

SunTrust Classical Series:

Guerrero Unveils Verdi

Schermerhorn Symphony Center
Laura Turner Concert Hall
May 8, 2008 at 7 p.m.
May 9 & 10, 2008 at 8 p.m.

Nashville Symphony
Giancarlo Guerrero, conductor
Michele Capalbo, soprano
Marietta Simpson, mezzo-soprano
Roy Cornelius Smith, tenor
Morris D. Robinson, bass
Nashville Symphony Chorus
George Mabry, chorus director

VERDI – MESSA DA REQUIEM

GIUSEPPE VERDI

(born in Parma, Italy, 1813; died in Milan, 1901)

Messa da Requiem

Scored for 3 flutes (3rd=piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 4 bassoons, 4 horns, 8 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum and strings

estimated length:

one hour, 23 minutes

The *Messa da Requiem* that Verdi composed in 1873 was in memory of an author he idolized as much for his championing of Italian independence as for his literary excellence. Alessandro Manzoni, born in 1785, is considered the father of the modern Italian novel. His masterpiece, *The Betrothed*, although a charming love story, was intended by the writer to express a strong political statement. When Verdi wrote the *Requiem*, he was, at 60, the composer of some 25 remarkably vivid operas, with only *Otello* and *Falstaff* to come. The dramatic impulses that gave life to *La Traviata*, *Il Trovatore*, *Aida* and the rest could not be diluted or stilled when directed toward this work honoring a man of whom Verdi, after they had met, wrote with unashamed emotion, “How to describe the extraordinary, indefinable sensation the presence of the saint produced in me. I would have gone down on my knees before him if we were allowed to worship men. They say it is wrong to do so and it may be, although we raise up on altars many that have neither the talent nor the virtue of Manzoni and indeed are rascals.”

When he heard of Manzoni’s death he was stunned, incredulous, so much so that he could not even bring himself to attend the revered man’s funeral. But with the passage of time the loss became more bearable, and as

the haze of mourning lifted, the idea of honoring Manzoni through music appeared clearly. He would write a *Requiem* Mass and express the depth of emotion he felt. He already had in hand the last section of a mass for the dead, a *Libera me*, having written it, or a version thereof, in 1868 as part of a *Requiem* Mass intended to commemorate the death of Rossini, to which the composers of the day were to contribute a movement. The planned honor for Rossini never materialized, but as a result of his effort on its behalf, Verdi had a starting point for the new work.

The Manzoni *Requiem* was first performed on May 22, 1874 at St. Mark's in Milan. Immediately following its premiere, it moved to La Scala for three hugely successful performances, and then Verdi took it to Paris, London and Vienna, where it received equal acclaim.

Architecturally, the work is in seven movements, with the second, the *Dies Irae*, the most extended, being set in 10 sections. The *Libera me*, an optional movement in a traditional requiem, becomes here, in its position as the final movement, a recapitulation musically of earlier materials. Textually, the *Libera me* brings a personal emphasis to the Mass. The *Requiem* text, ending as it often does with the *Lux aeterna* — “May eternal light shine on them, Lord...Grant them eternal rest” — fulfills the elevated ecclesiastical requirement of praying for the dead. In the *Libera me*, the fear of the “last enemy” that is latent in all of us is brought to consciousness: “Deliver me, Lord, from eternal death...Deliver me.”

Emotionally, the *Requiem* covers every shade of operatic expression that Verdi ever conjured, from the most inward and fragile to the most extroverted and violently passionate. To Verdi, religiosity was not ecclesiastic but humanistic, and his language for speaking operatically about the things of man was the same as speaking oratorically about the things of God. Remember that the composer's supplications to the Almighty in his massive *Requiem* were motivated by his having lost Manzoni, and not by his having found God. Verdi was all his adult life a lapsed Catholic.

The vocal elements in the work, both solo and choral, are masterful. What else could they be coming from the 19th century's supreme Italian melodist? Perhaps not so expected is the high level of Verdi's contrapuntal skill and harmonic sophistication, both of which, added to the *Requiem's* other virtues, prompted the severely conservative Brahms to say, “Verdi's *Requiem* is a work of genius.” Succeeding generations have echoed that judgment.

