

# VERDI ♫ REQUIEM

BERKELEY COMMUNITY CHORUS & ORCHESTRA  
MING LUKE, MUSIC DIRECTOR

GIUSEPPE VERDI

*Messa da Requiem*

Ming Luke, *Music Director*

Natalia Ter Agapova, *Assistant Conductor*

Erin Ridge, *soprano*

Mariya Kaganskaya, *mezzo-soprano*

Kevin Gino, *tenor*

Andrew Pardini, *bass*

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Friday, January 2, 2026, at 7:30 p.m.

Saturday, January 3, 2026, at 3:00 p.m.

Sunday, January 4, 2026, at 3:00 p.m.

Hertz Hall, University of California, Berkeley



## WELCOME!

Welcome to our January 2026 concert series. To celebrate BCCO's 60th anniversary, we return to one of the most beloved works in the choral repertoire, the Verdi *Requiem*, which BCCO last performed in June 2015. This requiem, a musical setting of the Catholic funeral mass, was first performed in 1874. It's a thrilling piece, reflecting Verdi's operatic genius and his talent for creating dramatic contrasts, from the roaring "Dies irae" to the delicate "Lacrymosa." This piece presents a rewarding challenge for BCCO choristers, and we're delighted to have another chance to perform it. We hope you enjoy the concert.

— Hester Bradbury & Ellen Rosenfield, *Co-Presidents*

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BCCO is supported in part by grants from the Alameda County ARTSFUND and the City of Berkeley CivicArts Grant Program.

# BERKELEY COMMUNITY CHORUS & ORCHESTRA

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## GIUSEPPE VERDI

### *Messa da Requiem*

I. Requiem and Kyrie (solo quartet, chorus)

II. Dies irae

    Dies irae (chorus)

    Tuba mirum (chorus)

    Mors stupebit (bass)

    Liber scriptus (mezzo-soprano, chorus)

    Quid sum miser (soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor)

    Rex tremendae (solo quartet, chorus)

    Recordare (soprano, mezzo-soprano)

    Ingemisco (tenor)

    Confutatis (bass, chorus)

    Lacrymosa (solo quartet, chorus)

— INTERMISSION —

III. Offertorio (solo quartet)

IV. Sanctus (double chorus)

V. Agnus Dei (soprano, mezzo-soprano, chorus)

VI. Lux aeterna (mezzo-soprano, tenor, bass)

VII. Libera me (soprano, chorus)

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*The concert will last approximately two hours, including one intermission.*

Ming Luke, *Music Director*

Natalia Ter Agapova, *Assistant Conductor*

Erin Ridge, *soprano*

Mariya Kaganskaya, *mezzo-soprano*

Kevin Gino, *tenor*

Andrew Pardini, *bass*

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## THE ORCHESTRA

**VIOLIN I**

Julie Kim  
    *Concertmaster*  
Sarah Elert  
    *Assistant Principal*  
Sarah Biagini  
Zoe Merrill  
Carlotta Jacobs  
Micha Okun

**VIOLIN II**

Rebecca Wishnia  
    *Principal*  
Sara Chazin  
    *Assistant Principal*  
Jinny Lee  
Mary Dougherty  
Henry Stroud

**VIOLA**

Taylor Cooksey  
    *Principal*  
Cynthia Ryan  
    *Assistant Principal*  
Ed Wharton

**CELLO**

David Wishnia  
    *Principal*  
Alana Shannon  
    *Assistant Principal*  
Jennifer Mathers  
Liz Varnhagen

**BASS**

Aaron Shaul  
    *Principal*  
    *Herrick Jackson Chair*  
Michael Minor  
    *Assistant Principal*

**FLUTE**

Sarah Holzman  
    *Principal*  
Lance Suzuki  
Tori Hauk

**OBOE**

Robin May  
    *Principal*  
TBD

**CLARINET**

Dan Ferreira  
    *Principal*  
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**BASSOON**

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**TRUMPET**

Ari Micich  
    *Principal*  
John Freeman  
Carla Lamb  
Theodore Stone  
Charles Ryan  
Robert Gambino

