



PUCCINI
**Preludio
sinfonico**
Requiem

Sebastian Bürger, Viola

Wolfgang Kläsener, Organ

Aalto Theatre Opera Chorus

Essen Philharmonic Choir

Essen Philharmonic Orchestra

Andrea Sanguineti



Giacomo
PUCCINI
(1858–1924)

- | | | |
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| 1 | Preludio sinfonico, SC 32 (1882) | 9:34 |
| 2 | Requiem, SC 76 (1905)
Text: Latin Mass for the Dead | 5:19 |

Sebastian Bürger, Viola **2**
Wolfgang Kläsener, Organ **2**

Aalto Theatre Opera Chorus **2**
Essen Philharmonic Choir **2**

Essen Philharmonic Orchestra **1**
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Giacomo Puccini (1858–1924)

Preludio sinfonico • Requiem

Giacomo Puccini was born in 1858 in the Italian city of Lucca, where his ancestors had worked as musicians for several generations. Setting out to follow in the family tradition he studied first at the music school in Lucca. Then, in 1880, he moved to Milan to take up a place at the Conservatory and pursue the dream he had cherished since hearing *Aida* in Pisa in 1876 – that of becoming an opera composer. He built on the success of his first stage work, *Le villi* (1884), and made his name across Europe with *Manon Lescaut*, premiered in Turin in 1893. Two years before this, he had moved to the small town of Torre del Lago (about ten miles from Lucca), and it was here that most of his operas were composed. After *Manon*, he worked with librettists Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica to produce *La Bohème* (1896), *Tosca* (1900) and *Madama Butterfly* (1904). *La Bohème*, despite a lukewarm reception at its premiere, soon became a worldwide hit, and his next opera, *La fanciulla del West*, enjoyed its world premiere at The Metropolitan Opera, New York (1910). In 1921 Puccini moved to a villa he had had built in Viareggio, just north of Torre del Lago. He died on 29 November 1924 after an operation to treat the cancer from which he was suffering. His final opera, *Turandot*, was left unfinished. At the request of his son, Puccini's body was laid to rest in a chapel built at the family's former home in Torre del Lago, now preserved as the Villa Puccini, a museum dedicated to the composer. As well as having been renamed Torre del Lago Puccini, since 1930 the town has been a kind of Italian Bayreuth, hosting an annual festival devoted solely to the works of the composer whose name it has adopted. All of Puccini's works, even his purely instrumental scores, are striking for their theatricality – his music being characterised by a blend of melodic writing designed for its dramatic impact and the latest harmonic developments of the post-Romantic period.

Preludio sinfonico • Requiem

The two works presented here were written 23 years apart, during which time Puccini had gone from the financial straits of student life in Milan to the glory of worldwide fame. He composed the *Preludio sinfonico* in A major in 1882 as an end-of-year examination piece for the Milan Conservatory, where it was performed on 15 July that year. The influential critic Filippo Filippi, who just a year later was predicting a bright future for Puccini as a composer of orchestral music, considered it to be overlong and lacking in direction. In fact, the *Preludio* has moments of great charm and shows a sure hand from the start, its beautifully hushed opening an almost programmatic demonstration of the central influence of his student years, namely Wagner. While comparisons with the crepuscular atmospheres of the prelude to *Lohengrin* are inevitable, the work also bears a striking resemblance to the opening of another work, albeit one that was yet to be written. Both thematically and in its use of quiet, dramatic string sonorities, Puccini's piece anticipates the start of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana*, the composition of which began some years later, in 1888. It is worth remembering that both Puccini and Mascagni studied with Amilcare Ponchielli and that they had become friends when Mascagni entered the Conservatory in the autumn of 1882.

The two young men shared not only a rented room and precarious financial circumstances, but also an interest in the scores of Wagner and Boito (we know, for example, that together they bought and studied *Parsifal*). Some of the atmospheric writing in Mascagni's later masterpiece can unquestionably be attributed to his years of study in Milan, and the Wagnerian influences both composers absorbed at the Conservatory stayed with them as time went on. Puccini's *Preludio* reveals the personal way in which he appropriated the technical and expressive achievements of late-Romantic German orchestral music. Essentially tripartite in form, the work is based on two main motifs. The first of these is transformed each time it returns – completely diatonic on its first appearance, on its second it is endowed with striking chromatic colours. The

second motif is in triple time, suggesting a waltz. The climax of the work falls just over halfway through when, heralded by a brass fanfare, the first motif returns, only to fade away into a diaphanous atmosphere.

