

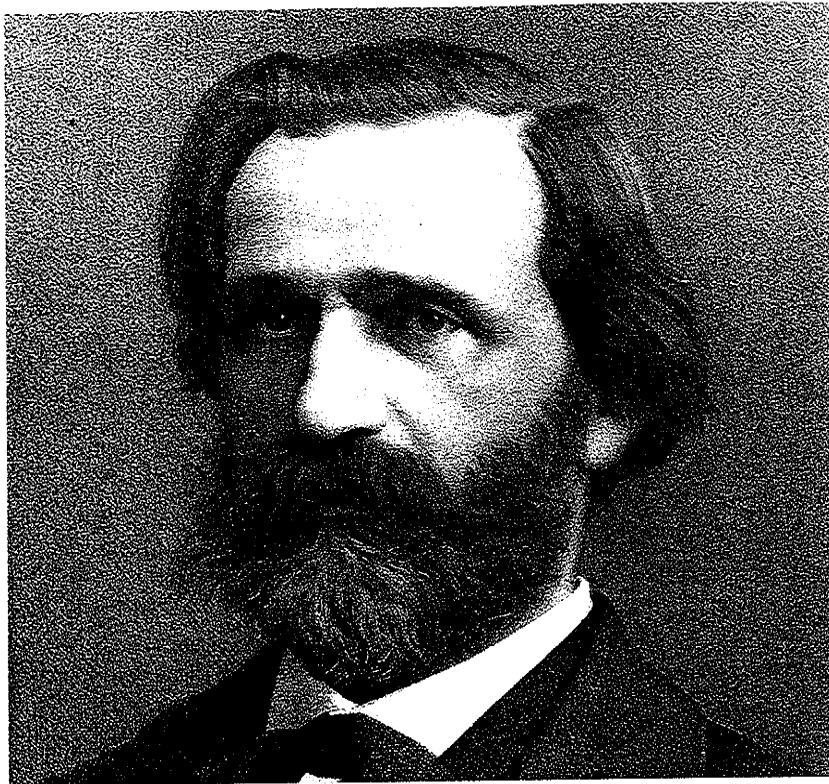


# VERDI REQUIEM

DIGITAL  
RECORDING

SHARON SWEET · FLORENCE QUIVAR · VINSON COLE · SIMON ESTES  
ERNST-SENFF-CHOR  
BERLINER PHILHARMONIKER  
CARLO MARIA GIULINI





GIUSEPPE VERDI



GIUSEPPE VERDI  
(1813–1901)

## MESSA DA REQUIEM

für vier Solostimmen, Chor und Orchester · for four solo voices, chorus and orchestra  
pour quatre voix solistes, chœur et orchestre · per quattro voci soliste, coro e orchestra

Sharon Sweet, Sopran  
Florence Quivar, Mezzosopran  
Vinson Cole, Tenor  
Simon Estes, Bass

Ernst-Senff-Chor  
Einstudierung / Chorus Master / Chef des chœurs / Maestro del coro: Ernst Senff

Berliner Philharmoniker  
CARLO MARIA GIULINI

In ihrer Gebärdenhaftigkeit, in ihrer Unmittelbarkeit, ist die Musik dieses »Requiems« eine zu tiefst persönliche, subjektive Musik; man vergegenwärtigt sich in diesem Zusammenhang die Formulierung der Worte »mors« (»Tod«) und »nil« (»nichts«)! Im persönlichen Affekt schließt auch das Werk; der letzten Textzeile, die von Angst, Rechenschaft und Zorn spricht, folgt noch einmal die Wiederholung der Bitte »befreie mich!« Am Ende steht das Individuum, das Ich, mit seiner persönlichen Angst vor dem Tod und

seiner persönlichen Bitte, von diesem Tod erlöst zu werden. Trotz seines versöhnlichen Verklügens tröstet das »Requiem« Verdis nicht, es ist keine »nie versiegende Quelle schmerzstillenden Trostes«, wie Kalbeck das »Deutsche Requiem« von Brahms charakterisieren konnte. Es ist, wie der italienische Musikkritiker Massimo Mila zu Recht hervorhob, ein »Requiem ante mortem«. Statt mit dem Tod zu versöhnen, mahnt es zu bewußterem Leben.

