

Verdi's style



Structure:

as in his operas, Verdi uses arias, recitatives, ensembles, choruses.

Texture:

much choral homophony, and most of the numbers are choral; traditional fugal writing; syllabic and melismatic settings.

Harmony and tonality:

favoured mediant relationships; frequent diminished 7^{ths}; chromatic colouring; use of inversions, unusual basslines; did not use modality.

Melody:

sublimely lyrical; the lack of ornamentation allowing clarity to express the meaning of words; wide range. Use of scalar motives, chromatic phrases, monotone chants and returning head motives.

Timbre:

instrumental writing always characterises the text; supports voices; some individual solos; brass important.

Rhythm:

mostly all in 4/4 (*Quid Sum* in 6/8); vigorous and always used to illuminate text; triplets, sextuplets; dotted; syncopation.

Dynamics:

a very wide range from *pppp* to *ff* always underpinning the drama of the text.

Dies irae

Dramatic, *ff*, G minor stabbing chords set the scene of awesome terror and will return with offbeat bass drum, binding the work.

Dotted rhythms, diminished 7^{ths}, chromatic descents, semiquaver runs, syncopated choral entries, wide tonicisations, rich harmony all characterise the first 53 bars. Change of mood for last section: *pp* choral homophony with chant-like soprano line and tremolando strings, low flute trills, shuddering string motif, offbeat horn and anapaestic timpani set the scene for concluding hushed, tremorous, homorhythmic choral utterances.





Background

Composed in 1873-1874 in memory of the novelist, Manzoni, and first performed in Milan, 1874.

Usually performed in concert rather than liturgical setting.

Verdi held Beethoven in the highest regard, and his music also bears influence of Donizetti, Bellini and Rossini.

Highly operatic and theatrical, rather than liturgical, showing strong links to Verdi's operatic writing.

In his Requiem, Verdi is the ultimate story-teller, addressing human issues and emotions such as anger and terror.



Tuba mirum

Extended opening fanfare for 8 trumpets (4 off stage); gradually increasing in volume, tempo and rhythmic activity is typical of Verdi and sets a highly dramatic mood for basses' entrance bar 117.

Tutti *ff* orchestral accompaniment with cross rhythms, chromaticism and temporal increase intensify the mood. Insistent fanfare triplets and syncopated crotchets in brass, with wide, arpeggiated bass line, lead to Neapolitan harmony, dramatic GP, then sudden change of mood for hushed, terrifying solo bass utterances of 'mors' (death).

Liber scriptus

First extended solo; mezzo soprano's line being a highly dramatic delivery of the verse text, illuminated with wide leaps, accents, dramatic dynamic contrasts, punctuated by tamps and oscillating semiquaver low string line.

Harmonic rate and instrumental accompaniment increase, with choral *sotto voce* reminders of *Dies irae* motif.

Ominous semiquavers, off beat wind and augmented 2^{nds} in low strings lead to *ff* reprise of the *Dies irae* outcry.

Rex tremendae

Set for 4 soloists and chorus, and full orchestra in C minor; the *ff* dotted rhythms, tremolo strings and powerful, wide, declamatory descending jagged opening line of the bass chorus set the scene for this movement, dramatically capturing the mood of the terrified sinners. Effective, hushed homophonic utterances by the tenors and more lyrical solo vocal phrases with poignant rising 6th offer suggestions of hope above the returning terrifying opening choral bass line over dim 7th harmony and antiphonal cries of 'salva me'. Rich, mediant-related harmonic progressions eventually resolve in hopeful C major.

Quid sum miser

Woodwind trio, with distinctive repetitive ostinato figuration and sparse string accompaniment appropriate for the expressive, penitent pleas for salvation by solo vocal trio (mezzo soprano, soprano and tenor).

G minor, with modulations to relative and tonic majors; frequent use of Neapolitan harmony, appoggiaturas, chromatic passing notes and some pizzicato in low strings.

Homophonic vocal harmony from bar 288, with plaintive, *a cappella* section, large intervallic leaps, wide vocal range with soprano soaring to top B natural b 311, the minor 9th dominant harmony intensifying the final solo phrases.

Recordare

A calm, serene duet for soprano and mezzo soprano soloists, with rocking rhythm accompanying figure in cellos and static tonic pedal reflecting the prayerful nature of the text in comforting F major.

Occasional use of suspensions, chromaticism, minor 9^{ths} (at mention of perdition bar 399) move to minor (for Jesus' suffering bar 410); the expressive nature of the writing is heightened by use of sighing, descending 3rd phrases in the solo lines and a return of the 'salva' motif in upper woodwind, over *pp* tremolo upper and pizzicato lower strings.

