

Verdi Requiem – Impressions from the Choir.

Judy Williams

In the weeks leading up to singing the Verdi Requiem last Sunday a few things occurred to me.

I would have loved to have been in the audience for this performance. Singing in enormous choirs with enormous orchestras has a few challenges, the main one being that, ironically, you can't always hear what's going on. But what a fine orchestra! I loved the wall of double basses in front of me, the abundance of celli and the sea of strings around to the left side.

The soloists were great! We finally got to hear the bass Adrian Tamburini for the first at the dress rehearsal on Sunday morning. Wow! I believe he is appearing in an opera in Melbourne. Tenor Andrew Goodwin has a real 'Italian' tenor sound, perfect for Verdi. The Lacrymosa is so beautiful, building up to the soprano Natalie coming in at the end over the top of the chorus and the soloists. Spine tingling. I did wonder at Verdi's choice of a mezzo to sing the part which is an active lower than the soprano in the Agnus Dei. It's very low even for an alto.

The ending is so dramatic with the soprano once again singing over the chorus. After such an operatic finale, Verdi reminds us we are singing a requiem and the final 10 bars are pppp. Unexpected but effective.

In the last movement, Libera Me, the chorus is very exposed as there is hardly any orchestration at the beginning when the altos start the fugue. We didn't realise this until Sunday morning, the first rehearsal with the orchestra. It was a bit of a shock as we had piano accompaniment at other rehearsals.

Noah Perez looks about 15, but is actually in his early 20's, I think. He is such a brilliant rehearsal pianist we took him for granted straight away. He is at Uni but NOT studying music apparently.

We would have benefitted from an additional rehearsal with the orchestra. I think we are very lucky that we always have 2 with MWC orchestra. In all the other scratch choirs I have sung with, we have only ever had one rehearsal with the orchestra.

Christopher Bowen was obviously passionate about this work. He said that in his opinion it is 'perfection' and that every time he hears it or conducts it he finds something new to appreciate in it. He must have done this many times as it seems he knows each vocal part off by heart.

There are 3 performances of Verdi's Requiem by Sydney Philharmonia Choir next June at the Opera House. The conductor is Oleg Caetani. I will definitely be in the audience.

Pat Irving

High's and low's of the Requiem.

Lots of high's but in a nutshell to be enveloped in that wonderful music with its great drama of joy, sorrow, anger and pleadings.

Perhaps the only low. Wish we could have had one more rehearsal (sounds familiar). After all, we did only have one full day and one half day to rehearse with a quick run through with the orchestra on the day of performance.

It was all a great buzz and worth all the hard work.

Margaret Stanley

Firstly the Music

The beautiful music as described by Brahms - 'only a genius could have written such a work'. From the quiet beginnings Requiem Aeternam to the exhilarating Kyrie Eleison, through to the triumphant Dies Irae, the beauty of Agnus Dei and the very moving Libera Me, I could hear some of Verdi's wonderful operas at times – Nabucco, Aida, La Traviata. His music is lyrical and deeply emotional from trembling to full drama. It was wonderful to sing and left me feeling so grateful I could be part of this production.

Secondly sharing the experience

It was so enjoyable having so many MWC members being involved, starting out in the morning excited and ready to begin the rehearsals and then being truly exhausted at the end of the day, we all said we went home and just collapsed such was the intensity of the rehearsals. The SUGC were very welcoming, it was fun performing with them and the guest choirs.

Thirdly performing with amazing Soloists

Having seen Natalie Aroyan the soprano perform with Opera Australia in Simon Boccanegra and Don Carlos, and Andrew Goodwin recently in Elgars' Gerontius, it was a truly wonderful experience to be part of the choir performing with them. All of the soloists were brilliant, we were so privileged to be on the stage with them at the beautiful Town Hall.

Pam Lewis

Lots of thoughts, impressions and emotions.

Taking part in the Verdi Requiem last weekend was a choral highlight for me. The sheer power of the music from the drama of the Dies Irae with all its dread and fear to the quiet simplicity of the Agnus Dei took over so I was totally immersed in the experience.

Great too was sharing this with other chorister friends in rehearsing and singing the music we all love.

What a privilege.

Mary Vinter

I didn't know the work when I signed up with the Graduate Choir. I had been so disappointed not to join the group singing the Brahms Requiem in New York I thought surely I can make it to Sydney Town Hall. Of course I recognised some of the main themes but was delighted when I realised 2nd sopranos had a starring role in the Dies Irae, carrying such a well-known and major theme. Second sops often feel neglected and under-appreciated but Verdi certainly recognised our full potential.

Apart from being overwhelmed by the power and drama of the music, the glorious experience of singing with so many wonderful voices and superb soloists I realised as I sat on the stage (2nd sops were on the main stage) that I had first sung at the Town Hall when I was 17 with the Combined Churches Choir singing the Messiah. And here I was again at 77 still singing there - 60 years, is it some sort of a record and how lucky I am.

It is particularly enjoyable going to these events with members of our choir and sharing such with friends such uplifting and life-affirming moments.

Marienne Short

The performance was indeed memorable, certainly for me, so I am sending you my feelings before anything else gets in the way and I lose some of the "lightness of being" resulting.

It was such a feeling of achievement to be able to sing Verdi's Requiem in such a beautiful Town Hall - it suited the mood of the music so well. The music was a challenge, but even though we were probably not note perfect in a few places, it nevertheless enabled us to feel the full sentiment behind the words, with the music providing so many dramatic changes in sound and tempo. I felt we mastered it all pretty well.

My favourite would have to be Agnus Dei which is so haunting and beautiful to sing. The four soloists were a joy to listen to - we all appreciated their skill, which together with the orchestra is the result of so many years of training, practice and a pure love of music.

As a chorister, these performances do make us appreciate even more the joys of singing and of doing so with so many others. It was also a pleasure to sing to such a large audience! Despite last days of anxiety, the house was nearly full which made it all the more fulfilling for us. And yes, there were presentations - beautiful Australian native flowers.

Any fears? Well, my only real worry was that I could have so easily dropped the heavy score and had it crash over the railing in a very noticeable way. However all was well.

Pat Hughes

I had always wanted to sing the Requiem, and was not disappointed. It was a wonderful experience to sing this perfectly crafted work with 200 choristers, superb soloists, full orchestra, and an excellent conductor. The Town Hall is a beautiful venue with great acoustics.

There were some anxious moments with Sanctus and Libera Me and the delivery was not perfect; hopefully it was not noticed.

Apparently Marie Bashir (who was singing in the Choir) had tears in her eyes as she congratulated the soloists, and Adrian Tamburini (the Bass soloist) wrote on Monday, "I am still reeling in the afterglow of a fabulous performance yesterday."

It was also most enjoyable to engage with the other choristers and to socialise with members of our choir.