## Verdi's "Requiem": A Memorial for an Epoch

JAMES HEPOKOSKI

The compositional history of Verdi's 1874 *Messa da Requiem* is interwoven with the memory of two giant figures in the 19th-century Italian arts: Gioacchino Rossini and Alessandro Manzoni. It was upon the death of Rossini in November 1868 that Verdi — in many ways himself on the way to becoming the parallel figure with Rossini for his own time — first proposed that an honorary Requiem be written, one which would have its individual movements contributed by thirteen different composers in Italy. Verdi himself agreed to compose the concluding movement, "Libera me." The composite work was rapidly completed, and plans were drawn up for a performance in Bologna in 1869, on the first anniversary of Rossini's death. This performance never occurred, however, and the *Messa-Rossini* remained unplayed.

Still, the thrust of Verdi's planned commemoration of Rossini in 1869 is clear. It had been Rossini who in his works from at least *Tancredi* (1813) to *Guillaume Tell* (1829) had set 19th-century Italian opera on the course that it would pursue for the next 50 years. The operas of Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi may be construed as a set of commentaries on, or transformations of, essentially Rossinian structural principles. But now that grand tradition was coming under in-

creasing attack by operatic reformers — by such firebrands as the strident, young Arrigo Boito. "From everybody one hears shouts of *Reform and Progress*," complained Verdi in August 1869, shortly after completing the "Libera me." "Everything is turned upside-down; the frame has become the picture!" In proposing the composite *Messa-Rossini* Verdi intended to honor the tradition of the "picture" — the glory of untrammelled Italian lyricism and vocality, a tradition that he sensed was shamefully neglected and in its decline.

With the collapse of the plans for the 1869 performance of the composite *Requiem*, Verdi's "Libera me" went unheard, and the composer turned to other work, most notably to the composition of *Aida*. In February 1871, however, he received a letter from Alberto Mazzucato, a composer and professor at the Milan Conservatory. Mazzucato had been examining the unplayed "Libera me" manuscript, and he now wrote Verdi that he found this concluding piece to be nothing short of "the most beautiful, the greatest and the most colossally poetic piece that anyone could imagine." Flattered by such extravagant praise, the composer responded, "Your words almost kindled in me the desire . . . to write an entire *Mass*; all the more since with a little

greater expansion I would find that the 'Requiem' and the 'Dies irae' movements would be already finished, for they are reprised in the 'Liberata,' already composed." Verdi here clearly glimpsed the possibility of a larger composition, which, in effect, would "grow into" the 1869 "Liberata" as its conclusion.

Yet from all indications he did not seriously consider beginning work on this larger project until at least April 1873. In that month his publisher Ricordi, doubtless upon the composer's request, sent him the earlier "Liberata" movement. But the Verdi who received that manuscript was in some senses a changed person from the one who had originally composed the piece. In the first place, he now considered that his career as an opera composer was over. This was fourteen months after the première of *Aida*, an opera whose reception in Italy had been charged with controversy. To Verdi's disgust, several critics had made gratuitous charges of *wagnerismo* and needless complexity (*Lohengrin* had received its first Italian performance only three months earlier), and questions were publicly raised about the composer's presumed renunciation of the simpler, Italian melodic tradition. Such remarks encouraged Verdi to become even more critical of the state of the modern operatic world. In response, he seems to have determined to make *Aida* his last opera — and to turn his attention from time to time, as had Rossini, to other forms of vocal composition.

About one month after beginning work in 1873 on the full-scale *Requiem* Verdi received word of the death of the revered literary figure, Alessan-

dro Manzoni. For the composer this must have signalled once again the death of the old world that he so much loved. Far beyond writing the greatest Italian novel, *I promessi sposi*, Manzoni had profoundly reshaped Italian consciousness of its language and its arts in the crucial decades prior to the wars for independence. As one of the first Italian proponents of Shakespeare, Schlegel and others, he was a major source of the Italian strain of Romanticism, a spiritual and artistic father to the grand epoch in which the composer had made his career. Deeply moved, Verdi now decided that this new *Requiem* must be completed, that it should honor Manzoni and that it would be first heard in public one year after Manzoni's death. This was indeed the case: the work received its first performance on 22 May 1874 in the Church of San Marco in Milan. It has been a staple of the repertory ever since.

