

This Macbeth, seems to be a very personal one, how did you make this story yours ? What did you keep of it ? What did you twist ?

I have a very strong relationship with this work: I have made three entirely different versions since 2001. The original Verdi opera is a very grand, very long work. A bit bombastic. I wanted to make a fast-moving, high energy piece: an opera with the formal, artistic and thematic concerns of today. I've chopped out several areas that I felt were unnecessary, and I have juggled the scenes around.

Also, I set the saga in the wars that have torn the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo apart over the past 20 years. These wars are fuelled by the demand for natural resources in the regions. Around 6 million people have been killed in this conflict, and millions more have been raped, injured and displaced.

And yet people outside of Africa barely know about this nightmare. I wanted to find a way for this 19th century opera to shine a light on what is happening in Central Africa.

Is Macbeth one of the most adaptable play of Shakespeare, that you keep going staging it ?

I'm not working with Shakespeare's play, I'm working with Verdi's opera. But the Macbeth story is very rich, with its themes of greed, ambition, betrayal, tyranny and witchcraft. Verdi's extraordinary music allows the artistic imagination to fly.

How did you choose and how did you worked with Fabrizio Cassol ? How would you describe his music ?

When I was looking for a composer to adapt Verdi's score, I searched for somebody who had worked with theatrical musical – be it opera or dance or whatever – I wanted somebody who was both a composer and a musician, and I wanted somebody who had had some access to African music. People like that aren't too common! And Fabrizio does have that mix. He spent a lot of time in the Congo, and has worked with artists like Luc Bondy and Alain Platel. He formed a jazz band called Aka Moon, which is based on music that he recorded with the Pigmies when he was in the Congo.

Fabrizio's music for Macbeth retains a lot of the Verdi, but also introduces his own sensitive unique voice.

It is played by a truly extraordinary orchestra from the Balkan region, with really wonderful virtuosity; and is sung by 10 black opera singers from South Africa.

What makes Macbeth close to the situation in Africa nowadays ?

In both MACBETH and the DRC, we have a country in a state of warfare. Militia leaders arise, battle for control, turn upon each other, and are vanquished. In this opera we see a militia leader who – together with his wife – is consumed by ambition. In a fit of weakness he kills his king and seizes power. When his rule becomes threatened he turns to absolute violence. The Congo conflict is the playfield of so many different military groups, armies and factions.

I fixed my gaze on the multinational corporations who vie for access to the resources in the Congo, and who will do anything to get their hands on them. The Eastern part of the Congo is one of the richest mineral regions in the world. Within the conflict situation here, in which millions of men, women and children have been murdered, maimed, raped, enslaved, displaced over the past 20 years, multinational corporations have funded the brutal militia that have committed these atrocities, so that they can get access to the minerals they need for their profits. The representatives of one of these corporations are my witches in MACBETH.

We just turned the 400 years death anniversary of Shakespeare, what makes this writer so still alive and important ?

I'm not working on a Shakespeare text. This is an opera by Verdi, not a work by Shakespeare.