REQUIEM MASS

I. *REQUIEM* AND *KYRIE*

(Solo Quartet and Chorus)

The work opens with the solemn expressiveness of muted cellos intoning a phrase containing two important motifs: a descending triad (A minor) and a descending step-wise four-note figure. When the muted violins echo the phrase, with the other strings in harmony, and the chorus murmurs “*Requiem*” on a single tone, the effect is overwhelming in its simple but profound eloquence. At the 12th measure, the poignancy is intensified as the violins sing a compact, haunting melody under which the lower strings provide quiet, gently wrenching dissonances by way of harmonic suspensions, and the choral sopranos sob softly above them. At the end of this phrase, the violins sing another melody, this one in major, a tender and consoling expression of the “perpetual light” text being sung by the chorus. (The main ideas presented instrumentally thus far return in the *Libera me*,

there sung by the soprano — one of Verdi's finest inspirations.) Verdi proceeds with a brief *a cappella* choral passage, then repeats the opening before taking up the *Kyrie* text. This is done in an energetic section whose enlivening subject is presented by the solo voices, in turn, of tenor, bass, soprano and mezzo. The music becomes more agitated and thoroughly operatic, and then subsides as the section ends prayerfully.

II. *DIES IRÆ*

(Chorus)

The 13th-century text, portraying the terrible Day of Wrath, evokes from Verdi the dramatic strength of which he proved himself a master, time and again, in his operas. Five shattering “chords of doom” erupt in the orchestra before the chorus enters with its despairing cries. The drama continues until, its strength sapped, it merges into a brief *misterioso* section replete with frightened choral whispers and strangely disjointed orchestral interjections. This veiled scene is interrupted by present and distant trumpets which, gathering full brass strength, call forth the . . .

Tuba mirum

(Chorus)

The “wondrous sound” of orchestra and chorus moves tempestuously to the . . .

Mors stupebit

(Bass)

The bass haltingly recites the text describing the terrifying moment of death. The faltering accompaniment and the throb of the bass drum add to the utter bleakness. This is followed by the . . .

Liber scriptus

(Mezzo, Chorus)

The mezzo intones the opening text on only two notes, and then breaks into impassioned utterances. These are punctuated at times by the chorus murmuring “*Dies Iræ*,” and by orchestral outbursts. Agitation increases until the chorus bursts in with the second part of the *Dies Iræ* theme. The excitement is short-lived, and the music subsides, giving way to the . . .

Quid sum miser

(Soprano, Mezzo, Tenor)

This solo trio section is colored by the strangely expressive bassoon figure that opens it and then persists virtually throughout. At the end, each voice alone asks its pleading question, and then chorus and orchestra break in with the hopeful cry . . .

Rex tremendae

(Solo Quartet, Chorus)

The intensity subsides quickly, and then the solo voices, in turn, beg to be saved. The imploring motif, at first rising symbolically and then falling, signals one of the work's most impassioned sections. The frequent changes from minor to major, a device used by Verdi throughout the *Requiem*, are particularly effective here.

Recordare

(Soprano, Mezzo)

The two sopranos' supplications to Jesus come in a simple, major-keyed melody that eventually turns to minor.

Ingemisco

(Tenor)

Beginning in a recitative-like manner, the tenor carries the main portion of the text on flowing Italianate melodies accompanied by shimmering strings and prominent woodwind figures.

Confutatis

(Bass)

The bass solo here is no less lyrical than the preceding one for tenor, though at "*cor contritum*," Verdi strikes an archaic tone with consecutive descending fifths in the accompaniment. The solo attains great excitement and then falls in intensity, only to be overwhelmed by the chords of doom and a return of the *Dies Irae*.

Lacrymosa

(Solo Quartet, Chorus)

The final *Dies Irae* section, beginning with the mezzo presenting a minor-key melody, is no less moving for being strikingly operatic. After the tears are spent, the "*Dona eis requiem*" is infused with noble calm, and finally the whispered "*Amen*" glows warmly in major.

III. OFFERTORY

(Solo Quartet)

A gentle introduction leads to the main melodic idea, given in cellos, which is then taken by the three lower solo voices. When the soprano finally enters, it is with a single word on a long sustained note and then another, during which time a high-flying violin plays the main motif. This is the preparation for the soprano to take the melody, in which she is joined by the other solo voices. The quick, imitative section that ensues is followed by a slow, austere passage initiated by the tenor. The earlier materials are repeated, and the movement closes with the main idea sung by clarinet and echoed by low strings.

IV. SANCTUS

(Double Chorus)

Trumpets announce a joyous double fugue carried along exuberantly by double chorus. The dance-like vigor continues in the orchestra even when the choruses recede briefly, only to erupt again to make a brilliant ending.

