leicester) 3 bars of introduction set the stage starting with a bar of gentle, rhythmic, 'oom-cha-cha, oom-cha-cha' vamping, leading to a woodwind preview of the opening of phrase *a*. Over a very regular continuation of the rocking accompaniment pattern just initiated, Leicester sings a graceful and romantic solo in three phrases.

Phrase *a*: 8 bars (4+4), a balanced, parallel period in which the 4-bar units break down still further into a regular 2+2 pattern. ("She was the picture of love in her youthful years; she had the face of an angel that appears and fascinates.") The great consistency of accompaniment and phrase structure create a soothing and almost hypnotic effect.

Phrase *b*: 4 bars (2+2) is a short, mildly contrasting transitional idea, featuring effective little woodwind echoes and a fuller orchestral sonority. ("She was a heavenly spirit, sweet was her breath.")

Phrase *c*: This would be 4 bars, but the impatient and irritated Queen breaks in before it can quite finish. In its understated way, *c* provides a satisfyingly swooning climax to the tenor's solo ("beautiful in her days of joy, beautiful in her suffering."). The rhythmic accompaniment now switches to bass 16<sup>th</sup>s, and the vocal melody is reinforced by instrumental doubling, concluding with an *a capella* note, prolonged by a fermata.

Contrasting Response: (Elisabetta) This is vigorous and aggressively rhythmic, as the Queen replies to Leicester by singing along to a continuous violin melody, at times strategically doubled an octave higher by flute. The orchestra not only adds impressive weight to Elisabetta's displeasure, but also frees her to pick up and drop the staccato melody as she chooses. The phrase structure is very regular with a basic 2-bar unit that repeats over and over, moving through shifting harmonies. The insistent reiteration imparts an obsessive quality to the queen's jealous mood. 8 bars (2+2+2+2). ("I believe you. She is an angel if you give her that boast, if in the filth of a prison cell the enchantress of every heart. I know that she entices every soul, flatters every desire.") Towards the end, Leicester inserts some brief protests, and then both singers participate in a transitional extension of a bar or so, leading to the...

Convergence: Elisabetta starts off with what appears to be a lilting, new melody, but soon Leicester contradicts this with a reprise of the opening 2 bars of his phrase *a*. He continues by freely riffing on the basic idea, giving way to Elisabetta at times, until eventually the two singers are harmonizing with each other while still mostly maintaining melodic independence. These are not two lovers who have joined together in agreement, and it is dramatically effective that they



maintain some distance, at least until the final *a capella* cadenza where their voices join, in the obligatory rhythmic sync.

Scena/Set up: *Allegro*. As Leicester and the Queen engage in a free dialogue characterized by rapid exchanges, the orchestra provides continuity in the form of a busy action theme. Elisabetta is reluctantly persuaded to agree to a meeting with Maria. Further into the scena, the instrumental melody gives way to impassioned vocal exclamations, and a strong sense of anticipation provides the launch of the ensuing...

Cabaletta: *Sul crin la rivale* (E major, Common time, *Vivace*)

Verse one: (Elisabetta: “Over my head my rival stretched out her hand, my royal crown she wanted to snatch from me; but vanquished, the proud creature became prouder yet, she tried to deprive me of a favorite heart. Ah! She offends me too much, I shall know how to punish her.”) The Queen expresses her anger and resolve by means of a sturdy, insistent melody with the style of steady ‘woomp, woomp, woomp, woomp’ counting-out-the-beats accompaniment, so typical of duet Cabalettas. The phrase structure of the first 16 bars is very square, as it breaks down into clear 4-bar sub phrases, but then a greater elasticity and extension of the pattern furnishes an effective climax to her solo. As she proceeds, her voice is lent increasing support by means of more and more consistent instrumental doubling.

Contrasting Interjection: (Leicester: “Ah! Come your Highness, show yourself forgiving; you shall see her divine, innocent, you are like a sister to her; pity for her, rather than hatred, has spoken forcibly to you.”) Emphasizing Leicester’s radically different perspective, Donizetti gives him a catchy melody of his own, with a regular phrase structure consisting of a 16-bar (8+8) parallel period. Moreover, the antecedent and consequent each also have a parallel (4+4) design. In fact, this (new) melody seems to be a close cousin of the infectious tune (also in E major) that Leicester introduced back during the early scena portion of the duet. What especially distinguishes it here is the compelling swing, resulting from an insistent repeated dotted rhythm. The tenor’s impassioned protestations are helped by continuous orchestral doubling as well as the underpinning of a twice-as-fast pulse to the accompaniment.

Extension/Interlude: The two singers now participate in a brief and noisy episode, characterized by rapid exchanges and forceful, fanfare rhythms. This energetic but not particularly tuneful passage provides the necessary contrast to prepare...

Verse Two: Demonstrating that the poor fellow is no match for the Queen, Leicester’s own melody is not allowed to recur, as this time he falls completely under the sway of Elisabetta’s official version of things. She starts off with a literal repeat of her original melody, but after about 8 bars, he begins voicing interjections and eventually harmonizes along with the Monarch’s tune.

Coda: *Più allegro*. This is a rousing but entirely conventional-sounding wrap-up to the duet and the entire first act, based on an insistent, orchestral pattern of scale figures played in octave oscillation with the singers mostly following along for the ride. After the soprano and tenor’s climactic high notes, the band continues into an additional fanfare-laden postlude.

## Act II

No. 6 Recitative/Scena and Aria with Cabaletta for Soprano (Maria)

WE FINALLY MEET THE EPONYMOUS MARIA STUARDA, AS SHE REFLECTS ON PAST HAPPINESS AND THEN REACTS TO THE SUDDEN AWARENESS OF ELISABETTA'S PROXIMITY.

This is a good example of the common and dramatically effective operatic practice of delaying the appearance of the main character. We have had to sit through an entire act before getting to see Maria, and our sense of anticipation has been that much more heightened by all of the discussion and maneuvering, centering on the offstage captive Queen.

Orchestral Prelude: (C major, Common time, *Vivace*) Donizetti takes some time for musical scene-setting, effectively evoking an outdoor, daytime mood combining delicacy, freshness and animation. Extensive use is made of a simple 6-bar phrase in flowing triplets that is repeated with incremental variation. Each time the prevailing soft dynamic level is punctuated by a *picante f* on the final note. This spritely idea is first presented by the strings with the violins' melody, supported by eighth-note chords in a tiptoeing rhythmic pattern. After a pregnant pause (the actual length of which varies, depending on the score or different recordings) the strings continue with a parallel answering phrase. The entire period is then repeated but this time scored for winds to charming effect. Now the bassoons are prominent in the accompanying chordal pattern which is also rhythmically altered. So far this has been very regular, but the following 12 bars introduce greater freedom and stronger dynamics as the basic material is developed and freely extended. One nice touch is the way the contrast between strings and winds is here turned into a process of rapid alternation. Also, at the end, the expectation of a loud concluding gesture is this time expanded into a forceful repetition of cadential chords.

Accompanied Recitative/Scena - Maria & Anna: Out in the beauty of nature, Maria allows herself some brief sensations of happiness, despite the typical 'wet-blanket' *comprimaria* anxieties voiced by Anna. Musically, this starts as a conventional accompanied recitative, but in parallel to Elisabetta in Act I, the vocal writing for Maria is impressively florid. However, while in the earlier instance this served to characterize the Queen of England as an imposing monarch, Maria's *fioratura* seems more expressive of charm and high spirits. Following his usual custom, Donizetti integrates the preceding prelude with this scene by briefly quoting its basic idea a short way into the dialogue. At the words "Look: in these fields appear fragrant and fair flowers of every kind. And on me, yes, on me they are smiling," the captive queen's voice moves to melodious *arioso* over a rhythmic accompanimental pattern. It is this lovely moment that gives this dialogue whatever claim it has to scena status. Soon however, things revert to Maria's virtuosic, recitative manner as she remembers her happy days growing up in France, including a cadenza in preparation for her following...

Cavatina: *Oh nube! che lieve per l'aria* (D-flat major, 3/8, *Larghetto*)

Orchestral Introduction: Before the Queen herself starts singing, a solo flute gives us a fresh and delicate-sounding preview of her opening melody, played over the serenade-style

accompaniment of softly plucked strings. The flute itself prepares this moment with a trilling opening cadenza, leading to a *rallentando* and fermata. All of this is a most effective bit of scene-painting that convincingly evokes the imagery of Maria's upcoming words. After the antecedent of phrase *a*, with an unresolved diversion of the harmony towards the end, a pregnant pause leads to...

#### Part I:

Phrase *a*: ("Oh cloud that wanders light upon the breeze, bear my affection, bear my sighs, to that blessed land that once nourished me.") The flowing, legato eighth-notes in stepwise motion that constitute the principle motive of phrase *a* do an admirable job of conveying leisurely, cloudlike motion. Also, though it is hard to know if this is merely coincidental, the use of harp accompaniment following on the heels of the flute introduction suggests a peculiarly French tone-color, given that nation's fondness for juxtaposing these two instruments. Antecedent - 8 bars (4+4). Consequent - 12 bars (4+8). Phrase *a* seems like it will be a balanced, parallel period, but then the consequent is agreeably extended an extra 4 bars by means of a deceptive cadence. The delayed conclusion of *a* is strongly punctuated by a loud chord intruding on the prevailing soft dynamics.

