

13 SEPTEMBER

FRIDAY SERIES 1

Helsinki Music Centre at 19.00

Hannu Lintu, conductor

Soile Isokoski, soprano

Lilli Paasikivi, mezzo-soprano

Sergei Semishkur, tenor

Matti Salminen, bass

The Helsinki Music Centre Choir, coach **Tapani Länsiö**

Giuseppe Verdi: Requiem

85 min

I Requiem aeternam – Kyrie eleison

II Dies irae

Dies Irae

Tuba mirum

Liber scriptus

Quid sum miser

Rex tremendae

Recordare

Ingemisco

Confutatis

Lacrimosa

III Offertorio

IV Sanctus

V Agnus Dei

VI Lux aeterna

VII Libera me

No interval. The concert ends at about 20.35.

GIUSEPPE VERDI (1813–1901): REQUIEM

Verdi completed his *Requiem* in April 1874 and conducted the premiere at St. Mark's Church, Milan on May 22. Three days later it was performed at the city's opera house, La Scala, where, unlike at the premiere, the audience was able to show its appreciation. The *Requiem* was not, however, heard in its final form until the following year, by which time Verdi had exchanged the original choral fugue in the *Liber scriptus* movement for a moving mezzo-soprano solo.

“An opera clothed in ecclesiastical garb”

On the whole, the *Requiem* got a jubilant reception and was soon being performed abroad. Some, however, were not so enamoured with it, and others questioned the right of Verdi, a known agnostic, to compose a religious mass. The Church further disapproved of the use of female voices, as this went against the practice of contemporary Italian church music. Although the *Requiem* was first performed in a church, Verdi did not really intend it for liturgical use, and it is nowadays heard mainly in concert halls.

The mood of the music – dramatic and often genuinely sentimental – also made people sceptical. Some claimed that it was too “operatic”. This claim is understandable in that the music does have affinities with Verdi's ope-

ras, and many of the details sound familiar. Verdi did, however, make a clear distinction between opera and the *Requiem*, noting that phrasing that was fine in a theatre would not be fitting in a religious context.

A multi-mood masterpiece

The Verdi *Requiem* is a work cast on a grand scale. Divided into seven sections, it lasts one-and-a-half hours in performance. Verdi immersed himself more deeply in the details of the text than other *Requiem* composers, and with greater descriptive force. He drew on the whole range of expressive devices, revealing seldom-heard aspects of himself as a composer. Only rarely do his operas find a use for imitative counterpoint, but the *Sanctus* and *Libera me* movements of the *Requiem* prove that he was also a master of the fugue.

The opening movement, breathing calmly, is a prayer that the dead may find eternal peace and serves as a gentle introduction to the *Requiem* world. The choir's picturesque *Requiem* leads to a *Kyrie* sung by the four soloists and choir.

The biggest section, and the musical-dramatic focus of the whole work, is the *Dies irae* sequence that begins with a shattering outburst. The opening theme, evoking the day of wrath, will be heard again later, not only in the *Dies irae* sequence itself but also in the *Liber scriptus*, the *Confutatis* and the closing *Libera me*. Mighty effects are also called up in the *Tuba mirum*, with extra off-stage trumpets, and in

the massive vocal climaxes of the *Rex tremenda*e. The *Dies irae* sequence is not, however, one of blood and thunder only, for it also has some moments of contemplation, such as the trio *Quid sum miser* for soprano, mezzo and tenor, the *Recordare* for soprano and mezzo, and the stunningly beautiful *Lacrimosa*. The last of these is one of the most moving sections of the whole work, and one adapted by Verdi from a duet once intended for his opera *Don Carlos* but later rejected.

From the serene *Offertorio* onwards the mood becomes more hopeful. The *Sanctus* erupts with a dazzling eight-part fugue scored for a double chorus, the *Agnus Dei* is a meditative moment of calm for soprano, mezzo and choir beginning with music evocative of Gregorian chant, and the *Lux aeterna* is a peaceful trio for soprano, mezzo and bass. Shadows of doubt still flicker in the closing *Libera me*, and especially its *Dies irae* reminder, but after an impressive build-up the animated fugue reaches a state of equilibrium in the final bars.

Kimmo Korhonen (abridged)

HANNU LINTU

Hannu Lintu, you began the season and your term as Chief Conductor last week with the premiere performance of a work commissioned by the FRSO, saying that you intend to make this a regular practice. Is this week, too, the start of a more lasting practice?

Well yes, actually, I hope so. I want to perform some major choral work in the standard repertoire at the beginning of each season. Not many have been performed by the Helsinki orchestras in recent years. It's ages since the FRSO last did Verdi's *Requiem*. Now, with the forming of the Helsinki Music Centre Choir, we will I hope have a first-class instrument for performing works like this.

Quite a lot of conductors, myself included, have a sort of mania – we love these great, noisy choral works, big crowds and costly set-ups. And what's more, we managed to get an unusually fine band of soloists for this performance of the *Requiem*.

