

# Otto Olsson REQUIEM

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Gustaf Vasa Oratorio Choir • Royal Opera Orchestra  
• Sylvia Lindenstrand • Inger Blom • Björn Haugan  
• Olle Sköld • Anders Ohlson, conductor

# OTTO OLSSON



Gustaf Vasa Oratorio Choir – Royal Opera Orchestra  
Conductor: Anders Ohlson

# REQUIEM

proprius

## Otto Olsson and his Requiem

Otto Olsson held the post of organist at Gustaf Vasa church in Stockholm for nigh on 50 years, from 1907 to 1956. He also taught harmony and organ at the Stockholm Conservatory of Music from 1908 to 1945, but to his contemporaries he was best known as a choral composer and writer of organ music.

*Advent*, for choir and organ, is sung in most Swedish churches on the first Sunday in Advent, and his organ pieces are played by virtually every organist in Sweden with sufficient command of the instrument. During his lifetime Otto Olsson's *Te Deum* for chorus and orchestra received more than a hundred performances, not only in Sweden but also on the continent. Even today it is still performed regularly and has been heard as far afield as America and Hong Kong. His organ works have been printed by music publishers in Germany, Denmark, France and England and certain works are also published in America.

Otto Olsson was a Romantic composer who found it difficult to accept new-fangled musical ideas. He preferred the more conventional sonorities of music from the turn of the century, in particular the organ music of the French Romantics, such as César Franck, Charles-Marie Widor and Louis Vierne.

After the First World War more and more time elapsed between each work from his hand.

The tremendous second organ symphony, *Credo Symphoniacum*, and the sombre *Prelude and Fugue no. 2 in F sharp minor*, both written in 1918, are his crowning achievements as a composer. His self-criticism and his inability to adapt to innovation caused him to retreat more and more into silence, with only a few notable exceptions: *Three Latin Hymns* from 1927-34, the *Prelude and Fugue no. 3 in D sharp minor* from 1935 and a *String Quartet in A minor* from 1948.

At the beginning of the fifties he was still working on an ambitious oratorio, *De Gloria Paradisi*, which he had begun during the First World War. It remained a musical torso at his death in 1964.

Otto Olsson's reasons for writing a requiem remain unclear. At twenty-two, he had just completed his studies at the Conservatory and was perhaps eager to try out his newly acquired skills in counterpoint and composition on a large-scale work, combining chorus and orchestra.

Maybe the *Requiem* was intended as a tribute to his father who died in November, 1900. He could very well have been inspired by the requiems of Brahms and Verdi which were performed in Stockholm in April, 1900 and December, 1901, just when he had started on his own requiem (the score is dated 1901-03).

He submitted the manuscript of the newly completed Requiem when he applied (successfully) for the state Composer's Fellowship in 1904. In May the following year the manuscript was returned and it is probable that he tried to have the Requiem performed at

this time, but without success. Instead the score was put on the shelf together with his other unperformed early works: the *Symphony for Orchestra*, a *Scherzo for piano and orchestra* and the *Suite for small orchestra*.

Many years later Otto Olsson still rated the Requiem highly, including it in catalogues of his works in 1908, 1925 and even as late as 1950.

However there is no mention of the work in any of the newspaper interviews with him and quite a sensation was caused by the first performance of the Requiem in 1976, 73 years after its completion (in conjunction with the 75th anniversary of the Church Musicians Society in Stockholm).

Even though Otto Olsson's Requiem was written at the outset of his composing career, it must nevertheless be regarded as a fully mature, imposing work. When the Requiem opus 13 became known, the picture of the composer Otto Olsson suddenly became complete: more and more clearly he stands out as one of the greatest names in nordic church music after Buxtehude.

Three features that are characteristic of the mature master are already well developed in this work – his careful attention to the beauty of the melody, his skilful management of counterpoint and his strong feeling for the musical architecture.

Olsson has a gift for melody and in this majestic work his melos blossoms out in a way that makes the music feel most un-Swedish – it has rather more in common with a Central European tradition.