**TROMBONE**

Steve Perdicaris  
    *Principal*  
Chris Vincenti  
Jason Borris  
    *bass trombone*

**TUBA**

TBD

**TIMPANI**

Fred Morgan  
    *Principal*

**BASS DRUM**

Divesh Karamchandani  
    *Principal*



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## THE CHORUS

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Veronika Fukson  
Marnie Ganotis  
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Christine Izaret  
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Carole Jones  
Brady Kahn  
Joyce Kanyuk  
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Sally Shafer  
Sheila Singleton  
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Sahoko Tamagawa  
Rebecca Tracy  
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\* Section Leader

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## ARTISTIC STAFF



### **Ming Luke**

*Music Director*

With “energy, creativity and charisma not seen since Leonard Bernstein,” and “vibrant,” “mind-blowing,” and “spectacular” conducting, bcco Music Director Ming Luke is a versatile conductor who has excited audiences around the world. Highlights include conducting the Bolshoi Orchestra in Moscow and *Romeo and Juliet* and *Cinderella* at the Kennedy Center, making his English debut at Sadler’s Wells with Birmingham Royal, conducting Dvořák’s *Requiem* in Dvořák Hall in Prague, recording the score for a Coppola film, and conducting over a hundred performances at the San Francisco War Memorial with the San Francisco Ballet. He has been recognized nationally for his work with music education and has designed and conducted education concerts and programs with Berkeley Symphony, Houston Symphony, Sacramento Philharmonic, and San Francisco Ballet, and he currently serves as music director of the Merced Symphony, principal

conductor of the Nashville Ballet, associate conductor of the Berkeley Symphony, and principal guest conductor of the San Francisco Ballet. Allan Ulrich of the *San Francisco Chronicle* said, “Ming Luke delivered the best live theater performance I’ve ever heard of [Prokofiev’s *Romeo and Juliet*],” and bcco’s *War Requiem* was named the best choral performance of 2016 in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Passionate about collaboration with dance companies and deepening the impact of movement to live music, Ming has guested with Boston Ballet, New York City Ballet Orchestra, Nashville Symphony/Ballet, San Diego Ballet, and others, and conducted Orchestre Prométhée in Paris as part of San Francisco’s residency with Les Étés de la Danse. Famed dancer Natalia Makarova stated, “Ming has a mixture of pure musicality and a sensitivity to needs of the dancers, which are such rare qualities.”

Ming has written, arranged, and performed over 150 education concerts with the Berkeley Symphony and has served on grant panels for the National Endowment of the Arts and the Grants and Cultural Committee of the Sacramento Metropolitan Arts Commission. An exciting pops conductor, he has created and conducted pops concerts in many venues, from baseball stadiums to picnics with over 4,000 people in attendance, traditional concert halls, and recordings for Major League Baseball.

Ming holds a master of fine arts degree in conducting from Carnegie Mellon University and a bachelor of music degree in music education and piano pedagogy from Westminster Choir College of Rider University.

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## ARTISTIC STAFF



### **Natalia Ter Agapova**

*Assistant Conductor*

Natalia Ter Agapova holds degrees in voice and choral conducting from the Alfred Schnittke Moscow State Institute of Music and is a laureate of numerous international vocal competitions. Based in San Francisco, she serves as soprano soloist and section leader at Calvary Presbyterian Church. Natalia appears frequently as a soloist, a Russian diction coach, and an ensemble singer

with Vox Humana SF, Golden Gate Symphony Orchestra & Chorus, and Zephyr Symphony & Chorus. She and her husband, Sergei, welcomed their first child, Alexander, this summer.



