

***Messa da Requiem*** - A requiem [Lat.] is a sacred composition honoring the dead that originated in the Catholic Church. It is called Requiem after the first word of its introduction or introit ("Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine," Grant to them eternal rest, O Lord). The format of the Latin Requiem Mass was not formalized by the Catholic Church until after the Council of Trent\* (1545-63). In Catholic ceremonies or rites, the selection of, and order in which specific prayers are said or Scripture is read, is called the Proper or Ordinary. In the Proper, the text changes with occasions such as baptisms, marriages, or funerals. The Ordinary refers to the text that does not change throughout the liturgical year. After the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic Church prescribed both Proper and Ordinary elements to be used in a Requiem. Each element, such as offering praise or thanksgiving to God, asking for God's mercy, and/or receiving forgiveness for sins, makes up movements in the requiem. Soloists may sing specific text, prayers, or portions of the Bible to introduce the idea of the movement and the chorus may be used to embellish the text.

It is interesting to note that Giuseppe Verdi was an agnostic and his Requiem began as a tribute to the composer Gioachino Rossini. When Rossini died in 1868, Verdi wrote, "A great name has disappeared from the world. His was the most extensive, the most popular reputation of our time, and it was an Italian glory!" Verdi so admired Rossini that he set about the task of enlisting the cooperative effort of 12 other Italian composers; each of whom would write a movement in tribute to Rossini with the final *Libera me* to be composed by Verdi. His motivation behind this joint venture was rooted in the frustration he felt over his attempts to help unify Italy under one ruler or king. In-fighting had occurred among Italy's States' leaders which only served to fuel the disrespect that was apparent from Italy's European neighbors. If the country could not unite, perhaps Verdi could set some sort of example by gathering a group of Italy's finest composers together to produce *Messa per Rossini*. The work was to have its premier on the first anniversary of Rossini's death. For whatever reason, the conductor lost interest in the project and the performance never took place. All the movements were returned to their composers and Verdi went on to compose his greatest opera *Aida*.

In 1873, when Italy's foremost Romantic poet Alessandro Manzoni died, Verdi was so deeply grieved that he could not attend the funeral. He was newly inspired by the life of this great national hero to complete the Requiem he had begun with his *Libera Me*. Verdi announced that the Requiem should be performed on May 22, 1874, the first anniversary of Manzoni's death. It was premiered in the Church of San Marco in Milan and was an immediate success. La Scala hosted three more performances later that week.

The Verdi Requiem did not hold to the traditional format of a requiem and it was not well-liked by the Roman Catholic Church. In the "Tuba mirum" section, trumpets played off stage and there was a rather dramatic soprano solo in the final *Libera Me* movement. These departures from the 300 year-old norm prompted Church officials to state that the work was not sacred enough and left out the important textual element of prayer for others and faith in God. In addition to these flaws in content and musicality, the church was well aware of the political views of Manzoni and was in disagreement with his beliefs. The Church placed Verdi right in the middle of these opposing points of view and accused Verdi of using the Requiem to antagonize the Church. Despite its criticisms,

the Manzoni Requiem, as it is sometimes called, enjoyed great success and was performed in opera houses and concert halls throughout Europe.

The sections of the Requiem that will be rehearsed at the Open Rehearsal are the *Sanctus* and *Libera Me*.

*Sanctus:*

Holy, holy, holy,  
Lord God of hosts!  
Heaven and earth are filled with Thy glory  
Hosanna in the highest!  
Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord  
Hosanna in the Highest!

*Libera Me*

Deliver me, O Lord, from everlasting death  
on that dreadful day  
when heaven and earth shall be shaken,  
when thou shalt come to judge the world by fire.  
I am seized with trembling and fear  
Until the judgment and the wrath to come,  
when heaven and earth shall be shaken.  
Oh! that day, that day of wrath,  
of ruin and distress,  
a great and bitter day indeed,  
when thou shalt come to judge the world by fire.  
Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord,  
and let perpetual light shine upon them.  
Deliver me, O Lord, etc.

The *Sanctus* opens with a trumpet fanfare jubilantly announcing “Sanctus!” (Holy, Holy, Holy!) An interesting fugue like section is begun by the sopranos, altos and winds. The strings enter almost immediately with a dance-like counter melody serving as ornamentation to the main theme introduced in the fugue. The movement builds in intensity and is descriptive of a joyous tribute to the Glory of God.

The *Libera Me* opens with a dramatic prayer sung by the soprano soloist. The choir enters quietly; intensity builds as pleas for deliverance and mercy are sung. Just when the listener feels somewhat at ease, the dreaded Dies Irae theme returns to emit the terror

and impending doom of Judgment Day. A return to the opening theme and text of the first movement (Kyrie) follows. “Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them. The *Libera Me* ends with another dramatic soprano solo followed by an intense fugue which revolves around the text “Deliver me, O Lord!”

\* “Council of Trent ,(1545-1563), 19th ecumenical council of the Roman Catholic church, which, in response to the Protestant Reformation, initiated a general reform of the church and precisely defined its essential dogmas. The decrees of the council were confirmed by Pope Pius IV on January 26, 1564, and they set the standard of faith and practice for the church until the mid-20th century.” (Microsoft Encarta)