However this profusion is always woven into a masterly contrapuntal line of thought: the melodic rapture is never an end in itself but is subordinate to formal designs.

In Olsson's setting there is no trace of the pessimism that characterizes Brahms's choice of texts (hardship, anxiety, transience...) and which forms the basis for his music. Olsson's "Missa profunctorum" is transfused with the hope of eternal life in true Christian spirit.

The entire work is pervaded by an atmosphere of faith and light. There is no lack of dramatic moments, but the composer does not resort to such extreme effects as Verdi does, for instance. In the Italian master's version of the *Dies Irae* it becomes the central point in his Requiem Mass with a large dose of histrionic effects. Instead Olsson concentrates the focus on subsequent movements, such as the Sanctus and the *Agnus Dei*. While with Verdi the *Agnus Dei* is hardly more than a digression, the same passage in Olsson's Requiem becomes an urgent, poignant, far-reaching prayer for mercy. As far as the apparently simple and unpretentious structure of some of the movements is concerned a certain affinity with Fauré's Requiem can perhaps be discerned, but Olsson is far removed from the Frenchman in other sections, such as the *Confutatis*, or more particularly the Sanctus. In radiant C major, using every available instrumental and vocal resource, it becomes an overwhelming, ecstatic song of praise to God Almighty.

And then something remarkable happens: by his use of the ancient Catholic Requiem text Otto Olsson's work is transformed into a



mighty and ardent sermon on Grace and Atonement in true Lutheran spirit.

Otto Olsson divides the traditional Latin text of the Requiem Mass into ten parts. *Requiem aeternam*, eternal rest, and *Kyrie eleison*, Lord, have mercy, are choral movements. In the third movement, *Dies irae*, the music rises to its first climax when the Day of Judgement is portrayed by the chorus and full orchestra. It leads directly into the fourth movement, *Rex tremendae majestatis*, scored for bass solo accompanied by chorus and orchestra. A smaller orchestra is used for the fifth movement, *Recordare*, which is choral in character, mild and contemplative. In the sixth movement, *Confutatis*, the serene atmosphere is disrupted by a violent outburst from the orchestra, reinforced by the entire wind section. The seventh movement opens with the mens' voices singing *Domine Jesu*, answered by *Libera animas* from the womens' voices. At the end of the movement both parts are woven together to form a whole. The soprano and alto soloists then appear in the eighth movement, *Hostias*. Using woodwind and strings Otto Olsson attains a simplicity in this duet which is almost worthy of Mozart, as the clarinet recalls the *Libera animas* melody. In the ensuing *Sanctus*, an exultant song of praise, the chorus and soloists are joined by the timpani and trumpets. A gentler section follows with the four soloists in the *Benedictus*, which is interrupted by a choral fugue on the text *Hosanna in excelsis*, Hosanna in the highest. In the final *Agnus Dei*, Lamb of God, the composer returns to the mood

of the first movement. At the words *peccata mundi*, the sins of the world, the music builds up to the ultimate climax of the Requiem. The text is a prayer for eternal peace. As the music recedes the soloists sing of light eternal, *lux aeterna*, accompanied by the celestial tones of the harp. The music dies away to nothing.

The conductor Anders Ohlson sums up: "Light, spirit, life, strength, sincere comfort, profound beauty – for me it has been a gift of inspiration to be able to immerse myself in Olsson's Requiem. This amazingly mature composition, written when Otto Olsson was a mere twenty-three years old, has an undisputable place among the great international sacred symphonic choral works."

### Curt Carlsson and Erik Lundkvist

Translation: Cynthia Zetterqvist

## REQUIEM

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,  
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Te decet hymnus, Deus in Sion,  
et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem.  
Exaudi orationem meam,  
ad te omnis caro veniet.

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,  
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

## KYRIE

Kyrie, eleison!  
Christe, eleison!  
Kyrie, eleison!

