

**Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society**  
**Spring Concert**



**Verdi**  
**Requiem**

**Anne Osborne - *Soprano***

**Karen Shelby - *Mezzo-Soprano***

**John Kerr - *Tenor***

**Jonathan Coad - *Bass-Baritone***

***Conductor* - Derek Watmough**

**Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society**  
**Orchestra**

Leader: Rita French

Programme 50p

Sunday 29 March 1998

### **(Offertorium - continued)**

“Hostias...” is set to an exquisite melody which moves within the compass of five notes. “Quam olim Abrahae” is repeated and the movement ends with the soprano floating gently and prayerfully on a high A flat.

### **Sanctus**

Trumpet calls usher in the chorus, divided into two choirs, who sing the whole of the Sanctus, Benedictus and Hosanna in an unbroken double fugue, which bounces along joyfully in striking contrast to the rest of the work. “If it is dance-like”, Donald Tovey writes, “the dance is that of the Sons of the Morning”.

### **Agnus Dei**

The plaintive melody is set, with daring originality, for the soprano and mezzo-soprano soloists, who sing in octaves, unaccompanied. The chorus follows, also in unison octaves. After the soloists have repeated the tune in the minor, the choir answers with a richly harmonised version of the last six bars. There is a third statement of the tune by the soloists, decorated with three flutes in flowing counterpoint. Choir, soloists and orchestra unite at the close.

### **Lux aeterna**

The violins shimmer with the never-fading light, introducing a trio for the three lower solo voices. The gentle, intimate mood of the mezzo-soprano’s opening bars gives way to a darkly-coloured funeral chant in B flat minor, intoned by the bass. The three voices unite in a brief unaccompanied passage of luminous part-writing, after which a repetition of “Et lux perpetua”, set to a broad, lyrical tune, carries the movement along to the end.

### **Libera me**

Here we are back once again with the terror and despair suggested by thoughts of the Last Judgment. The soprano soloist, and then the chorus, mutter the opening words in monotone; and after an agitated, intensely dramatic recitative for the soloists the chorus erupts with the now familiar but always startling “Dies irae”. There follows a passage of the most moving beauty: a repeat of “Requiem aeternam” as heard at the opening of the work, but with the unaccompanied choir, led by the solo soprano, singing music which was formerly only given by the orchestra. The work ends with a fugue on “Libera me, Domine”. Any feeling that its sprightliness is inappropriate to the solemnity of the text is entirely dispelled when the soprano soloist enters with the theme at half speed and in the major mode - yet another great moment. The final page has the soloist and chorus murmuring the prayer for deliverance in a hushed *pppp*; and, as one commentator has put it: “the music ends, poised over the void”.

# The text

## 1 Requiem

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. Requiem ... Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison.

## 2 Dies irae

**Dies irae**, dies illa, Solvet saeculum in favilla, Teste David cum Sybilla. Quantus tremor est futurus, Quando iudex est venturus, Cuncta stricte discussurus!

**Tuba mirum** spargens sonum, Per sepulchra regionum, Coget omnes ante thronum, Mors stupebit et natura, Cum resurget creatura, Judicanti responsura.

**Liber scriptus** proferetur, In quo totum continetur, Unde mundus judicetur. Iudex ergo cum sedebit, Quidquid latet apparebit, Nil inultum remanebit.

*Dies irae, dies illa, Solvet saeculum in favilla, Teste David cum Sybilla.*

**Quid sum miser** tunc dicturus, Quem patronem rogaturus, Cum vix justus sit securus?

**Rex tremendae** majestatis! Qui salvandos salvas gratis! Salva me fons pietatis!

**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 iudex ultionis, Donum fac remissionis Ante diem rationis.

**Ingemisco** tamquam reus, Culpa rubet vultus meus, Supplici parce, Deus. Qui Mariam absolvisti, Et latronem exaudisti, Mihi quoque spem dedisti. Preces meae non sunt dignae, Sed tu bonus fac benigne, Ne perenni cremer igne. Inter oves locum praesta, Et ab haedis me sequestra, Statuens in parte dextra.

**Confutatis** maledictis, Flammis acerbis addictis, Voca me cum benedictis. Oro supplex et acclinis, Cor contritum quasi cinis, Gere curam mei finis. Dies irae...

