

Prelude

A STUDY GUIDE BY AND FOR
THE CATHEDRAL CHORAL SOCIETY
IN PREPARATION FOR ITS CONCERTS
VOLUME XVII NUMBER 1 FALL 2009

CATHEDRAL CHORAL SOCIETY
J. Reilly Lewis, Music Director
2009-2010 Season

CONCERT I
Sunday, October 18, 2009,
at 4:00 PM



Verdi Requiem

Cathedral Choral Society
Chorus and Orchestra
J. Reilly Lewis, *conductor*
assisted by

Lise Lindstrom, *soprano*
Ann McMahon Quintero,
mezzo-soprano
John Horton Murray, *tenor*
Wayne Tigges, *bass*



PRE-CONCERT DISCUSSION
Perry Auditorium at 2:30 PM

Paul Bachmann, XMSirius
WETA "Around Town" panelist

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Verdi Requiem



“Dies IRAE!!”

Verdi directs his *Messa da Requiem* in this 1874 watercolor by Melchiorre Delfico (1825-1895), one of many caricatures of Verdi appearing in the Victorian and Edwardian-era British magazine *Vanity Fair*.



Washington Premiere of Verdi *Requiem*

TWENTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER its American premiere at the American Academy of Music in New York on November 17, 1874, Verdi's *Requiem* had still not been heard in Washington, D.C. The reason was simple: there was neither chorus nor orchestra capable of a performance.

Throughout the nineteenth century in the nation's capital, there had been performing ensembles such as the Washington Masonic Choir, Georgetown Masonic Chorus, and Philharmonic Society of Washington. Not until 1883 was the Choral Society of Washington, D.C., formed for the purpose of presenting the larger choral works.

The Choral Society of Washington, augmented by singers from the city's church choirs, presented the Washington premiere of Verdi's *Requiem* at the First Congregational Church of Washington on February 28, 1899, under the direction of Josef Kaspar, who was conductor of the Georgetown Amateur Symphony Orchestra and a prominent music teacher born and educated in Prague. A month of large sight-singing classes preceded the premiere, and the vice rector of Catholic University explained the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass at a public lecture.

An unsigned musical review pronounced the work of the chorus as "all that could be expected, and that is saying a great deal The 200 voices preserved their unison and produced the finest shades of volume, from a trembling diminuendo to a crescendo that filled the whole auditorium." The New York-based solo quartet appears to have carried the day. "The audience was breathless with rapture," reported the reviewer, "when ['Quid sum miser'] was concluded, and then broke into perfect salvos of applause."

The first Washington performance of Verdi's *Requiem* was not without controversy: singing a Latin text. Just one month earlier, Leo XIII had issued a papal encyclical against progressive American Catholicism. The Board of Managers recognized that by scheduling the *Requiem*, they "were entering a field somewhat new to the Society, that of ecclesiastical music written to be sung to Latin words." After rehearsals were under way,



Reilly Lewis's grandfather and great-grandmother, seen here at the Peace Cross Dedication in 1898, sang Verdi's *Requiem* the next year with the old Choral Society of Washington.

a prominent member of the Society informed the Board that he had "very great doubts as to the propriety of this change [Latin] . . . and, as there are English words given to the music," he requested a vote of the full membership on the question of Latin v. English.

The Board sought the opinions of leading music critics in the nation. The response from Henry Krehbiel, musical editor of the *New York Tribune*, was unequivocal: "Pray beg of the Choral Society not to sing the *Requiem* in English. I have never yet seen a composition set to Latin words that could be sung in English without much of it being made absurd. Take the Verdi *Requiem*. What shall be said of such monstrosities as these?" proceeding to illustrate with examples from the Verdi *Requiem*.

