

A Mass for the Dead: Verdi's Requiem

Saturday, August 15, 2026 · 11:00 · Großes Festspielhaus

Riccardo Muti, conductor · Iwona Sobotka, soprano · Marianne Crebassa, mezzo-soprano · Michael Spyres, tenor · Maharram Huseynov, bass · Konzer-
tvereinigung Wiener Staatsopernchor, chorus

approximately 85 minutes

Giuseppe Verdi

1813–1901

85 minutes

Messa da Requiem

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

In the opening Requiem and Kyrie, listen for how quietly Verdi begins: the cellos murmur a hushed figure, almost too soft to hear, and the chorus enters in a whisper, as if afraid to disturb the dead. This is prayer, not display. Then the four soloists arrive one by one for the Kyrie, their pleas overlapping and entwining; mark how Verdi, even here, gives each voice its own human profile rather than blending them into anonymity.

The Dies irae that follows is the heart of the work and its great shock. Out of the calm the chorus erupts in terror: slashing descending figures over hammered orchestral chords and a thunderous bass drum, the music of the world's last day. Crucially, Verdi brings this music back: the hammering Dies irae returns several times across the long sequence, each time as a fresh convulsion of dread, framing the gentler movements between. Train your ear to recognise it, because its returns are the structural pillars of the whole. Listen, too, in the Tuba mirum, for the trumpets that call the dead to judgment: Verdi places a second group of four trumpets apart from the orchestra, offstage or in the gallery, so that the summons seems to come from every direction, answered by the players on the platform, an antiphonal blaze announcing the Last Trumpet.

In the Offertorio the storm lifts. The four soloists sing alone, without chorus, in music of flowing tenderness, the 'Domine Jesu' rising and falling in long lyrical lines, with a serene central section ('Hostias') for the tenor that is among the most beautiful things Verdi ever wrote.

The Sanctus brings the work's display of pure craft: after a fanfare, the chorus splits into two separate choirs and launches a brilliant double fugue, the voices chasing one another at speed in a glittering, almost dancing exuberance: joy expressed as sheer contrapuntal energy.

The Agnus Dei is quieter and stranger. Soprano and mezzo-soprano sing the same melody in bare octaves, unaccompanied at first, and the chorus answers; the melody returns in varied guises, growing in richness. Listen for the unusual purity of those two voices moving as one.

The Lux aeterna, for mezzo-soprano, tenor, and bass, asks for 'eternal light': hear the shimmer in the high strings depicting that light, set against the dark, low utterances of the bass, radiance and shadow held together.

The concluding Libera me, the movement Verdi wrote first, for Rossini, gathers up the whole work. The soprano pleads, half-spoken, for deliverance; the Dies irae storms back one final time in all its fury; the serene opening Requiem music returns as a memory of peace; and then Verdi unleashes a great fugue on 'Libera me, Domine.' At the very end the music subsides to the soprano and chorus murmuring the words almost without pitch, fading into silence: a question left hanging, deliverance asked for but not assured.



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