**Lacrymosa** dies illa, Qua resurget ex favilla, Judicandus homo reus. Huic ergo parce Deus. *Pie Jesu Domine, Dona eis requiem! Amen.*

## 3 Offertorio

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 Abraham 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 fidelium defunctorum de poenis inferni et de profundo lacu, de morte transire ad vitam.

# Musical Notes

## Verdi Requiem

On 22nd May 1873 in Milan, the great Italian poet and novelist Alessandro Manzoni slipped on the steps of the church of San Fedele as he was going to early morning Mass and was carried home unconscious. He was 89 and so his ensuing death was not unexpected; but Verdi had regarded Manzoni with a quite extraordinary reverence ever since he had read the celebrated classic novel *I Promessi Sposi* at the age of 16, and the author's death left him heart-smitten with emotion and grief. "Perhaps after I have thought it over and measured my strength", he wrote to Giulio Ricordi, his publisher, "I shall propose something to honour his memory." (Verdi was still at the height of his powers at 60. *Aida* had been produced only a year earlier, but a really large scale choral work was something he had never before attempted and it presented unfamiliar problems.)

The "something" turned out to be the Requiem, which had its first performance at St. Mark's Church in Milan on 22nd May 1874 (the first anniversary of Manzoni's death), with Verdi himself conducting a specially chosen choir of 120 singers and an orchestra of 110 players. The work was rapturously received by the audience, and subsequent performances in Paris and Vienna were equally successful. London, too, was impressed, but there were some reservations expressed concerning the theatrical character of the music - an objection still felt by some. Theatrical it certainly is; but Verdi was simply using the musical language that came naturally to him: anything else would have been inconsistent with the depth and sincerity of his feelings. Furthermore, although the liturgical aspect is respectfully treated, the work was intended for the concert hall, not the church.

Verdi's *Requiem* is a work of astonishing imagination, beauty and power. People who don't like it (one is tempted to say) don't really like music.

## Requiem and Kyrie

The work opens quietly with a slow falling phrase on muted cellos. A gentle crescendo leads to a magical change from the minor to the major key while the chorus murmurs the prayer for eternal rest. "Te decet hymnus", set to a plainsong melody for unaccompanied choir, is followed by a repeat of the hushed opening music. The four soloists then enter successively with the urgent "Kyrie eleison" prayer set to a noble theme with choral accompaniment; and the movement ends with "Christe eleison" (one of Verdi's departures from liturgical tradition): an eight part choral progression through remote keys to a final resting point in the 'home key' of A major.

## **Dies Irae**

After a startling detonation of four staccato orchestral chords the chorus enters with a wild swirling theme powerfully expressive of terror and grief, quietening down to a *sotto voce* monotone at “Quantus tremor est futurus”. This leads straight into:

*Tuba mirum.* Trumpet fanfares, echoed ‘off-stage’, build up to a climax reinforced by the choir and the rest of the orchestra. “Mors stupebit” is given to the bass solo, with a subtle and effective orchestral accompaniment.

*Liber scriptus.* The mezzo-soprano enters unaccompanied on the dominant A, reaching the key chord of D minor with tremendous emphasis on “Unde mundus judicetur” (when creation comes to trial). An eloquent solo aria follows, punctuated by “Dies irae” from the chorus, whispered at first, then bursting with full force.

*Quid sum miser.* A trio for the three upper solo voices, accompanied by violins and viola with a solo bassoon and expressive flowing bass.

*Rex tremendae majestatis.* The opening words are thundered out by the chorus basses, followed immediately by entries from all four soloists on “Salva me”: a reminder that the majestic King is also the fount of grace (“Fons pietatis”) whose prerogative is mercy. The full chorus combines and the movement builds up to a great emotional climax.

*Recordare.* A duet for soprano and mezzo-soprano accompanied by a reiterated rhythmic figure given to the woodwind.

*Ingemisco.* The tenor soloist takes up the penitential prayer in a mood of tender lyricism evoked by the reference to Mary Magdalen (“Qui Mariam absolvisti”)

*Confutatis maledictis.* The solo bass pleads for mercy at the hour of death in an expressive aria over a gently throbbing orchestral accompaniment. The final cadence moves unexpectedly into G minor, and the chorus blazes in again with “Dies Irae”.