### **Leon Chou**

*Accompanist*

Leon Chou is a pianist, organist, violinist, and violist based in the SF Bay Area. The son of two pastors, he was raised playing piano for church services and ringing handbells in the bell choir. Singing with the San Francisco Boys Chorus was his first experience in ensemble singing; he would later become the accompanist for the

middle and high school choirs in the Albany Unified School District. As for the violin, Leon played with Berkeley Youth Orchestra under Jay Lehmann and Young People's Symphony Orchestra under David Ramadanoff for a combined seven years, becoming the concertmaster of both orchestras; he played Gershwin's *Concerto in F* as a soloist with YPSO. At UC Berkeley, he studied organ with George Emblom, music director of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, where he substituted for church services on their magnificent Flentrop organ. He also studied carillon up in the famous campanile on the UC Berkeley campus with Jeff Davis. Throughout college, he was a member of UC Berkeley's vocal jazz ensemble, Cal Jazz Choir, and both directed the group and arranged music. Currently, Leon is the music director at Good Shepherd Episcopal Church and accompanies children's choirs with the Oakland-based choral education organization Cantare Con Vivo. He is also the orchestra manager of Berkeley Youth Orchestra.



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## GUEST ARTISTS



### **Erin Ridge**

*soprano*

Lauded by *The Washington Post* as having a “smooth and charismatic lyric soprano,” Erin Ridge is a D.C.-based multidisciplinary artist making a name for herself as both a lyric soprano and a stage director. Combining versatile artistry with a probing intellect and commanding stage presence, Erin delivers compellingly honest performances both on and off the stage.

This season, Erin is looking forward to a wide variety of artistic engagements, including her solo debut with Great Falls Philharmonic singing Barber’s *Knoxville: Summer of 1915*, her debut as the soprano soloist in Verdi’s *Requiem* with BCCO, singing Diana in Washington Concert Opera’s *Iphigénie en Tauride*, and co-writing and performing in an original musical, *Fabric of Our Nation . . . The Life and Labor of Elizabeth Keckly*.

A fierce competitor, Erin has been the recipient of many awards in the U.S. and Europe, including first place at the American International Czech & Slovak Voice Competition and third place at the National Society of Arts and Letters National Voice Competition.

On stage, Erin has applied her versatile artistry to a variety of roles. She adores curating recitals and, as a champion of multidisciplinary artistry, she has thrived in creating a multifaceted opera career not just as a singer, but also as a stage director.

Passionate about nurturing the next generation of opera creatives, Erin is a returning faculty member at the Duke Ellington Performing Arts High School and Prague Summer Nights: Young Artists Music Festival, teaching acting for singers and directing scenes, programs, and operas.

Erin holds degrees in opera performance from Vanderbilt University and the University of Maryland.

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### **Mariya Kaganskaya**

*mezzo-soprano*

Hailed for her “rich mezzo” (*Opera Magazine*), mezzo-soprano Mariya Kaganskaya returned to San Francisco Opera in the 2023–24 season to cover the role of Third Lady in *The Magic Flute*. Additional appearances included the role of Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly* with West Bay Opera and her Opera Columbus debut as Larina in *Eugene Onegin*. In the 2024–25 season, she made her Opera San José debut as Third Lady in *The Magic Flute* under the baton of Alma Deutscher, and she appeared in concert singing works by Wagner, Elinor Armer, Aleksandra Vrebalov, and Julie Barwick. Her 2025–26 appearances include Verdi’s *Requiem* with BCCO and Mozart’s *Requiem* with the Columbus Symphony.

Mariya’s training includes residencies with the Santa Fe Opera, Arizona Opera, Florida Grand Opera, Opera Santa Barbara, and the iSing! International Festival in China. She is an alumna of the OperaWorks Advanced Artist Program and the Russian Opera Workshop at the Academy of Vocal Arts.

Recent awards include first place in the Classical Singer Competition (Emerging Professional Division), the Lois Alba Aria Competition, the Los Angeles International Liszt Competition, the St. Petersburg Opera Guild Competition, the Gershwin International Music Competition, the Pacific Musical Society Competition, and the Eastern, Southeastern, and At Large Regions of the NATS Artist Awards. Mariya is a winner of the most recent Bel Canto Vocal Scholarship Foundation Competition and the inaugural Butler Opera International Competition, among others.

Mariya earned her master of music and postgraduate degrees at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, under the tutelage of Catherine Cook.