Phrase *b*: ("Ah! Come down now, take me upon your wings. Take me back to France. Take me away from the suffering.") This is a short, contrasting passage, consisting of a parallel period of 9 bars (4+5). The end of the consequent is extended for an extra bar, consisting of a vocal cadenza and fermata. The minor mode is used here to convey a somewhat more dramatic and poignant atmosphere.

#### Part II:

Phrase *a'*: ("But cruel is the cloud that escaped to that blessed land that once nourished me.") This is an abbreviated reprise of the *a* material, based on the original consequent more than the antecedent, including the same deceptive cadence and extension.

Codetta phrase: 8 bars. This time, instead of the loud, punctuating chord, the prevailing mood is further extended into the close of the aria. This delay of resolution, by means of additional deceptive cadences, does a nice job of portraying La Stuarda's great longing. Before the final vocal cadenza there is a nice return of the solo flute engaging in a little bit of back and forth dialogue with Maria. Once the soprano has finished we hear an additional 9<sup>th</sup> bar of soft, sustained, orchestral harmony in character with the quiet understatement of this cavatina.

Scena/Set-up, featuring off-stage hunting chorus and off-stage brass: (B-flat major, 6/8, *Allegro*) This is a dramatically effective example of the type of external intervention that ideally should happen to motivate and justify a cabaletta. The two women are startled by the sounds of the royal hunt approaching, and Maria is seized with anxiety at the prospect of finally meeting her cousin Elisabetta. Donizetti gives us a vivid little piece of musical genre-painting that lasts just under a minute. Contributing particularly to its impact is the varied acoustical perspective arising from the carefully coordinated interplay between the normal orchestra in the pit, the soloists on stage, and the instruments and chorus behind the scene. This colorful vignette unfolds as a gradual crescendo (punctuated by the onstage ladies), starting with the timpani roll that breaks in at the end of Maria's cavatina, progressing to nearer and nearer brass fanfares, and

culminating in a jaunty hunting chorus. The use of 6/8 meter is very traditional in this context, and the chorus's tune is given lively decoration by means of a persistent orchestral countermelody. As Maria and Anna continue to exclaim, the mounting excitement builds ultimately to more fanfares, crowned by our prima donna's climactic outburst. This takes the form of a cadenza-like passage, prolonged by a fermata and serving as lead-in to the expected...

Cabaletta: *Nella pace del mesto riposo* (B-flat major, Common time, *Moderato e fiero* [proud or fierce])

As Maria masters her fear, she projects a boldly defiant mood in music, which almost seems more typical of the strutting machismo of a heroic male cabaletta.

Orchestral Introduction: After just under a bar of exciting, rhythmic accompaniment (the characteristically masculine sound of strings evoking the strumming of a giant guitar) we hear a trumpet-heavy preview of the dotted rhythm melody of phrase *a*. Winds are also used as is so typical in these introductions, but the predominantly brassy sound conveys a distinctly martial mood. At 8 bars, this is the same length as phrase *a* itself, but here the consequent is diverted into a wispy wind flourish leading to a climactic *ff* chord.

Verse One: ("In the peace of my sad seclusion she would afflict me with new terror. I asked her... but dare not see her... I do not feel such courage in my soul! Stay upon your throne and be adored, as long as your glance stays far from me; I have been treated too contemptuously: In everyone's heart, pity for me remains silent!")

Phrase *a*: This is an 8-bar (4+4) parallel period given an even stronger sense of phrase regularity as a result of the antecedent and consequent neatly dividing into 2+2 bars.

Phrase *b* is a short, transitional phrase, four bars with a 2+2 feeling that detours into the minor mode. The shift to a plaintive mood is enhanced by a sighing clarinet part.

From this point through the end of the verse, there appear to be two distinctly different versions of this cabaletta: the one printed in the score and sung by Sutherland in the Bonyng recording and a completely different one, sung by both Sills and Gruberova in their traversals of the role. The second version offers a strong but shortened return of the opening *a* melody, reinforced now by trumpet doubling and followed by a catchy, climactic phrase that is given an immediate, varied repeat leading to the expected vocal cadenza. Throughout, Maria's line is generally reinforced by instrumental doubling in a manner that enhances the effect of a powerful conclusion. Because of its punchy reprise of the catchy opening tune, version two seems especially popular in style. Without access to written music for it, it is not possible to say much more.

What follows is a description of the last part of the verse as represented in the score. Phrase *c* is a climactic, new idea of 9 bars (4+5). The opening 4 bars have a 2+2 feeling and a strong dotted rhythm that harkens back, at least somewhat, to *a*. The balance of the phrase is then quite contrasting, as the vocal line gives way to a wonderful effusion of 16<sup>th</sup>-note runs, leading to a cadenza-like close (that extra 5<sup>th</sup> bar). Despite fuller orchestral sound at times, in this case, the voice is not doubled in the manner of the alternate version.

Interlude: Marked by a faster tempo, *allegro*, and a change to 6/8 meter, relating it to the previous “hunting” episode. Most of this is driven by an exciting, galloping theme in the orchestra, 8 bars long and heard twice. Against this, the women have freer exclamatory material, with Anna urging her mistress to withdraw. 4 more bars provide a freer springboard to Maria’s...

Verse Two: In the score a literal repeat of the original, but of course offering scope for free vocal elaboration.

Coda: Instead of being based on the interlude, this consists of relatively conventional, new material, sticking to the prevailing tempo and meter. Anna joins Maria as the two sing over a noisy orchestral wrap-up. The very ending is marked by two short, descending brass fanfares, a nice tie-in with the earlier use of trumpet. (On a smaller scale, there also seem to be two competing versions of this coda, the one found in the score and a somewhat longer expansion used in both the Sills and Gruberova recordings, which also had the different version of the verse.)

No. 7 Recitative and Duet for Soprano & Tenor (Maria & Leicester)

LEICESTER ARRIVES TO PREPARE MARIA FOR HER ENCOUNTER WITH ELISABETTA, A PROCESS THAT ALSO OFFERS THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A LOVE DUET.

Accompanied Recitative: Bustling music heralds the appearance of Leicester, and the agitated orchestral motion will recur during the first part of the ensuing dialogue. Maria’s joy is short-lived as she learns that she must imminently face her enemy (some powerful *tutti* fanfares). Leicester’s attempt at calming reassurance provides the segue into the formal portion of the duet.

Quasi-Cavatina Section: *Da tutti abbandonata* (A-flat major, 6/8 time, *Larghetto*)

Maria’s opening melody: (“Forsaken by everyone, prey to bitter sadness, overwhelmed, distressed, my heart knows no hope. I was condemned to weep, to sigh forever. Only your affection can ease my woes.”) After 1 bar establishing the gentle ‘oom-cha-cha, oom-cha-cha’ style accompaniment, Maria unburdens herself in a beautiful and effecting melody that seems to look forward to Verdi.

Phrase *a* is an 8-bar (4+4) parallel period with the added regularity of both the antecedent and consequent breaking down into 2+2. Although this music is in the major mode, it conveys considerable pathos, underlined by the striking appearance of diminished chords and a solo horn-line during the end of the consequent.

Phrase *b* is a short, contrasting transitional phrase, 4 bars with a 2+2 feeling.

Phrase *a'*, 4 bars, but lengthened at the end by a fermata and vocal cadenza. This climactic phrase reprises the start of *a* but then reshapes it to soar higher in a more flowing rhythm. The effect of culmination is reinforced by woodwind doubling of the vocal line.

Leicester's response: Instead of the contrasting musical rejoinder more typical at this point, Leicester demonstrates his love for Maria by singing her own melody back to her, but outfitted with new words. ("No, you must not despair, for she is powerful on her throne. Her heart was moved by your letter. And on her lashes I saw a glint of a tear. If you listen and trust in me, you will see everything change.") He sings the tune unaltered, but down an octave in his tenor register. The accompaniment too is as before, but Maria enriches the overall effect now with brief exclamations during the natural pauses in Leicester's line ("What hope is there? ... What are you saying? ... Oh, Heavens! ... Ah! ..."), before transitioning to some actual harmonizing with the tenor's voice over the course of phrase *a'*.

Contrasting, concluding section for both, together: (Portions of the previous text are recycled with no new words introduced.)

Phrase *c*: 4 bars with a 2+2 parallel period feeling. While both singers are now singing most of the time, this lovely passage has a beautiful back and forth feeling, with Maria initiating and Leicester responding.

Phrase *d*: This new idea is 8 bars long but really consists of a 4-bar (2+2) contrasting phrase that is then simply repeated. The first 2 bars act as a set-up with both voices still moving independently, but then the contrasting sequel brings tenor and soprano together in synchronized thirds into a suavely sighing line reinforced by instrumental doubling. After this memorable passage is heard again, a 6-bar codetta and cadenza is initiated by a brief woodwind interpolation. This affords ample opportunity for more sweet harmony as the lovers' voices demonstrate their blissful accord. This entire concluding section is a splendid example of a skillfully managed gradient from separate identity to synchronized unity.

Transition/Set-up: (F major – a boldly contrasting key, but soon reverting to the prevailing D-flat major, Common time, *Allegro*) So much for blissful unity, as Maria and Leicester now argue over the prospects for Elisabetta's clemency. Ultimately, the Earl vows that he will fight for vengeance if things don't go their way. Musically, this is more scena than accompanied recitative, though it is still fairly declamatory in style. Stern orchestra unisons set up Maria's initial sarcastic salvo and Leicester's parallel response, after which things progress with less formality and increasing agitation.

