

## Verdi: Requiem

Verdi wrote very few non-operatic works – but of these the one which stands out is the Requiem. Naturally, much of his operatic skill is present in the Requiem, but the style and texture are very different, despite the oft-made quip that it is his “opera for the church!” There is no question that Verdi was a master of dramatic art, as can be seen in his many operas based on Shakespeare, and so it is with the Requiem. In it he captures the drama of the Latin text and magnifies it through music.

The story of how the Requiem came into being is an interesting one. Many music-lovers know that it was composed for Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873) (author of *I Promessi Sposi* – The Betrothed) who was regarded by Italians, especially the Milanese, as the central figure of Italian culture and literature of the 19th century. But it is less well known that Verdi had been the innovator of a plan to honor Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868) by collaborating with other leading composers of Italian opera on a requiem to be played on the anniversary of Rossini’s death. Verdi’s contribution was to be the *Libera me*. However, the anniversary of Rossini’s death came and went without any concrete result. (The project was eventually completed, but the memorial to Rossini never actually took place). When Alessandro Manzoni died in 1873, Verdi decided to compose a memorial requiem entirely himself. Verdi reworked the existing *Libera me* and incorporated thematic material from it in the other movements.

The Requiem was written during a fallow period of fifteen years between Aida and Othello, twenty years after his incredible hat trick of Rigoletto, Trovatore and Traviata. The orchestration and length of the work make it a very close second to Berlioz’s Requiem (with which Verdi was quite familiar). It is divided into seven segments, and of these, the *Dies Irae* comprises approximately half the total length of the piece.

Each of the soloists makes an entry in the *Kyrie eleison*, after which they are parsed out in all their permutations, with such seeming inevitability that you scarcely notice the great care the composer has taken to assure each an equal share of the action. The bass, like an angel of death, has the first solo of the *Dies irae*, albeit a brief one, at the words *Mors stupebit*. Then comes the mezzo’s haunting aria on the proffering of the Book of the Dead (*Liber scriptus*), in which all things are written, nothing hidden. At the center of the movement the soprano joins the mezzo-soprano for the *Recordare*, with its striking cello-dominated climax; there follow the big solos for tenor (*Ingemisco*, a plea to be numbered not with the goats but among the lambs) and bass (*Confutatis maledictis*, begging to be spared from the acrid flame of Judgment Day). Meanwhile there are fine trio and quartet passages, and, in the profound tutti’s of the *Salve me* and *Lacrymosa*, a scoring that allows the soprano’s several high B’s and C’s to float over the mass of performers with crystalline clarity.

Verdi’s *Dies Irae* is a frightening apocalypse, with its bass-drum explosions and rapid passagework fleeing in all directions. This section should terrify with its graphic suggestion of the Devil chasing you to Hell. Nor are Gabriel’s trumpets in the *Tuba mirum* especially comforting, but Verdi offsets the horror with passages of tender supplication and a glimmer of optimism as in the *Offertorium*.

The *Sanctus* is a fugue for double chorus. In contrast, the *Agnus Dei* is a model of simplicity and eloquence. Liturgically, the *Libera me* is not part of the requiem mass but is recited over the coffin as it is taken from the church. It reprises some of the requiem text and Verdi reprises some of the earlier thematic material. The music moves into a fugue which dissolves into an insistent, almost primitively

rhythmic "libera me, Domine" (deliver me, O Lord) before ending quietly with the same chant-like material with which the movement opened.

The theatricality of Verdi's setting has led some to question the sincerity of the Requiem. This really misses the point! Verdi intended the Requiem as a monument to a great man, not as a liturgical work, and in this Verdi succeeded beyond all expectation. Whatever his own personal religious views, Verdi invested the text with a great intensity and depth of feeling which still ring true.

For soloists (S,Ms,T,B); chorus (SSAATTBB); piccolo, flutes I-II, oboes I-II, clarinets I-II, bassoons I-IV; horns I-IV, trumpets I-IV, offstage trumpets I-IV, trombones I-III, tuba; timpani, bass drum; strings. Composed 1874 in Sant'Agata, in memory of Alessandro Manzoni. First performed 22 May 1874 at the Church of San Marco, Milan, Verdi conducting.

### **I. Requiem and Kyrie**

#### *Chorus:*

Requiem aeternam 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.

#### *Quartet and Chorus:*

Kyrie eleison. Christe eleison.  
Kyrie eleison.

### **II. Sequence**

#### *Chorus:*

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 sepulcra regionem,  
coget omnes ante thronum.

#### *Bass:*

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

#### *Mezzo-soprano and Chorus:*

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

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

### **I. Requiem and Kyrie**

#### *Chorus:*

Grant them eternal rest, O Lord;  
and may perpetual light shine upon them.  
A hymn in Zion befits you, O God,  
and a debt will be paid to you in Jerusalem.  
Hear my prayer:  
all earthly flesh will come to you.

#### *Quartet and Chorus:*

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

### **II. Sequence**

#### *Chorus:*

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

How great will be the terror,  
when the Judge comes  
who will smash everything completely!

The trumpet, scattering a marvelous sound  
through the tombs of every land,  
will gather all before the throne.

#### *Bass:*

Death and Nature shall stand amazed,  
when all Creation rises again  
to answer to the Judge.

#### *Mezzo-soprano and Chorus:*

A written book will be brought forth,  
which contains everything  
for which the world will be judged.

Therefore when the Judge takes His seat,  
whatever is hidden will be revealed:  
nothing shall remain unavenged.

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

*Soprano, Mezzo-soprano and Tenor:*

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

*Solo Quartet and Chorus:*

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

*Soprano and Mezzo-soprano:*

Recordare, Jesu pie,  
quod sum causa tuae viae:  
ne me perdas illa die.  
Quaerens me, sedisti lassus;  
redemisti crucem pacem:  
tantus labor non sit causas.

