

Requiem

by Giuseppe Verdi

About the Music

What kind of piece is this?

Verdi's *Requiem* (also called *Messa da Requiem*, or *Requiem Mass*) is a musical setting of the text from the Catholic funeral mass. It is written for four soloists, a double choir, and orchestra. It has seven sections, all based on the order of the Catholic mass: *Introit* and *Kyrie*, *Dies Irae*, *Offertory*, *Sanctus*, *Agnus Dei*, *Lux Aeterna*, and *Libera me*. Unlike other multi-movement works, *Requiem* is all one continuous piece. This also means there are no pauses between movements, and there is never an intermission during the performance of this piece.

When was it written?

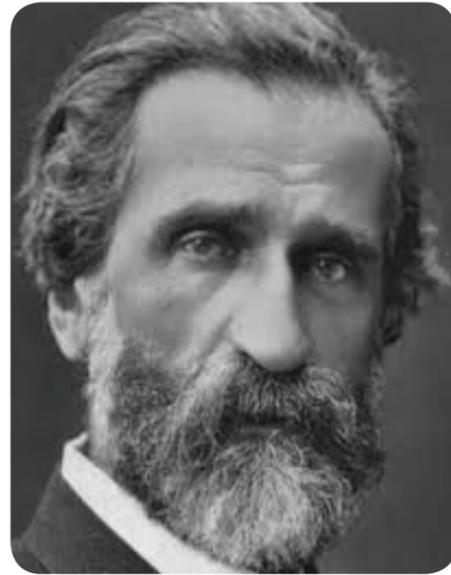
After composer Gioachino Rossini's death in 1868, Verdi formed a team of some of the best composers in Italy to create a Requiem Mass to honor Rossini. Verdi wrote the final section called *Libera me*, and the other composers each contributed to the rest of the piece. The premiere was scheduled for November 13, 1869, the first anniversary of Rossini's death. However, nine days before the performance, the committee abandoned the project. Verdi, however, was not satisfied, and kept working on his *Libera me*. In May of 1873, the Italian poet and novelist Alessandro Manzoni, whom Verdi had admired all his life, passed away. Upon hearing of his death, Verdi decided to once again write a Requiem – this time for Manzoni. Unlike the Requiem for Rossini, this piece would be entirely his own work, and he persisted until its completion. It does include a revised version of the *Libera me* Verdi originally composed for Rossini. It was first performed in the San Marco church in Milan on May 22, 1874, on the anniversary of Manzoni's death.

What is it about?

This work was never intended for religious use, but rather as a concert work that honored Alessandro Manzoni. Verdi was not religious at all; in fact his wife considered him an atheist and said that he would laugh and call her mad when she talked about religion. This piece is very powerful, and explores the many emotions related to the concept of death. Music editor George Marek called it “a prayer for peace by a man who had devoted his music to conflict.”

About the Composer

Giuseppe Verdi | Born October 10, 1813 in Le Roncole, Italy | Died January 27, 1901 in Milan, Italy



Listen for...

The “Dies Irae” section. This is one of the most well-known parts of this piece, but it is also one of the most widely used melodies in music by other composers. The melody comes from a hymn that was written around the 13th century. “Dies Irae” translates to “Day of Wrath” and represents the fury and power of the Last Judgment, when the dead are summoned before God.



Verdi conducting the premier of his opera “Aida” in Paris, France in 1871.

Family and Career

Verdi was born to working class Italian parents. His mother, Luigia Uttini, was a spinner, and his father, Carlo Guiseppe Verdi, was a local inn-keeper. The composer showed a musical talent at a young age and he played organ for his local church at just nine years old, Verdi did not receive any formal music education until he was 19. He applied to the Milan Conservatory when his family moved to Busseto, but he was rejected due to his age. Following his rejection to the Conservatory, he began studying with Vincenzo Lavigna, who was a famous composer from Milan. Soon after, Verdi began his career as a conductor and organist for his local orchestra.