For perceptive Italian musicians of 1874 Verdi's new *Requiem* carried a number of strong, if tacit, messages. In a world of increasing musical challenge, complexity and internationalism, its principal allegiance was to the Italian past. Notwithstanding the variety of its "modern" orchestral effects, it embraced the tradition of Mediterranean lyricism, of *vocal* composition stressing the "picture," not the frame. Accordingly, Verdi hoped that it might serve as both an inspiring example and a gentle rebuke to those younger Italians ever more seduced away towards instrumental composition and Northern European orchestral density. Perhaps more significantly, Verdi's *Requiem* may be understood as commemorating far more than the death of either Rossini or Man-

zoni. It grieved the passing of the whole culture that flowed from those two men; it grieved a whole way of life, a whole *modo di sentire* ("way of feeling"), as the composer might have put it. The age of Italian musical strength was dissolving, and Verdi clearly foresaw the looming barrenness and inevitable demise of this exuberant phase of Italian *vocalità*. The *Requiem* is its memorial.

The first of the seven movements joins together the Introit (a psalm, "Te decet hymnus," flanked on either side by its antiphon, "Requiem aeternam") with the subsequent Kyrie. The work opens with extremely restrained, muffled sounds: as if with a reverent, head-bowing gesture, muted strings descend in A minor and lead into *sottovoce* choral murmurs that grow into the throbbing, descending sequences of "dona eis, Domine." The minor mode gives way to major at the first mention of "light," "et lux perpetua." This is music that will recur not only later in this movement but also, as a memory, in the final one: it is one of the central musical images of the piece. From it emerges the psalm for voices alone, evoking the "strict" four-part style. A repetition of the "Requiem" antiphon follows, but this time it blossoms into a surging, imitative "Kyrie" begun strikingly by the tenor: here the strings remove their mutes: here the winds enter for the first time: here the piece begins in earnest to move forward.

The second movement, the "Dies irae," is by far the longest and most complex. It is subdivided into an initial chorus, "Dies irae," and eight en-

suing subsections. Within these successive, brief "submovements" — which constitute a veritable parade of individual and communal utterances, a picture, no doubt, of the diverse voices of mankind on that *dies irae* — the initial choral music recurs twice as a ritornello within the larger structure. This chorus is also heard again, along with the opening "Requiem," in the final movement, "Liberata." With its unshamed extroversion, spectacular scoring, and celebrated *fortissimo* initial hammer-blows, the "Dies irae," too, is a focal image in Verdi's *Requiem*. Its desperate cries and the sheer risk of a compositional idea that holds nothing in reserve remain imprinted in the mind long after the entire work is concluded.

Following the first "Dies irae," the individual submovements are divided into two groups of four, each with its own logical progression, and each culminating in a formal Quartet. The first group generally ascends in voice-type and complexity. It begins in the choir and low, solo bass ("Tuba mirum" — "Mors stupebit") and begins to move "upward" to the mezzo-soprano ("Liber scriptus," the only portion of the *Requiem* that Verdi recomposed after the première: originally written as a fugue for chorus, it was replaced with the present movement in 1875). After a reprise of the "Dies irae" ritornello, the first group continues its ascent with a trio for soprano, mezzo-soprano and tenor, "Quid sum miser;" and the progression of individual submovements reaches its goal in the climactic Quartet, "Rex tremendae majestatis." Its principal melody, "Salva me, fons pietatis," foreshadows the pivotal, sweeping phrase for Amelia within the *concertato* of the

Council Chamber Scene in Verdi's 1881 revision of *Simon Boccanegra*: one can see here some elements of the composer's "late style" in the making.

