

VERDI **Requiem Mass** (1874)

Requiem
Dies irae
Offertorium
Sanctus
Agnus Dei
Lux aeterna
Libera me

No intermission.

Messa da Requiem

GIUSEPPE VERDI (1813-1901)

Fiercely independent and passionately patriotic, Verdi revered few men as great or saintly. At the top rung of the ladder of greatness he placed only two names, Rossini and Manzoni, and it was the deaths of these two that led to the composition of his incomparably beautiful version of the Latin Requiem Mass.

Gioacchino Rossini, of course, was world famous as composer of numerous Italian operas. Verdi respected him as the creator of such masterpieces as *The Barber of Seville*. After Rossini died, Verdi wrote that "His reputation was one of the glories of Italy. When the other that is like it [that is, Manzoni's life] exists no more, what will remain to us?"

His other idol, the Italian poet Alessandro Manzoni, was author of the novel *I promessi sposi* ("The Betrothed"), which had done much to unite linguistically the fragmented regions of Italy. As Steven Ledbetter has written, "Inspired in its architecture by the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott, Manzoni's book easily surpasses them in scope, characterization, feeling for the forces of history, and beauty of language." By selecting the Tuscan dialect as most representative of Italy as a whole and using that dialect with such persuasively poetic beauty in his novel, Manzoni did as much in his way to promote the cause of Italian unification as all the soldiers and statesmen did in theirs.

Immediately after Rossini's death in 1868, Verdi conceived a plan to honor his memory: a Requiem Mass, each of whose thirteen sections would be composed by a different Italian composer, the composite work to be given in Bologna on the first anniversary of Rossini's death. The plan was doomed. Petty jealousies and official indifference combined to assure that the "Rossini" Requiem would not be performed as planned. Verdi was humiliated and bitterly disappointed in his countrymen.

Five years later Manzoni died at the age of 88. Verdi stayed away from the public funeral, paying his respects privately at the grave in Milan a few days later. Again he thought of a Requiem Mass to memorialize the deceased. "It is a heartfelt impulse, or rather necessity, that prompts me to do honor as best I can to that Great One whom I so much admired and venerated as a man."

His plan was presented through his publisher to the mayor of Milan, Manzoni's home city and Verdi's adopted home as well: Verdi would write the Requiem (all of it himself this time) and bear the cost of copying the parts, if the city of Milan would pay for the performance. The terms were accepted, Verdi finished the Requiem with slightly over a month to spare, and the "Manzoni" Requiem (as it is often called) was performed in the Church of St. Mark on May 27, 1874, the first anniversary of Manzoni's death.

Many musicians and church officials have worried about whether this is truly a sacred work or an opera in disguise. It is obvious that Verdi, raised as a Catholic but shunning organized religion in his maturity, wrote not a dark, mystical, liturgical setting but a glowing, dramatic depiction, not an aid to worship but a memorial concert work, and one that concentrates less on thoughts of the dead than on prayers for the well-being of the living. Although he stayed closer to the prescribed text than did Berlioz, for instance, he was not above repeating portions of the text in unconventional ways when it suited his dramatic purpose.

The music in this Requiem actually had its beginning in the aborted "Rossini" Requiem,

especially the "Libera me" that Verdi composed as his own contribution to that composite work. To a professor at the Milan Conservatory he later admitted that he had also made some sketches for a "Requiem aeternam" movement and a "Dies irae," although he said he didn't expect then to finish a complete Requiem. With the impetus provided by Manzoni's passing, however, he used these sketches and a thorough reworking of the "Libera me" as starting points for his "Manzoni" Requiem. Apparently, only the opening chants of the "Libera me" and its choral fugue were retained intact from the earlier, "Rossini" version.