Philip Hale, editor of Boston's *Musical Record*, further argued against singing in English:

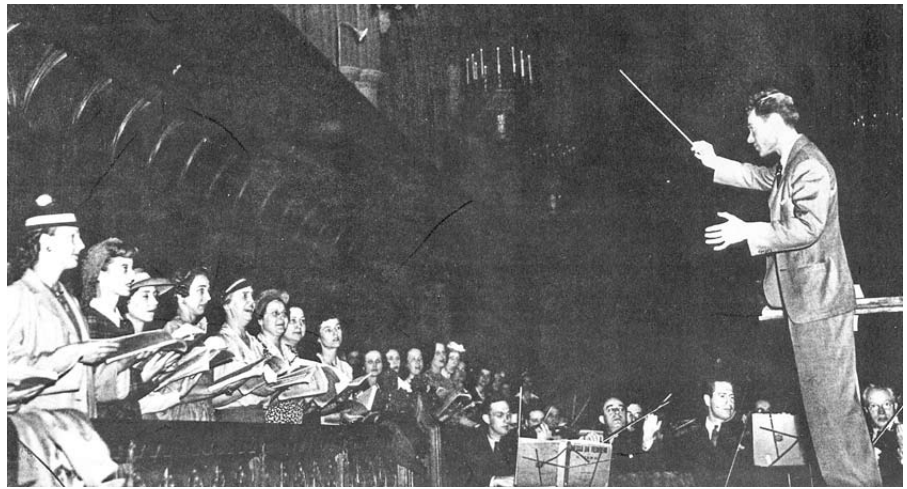
The performance of Verdi's *Requiem* in English would be all wrong, inappropriate, inartistic. The question does not seem to me to admit of discussion. In the first place the composer's music will suffer if there be such wrenching of text, for no translation can preserve the identical musical accent and designed effect. In the second place there is no translation of the 'Dies Irae' that equals the original. And then the Latin is so simple, so much more melodious when sung than English would be. Furthermore, the Requiem Mass is celebrated in Latin the world over. Why should it not be sung in like manner?

Since the opinions they received were unanimous, the Board of Managers "adhere[d] to their recommendation that Verdi's *Requiem* shall be sung in Latin." Upon polling the membership, the results were 103 for Latin, 18 for English, and *one for neither*.

Sources: The Choral Society Collection, Washingtoniana Division, District of Columbia Public Library; Marguerite A. Martinelli, "The Choral Society of Washington D.C., 1883-1911," master's thesis, The American University, 1954; *Washington Post* archives.

Verdi *Requiem* Ushers in New Era of Choral Singing

VERDI'S *REQUIEM* has been the signature work of the Cathedral Choral Society since its founding. Paul Callaway was a young man just turned thirty when he entered upon his duties as the third organist and choirmaster of Washington National Cathedral on September 1, 1939 — the very day World War II began with Germany's invasion of Poland. Amid the "gathering storm," Callaway met with the Very Rev. ZeBarney Thorne Phillips, who was a trained singer, pianist, and organist in addition to being the chaplain of the U.S. Senate and rector of a prominent Washington church. Even before his installation as dean of the Cathedral in November 1941, Phillips and Callaway discussed their mutual dream for a large chorus of men and women to sing "the great religious music in a great religious temple."



Paul Callaway directs singers and orchestra in the Great Choir on May 12, 1942, at dress rehearsal for the Society's inaugural concert.

Photo: *Evening Star*, courtesy, *The Washington Post*

The Cathedral Choral Society gave its inaugural performance on Wednesday evening, May 13, 1942, in the Great Choir of Washington National Cathedral, singing Verdi's *Requiem* under the baton of Paul Callaway, who was standing before an orchestra for the first time. The orchestra — fifty members of the National Symphony Orchestra — cost \$821.81; orchestral parts were borrowed from the Metropolitan Opera's Mapleson Library.

The promising tenure of Dean Phillips was cut short by his sudden death two days before the Society's inaugural concert. The performance, which became his *Requiem*, began at 8:30 PM with prayers for the late Dean; it barely ended before the wartime blackout went into effect at ten o'clock.

"Those who attend the first presentation of the Choral Society of Washington Cathedral tonight," *The Washington Post* had promised, "never will forget the occasion." Next day, *The Evening Star* reported "the performance was one of the most impressive presentations ever held within the walls of the Cathedral" and predicted presciently that "last night's performance may be considered the beginning of a new era and of new possibilities in the field of choral singing."

The Society's future board president, Ambassador William R. Castle, confided to his diary that the *Washington Times-Herald's* music critic, Glenn Dillard Gunn, later said to him, "I hope you realize that [Callaway] is an inspired conductor and that the Verdi *Requiem* was the most perfect thing that has ever been given in Washington."



Posters recruiting singers for the new choral society circulated throughout the churches and government agencies filled with wartime workers. Callaway said he "hoped the organization would be made up in great part of men and women who have recently arrived in the city."

