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Verdi: *Requiem*

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Preface

With the completion of *Aida* in 1871 and the *Requiem* in 1874, Verdi, in his sixty-first year, believed that he had ended his career as a composer. There would follow only the revisions of *Simon Boccanegra* and *Don Carlos* (1881 and 1883, respectively) and his last two masterpieces, *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893). Since the mid-1840s he had dominated without a rival the field of Italian opera, which is to say, Italian music, for opera was the only genre that mattered. His only work rivalling the operas, both in importance and quality, is the *Requiem*, probably the most frequently performed major choral work composed since the compilation of Mozart's Requiem.

In the last few decades most of the philological problems involving the *Requiem* have been resolved; and Chapters 1 and 2 summarize the current state of our knowledge about its genesis, its reception history, and contemporary performing practices. It should come as no surprise that there are few detailed analytical or critical studies of the *Requiem*: analysis of Verdi's music began in earnest only in the mid-1960s, and most energy has gone into study of the operas.¹ Chapters 3–9 provide a comprehensive view of the work, while exploring some of the critical issues raised by individual sections. One of these issues is Verdi's interpretation of the text and his reception of works that may have influenced him: the settings of Mozart, Cherubini, and Berlioz. Another aspect of its reception, the reactions of some of the major critics, is also considered in these chapters. The various pieces suggested different approaches, and I have not felt bound to adopt a uniform approach to all parts of the work.

In composing the *Requiem* Verdi made use of earlier material: most important, the *Libera me* is a revision of the movement composed in 1869 for a Requiem Mass written to commemorate the death of Rossini. The chapter on the *Libera me* includes discussion of some of the major changes, while Chapter 10 considers the two remaining revisions: the fashioning of the principal theme of the 'Lacrymosa' from a duet written for *Don Carlos* but discarded before the premiere, and the replacement of the original 'Liber

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scriptus' section of the *Dies iræ*, a choral fugue, with the mezzo-soprano solo known today.

The last two chapters consider two issues concerning the work as a whole: its *unità musicale* (to use Verdi's phrase) and, the central issue in its reception, its genre – specifically, the degree to which the *Requiem* is 'operatic'.

Terminology

The titles of the seven 'movements' appear in italics, while a textual incipit in quotation marks refers to individual sections or subsections: e.g., the first movement, *Requiem e Kyrie*, is composed of the 'Requiem æternam' and the 'Kyrie'; the 'Dies iræ' and 'Tuba mirum' are the first two sections of the *Dies iræ*. Verdi's entire work is usually referred to as the *Requiem* (in italics), while the genre to which it belongs, the Requiem, appears in roman type.

Scores

For all but the opening chapters the reader will need a score at hand, ideally an orchestral score furnished with bar numbers. I recommend the critical edition of the *Requiem* I prepared for *The Works of Giuseppe Verdi* (henceforth *WGV*), the only edition based primarily on the autograph score (and supplemented with other sources in the composer's hand, such as letters to his publisher and interventions made while proofreading a manuscript copy).² *WGV* includes the original versions of two pieces that Verdi later revised, the *Libera me* and the 'Liber scriptus' section of the *Dies iræ*.³ A few libraries own a facsimile edition of Verdi's autograph of the *Requiem*; more accessible is the recently published facsimile of the autograph of his 1869 *Libera me* movement.⁴ Both repay study but are not essential for the discussion here. There are many available recordings of the *Requiem* and even one of the complete *Messa per Rossini*, including Verdi's 1869 *Libera me* movement.⁵

Documentation

The first two chapters borrow heavily from the introduction to my edition in *WGV*, and I have not supplied references easily traced there. I have lived with the *Requiem* for many years, and it is difficult to trace the provenance of my ideas about it. I have doubtless pilfered some ideas and felicitous phrases of other writers without acknowledgment.

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Introductory material in Chapters 3–9

In the texts and translations extra-liturgical text appears in square brackets (immediate repetitions of text within a section, however, are not shown). The approximate durations of the various sections or movements, usually rounded off to the nearest fifteen seconds, are based upon Verdi's metronome markings (estimating the length of the fermatas and passages with verbal indications only [e.g., *più animato*]). Even when changes of tempo are not indicated, Verdi doubtless expected some interpretative freedom rather than a rigid, metronomic tempo,⁶ so to propose even an approximate duration presupposes that departures from the specified tempo will average out, that conductors will occasionally want to speed up as well as slow down.

Acknowledgments

In addition to all those who helped me prepare the critical edition of the *Requiem* and who are acknowledged there, I should like to extend my deep gratitude to Julian Rushton and Penny Souster for their perceptive editorial comments, encouragement, and nearly infinite patience.