*What is it that appeals to you in Verdi's *Requiem*?*

I've always been fascinated by the very special link between piety and music in this work. Could the fact that Verdi was Italian partly explain the lack of seriousness and grovelling so typical of Protestant church music? We may, on the other hand, ask whether Catholics need to approach their god with trumpets and trombones and opera singers if they want to be sure their voice will reach up to heaven. This work has a lot in common with a Roman Catholic cathedral – decorativeness, massiveness and theatricality are somehow intrinsic qualities.

Verdi's *Requiem* has been called an opera clothed in ecclesiastical garb. This may seem true if you compare it with the *Requiems* of, say, Mozart or Fauré. Verdi's does of course have

more dramatic gestures and is more episodic, but if you regard this as operatic, you end up on the wrong track. The fact that Verdi's *Requiem* speaks to people – those who are not religious as well – springs precisely from the dramatic and expressive nature of the music.

Aïda had been completed only three years earlier, and all the soloists in the first performance of the *Requiem* had sung in the premiere of *Aïda*. Mezzo-soprano Maria Waldmann, who had sung Amneris, made such a great impression on Verdi that he later made the mezzo part in the *Requiem* even bigger. And in other respects, too, he would appear to have had in mind dramatic voice types such as those required for *Aïda*, Amneris, Radamès and Ramfis.

For me, it's wonderful to bring the *Requiem* into a concert hall. In Italy in Verdi's day, performing it in a church – the domain of boy sopranos, castrati and countertenors – was difficult because it needs female singers. It was first performed in St Mark's Church, Milan in May 1874, but only with a special dispensation. The next performance a few days later was at La Scala, and from then onwards it remained rooted for a long time in concert halls. This may be another reason why it gained more of a reputation as an opera than as a mass. To my mind the *Requiem* is well suited to a concert hall, because logically it's so demanding. We now have a big platform at our disposal and don't need to squash the performers somewhere between the pulpit and the altar. And the musical texture

comes over best in the balanced acoustics of a concert hall, without detracting from the piety of the work.

Due to its hybrid nature, Verdi's *Requiem* was undoubtedly a new and strange experience in its day. By that time, of course, Berlioz had already produced his baffling *Requiem* and *Te Deum*, but the golden age of the giant battery of performers was only just coming in.

Lotta Emanuelsson

www.hannulintu.fi

SOILE ISOKOSKI

A regular guest at the most illustrious opera and concert venues, Soile Isokoski is one of the most sought-after sopranos in the world today.

At the Finnish National Opera Soile Isokoski made her debut as Mimi in *La bohème* and has since sung to great acclaim at the Vienna, Hamburg, Berlin and Bavarian State Operas, La Scala, the Opéra Bastille, Covent Garden and the New York Metropolitan. She is also a regular guest at many international festivals and has worked with a host of celebrated conductors.

Soile Isokoski has a large concert repertoire and has held numerous Lied recitals all over the world. With Marita Viitasalo she has recorded works by many Finnish and Scandinavian composers, by Schubert, Schumann and Richard Strauss. She has been the recipient of a Gramophone Editor's Choice Award, a MIDEM Classical Award and a

BBC Music Magazine Disc of the Year Award.

For her merits as an artist and her services to Finnish music Soile Isokoski was awarded the prestigious Pro Finlandia Medal in 2002. She received Finland's State Prize for Music in 2005 and was honoured with the title of Austrian Kammersängerin in 2008. In 2011 she received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Helsinki.

Engagements in the 2013/2014 season include appearances in Dresden, Berlin, Munich, Paris and London.

LILLI PAASIKIVI

Lilli Paasikivi is a frequent guest at the world's leading opera houses, concert halls and music festivals. Since her debut in Wagner's Ring with Sir Simon Rattle and the Berlin Philharmonic at the Aix-en-Provence Festival, Wagner roles have become central to her work on stage.

This season her engagements include Sibelius's Kullervo at the Berlin Konzerthaus, Mahler's Kindertotenlieder with the Malmö Symphony Orchestra and the Bordeaux National Orchestra and Das Lied von der Erde with the Bilbao Symphony Orchestra, and Prokofiev's Ivan the Terrible with the Philharmonia Orchestra.

At the Finnish National Opera, Lilli Paasikivi's assignments have included the title role in Carmen, Amneris in Aïda, Genevieve in Pelléas et Mélisande and Waltraute in Götterdämmerung. She has appeared widely in Mahler symphonies and song cycles with,

among others, the Los Angeles and Berlin Philharmonics and the London and Sydney Symphonies.

Among the items in Lilli Paasikivi's discography are Beethoven's 9th Symphony with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, Mahler's 3rd Symphony with the Philharmonia and 8th Symphony with the London Symphony.

In August 2013 Lilli Paasikivi began as Artistic Director of the Finnish National Opera. She is also Artistic Director of the Pyhäniemi Manor concert series.