Complementing the first group's essentially upward motion, the second group of four begins to "descend," first through a duet for soprano and mezzo-soprano ("Recordare"), then to the celebrated tenor solo, "Ingemisco," downward further to the solo bass again ("Confutatis maledictis"), and finally — after another electrifying "Dies irae" reprise — to the goal of the second group: the "Lacrymosa" Quartet with Chorus. Whereas the earlier Quartet had looked forward in some thematic respects to the 1881 *Simon Boccanegra*, the expansive "Lacrymosa" looks backward to the 1867 *Don Carlos*. In fact, its principal melody is an adaptation of the opening melody from an ensemble that Verdi had cut from Act IV before that opera's première, "Qui me rendra ce mort," originally planned to be sung shortly after the murder of Rodrigue.

The next movement, the Offertory-Quartet "Domine Jesu" — again particularly redolent of Verdi's "French" style, a suave but broad, highly inflected and nuanced style that he had been absorbing and making his own in the 1860s — may readily be perceived as a five-part arch structure, *ABCBA*. Its outer sections are concerned with elaborating and decorating the gently rocking melody first heard in the cellos as an underpinning for the opening lines of text. The more vigorous second and fourth sections, "Quam olim Abrahæ," provide something resembling a dramatic *stretta* complement to the opening. The

glowing centerpiece of the arch is the still, nearly motionless and smoothly undular "Hostias," introduced by the tenor with a melody that recalls portions of his earlier "Ingemisco" in the "Dies irae."

The fourth and fifth movements are brief and contrast markedly with one another. The fleet-footed, remarkably original "Sanctus" is an energetic, imitative *tour de force* for double chorus. It rushes forward with every bar, races rapidly through the "Benedictus" and never flags for an instant, although it does broaden impressively in the final, *dolcissimo* "Pleni sunt coeli" near the end of the movement. After such brisk acrobatics, the subsequent "Agnus Dei" appears as simplicity itself, a specially consecrated space within the *Requiem* as a whole. Here we find a single four-phrase, C major melody, initially stated unharmonized by the soprano and mezzo-soprano in octaves, treated to a set of five variations. Given such restrained means, the effects produced are astonishing. Indeed, one of the most affecting moments in the entire *Requiem* occurs at the point when the second "variation," a minor-mode statement for the two soloists, gives way to the full chorus entering, *pianissimo*, in the major at the start of the third: the very breath of the chorus, supported by the new, expressive harmonization, is used as a conveyor of the sacred.

The sixth movement, the Communion "Lux aeterna," opens with a long phrase for the mezzo-soprano accompanied by tremolo shimmers in the subdivided violins. With the entry of the bass, at "Requiem aeternam," the music turns ritualistically somber: the musical archetype evoked

here is that of the funeral march — a slow-paced, dotted rhythm, inexorable course, backed ominously by quiet timpani rumblings and fatalistic punctuations from the low brass and bassoons. This bass-led "Requiem aeternam" music appears twice. Each time it gives rise to a florid, more hopeful continuation "et lux perpetua luceat eis," bringing in the mezzo and tenor soloists. The second of these continuations is expanded at length, more "operatically," and one of its repeated figures at the cadence near the end, "quia pius est," would be re-employed (in the same key) in the Act II Quartet of *Otello*. The final "Libera me" is a reworking of the 1869 original planned for the *Messa-Rossini*. In its context here it serves as both a dramatic conclusion to and an unerringly effective summary of the entire *Requiem*. The soprano's chromatic presentation of "tremens factus sum ego et ti-

meo," for instance, recalls moments of the earlier "Quam olim Abrahæ" from the second movement. Portions of the spectacular "Dies irae" ritornello and the initial, comforting "Requiem aeternam" follow (the latter now "symbolically" transposed up a semitone and expanded beautifully, with the soprano soloist — in the role, one supposes, of "good angel" — leading the chorus throughout this ascent. And the concluding fugue, "Libera me, Domine," clearly alludes to the theme and textures of the earlier imitative "Sanctus": its opening notes are essentially those of the "Sanctus" played upside down and given a differing continuation. After several impressive moments the fugue winds down to the moving, declamatory, low C supplication by the soprano, "Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna, in die illa tremenda," accompanied *morendo* by the chorus.