In composing the work, Verdi had the advantage of studying earlier settings of the Requiem text. His "Dies irae" especially, with its trumpet of doom multiplied in echoing profusion, owes much to the Berlioz version, just as the later *War Requiem* of Britten would benefit from the example of Verdi. But where Berlioz's Requiem seems representative of French state occasions, a grand paean to national *gloire*, Verdi's has a particularly Italian coloration, with its multitude of wonderful melodies, its solos and ensembles addressing prayers for the dead and the living in a most personal way. The Berlioz Requiem was designed for the vast reverberant spaces of a cathedral, but Verdi's, though written for premiere in a church, seems tailored more for theatrical performance. This Requiem, which Brahms said "could be done only by a genius," stands as a sublime tribute to the greatness of both Manzoni and Verdi.

REQUIEM MASS

The text as set by Verdi

I. REQUIEM

Muted strings introduce the Introit, setting the stage for choral petitions of eternal light for the deceased. The Psalm verse "Te decet hymnus" gets unaccompanied polyphonic treatment, and there is a brief, liturgically proper repetition of the opening lines before the "Kyrie" portion, in which the soloists are first heard. Interestingly, Verdi ends by returning to the middle line of text, "Christe eleison," and the movement closes softly as violins ascend, carrying the prayers heavenward.

Chorus

*Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.*

Grant them rest eternal, Lord,
and may perpetual light shine on them.

*Te decet hymnus, Deus in Sion,
et tibi redettur votum in Jerusalem,
exaudi orationem meam,
ad te omnis caro veniet.*

A hymn to you is fitting, God of Zion,
and to you shall a vow be made in Jerusalem.
Listen to my prayer;
unto you all flesh shall come.

*Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.*

Grant them rest eternal, Lord,
and may perpetual light shine on them.

Solo Quartet and Chorus

*Kyrie eleison;
Christe eleison;*

Lord, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.

Kyrie eleison.

Lord, have mercy.

II. DIES IRAE

As with the Berlioz Requiem, this one too has as its most prominent feature the dramatic pictorialism of the Sequence, "Dies irae." Verdi uses hammer strokes from the brass and bass drum to make quite literal the destruction of the world on that "day of wrath." (The composer directs that the bass drum be stretched very tight, so that its off-beat strokes will sound short and powerful.) Echoing trumpets, some separated off-stage, herald the Judge's arrival, and ominous choral repetitions of "Dies irae" punctuate the solo bass's description of the Judgement. Twice during the course of this long poem (which Verdi, unlike Mozart and Berlioz, sets as one continuous movement), the opening strokes and cries of doom return, making the following entreaties for salvation all the more poignant.

*Dies irae, dies illa,
solvat saeculum in favilla,
teste David cum Sibylla.*

*Quantus tremor est futurus,
quando iudex est venturus,
cuncta stricte discussurus.*

*Tuba mirum spargens sonum,
per sepulchra regionum,
coget omnes ante thronum.*

*Mors stupebit et natura,
cum resurget creatura,
judicanti responsura.*

*Liber scriptus proferetur,
in quo totum continetur,
unde mundus iudicetur.*

*Judex ergo, cum sedebit,
quidquid latet, apparebit,
nil inultum remanebit.*

*Dies irae, dies illa,
solvat saeculum in favilla,
teste David cum Sibylla.*

Chorus

Day of wrath, that day
the world will dissolve in ashes,
as witness David and the Sibyl.

What trembling there will be,
when the judge shall come
to examine all things thoroughly.

The trumpet, spreading its wondrous sound
through the tombs of all regions,
will gather all before the throne.

Bass Solo

Death will be stupefied, also nature,
when all creation arises
to answer to the judge.

Mezzo-Soprano Solo and Chorus

A written book will be brought forth,
in which everything shall be contained,
by which the world shall be judged.

When the judge is therefore seated,
whatever is hidden will be exposed;
nothing shall remain unavenged.

Chorus

Day of wrath, that day
the world will dissolve in ashes,
as witness David and the Sibyl.

Soprano, Mezzo-Soprano and Tenor Solos

*Quid sum miser tunc dicturus,
quem patronum rogaturus,
cum vix justus sit securus?*

What am I, a miserable one, to say then?
What patron shall I request,
when the righteous are scarcely secure?