Two weeks of auditions preceded the Society's first rehearsal on Monday evening, December 1, 1941, at

eight o'clock in Whitby Hall of the National Cathedral School for Girls. Before the second rehearsal, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor plunged America into World War II.

In April, Callaway went to Steinway Hall in New York City to rehearse the solo quartet — Agnes Davis, Pauline Pierce, William Hain, and George Britton — all leading oratorio soloists of the time. Edwin McArthur, a conductor at the Metropolitan Opera and Kirsten Flagstad's accompanist, coached Callaway on conducting techniques.

Program Notes

The Composer

BORN IN 1813 to a poor family in the Po Valley near Parma, Italy, young Verdi played the organ for church services before he was eleven years old, then was sent by his father to study with the cathedral organist in nearby Busseto. Verdi showed so much promise that local residents raised the money to send him away for study at the conservatory in Milan. The conservatory, however, refused him admittance on the grounds that at eighteen he was “too old” and “insufficiently talented.” From these inauspicious beginnings, Giuseppe Verdi rose to become one of the most celebrated composers in history.

Paul Hume, long-time music critic of *The Washington Post*, explained in his study *Verdi: The Man and His Music* that by the mid-nineteenth century, Verdi had become more to Italians than simply the composer of twenty-one beloved operas. “Verdi’s name had become a symbol. The letters in the name V-E-R-D-I could also stand for Vittorio Emmanuele, Re d’Italia... and ‘Viva Verdi!’ became a two-edged battle cry, a slogan that appeared on walls from one end of the country to the other. Verdi’s music had made him the most popular composer in Italy. His name had made him even more beloved in a country moving inexorably to throw off the foreign rule that had divided it for centuries, and to unite under Vittorio Emmanuele.”

The three principal figures of nineteenth-century Italian music and literature were composer Gioacchino Rossini (1792-1868), poet and novelist Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873), and Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901). When Rossini died in November 1868, Verdi called the venerable composer “one of the glories of Italy” and lamented, “When the other [Manzoni] who still lives has gone, who will we have left?”

To honor the memory of Rossini, Verdi proposed to his publisher, Ricordi, what amounted to a requiem-by-committee. “I should like to ask the most distinguished Italian composers . . . to compose a Requiem Mass to be performed on the anniversary of his death.... I want no

foreigner, nor anyone outside the world of music, to help in this, however powerful they may be.

“If I were in the good graces of the Holy Father,” the anticlerical, agnostic, opera composer said, “I would beg him to allow, at least this once, women to take part in the performance of this music, but since I am not, it would be best to find a person more suitable than I to achieve this end.”



Thirteen composers, of whom only Verdi is well-known today, were chosen and given assignments. But a performance of the *Messa per Rossini* could never be arranged. (In fact, it was not performed until 1988.) Verdi had reserved to himself the final movement, the “Libera me.” Of it, his collaborator Alberto Mazzucato exclaimed to Verdi, “You, my dear Maestro, have written the most beautiful, the greatest, the most colossally poetic page that can be imagined.” These words momentarily tempted Verdi “to finish, later, the entire Mass . . . because with some more development I would find myself already having finished the Requiem and the ‘Dies irae,’ of which the reprise

in the ‘Libera’ is already composed. Consider then, and regret, what dreadful consequences your praise could have — but do not worry: it is a temptation that will pass like so many others. I do not like useless things. There are so many, many Requiem Masses!!!! It is useless to add one more.”

Then, on May 22, 1873, the tallest timber in Verdi’s forest fell.

Alessandro Manzoni died at the age of 88 after a fall on the steps of a church. [See sidebar opposite page] Unable to bear attending Manzoni’s public funeral, Verdi traveled incognito and alone to visit his hero’s new tomb. Shortly afterward, he approached the mayor and Council of Milan with an offer to write a Requiem Mass to be performed on the first anniversary of Manzoni’s death, if the city of Milan would bear the costs of the performance. Official Milan agreed, and Verdi, whose score for his “Libera me” had been

returned to him only recently, renewed work on a complete Requiem in the summer of 1873 while in Paris.