Cabaletta: *Ah, se il mio cor tremo giammai* (D-flat major, Common time, *Allegro - Vivace*)

Verse 1 - Maria ("Ah! Though my heart has never trembled at the cruel face of death, do not do that which would force me to fear for your life. I only wanted and I only sought to see you both faithful and graceful; through you I hope that my condition will not be as miserable as it is now.") Over the sort of steadily thumping, plucked-string accompaniment so characteristic of duet cabalettas, Maria sings a passionate melody that starts out with regular phrase structure but then continues into increasing unpredictability.

Phrase *a* is an 8-bar (4+4) parallel period, energized through insistent repetition of a grace-note dotted rhythm. The square cut of this material is further reinforced by each four bar sub-phrase, breaking down with a 2+2 feeling.

Phrase *b*: 4 bars (2+2). The powerful momentum continues now into a more fragmentary sounding extension, exploiting the same basic rhythm and providing a brief harmonic excursion. This arrives at a suspensefully held note, prolonged by a fermata, from which launches the climactic...

Phrase *c*: 10 bars. There is a feeling of culmination as we return to the tonic, and an opening that might almost be a reprise of phrase *a*, except that the melody turns out to be too new after all, for that. The soprano's voice is now given considerable extra heft from instrumental doubling. Most interestingly however, this phrase goes on and on without the 2 and 4-bar subdivisions we have been set up to expect, giving it a particularly free and spontaneous feeling. Over its unusual 10-bar length, it somehow seems to extend and double back on itself, while never stopping to take even the briefest rest, except for just before the last 2 bars.

Codetta: 4 bars with a fermata-lengthened cadenza. This arrives rather suddenly, set off by a bracing, new triplet rhythm heard in the voice and doubled by winds.

Verse Two - Leicester: ("Yes, my life, my honor, I pledge them; and my heart that loves you swears it: you will rise from the misfortune that has robbed you of all glory. And though I cannot offer you a kingdom, nor the right hand of a ruler, at least I can offer you the hand that opened your prison.") Aside from Leicester singing his own new words down in the tenor octave, this is musically the same as verse one.

Interlude: During this episode, which serves to provide contrast and anticipation before the return of the cabaletta tune, the two lovers engage in a frantic series of brief exchanges. At first the music is carried along by a 4-bar moto-perpetuo orchestral theme, ending with bold syncopations. This idea is immediately repeated, after which a more fanfare-like manner takes over, serving as a noisy set up to...

Verse Three - Maria & Leicester, together: The third time's the charm as the now familiar melody returns, scored for maximum impact. Through phrases *a* and *b*, Donizetti attractively splits up the tune by assigning it back and forth between the soprano and tenor. This is an excellent preparation for the climactic phrase *c* when we finally get both voices singing lustily, in sync together, while the entire audience taps along with their toes. After what is now a shared codetta and cadenza, the music launches straight into a final...

Coda: The first part of this is entirely conventional with loud cadential harmonies repeated in a regular rhythm, but then the orchestra kicks into a higher gear of excitement with a genuinely thrilling wind-up and final dash to the finish. This last bit is based on a nice return to the moto-perpetuo idea from the interlude.

No. 8 Act II Finale in Four Parts

THE MUCH ANTICIPATED (THOUGH AHISTORICAL) MEETING AND CLASH OF THE TWO QUEENS.

Finale Part I: Accompanied Recitative. This serves as preparation for the fateful encounter, as each reluctant monarch is prepped and prodded by counselors. While the vocal material is limited to mostly *a capella* recitative, the orchestra dramatizes the action (Elisabetta's entry, Maria's entry, etc.) with several contrasting and rhythmically distinctive motives. Ultimately, this arrives at a sudden crescendo of excitement with a *tutti* vocal exclamation, loud tympani roll and forceful, orchestral dotted rhythms. Then, just as abruptly, the texture drops to only Maria's quiet voice, followed by some softly plucked strings. This is the pregnant setup for the ensuing...

Finale Part II: Sextet (the quasi-cavatina portion) *È sempre la stessa* (B-flat major, 3/4, *Larghetto*) This formal vocal ensemble is dramatically a moment of stopped time as each participant reacts to the fraught situation by singing his or her own private thoughts. In other words, there is no interaction or communication between the various characters until Finale Part III.

Melody A - Elisabetta solo. ("She is always the same, proud, overbearing; with her haughty spirit, she moves me to wrath. But she is silent, subdued by rightful panic.") This is a melody of strict formality befitting an offended Queen. There are many brief pauses in the vocal line which contribute to the impression of rigid hauteur. These will also prove strategically valuable when the solo is transformed into a trio. A unifying device throughout is a short, rhythmic motive, beginning with a triplet. In the orchestra this is always sounded on a monotone, particularly by plucked strings, while the vocal line lends it various melodic shapes. Including the brief instrumental setup, A is 10 bars in length. The phrase structure of the vocal line is very regular at first, but eventually extends into greater freedom. An initial parallel period, 4 bars (2+2), with both antecedent and consequent also neatly subdivided by tiny pauses, is followed by a mildly contrasting, 2-bar phrase. This short harmonic excursion provides the setup for a climactic final phrase that breaks free of the established pattern and extends to 3 bars, further lengthened by a fermata. Generally the orchestration is very spare, focusing on that insistent triplet motive, but as A arrives at its climax, there are telling increases in instrumental sonority including a notable trumpet contribution.

Melody A' - Trio now with two Queens and Talbot. (Maria: "On the face of that tyrant stands written her grim condemnation, her proud spite." Talbot: "At least there is stilled in her royal breast that fatal wrath, that blind rage, that has savagely oppressed a pure and lovely flower." Elisabetta: As above.) In contrast to the spare airiness of the original A, Donizetti now fills in all those convenient spaces with additional vocal parts. This time, Maria is assigned the lead melody much as it was heard before, except for her new words, while Elisabetta and Talbot weave their voices around its stable framework. In the orchestra, that persistent triplet motive still holds sway.

Melody B - Finally, the full sextet, with the addition of Anna, Leicester and Cecil. (Anna: "In my soul I feel fear and foreboding. Oh, what an ordeal is being readied for that heart. Heavens! May the beset creature be spared from the new troubles." Leicester: "The unfortunate woman has her sufferings stamped on her features; nor are the despotic stars placated yet. If I could only spare her from such great grief." Cecil: "Repressed vengeance, I feel it ready to explode; in this strenuous ordeal my heart is beating wildly. May the victim be overwhelmed with external



pain.” The other three rehash their previous words.) At this point, the formality of the A material gives way to a contrasting section that is more free and organic. It is as though the pent-up emotion can no longer be contained and must well over into more flowing and loosely extended lyrical expression. The rhythm of the earlier triplet motive is now used as the basis of short swaying phrases that are continually repeated, varied and imitated. At first there seems to be a pattern of the earlier trio of vocalists sticking together and being set off against the new trio, but after 4 bars, this breaks down into a more irregular and shifting texture. With its greater length (17 bars) and rhapsodic style, B provides an effective climax to the entire ensemble. Throughout much of this, the thick vocal texture is effectively leavened by a recurring rhythmic, instrumental bass figure, freely derived from that same unifying triplet.

Though it does not reach the same lofty heights of inspiration as the Lucia di Lammermoor sextet, which Donizetti would write the following year (1835), this earlier specimen is quite similar in plan with its A-A'-B structure and procedure of cumulative addition, building eventually to the full vocal complement.

Finale Part III: Scena. At this point everyone snaps out of his or her extended reverie, and the dramatic action resumes. About eight minutes in length, this is by far the longest portion of the finale and more than double the duration of each of the three other parts. Donizetti uses this to churn through a lot of the libretto, as the conflict between the two monarchs is brought to a powerful crisis. Roughly the first half of the section is organized around two parallel helpings of an extended lyrical paragraph, distributed in an appropriately even-handed manner to first Maria and then Elisabetta. (D major, Common time, *Allegro*) To set up Maria's solo, there is a preparatory bit of accompanied recitative featuring orchestral gestures and motives, punctuated by brief, declamatory vocal exchanges. All of this starts with an arresting unison on the tonic D, and after 11 bars, a return to that opening sonority signals a shortened and varied repeat of the basic musical content.

Lyrical paragraph - Verse One. Maria's attempted show of deference. (“Dead to the world, and dead to the throne, I lie prostrate at your feet, I beg only for your pardon; do not show yourself inexorable. Sister, now be satisfied with all the outrages you have dealt me! Alas! Raise up an unhappy woman who casts herself upon your heart. Yes, sister, she relies upon your heart. Raise her up, alas! Sister!”) 4 bars of orchestral introduction provide a teasing buildup to the coming melodic effusion and introduce a little rhythmic motive with a two 16<sup>th</sup>-note pickup that will dominate in the accompaniment throughout. After the flexible tempo of the preliminary recitative, this now settles into a vigorously pulsing and regular groove. While Maria's vocal line is certainly memorable, it is the busy and continuous orchestral melody, mostly in the violins, that really holds this together and lends it such a strong sense of forward momentum. This type of texture with an orchestral tune providing much of the musical backbone is a typical scena device. From Maria's vocal entry, this extended paragraph has an impressive span of over 32 bars. Towards the end, its climax is enhanced by the addition of Cecil's bass voice, followed by an *a capella* cadenza.

Parsing the phrase structure here presents an interesting challenge because of the flexible interplay between the orchestral melody and Maria's vocal line. Still, it appears to break down essentially as follows:

Phrase *a* has the character of an opening parallel period, 12 bars (6+6), but with the interesting quirk that the opening bar of both the antecedent and the consequent is for orchestra only. Each half of *a* is further subdivided with a 3+3 feeling.

