

Verdi Requiem: Full Score Introduction and Performance Notes

Scoring: 2 Hrns. 2 Trpts. T. Tromb. B. Tromb. Perc (1 player) Strings (66442) Organ

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1. The Original.

Verdi is generally known by famous arias and choruses from his many operas. As far as being known in their entirety is concerned, the Requiem is probably his most well known work. The first suggestion of Verdi's involvement in a Requiem Mass was shortly after the death of Rossini, in November 1868. Verdi revered him as the greatest Italian composer of the previous generation. As Rossini was also greatly respected by his fellow Italian composers, Verdi suggested a *Requiem* be composed as a joint project between them. He stipulated that no one was to make money out of it and offered the *Libera Me* as his contribution. In the event the Requiem did not progress beyond the committee stage, the stumbling-block being the non-profit motive.

In February 1871, Alberto Mazzucato, the Director of Milan Conservatoire who was also a member of the Rossini Memorial Committee, wrote to Verdi, praising his *Libera Me* and urging him to complete the Mass. Verdi's modest reply was to the effect that there were plenty of Requiem Masses already written and it would be useless to add to their number. The occasion that would make such an addition "useful" occurred in May 1873. It was the death of the famous writer and poet Alessandro Manzoni. This event affected Verdi profoundly, for not only had they been friends together but Verdi greatly admired Manzoni's work and was disgusted by the lack of respect displayed by the press reports on his death. So, deciding that he would try to write something himself more worthy of this great man, Verdi suggested to the Mayor and Council of Milan that he would compose and pay for the publication of a Requiem for Performance in Manzoni's native city on the anniversary of his death. They gratefully accepted his offer and the first performance was given on 22 May 1874 at the Church of San Marco, Milan. It made a deep impression on the audience and so many people were disappointed to have missed it that three further performances were given immediately at La Scala. The *Requiem* was taken on tour with Verdi conducting and was performed in Paris, Vienna and London, the latter at the Royal Albert Hall with Stainer at the organ and a choir of 1,200, just a year after the first performance in Milan.

There have been critics who have derided Verdi's *Requiem* as "an opera to liturgical libretto" but that was after all Verdi's musical language, so who really can question the sincerity of the music, just because it is extremely dramatic in parts? Perhaps the most significant comment would be to quote the words of another great composer - Brahms - "*Verdi's Requiem is a work of genius*".

2. About this orchestration.

Reduced orchestrations of operas are now common place, yet in spite of the work's popularity its main publishers, as yet, have no such version of the *Requiem* in their catalogues. I thought of remedying that situation at the same time as deciding to do the reduced orchestration of Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius*, premièred by the A40 Choir in November 1999. The aim for both though, was not just to reduce the size, but to do so while maintaining the overall impression of the colour differences between the main sections of the orchestra: wind, brass, percussion and strings.

I first heard the Verdi *Requiem* while still in short trousers when attending a concert day afternoon rehearsal for a concert in which my parents were singing in the chorus. The greatest recollection is of jumping out of my skin at the opening of the *Dies Irae* (and its repetitions), and not only hearing the bass drum, but also feeling it. I later sang the work at the Royal Albert Hall during my first term at the Royal College of Music, under Sir David Willcocks - his last term as Director of RCM - in a combined choir of about 700. Fairly soon after forming the

A40 Choir, choristers were mentioning the work, and so it seemed to me that the best way of allowing moderately sized choirs to tackle it was to reduce the massive orchestra so that the work could be accommodated in provincial venues with a good balance between choral and instrumental forces. The overall method was essentially the same as for Elgar's *Dream*, only this time the string parts have been unaltered, apart from a couple of octave transpositions and taking on an extra bar of flute's notes in the *Sanctus*. The wind parts have been transferred to the organ; and the brass parts reduced to two French Horns, two Trumpets, and one each of Tenor and Bass Trombones. Both the Timpani and Bass drum parts are covered by one player. Because of shortage of time, just the altered parts were set and the first performance was conducted from the original's Full Score with annotations. The Full score and final edits were made in August 2001 in preparation for another performance in October 2001.

