



VERDI, from the bust by Vincenzo Gemito.

The Great Verdi Requiem

I Promessi Sposi ("The Betrothed"). He had once written to a friend that "it is more than a book, it is a consolation for mankind! I was 16 years old when I read it for the first time . . . still my enthusiasm for the book remains undiminished; indeed, with increasing knowledge of mankind my enthusiasm has grown. And that because the book is true; as true as the truth itself."

After Manzoni's death Verdi approached the Mayor of Milan and offered to write a large choral work in his friend's honour. "I do not deserve any thanks whatever for my offer. . . . It was simply an impulse, or rather a heartfelt need, which compelled me to do honour to this great

man according to my best endeavour," he wrote. The offer was accepted and the *Requiem* was first performed under Verdi's direction at St. Mark's Church in Milan and for the next performance transferred to La Scala. It was received with great enthusiasm and parts of the work were encored. "Verdi was always very disappointed in an opera when the arias were not applauded," said James Robertson when discussing the work. Applause in such a work was usual in Italy, but the custom has never caught on in other countries.

It is one of Verdi's few non-operatic works, and in writing it he has inevitably

used an operatic style. The work was so different from the customary *Requiem* that it aroused strong criticism throughout Europe, and the composer was accused of having written another opera instead of a religious work. Verdi was undisturbed by the hostility for he had written it in the way he knew best, that of the theatre.

"It is certainly very theatrical, and there's no attempt to deny it," said James Robertson. "It also has beautiful lyrical passages, is thoroughly sincere, and very dramatic. For an Italian there is no problem in the work, as without any trouble he simply imagines himself there."

Among the brilliant orchestral effects, besides well-known means of arousing excitement such as the diminished seventh and the rushing chromatic scales, there is what Mr Robertson called "the extraordinary bubbling effect" at the lines "Quantus tremor est futurus," and the dazzling brilliance of the brass in the "Tuba mirum." Extra trumpets will be placed at strategic points in the hall for this section.

"The work requires a kind of blazing operatic treatment," said James Robertson, and all the soloists have had operatic experience. Vincente Major (soprano), who was introduced to James Robertson by the Australian tenor Ronald Dowd, sang in last year's radio opera *Il Tabarro*. Mona Ross (mezzo-soprano) spent the last four years with the Carl Rosa Opera Company, where she sang all the leading mezzo roles,

and is well acquainted with Verdi. Richard Lewis (tenor) is equally at home in oratorio and opera, which makes him particularly at home in this work. Laslo Rogatsy (bass baritone) was a former leading baritone at the State Theatre, Bremen, and has sung this role in England. Since coming to New Zealand in 1952 his roles include "Elijah," the father in *Hansel and Gretel*, and Michele in *Il Tabarro*.

The Christchurch Harmonic Society Choir paid a similar visit to Wellington two years ago to sing *Belshazzar's Feast*. "No praise is too high for that performance," said James Robertson, who, at the time, paid tribute to the fine work of their choir-master, Victor Peters.

The order of the Mass, with the sections of the work, is as follows: *Requiem* and *Kyrie*, soloists and chorus; *Dies Irae* (Dies irae, chorus; Tuba mirum, chorus; Liber scriptus, mezzo-soprano and chorus; Quid sum miser, soprano, mezzo-soprano and tenor; Rex tremendae, quartet and

chorus; Recordare, soprano and mezzo-soprano; Ingemisco, tenor; Confutatis, bass; Lacrymosa, quartet and chorus); *Offertorium* (quartet); *Sanctus* (fugue for double chorus); *Agnus Dei* (soprano, mezzo-soprano and chorus); *Lux Aeterna* (mezzo-soprano, tenor and bass); *Libera Me* (soprano solo, chorus and final fugue).

The Wellington performance takes place on Saturday, June 15 (YCs, 8.0 p.m.) and the Christchurch performance on Tuesday, June 18 (3YC, 8.0 p.m.)



A reproduction of Verdi's right hand, by Dupre.

ONE of the greatest works of its kind, the Verdi *Requiem Mass* will be presented by the NZBS in both Wellington and Christchurch during June. A notable cast of soloists is headed by the distinguished English tenor Richard Lewis, the choir is the Christchurch Harmonic under their choir-master Victor Peters, and James Robertson will be conducting the National Orchestra.

Verdi composed this work late in his life after the death of the Italian writer Manzoni in 1873. Verdi had a profound regard for Manzoni, and all his life had admired his masterpiece

THE TWO WORLDS OF J. S. BACH

IN the home of Johann Sebastian Bach there was frequently a cradle in one room and a coffin in the next. Eleven of his 20 children died before him; those surviving gave their father troubles in proportion to their numbers. Bach was a prisoner of this world's demands; always accompanied by grief; always pursued by envy and pettiness and conflict.

Yet throughout his life he wrote about 20 pages of music a day; works which are unsurpassed in their blend of meticulous craft and the strong faith which inspired and sustained their composer. With Bach, says Albert Schweitzer, art and religion were one and the same thing. These two loyalties—to life earthly and divine—provide the title and theme of a major series of programmes, *Bach: Citizen of Two Worlds*, starting soon from YC stations.

Written by Dr Hans Besch for broadcast by the North-West German Radio in the "Bach Year," the programmes dig deeply into the apprenticeship and career of Bach, in both its material and musical-religious aspects. The dramatised presentation is by actors of the NZBS Production Studios, working from a translation made by the Australian Broadcasting



DR HANS BESCH

Commission; the liberal musical illustrations are those used for the original broadcast in Germany, and are by courtesy of the North-West German Radio. Such outstanding artists as Monique Haas (piano), Professor Helmut Walcha (organ), Hans Hotter (baritone) and Margo Guillaume and Martha Schilling (sopranos) are heard in these passages. The whole series is in 18 programmes, each of one hour duration.

Dr Besch, a Bach scholar of 35 years standing, notes that an article in *Pravda*, the Moscow paper, once claimed that Bach wrote his many religious works only to save his numerous family from destitution—implying that his faith was only a matter of form, a self-interested conformity. Yet, says Dr Besch, the appeal of Bach's music is that it is often a comfort and support to faith; it is directed to the soul of man. Even, perhaps, to the Russian soul. "In 1950," he writes, "when the bones of Bach were transferred from the destroyed Johanneskirche in Leipzig to the Thomaskirche, a detachment of Russian officers appeared, bringing a wreath of roses as big as a door."

The Thomaskirche, mentioned above, was the church at which Bach served as cantor for

27 years up to his death in 1750. There he produced 265 of his 295 church cantatas, a number of secular cantatas, the six great motets, five masses, including that in B Minor, four Passions, including the *St. Matthew*, and a great variety of other works. This in spite of a demanding round of duties which included the instruction of pupils at St. Thomas's School. Bach only managed to escape giving classes in Latin by employing a substitute teacher at his own expense.

In spite of his natural and occupational bias toward religious music, Dr Besch points out, Bach embodied in his works all types of dances of his age, he sang of the passion of the coffee drinkers, of the joys of the hunt and of love's young dream. As a man he belonged to his own age; as a genius to all ages.

The part of Bach in the NZBS production is played by Lawrence Hepworth. Others are William Lloyd, as Goethe, Charles Tingwell as Mendelssohn, Athol Coats as Wagner, Ernest



Johann Sebastian Bach.

Blair as Albert Schweitzer, and William Rees as Bach's biographer, Spitta. The narrator is Sidney Musgrove.

(*Bach: Citizen of Two Worlds*, all YC stations, weekly for 18 weeks, beginning Friday, June 14, at 9.15 p.m.)