Phrase *b* introduces mild contrast and a feeling of excursion. It starts with a short-breathed 2+2 idea, typical of a *b* phrase, but then continues into a 4-and-a-half-bar extension/crescendo that serves to set up...

Phrase *c*: This climactic melody starts once again with a bar of orchestral setup which, combined with the return to the tonic, might lead us to expect a reappearance of the *a* material, but instead we get a pleasantly satisfying new idea. Including that orchestral bar (which this time is actually divided between 2 bars in an example of the lack of squareness here), phrase *c* is 5 bars long.

Codetta: This is basically an extension of *c* that is set off and given heft by a fuller instrumental sonority and the stern intrusion of Cecil. It lasts 8 bars (3+5), though the fermata-lengthened cadenza distorts the sense of duration towards the end.

Without any pause the music now returns to accompanied recitative, somewhat in the same vein as that before, to prepare Elisabetta's turn at the lyrical paragraph. Here, the exchange is limited to just the two Queens as the English monarch makes clear that she is unmollified by her rival's show of submission. Over the course of this, a steady increase in orchestral excitement finally brings us to...

Lyrical Paragraph - Verse Two. Elisabetta's scornful rejoinder. ("Go and ask, oh wicked creature, go ask your betrayed marriage-bed, and ask the unavenged ghost of that miserable husband, ask your arms... your wicked heart, with all its simperings of love... Only crimes and betrayals, only treacheries has it plotted.") Aside from the new words, this closely follows verse one with only minor adjustments to the vocal line. However, the instrumental introduction is given a varied feeling this time through the insertion of additional rests, and the codetta now features the voices of Maria and Leicester as well as a shortened cadenza for Elisabetta.

At the close of verse two we head into the second half of this part of the finale, starting with new *scena* material organized around an impressive orchestral motive. This is a splendidly dramatic passage that sounds fresh and exciting and avoids any sense of anti-climax that might result from relapsing directly into more conventional recitative. The tense rhythmic motive consists of a repeated note followed by a leap of a rising 6<sup>th</sup> (or 7<sup>th</sup>) and a brief chromatic descent. Each time, this starts in the bass and is then immediately echoed two octaves higher. For all its impact, this opening salvo lasts less than a minute and then smoothly transitions into free, if still highly charged, declamation. Cecil and Leicester have been vying with each other for Elisabetta's ear, urging her towards punishment or mercy. She, however, is too riled up to pay much attention. Following a good stretch of recitative, the music again becomes more *scena*-like, with a clear reference to the earlier lyrical paragraph that builds to a climax based on its codetta. Through all of this, Maria grows more and more indignant. Finally, after the strong cadence harmonies that close off the *scena* bit, La Stuarda revs up for her explosive tirade during which she abandons all caution and tells Elisabetta exactly what she thinks of her. There are still a few loud interjections

from the others, but this is Maria's grand moment, and Donizetti does her proud with a declamatory passage of mounting intensity, climaxing with her definitive "*vil bastarda*" (vile bastard) insult. Throughout, the orchestra is used to gradually amplify the dramatic tension, first with a running commentary, mostly between Maria's utterances, and then a fine sustained tremolo reinforced by dotted-rhythm 'hammer blows.'

Maria has essentially sealed her doom through her outburst, and the shocked reaction from Elisabetta and the rest of the company serves as a noisy buildup to the following...

Finale Part IV: *Stretta (Allegro Vivace* - still D major and Common time). (A *stretta* is the concluding, cabaletta-like portion of an extended finale - fast, loud and boisterous - and generally deploying the entire cast and chorus as factions square off with each other. Everyone is stirred up and in full-cry, bringing the act to as exciting a close as possible. As the second, more formal element in a finale, the *stretta* provides an extroverted contrast and complement to the earlier slow ensemble's individualized introspection.)

There is a brief introductory passage that serves to prepare the *stretta* proper. During this Elisabetta, who has just summoned her guards, launches into an impassioned solo with florid ornamentation suggestive of her outraged dignity. After a vamping bar of throbbing accompaniment, the queen sings a 16-bar (8+8) parallel period. Cecil then joins her in an 8-bar, contrasting phrase of building tension, and the passage concludes with approximately 7 more bars that have a *cadenza*-like effect. ("Go prepare yourself, raving creature, to suffer your final fate: on your hateful head, I will heap shame. Drag away that raving creature who has condemned herself.")

We are now ready for the actual *stretta* which has an overall structure similar to that of a solo cabaletta.

Verse One: Musically the version of this performed in all three recordings is significantly different from that presented in the score, though the overall phrase structure is the same. Not only are the vocal lines dissimilar, but also the recordings include the chorus (and perhaps some additional solo voices, it's hard to be sure) right from the beginning instead of waiting until verse two. This is very catchy music with a generally square phrase structure and a steady beat of marching quarter-notes (beats one and three) hammered out by the low male voices. The melody above unfolds as follows: Phrase *a*, a 16-bar (8+8) parallel period with antecedent and consequent, each subdivided into 4+4, and contrasting phrase *b*, 8 bars long with a typical *b*-phrase, 4+4 feeling. Rather than a return to *a*, the tune concludes with a new phrase *c*, that is also a 16 bar (8+8) parallel period.

Contrasting Interlude: Here the discrepancy between the recordings and the score is even greater; it's really not the same music. On the records, what we hear is a forceful, back and forth trading of short phrases between opposing sides, energized by racing strings and a forceful outburst from the brass section.

Verse Two: Though on the page this is where the material receives augmented scoring with all the vocal resources finally now participating, on the recordings it sounds like a pretty straightforward reprise of what has already been heard.

Coda: While rousing and effective, this is more reliant on conventional material than the rest of the stretta, with its repeated cadential harmonies and noisy closing gestures. While not returning literally to the interlude material, the strings' busy flow of 8<sup>th</sup> notes and the clamor of brass instruments recall that earlier passage.

### Act III

This final act is the opera's longest and most complex, incorporating three separate scenes and locations. Musically as well, the conventional forms encountered so often up to this point now tend to be treated with greater freedom and flexibility.

#### Scene I

RESPONDING TO THE CONFLICTING EXHORTATIONS OF CECIL AND LEICESTER, ELISABETTA FINALLY TAKES THE DEFINITIVE STEP OF SIGNING MARIA'S DEATH WARRANT.

This relatively brief scene is about 16 minutes long and unusually fluid in its formal design. It represents Elisabetta's last moment in the spotlight before she disappears from the opera. It would be easy to imagine Donizetti casting this as a second grand aria for the queen of England (cavatina as she weighs her decision, cabaletta following the signing of the execution order) and the two men reduced to *comprimario* support. Instead we are given something often more scenalike in character with the three soloists acting closer to musical equals.

No. 9 Duetтино (little duet) for Soprano and Baritone (Cecil & Elisabetta)

Orchestral Introduction (C major, Common time, *Andante*): In a bit less than a minute and a half, Donizetti paints a graceful mood with undercurrents of solemn gravity.

Accompanied Recitative: This is a dramatic dialogue presented in straightforward declamation without any melodically memorable *arioso* bits or even the expected inclusion of references to the instrumental prelude.

Duetтино Proper (so called because it lacks the usual cavatina/cabaletta duality - changes to E-flat major and *allegro*). This number is simply cast as two somewhat parallel solos: first for Elisabetta and then for Cecil.

Elisabetta's Statement: Anticipation is heightened over the course of 8 instrumental bars before the queen launches into her initial salvo. Her vigorous vocal line is actually then preceded by one additional vamping bar to establish the driving pulse of the accompaniment. Here again Donizetti uses florid writing to convey the angry assertion of power with an effect similar to

Elisabetta's setup to the finale stretta. The melody starts with a relatively formal 4+4 structure that then continues into a freer, cadenza-like conclusion. It now turns out that all of this has served as preparation for a lyrical refrain, initiated by a catchy woodwind melody before the soprano voice joins back in. We recognize here a typical scena device, and its use in this case is parallel to the way the two Queens traded refrains during the previous finale. However, in the present example, the jaunty music for clarinets and flutes sounds incongruously redolent of an Italian street festival. The entire refrain is a fairly long musical paragraph that acquires some more dramatically appropriate seriousness as it progresses. The ultimate conclusion is loud and exciting. ("But my heart stops my hand; a cloud obscures my thoughts. I seem to see the wicked woman, to hear her. She frightens me, terrifies me; and the hope of tranquility she threatens to steal from me. Ah! Just heaven! Strengthen a soul all too ready to doubt.") As for its phrase structure with orchestra and vocal line combined, the breakdown is essentially as follows:  
Phrase *a* – 12 bars (4+4+4). This is the "party music" opening.  
Phrase *b* – circa 4 bars - represents a shift to a more severe and declamatory style.  
Phrase *c* – circa 4 bars - grows out of *b*, but is again more lyrical.  
Phrase *d* – circa 10 bars (4+almost 6, but including fermata and cadenza) has the sound of a peroration, especially its longer second part that turns loud and coda-like.

Cecil's Response: As with the queen's solo, Cecil also has a preparatory passage of roughly equivalent length, but the material in this case is new and contrasting. The overall phrase structure works out to be two parallel 5-bar phrases followed by a 2-bar codetta, prolonged by a fermata. Further reinforcing the scena-like atmosphere, the melodic material is actually constructed as a dialogue between the orchestra and Cecil, rendering his vocal part rather terse and declamatory in a manner typical of his previous musical characterization.