Juste iudex ultionis:

donum fac remissionis  
ante diem rationis.

*Tenor:*

Ingemisco tamquam reus,  
culpa rubet vultus meus;  
supplicanti parce, Deus.

Qui Mariam absolvisti,  
et latronem exaudisti,  
mihi quoque spem dedisti.

Preces meae non sunt digne,  
sed tu, bonus, fac benigne,  
ne perenni cremer igne.

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

*Bass and Chorus:*

Confutatis maledictis,  
flammis acerbis addictis,  
voca me cum benedictis.

Oro supplex et acclinis,  
cor contritum quasi cinis:  
gere curam mei finis.

*Chorus:*

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

*Solo Quartet and Chorus:*

Lacrymosa dies illa,

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

*Soprano, Mezzo-soprano and Tenor:*

What can a wretch like me say?  
Whom shall I ask to intercede for me,  
when even the just ones are unsafe?

*Solo Quartet and Chorus:*

King of dreadful majesty,  
who freely saves the redeemed ones,  
save me, O font of pity.

*Soprano and Mezzo-soprano:*

Recall, merciful Jesus,  
that I was the reason for your journey:  
do not destroy me on that day.  
In seeking me, you sat down wearily;  
enduring the Cross, you redeemed me:  
do not let these pains to have been in vain.

Just Judge of punishment:

give me the gift of redemption  
before the day of reckoning.

*Tenor:*

I groan as a guilty one,  
and my face blushes with guilt;  
spare the supplicant, O God.

You, who absolved Mary Magdalene,  
and heard the prayer of the thief,  
have given me hope, as well.

My prayers are not worthy,  
but show mercy, O benevolent one,  
lest I burn forever in fire.

Give me a place among the sheep,  
and separate me from the goats,  
placing me on your right hand.

*Bass and Chorus:*

When the damned are silenced,  
and given to the fierce flames,  
call me with the blessed ones.

I pray, suppliant and kneeling,  
with a heart contrite as ashes:  
take my ending into your care.

*Chorus:*

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

*Solo Quartet and Chorus:*

That day is one of weeping,

qua resurget ex favilla,  
judicandus homo reus.

Huic ergo parce, Deus.  
Pie Jesu Domine:  
dona eis requiem. Amen.

### III. Offertorio

*Quartet:*

Domine Jesu Christe, Rex gloriae:  
libera animas omnium fidelum  
defunctorum de poenis inferni  
et profundo lacu; libera eas de ore leonis;  
ne absorbeat eas tartarus,  
ne cadant in obscurum.  
Sed signifer sanctus Michael  
repraesentet eas in lucem sanctam.  
Quam olim Abrahae 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 Abrahae promisisti et semini ejus.

Libera animas omnium fidelum defunctorum de poenis inferni;  
fac eas de morte transire ad vitam.

### IV. Sanctus

*Double Chorus:*

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth.  
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.  
Hosanna in excelsis!  
Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.  
Hosanna in excelsis!

### V. Agnus Dei

*Soprano, Mezzo-soprano, and Chorus:*

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

### VI. Lux aeterna

*Mezzo-soprano, Tenor and Bass:*

Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine,  
cum sanctis tuis in aeternam; quia pius es.  
Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis,  
cum sanctis tuis in aeternam; quia pius es.

### VII. Libera me

*Soprano and Chorus:*

Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna in die illa tremenda;  
quando coeli movendi sunt et terra:  
dum veneris judicare saeculum per ignem.

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

Dies irae, dies illa calamitatis et miseriae; dies magna et amara  
valde.

on which shall rise from the ashes  
the guilty man, to be judged.

Therefore, spare this one, O God.  
Merciful Lord Jesus:  
grant them peace. Amen.

### III. Offertorio

*Quartet:*

O Lord Jesus Christ, King of Glory:  
deliver the souls of all the faithful  
dead from the pains of hell and from the  
deep pit; deliver them from the mouth of the lion;  
that hell may not swallow them, and  
that they may not fall into darkness.  
But may the holy standard-bearer Michael  
show them the holy light; which you once promised to  
Abraham and his descendents.  
We offer to you, O Lord, sacrifices and prayers.  
Receive them on behalf of those souls we commemorate today.  
Grant, O Lord, that they might pass from death into that life  
which you once promised to Abraham and his descendents.

Deliver the souls of all the faithful dead from the pains of hell;  
Grant that they might pass from death into that life.

### IV. Sanctus

*Double Chorus:*

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth.  
Heaven and earth are filled with your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest!  
Blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest!

### V. Agnus Dei

*Soprano, Mezzo-soprano, and Chorus:*

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, grant  
them rest. Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world,  
grant them rest everlasting.

### VI. Lux aeterna

*Mezzo-soprano, Tenor and Bass:*

Let eternal light shine upon them, O Lord,  
with your saints forever; for you are merciful.  
Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, and may perpetual light shine  
upon them with your saints forever; for you are merciful.

### VII. Libera me

*Soprano and Chorus:*

Deliver me, O Lord, from eternal death on that awful day,  
when the heavens and the earth shall be moved:  
when you will come to judge the world by fire.

I tremble, and I fear the judgment and the wrath to come,  
when the heavens and the earth shall be moved.

The day of wrath, that day of calamity and misery; a great and  
bitter day, indeed.

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

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

Libera me, Domine, quando coeli movendi sunt et terra;  
dum veneris judicare saeculum per ignem.

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

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

Deliver me, Lord, from eternal death on that awful day.

Deliver me, O Lord, when the heavens and the earth shall be moved; when you will come to judge the world by fire.

Deliver me, Lord, from eternal death on that awful day.  
Deliver me.