V. AGNUS DEI

(Soprano, Mezzo and Chorus)

This section begins with the soprano and mezzo, an octave apart and unaccompanied, singing the minor-key melody, after which the chorus, un-harmonized, presents it accompanied by the orchestra, also without harmony. Next the solo sopranos sing the theme with a harmonized accompaniment, after which the chorus responds in major, and the solo sopranos, surrounded by three flowing flutes, repeat the warmly colored major version.

VI. LUX AETERNA

(Mezzo, Tenor and Bass)

The mezzo declaims the first part of the text, the bass continuing it with a severe melody to which timpani rolls add an ominous touch. Mezzo, tenor and bass pursue the text, at one time *a cappella*. The movement ends, in major, more lyrically than it began.

VII. LIBERA ME

(Soprano and Chorus)

In the *Libera me*, Verdi allots to the soprano and chorus some of the themes heard only in the orchestra at the opening of the Mass. The movement begins with the solo voice and the chorus presenting the texts in a dramatic, declamatory manner. At a moment of repose, the pounding *Dies Irae* bursts in, sweeping all before it. Its demonism subsides slowly, and when it does the soprano sings “*Requiem*” on three descending notes, the same ones intoned by cellos at the work’s opening. The chorus then answers with four descending scale steps, again cello material, after which the soprano sings the ineffably tender melody we heard in the violins starting at the 12th bar of the first movement. A *Libera me* choral fugue separates this section of the movement from the final hushed, devotional supplication by soprano and chorus, also to the words “*Libera me.*”

-Program note by Orrin Howard

ARTIST BIOS

GIANCARLO GUERRERO,

conductor

Costa Rican conductor Giancarlo Guerrero, now in his sixth season as Music Director of Oregon’s Eugene Symphony, has been appointed Music Director of the Nashville Symphony, beginning with the 2009/10 season. Next season, he will serve as the Symphony’s Music Director Designate.

A champion of new music, Guerrero initiated a guest-composer series in Eugene, where, under his leadership, the ensemble has hosted several of America’s most respected composers, including John Adams, John Corigliano, Jennifer Higdon, Aaron Jay Kernis and Michael Daugherty.

As a guest conductor, Guerrero recently made his European debut with the Gulbenkian Orchestra, where he was immediately invited to return, and his UK Debut with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. He has also recently made successful debuts with several major American orchestras, including the Baltimore Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl. Other recent orchestral engagements in North America include appearances with the orchestras of Columbus, Dallas, Detroit, Houston, Indianapolis, Minnesota, Oregon, Phoenix, San Antonio, San Diego, Seattle, Winnipeg and the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, D.C., among others.

During the 2007/08 season, Guerrero’s guest conducting engagements include his return appearances with the Cleveland Orchestra both in Cleveland and on tour, including the orchestra’s residency in Miami. He also leads the Australian premiere of Osvaldo Golijov’s chamber opera *Ainadamar* at the Adelaide Festival. Additional engagements include appearances with the symphony orchestras of Dallas, Kansas City, Milwaukee, San Antonio and San Diego, as well as his return to Nashville in May 2008 for performances of Verdi’s *Requiem*.

Also in demand in both Central and South America, Guerrero conducts regularly in Venezuela, both with the

Orquesta Sinfonica Simon Bolivar and the Orquesta Sinfonica de Venezuela.

Guerrero served as Associate Conductor of the Minnesota Orchestra from 1999-2004. He made his Minnesota Orchestra subscription debut in March 2000, leading the world premiere of John Corigliano's Phantasmagoria on *The Ghosts of Versailles*. He returned on subscription every subsequent season during his tenure.

In June 2004, Guerrero was awarded the Helen M. Thompson Award by the American Symphony Orchestra League, which recognizes outstanding achievement among young conductors nationwide.

Guerrero holds degrees from Baylor and Northwestern universities. Prior to his tenure with the Minnesota Orchestra, he served as music director of the Tachira Symphony Orchestra in Venezuela.

MICHELE CAPALBO, soprano

Excelling as an interpreter of Verdian and *verismo* roles, world-class soprano Michele Capalbo wields a beautiful timbre and Italianate style with thrilling vocal dexterity and finesse. Highlights of the 2007/08 season include *Aida* with Houston Grand Opera (company debut), *Il Trovatore* in Madrid (role debut), *Macbeth* in Dayton (role debut), *Tosca* for her debuts with both Seattle Opera and Calgary Opera, and *Don Carlos* in Geneva (both role and company debuts). Upcoming engagements include *Il Trovatore* in Manitoba and *Macbeth* in Montreal.