Solo Quartet and Chorus

*Rex tremendae majestatis,
qui salvandos salvas gratis,
salva me, fons pietatis.*

King of fearful majesty,
who freely saves the redeemed,
save me, fount of mercy.

Soprano and Mezzo-Soprano Solos

*Recordare Jesu pie,
quod sum causa tuae viae,
ne me perdas illa die.*

Remember, merciful Jesus,
that I am the cause of your journey;
do not abandon me on that day.

*Quaerens me, sedisti lassus,
redemisti crucem passus,
tantus labor non sit cassus.*

Seeking me, you sat down exhausted;
you redeemed me by suffering the cross.
Such great labor should not be in vain.

*Juste judex ultionis,
donum fac remissionis,
ante diem rationis.*

Just judge of vengeance,
make the gift of remission
before the day of accounting.

Tenor Solo

*Ingemisco, tanquam reus,
culpa rubet vultus meus,
supplici parce, Deus.*

I sigh as one accused;
shame reddens my face.
Spare the suppliant, God.

*Qui Mariam absolvisti,
et latronem exaudisti,
mihi quoque spem didisti.*

You who absolved Mary [Magdalene]
and listened to the thief
have given me hope also.

*Preces meae non sunt dignae,
sed tu bonus fac benigne,
ne perenni cremer igne!*

My prayers are not worthy,
but you, good one, be merciful,
lest I burn in everlasting flames!

*Inter oves locum praesta,
et ab haedis me sequestra,
statuens in parte dextra.*

Place me prominently among your sheep,
and from the goats separate me,
placing me in the portion on the right.

Bass Solo and Chorus

*Confutatis maledictis,
flammis acribus addictis,
voca me cum benedictis.*

Silencing the accursed,
to acrid flames consigning them,
call me with those blessed.

Oro supplex et acclinis,

I pray, bowed and kneeling,

*cor contritum quasi cinis,
gere curam mei finis.*

my heart contrite as ashes;
take care of me at the last.

*Dies irae, dies illa,
solvat saeculum in favilla,
teste David cum Sibylla.*

Chorus

Day of wrath, that day
the world will dissolve in ashes,
as witness David and the Sibyl.

Solo Quartet and Chorus

*Lacrymosa dies illa,
qua resurget ex favilla,
judicandus homo reus.
Huic ergo parce Deus.*

That tearful day,
when guilty man shall rise
from the embers to be judged.
Oh, therefore spare him, God.

*Pie Jesu Domine,
dona eis requiem. Amen.*

Merciful Lord Jesus,
grant them rest. Amen.

III. OFFERTORIUM

The Offertory, "Domine Jesu Christe," is reserved for the soloists. A highlight among the many splendid moments of vocal beauty is the soprano's first entrance, a long note held while a pair of violins previews the melody she will sing in describing Saint Michael the Standardbearer. The piece dies out in a shimmer of strings.

*Domine Jesu Christe, Rex gloriae,
libera animas omnium fidelium
defunctorum de poenis inferni
et de profundo lacu.
Libera eas de ore leonis,
ne absorbeat eas tartarus,
ne cadant in obscurum:*

Solo Quartet

Lord Jesu Christ, glorious King,
free the souls of all the faithful dead
from punishment in the inferno,
and from the deep pit.
Deliver them from the lion's mouth,
lest the abyss swallow them up,
lest they fall into darkness.

*Sed signifer sanctus Michael
repraesentet eas in lucem sanctam,
quam olim Abrahae promisisti
et semini ejus.*

But may the standardbearer St. Michael
bring them into the holy light,
as once you promised to Abraham
and his seed.

*Hostias et preces tibi,
Domine, laudis offerimus.
Tu suscipe pro animabus illis,
quarum hodie memoriam facimus;
Fac eas, Domine,
de morte transire ad vitam,*

Sacrifices and prayers we offer
to you, Lord, with praise.
Receive them for the souls of those
whom today we commemorate;
make them, Lord,
to pass from death to life,

quam olim Abrahae promisisti

as once you promised to Abraham

et semini ejus.

and his seed.