The wealth of ideas in the *Preludio* is also reflected in Puccini's reuse of some of its material in subsequent works – this kind of recycling became common practice for him. Notably, he borrowed the opening theme for a trio in the first version of *Edgar* ('Ultima speme, tu sei svanita' – 'Last hope, you have vanished'), an opera in which other fragments of the *Preludio* can also be found. Others again found a new home in *Le villi*, into whose score an extraordinary number of the young Puccini's motifs were woven. Borrowings and reworkings add to the difficulties that arise when trying to reconstruct the composer's own intentions as regards many of his early works. The individual parts of the *Preludio* include numerous cuts and performance indications at odds with the full score. The surviving autograph manuscript is incomplete, although a copy thought to be in Puccini's brother Michele's hand with corrections and additions from the composer himself also exists. Michele Girardi's critical edition, published as part of the *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere di Giacomo Puccini* in 2015 is, to date, probably the version that gets closest to Puccini's original vision.

By contrast, the short but compelling *Requiem* is a product of the composer's full maturity. It was commissioned by Giulio Ricordi, who wanted to commemorate the fourth anniversary of the death of Giuseppe Verdi, and entrusted this task to the man who had inherited Verdi's operatic mantle. The resulting work was brought to the attention of Puccini scholars by musicologist Giorgio Magri, who unearthed the score in 1972. According to the records, the *Requiem* was performed by the chorus of La Scala, Milan, conducted by Aristide Venturi, on the exact anniversary – 27 January 1905. This premiere took place in the chapel of Casa Verdi, the retirement home for singers and musicians founded in Milan by Verdi himself.

Despite its title, which suggests this might be a full-scale choral work, Puccini in fact sets only a few lines from the 'Requiem aeternam' introit of the Latin Mass for the dead. Written for sopranos, tenors and basses (sometimes divided), his *Requiem* is within the reach of amateur as well as professional choirs, and is accompanied by just a solo viola (playing in its poignant central-upper register) and either organ or harmonium.

The work is also structurally straightforward – in tripartite form, it opens in D minor (the same key as the *Requiem* by Mozart, whose birthday, by coincidence, was 27 January) with the voices in unison, accompanied by the organ. The first phrase, 'Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine' ('Lord, give them eternal rest'), moves in uncomplicated fashion from the tonic to the dominant. In the following phrase ('et lux perpetua luceat eis' – 'and may perpetual light shine upon them'), however, some surprising chromaticism from the vocal lines above contrary motion in the bass raises the melody up by an octave from the opening. The entire first part is, essentially, a scale, which begins diatonically, before, from the dominant onwards, using every other note of the chromatic scale. In the second part the organ accompanies the viola in its upper register (its line is notated in the treble clef); there follows a polyphonic section for the voices, with the viola in counterpoint – the only polyphonic episode in this piece. The third part is a repeat of the first, with the addition of a coda on the closing words, 'Requiescant in pace. Amen' ('May they rest in peace'), which also features the viola, before the traditional plagal cadence on the word 'Amen'.

The work's subdued and elegiac tone in no way diminishes the boldness and originality of Puccini's homage to Verdi; a homage which, according to Michele Girardi, extends to the technical aspect, through its reminiscences of the 'enigmatic scale' heard in Verdi's *Ave Maria*. In fact, Puccini seems to be using all the notes of the two main forms of minor scale, the melodic and the harmonic, but, as Verdi himself said about his enigmatic version, it is harmonisation that makes a scale work, something of which Puccini, an avid assimilator of all musical experiences, was very much aware.

Tommaso Manera

English translation: Susannah Howe



Photo © Atilia Hartwig

Aalto Theatre Opera Chorus

The Aalto Theatre Opera Chorus has existed since the opening of the Stadttheater in 1892 (now the Grillo Theatre). It originally consisted of six men and eight women, and today has over 50 members. Following a formative collaboration between choral directors Konrad Haenisch and Alexander Eberle, Jens Bingert served as director from the 2016/17 season until the end of the 2021/22 season. Klaas-Jan de Groot has been director since the 2022/23 season, with Patrick Jaskolka serving as deputy, as he was under Jens Bingert. The professionally trained

singers from 15 nations not only perform on the opera stage, but also in symphonic and special concerts. www.theater-essen.de/musiktheater/aalto-opernchor/



