Concerts of Thursday, November 12, and Saturday, November 14, 2015, at 8:00p.

Robert Spano, Conductor
Latonia Moore, soprano
Jennifer Johnson Cano, mezzo-soprano
Anthony Dean Griffey, tenor
Nathan Stark, bass
Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus,
Norman Mackenzie, Director of Choruses

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901)

*Messa da requiem* (1874)

I. Requiem
II. Dies irae
III. Offertorium
IV. Sanctus
V. Agnus Dei
VI. Lux aeterna
VII. Libera me

This concert will be performed without intermission.

English surtitles by Ken Meltzer
Notes on the Program by Ken Meltzer

*Messa da requiem* (1874)

Giuseppe Verdi was born in Roncole, Italy, on October 9 or 10, 1813, and died in Milan, Italy, on January 27, 1901. The first performance of the *Messa da requiem* took place at the Church of San Marco in Milan on May 22, 1874, with the composer conducting. The *Messa da requiem* is scored for soprano, alto, tenor, and bass solo, mixed chorus, piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, four bassoons, four horns, four trumpets (and four offstage trumpets), three trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, and strings. Approximate performance time is eighty-four minutes.


Robert Shaw Performances: (Subscription, unless otherwise noted): May 22, 23, and 25, 1969, Atlanta Symphony Chamber Chorus, Choral Guild of Atlanta; May 19, 20, and 21, 1977, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus; March 20, 21, and 22, 1980, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus; April 3, 1980, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus (Tour); April 9, 10, and 11, 1987, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra Chorus.

ASO Recording: Telarc CD-80152 (2 discs), Robert Shaw, Conductor

“Stay away from priests”

Composer Arrigo Boito (1842-1918), who also served as the librettist for Giuseppe Verdi’s final operatic masterworks, *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893), offered this description of the maestro's religious beliefs:

This is the day, of all days of the year, that he loved best. Christmas eve reminded him of the holy marvels of childhood, the enchantments of a faith that is truly celestial only when it attains to belief in miracles. That belief, alas, he lost early, like all of us, but perhaps more than the rest of us he retained all his life a keen regret for it.

He provided an example of Christian faith by the moving beauty of his religious works, by observing rites (you must remember his beautiful head bowed in the chapel of [his home in] Sant’Agata), by his illustrious homage to (Alessandro) Manzoni (the *Messa da requiem*), by the directions for his funeral found in his will: “one
priest, one candle, one cross.” He knew that faith was the sustenance of hearts.

...In the ideal and moral sense he was a great Christian, but one should take care not to present him as a Catholic in the political and strictly theological sense of the word: nothing could be further from the truth.

The “truth” was that Giuseppe Verdi harbored a lifelong distrust for organized religion. “Sta lontan dai pret” (“Stay away from priests”), he once cautioned a member of his family. And in such operas as Don Carlos and Aida, Verdi graphically portrays hypocrisy within the religious hierarchy.

Verdi’s negative feelings toward organized religion may have had their origins in a childhood incident. When Verdi was about seven years old, he served as an altar boy at the church of San Michele in his birthplace of Roncole. During Mass, the young Verdi failed to respond promptly to the priest’s request for water and wine. The priest shoved Verdi, and the child fell from the altar. The humiliated boy responded with the peasant curse, “Dio t’ manda ‘na sajetta!” (“May God strike you with lightning!”) In a surreal turn of events, eight years later the priest was indeed struck by lightning and killed.

But Verdi was also capable of writing music of extraordinary beauty that portrayed sincere religious fervor. One need only hear the supplications of Amelia in Un ballo in maschera, Leonora in La forza del destino, Aida, or Desdemona in Otello to realize that Verdi’s operatic characters could pray with as much devotion as anyone. And, it should be noted that Italy’s foremost opera composer ended his career with a sacred work, the Quattro pezzi sacri (1898).

“I would have knelt before him”

The 1874 Requiem Mass represents Verdi’s greatest achievement in the realm of sacred music. The work had its origin in the November 13, 1868 passing of opera composer Gioachino Rossini. Verdi proposed that several Italian composers collaborate on a Requiem Mass to be presented on the first anniversary of Rossini’s death. Verdi contributed the concluding Libera me to the Messa per Rossini. Due to various political intrigues, the work was not performed until 1988. However the death of another immortal Italian artist five years after Rossini’s demise inspired Verdi to compose his Requiem Mass.

