

[Program Notes by Michael Moore](#)

Performed October 5, 2005

Drei Equali

The Happiest and Unhappiest of Men

Psalm 23

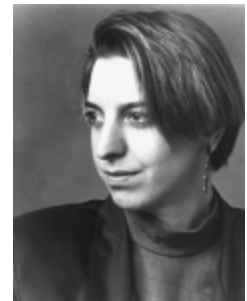
Gesang der Geister über den Wassern

Requiem

It's all about Beethoven. This evening's concert features music which in some way is related to the great composer. There are two exquisite partsongs by Franz Schubert, who idolized Beethoven and once sent him a set of variations with the inscription "from his Worshipper and Admirer, Franz Schubert." There is the world premiere of a commissioned piece from Kim D. Sherman with text drawn from Beethoven's own words. The centerpiece of the concert is Luigi Cherubini's magnificent *Requiem in C minor*, a work much admired by Beethoven, who is reported to have said "If I were to write a Requiem, Cherubini's would be my model." The *Requiem* was performed in one of the memorial services following Beethoven's death in 1827.

The program opens with one of Beethoven's rarely performed *Drei Equali* for trombones. As the name implies, it is a work written for equal voices, that is, voices with the same timbre and range. In Beethoven's day, trombones were rarely featured in orchestral music but rather were used for solemn occasions like funeral services. Beethoven wrote these *Equali* in 1812 at the request of Franz Xaver Glöggel, kapellmeister of the Linz cathedral, and they were first performed there on All Souls' Day of that year. They were subsequently performed at Beethoven's own funeral procession in vocal arrangements prepared by Ignaz Seyfried, composer, music director of the Theater an der Wien and close friend of Beethoven.

Composer Kim D. Sherman is best known for her theatrical work. She has produced incidental scores for numerous productions including the Broadway hit *I Hate Hamlet* and the Dallas Theater Center's *A Christmas Carol*. Her many works for the musical theater include *O Pioneers!*, *Honor Song for Crazy Horse*, *Heartland*, *The Boxcar Children*, *Leaving Queens*, *Lenny and the Heartbreakers* and *The Two Orphans*. In addition to musical theater, Sherman's compositions include opera, chamber music, songs and choral works. The *Happiest and Unhappiest of Men* is Sherman's second commission from Mendelssohn Club, having composed *A Winter Solstice Ritual* in 1994.



Sherman used quotations from Beethoven's own writings as the text for *The Happiest and Unhappiest of Men*. They range from the humorous – Beethoven explaining why he discharged a housekeeper: "Anyone who tells a lie has not a pure heart, and cannot make a good soup." – to the profound, and reveal much about Beethoven's character,

philosophy and art. The title comes from Beethoven's letter to the woman known only as his "Immortal Beloved." This passionate love letter was found among his papers after his death, and has spawned intense speculation by musicologists and historians as to the identity of the mystery woman. Although undated, the letter is now thought to have been written in 1812, coincidentally the same time that he was composing the *Drei Equali*.

The Happiest and Unhappiest of Men is set for eight-part chorus, strings and flute. Sherman's musical language is economical, and the text is presented very clearly and naturally. The piece opens with the chorus rhythmically patting their chests to create the sound of a heartbeat. The music begins simply, with each line of text given sequentially to a different voice part in chant-like phrases, creating an effect like a dialog or conversation. Each phrase is separated by modulations of a rather eclectic and distinctly Beethovenesque character. The music builds in intensity as sung phrases and spoken text overlap, until a final crescendo is reached on the enigmatic text that Beethoven wrote on his final composition, the *String Quartet in F major, Op. 135*: "Must it be? It must be." The piece ends as it began, with the heartbeat, now softly fading away.

Franz Schubert (1797-1828) was born in Vienna, the son of a schoolmaster who gave him his first musical instruction. As a boy he auditioned for Salieri (Mozart's erstwhile rival, Antonio Salieri, now held the post of kapellmeister at the imperial court) and was accepted as a mezzo-soprano in the Hofkapelle singers, where he stayed until his voice broke at 16. Although he later studied composition privately with Salieri, his instrumental training was haphazard at best and he never developed a virtuoso technique. This hindered him in furthering his career as a composer, for as Mozart and Beethoven had demonstrated, the quickest route to success in Vienna was as a performer, which allowed you to feature your own compositions and arrange academies, or public performances. Lacking both the technique and the temperament for the relentless self promotion which drove Mozart and Beethoven, Schubert was unable to make a living as a composer. He taught in his father's school for a short time, but in his later years was supported almost exclusively by his circle of friends.



