



Beecham

Berlioz: La Grand Messe des Morts



Berlioz was undoubtedly one of Thomas Beecham's favourite composers. He conducted Berlioz's music even when it was unfashionable, and after the war he was one of several conductors responsible for a reassessment of Berlioz's merits. In 1947 he conducted a radio performance of Berlioz's epic opera, *Les Troyens*, and throughout the 1950s regularly programmed pieces by Berlioz in his concerts.

Beecham conducted Berlioz's *La Grande Messe des Morts* on several occasions, but this is the sole recording of his interpretation of this work. He had conducted the piece in 1958 in the Royal Festival Hall but found the results rather disappointing. The space was too constricted to permit the full orchestral requirements from the score, and the LPO chorus was not as polished as he would have liked. Beecham decided to try again in late 1959, this time in the much larger Royal Albert Hall, with a significantly larger orchestra, and a smaller but better-trained chorus. The result was a triumph. The Times praised his 'remarkable ear of orchestral balance' that produced a 'magnificently vital performance.' The Times wished that the radio audience had been able to hear the work in stereo to appreciate Beecham's careful spacing of the instrumental forces in the hall, including some in the boxes. The BBC did not record it in stereo, unfortunately, though the ambient stereo version presented here gives us some sense of how the audience in the hall heard it at the time.

The soloist is the Welsh tenor Richard Lewis, a well-known recitalist, concert and opera performer in Britain in the 1950s and 1960s. He was particularly famed for his *Gerontius* (see PASC525) and his Mozart roles at Glyndebourne, but was also one of the few able to cope with complex roles in new operas such as *King Priam* and *Moses and Aaron*.

This was Beecham's last concert in the Royal Albert Hall. He gave his last concert (in Portsmouth) less than six months later in May 1960, and died in March 1961.



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BERLIOZ LA GRANDE MESSE DES MORTS, Op. 5
BEECHAM, ROYAL PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA AND CHORUS

beechem

conducts berlioz

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XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a photograph
of Sir Thomas Beecham

Performance of 13 December, 1959
Royal Albert Hall, London

Original recording by
BBC Transcription Services

Total duration: 78:48

BERLIOZ La Grande Messe des Morts (Requiem) Op. 5, H. 75

1. Requiem et Kyrie. Introït (9:42)
2. Dies iræ. Prose - Tuba mirum (11:10)
3. Quid sum miser (3:22)
4. Rex tremendæ (5:32)
5. Quærens me (5:04)
6. Lacrimosa (9:39)
7. Offertoire. Chœur des âmes du Purgatoire (8:57)
8. Hostias (3:09)
9. Sanctus (10:44)
10. Agnus Dei (11:29)

Richard Lewis, tenor
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus

conducted by Sir Thomas Beecham

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