Throughout his life, Verdi revered the beloved Italian writer Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873), the author of the epic 1827 novel, I promessi sposi (The Betrothed). I promessi sposi tells the story of a young couple in early 17th-century Italy who are separated by political and social tyranny. This magnificent work resonated with those who, like Verdi, advocated the overthrow of foreign rulers and the unification of Italy. Verdi himself called I promessi sposi “not just a book, but a consolation to all mankind.” After finally meeting the author in 1868, Verdi wrote:
“What can I say of Manzoni? How to describe the extraordinary, indefinable sensation the presence of that saint...produced in me? I would have knelt down before him if we were allowed to worship men.”

Manzoni died on May 22, 1873. Verdi was so devastated by the loss that he was unable to attend the funeral. However, Verdi wrote to publisher Giulio Ricordi: “I shall come in a little while to visit his grave, alone and without being seen, and perhaps (after further reflection, and after I have weighed up my strength) to propose some way of honoring his memory.” Verdi decided that his homage to Manzoni would be in the form of a Requiem Mass, to be offered on the first anniversary of the author’s death. In the Manzoni Requiem, Verdi incorporated the Libera me from the ill-fated Messa per Rossini.

“His latest opera in ecclesiastical garb”

The premiere of Verdi’s Requiem Mass took place in Milan at the Church of San Marco on May 22, 1874. Verdi himself conducted the orchestra, chorus and distinguished vocal quartet of soprano Teresa Stolz, mezzo-soprano Maria Waldmann, tenor Giuseppe Capponi, and bass Ormondo Maini. Reactions of the audience and critics were generally favorable. However, on the day before the premiere, the conductor, pianist, and Richard Wagner disciple, Hans von Bülow, wrote the following for the Allgemeine Zeitung:

Tomorrow will see at the Church of St. Mark, Milan, decked out like a theatre for the event, a monster performance of Verdi’s Requiem, conducted, exceptionally by the composer himself...a work with which the all-powerful corrupter of Italian artistic taste presumably hopes to sweep away the remains of Rossini’s immortality, which is so troublesome to his ambition. His latest opera in ecclesiastical garb will then be exposed to public admiration at La Scala for three evenings in succession...

These words prompted Bülow’s friend, Johannes Brahms, to remark: “Bülow has made a fool of himself for all time; only a genius could write such a work.” Several years later, Bülow wrote to Verdi and confessed that a performance of the Requiem had moved him to tears. “Now I admire you, I love you!”, Bülow exclaimed. “Will you forgive me, will you use the sovereign’s right to grant pardon?...Long live VERDI, the Wagner of our dear allies!” Verdi replied, “There is no trace of sin in you. Besides, who knows? Perhaps you were right the first time!” Privately, however, Verdi told Ricordi that Bülow was “decidedly mad.”

“To the greater glory of God”

Bülow’s original observations, as caustic as they are, do point to a criticism that has often been leveled against the Verdi Requiem—specifically, that the music is too operatic, too overtly dramatic for a liturgical text. It is true that in the composition of the Requiem, Verdi drew upon his thirty-five years of experience
in the theater. Verdi was sixty at the time of the work’s premiere, and had composed all but two of his twenty-eight operas. In Verdi’s defense, however, one might rhetorically inquire what text is more dramatic than one depicting man at the end of his days upon Earth, awaiting eternal judgment?

While some may question the appropriateness of Verdi’s setting of the *Requiem*, few would argue with the proposition that the work is the creation of a genius at the height of his powers. For Verdi’s part, he summarized his feelings about the *Manzoni Requiem* in the following manner: “I have done nothing but write note after note, to the greater glory of God...Now the music is done, and I am happy to have written it.”
Texts and Translations

I. REQUIEM

Requiem aeternum (soloists and chorus)

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.
Te decet hymnus, Deus, in Sion,
et tibi redetur votum in Jerusalem.
Exaudi orationem meam.
Ad te omnis caro veniet.
Requiem aeternum dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.
Kyrie eleison;
Christe eleison.

Grant them eternal rest, O Lord
and may perpetual light shine upon them.
Thou shalt have praise in Zion, oh God,
and homage shall be paid to Thee in Jerusalem.
Hear my prayer.
To Thee all flesh shall come.
Grant them eternal rest, O Lord
and may perpetual light shine upon them.
Lord, have mercy upon us;
Christ have mercy upon us.

II. DIES IRAE

Dies irae (chorus)

Dies irae, dies illa
solvet saeculum in favilla,
teste David cum Sibylla.
Quantus tremor est futurus,
quando judex est venturus
cuncta stricte discussurus.

