

PROGRAM NOTES

The Wagner acolyte Hans von Bülow labeled Verdi's *Requiem* an "opera in ecclesiastical robes," thus posing the great question about this enduring masterpiece. The 1874 *Requiem* is certainly one of the highest achievements of Italian musical style, and along with several songs, a string quartet and the visionary *Four Sacred Pieces*, the only non-opera Verdi composed. Coming at the summit of his career, after all of his major operas except *Otello* and *Falstaff*, the work shows Verdi as a musical Shakespeare capable of conveying authentic emotion without pandering or manipulation. With not a single wasted gesture or disproportionate event, and with virtuosic, impassioned writing for the soloists, the *Requiem* communicates as a great drama should.

That being said, the *Requiem* is not at all a theater piece. Verdi himself cautioned that "one mustn't sing this Mass in the way one sings an opera, and therefore phrasing and dynamics that may be fine in the theater won't satisfy me at all, *not at all*." The centrality of the chorus, expansive fugues, motivic development and text-driven musical structure place it in line with the earlier sacred works of Mozart and Cherubini. The soloists and chorus do not play individuals, but instead articulate generalized human emotion. There is no "fourth wall" or pretense of plot and character development: everything is action or reflection. This communal, universal mindset makes the work difficult to confine to the world of opera, or perhaps even to any particular religious creed.

The *Requiem* opens almost behind a dimly lit scrim—something awful has happened, and we are called together toward an ancient mourning ritual. A descending triadic theme, first heard in the cellos, becomes an important thread. Sung to the text "*re-qui-em*" toward the end of the work, it is also the basis for the *Libera me* and *Sanctus* fugues. The Verdi scholar David Rosen rightly identifies in this opening section the musical language of the Renaissance: "The a cappella scoring, imitation, and severe melodic material—all evoking the stile antico—again serve to distance [the work] from the profane world of opera."

The stunning imagery of the *Dies Irae* sequence plays out over a sprawling scene for chorus and soloists. The orchestra takes on opera house proportions, adding piccolo, two extra bassoons, four offstage trumpets and bass drum, delivering its famous gut-punch. The chromatic scale that spirals downward on the title text returns in many guises throughout the *Requiem*. Extended episodes for the soloists—beseeching, argumentative, awestruck, often spoken in the first person—add up to a personal plea for salvation. The *Lacrymosa* section (based on a discarded duet from *Don Carlos*) ends with desolation, the sudden shift to a G major "Amen" lending an almost mordant, ironic tone.

Verdi's beautiful *Offertorio* for solo quartet follows an A-B-C-B-A structure that leads the listener to and from a high altar where the most reverential prayers of the

people are offered. The bumptious *Sanctus/Benedictus* for double chorus relieves dramatic tension, with the two texts treated together as "projecting a single joyous affect." The *Agnus Dei* offers a moment of mystical serenity. It is structured as a theme and variations, "one of the most placid of all musical forms, well suited to impart a sense of calm and timelessness." The melody calls to mind Gregorian chant, and a trio of flutes add a hauntingly beautiful touch. Instruments of light (divided violins and violas, flute, clarinet) and darkness (bassoons, trombones, timpani, bass drum) illustrate the twin texts of the *Lux aeterna*, which serves as a valedictory for the mezzo-soprano, tenor and bass soloists.

The *Libera me* section features the soprano soloist, Cassandra-like, in close interaction with the chorus. The movement is a highly dramatic and individual fusion of the operatic (the work's first use of recitative, the "mad scene" quality of the soprano's searching plea, and the climactic moment of the fugue) and the sacred (the chanted responses from the chorus, the a cappella motet with soprano soloist, and the fugue itself). The text speaks in the first person, like the *Dies Irae* section, a correspondence that Verdi makes by recapitulating the earlier musical material. The powerful fugue balances the immense tension that has built up through the entire work. In the words of one commentator, it is "so dynamic and insistent that one seems to sense the clamor of a multitude intent on achieving salvation by violence." The *Requiem* ends, not triumphally, but in a sense of collapse, the final lines spoken rather than sung. The major third at the end, so often used in music as a ray of sunshine, hits us instead "like the last flickering light in the cathedral."

That Verdi was a skeptic on matters of faith will come as no surprise to listeners of the *Requiem*. But the care and intensity with which he approached the act of composing it show his profound intention for the work to serve a great purpose, as a summation of his own artistry, an act of dedication to his fellow creators and a unifying force for his listeners. The *Requiem* combines the most salient and universal features of the operatic and the sacred, belonging neither to the theater or the church, but to our common cultural heritage.

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TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

MESSA DA REQUIEM (1874)

Giuseppe Verdi
(1813–1901)

REQUIEM

Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.
Te decet hymnus, Deus, in Sion, et
tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem.
Exaudi orationem meam;
ad te omnis caro veniet.
Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Kyrie eleison.
Christe eleison.

*Grant them eternal rest, O Lord,
and may light perpetual shine upon them.
Thou shalt have praise in Sion, O Lord; and
homage shall be paid to Thee in Jerusalem.
Hear my prayer, O Lord,
All flesh shall come before Thee.
Grant them eternal rest, O Lord,
and may light perpetual shine upon them.*

*Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.*

SEQUENTIA: DIES IRAE

Dies irae, dies illa
solvat saeculum in favilla,
teste David cum Sybilla.
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 continentur,
unde mundus iudicetur.
Iudex ergo cum sedebit,
quidquid latet apparebit,
nil inultum remanebit.