## DIES IRAE

Dies irae, dies illa,  
solvet saeculum in favilla,  
teste David cum Sibylla.

Quantus tremor est futurus,  
quando iudex est venturus,  
cuncta stricte discussurus!

Tuba mirum spargens sonum,  
per sepulcra regionum  
coget omnes ante thronum.

Mors stupebit et natura,  
cum resurget creatura,  
iudicanti responsura.

Liber scriptus profereatur,  
in quo totum continetur,  
unde mundus iudicetur.

Judex ergo cum sedebit,  
quidquid latet apparebit,  
nil inultum remanebit.

Quid sum miser tunc dicturus,  
quem patronum rogaturus,  
cum vix justus sit securus?

## REX TREMENDAE

Rex tremendae majestatis,  
qui salvandos salvas gratis,  
salva me, fons pietatis!

## RECORDARE, JESU PIE

Recordare, Jesu pie,  
quod sum causa tuae viae,  
ne me perdas illa die!

Quaerens me sedisti lassus,  
redemisti crucem passus,  
tantus labor non sit cassus.

Iuste iudex ultionis,  
donum fac remissionis,  
ante diem rationis.

Ingemisco tamquam reus,  
culpa rubet vultus meus,  
supplicanti parce, Deus!

Qui Mariam absolvisti,  
et latronem exaudisti,  
mihi quoque spem dedisti.

Preces meae non sunt dignae,  
sed tu bonus, fac benigne,  
ne perenni cremer igne!

Inter oves locum praesta,  
et ab haedis me sequestra,  
statuens in parte dextra!

## CONFUTATIS MALEDICTIS

Confutatis maledictis,  
flammis acribus addictis,  
voca me cum benedictis.

Oro supplex et acclinis,  
cor contritum quasi cinis,  
gere curam mei finis.

Lacrymosa dies illa,  
qua resurget ex favilla  
judicandus homo reus.  
Huic ergo parce, Deus!  
Pie Jesu Domine,  
dona eis requiem! Amen.

## DOMINE JESU

Domine Jesu Christe! Rex gloriae!  
Libera animas omnium fidelium  
defunctorum

de poenis inferni et de profundo lacu!  
Libera eas de ore leonis,  
ne absorbeat eas tartarus,  
ne cadant in obscurum.

Sed signifer sanctus Michael  
repraesentet eas in lucem sanctam,  
quam olim Abrahae promisisti  
et semini ejus.

## HOSTIAS

Hostias et preces tibi, Domine,  
laudis offerimus.

Tu suscipe pro animabus illis,  
quarum hodie memoriam facimus.  
Fac eas, Domine, de morte transire ad  
vitam,

quam olim Abrahae promisisti  
et semini ejus.

## SANCTUS

Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus  
Dominus, Deus Sabaoth!  
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.  
Hosanna in excelsis!

Benedictus, qui venit in nomine  
Domini.  
Hosanna in excelsis!

**AGNUS DEI**

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,  
dona eis requiem.  
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi,  
dona eis requiem sempiternam!

Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine!  
Cum sanctis tuis in aeternum,  
quia pius es.  
Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,  
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

## Sylvia Lindenstrand

soprano, made her debut at the Royal Opera, Stockholm, as *Olga* in *Eugene Onegin*. As a regular member of the Opera company she was given important roles such as *Dorabella* in *Così fan tutte*, *Cherubino* in *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Brangäne* in *Tristan und Isolde*. She definitely made her name as *Zerlina* in *Don Giovanni*. Then followed new roles in quick succession.

Today Sylvia Lindenstrand is one of the most widely-travelled Swedish artists. She has given numerous opera guest performances and/or recitals and has made TV appearances in New York, Vienna, Paris, London, Moscow and Peking. She has also sung leading parts in TV versions of *Falstaff* (cond. Sir Georg Solti, direct. Götz Friedrich), *Così fan tutte* and *Idomeneo*.

