

WIENER PHILHARMONIKER

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 · Konzertvereinigung Wiener Staatsopernchor, chorus

approximately 85 minutes

Giuseppe Verdi

1813–1901

Messa da Requiem

85 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* grew out of two deaths, and out of one great disappointment. The first death was Rossini's, in 1868. Verdi, who revered the older master, proposed that the leading Italian composers of the day each write a movement of a collective Requiem in his memory, to be performed on the first anniversary of his passing. Verdi himself supplied the final movement, the 'Libera me.' The project foundered in the petty politics of the musical world and the planned performance

never took place; the assembled ‘Messa per Rossini’ was quietly shelved, and Verdi’s contribution sat in a drawer. It is a piece of luck for posterity that he kept it.

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.

Tonight's artists

Iwona Sobotka *soprano*

Soprano: leads the great pleading lines of the Kyrie, Offertorio, and the concluding Libera me.

Iwona Sobotka is a Polish soprano who first drew international notice by winning the Grand Prix of the Queen Elisabeth Competition in Brussels in 2004. Trained in Warsaw and Madrid, she has built a wide-ranging career on the opera stage and the concert platform, admired for the warmth, evenness, and expressive sincerity of a lyric voice equally at home in Mozart, Szymanowski, and the great choral-symphonic works. Her clarity of line and long-breathed phrasing suit the soprano's pleading role in Verdi's Requiem.

Marianne Crebassa *mezzo-soprano*

Mezzo-soprano: voice of the Liber scriptus and a partner in the bare-octave duet of the Agnus Dei.

Marianne Crebassa is a French mezzo-soprano, born in Béziers and trained in Montpellier, celebrated for the dusky warmth and supple agility of her voice and for a stage presence of unusual elegance. Named Artiste Lyrique of the year at the Victoires de la Musique, she has become a favourite in Mozart's trouser roles, among them Cherubino and Sesto, at leading houses and festivals, and a sought-after recitalist. Her rich lower register and finely controlled line bring both gravity and lyric beauty to the mezzo writing of Verdi's Requiem.

Michael Spyres *tenor*

Tenor: carries the lyric heart of the Ingemisco and the serene Hostias of the Offertorio.

Michael Spyres is an American tenor from Missouri, one of the most versatile singers of his generation, whose unusually wide range has led him to describe himself as a 'baritenor.' Equally commanding in the high-flying bel canto of Rossini, the heroic French repertoire, and Mozart, he has won acclaim at the world's major houses for the freedom of his top, the richness of his lower voice, and his stylish musicianship. That breadth and security suit the demanding lyric and dramatic writing Verdi gives the tenor.

Maharram Huseynov *bass*

Bass: the dark voice of the Mors stupebit and the Confutatis, judgment's awe and dread.

Maharram Huseynov is an Azerbaijani bass-baritone who trained in his native Baku and in Italy, at the Accademia d'Arte Lirica in Osimo, before joining the Accademia Teatro alla Scala from 2017 to 2019. A prize-winner at the Sozvezdie Competition in Odessa and the Muslim Magomaev Competition in Moscow, he has sung roles such as Leporello, Philip II and Figaro, and is admired for the depth, focus and resonance of a voice well suited to Verdi and Mozart alike. He has already sung the Requiem under Riccardo Muti in Philadelphia, Chicago and Paris, and makes his Salzburg Festival debut in this work; his firm, dark tone gives weight and solemnity to the bass's awe-struck pronouncements in the Requiem's vision of judgment.

Konzertvereinigung Wiener Staatsopernchor *chorus*

The Vienna State Opera Chorus, a fixture of the Salzburg Festival, supplies the work's vast choral terror and its dazzling double fugue.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/wp-2026-08-15-muti>

Version 3, 30 September 2026