Recognized by *Opera News* as "a world-class Aida, passionate, subtle and vocally satisfying," Capalbo burst onto the European stage as a last-minute replacement at Le Festival de Musique de Strasbourg. Subsequent successes in the title role of *Aida* followed at Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico, and le Théâtre du Capitole de Toulouse, France.

Recent concert performances have included Ginevra in Giordano's *La Cena Delle Beffe* at Lincoln Center; Poulenc's *Stabat Mater* with Maggio Musicale under the direction of Marcello Viotti; and the Verdi *Requiem* with Connecticut Grand Opera.

MARIETTA SIMPSON,

mezzo-soprano

American mezzo-soprano Marietta Simpson has sung with major orchestras throughout the United States and Europe with many of the world's greatest conductors. She made her Carnegie Hall debut as soloist in Brahms' Alto Rhapsody under the late Robert Shaw with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and made her New York Philharmonic debut under Kurt Masur in Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. She has performed Szymanowski's *Stabat Mater* under the direction of Sir Simon Rattle with both the Vienna Philharmonic and the Berlin Philharmonic and performed Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 under the direction of Daniel Barenboim with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Simpson recently sang Maria in *Porgy and Bess* with the Los Angeles Opera, a role which she performed at Washington National Opera as well as her debut at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, before touring with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Lorin Maazel in concert performances of the opera. Simpson can be heard on several recordings for the Telarc label.

ROY CORNELIUS SMITH, tenor

In a growing international career, Roy Cornelius Smith has performed leading roles on such stages as the Salzburger Festspiele, Volksoper Wien, Lyric Opera of Chicago and the New Israeli Opera, and he has been soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Orchestra del Teatro Carlo Felice,

Orchestre Métropolitain du Grand Montréal and the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra.

In 2007/08 season he performs Calaf in *Turandot* in Memphis and Vienna; Erik in *Der fliegende Holländer* at Grand Rapids Opera; Pinkerton in *Madama Butterfly* at the Steyr Music Festival in Austria; and Verdi's *Requiem* at the Kennedy Center and with the Spokane Symphony. Recently he joined the Metropolitan Opera to appear in both *Die Meistersinger* and *Simon Boccanegra* and he performed Pinkerton at the Aspen Music Festival and Hoffegut in Braunfel's *Die Vögel* at the Spoleto Festival (USA). He made his Metropolitan Opera debut in 2000 in *Aida* and since then has been heard in 11 different productions.

MORRIS ROBINSON, bass

This season, Morris Robinson made his debuts at the Washington National Opera as Commendatore in *Don Giovanni*, the Pittsburgh Opera as Ramfis in *Aida*, and Opera Pacific as Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte*. He also appeared in concert with the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, the Sao Paulo Symphony and the National Symphony Orchestra. Upcoming engagements include his return to the Cincinnati May Festival and his debuts at the Aix-en-Provence and the Ravinia Festivals.

A graduate of the Metropolitan Opera Lindemann Young Artist Development Program, Robinson made his debut at the Metropolitan Opera in 2002 in its production of *Fidelio*. He has since appeared there as Sarastro in *Die Zauberflöte*, the King in *Aida*, and in roles in *Nabucco*, *Tannhäuser*, *Les Troyens* and *Salome*.

Robinson's first album, *Going Home*, was released in February 2007 on the Decca label. An Atlanta native, he is a graduate of The Citadel and received his musical training from the Boston University Opera Institute.

GEORGE MABRY,

chorus director

George Mabry, who has directed the Nashville Symphony Chorus since 1998, is Professor Emeritus of Music at Austin Peay State University in Clarksville. He served as Director of its Center for the Creative Arts and Director of Choral Activities at the university until his retirement in 2003.

While at Austin Peay, Mabry's choirs performed for national and regional conventions of the Music Educators National Conference and the American Choral Directors Association. A native Tennessean, Mabry holds a Bachelor's Degree from Florida State University and Master of Music and Doctor of Philosophy degrees from George Peabody College for Teachers at Vanderbilt University. Mabry is active as a choral clinician and festival adjudicator. He has conducted all-state choirs in Kentucky and Virginia.

Mabry is also a published composer and arranger. In addition to his choral and instrumental compositions, he has written and produced musical shows for entertainment parks around the country. He was formerly Director of Entertainment for Opryland U.S.A. in Nashville. In 2003, he received the Governor's Award in the Arts for Arts Leadership in Tennessee and the Spirit of Tennessee Award from the Tennessee Arts Academy.