*Lacrymosa.* A simple and unforgettable tune, given first to the mezzo-soprano soloist and then taken up by the chorus. “Pie Jesu Domine” is set to a short unaccompanied passage for the solo quartet.

## **Offertorium**

The whole movement is set as a solo quartet. One of the great moments of the work comes with the entry of the soprano as Michael the Standard-Bearer (“sed signifer sanctus Michael”) on an E held for five whole bars. With “Quam olim Abrahae” Verdi seems to hint at the fugue which is usual at this point, but we are given instead a powerful sequence based on

## Text - continued

### 4 Sanctus

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

### 5 Agnus Dei

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

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

### 6 Lux aeterna

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

### 7 Libera me

Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna in die illa tremenda; quando coeli movendi sunt et terra. Dum veneris iudicare saeculum per ignem. Tremens factus sum ego et timeo, dum discussio venerit atque ventura ira.

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

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

## Our Soloists

### Anne Osborne - *Soprano*

Anne was born in Southampton. She joined the Royal Opera Chorus in 1986. In 1982 Anne sang Susanna (*Le Nozze di Figaro*) in a school workshop, televised by the BBC. That May she sang Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*) at Portsmouth Guildhall. Her concert repertory includes: Mahler's *Fourth Symphony*, Berlioz's *Les Nuits d'Été*, Elgar's *Coronation Ode*, and Handel's *Messiah*. In March 1995 she sang Villa-Lobos' *Bachianas Brasileiras No 5* for the Friends of Covent Garden. In May 1996 and again in June 1997 Anne was the soprano soloist in Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana* performed by the Birmingham Royal Ballet at the Royal Opera House.

## **Karen Shelby - Mezzo-Soprano**

Born in Bournemouth, she studied at the Royal College of Music with Redvers Llewellyn and in Munich with Brigitte Fassbaender. She joined the Royal Opera in 1978. She has had a wide variety of principal parts with that company, including the Mother in the world première of Henze's *Pollicino*.

Karen has recorded for Deutsche Grammophon, (*Tannhäuser* - Edelknabe), EMI (*The Cunning Little Vixen*), Decca and RCA, and made numerous appearances on TV and radio.

Other operatic appearances include Hansel (*Hansel and Gretel*), for New Sadler's Wells, Phebe (*Castor et Pollux*) for English Bach Festival and Junon (*Platée*) at the Batignano Festival, Italy.

## **John Kerr - Tenor**

John began his professional singing career at Glyndebourne in 1968. Before joining the Royal Opera Company in 1974 he also appeared with Opera For All and Welsh National Opera. Born in Leicestershire he now lives in Tunbridge Wells. He has sung numerous roles in opera, oratorio and operetta. He also enjoys giving song recitals, conducting choirs and playing the organ. John frequently appears as a guest artist at Finchcocks, Goudhurst, the home of the Richard Burnett Collection of Early Keyboard Instruments, where he recorded his first solo CD: *Sigh No More, Ladies*, which received favourable reviews.

In 1996 John was invited to appear as Sancho Panza in Purcell's *Don Quixote* at the Dartington International Summer School. Engagements in 1997 included Mr Peachum in *The Beggar's Opera* and an appearance at the Wigmore Hall as the Restoration actor and singer Thomas Doggett.

## **Jonathan Coad - Bass-Baritone**

Born in Crayford, Kent, he studied at the Royal College of Music. He has sung in many concerts and recordings with specialist vocal ensembles, notably the Groupe Vocale de France, travelling extensively in Europe and North America. Jonathan has also appeared as a concert soloist in England and France. He was a member of the New D'Oyly Carte Company, singing the part of Pooh-Bah (*The Mikado*). He played ensemble and small roles in the award-winning production of Bernstein's *Candide* at the Old Vic.

Jonathan has been a member of the Royal Opera Chorus since 1989 and has performed solo roles in *Death in Venice* and *Paul Bunyan* (Britten), *Fiery Angel* (Prokofiev), *Jenufa* (Janaček), *Arabella* (Strauss), *Rigoletto* and

## Next concert

**Sunday 8 November 1998**  
Assembly Hall, Tunbridge Wells, 3pm.  
**Beethoven Concert**  
Overture: Leonora No 3  
Choral Fantasia  
Mass in C

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