SERGEI SEMISHKUR

Born in Kirov in Russia, Sergei Semishkur graduated from the Nizhny-Novgorod State Glinka Conservatoire in 2003 and has been a soloist with the Mariinsky Opera Company since 2007. His opera engagements have taken him to the Salzburg Festival, the operas in Warsaw and Israel, the Deutsche Oper Berlin and the Savonlinna Opera Festival.

On the concert platform, Sergei Semishkur has sung in such works as the Berlioz, Mozart, Verdi and Webber Requiems, Beethoven's 9th Symphony and Mahler's 8th. He has appeared at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, the Barbican and the Edinburgh Festival, and he has a close relationship with the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the London Symphony, the Choir and Orchestra of the Mariinsky Theatre and the Munich Philharmonic.

Highlights of last season included the part of Alfredo in La traviata in Monte Carlo, Pinkerton in Madama Butterfly at the National Opera in Oman, the ti-

tle role in *Benvenuto Cellini* in Paris and Dvořák's *Requiem* with the Orchestre de Paris.

Sergei Semishkur has recorded extensively on the Mariinsky label: Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*, Shostakovich's *The Nose*, Berlioz's *Requiem*, Wagner's *Das Rheingold* and Mahler's 8th Symphony, to mention just a few of the items.

MATTI SALMINEN

Matti Salminen ranks as one of the greatest basses in the world today. A member of the solo ensemble of the Cologne Opera 1972–1980, he has been at the Zurich Opera since 1984. Guest performances have taken him to Berlin, Munich, Vienna, Barcelona and Helsinki, and to the world's major opera houses, such as the New York Metropolitan and the Opéra national de Paris.

In addition to the operas of Mozart, Wagner and Verdi, Matti Salminen's repertoire encompasses the great bass roles in Russian operas, such as *Boris Godunov* and *Ivan Khovansky*. He has sung the title roles in Aulis Sallinen's operas *The Horseman* and *King Lear*, and Einojuhani Rautavaara's *Rasputin*, which was written for him.

Matti Salminen has made numerous award-winning discs, including several complete recordings of operas. Those of Wagner's *Das Rheingold* and *Götterdämmerung* have won him Grammy awards. Berlin, Bavaria and Austria have honoured him with the title of *Kammersänger*. Matti Salminen has set up a foundation bearing his

name to support talented young singers.

THE HELSINKI MUSIC CENTRE CHOIR

Founded in autumn 2011, the Helsinki Music Centre Choir of about 85 singers can, as required, regroup as a male, female or chamber choir. It works in close partnership with the main Helsinki Music Centre occupants: the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra and the Sibelius Academy. Its Artistic Director has from the very beginning been composer Tapani Länsiö and the members are amateurs with a passion for singing.

The HMCC repertoire, planned jointly by conductors Hannu Lintu, Jukka-Pekka Saraste and John Storgårds, consists mainly of symphonic choral and orchestral works and unaccompanied music for large choir, not forgetting contemporary music.

The Choir appears in concert from eight to ten times a year, mainly at the Helsinki Music Centre but also at other venues. Fixtures this year include the Organ Night and Aria festival in Espoo and the Turku Music Festival. The choir's annual All Saints Day concert of unaccompanied music will this year be devoted to hymns and begin at the Helsinki Music Centre at 21.00 on November 2.

THE FINNISH RADIO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

The Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra (FRSO) is the orchestra of the Finnish Broadcasting Company (Yle). Its mission is to produce and promote Finnish musical culture and its Chief Conductor as of autumn 2013 is Hannu Lintu.

The Radio Orchestra of ten players founded in 1927 grew to symphony orchestra strength in the 1960s. Its previous Chief Conductors have been Toivo Haapanen, Nils-Eric Fougstedt, Paavo Berglund, Okko Kamu, Leif Segerstam, Jukka-Pekka Saraste and Sakari Oramo. The FRSO has two Honorary Conductors: Jukka-Pekka Saraste and Sakari Oramo.

The latest contemporary music is a major item in the repertoire of the FRSO, which each year premieres a number of Yle commissions. Another of the orchestra's tasks is to record all Finnish orchestral music for the Yle archive. During the 2013/2014 season it will premiere six Finnish works commissioned by Yle.

The FRSO has recorded works by Eötvös, Nielsen, Hakola, Lindberg, Saariaho, Sallinen, Kaipainen, Kokkonen and others, and the debut disc of the opera *Aslak Hetta* by Armas Launis. Its discs have reaped some major distinctions, such as the BBC Music Magazine Award and the Académie Charles Cros Award. The disc of the Sibelius and Lindberg violin concertos (Sony BMG) with Lisa Batiashvili as the soloist received the MIDEM Classical Award in 2008, in which year the New York Times chose the other Lindberg disc as its Record of the Year.

The FRSO regularly tours to all parts of the world. During the 2013/2014 season it will be visiting Central Europe under the baton of Hannu Lintu.

All the FRSO concerts both in Finland and abroad are broadcast, usually live, on Yle Radio 1. They can also be heard and watched with excellent stream quality on yle.fi/klassinen.