It was the poet Johann Mayrhofer who introduced Schubert to his "culture circle," a group of young men of artistic bent who lived a rather Bohemian lifestyle, holding court in the coffeehouses and taverns of Vienna. This provided Schubert not only with companionship, but with important contacts that furthered his career. The baritone Johann Michael Vogl featured Schubert's songs in his recitals, including the first public performance of *Der Erlkönig*, which led to the publication of seven of his songs. Others championed his piano music or provided venues for private performances of his music. These events became known as Schubertiads and were grand affairs, often lasting through the night and keeping Schubert at the piano until he was exhausted. But it was through these private concerts that his music began to become widely known throughout Vienna. Beethoven was acquainted with Schubert's music, both through the variations which Schubert had presented to him and through his songs, which he studied during the long illness which ended in his death. For his part, Schubert had very little personal contact with the composer who influenced his work so strongly, preferring to remain on

the periphery of Beethoven's circle of acquaintances. He did not even meet Beethoven when he delivered the variations and their flowery dedication, for Beethoven was not at home that day. He was deeply moved by Beethoven's death, and was one of the 36 torchbearers in Beethoven's funeral procession. Dining with friends after the funeral, he proposed two toasts, one to Beethoven and one to "him who would shortly follow." Already seriously ill with syphilis, Schubert survived Beethoven by less than two years and died in 1828 at age 31. Although his life was short, his compositional output was staggering: nearly 1000 works, including 9 symphonies, 6 masses, 21 piano sonatas, 15 string quartets, 5 singspiels, 2 operas, a melodrama, the incidental music for *Rosamunde*, overtures, chamber music, and more than 600 song settings.

Both *Psalm 23* and the *Gesang der Geister über den Wassern* date from 1820. *Psalm 23* is a setting of a German text which was translated from the Hebrew by Moses Mendelssohn, philosopher, scholar and grandfather of the composer. It is set for four-part women's chorus, with a wonderfully expressive melody which reveals Schubert at his lyrical finest. Mendelssohn Club composer-in-residence Donald St. Pierre has provided the string arrangement heard in this performance. *Gesang der Geister über den Wassern* (Song of the Spirits Above the Waters) is one of Schubert's most complex choral works, a virtuoso setting of a poem by Goethe for eight-part men's chorus and low strings. The poem is part Romantic mysticism and part a dramatic description of nature, with waterfalls gushing forth from rocky crags, tumbling over stones and boulders until the water gathers into a gentle stream flowing into the glassy sea. The piece opens quietly and mysteriously, almost like an invocation by a chorus of priests: man's soul is like water, falling from the heavens and to the heavens returning in an endless cycle. The descriptive music is set antiphonally between the tenor and bass choirs, with the tenors generally having the more lyrical music describing the gently flowing water and the basses having the more dramatic descriptions of torrents and cliffs. Schubert was clearly taken with the image of waterfalls cascading over the cliffs, which he depicts three times in a series of octave leaps, and of the foaming water, as running passages of sixteenth notes for the bass choir. The piece ends quietly with a reprise of the invocation music.



Luigi Cherubini (1760-1842) is probably the most influential of composers whose name and works have fallen into relative obscurity. He was born in Florence but moved to Paris in 1785 and spent most of his creative life there. This was clearly a difficult time for an artistic career in Paris; Cherubini lived through the turmoil of the French Revolution, the Directorate, the Napoleonic Wars and the Restoration.

In 1789 he was named director of the Theatre de Monsieur under the patronage of the Comte de Provence, the brother of King Louis XVI, who himself would assume the throne in 1814 after the defeat of Napoleon. Cherubini embarked on an operatic career, and although he composed some 35 operas, they failed to find much favor with the public. His music was elegant, refined, exhibited the classicist's emphasis on form, and was viewed as somewhat inaccessible. His operas were ultimately eclipsed by those of another Italian emigré, Rossini. After the French Revolution, he was forced to downplay

his royalist sympathies. With characteristic pragmatism, he accepted a commission to write music celebrating the execution of Louis XVI in 1796. He was acquainted with Napoleon, who did not particularly care for Cherubini's music but nevertheless continued to commission pieces from him. In 1805, Cherubini went to Vienna to mount a production of a new opera, *Faniska* – ironically his operas were far more popular in Germany and Austria than they were in France. Cherubini's timing, however, was unfortunate as 1805 coincided with Napoleon's attack on Vienna and subsequent occupation. Cherubini's reunion with Napoleon was less than cordial. The emperor requested him to take charge of the musical activities at Schönbrunn, which he did but without enthusiasm. He soon returned to Paris, but composed little.

