

The
DEFIANT REQUIEM
Foundation

***A Summary of the Concert/Drama
Defiant Requiem: Verdi at Terezín***

Defiant Requiem: Verdi at Terezín is a unique concert-drama that commemorates the remarkable story of courageous Jewish prisoners in the Theresienstadt (Terezín) Concentration Camp during World War II, who performed the ambitious Verdi Requiem while enduring the depths of human degradation. Prisoner Rafael Schächter (1905-1944/45), a graduate of the Prague Conservatory, using a smuggled score and single piano, organized a 150-person Jewish choir that performed Verdi's celebrated Requiem 16 times between 1943 and 1944. Schächter selected this highly dramatic composition by the great Italian composer because of the power of both the music and its Latin text.

This is not an ordinary performance of the Verdi Requiem, but a concert-drama created by Maestro Murry Sidlin as a tribute to the inspired leadership and courage of Rafael Schächter and the Terezín choir. It combines the magnificent music of Giuseppe Verdi's Requiem, with video testimony from survivors of the original chorus, and segments of the Nazi propaganda film made at Terezín in 1944, used to deceive the world about the living conditions of Jews in the camp. The performance also includes actors embedded in the orchestra who speak the words of conductor Rafael Schächter and others.

The text of the Requiem is part of the living liturgy of the Catholic Church. But for Schächter and the Terezín Jews, it was their act of defiance; a temporary solace from their brutal confinement and likely deportation, an assurance of God's presence and a desire to express a collective spiritual belief in their own humanity amidst the unspeakable violations perpetrated against them. The longest section of Verdi's score, the *Dies irae* (Day of Wrath), was seen by Schächter and the choir as a certainty of what awaited their Nazi oppressors: "nothing shall remain unavenged." Singing these words to the Nazis gave the prisoners the courage to persevere and to defy Nazi brutality, however temporary. Schächter told the members of the choir: "We will sing to the Nazis what we cannot say to them."

Following the deportation of close to 470 Jews from Denmark to Theresienstadt, at the urging of the Danish King, the Nazis agreed to permit a delegation from the International Red Cross to visit Theresienstadt. The Nazis made elaborate and cunning efforts in advance of the visit to deceive the delegation and the world. On June 23, 1944, the International Red Cross and members of the Nazi high command came to Theresienstadt for an "inspection." Rafael Schächter and his choir were ordered, under duress, to entertain the delegation with what became their last, and most bittersweet, performance of the Requiem.

On October 16, 1944, four months after the final performance, Schächter and most of the choir were deported to Auschwitz. The majority were immediately murdered in the gas chambers.

Schächter survived Auschwitz, but in the spring of 1945, at age 39 and with a great career ahead of him, he most likely perished on a death march. A month later Czechoslovakia was liberated.

This concert/drama honors the memory of Rafael Schächter, his choir, and the performances of Verdi's Requiem in Terezín. This concert celebrates Schächter's moral courage and the transcendent power of the arts and humanities. Resonating throughout the performance is the universal message that the human spirit can be elevated in the most oppressive conditions, that hope and resilience are indomitable, that mankind can rise above bondage and horror. Schächter and his fellow Jewish prisoners demonstrated that it is possible to respond to the worst of mankind with the best of mankind.

The lessons of Terezín are powerful, dramatic, and inspirational, with a contemporary message of hope for all who are caught up in conflict and who hear this story.

Defiant Requiem: Verdi at Terezín has been presented worldwide more than fifty times since the Portland (OR) premiere in 2002. A complete list of all of our concert performances is available. Notable performances in the US include Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center, Boston Symphony Hall, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, DC, in San Diego, Chicago and Atlanta, among others. The concert has been performed internationally in Durham, UK; Vienna; Berlin; Budapest; Jerusalem; Prague, and on the grounds of Terezín three times.

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For more information, please visit our website at www.defiantrequiem.org or contact General Manager, Sean Kehoe, by phone at 202.244.0220, or email skehoe@defiantrequiem.org.