

Berlioz: Requiem

North Carolina Master Chorale
Alfred E. Sturgis, Music Director

Dustin Lucas, Tenor
Symphony Orchestra

Tuesday, May 8 at 7:30pm
Meymandi Concert Hall | Duke Energy Center for the Performing Arts

Program

Grande Messe des Morts (Requiem), Op. 5

Hector Berlioz (1803-1869)

Notes

***Grande Messe des Morts (Requiem)*, Op. 5**

"If I were threatened with the destruction of the whole of my works save one, I should crave mercy for the *Messe des morts*" –Hector Berlioz

A rebel artist without independent means can find life particularly difficult. Hector Berlioz had virtually no education in music as a child (a little amateur flute and guitar). The son of a physician, he was sent by his family to Paris to study medicine, but at 21 gave it up to become a musician—thereby causing his family to cut him off financially. To make ends meet as a composer, he became a prolific writer on music, musicians, conducting and orchestration, as well as a sharp-tongued music critic for Paris newspapers.

A master of orchestration, Berlioz expanded and liberated the brass, making it the equal of the other orchestral sections. He experimented with new instruments, the bass clarinet and the valve trumpet, and pioneered the use of the English horn as one of the orchestra's most expressive solo instruments. He was the first to use divided strings. His musical style was harmonically quirky, even in the age of Romanticism. He paid only lip service to traditional musical form and was the foremost advocate of the idea of program music. All of his compositions are programmatic – either settings of text, or the musical portrayal of a literary idea. This approach to art was the natural outcome of his belief in the intrinsic kinship of music and ideas. For Berlioz, music and

literature were inextricably connected, both expressions of the human imagination and emotion.

Berlioz, however, had trouble breaking into the musical mainstream, his music regarded as "eccentric and incorrect." It is, therefore, astonishing that the *Grande Messe des Morts*, composed in 1837, is his first major composition. That being said, he had already internalized an aesthetic sensibility inspired by Shakespeare, whose plays had also been scorned on the continent. He walked the talk not only in his music but in his stormy marriage to Harriet Smithson, a British Shakespearean actress of the period.

Berlioz was a professed and rather snarky atheist, although his definitive biographer, David Cairns, interprets the *Requiem* as an atheist's search – in vain – for God. Berlioz composed The *Grande Messe des Morts* to honor the dead of the revolution of 1830 that overthrew King Charles X, an uprising pretty much forgotten today even by the French. It was commissioned not by the Church, but by the minister of the interior. Conceived for the space of the Church of *Les Invalides*, it nevertheless belongs to a tradition of monumental, patriotic outdoor musical extravaganzas initiated during the French Revolution.

Cairns has interpreted it as a psychological, Dantean pilgrimage through Hell (*Dies irae*), Purgatory (Offertory) and Paradise (*Sanctus*); but the

recapitulation of the music from the Introit in the *Lux aeterna* leaves the individual back at the beginning of the journey. Berlioz conceived the dramatic trajectory quite differently from Mozart, for example, beginning with a very subdued *Dies irae*. While Mozart used extensive tone painting to achieve dramatic effect, Berlioz digs deeper into the human psyche.

Almost the entire work is choral; long section solos replace the traditional use of soloists. In other words, this is a journey undertaken by everyone. Only the *Sanctus* employs a tenor solo, perhaps to represent an ethereal voice above the human drama. The *Requiem* is something of a psychological roller coaster, with sudden shifts in tempo, orchestral forces and mood swings between movements. But whether employing a chorus of 600 and an unprecedentedly huge orchestra, or an a cappella choral chant, the emotional intensity never lets up.

Before getting into the individual movements, something should be said about Berlioz's orchestra. As mentioned above, he instituted lasting changes in the fabric of symphonic music, but nothing compares with the orchestral forces he prescribed for the *Requiem*.

Woodwinds: 4 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 English horns, 4 b-flat clarinets and 8 bassoons

Brass: 12 horns, 4 b-flat cornets, 12 trombones and 4 tubas;

Percussion: 16 timpani, 2 bass drums, 10 pairs of cymbals and 4 tam tams.

Strings: 25 each of first and second violins, 20 violas, 20 cellos and 18 double basses.

And this does not count the four brass choirs of between 10 to 12 players, each playing a different combination of instruments, to be located at the cardinal compass points of the concert hall, and the four brass "orchestras" for the *Lacrimosa*. Nor does it take into account that the composer was all too happy to expand the entire ensemble to the proverbial "cast of thousands." To say the least, very few modern performances can afford that many subs to augment the standard orchestra. Perhaps most important, however, is not how many instruments Berlioz used at one time, but rather how he altered the size and composition of the ensembles to achieve dramatic effect (for example, passages scored for

three flutes and 8 tenor trombones playing below their natural range). Some movements are for chamber-sized groups, usually dominated by woodwinds, which create a bleak ambience. In general, the orchestra can be regarded as a separate character in the drama, seldom doubling the chorus, but rather commenting on it.

