



Giuseppe Verdi - Quattro pezzi sacri

In the last years of his career Giuseppe Verdi returned to the sacred genre by composing, at different moments and for different ensembles, four choral pieces - *Ave Maria*, *Stabat Mater*, *Laudi alla Vergine Maria*, *Te Deum* - which at the insistence of the publisher Ricordi were published together in 1898 as *Quattro pezzi sacri*. The pieces are four prayers, four meditations on the meaning of death by the composer who at the end of his years feels called to deal with his own religious sentiment. Three out of four intonations are dedicated to the Madonna while one is dedicated to God. Addressing one's prayer to the Virgin Mary is probably the most natural gesture for Verdi; in many years of his theatrical career the female figure has always represented for him virtue, redemption, the best aspect of humanity represented on the stage. In the *Stabat Mater*, for example, Maria is seen by Verdi first of all as a loving and painful mother, a woman who weeps at the feet of her son on the cross and shares with him all earthly sufferings. In the composition emerges a humanity portrayed in its terror of the unknown; the same image of glory in heaven is accompanied by a sonorous apotheosis, as tradition dictates, but with a final reserve, a last dissonance that seems to disperse in the void. There seems to be no room for hope for Verdi's secular religiosity. Even in the last of the passages, the *Te Deum*, the same pessimistic climate dominates: the question of the believer who entrusts his soul to God does not seem to have an affirmative answer. For Verdi, man is reconfirmed only in the face of eternity and the silence of the cosmos.

Richard Wagner – Extracts from Parsifal

Christened by Hermann Levi at the Bayreuth Festival on July 26, 1882, *Parsifal* is Richard Wagner's latest musical drama. In the medieval myth of Parsifal, knight of the Round Table devoted to the search for the Holy Grail, themes particularly congenial to Wagnerian poetics are found. Wagner's Parsifal, the 'pure madman' because initially unaware of his own destiny, is the one chosen to preserve and defend the holy relic. But the way to revelation is long and full of obstacles and temptations that Parsifal will have to face. The sacredness of the drama is expressed from the very first bars of the Prelude of Act I, in which there are two key motifs of the work articulated together. The strings in unison intone the theme of the Last Supper, a sweet and painful melody that hovers in the sound space while a choir of trumpets and trombones loudly announces the theme of Faith, gradually contaminated with anguish in a continuous chromatic tension. Parsifal's entry into the Grail room is preceded by a particularly suggestive symphonic page, *Verwandlungsmusik*, which underlines the change of scene: Parsifal hears the blare of trumpets in the distance and a gentle chime that gets closer and closer. After having faced and defeated the magician Klingsor, representative of the world of Evil, and reconquered the Sacred spear of salvation, Parsifal wanders aimlessly for an indefinite time, on a path of spiritual transformation. Tempered by suffering and driven by faith, at the beginning of the third and final act, he finally arrives at the castle of Montsalvat, the temple of the Knights of the Grail. The time of redemption has come and after the investiture rite and the blessing given to him by the elderly knight Gurnemanz, Parsifal sets off for the castle. *The Good Friday Spell* resonates in the orchestra, a sound panel of elegiac beauty that describes the awakening of Nature in the first rays of the morning sun. In the enveloping melody of the strings, the sounds of the woods fluctuate gently and the blasts of brass resound like echoes of joy in the distance: it is the benevolent omen of rebirth and final salvation.