Essen Philharmonic Choir

'I didn't even compose the piece as beautifully as the Esseners sang it,' stated Johannes Brahms in 1885 about the performance of his motet *O Heiland, reiß die Himmel auf* by what was then the Gesangs-Musikverein. Patrick Jaskolka, who has directed the choir since 2016, aims to maintain this high level of performance. Founded in 1838, the choir is considered to be the oldest artistic association in the city of Essen, and is an important part of cultural life in the Ruhr region. The Essen Philharmonic Choir regularly participates in choral concerts with the Essen

Philharmonic Orchestra, as well as giving its own concerts, including guest appearances in neighbouring cities in the Ruhr area and the Rhineland. www.philharmonischerchor-essen.de



Photo © Volker Wiciak

Essen Philharmonic Orchestra

The Essen Philharmonic Orchestra is the symphony and opera orchestra of the city of Essen, and also enjoys an excellent international reputation thanks to regular guest appearances at Het Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, the Dvořák Prague Festival and the Richard Strauss Festival in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. The orchestra has also collaborated with eminent guest conductors including Philippe Herreweghe, Thomas Hengelbrock, Jun Märkl, Simone Young, Thomas Guggeis and Cornelius Meister, and soloists such as Rudolf Buchbinder, Frank Peter

Zimmermann, Maximilian Hornung, Julian Rachlin and Gautier Capuçon. In addition to regular opera performances at the Aalto Theatre, the Essen Philharmonic Orchestra performs more than 30 concerts per season at the Philharmonie

Essen, including chamber and special concerts. The musicians of the orchestra also put on their own series of chamber concerts in the foyer of the Aalto Theatre and in the Philharmonie, and appear in eclectic performances with guest artists at the KlassikLounge in the Grillo Theatre. The Essen Philharmonic Orchestra is a founding member of the Orchestra of Change initiative, which is committed to sustainable orchestral operations. Andrea Sanguineti is the general music director of the Essen Philharmonic Orchestra. <https://www.theater-essen.de/philharmoniker>



Photo © Benne Ochs

Andrea Sanguineti

German-Italian conductor Andrea Sanguineti is music director of the Essen Philharmonic Orchestra and the Aalto Theatre in Essen. He has conducted productions at major European opera houses including the Opernhaus Zürich, Oper Köln, Oper Leipzig, Opéra national du Rhin, Opéra de Nice and the Grand Théâtre de Genève. He made his debut at the Sydney Opera House in 2023 with *Roberto Devereux*, and the Savonlinna Opera Festival in 2024 with *Don Giovanni*. In addition to his success in the opera world, Sanguineti has given critically acclaimed performances with the Essen Philharmonic Orchestra, and has also appeared with the Gürzenich Orchester Köln, ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, Radio Filharmonisch Orkest and Orchestra Națională Radio. He regularly collaborates with renowned artists such as Frank Peter Zimmermann, Anna Vinnitskaya, Maria Agresta and Rolando Villazón. After training in Vienna and Milan, Sanguineti began his career as maestro preparatore and then Kapellmeister at the Staatsoper Hannover. In 2011, he was appointed First Kapellmeister at the Mainfranken Theater Würzburg and shortly afterwards music director of the Gerhart-Hauptmann-Theater Görlitz-Zittau, where he served until 2018. www.andreasanguineti.de

Requiem

- 2 Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Requiescant in pace. Amen.

Giacomo Puccini achieved global renown as an opera composer, but the orchestral and sacred works recorded here reveal little-known aspects of his output. The two pieces featured on this album were written 23 years apart during which time Puccini had gone from talented student to worldwide fame. The *Preludio sinfonico* was written in 1882 as an end-of-year examination piece for the Milan Conservatory; the *Requiem*, composed in 1905 to commemorate the death of Verdi, was rediscovered in 1972. An album featuring the *Messa di Gloria* and the *Capriccio sinfonico* along with a selection of orchestral rarities is available on 8.574685.

**Giacomo
PUCCINI**
(1858–1924)

Playing Time
14:57

- 1 Preludio sinfonico, SC 32 (1882) 9:34**
- 2 Requiem, SC 76 (1905) 5:20**

Text: Latin Mass for the Dead

Sebastian Bürger, Viola [2]

Wolfgang Kläsener, Organ [2]

Aalto Theatre Opera Chorus [2]

Essen Philharmonic Choir [2]

Essen Philharmonic Orchestra [1]

Andrea Sanguineti

Booklet notes in Italian can be found at www.naxos.com/notes/70398.htm

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di Giacomo Puccini (ed. Michele Girardi) [1], ed. Michele Girardi [2]

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