Although Manzoni had considered himself a Christian believer and a “good” Catholic, his political ideas had earned him the enmity of the Church in Rome. Verdi, however, had no such allegiances. He was an atheist, occasionally slipping into agnosticism, but always an implacable foe of organized religion. Requiem Masses were not only a central ecclesiastical rite of the Catholic Church, but also had become public and political rituals. Berlioz’s *Requiem* (1837) had been used, for example, to honor those who had lost their lives in the storming of Constantine, Algeria. Hence, a Requiem Mass to honor Manzoni was not unusual. But Verdi’s decision to write a Requiem would mark a turning point in his career and life. Nearly all of Verdi’s sacred choral works, including his *Stabat Mater* and *Te Deum*, were written after the *Requiem* (1874).

“Sorrow,” Verdi wrote a friend, “succeeds sorrow with appalling rapidity.” His father had died in 1867, only to be followed six months later by Antonio Barezzi, his “second father and benefactor” who had underwritten his early music education. Verdi, the agnostic, said of him, “If there is a second life, he will see if I have loved him and if I am grateful for what he did for me.”

First Rossini died, then Manzoni. Of all the great men in his generation, Verdi alone was left. Imperceptibly, the sixty-year-old composer appears to have drawn nigh the gates of his long-abandoned Christian faith, if not the Church itself. German conductor Hans von Bülow dismissed the *Requiem* as “Verdi’s latest opera, in ecclesiastical dress,” a remark he later regretted. Nevertheless, the sobriquet of the *Requiem* as “Verdi’s greatest opera” has endured.

Is the *Requiem* opera? Not to Verdi. “One must not sing this Mass in the way one sings an opera, and therefore phrasings and dynamics that may be found in the theatre won’t satisfy me at all, not at all.”

Well then, is it ecclesiastical music? Of his religious feelings, Verdi’s wife, Giuseppina, astutely observed: “They talk a lot about the spirit more or less religious, of Mozart, Cherubini, etc. I say that a man like Verdi must write like Verdi — that is, according to his own way of feeling and interpreting the text . . . The religious spirit and the way in which it finds expression must bear the imprint of its time and the individuality of the author. I should, so to speak, have repudiated a Mass by Verdi, if it had been modeled on those of A., B. or C.”

Alessandro Manzoni



FOR YEARS, Verdi’s *Requiem* was known simply as the Manzoni *Requiem*. Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873) needed no identification.

To nineteenth-

century Italians, he was the primary figure in their literature and culture. His most famous and enduring work was the historical novel *I Promessi Sposi* (The Betrothed), which Verdi had read shortly after its publication in 1827. The setting was seventeenth-century Lombardy under Spanish rule, but Northern Italians easily made the analogy to their own current efforts to throw off Austrian occupation. Manzoni’s novel, like Verdi’s openly patriotic operas of the 1840s, had a bracing political effect on the people.

The two men met only once. In 1868, Clara Maffei, a woman of letters and a supporter of the Risorgimento, took Verdi to meet Manzoni at his home in Milan. Verdi wrote her afterward, saying:

“You know very well how great and how deep is my veneration of that Man who, in my opinion, has written not only the greatest book of our time but one of the greatest books ever to emerge from the human mind. And it is more than a book, it is a consolation to mankind. How to explain the extraordinary, indefinable sensation the presence of that saint . . . produced in me? I would have knelt before him if men could be worshipped. They say it must not be done, and so be it; although we venerate on altars many who lacked the talent or the virtues of Manzoni, and who indeed were downright rascals. When you see him, kiss his hand, and convey to him all my veneration.”



Program Notes

The Requiem

VERDI FINISHED THE SCORE in April 1874, then went to Milan to begin rehearsals for the premiere on May 22, the first anniversary of Manzoni's death. The composer conducted an orchestra of 100, a chorus of 120, and four soloists at the Church of San Marco, which he felt had better acoustics than the church where Manzoni's funeral had taken place. Three days later, he led a performance at La Scala, the first of many commemorative performances throughout Europe.

The *Requiem* owes its secure place in the choral canon of the twentieth century, first, to the renewed interest in Verdi aroused by performances of his operas conducted by Arturo Toscanini and, second, to the choral renaissance led by the late Robert Shaw, who was influenced greatly by his early association with Toscanini.