Cherubini's fortunes improved markedly after the Restoration. His old patron, now Louis XVIII, appointed him co-director of the Chapel Royal, Royal Superintendent of Music and ultimately Director of the Paris Conservatoire. At the same time, he turned more and more to sacred music and began a steady stream of masses, motets, and other liturgical music. His best-known work, the *Requiem in C minor*, was composed in 1817 on a royal commission, ironically for a commemoration of the death of Louis XVI.

Beethoven had met Cherubini when he was in Vienna in 1805. He was an ardent admirer of Cherubini's music and later called him the "greatest living dramatic composer." Beethoven may have had a secondary motive for his effusive praise, for he tried to use Cherubini's influence to have a production of the *Missa Solemnis* mounted in Paris, and he again enlisted Cherubini in his plan to offer presentation copies of the *Missa* to various European rulers on a subscription basis. But Cherubini's influence on Beethoven was real and is seen not only in his opera *Fidelio* but also in the heroic style of some of his overtures. For his part, Cherubini did not return Beethoven's admiration. He famously called Beethoven "an unlicked bear," complained that because of all the modulations he was unable to tell what key the *Leonore* overture was in, and said that Beethoven's later music made him sneeze!

Cherubini's *Requiem* is unusual in several respects. It is set for chorus and orchestra only; there are no soloists. Cherubini also avoids breaking up the individual movements into episodes. In this the *Requiem* greatly resembles Beethoven's earlier *Mass in C*, and has more of the feeling of a liturgical work than a concert piece. It opens softly, with an upward reaching figure in the low strings, setting an appropriately solemn mood. The choral entrance is similarly restrained. Despite the restraint and the general subservience of the text to the underlying musical form, Cherubini is still able to imbue the *Requiem* with a great deal of emotional character. There is a grand crescendo, for example, on the phrase *exaudi orationem meam*, "hear my prayer." And although the movement began in C minor, it ends quietly on a hopeful C major chord. This is a Renaissance device called the Picardy third, frequently used in liturgical music, and helps provide a sense of closure and finality to the music. The Graduale has a decidedly Mozartean flavor, with a beautiful soprano-tenor duet presented in canon with an alto-bass duet, and like the Introitus, ends with a Picardy third, this time in G.

The Sequence, or Dies Iræ, is the most distinctive part of the Requiem mass. It is a 19-verse poem which alternates between graphic images of the Day of Judgment and heartfelt pleas for mercy. Liturgically, it is a reminder to the living of the transitory nature of human life. Musically, it affords a rare opportunity for dramatic writing which few composers can resist. Cherubini opens this movement with a trumpet fanfare, followed by the crash of a gong, the one theatrical effect that Cherubini allowed himself. The chorus enters softly, again in a canon, which builds intensity until a climax is reached on the *Tuba mirum* text, the sound of the last trumpet calling everyone to judgment. Over the next several verses, the music is repeated, again reaching a climax on *Rex tremendæ*, the entrance of the terrifying King of Majesty, followed by a suddenly quiet *salva me*, “save me.” The next set of verses might ordinarily be given to soloists, but Cherubini instead gives long solo lines to the individual voice parts of the chorus. The music builds to one more crescendo, on the *confutatis maledictis* text, “the damned will be confounded and consigned to the flames,” again followed by a suddenly quiet *voca me*, “call me to be among the blessed.”

The Offertorium opens with a dignified and majestic phrase, which moves to a very beautiful trio set for the upper three voices. Following tradition, Cherubini sets the *quam olim Abrahæ* text as a fugue, doubling the tempo on the repeat of the text. The Sanctus is equally majestic but brief, and leads directly into the Pie Jesu. This is also text which would ordinarily be given to a solo voice, but Cherubini instead distributes the long, beautiful lines to the chorus.

The Agnus Dei is the most unusual movement in the *Requiem*. It opens with an angular orchestral phrase, increasing in intensity until the chorus enters with an almost anguished plea, followed by a much more subdued *dona eis requiem*, “grant them rest.” Cherubini repeats the final line, *dona eis requiem sempiternam*, “grant them eternal rest,” ending with a very long modulation on the word *sempiternam*, like a musical depiction of eternity. The chorus sings the last phrases on a unison C while the orchestra plays a descending phrase, almost like the mirror image of the opening music, and finally settles into a gentle C major chord as the music also finds rest.

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