Lyrical refrain. Verse Two: With new words and in the new key of B-flat (the dominant), Cecil now offers us a second helping of the catchy, carnivalesque paragraph. His vocal line, however, is often quite different from Elisabetta's, but the phrase structure and instrumental framework provide compensatory continuity. This time the more serious later material takes on some of the formulaic gestures of an *opera buffo basso*, and phrase *d* is notably shortened. ("For the words uttered before you, for the outrages dared, right now every Englishman would want to avenge you. Sign the paper, so that every ruler will know how to pardon you for it.")

No. 10 Trio - Soprano, Tenor & Baritone (Elisabetta, Leicester & Cecil)

In keeping with the scena-like character of this scene, this new number flows directly from the preceding duet without a concluding coda or much sense of a break. It is simply triggered by the arrival of Leicester, and over the course of the trio his hapless efforts to still save Maria succeed only in heightening her jealousy and stiffening her resolve. Structurally, this ensemble returns us to more familiar ground as it is laid out in the conventional two part duet pattern, but simply modified to incorporate an extra vocal part.

Scena setup: Instead of accompanied recitative, things start off with a repeated 4-bar orchestral idea that provides a framework for the singers' dialogue. The simple melody begins with formal gravity and then shifts into a more animated, galloping rhythm. After being played through the same way twice, it cycles around one more time, but now altered by modulations. We then

transition into free exchanges in a heightened, declamatory style, no longer structured to instrumental continuity. During part of this a high, sustained oboe note provides a nice effect of pathos.

Cavatina-like section: *Ah! Deh! Per pieta sospendi* (D-flat major, 6/8 time, *Larghetto*)

Verse One: After an *a capella* sighing melisma, Leicester leads off with one of his characteristically eloquent melodies and what turns out to be his last opportunity for dreamy lyricism. (“Alas. For pity’s sake, spare the final blow at least. Let my pleas soften you. Or hasten the blow at my breast. No one can force you; free is your will. Ah, have mercy!”) Elisabetta remains silent throughout verse one, but Cecil persistently undermines Leicester’s entreaties with a grumbling and fairly independent harmony part. (“Don’t listen to the unworthy fellow... now that you are already saved. Ah! For her who aspired to your kingdom, you must no longer trouble yourself; the day that is the last for the guilty one is the first day of peace.”)

Phrase *a*: 8-bar (4+4) parallel period, with both the antecedent and consequent evenly subdivided into 2+2. However, *a* ultimately turns out to be actually 10 bars long because the consequent has an unexpected 2-bar extension grafted onto the end of it. The rich accompaniment combines a steady pulse of pizzicato strings with sustained woodwind harmonies as well as bowed string figuration. During the consequent, winds (sounds mostly like flute) anticipate and then double the vocal line to telling effect.

Phrase *b*: 4 bars (2+2) has the typical, contrasting phrase strategy of a short idea heard twice.

Phrase *c*: 4 bars prolonged by fermata makes no obvious reference to *a*, but rounds off the melody. It is different enough that it creates a conclusion without an explicit sense of return to the opening. During *c*, there is a delicate wind introjection that will be considerably elaborated in the codetta to verse two.

Verse Two: For full trio now, but with Elisabetta in the lead (“Your plea is useless; I am firm in this determination. In the end of the proud creature is the end of my peril. From the shedding of her blood my power rises more free.”) Within the already established musical framework, Elisabetta offers her rejoinder to Leicester by singing his own tune back to him but with new words and significant melodic alterations that convey her contrasting mood. This starts as essentially a soprano solo, but before long, the two men are playing a progressively more prominent part. In fact, by the time we reach phrase *c*, Leicester briefly reassumes the lead, though with a melodic line that is considerably different from his previous conclusion. (Earlier, an interesting detail in the phrase structure is the elimination of the 2-bar extension to phrase *a*, rendering Elisabetta’s approach to the material more square.) What follows is a new and fairly extensive codetta for all three voices. Several times, we alternate between instruments alone (plucked strings, then winds) and *a capella* singers leading to a fermata and cadenza. All of this is hushed, and the gently poetic effect seems somewhat at odds with the fraught dramatic situation.

Transition/setup, scena-style (B-flat major, Common time, *Allegro*). We hear only Leicester and Elisabetta here as they trade desperate and angry words. The poor man has not only failed at

saving his beloved, but he now learns he will actually have to witness her execution. All of this lasts a little more than a minute and is played out to lively action music with the orchestra providing continuity and forward momentum. A 4-bar instrumental idea starts things off, leading to Leicester's first salvo and recurring before Elisabetta's response. The agitated mood established in this way continues more freely thereafter as the queen rises to ever greater indignation. Eventually there is a powerful climax that includes a sudden outburst for brass playing a harsh descending idea in ringing octaves. This descending momentum continues in a sequence of accented *tutti* chords that seem to bring everything to a close. Elisabetta and then Leicester, now starkly unaccompanied, have a few more stunned utterances that serve as preparation for the following...

Cabaletta: *Vanne, indegno: t'appare sul volto* (E-flat major, Common time, *Vivace*)

Verse One: (Elisabetta & Leicester only) One vamping bar is devoted to establishing the sort of steadily thumping pizzicato accompaniment so typical of duet cabalettas.

Phrase *a* (Elisabetta's solo), a particularly square-sounding 16-bar (8+8) parallel period. ("Go then, unworthy man, in your face appears the terror that strikes you to the heart. Prepare the grave of your affection when Mary Stuart will die!")

Heralded by a little trumpet fanfare, phrase *b* (Leicester lead) - 8 bars (4+4), is a typical contrasting phrase with a short idea that is heard twice. ("I go, I go, I read your face, all raving and flaming with jealousy. A friend, a comfort, a support the poor woman will find in my heart.") Elisabetta is relegated to a minimal role, chiming in during the end of sub-phrases.

Phrase *a'* (Shared lead) 11 bars (8+3). Starting off at first in unison, soprano and tenor provide us with a lusty reprise of the opening melody which now, however, is soon diverted into new, climactic material.

Interlude (*Poco piu vivace*) In *scena* style, this hectic passage is organized against a wildly bustling orchestral melody. Cecil reminds us of his presence with a prominent opening solo, but soon the entire trio is actively participating in the fray.

Verse Two: (Amplified to full trio now) This is essentially the same material as before, especially as far as the lead vocals, but Cecil is added, and Leicester's harmony part is expanded.

The coda (*Piu allegro*, full participation from vocal trio throughout) emerges seamlessly from the end of verse two and is concocted from new, but rather formulaic material. This noisy and clamorous peroration continues at surprising length and is considerably trimmed in all but one of the reference recordings. We must regard this as a pity, however, for though perhaps a bit silly, the total cumulative effect is still great fun and satisfyingly exciting, especially the unexpected extra orchestral postlude based on the previous interlude.

From this point onward, the Queen of England is no longer a tangible presence in the drama, and the center of gravity moves decisively to Maria as she prepares for her death. The following two

scenes focus with increasing intensity on La Stuarda, and Donizetti now lavishes some of his most powerful inspiration on his tragic heroine.

## Scene II

With the decisive shift to Maria, the setting returns to Fotheringhay Castle, though this time indoors.

No. 11 Recitative/Scena and Duet for Soprano & Baritone (Maria & Talbot)

IN HER PRIVATE QUARTERS MARIA IS VISITED BY CECIL AND TALBOT. ONCE CECIL HAS COLDLY INFORMED HER OF HER IMPENDING EXECUTION, TALBOT REMAINS BEHIND TO OFFER COMFORT AND ABSOLUTION.

Orchestral Prelude: In preparation for the curtain's rise, Donizetti follows his customary practice of indulging in some instrumental scene-setting. The mood conveyed is perhaps a bit generic but suitable in its seriousness, combined with intimacy to serve to conjure Maria alone in her captivity. The prelude lasts just under two minutes and consists of three related but mildly contrasting parts. The first of these is the most formal – an 8-bar (4+4) parallel period with the quiet melody solemnly intoned by low strings. A distinctive element here is the use of pronounced appoggiaturas at the end of the antecedent and consequent. The following 8 bars act as a much freer development of the opening theme with the color shifting to winds and brass and the texture splitting into contrapuntal lines. There is also a brief crescendo up to *f* followed by an immediate diminuendo before the end of this central portion. The remaining 10 bars of the prelude depart further from the opening material with a gradually shifting interplay of ideas that settle into a subdued introduction to Maria's opening monologue.

Recitative: A startling *f* chord in forceful dotted rhythm precedes the queen's first utterance. She initially soliloquizes in highly charged declamation that is mostly *a capella*, but then Donizetti brings back the entire opening 8-bar period from the prelude to now serve as an accompaniment to Maria's free exclamations. More spare recitative follows, and this leads to a brief and somewhat varied reminiscence of the woodwind opening of part two from the prelude. This ends up marking the end of our heroine's privacy as the following instrumental crescendo signals the entry of her two visitors. What comes next is slightly over three minutes of dialogue, first mostly Cecil and Maria, then switching to Talbot and Maria once Cecil has left the two of them together. All of this is set as a flexible, accompanied recitative, sometimes quite simple and almost *a capella* but tending at times towards *arioso* with more elaborate orchestral participation. By far the most memorable musical element is a twice-heard woodwind melody of considerable emotional impact that seems to represent the special sympathy existing between Maria and Talbot. Each time this occurs as a miniature *Larghetto* episode without vocal intrusion. The theme is originally presented as a clarinet solo, but when it recurs, the effect is intensified by a flute doubling in the upper octave.