Introit and Kyrie

Verdi's *Messa da Requiem per l'anniversario della morte di Manzoni 22 maggio 1874* opens with the **Introit**, from which the Mass for the Dead derives its title. The listener has stepped inside a great cathedral to find penitents murmuring their hushed prayers: "Requiem aeternam" (rest eternal). Then, attention shifts to the choir, whose unaccompanied voices sing the Psalm "Te decet hymnus, Deus." The murmuring of prayers returns. In the **Kyrie**, Verdi departs from the traditional tripartite repetition. Instead, as Donald Tovey has written, "the solo voices enter with the Kyrie, which is worked out in the most moving passage in all Verdi's works, unquestionably one of the greater monuments

of musical pathos."

The **Dies irae** is a non-liturgical poem of eighteen rhymed verses attributed to Thomas of Celano (d. 1250). Its graphic description of the Judgment Day — the Day of Wrath — has inspired many composers, none more

dramatic than the settings of Verdi and Berlioz.

Indeed, it is in the "Dies irae" that Verdi's *Requiem* most resembles Berlioz's *Requiem*. Verdi biographer Julian Budden has described the opening as "four tutti thunderclaps, later separated by powerful blows on the bass drum, the skin tightened to give a hard dry sound (the Shakespearean 'crack of doom?');



Giuseppe Verdi conducts his Messa da Requiem in remembrance of the anniversary of the death of Alessandro Manzoni at the Opéra Comique in Paris in 1874.

COURTESY, LEEBAGE/LEBRECHT MUSIC AND ARTS PHOTO LIBRARY

rapid scales in contrary motion: preemptory calls to attention on the brass, and a chromatic choral line collapsing into those slow triplets that Verdi will use again for the real storm in *Otello*."

Four off-stage trumpets (as opposed to Berlioz's four on-stage brass choirs) announce the **Tuba mirum**, when the trumpet "will summon all before the throne." The gathering storm terrorizes the listener, then, after an abrupt shriek from the chorus, the bass soloist describes confounding Death, "Mors stupebit," in the hushed tones of a cathedral crypt. The mezzo-soprano declaims the **Liber scriptus**, the written record that will leave nothing unpunished, as choral reminders of the "day of wrath" begin as whispers, crescendo into a reprise of the original "Dies irae," and dissipate in the dying embers of wrath. A trio of soloists asks, each in turn, "What am I to say then, wretch that I am?" The answer comes with an outburst of terrified sinners — choral basses — throwing themselves on the mercy of the King of majesty (**Rex tremendae majesta-**

tis). Pleas for mercy are simultaneously issued on two separate planes. The four soloists cry “Salve me,” their melodic arching of a major sixth falling back to the fifth, a traditional musical device of pleading. At the same time, choral basses hammer away at the theme of majesty, while the upper three choral voices intone “salve me” in increasing intensity until soloists and chorus unite in a common prayer for salvation. From the chorus comes a quiet C major affirmation of the final utterance of “salve me.”

The next three verses comprise the **Recordare**, a duet between soprano and mezzo-soprano. The text suggests a deep understanding of human nature: that if the previous pleadings of the merits of the sinners’ case have been insufficient to convince the King, the Son might want to think of how much He already has invested in them! Jesus is reminded, none too subtly, that since He has already suffered because of them, He should not now throw all that pain away by not remitting their sins. The demanding spirit of previous prayers to grant salvation turns to bargaining in the tenor solo, **Ingemisco**, the most “operatic” of the *Requiem’s* solos, a humble acknowledgment of the petitioner’s unworthiness that ends with the simple request: “Give me place among the sheep.”

The two verses comprising the **Confutatis maledictis** are assigned to the bass soloist and are accompanied by woodwinds, horns, timpani, and strings, a malignant concoction dramatizing the terrors of the damned, reinforced by a third choral reprise of the “Dies irae,” which dissolves into the tears of the **Lacrymosa**. The sobbing lament of the soprano, which ascends to a high B-flat, is undergirded by a dirge-like melody mourning the tears that will accompany the Judgment Day. The concluding prayer for mercy, “Pie Jesu, Domine” is an unaccompanied solo quartet joined by the chorus again murmuring “dona eis requiem.”

Although today’s custom is to perform the *Requiem* without pause, Verdi allowed an intermission following the “Dies irae.” The second half opens with the **Offertorio**, an extensive treatment of the liturgical text sung by the solo quartet. The **Sanctus** is a dramatic departure from the earlier movements. The same text that has inspired composers such as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven,

and Berlioz to glorious heights is set by Verdi as an ecstatic fugue for double chorus. The “Hosanna in excelsis” is a choral accompaniment to whirling, ascending, chromatic scales in the woodwinds and horns.

