

Hermann Scherchen was one of the leading conductors in the middle part of the twentieth century, especially valued for his pioneering performances of the contemporary music of his time. He was essentially self-taught as a musician and became a violist in the Blüthner Orchestra and the Berlin Philharmonic when he was 16. In 1911 he was an assistant to Arnold Schoenberg in the preparation of *Pierrot Lunaire* for performance. Following its Berlin premiere, the piece was taken on a tour in which Scherchen conducted. He became the conductor of the Riga Symphony Orchestra in 1914, but was soon interned by the Russians as an enemy alien when World War I started. He returned to Germany after Russia left the war to found the Neue Musikgesellschaft and the Scherchen Quartet. In 1919 he founded a militant magazine *Melos*.



He succeeded Furtwängler as the director of the Frankfurt Museum Concerts in 1922 and in the same year began a long relationship with the Winterthur Musikkollegium in Switzerland. From 1928 to 1933 he was the Generalmusikdirektor in Königsberg. He frequently conducted contemporary music festivals, especially with the International Society for Contemporary Music, with which he was connected from its founding in 1923. Among his premieres in the 1920s and 1930s were the *Three Fragments from Wozzeck* by Berg and the quarter-tone opera *Mother* by Alois Haba. He left Germany immediately upon the rise of the Nazis to power in 1933, settling in Switzerland, where he became music director of the Zurich Radio Orchestra and also gave courses in conducting, which became a regular summer school in Switzerland in 1939. In the same year he founded the *Ars Viva* Orchestra. He married the Chinese composer Hsiao Shu-sien. They had a daughter, Tona Scherchen-Hsiao, born in 1937, who went back to China with her mother in 1949. She became a noted composer, especially after she moved to France in 1972.

Scherchen resumed his continent-wide activities after World War II ended. He was director of the Zürich Radio Orchestra (1944-1950) and in 1950, with the support of UNESCO, opened a studio for electroacoustic research in 1954 in Gravesano, the village where he lived. He continued his writing about new music in the *Gravesano Blätter*. Unlike many conductors of his generation his "new music" was not merely the new music of his youth, but the continuing evolution of new music. In the 1950s he conducted the premieres of such works as Dallapiccola's *Il prigioniero*, Dessau's *Das Verhör des Lukullus*, and Henze's *König Hirsch*. He was the first to play any music from Schoenberg's *Aron und Moses* in Darmstadt (1951), edited it for its first performance under his colleague Hans Rosbaud, and led its first performance in Berlin. He did not appear in the United States until 1964 when he conducted the Philadelphia Orchestra.

He was the author of a leading text on conducting and of many articles supporting modern music. He suffered a heart attack while conducting Malipiero's *Orfeide* in Florence and died four days later.

Hector Berlioz Requiem Grande Messe des morts

Paris National Opera Orchestra
French Radio Choir
Jean Giraudeau, tenor
conducted by
Hermann Scherchen

During the 1830s, there were political revolutions all over Europe, and France was no exception to that. To commemorate the fallen heroes in the July Revolution of 1830, the Minister of the Interior, a M. le Comte Adrien de Gasparin, on March 8, 1837, requested Berlioz to compose a requiem for the service. Berlioz was happy to receive the commission, since he had long wished to produce a large-scale, sacred work describing the Judgement Day. Several bureaucratic complications, however, delayed the performance of this work.

One of such complications had to deal with the Director of the Conservatoire at that time: Luigi Cherubini. As the Music Director, Cherubini thought that a government-sponsored ceremony should naturally use a work of his own, and not that of a young, eccentric composer like Berlioz. After Berlioz dealt with Cherubini's hindrance and after having the work composed, the French government decided to cancel the ceremony. Having spent all of his money on script copying and hiring players for rehearsals, Berlioz was in extreme financial trouble.

When General Charles Denys de Damremont fell with other French soldiers on October 13, 1837, during the capture of the town of Constantine, the Ministry of War at that time decided to hold a memorial service for the fallen soldiers. After being approached by the Minister of War, General Simon Bernard, this work was finally performed on December 5, 1837. Francois-Antoine Habeneck was the conductor, as he was responsible for performing works for state functions.

An interesting story was attached to this first performance of the Requiem. According to Berlioz, during a crucial moment in the work, the *Tuba mirum*, Habeneck decided to take his habitual pinch of snuff when he should have been guiding the orchestra through a complicated passage that involved the sequential introduction of 4 brass bands in the work. Berlioz described this event in his Memoirs:

There are, perhaps, one thousand bars in my Requiem. Precisely in that of which I have just been speaking, when the movement broadens out, and the brass burst in which their

terrible fanfare; in fact, just in the one bar where the conductor's direction is absolutely indispensable, Habeneck puts down his baton, quietly takes out his snuff-box, and proceeds to take a pinch of snuff. I had never taken my eyes off him: instantly... springing forward before him, I stretched out my arm and marked the four great beats of the new movement. The orchestras followed me... I conducted the piece to the end, and the effect which I had dreamed of was produced.

The first performance was declared a success. It was reported that some even broke down and cried during the performance. Berlioz was finally paid by the state government, but without further bureaucratic complications. Ultimately, Berlioz dedicated the work to M. de Gasparin for his help and understanding.

Berlioz's Requiem is perhaps one of the least religious masses for the dead ever written. Berlioz himself was not a deeply religious man, though his mother was an orthodox Roman Catholic. The Requiem is a sacred work, but it does not express any deep personal faith from Berlioz himself. The concept of Judgement Day is used in the work as a dramatic setting.

The work is set in Latin text for the Mass for the Dead. Berlioz was very liberal with the original text when he composed Requiem. For example, he freely shuffled text in several movements to suit the dramatic need of his music. The work was written for a massive orchestra and chorus. In its original performance, there were 400 singers and players total assembled, including 20 woodwinds, 12 horns, more than 100 strings, and 4 brass ensembles positioned at four corners of the concert stage.

Among all his works, Requiem apparently held a special place in Berlioz's heart. During the last few years of his life, Berlioz wrote to a friend: "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

Requiem

Grande Messe des morts

Jean Giraudeau tenor - Paris National Opera Orchestra - French Radio Choir
Hermann Scherchen conducting

CD-1

- 1 Requiem aeternam & Kyrie: Introitus
- 2 Dies irae: Prosa, Tuba mirum
- 3 Quid sum miser
- 4 Rex tremendae
- 5 Quaerens me

CD-2

- 6 Lacrymosa
- 7 Domine Jesu Christe
- 8 Hostias
- 9 Sanctus
- 10 Communion

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