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## GUEST ARTISTS



### Kevin Gino

*tenor*

Recognized for his “strong, utterly determined” singing, Filipino-American tenor Kevin Gino performs widely in both solo and choral capacities throughout the San Francisco Bay Area.

Since relocating from Los Angeles, Kevin has performed with numerous distinguished ensembles, including San Francisco Opera Chorus, California Bach Society, American Bach Soloists, Marin Baroque, Volti, Opera Parallèle, Pocket Opera, Ars Minerva, and San Francisco Chamber Orchestra. Recent operatic engagements include Camille in *The Merry Widow* with Pocket Opera, Tullio in *Messalina* with Ars Minerva, Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* with Pocket Opera, Nemorino in *L'elisir d'amore* with Mendocino Music Festival, Goro in *Madama Butterfly* with Opera San José, Ulysses in *Ifigenia in Aulide* with Ars Minerva, and Damon in *Acis and Galatea* with San Francisco Chamber Orchestra. Additional notable performances include Peter Quint in Britten’s *The Turn of the Screw*, Don José in Bizet and Brook’s *La Tragédie de Carmen*, and the title role in the premiere of *Tenor by Night*. As a concert soloist, Kevin has performed Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony with Peninsula Symphony and Gounod’s *St. Cecilia Mass*.

Tullio in *Messalina* with Ars Minerva, Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* with Pocket Opera, Nemorino in *L'elisir d'amore* with Mendocino Music Festival, Goro in *Madama Butterfly* with Opera San José, Ulysses in *Ifigenia in Aulide* with Ars Minerva, and Damon in *Acis and Galatea* with San Francisco Chamber Orchestra. Additional notable performances include Peter Quint in Britten’s *The Turn of the Screw*, Don José in Bizet and Brook’s *La Tragédie de Carmen*, and the title role in the premiere of *Tenor by Night*. As a concert soloist, Kevin has performed Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony with Peninsula Symphony and Gounod’s *St. Cecilia Mass*.

Kevin has honed his craft at distinguished training programs, including the Janiec Opera Company at Brevard Music Center and Music Academy of the West. He has worked with such renowned artists as Sir Thomas Allen, Marilyn Horne, Anthony Dean Griffey, Patrick Summers, Dean Anthony, and Jeffrey Buchman.

Kevin holds degrees from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, where he studied with Cesar Ulloa.



### Andrew Pardini

*bass*

Extolled by the *Baltimore Sun* for his “robust work” and by DC Metro Theater Arts for “a heart-stopping, high voltage bass-baritone voice,” Andrew Thomas Pardini continues to win audiences with his vibrant tone and thrilling character portrayals.

Andrew is a tenured member of the Regular Chorus with the San Francisco Opera, where he made his company debut as part of its 2022–23 centennial season. Past roles at San Francisco Opera include Flora’s Servant in *La traviata*, The Imperial Commissioner in *Madame Butterfly*, Reporter in *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, and Sergeant in *La bohème*. Engagements for 2024–25 included company and role debuts with Cantare as the baritone soloist in *Belshazzar’s Feast*, with Marin Symphony as the bass soloist for *Lord Nelson Mass*, and with Lakeside Concert Series SF as the bass soloist for the Mozart *Requiem*. He also appeared with Opera Modesto, Livermore Valley Opera, and the San Francisco Opera Guild. In the 2025–26 season, he was the baritone soloist with the San Francisco Choral Society for *Ein deutsches Requiem*, a role he performed with BCCO in 2019, in both Berkeley and Europe.

Andrew holds a master of music degree in opera performance from the University of Maryland—Maryland Opera Studio, under the tutelage of Dominic Cossa and François Loup, and a bachelor of music degree in vocal performance from the University of Southern California—Thornton School of Music, studying with Gary Glaze. Prior to university, Andrew spent his earliest years as the student of Erik “Buck” Townsend, who imbued him with a passion and reverence for singing and performing. Andrew dedicates his every artistic pursuit, with love and admiration, to his voice teacher and mentor.