The First Performance, which took place in The Parish Church of All Saints, High Wycombe on 23 March 2000 was given added drama by having to replace the Mezzo and Tenor soloists within 48 and 24 hours respectively. The première's main artists were:

David Meacock conductor

Giselle Allen soprano

Sylvia Clarke mezzo soprano

Rich Cartmire tenor

Tim Mirfin bass

Peter Barley Organ

A40 Choir

A40 Sinfonia (Lucy Waterhouse Leader)

3. Performance Notes.

Note by note comparison between this version and the original will obviously reveal all similarities and changes, but for convenience all aspects of modifications needing to be noted for a successful performance are listed below, along with other general observations.

3.1 Chorus

The Chorus use exactly the same parts as various publishers' vocal scores.

However some minor adjustments will be useful:

No. 1. Bar 12, and other places where chorus soloists or half chorus are indicated can be sung *pp* by everyone (or in the latter case, perhaps just firsts).

No. 2. The single tenor and bass lines in bars 117-137 can be taken by all men together with tenors dropping out of the lowest notes and basses leaving out notes which are too high.

The middle part of the two quiet 3 part tenor phrases (bars 324-5 & 328-9) can be taken by the alto sections. Following the orchestration practice of dovetailing parts, by putting the altos in the middle, produces a better blend of sound and makes it less obvious that these phrases are not being sung just by the tenors (than if they are singing the chords' top notes).

No. 4. The two opening *Sanctus* entries are probably best sing by all Basses and then All Tenors and Basses. The 1st and 2nd tenors then might like to swap parts for the *ff tutti Sanctus*.

A general point worth noting is that in No. 7, clarity of the fugue's dotted crotchet quaver rhythm to Li-ber-a can be helped by at least thinking of a crotchet, quaver rest and then quaver. Additionally, seeing the quaver as linked to, and coming before the accented 3rd beat crotchet rather than as coming after the dotted crotchet will help keep the quaver short and produce a tight snappy rhythm.

3.2 Brass Parts.

Dies irae off stage trumpets effect. The notes originally played by off-stage trumpets have been indicated by a square bracket with the direction, *quasi mute* in both the trumpet and horn parts. In the case of trumpets, the effect can be imitated to a degree by hanging a deep pile rug or thick winter coat over the back of a chair near the music stand, and placing the trumpet's bell very close to the material so as to produce a muffled sound. All brass players remain on stage since given that this version is partly about using resources economically it seems pointless buying in extra players for such a short passage within the whole work just to satisfy puritanical dogma while potentially causing logistical problems! As there is not such a great contrast in the late Solti recording between the sounds produced by on and off stage brass, parochial performers should equally have no qualms about producing a subtle but adequately noticeable difference.

3.3 Percussion part.

The percussion parts have been reduced so as to be playable by one player. Firstly, a small orchestra does not require as much, and secondly, one of the aims of this version is to help minimise promotion costs by only using bare essentials: better to have an extra string player playing nearly all the time, than spend the same money on an additional percussionist who only plays for a few bars! For the same reason (and likely shortage of space) a conventional bass drum will be adequate - some players might find a pedal attachment useful too.

The original Full Score timpani parts sometimes contain notes which have nothing to do with the harmony, because pedal instruments were not readily available at the time. For example, a loud F# major orchestral chord

might have an G natural in the Timpani part with the imaginative, but then practical, expectation that the looser skins then used, would distort to near enough F# if hit strongly enough! Thus some notes have been altered with the expectation that, in line with common practice nowadays, pedal timpanis will indeed be used. Some of the original bass drum part is just amplifying the timpani, (e.g. where both have rolls together) in a way which is inappropriate for a smaller orchestra, and so although both instruments are covered by one player, the overall effect will be very close to that of the original.