This day, this day of wrath
shall consume the world in ashes,
as prophesied by David and the Sibyl.
What trembling there shall be
when the Judge shall come
to weigh everything strictly.

Tuba mirum (bass and chorus)
Tuba mirum spargens sonum
der sepulchra regionum
cogit omnes ante tronum.
Mors stupebit et natura,
cum resurget creatura
judicanti responsura.

The trumpet, scattering its awful sound
across the graves of all lands,
summons all before the throne.
Death and nature shall stand amazed
when creation arises
to answer to the Judge.

**Liber scriptus (mezzo-soprano and chorus)**

Liber scriptus proferetur
in quo totum continetur,
unde mundus judicetur.
Judex ergo cum sedebit
quidquid latet apparebit,
il inultum remanebit.

A written book shall be brought forth
that contains everything
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 (soprano, mezzo-soprano, and tenor)**

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

What shall I, a wretch, say?
To which protector shall I appeal
when even the righteous is barely safe?

**Rex tremendae (soloists and chorus)**

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

King of awful majesty,
who freely saves the redeemed,
save me, fount of pity.

**Recordare (soprano and mezzo-soprano)**

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

Remember, gentle Jesus,
that I am the reason for Thy time on earth,
do not cast me out on that day.
Seeking me, Thou didst sink down wearily,
Thou didst redeem me by enduring the cross,
such travail must not be in vain.
Just judge of vengeance,
give me the gift of redemption
before the day of reckoning.

**Ingemisco (tenor)**

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

I groan, like the sinner that I am,
and my face reddens with guilt,
spare the supplicant, O God.
Thou, who pardoned Mary
and heard the prayer of the thief,
hast given me hope as well.
My prayers are not worthy,
but Thou, good one, in pity
let me not burn in the everlasting fire.
Give me a place among the sheep
and separate me from the goats,
placing me on Thy right hand.

**Confutatis (bass and chorus)**

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

When the damned are cast away
and consigned to the searing flames,
call me with the blessed.
Bowed down in supplication I beg Thee,
my heart as contrite as ashes:
take Thou my ending into Thy care.

**Lacrymosa (soloists and chorus)**

Lacrymosa dies illa
qua resurget ex favilla
judicandus homo reus;
huic ergo parce Deus.
Pie Jesu, Domine,
dona eis requiem.
Amen.

Oh this day full of weeping
when from the ashes arises
the guilty man, to be judged:
have mercy upon him, O Lord.
merciful Lord Jesus,
grant them rest.
Amen.

**III. OFFERTORIUM**

**Domine Jesu Christe (soloists)**

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;
sed signifer sanctus Michael
repraesentet eas in lucem sanctam,
quam olim Abrahae pomisisti
et semini ejus.

Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory,
deliver the souls of the faithful departed
from the pains of hell
and the deep pit.
Deliver them from the mouth of the lion,
that hell may not engulf them,
and that they not be plunged into darkness;
but may the holy standard-bearer Michael
lead them into the holy light,
as Thou didst promise of old 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,
quam olim Abrahae promisisti
et semini ejus.

In praise we offer to Thee, O Lord,
sacrifices and prayers,
do Thou receive them on behalf of souls of those
whom we remember this day:
allow them, O Lord, to pass
from death to life,
as Thou didst promise of old to Abraham
and his seed.

IV. SANCTUS

Sanctus (chorus)

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus,
Dominus Deus Saboath!
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis!
Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini!
Hosanna in excelsis!
Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God of hosts!
Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.
Glory to God in the highest!
Blessed is he who cometh in the name of the Lord.
Glory to God in the highest!

V. AGNUS DEI

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.

Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world,
grant them rest.
Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world,
grant them eternal rest.

VI. LUX AETERNA

Lux aeterna (mezzo-soprano, tenor, and bass)

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

May everlasting light shine upon them, O Lord,
with Thy saints forever,
for Thou art merciful.

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

Lord, grant them eternal rest
and let perpetual light shine upon them
with Thy Saints forever,
for Thou art merciful.

VII. LIBERA ME

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.

Deliver me, O Lord, from eternal death
in that awful day
when the heavens and earth shall be moved,
when Thou shalt come to judge the world by fire.

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

I am seized with fear and trembling,
until the trial shall be at hand and the wrath to come:
when the heavens and the earth shall be moved.

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

This day, this day of wrath,
of calamity and misery,
a great day and bitter indeed,
when Thou shalt come to judge the world by fire.

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

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

Libera me, Domine, etc.

Deliver me, O Lord, etc.