As an effective gradient toward the duet proper to come, Donizetti now shifts gears musically for the next not quite three minutes to a more overtly *arioso* style. This starts with a heightened *Larghetto* scena for Maria, accompanied by ominous tremolos and solemn brass as she describes



the phantoms conjured by the guilt she feels over past sins. This turns out to be Talbot's cue to reveal the Catholic priest's robes he is wearing under his cloak and to offer his services as a final confessor.

Quasi-cavatina: *Quando il luce rosea* (G minor/major, Common time, *Larghetto*)

For a bar-and-a-half Donizetti conjures an appropriately religious atmosphere with a miniature woodwind prelude evocative of a church organ.

Maria's extended solo: This is so long that it seems more like an actual aria than the opening salvo of a duet. For one vamping bar, the strings establish a gently rocking accompaniment that seems to look forward to Verdi. Maria then sings a soft and plaintive phrase *a* that starts out as a balanced, parallel 8-bar (4+4) period, except that then the phrase is seamlessly extended an extra 3-and-a-half bars by means of a free continuation that seems to intensify and round off this initial paragraph of her solo. ("Ah, your voice comes down from heaven! While with the light of dawn my life still sparkled, when among happy fancies this spirit revealed, love made me a sinner, love opened the abyss before me...")

Unusually, the contrasting paragraph that follows is still assigned to Maria rather than switching the lead to the other participant in the duet. While continuity results from the use of the same style of rocking accompaniment, this new material is set off by its prominent use of the major mode and its considerably greater length.

Phrase *b*: ("Love's sweet smile my husband hated. Darnley, alas! Poor wretch, through me he came to death...") Maria's words are explicitly dramatized in a new parallel period that contrasts major and minor. The phrase is seemingly 8 bars (4+4), but the consequent is actually cut a little bit short. Twice, an optimistic start in the relative major featuring a trilling high note is followed by a plunge into darkness.

Phrase *c* ("But his mournful voice still pierces my inmost heart. Ah!") is a shorter, somewhat fragmentary transitional phrase that lasts not quite 4 bars.

Phrase *d*: ("Beloved ghost, be appeased; I feel death within my breast. May my tears satisfy you, may my suffering satisfy you!") We have already experienced brief moments of B-flat major, the relative major, but now here we move definitively to G major, the parallel major for this climactic phrase, an irregular period with an extended consequent that sprawls to 10 bars (4+6). The free and virtuosic elongation of the consequent serves the function of a brief cadenza, an effect enhanced by the use of a ritard. [Incidentally, the Darnley referred to was one of Mary Queen of Scots' husbands, and he was murdered under mysterious circumstances. Mary's enemies later rumored, not very convincingly, that she had some involvement with the crime.]

Finally, Talbot is given a chance to sing, but his very brief solo is soon relegated to a supporting role as Maria reenters and claims the true melodic lead. This concluding passage of the *Larghetto* turns out to be a genuine duet with both vocalists used together at last. (Talbot: "Ah, forgiveness from God. Oh, unhappy woman, I will implore for you." Maria: "Pardon my lengthy complaints and pray to heaven for me.") Probably most striking here is a boldly leaping idea that Maria offers twice against Talbot's bass underpinning. To bring things to a close, there is an additional 5-bar codetta that includes a cadenza. While Talbot is given some solo moments during this, the cadenza-with-fermata itself is reserved for Maria alone, Talbot only entering to

harmonize during the closing cadence. This feels dramatically appropriate as a shared cadenza might be too suggestive of the typical end of a love duet.

Transition/Setup: Rather than letting the musical interest dissipate over an extended accompanied recitative, this scena-style episode is highly charged and dramatic, incorporating major *arioso* solos for both Talbot and Maria. The somewhat contrived justification for all this chest pounding is Maria's supposed adultery with Babington. The 'til now gently sympathetic Talbot confronts his queen with temporary severity in one of his most extended and attention-getting solos. His imposing *arioso* unfolds against an implacable-sounding ostinato accompaniment. His application of pressure is successful, and Maria can no longer hold out. In a much more melodically fluid, but impassioned response, she confesses to this remaining transgression. Her *arioso* has a fully scored and lively accompaniment, and even the vocal line is at times enhanced by woodwind doubling. Satisfied that he has faithfully performed his duty, Talbot is now able to offer Maria God's absolution. These final moments are reduced to practically *a capella* vocal exchanges providing a typically suspenseful set-up to the ensuing...

Cabaletta: *Lascia contenta al carcere* (G major, Common time, *Moderato*)

Structurally this follows the same framework that Donizetti would use the following year for the famous lovers' cabaletta that ends the first act of Lucia - that is a catchy refrain heard three times: first in alternating solos and then, after a contrasting episode, sung by both vocalists together. (On the other hand, the actual musical material here is considerably more pedestrian than the magical later example.) Talbot, who generally has been relegated to practically *comprimario* status, now receives the rare honor of leading things off and introducing an actual memorable tune all by himself.

Verse One: (Talbot) After one vamping bar of characteristic duet cabaletta, thumping-heart pizzicato accompaniment, Talbot launches into a forthright and foursquare melody. ("Contented, leave behind in prison this sorrowful life. You will go transformed as an angel before God the consoler. And in purest joy your rapt soul will forget the anxieties that have troubled your heart.") Phrase *a* is a roughly 8-bar (4+4) parallel period with both antecedent and consequent having a 2+2 feeling. At 4 bars, the transitional phrase *b* is shorter and more fragmentary and ends with a fermata that creates anticipation for the concluding phrase *c*. This is 8 bars and the most irregular and unpredictable as it freely extends by means of repetition and elaboration. A sense of culmination and excitement is provided at the end when the winds join in to reinforce the idea of exultation.

Verse Two: (Maria) ("Now that the spark of my feeble life is dying, heaven alone can grant peace to my woeful heart. Ah! If with too many tears this soul has been fed, may my long sufferings be paid for with my final pangs.") While this is recognizably the same tune that the queen sings back with her own new words, the vocal line is freely varied and elaborated to give scope to her more virtuosic style. Most changed of all is phrase *c* which now extends an extra four bars, revolves around exciting high notes, and ends with a miniature cadenza. (The fermata that earlier ended phrase *b* is in this case moved to the end of *c* to accommodate Maria's flashy conclusion.)

Contrasting Interlude: The first part of this is loud and boisterous, alternating a lively orchestral figure with vocal exclamations and building to a climax, but then the music softens and slows to a more gentle and introspective mood, priming us for the climactic return of the familiar refrain.

Verse Three: (Combined lead) Unlike the comparable Lucia example where the lovers sing most of verse three in unison, this rendition is more varied and actually represents a grafting together of Talbot and Maria's alternate versions of the tune. That is, Talbot sings all of phrase *a* by himself exactly as he did originally, and then Maria enters with her variant of phrase *b*, though with Talbot providing a harmony part. Phrase *c* continues in Maria's version, but now finally, at least for the initial bars, the two singers are linked in rhythmic sync, and they lustily harmonize the melody together. However, once Maria goes off into her flashy display mode, Talbot is again relegated to a mostly independent, supporting part. This way of handling the combined lead makes sense in avoiding any incongruous suggestion of paired lovers.

Coda: (*Più Allegro*) This is loud and enthusiastic and entirely conventional, as it hammers out its cadential formulas. Once again, the singers have an opportunity to briefly join their voices in sync.

Dramatically, this ending seems unfortunately flat-footed, hardly in keeping with the situation of a condemned queen and her advisor/confessor as they prepare for her imminent death. But not to worry, for we have now arrived at the magnificent final scene where Donizetti's muse is firmly in charge and the composer never sounds a false note.

### Scene III

No. 12 (Finale Part I) Chorus of Mourning, *Vedeste? Vedemmo*

#### MARIA'S LOYAL SCOTTISH RETINUE ANTICIPATES WITH HORROR THEIR MISTRESS'S EXECUTION

The chorus will play a particularly important role throughout this final scene, and here they are given an extended number of their own that rises considerably above the more routine choral episodes earlier in the opera. In fact, this magnificent evocation of communal sorrow and dismay may be considered a worthy precursor to the grand Verdian chorus, *Patria oppressa* from MacBeth (1865 Paris version).

Orchestral Prelude: (E minor, Common time, *Maestoso*) As he has done each time a new setting is presented, Donizetti provides an instrumental introduction to prepare for the raising of the curtain. On this occasion, however, these nearly two minutes of music are particularly well-integrated with the following chorus and do an admirable job of conjuring the highly-charged mood of tragedy. For starters, we hear the brass choir softly intoning a mournful chorale, punctuated by timpani triplets. This seems to set out to be a balanced period with a 4-bar antecedent, but the consequent stops a bit short and is then followed by a brief extension that rises to a blazing *f* outburst. The use of timpani here is prophetic as the sound of ominous drum beats will suggest a funereal color throughout the entire chorus. The triplets, too, are highly significant for their distinctive pulse will soon predominate throughout much of the number. The

dynamic level immediately drops back down to *p* as a triplet string accompaniment pattern is established, suggestive of a troubled heartbeat. This insistent throb continues as a 4-bar phrase is presented, starting in low instruments but quickly echoed two octaves higher by keening woodwinds which then extend it. The entire phrase is immediately repeated with a slightly altered ending that leads to the climax of the prelude. These final 5 bars represent a plateau of tension with repeated *fp* dynamics and timpani tattoos. As it continues, an important new triplet idea is briefly incorporated - a loud, upward-winding line that rises in octaves from the bass, but then almost immediately the volume of sound sinks back down into a hint of the brass chorale as we prepare to enter the chorus proper.

