

LONDON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Pappano Conducts Berlioz's Requiem at the Proms

Saturday, August 15, 2026 · 19:30 · Royal Albert Hall

Antonio Pappano, conductor · Julien Henric, tenor · London Symphony Chorus, choir · BBC Symphony Chorus, choir

approximately 82 minutes

Hector Berlioz

1803–1869

82 minutes

Requiem (Grande messe des morts), Op. 5

THE COMPOSER

Hector Berlioz was music's great revolutionary. Born in 1803 near Grenoble, he was expected to follow his father, a physician, into medicine and dutifully enrolled at the School of Medicine in Paris. But the lure of music proved irresistible.

Berlioz's path was never easy. His independent mind and refusal to follow traditional rules put him at odds with the conservative Parisian musical establishment. He won the prestigious Prix de Rome in 1830. Throughout his life his music was more appreciated abroad, in Germany, Britain and Russia, than at home. Yet his innovations in orchestration, program music, and musical narrative transformed the art form.

Unlike most of his contemporaries, Berlioz never studied the piano and played it haltingly at best. The orchestra was his instrument, and he expanded its expressive possibilities in ways no one had imagined.

ABOUT THE WORK

Berlioz's Requiem, the Grande messe des morts, is one of the most colossal works in the entire repertoire, and the Royal Albert Hall at the Proms is the ideal place to experience its overwhelming scale. Berlioz received the commission in 1837 from the French government, to commemorate the soldiers who died in the July Revolution of 1830, and he seized the chance to think on the grandest possible canvas. The score calls for a vast orchestra and chorus and, most famously, four additional brass bands stationed at the corners of the performing space, plus a battery of sixteen timpani. When all these forces unleash the Dies irae and Tuba mirum, the effect is of the Last Judgment made audible, sound coming from every direction at once.

Yet the Requiem is far more than spectacle, and this is the key to understanding it. Berlioz uses his enormous apparatus with extraordinary restraint and subtlety: the gigantic climaxes are devastating precisely because so much of the work is hushed, intimate and strange. Long stretches are sung quietly, even a cappella; there are passages of aching tenderness and eerie stillness; and the single tenor soloist appears only once, in the radiant Sanctus, floating high and serene above the chorus. The contrast between the apocalyptic and the consoling is the whole expressive point. Premiered at Les Invalides in Paris in December 1837, it remains one of the supreme achievements of French Romanticism, a work that needs the great forces and the great space that this Proms performance provides.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the architecture of contrast: the way Berlioz holds back his vast forces so that their unleashing overwhelms. The famous moment is the **Tuba mirum** (within the Dies irae): after a long build, the four brass bands at the corners of the hall blaze out in turn and the massed timpani thunder, depicting the trumpets summoning the dead to judgement. It is one of the most physically overwhelming sounds in all of music, and unforgettable in a space like the Albert Hall.

But listen just as much for the quiet music around it: the hushed, prayerful opening; the unaccompanied chorus of the **Quaerens me**; the strange, bare textures (Berlioz's famous trick of pairing flutes with low trombones in the Hostias). And listen for the **Sanctus**, where the lone tenor soloist enters, high and ethereal, answered by the women's voices, a moment of heavenly calm amid the grandeur. The work ends not in triumph but in peace, the chorus murmuring its final 'Amen' into stillness. It is a piece that uses the largest means to arrive at the most profound serenity: overwhelming, but ultimately consoling.

Tonight's artists

Julien Henric *tenor*

The Requiem's only solo comes late, in the Sanctus, and it is a test of control rather than power: a long, high line sung softly over hushed strings and answered by the women of the chorus. Julien Henric, a French tenor schooled in Lyon, sings it.

Julien Henric is a French tenor from Lyon, where he studied acting and singing before graduating from the Conservatoire national supérieur de musique et de danse in 2020. In 2018 the French performers' organisation Adami named him a Révélation Lyrique, and he won three prizes at the Raymond Duffaut competition in Avignon; further prizes followed at Mâcon in 2019 and Marmande in 2022. He spent the 2020/21 and 2021/22 seasons in the Jeune Ensemble of the Grand Théâtre de Genève. His roles since include Flavio in Norma at the Aix-en-Provence Festival, Marcellus in Hamlet at the Paris Opéra, and Don Ottavio in Don Giovanni at the Liceu in Barcelona and the Opéra National de Bordeaux.

London Symphony Chorus *choir*

Berlioz's Requiem demands a huge chorus, and here two are combined. The London Symphony Chorus, the orchestra's long-standing partner chorus, joins forces with the BBC Symphony Chorus to field the massed voices the Grande messe des morts requires, from its thunderous Dies irae to its hushed, unaccompanied prayers.

The London Symphony Chorus was founded in 1966 as the chorus of the London Symphony Orchestra. Now an independent, self-governing choir, it keeps a close association with the LSO, performing and recording the great choral-orchestral repertoire with the orchestra at the Barbican and elsewhere, and also working with other orchestras.

BBC Symphony Chorus *choir*

For a work on the scale of the Berlioz Requiem, even a great symphony chorus needs reinforcement. The BBC Symphony Chorus, the chorus at the heart of the Proms, joins the London Symphony Chorus to supply the enormous massed sound, capable both of shattering power in the Dies irae and of the hushed delicacy Berlioz asks for elsewhere.

The BBC Symphony Chorus, founded in 1928, is one of Britain's leading large symphonic choruses and the chorus most closely associated with the BBC Proms. An amateur choir that works to professional standards, it performs a vast repertoire with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and other ensembles, and is heard regularly on BBC broadcasts.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz

Hector Berlioz, translated by David Cairns, Alfred A. Knopf 2002

Berlioz's own memoirs, as entertaining as a novel, including his account of the commission and first performance of the Requiem.

ACCESSIBLE The Life of Berlioz

Peter Bloom, Cambridge University Press 1998

A short, readable life of Berlioz that places the Requiem among his large-scale works of the 1830s.

DEEPER Berlioz: Servitude and Greatness

David Cairns, University of California Press 2000

The second volume of David Cairns's biography, covering the years from 1832 in which Berlioz wrote the Grande messe des morts.

SOURCES

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2. Proms 2026: Grandeur and Intimacy Shape Pappano's Revelatory Berlioz Requiem, Opera Today. <https://operatoday.com/2026/08/proms-2026-grandeur-and-intimacy-shape-pappanos-revelatory-berlioz-requiem/>
3. Requiem (Berlioz), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Requiem_\(Berlioz\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Requiem_(Berlioz))
4. Requiem, LA Phil. <https://www.laphil.com/works/requiem-berlioz>
5. Grande Messe des morts [Requiem] op. 5, Bru Zane Mediabase. <https://www.bruzane-mediabase.com/en/exploration/works/grande-messe-morts-requiem-op-5-hector-berlioz>
6. BBC Symphony Chorus, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BBC_Symphony_Chorus
7. BBC Chorus / BBC Symphony Chorus: Short History, Bach Cantatas Website. <https://www.bach-cantatas.com/Bio/BBCSC.htm>
8. Julien Henric, Gulbenkian Música. <https://gulbenkian.pt/musica/en/biography/julien-henric/>
9. Julien Henric, Salzburg Festival. <https://www.salzburgerfestspiele.at/en/a/julien-henric>
10. The Memoirs of Hector Berlioz, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780375413919>

11. The Life of Berlioz, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780521485487>

12. Berlioz: Servitude and Greatness, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780520222007>



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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2026-08-15-pappano>

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