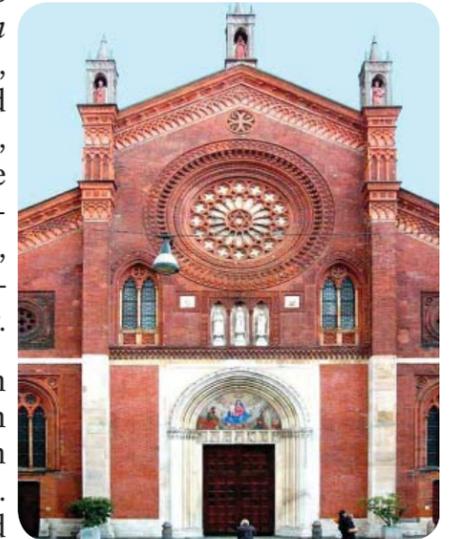
In 1831, Verdi's music caught the attention of merchant Antonio Barezzi, and shortly after that, Verdi moved in with Barezzi and began giving singing and piano lessons to his daughter Margherita. The two fell in love and were married in 1836. They had two children, Virginia and Icilio. In this time, Verdi began writing his first opera, *Oberto*, which was very successful! However, tragedy struck Verdi when his two children died in 1838 and 1839, and his wife passed away in 1840, just months after his second opera, *Un giorno di regno*, premiered. *Un giorno di regno* was a comic opera, however, unlike *Oberto*, it was not received well by its audience and music critics. These experiences led Verdi to a severe depression, where he struggled for a few years in writing new music. Despite this, he was pushed to continue composing, and his next opera, *Nabucco*, was premiered in 1842. This opera was a major success, and it led to Verdi's “galley years,” a period where his music career erupted, and he composed nearly two major operas each year.

This period was also a much better time for Verdi personally. In this time, he embarked on many European journeys, visiting London and Paris. There, he also met soprano Giuseppe Strepponi, a woman who would become Verdi's companion and later, in 1859, his wife. Later in his life, Verdi seemed to focus more on acquiring land and building a home than composing. Though he wasn't producing as many operas as he had earlier in his life, his late operas were still continuously rising in quality. They were longer, bigger, and more diverse in character. His operas explored very challenging topics that often took audiences by surprise.

Due to the rising fame of other composers, along with Italy's criticism to political and religious topics, Verdi chose to retire in his estate at Sant'Agata. During his retirement, he focused on philanthropic projects, including founding the *Casa di Riposo per Musicisti* - a retirement home for musicians in Milan that still exists. His death in 1901 from a stroke was mourned by the entire nation with the kind of national grief associated with the passing of royalty. It is still considered to be one of the largest public events in the history of Italy, with an estimated 300,000 people in attendance.

Fun Fact

Verdi loved Shakespeare. Three of his operas were based on Shakespeare plays: *Macbeth*, *Otello*, and *Falstaff*. He also considered composing operas for *Hamlet*, *Tempest*, and *Romeo and Juliet*. And Verdi couldn't even read English!



The Church of San Marco in Milan where “Requiem” was first performed

Fun Fact

Verdi loved food - he loved to eat and cook! One of his favorite traditional Italian dishes was “Spalla de San Secondo” - made with a ham-like meat. Verdi used to send these to his friends and colleagues all over the world and give advice on how to cook it.





Verdi's *Casa di Riposo per Musicisti* in Milan, Italy

Fun Fact

In his lifetime, Verdi composed over 25 major operas. He continues to be known as one of the greatest composers in history, and his works are still performed more than any other composer's worldwide!

The Requiem through History

A "Requiem" or "Requiem Mass" (also called "Mass for the Dead") is a mass of the Catholic church that is offered as an eternal state of rest for the soul of the deceased. Traditionally, it is used as a dirge or chant in the context of a funeral. The name "Requiem" comes from the first word of the *In-troit*, the beginning of the original Latin mass: *Réquiem ætérnam dona eis, Dómine; et lux perpétua líceat eis.* ("Eternal rest give to them, O Lord; and let perpetual light shine upon them")

Many composers throughout time have written entire concert works inspired by the Requiem. In fact, over 2,000 Requiems have been written! Typically in the Renaissance time period, they were performed a capella (without accompanying instrumental parts). However, around 1600, composers starting using instruments to accompany a choir, and many included vocal soloists as well. There is no standard for how much of the traditional Latin mass composers typically include in their musical settings, and each composer has recreated the mass in their own format.

Below is a time line of some of the most popular musical settings of the Requiem Mass!



François Gossec
1760
Messa des Morts



Michael Haydn
1771
Requiem



Wolfgang Mozart
1791
Requiem



Georg Vogler
1808
Requiem



Hector Berlioz
1837
Grande Messe des Morts



Anton Bruckner
1849
Requiem



Franz von Suppe
1855
Requiem



Johannes Brahms
1869
German Requiem



Giuseppe Verdi
1874
Messa da Requiem



Antonín Dvořák
1890
Requiem



Program Notes for kids

Verdi Requiem
Saturday, April 21, 2018
8:00 p.m.
Hill Auditorium

Verdi

Requiem



Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra
Music in the Key of A²