

Fritz Reiner was one of the most acclaimed conductors of the 20th century -- noted for the vast range of his repertoire, which included both symphonic and operatic pieces spanning from the traditional canon to contemporary material, he was also an influential educator who counted among his pupils Leonard Bernstein. Reiner was born in Budapest, Hungary, on December 19, 1888; despite earning a law degree from the University of Bucharest, he pursued a career in music, and at age 21 was named chorumaster of the Budapest Opera. A stint as conductor with the Budapest Volksoper followed before Reiner was chosen in 1914 to serve as principal conductor of the Royal Opera in Dresden, where he collaborated with Richard Strauss on productions of several of the composer's early operas.

In 1922 Reiner left Europe to relocate to America, settling in Cincinnati, OH, and signing on as conductor with the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra; a decade later he was tapped to head the orchestral and opera departments at Philadelphia's Curtis Institute of Music, where his students included Bernstein. After next serving as the music director of the Pittsburgh Symphony between 1938 and 1948, he served five years with the Metropolitan Opera. While Reiner's frequent migration might have been attributed largely to a restless creativity, he was also a notoriously difficult personality who frequently alienated those around him -- many of the musicians under his command openly loathed him, although he inevitably inspired the best work of their careers.

Reiner's own best work was undoubtedly his tenure with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which he elevated into one of the most celebrated ensembles in the world. Moving over to the CSO in 1953, he not only established the orchestra as a top-flight live attraction but also as a popular recording entity -- the countless albums they made for RCA's Living Stereo series during Reiner's decade-long tenure were much acclaimed by collectors for both the power of the performances and the unusually high fidelity of the recordings themselves. Releases like Fritz Reiner Conducts Richard Strauss and Fritz Reiner Conducts Bartók in particular remain definitive interpretations of the composers in question. Health problems forced Reiner to resign his position in 1962, and he died in New York City on November 15 of the following year.



VERDI REQUIEM

Fritz Reiner

Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra

Leontyne Price • Rosalind Elias • Jussi Bjoerling • Giorgio Tozzi

Chorus – Society Of The Friends Of Music, Vienna

Requiem, also called Requiem Mass, Italian in full *Messa da requiem per l'anniversario della morte di Manzoni 22 maggio 1874* (“Requiem Mass for the Anniversary of the Death of Manzoni May 22, 1874”), requiem mass by Giuseppe Verdi, intended as a memorial to a departed hero—the poet, playwright, and novelist Alessandro Manzoni. Requiem premiered in Milan on May 22, 1874. It is Verdi’s largest-scale nonoperatic work.

The leading Italian writer of the 1800s, Manzoni played the role in Italy that Goethe had for an earlier generation of Germans: that of the country’s literary soul. On May 22, 1873, when Manzoni passed away, all Italy mourned. Verdi, in a letter to his publisher, expressed a wish to write something in memory of Manzoni. Determined to conduct the work himself on the first anniversary of Manzoni’s death, Verdi arranged with the city of Milan that the premiere would take place in San Marco. Requiem premiered on schedule to massive public acclaim. The performance at San Marco was followed by three more at La Scala.

In the opening “Requiem Aeternam,” “Te Decet Hymnus,” and “Kyrie” sections, Verdi gradually builds up energy on flowing lines of imitative polyphony.

The second movement, which has 10 sections, begins with a “Dies Irae”

that spans roughly half an hour by itself. It opens with strident brass, swirling strings and the tumultuous fury of the chorus’s lines. For the “Tuba Mirum” portion, the solo trumpet grows to a trumpet ensemble as the composer evokes the trumpet that on Judgment Day calls forth the dead from their graves. Also of note in this movement are the virtuosic use of the vocal quartet in the “Rex Tremendae” section and the tenor aria in the “Ingemisco”.

The “Offertorio” (third movement) sets the chorus aside in favour of the vocal quartet, though the chorus returns in force for the “Sanctus” (fourth movement). The “Agnus Dei” (fifth movement) begins with the soprano and mezzo-soprano in lullaby-like a capella lines, before being joined gently by the chorus and orchestra. The “Lux Aeterna” (sixth movement) combines the mezzo-soprano not with the soprano, but rather with the tenor and bass, as shimmering string tremolos seek to capture the sense of that eternal light.

For the seventh and final movement, “Libera Me,” Verdi provides assertive lines for the solo soprano, while the chorus is set in a far more soft-spoken fashion, at least until the return of the tempest of sound that is the “Dies Irae.” The “Requiem Aeternam” of the first movement is also repeated. In the final section of the work, Verdi layers the choral parts into a restless fugue.

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1 Requiem And Kyrie 12:03

2 Dies Irae Part 1 14:36

3 Dies Irae (Concluded) 25:07

4 Offertorium 11:59

5 Sanctus 2:45

6 Agnus Dei 5:33

7 Lux Aeterna 7:07

8 Libera Me 16:04

Total Time: 1:35:14

Producer: Erik Smith

Engineer: James Brown

Recorded by Decca at Sofeinsaal, Vienna, May & June 1960



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