*This day, this day of wrath
Shall consume the world in ashes,
As foretold by David and the Sibyl.
What trembling there shall be
When the judge shall come
To weigh everything strictly.*

*The trumpet, scattering its sound
Across the graves of all lands,
Summons all before the throne.*

*Death and nature shall be stunned
When Creation arises
To render account before the judge.*

*The written book shall be brought forth
In which all is contained
Whereby the world shall be judged.
When the judge takes his seat,
All that is hidden shall appear:
Nothing shall remain unavenged.*

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

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

Recordare, Jesu pie,
quod sum causa tuae viae,
ne me perdas ille die.
Quaerens me sedisti lassus,
redemisti crucem passus;
tantus labor non sit cassus.
Juste iudex ultionis,
donum fac remissionis
ante diem rationis.

Ingemisco tamquam reus,
culpa rubet vultus meus,
supplicant parce, Deus.
Qui Mariam absolvisti,
et latronem exaudisti,
mihi quoque spem dedisti.
Preces meae non sunt dignae,
sed tu, bonus, fac benigne,
ne perenni cremer igne.
Inter oves locum praesta,
et ab hoedis me sequestra,
statuens in parte dextra.

Confutatis maledictis,
flammis acribus addictis,
voca me cum benedictis.
Oro supplex et acclinis,
cor contritum quasi cinis,
gere curam mei finis.

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

Pie Jesu Domine,
dona eis requiem.
Amen.

*What shall I, poor wretch, say then?
To which protector shall I appeal
When even the just man is barely safe?*

*King of awesome majesty,
Who freely saves those worthy of salvation,
Save me, fount of pity.*

*Remember, gentle Jesus,
That I am the reason for your journey;
Do not cast me out on that day.
Seeking me, you have sat down wearily,
You have redeemed me by enduring the cross;
Such travail must not be in vain.
Righteous judge of vengeance,
Grant your gift of absolution
Before the day of reckoning.*

*I groan like the sinner I am,
Guilt reddens my face,
Spare this supplicant, O God.
You, who pardoned Mary
And heeded the thief,
Have given me hope as well.
Though my prayers are not worthy of you,
Grant that through your good grace
I may not be consumed in eternal fire.
Give me a place among the sheep
And separate me from the goats,
Let me stand at your right hand.*

*When the damned are cast away
And consigned to the bitter flames,
Call me to be with the blessed.
Bowed down in supplication I beg you,
My heart as though ground to ashes:
Help me in my last hour.*

*This day full of tears,
When from the embers arises
Guilty man, to be judged:
O Lord, have mercy upon him.*

*Gentle Lord Jesus,
grant them rest.
Amen.*

OFFERTORIO:

DOMINE JESU CHRISTE

Domine, Jesu Christe, Rex gloriæ,
libera animas omnium fidelium
defunctorum de pœnis inferni et de
profundo lacu.

Libera eas de ore leonis, ne absorbeat
eas Tartarus, ne cadant in obscurum;

Sed signifer sanctus Michæl repræsentet
eas in lucem sanctam, quam olim
Abrahæ promisisti, et semini ejus.

Hostias et preces tibi, Domine, laudis
offerimus; tu suscipe pro animabus
illis, quarum hodie memoriam
facimus. Fac eas, Domine, de morte
transire ad vitam, quam olim Abrahæ
promisisti et semini ejus.

*Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory,
deliver the souls of all the faithful departed
from the pains of hell and from the
bottomless pit.*

*Deliver them from the mouth of the lion, neither
let them be swallowed up by the abyss, nor fall
into darkness.*

*But let the holy standard-bearer Michael lead
them into the holy light, as you promised to
Abraham and his seed.*

*We offer prayers and sacrifices to you, O Lord;
receive them on behalf of those souls
we commemorate this day.
Grant them, O Lord, to pass over from
death to life, as you promised Abraham
and his seed.*

SANCTUS

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus
Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt coeli et terra
gloria tua. Osanna in excelsis.

Benedictus qui venit in nomine
Domini. Osanna in excelsis.

*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.
Hosanna in the highest.*

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

AGNUS DEI

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

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

*Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the
world, grant them rest.*

*Lamb of God, who takest away the sins of the
world, grant them eternal rest.*

LUX AETERNA

Lux æterna luceat eis, Domine, cum
sanctis tuis in æternum, quia pius es.

Requiem æternam dona eis,
Domine; et lux perpetua luceat eis,
cum sanctis tuis in æternum, quia
pius es.

*May eternal light shine on them, O Lord,
with Thy saints forever, for Thou art merciful.*

*Grant them eternal rest, O Lord;
and may perpetual light shine on them,
with Thy saints forever, for Thou art
merciful.*

LIBERA ME

Libera me, Domine, de morte
æterna, in die illa tremenda, quando
coeli movendi sunt et terra, dum
veneris judicare sæculum per ignem.

Tremens factus sum ego et timeo, dum
discussio venerit atque ventura ira.

Dies illa, dies iræ, calamitatis, et
miseriæ, dies magna et amara valde.

Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Libera me, Domine, de morte æterna,
in die illa tremenda. Libera me.

*Deliver me, O Lord, from everlasting death,
on that fearful day when the heavens and earth
are moved, when Thou shalt come to judge the
world through fire.*

*I am seized with fear and trembling when I reflect
upon the judgment and the wrath to come.*

*That day, that day of wrath, calamity, and
misery, that terrible and exceedingly bitter day.*

*Rest eternal grant them, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine on them.*

*Deliver me, O Lord, from everlasting death,
on that fearful day. Deliver me.*