(“Did you see? We saw. Oh, the cruel display! The block, the axe, the gloomy hall. And the people trembling near the steps of the fatal scaffold! What a sight! What a horror! The victim is awaited by the ill-bred throng. The royal victim... Oh inconstant fate! But a Queen’s savage death brings upon England forever infamy and shame.”)

Section I (E minor): This first part of the chorus is cast as a dialogue with hushed questions and comments traded between smaller groups interspersing tenors alone, basses alone, etc. with the combined vocal forces. Musically this is essentially a heightened reprise of most of the prelude, omitting only the brass chorale. Once again, the 8-bar (4+4) parallel period leads to a loud climax, but this time these dramatic final bars are considerably enhanced and extended an extra 2 bars, placing greater emphasis on the upward-winding triplet idea.

Section II (G major): As usual we get a bar of accompaniment alone before the voices reenter, and it is still based on the characteristic pulsing triplets, but this time, steady repeated notes are harmonized in thirds. The following 8 bars are just for men, with divided tenors introducing a lyrical new strain while basses intone more simply during the gaps in the melody. Then the women take over to start a new, contrasting 8-bar phrase that constitutes another climax, soon involving the entire chorus and drawing on material familiar from the ending of section II, particularly the upward-winding triplet idea. This is still one more instance of the previously established pattern in which soft lyricism overflows into loud, dramatic outbursts. As the storm dies down, several bars of pulsing triplets effect a modulation to the parallel major and set up the concluding...

Section III (E major): From the start of the prelude up to this point, there has been a steady gradient towards increasing melodic richness, and this now culminates in the most lyrical section yet, an extended song of attempted consolation. Nothing in the words really justifies the shift in mood here, but the musical rhetoric still makes this emotionally moving and dramatically compelling. Rather than the short snatches of melody we’ve heard so far, here we are finally offered a big, continuous tune with phrase leading to phrase in a beautiful unfolding.

Phrase *a*, an 8-bar (4+4) parallel period is sung by all, harmonizing together in rhythmic sync and reinforced by expressive woodwind doublings.

Phrase *b*, 4 bars (2+2), is a short contrasting phrase, more dramatic in feeling, and exploiting emphatic dynamic shifts.

Phrase *c* is another long-breathed, lyrical utterance, seemingly an 8-bar (4+4) parallel period, but actually the consequent is cut a little bit short. Up to this point the chorus has been singing as a combined, unified force, putting across the beautiful melodic line with simple clarity.

Codetta phrase, 8 bars (4+4), plus 6-bar extension. An effective shift is signaled here as the choir is once again used in sometimes-separate sections. A 4-bar idea is started by basses, answered by tenors, and then loudly finished by united chorus. The same material is then immediately repeated. Not only is there an effective wrapping up feeling here, but also a sense of rounding off as we are subtly reminded of the earlier conversational style. The following extension lets the voices conclude with two soft, low laments, followed by a little instrumental postlude of loud cadence chords against a crescendoing timpani roll.

Now that the chorus has so effectively set the stage, the focus shifts to Maria, dramatically and musically, and she will remain continually in the spot light until the curtain falls. Rather than rigidly following his typical structural templates, Donizetti will furnish the Queen of Scots with an impressively varied series of emotionally-charged star turns that combine sensual beauty with emotional depth.

No. 13 (Finale Part II) Scena and Prayer for Soprano (Maria) and Chorus.

AFTER MARIA ENTERS AND ATTEMPTS TO CONSOLE HER FOLLOWERS, THEY ALL JOIN WITH HER IN A FERVENT PRAYER.

Scena: Roughly the first half of this consists of unusually memorable musical material that transcends the typical accompanied recitative/scena conventions. Donizetti seems determined to preserve a heightened mood throughout his finale, even when we might expect him to rely more on stock conventions. A 3-bar instrumental idea starts things off and is then used as the initial framework, through sequencing and variation, for the exchange between Anna and the chorus. Soon this is dropped for simpler textures, but only in preparation for the magnificent entrance of Maria herself. Aside from the onstage action, this is a purely instrumental moment, lent great warmth and dignity by the accompaniment of a lyrical woodwind melody in F major that is basically an 8-bar (4+4) parallel period, though the consequent is actually slightly extended. This tune seems so significant that we might at first expect it to be the introduction to an aria, one of those that offers a preview of the coming vocal melody. But no, it is still very much part of the scena and seems to portray the bond of affection between Maria and her followers in a manner similar to the lyrical woodwind motive from the previous scene that dramatized Maria and Talbot's friendship. In fact, though this is a longer and more formal melody, it also shares the same distinctive flute and clarinet coloration. The theme starts with an elegant pickup that is beautifully stretched out through a *rallentando*. Once the downbeat and its regular tempo arrive, the vocal character is accentuated by a rhythmic pizzicato accompaniment of eighth-note arpeggios. Even though it is not the start of an aria, this is way too lovely to just abandon; so instead, the entire wind melody is faithfully repeated but serving as a framework for free exchanges between the chorus and their queen. All of this has constituted the musical apex of this scena episode, and from here on, the treatment is greatly pared down to provide an effective foil for the upcoming prayer. Maria now dominates with an extended recitative, largely *a*

*capella* and relieved by only brief choral intjections. Finally, a loud dotted-rhythm chord acts as a summons to attention, followed by some virtually silent bars that set up the anticipated...

Prayer: *Deh! Tu di un umile preghiera* (E-flat major, Common time, *Andante comodo*) In a way, this number might seem dangerously repetitious, but it is a gamble that pays off, as the steady reliance on one main melody conveys a powerful cumulative sense of fervor and insistence. When petitioning heaven, these Scots are clearly unwilling to take “no” for an answer. (“All! May Thou hear the sound of our humble prayer, oh, beneficent God of grace! Gather me in the protection of Thy forgiveness; the heart has no other refuge.”)

Verse One: (Maria solo) To a harp accompaniment that may evoke the heavenly multitudes, La Stuarda offers the first traversal of this beautiful melody. Phrase *a*, an 8-bar (4+4) parallel period, is preceded by one preparatory vamping bar. Phrase *b* is a typical transitional phrase, only 4 bars (2+2) and based on the repetition of a brief idea, enhanced by some nice woodwind touches. The climactic phrase *c*, 4 bars, very effectively sets the seal on this entreaty, ending with a little wind up that will consistently propel the music back to the opening phrase. Adding to the powerful effect here, is the way the entire melody has been unified through the constant repetition of a basic rhythmic and melodic motive – in its original form consisting of four quarter notes hammered out on the same pitch, followed by a short, stepwise, dotted-rhythm descent.

So here is the basic material, softly and simply presented, and from now on Donizetti will figure out ways of varying and arranging it, while building incrementally to a tremendous pitch of excitement.

Verse Two: (Repetition for chorus, with *obligato* touches for Maria) This is a deliberately simple homophonic arrangement that faithfully reproduces the original melody. The dynamic level is still mostly soft, but strategic *fs* at the start of phrases subtly initiate the process of intensification along with Maria’s deployment of relatively restrained soloistic touches.

Mildly-contrasting Interlude: At this point, the familiar material starts to be treated with greater freedom. For starters, we get a rousing *f* rendition of phrase *a* for Maria with chorus, but it is actually *a'*, as the tune is given a new shape and harmonic direction. During the antecedent Maria is briefly subsumed into the choral sopranos, but then her solo melody line soars above for the consequent. Following this comes an even stronger contrast, a new 8-bar (4+4) parallel period that breaks free of the established phrases. Now, the effect is hushed and rather static, as Maria sings the antecedent alone and the chorus answers with the parallel consequent. During the final bar, Maria reenters floating a sustained G which will lead us directly into...

Verse Three: This represents the last traversal of the entire melody as well as its most elaborate presentation. While Maria clings perilously long to her high, pedal-point dominant, the chorus sings a false start by giving us the entirety of phrase *a* in the colorfully distant key of C (the major submediant). An exciting modulation during the last bar returns us back home to E-flat, with the chorus starting over with phrase *a* in its normal key. Now, we get the whole full length tune from the chorus, but attention soon reverts to Maria as a result of her high soloistic descent (considerably elaborated by Sills in our main reference recording).

Coda: This final summation in three parts continues with the high pitch of fervor that has now been achieved.

Part I is a repetition of the *a'* variant of the opening period that started the contrasting interlude. However, this time it ends on a shocking deceptive cadence that wrenches us into...

Part II: Here, troubled harmonies and unsettling trumpet fanfares hold things briefly in abeyance, followed by a swelling *stringendo* for Maria et al.

Part III: At this point we encounter another one of the discrepancies between the recordings and the score. All three performances feature a powerful return to the basic motive, at first pounded out by the orchestra and then present in the choral parts as well. This effectively rounds off the coda and, at the same time, seems like the natural capstone to the entire prayer and its process of incremental crescendo. Surprisingly, though, this does not appear in the score, which offers a different part III that is also notably longer. Still, the last 8 bars of both the recordings and the score seem to return to essential agreement with their final vocal gestures and cadential chords. Before the number has barely finished, there is an offstage cannon blast, the first of three that punctuate this last stretch of the opera and serve as eminently theatrical signals of the approaching execution.

It might be worth suggesting in passing that this prayer for solo soprano and chorus would make an interesting comparison with a somewhat parallel operatic highlight from 56 years later when the new *varismo* style was just being established. In Pietro Mascagni's one-act opera Cavalleria Rusticana one finds the mighty Easter Prayer that vocally combines the congregation in the church with the devout Santuzza who is barred from entry.

