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Before the opening performance of Verdi's Requiem in 1874, one critic dismissed it as "his latest opera in ecclesiastical robes". That remark was not that far off the truth. If you swap liturgy for libretto, the work's crashing choruses and soaring arias would fit in perfectly into scenes for any of his operatic blockbusters. The Requiem is a marvellous combination of scintillating orchestration and sublime vocal creativity, which make it one of the most compelling choral works ever written. Sunday evening's performance in the Perth Concert Hall by the Perth Choral Society did nothing to undermine its reputation.

The chorus were up against it in the full orchestra movements like the Dies Irae, but came over superbly when given the chance. Conductor Peter Rutterford has obviously schooled them well, because the phrasing was good, diction excellent and, apart from a slight wobble in the final Requiem sequence, the intonation was spot-on. The opening Te Decet Hymnus and the superb Lacrymosa showed their credentials as well as in the double-chorus Sanctus which was excellent considering their resources were stretched to the full.

Of the soloists, it was mezzo-soprano Anne Lewis who was my pick of the quartet. At first, I thought her voice lacked the power that this work needs, but her qualities shown through more and more as the performance progressed. Her Liber Scriptus and her contribution to the Lacrymosa were sensational. Tenor Shaun Dixon made an immediate impact in the opening Kyrie, and also excelled in the Ingemisco, one of the work's finest arias. Donald Maxwell, bass, has always had a commanding stage presence, and amongst his fine contribution of the evening was his Confutatis, which was as authoritative as one would expect.

The onus of this work falls on the shoulders of the soprano, who has to cope with a fiendishly-high and exposed top-line in the final unaccompanied Requiem. Rebecca Rudge was equal to the task, however, and her performance was perfectly controlled and contrasted well with her other more urgent and pressing parts of the Libera Me.

The Angus Chamber Orchestra, although larger in numbers than usual, were smaller than an orchestra you would normally expect for a work of this proportion, but they were excellent throughout, and were marshalled well by Peter Rutterford.

Bravo to the Perth Choral Society, not for only choosing to perform one of my top ten classical favourites, but for doing so with so much aplomb, style and enthusiasm.