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## PROGRAM NOTES

### GIUSEPPE VERDI, 1813–1901

#### *Messa da Requiem*

##### Verdi's *Requiem*: Terrestrial and Celestial Spheres

Verdi's *Requiem* may be read as a layered allegory in which the levels of meaning seep into and saturate each other. The work is based on the traditional requiem, a Christian plea for spiritual salvation in the face of death and the final judgment. This level of discourse, reflecting our common human fate in a fallen/faulty world, is overlaid with something quite different—a tribute from one iconic Italian artist to another. Verdi mourns the loss of the great novelist Alessandro Manzoni, but he also celebrates Manzoni's achievements—his daring efforts to promote the cause of the Risorgimento and his literary alignment with the beauty and nuances of Italian language and culture.

By the time the Risorgimento had wound down, in 1871, Verdi had already written his first version of the “Libera me” (1868), originally intended as a tribute to Rossini. When Manzoni died in 1873, Verdi traveled to Paris, where he stayed and wrote the *Requiem*, including a revision of the “Libera me”; the work was first performed within a year. Verdi apparently needed some physical and emotional distance from Italy to come to terms with Manzoni's death and recent events. Writing the *Requiem* offered a way for him to process and come to terms with the death of a revered fellow artist and activist.

The *Requiem*, then, is a celestial drama, overlaid with a biographical tribute; but there is a third layer of meaning, of political allegory, referencing the terrestrial life and times. The work is a retrospective on Italian history, acknowledging the pain and suffering that Italy endured for years under Austrian control—and the heroic effort it took to break free of the occupiers and become a more unified whole, known as the Risorgimento.

The past and future of Italy clearly haunted Verdi; his anguish surfaces in many of his operas, in the depiction of the plights of his characters. As noted by Mitchell Cohen, in *The Politics of Opera*, “A nation's voice, the voice of its People—or the voice of an imagined nation-in-the-making—can be heard in different and powerful ways in famous works by leading composers and in lesser works too in the century after the French Revolution.” Cohen cites Verdi's *Nabucco* as a prime

example, with “exiled Hebrew slaves in Babylon singing in a now famous chorale—‘Va, Pensiero’ (Fly, Thought)—which became an Italian Nationalist anthem.” (*The Politics of Opera: A History from Monteverdi to Mozart*, Princeton University Press, 2017, p. 388)

If, as many say, the *Requiem* is Verdi's finest opera, the main character is Italy herself, the suffering heroine; and the drama is the story of mounting threats to her well-being and the resolution of conflict. God is literally the *deus ex machina*, the intervening force from above (traditionally found in drama and opera) who pushes the outcome in the right direction.

As with many requiems of the period, harsh emotions burst out and are then quelled with calm assurance, suggesting the cessation of pain or the promise of it from above. Verdi's *Requiem* seesaws back and forth between moods with a dizzying momentum: dark forebodings with light escapes, warlike threats with lyrical interludes, almost petulant pleading with a sense of overwhelming victory and glory. Throughout this wild ride, Verdi lays bare the festering wounds and psychological trauma that he and his fellow countrymen had experienced and that would linger for years, as well as the gathering of a unified Italian will that was to result in a military showdown with the Austrians.

The opening instrumental bars of the *Requiem* descend the scale like the faltering tread of a soldier, focused downward in defeat. The opening suggests not only an uncertain future, but also a relentless trajectory into darkness and confusion. This unfathomable sadness and disorder is countered by the opening choral repetitions in the key of E, conveying a premonition of ultimate stasis, balance, and restoration of peace. Many of the Italian soldiers who fell in armed combat died without the benefit of the Catholic rite of extreme unction. If they died for a righteous political cause, they were denied a potent final ritual to help ease sinners into heaven. By pairing requests for peace for the dead with strident warlike musical phrases, Verdi emphatically references the fate of these soldiers.

In key sections, the earthbound voices of humanity represented by the chorus are played off against the angelic voice of the soprano soloist that floats high above. These sections

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## PROGRAM NOTES

acknowledge two legitimate spheres of being: the terrestrial and the celestial, the time-bound dramas of human life and the timeless and peaceful life beyond death. When the soprano choral section dives downward while the soprano soloist lifts to a high note, we hear the suggestion of two spheres of rest and peace—the earthly tomb into which we fall at death and the celestial realm of the spirit. The concluding section, “Libera me,” encapsulates this duality of spheres, conveying, in effect, “liberate us here on earth from our enemy and free our souls for eternity.”