The digital recording was made on May 16, 1993, in the Gustaf Vasa church, Stockholm. Recording engineer was Bertil Gripe, who used a Fostex D20B DAT and an AKG C426 microphone in M/S-mode connected to a SAM 82 mixer. Calrec microphones were used as support for the orchestra.

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Mastering: Rune Persson,

RP Recording.

Processing: DCM, Stockholm.

Cover art: Tor Svae.

Translation: Cynthia Zetterqvist and  
Mats Bergström.

Production: Jacob Boëthius.

## Inger Blom

mezzo-soprano, first trained as a music teacher, then studied solo singing at the Royal University College of Music, after which she entered the University College of Opera in Stockholm. On graduating she was engaged at the Royal Opera and made her debut as the *Secretary* in *Menotti's The Consul*. Other roles have been the *Prioresse* in *Dialogue des Carmélites*, *Olga* in *Eugene Onegin*, *Marcellina* in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* and the title role in *Carmen*.

Inger Blom is much sought-after as a concert singer and oratorio singer. On gramophone record she can be heard in *Schmittke's Faust Cantata* and in *Striabin's First Symphony*.

The recording of Otto Olsson's *Requiem* was bestowed a generous contribution by the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs.

## Björn Haugan

tenor, studied at the Royal University College of Music in Stockholm and with Ettore Campogalliani in Milan. In 1971 he made his debut as the *Duke* in *Rigoletto*. During the 1970s and 1980s he established himself as a distinguished interpreter of demanding contemporary opera repertoire. As a concert and oratorio singer Björn Haugan has sung practically all the major tenor parts and he makes regular guest appearances all over Scandinavia and Germany. His interpretations of the tenor parts of *Beethoven's Ninth Symphony*, *Verdi's Requiem* and *Orff's Carmina Burana* have been much admired.

From the season 1993/94 Björn Haugan is engaged at the Kassel Opera in Germany.

## Olle Sköld

bass, studied at the Royal University College of Music in Stockholm (solo singing and flute), followed by the Royal University College of Opera and the Copenhagen Conservatory of Music. He has sung with a number of Swedish Opera Companies such as The Royal Opera in Stockholm, The Drottningholm Court Theatre and The Norrland Opera in Umeå. Some of his roles are *Timor* in *Turandot*, the *Grand Inquisitor* in *Don Carlos*, *don Basilio* in *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, *don Alfonso* in *Così fan tutte* and the *Commendatore* in *Don Giovanni*.

Olle Sköld is in great demand as a concert and oratorio singer and has made a number of gramophone recordings and radio appearances.

Photo: Kungliga Teatern



Sylwia Lindenstrand

Photo: Konserthuset

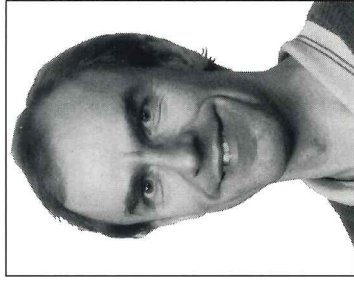


Björn Haugan

Photo: Kungliga Teatern



Irger Blom



Olle Sköld





Photo: Mats Hildingsson

### *Gustaf Vasa Oratorio Choir*

was founded in 1988 by Anders Ohlson. Among major works performed can be mentioned the *Requiems* of *Verdi* and *Brahms*, *Bruckner's Mass in e* as well as 20th century music such as *Stravinsky's Symphony of Psalms* and *Szymanowski's Stabat Mater*.



### *Anders Ohlson*

is choirmaster and organist at the Gustaf Vasa Church, Stockholm, since 1982. He studied at the Royal University College of Music in Stockholm 1961-68 and 1970-73. He qualified as an organist, a choirmaster and as a singing teacher. In 1973 he gained a conducting diploma after studying with Siegfried Naumann and Stig Westerberg.

Anders Ohlson also has a wide experience as a singer and as a conductor of orchestral music and opera.

The music was performed by the *Royal Opera Orchestra*, Stockholm.