The Introit (*Requiem aeternam*) and *Kyrie* introduce a well-worn chromatically descending lament motive. That halting descending chromatic scale psychologically belies the promise of concurrent flowing, calming melodies.

Given our familiarity with Mozart and Verdi, the *Dies irae*, opening with an a cappella soprano section solo, followed by passages of antiphonal chant and free counterpoint, and calming, flowing melody, comes as a surprise. For each succeeding quatrain of the sequence Berlioz increases the tempo, orchestral forces and contrapuntal complexity, again contrasting cantilena melody in one voice against the stark staccato of the Latin trochaic doggerel in another. In retrospect, it's all been a buildup to the call to the Last Judgment, the *Tuba mirum* with its four brass choirs and 16 timpani. From then on, Berlioz sets every word of text as a separate dramatic element. After all the sound and fury, the tenors are suddenly abandoned, alone with just flutes, English horns, bassoons and basses to lament: "What shall I say, miserable wretch that I am?"

The set of verses, beginning with *Rex tremendae majestatis*, form a separate act in the drama. In a final desperate plea for salvation, Berlioz has the chorus turn frankly hysterical, yelling at God and frantically scrambling not to be sucked down with the damned. The movement ends with a reprise of the words *Rex tremendae*, only at the final cadence adding the epithet *fons pietatis* (source of pity) in its proper place in the text. The chorus at last settles down with a more appropriately contrite a cappella plea, *Quaerens me*.

The final verse, *Lacrimosa dies illa*, replaces Mozart's gentle sighing for a chaotic-sounding wailing in which the chorus's steady 9/8 melody is accompanied with syncopated orchestral shrieks. As each vocal part enters separately with the entire theme, the overall effect resembles a set of free variations.

In the Offertory, Berlioz pulls off a stunning tour de force. Essentially, this section is a contrapuntal orchestral interlude, a set of free variations on a melody first introduced by the strings and gradually adding more instruments. The chorus, however, periodically and strategically interjects the text in fragments on a two-note motive, A B-flat A. The text, *Quam olim Abrahae*, traditionally set as a fugue, is decidedly understated. Tenors and basses sing the *Hostias* a cappella, the phrases punctuated with sustained orchestral chords (the final ones a flute and tenor trombone duet)

A tenor soloist intones the *Sanctus*, echoed by an all-female chorus – the only time Berlioz scores specifically for altos! The *Hosanna* for full chorus is the *Requiem's* only fugue. Instead of the *Benedictus*, Berlioz repeats the *Sanctus* and *hosanna* fugue.

In the *Agnus Dei*, Berlioz brings back the music of the Introit for the conclusion of the mass to intensify the call for eternal rest in both sections, as well as to create a large, organic structure.

Program notes by:
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ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Dustin Lucas, Tenor

Dustin Lucas currently holds a position as a tenor vocalist in the Metropolitan Opera Chorus. He has appeared in past productions as the coachman in *Lady Macbeth of Mzensk*, the Animal Vendor in *Der Rosenkavalier*, Prisoner in *Francesca da Rimini*, a Herald in *Turandot*, and over fifty Met productions as a chorister. In the summer of 2011, Dustin was a Studio Artist with Wolf Trap Opera Company appearing as Almoro in *Le donne curiose*, as Cochenille in *Les contes de Hoffman*, and as Beadle Bamford in *Sweeney Todd* with the National Symphony Orchestra.

From 2007 to 2011, Dustin was a tenor chorister and soloist in the esteemed United States Navy Band Sea Chanters Chorus. He performed in over twenty-five high profile events including the 2009 Presidential Inauguration of Barack Obama, private dinners for President George W. Bush, Laura Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, the Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Chief of Naval Operations, and numerous memorials and dedications including the Pentagon Memorial dedication concert. Mr. Lucas was also a member of the renowned Washington National Cathedral Chorus of men, boys, and girls, performing and soloing in numerous high profile

events including the 2009 Inaugural Prayer Service and the annual nationally televised Christmas Morning Broadcast.

Dustin competed in the 2010 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and received an Encouragement Award at the regional finals at the Kennedy Center. Past competition credits include being a 2009 and 2010 Metropolitan Opera National Council district first place winner and a two-time finalist for The National Association of Teachers of Singing. Dustin has appeared in the musicals *Always Patsy Cline*, *Gershwin's Trial by Jury*, and played Caspar in Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and has performed as a soloist in numerous ensembles including Orpheus Chamber Singers in Dallas, Texas, Washington Bach Consort, Washington Choral Arts Society, the Washington Philharmonic, and the Folger Consort.

Dustin was born and raised in Dallas, Texas and earned his vocal performance degree from the University of North Texas. He has studied voice and coached with Francois Loup, David Sundquist, Michael McCarthy, and Kathy Olsen. Currently, he and his wife Lexie reside in Nyack, New York.