The almost hopeless yearning for freedom in the final notes of the *Requiem*, together with the dark opening bars that march down into darkness, frame the entire piece as a cry from the beleaguered country and its state of subjugation. If salvation is hard won for a Christian, so too were the liberation and the unification of Italy. When the chorus sings *salva me*, it should be with the same urgency and insistence as *libera me*. *Salva me* are the words of the sinner on the brink of damnation or salvation; they are also Italy’s plea for divine help to cast out foreign rulers once and for all. The chorus repeatedly sings the syllables of *salva me* on the same note, conveying a sense of being stuck, unable to take decisive action.

The “Dies irae” motif that erupts throughout the piece is a sinner’s reminder of the final day of judgment. Its primal wrath suggesting the fury and agony of judgment day paints an aural picture of a medieval fresco depicting the violent separation of souls who will be prodded downward by devils into the fiery pit of hell. The repetition of *dies irae* also builds the tension that sets off the final plea for release in the “Libera me.” Woven throughout the piece, the *dies irae*s suggest the military skirmishes throughout Italy, as the enemy is routed from the country’s midst, with the blood and fire and loss of life among Austrians as well as Italians throughout the drawn-out conflict. The “Tuba mirum” is also a battle cry, a dramatic replay of vengeance upon the Austrians. In war, the trumpet players were often among the most heavily protected members of a troop of soldiers, as they issued the call to arms as well as instructions to other sections of the army. In the *Requiem*, trumpeters surround the stage as they announce the day of wrath, much like medieval trumpeters around advancing soldiers.

The “Rex tremenda” invokes the *deus ex machina* with a ritualistic plea for intervention, reinforcing an awareness of

the great chasm between the heavenly and the human. The divine, if powerful and majestic, is also remote, at a great distance from the lowly sinner. The “Lacrymosa” is a lament for the state of Italy, as well as a plea for mercy for the battlefield dead. Tears are shed not only for the human sinner, and for Manzoni, but for the spiritual condition of the freedom fighters and for Italy’s lost cultural dominance.

The “Sanctus” is the celebration of the eventual success and victory, marked by its opening fanfare. The eight-part fugue is lively and jubilant; the woven voices suggest the unification of many disparate parts, not unlike the joining together of Italians far and wide, creating a whole while still partaking of differences. This section concludes with a distinctively operatic chord sequence, as if the curtain is coming down on the last act. The repeated *sanctus* drives home the jubilation as well as the praise due to God for liberation from the Austrians, after the long night of conflict. The double chorus stresses the coming together of many diverse voices in a holistic and healing celebration.

The rest of the *Requiem* serves as a coda or postlude to the action as the *Requiem* begins to wind down to the “Libera me.” The “Libera me” stands apart from the work, at first erupting with a melody line that mimics the motion of jumping; it is full of vigor both desperate and exuberant, before spending down all its energy. From beginning to end, its mood shifts from confrontational to wistful, consolidating the welter of emotions that the entire piece has been trying to convey. It seems to say, “Free me, have you heard me yet?” It resonates with intimacy and urgency as Italy pleads to God for herself in this new direct and personal tone, the fugue uniting the many voices of the Risorgimento in a final and decisive outburst. No matter the country’s ongoing disarray, everyone is looking forward to freedom.

The “Libera me” may also remind us that the final story had not been written; at the end of the Risorgimento, Italy was in the throes of internal dissension over the imposition of a constitutional monarchy. Some historians don’t date the final unification of Italy until 1918; some say that it is still today a disjointed collection of regions. As the last *libera me* fades away, who is to say when any story really ends?

— Kitty Hughes, *BCCO soprano*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to our concert recordist Keith Sklower and to the Hertz Hall staff. Program credits: Kris Kargo (cover image), Karen Davison (editing), Penny Werner (layout), and Minuteman Press, Oakland (printing).

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