No. 14 (Finale Part III) Scena and aria with cabaletta for Soprano (Maria)

CONFRONTED BY CECIL ANNOUNCING THE FATAL HOUR, MARIA OFFERS HER FORGIVENESS TO ELISABETTA. LATER, WHEN LEICESTER ARRIVES, HIS IMPASSIONED PROTESTATIONS DO NOTHING TO SLOW THE WORKINGS OF 'JUSTICE,' AND MARIA BIDS A BRAVE, FINAL FAREWELL, BEFORE BEING LEAD TO THE BLOCK.

Scena: Lasting only about a minute-and-a-half, this is relatively short and simple and offers a respite from the heightened musical palate. Aside from the orchestra portraying Talbot's entry with imposing tremolos and dotted rhythms, the dialogue is conducted in spare, accompanied recitative.

Cavatina: *Di un cor che muore* (F minor/major, Common time, *Larghetto*)

(There is an alternate version of this cavatina that is given as an appendix in the score and which Sutherland opts for in her recording. While similar in layout, it is notably different until the codetta to phrase *c* and the major key conclusion, which revert to the music as discussed below.)

Instrumental Introduction: 4 bars. While winds in octaves play a brief preview of the coming vocal melody, plucked strings establish a persistent short-short-short-long chordal accompaniment pattern that will continue through the first part of the cavatina. Rhythmic repeated-note figures of this sort were understood to represent death in the musical iconography of the period, an association originally deriving from the drum tattoos accompanying a death march.

Maria's solo commences with almost exaggerated austerity and only gradually progresses to fuller scoring and a richer, expressive effect.

Phrase *a*: ("From a heart that is dying may pardon be granted to her who has wronged me, who has condemned me. Tell her I wish she may be happy and remain on her throne, and that her happy life I shall not disturb. Upon Britain, upon Elizabeth's life.") Based on the introduction, this is a parallel period, but with an extended consequent so that it is actually 10 bars. During the extension, the sonority is subtly enhanced by the addition of sustained winds, and these are also occasionally employed over the course of the following...

Phrase *b*: ("I shall pray for heaven's grace. Ah! By remorse may she be not punished.") At 4 bars, this represents a short, contrasting departure.

Phrase *a'*: ("With my blood I shall erase everything. Yes! Ah! From a heart that is dying may pardon be granted.") Like the consequent of the original *a*, this is 6 bars long, consisting of 4 plus a 2-bar extension. By returning to a variant of the original melody, Donizetti rounds things off and sets this opening extended paragraph apart from what follows.

Phrase *c*: Roughly 8 bars. One immediately apparent difference is the absence now of that persistent accompanimental "death figure." Also, the melody line has become more sensuous and supple, while the winds emerge as a pervasive presence, both in doubling Maria's voice and providing independent, ornamental lines. All of phrase *c* is then repeated with the addition of Anna and Talbot singing subsidiary parts. The cumulative effect of voices and instruments has by now achieved a remarkable richness.

Phrase *c* codetta: Almost 4 bars. At this point, Cecil and the chorus are added as well, and the music switches from extended lyricism to a dramatic, fragmented manner, emphasizing the repetition of short exclamations. Instead of bringing the entire cavatina to a close, this instead serves to set up the switch to the parallel major which would have been regarded as a necessity in the operatic conventions of the time.

Phrase *d* (F major), *rallentando*: This tranquil conclusion is approximately 8 bars, but it includes the stopped-time effect of an elaborate solo cadenza, postponing the arrival of the soft closing chords. While the chorus and other soloists continue as a discrete presence, the focus is unequivocally back on Maria. For 2 bars she sings a luxurious *melisma* and then follows it with a decorated repetition that reaches further into her upper range. The 5<sup>th</sup> bar is more fragmentary in style and serves to prepare the *a capella* cadenza.



Scena/setup: Leicester's arrival provides the occasion for some very energized and compelling music, a real shot-in-the-arm after the quiet melancholy of the cavatina.

Part I: (Common time, *Allegro*) This skillfully calculated crescendo of mounting excitement heralds the Earl's entry and features jarring brass unisons, timpani rolls, and a final blazing fanfare that includes the tenor's opening vocal salvo.

Part II is the longest and most memorably tuneful, employing the popular scena device of a sustained orchestral melody, supporting a freer vocal dialogue.

Phrase *a* features an 8-bar (4+4) parallel period that is immediately repeated with a slightly modified ending. Over a tensely throbbing accompaniment, winds and strings sing a passionate lament in E minor, as Leicester gives vent to his shock and displeasure.

Phrase *b*, almost 12 bars, continues the melodic momentum into a mildly contrasting strain, followed by a 7-bar extension that is more choppy and dramatic.

Part III: ("You are evil all. All of you fear a God who avenges innocence!") At just over 6 bars, this is the shortest part of the scena, but it represents the climax, as Leicester vents his fury in D minor to the accompaniment of thunderous dotted rhythm chords. With a good tenor, this can be an electrifying moment serving to help us overlook the fact that the ineffectual lover is actually accomplishing nothing. As this is his last significant musical moment, we would do well to tactfully forget his earlier pledge to rescue Maria or die in the attempt. Poor Leicester's heroic music does not necessarily translate into actual heroism. At the end, as he is attempting a resolute close, the second fateful cannon blast and a deceptive cadence undercut his certainty and wrench us into...

Part IV: This is constructed in two brief and strongly-contrasting halves consisting of the chorus's loud, shocked reaction and then Maria's almost *a capella*, hushed lead-in to her...

Cabaletta: *Ah! Se un giorno* (B minor, Common time, *Maestoso*)

(In the score there is an appendix with a slightly different version of the cabaletta, and it is on this alternate take that all three reference recordings rely.)

The jaunty or bravura character of a typical cabaletta would seem fatally out-of-place here, and we are fortunate that Donizetti rises to the occasion, in providing Maria with a "swan song" that is both dignified and touching.

Orchestral introduction: As is conventional with a solo cabaletta, the opening melody is anticipated by a woodwind preview, but in this instance, the minor tonality and solemn tempo establish a mood that is charged with foreboding. After almost a bar of subdued rhythmic accompaniment, the winds intone the first 4 bars of phrase *a*.

Verse One: Phrase *a* is an 8-bar (4+4) parallel period that sounds simple and subdued until a high note during the consequent evokes the relative major in a brief flash of sunshine. The spare accompaniment is restricted to the by-now familiar repetitive string pattern. (Addressed to

Leicester: “Ah! Though one day from this prison your arm wanted to abduct me, now you lead me to my death like a strong man as the final comfort of love.”)

Phrase *b*, 4 bars (2+2), represents a brief contrast, featuring a short idea that is immediately repeated. At the same time, soft brass fanfares subtly enrich the instrumental palate. (“And may the shedding of my innocent blood soothe the wrath of outraged heaven.”)

Phrase *c* is also 4 bars with a slight break at the 2-bar mark, but here the melody evolves freely without any sense of parallel repetition. (“And not call down on heretic England, a scourge from a vengeful God.”) Winds contribute some sustained notes in preparation for the climactic...

Phrase *d*: (The words are now just a rehash of the earlier ones.) At this point, Maria’s composure finally starts to give way to agitation and desperation, and this is most effectively represented by an over 10-bar phrase that freely extends through fragmentation and repetition. A powerful sense of culmination results from winds now consistently doubling the vocal line and a crescendo into more extraverted dynamics. By the end, the emotional outpouring is further intensified by an even stronger crescendo, combined with a frantic-sounding acceleration. Maria has made her way to the relative major, but her closing cadence is abruptly interrupted by the intrusion of the...

Interlude: (*Più allegro*, starting in D major) The first part of this is a ***ff*** general commotion, but soon the turbulence dies down to a softly descending woodwind line. Then, over hushed ‘death figures’ in the strings, Maria declaims a final farewell to Anna, ending on a fermata-prolonged high note (mini-cadenza?) that serves to set up...

Verse Two: Instead of the straightforward repeat we might expect here, Donizetti significantly rewrites phrase *a*, so that it is now melodically altered and radiantly transposed into the parallel major. This surprising recasting of the material lends a dramatically effective through-composed feeling to the normally more simplistic cabaletta form. There is, however, no change in the words to motivate the departure. With phrase *b*, the melody reverts to its original notes, though the harmonic context is still in transition. Thus it is not until phrase *c* that things slip back into a literal repeat of the earlier music. However, in their recordings, Sills and Sutherland resort to so much free improvisation that these structural events may not be readily apparent to a casual listener. Normally it is entirely appropriate to ornament and vary verse two, but in this case we feel that Gruberova’s approach of singing the melody line, as written, is to be preferred.

Coda: (*Più allegro* and D major, the relative major, as with the interlude.) Maria’s sequence of great solo moments is finally over, and the drama now reaches a swift conclusion. All the assembled forces participate in a loud outburst combining harsh, fanfare-like rhythms with Maria’s final series of high notes. After the vocal contingent unleashes its last ringing chord, the orchestra continues with a forceful postlude, repeating cadential harmonies for an additional seven and a half bars. Custom dictates that this ending is in major, but it is a severe and uncompromising D major as is fitting with poor Maria about to be decapitated. (During this coda, the fateful third and final cannon shot is heard, but exactly where is up for grabs. While the score places it at the beginning of the instrumental postlude, the recordings prefer it earlier, coming more closely on the heels of verse two.)