3.4 Organ part.

This covers the Wind parts.

Registration has been kept to a minimum as instruments can be very varied. The ft indications are to ensure that orchestral lines are fully covered: for example, the 4ft sometimes covers high orchestral flutes. Thus, +4ft and -4ft reflects the original orchestral pitches. It should be noted that each marking only applies to one stave, as for example when often the top stave of a system will be 8+4ft, while the middle stave will be just 8ft. Where there is no marking at start of sections, it should be assumed that 8 ft pitch is required. Pedal notes should be assumed to be 8ft+16ft unless otherwise indicated. In order to guide organists as to timbre, some of the original instrumentation has been indicated in brackets - particularly where these were originally solo lines. Where organists are in doubt, consultation of the original version's Full Score will clarify intentions.

3.5 String parts and minimum numbers required.

The minimum recommended number for the orchestra to be balanced within itself is 6 6 4 4 2. This number will be adequate for any choir of up to 100 singers. Larger choirs may want to add more.

3.6 Full Score Bar numbering & Vocal Score Figures.

Because Vocal Scores are published by a number of publishers, it has been decided not to add Figures in the Full Score - nor sits and stands markings. Conductors can either have their own VS to hand; use post-it stickers or lightly mark really strategic ones in pencil.

4. Acknowledgement.

I gratefully acknowledge advice enthusiastically and freely given by colleagues throughout this project.

August 2001.

Other's comments about these Elgar & Verdi reduced orchestrations.

Many thanks for your excellent reduced orchestration of the Verdi Requiem. Our performance was spectacularly successful, thanks in part to your fine work in creating this version. You have paved the way for many who would not otherwise have had the chance to perform this towering masterpiece. . . You have done a marvellous job with your reduced orchestration, and you have done a great service to the choral community, both in the U.K. and elsewhere. I hope that my discovery and use of your Verdi orchestration will lead to more performances in the U.S.

Dr. Glenn R. Gregg, Music Director Kirkland Choral Society

- conductor of the USA 1st performance on 19 May 2007

a well conceived idea, intelligently realised Peter Barley, Verdi 1st perf. organist

As a 'cellist in the BBC SO for 21 years . . . I have played [Verdi Requiem] dozens of times . . . much of the time I was not particularly conscious of any difference from the original. Peter Freyan

unambiguously successful Review of Elgar 1st perf., John Norris, Elgar Society Council Member

agreeably surprised by the skill & sympathy . . . whilst maintaining the essential flavour of the original score . . . a wider array of amateur choral singers may now enjoy the experience of singing in his wonderful piece which hitherto has perhaps been the preserve of those with access to larger and more expensive orchestras.

Mark Wildman, Head of Vocal Studies at RAM, and Bass soloist in Elgar 1st perf..

Some were understandably sceptical when initially eyeing the line-up, but were pleasantly surprised upon hearing the performances. Typical is Richard Cartmire, the Verdi 1st performance tenor soloist who was released from ENO at less than 48 hours notice, who also has experience of 19th Century Operatic repertoire as orchestral player and conductor:

Essentially he has ingeniously reduced the size of the brass section and re-assigned all the woodwind parts [onto organ] . . . I have to say that this works remarkably well, indeed far better than I might have expected.

a useful and interesting new version . . . well written for the organ Malcolm Hicks, Elgar 1st perf. Organist

very fair representation of the originals . . . an excellent way of being able to perform the pieces with smaller forces and in venues which would be unable to accommodate a full size performance.

Sheila Nolan, Head of Percussion Surrey Youth Music & Performing Arts

Last year, [July 2002] I thought doing the Verdi Requiem was ambitious, but having recently heard the full version of The Dream of Gerontius, I couldn't begin to imagine how the London Oratory School Choir would be able to begin to perform such a huge work, let alone do so, so convincingly; thanks to all involved.

Words the Principal of the London Oratory School spoke to the audience immediately after the School's July 2003 *Gerontius* performance

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