*Libera animas omnium fidelium
defunctorum de poenis inferni.
Fac eas de morte transire ad vitam.*

Free the souls of all the faithful dead
from punishment in the inferno.
May they pass from death to life.

IV. SANCTUS

For the "Sanctus," the chorus is divided into eight parts, sometimes woven together in counterpoint, sometimes divided as two four-part choruses in antiphonal opposition. Following the lead of Luigi Cherubini's Requiem, Verdi combines the "Sanctus" and "Benedictus" into one seamless movement, beginning and ending in celestial glory.

Choruses I and II

*Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus,
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt coeli et terra
gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis.*

Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God of the Hosts.
The heavens and earth are filled
with your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

*Benedictus, qui venit
in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis!*

Blessed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest!

V. AGNUS DEI

The two female soloists begin the "Agnus Dei," singing unaccompanied in octave unison and echoed by the unison chorus. As the text is repeated, the orchestra joins the singers, and the chorus begins to add harmony. The atmosphere throughout is one of simplicity and pathos.

Soprano and Mezzo-Soprano Solos and Chorus

*Agnus Dei,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona eis requiem.*

Lamb of God,
who removes the world's sins,
grant them rest.

*Agnus Dei,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona eis requiem sempiternam.*

Lamb of God,
who removes the world's sins,
grant them rest everlasting.

VI. LUX AETERNA

These closing words of the Mass for the Dead replace the blessing of the congregation used in the regular Mass, iterating once more the concerns for perpetual light and rest for those who have died. The Mozart and Cherubini versions append this portion to the "Agnus Dei"; Berlioz omits it in order to repeat a part of his Introit. Verdi makes it a separate movement, an intimate and loving farewell to the saintly figure of Manzoni. The chorus and solo soprano do not sing here; Verdi is

reserving them for the last movement.

Mezzo-Soprano, Tenor and Bass Solos

*Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine,
cum sanctis tuis in aeternum,
quia pius es.*

May eternal light shine on them, Lord,
with your saints for eternity,
because you are merciful.

*Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis,
cum sanctis tuis in aeternum,
quia pius es.*

Grant them eternal rest, Lord,
and may perpetual light shine on them,
with your saints for eternity,
because you are merciful.

VII. LIBERA ME

Differing once again from the Mozart and Berlioz settings, Verdi includes the Absolution, "Libera me," which technically follows the Requiem Mass as part of the service of burial. Here he makes use of a similarity in text ("Dies illa, dies irae," as opposed to the Sequence's "Dies irae, dies illa") to bring in the doomsday cries and hammer blows of the second movement once more. This finale combines elements of Gregorian chant, Baroque fugue, concern for the departed, and prayers for the living. Without continuing on to the "In Paradisum" (which Fauré and Duruflé would later include in their Requiems), Verdi concludes by repeating the hopeful prayers of "Libera me, libera me."

Soprano Solo and Chorus

*Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna,
in die illa tremenda,
quando coeli movendi sunt et terra,*

Deliver me, Lord, from eternal death,
on that dreadful day,
when the heavens and earth shall be moved,

*dum veneris judicare
saeculum per ignem.*

when you come to judge
the world through fire.

*Tremens factus sum ego et timeo,
dum discussio venerit
atque ventura ira,
quando coeli movendi sunt et terra.*

I am made to tremble and to fear,
awaiting the judgement that shall come,
and also at your coming wrath,
when the heavens and earth shall be moved.

*Dies illa, dies irae,
calamitatis et miseriae,
dies magna et amara valde,
dum veneris judicare
saeculum per ignem.*

That day, day of wrath,
of calamity and misery,
great and exceedingly bitter day,
when you come to judge
the world through fire.

*Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.*

Grant them rest eternal, Lord,
and may perpetual light shine on them.

*Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna,
in die illa tremenda,*

Deliver me, Lord, from eternal death,
on that dreadful day,

*quando coeli movendi sunt et terra,
dum veneris judicare
saeculum per ignem.*

when the heavens and earth shall be moved,
when you come to judge
the world through fire.

— Program notes and English translation
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