The **Agnus Dei** is one of the most sublime movements in choral music. A profound serenity characterizes the C major theme of the thrice-repeated petition, “Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant them rest.” Sung first by soprano and mezzo-soprano soloists in octaves, the theme is taken up by the chorus in unison. When the soloists restate the theme, it has shifted by only one note to C minor. The third iteration returns to C major. With significant repetitions of text, it is the instrumental quality of the theme that bears the greater weight of religious expression in this movement.

In **Lux aeterna**, the penultimate movement, the mezzo-soprano, surrounded by the shimmering strings suggestive of light, declaims the antiphon: “Let light perpetual shine upon them, O Lord.” The “light” of the soprano gives way to the rhythms, punctuated by a bass drum, of mourners (here the bass and tenor soloists) invoking a final “Requiem aeternam.” Once more, light pierces the gloom, and the music returns to B-flat major as darkness is finally overcome.

Libera me, which Verdi originally wrote for the *Messa per Rossini*, was extensively revised as the closing movement of the *Manzoni Requiem*. The supplicating chant of the soprano (“save me, Lord, from eternal death”) is followed by the whispered response of the chorus. The agitated soprano soloist sings of her trembling fear, underscored by a choral reprise of the “Dies irae” music.

Together, petitioners return to the opening music of the *Requiem*. A transitional soprano incantation of the text leads directly to the stunning fugue for chorus and orchestra that culminates in a unified cry for salvation, the soprano soaring above the chorus to a high C. Chorus and soloist stammer out their final pleas for salvation — “Li-be-ra me” — like the dying light of day casts its shadow across the vaulting of a cathedral.

– © 1999; rev. 2009 by Margaret Shannon



Verdi with baton, chromolithograph by Theobald Chartran, Vanity Fair (February 15, 1879)

Pre-Concert Discussion

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2009 AT 2:30 PM

Verdi and his Requiem



BACHMANN: COURTESY WETA

PAUL BACHMANN, a classical music specialist at XMSirius, will lead the first pre-concert lecture of the Cathedral Choral Society's 2009-2010 season.

A Maryland native and radio veteran, Mr. Bachmann has been a regular panelist on WETA's "Around Town" since 2007.

That same year, he was tapped to take the helm of XM2 - XM 2, XM's home for exclusive music. He is a host on the channel where XM listeners can find shows hosted by the likes of Bob Dylan, Tom Petty, Bill Anderson, Quincy

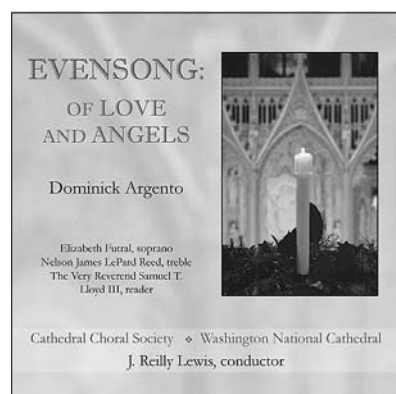
Jones, Wynton Marsalis, and other music legends.

Paul is one of XM Radio's Jack-of-all-Trades. At XM's birth in 2001, he lived in the classical world on XM Classics and XM Pops. Soon after, he added live shows to the alternative rock channels Fred and Ethel.

Mr. Bachmann received a Bachelor of Arts in Music from the University of Maryland at College Park, and his radio career has included stops in Raleigh, NC and Boston, along with his first radio job at WGMS in Washington. In addition to reporting on the arts for "Around Town," Mr. Bachmann enjoys participating in presenting the arts locally, whether by singing or pre-concert commentary.



The Cathedral Choral Society's pre-concert discussions, which are free and open to the public, are held ninety minutes prior to each subscription concert (except Joy of Christmas) in Perry Auditorium on the seventh floor of the West Front Towers.



The Cathedral Choral Society's most recent recording — Evensong: Of Love and Angels, Dominick Argento's sublime tribute to his beloved wife, Carolyn — is now available at rehearsals, through Gothic Records (www.Gothic-catalog.com), or from the Society's office.



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