

6 December 2018

Barbican Presents:

[Tristia: Requiems for Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette](#)

25 January 2019, Barbican Hall, 7.30pm

On 25 January 2019, conductor **Hervé Niquet** and renowned French Baroque ensemble **Le Concert Spirituel** return to the Barbican Hall with a programme of tragic works composed in the turbulent wake of the French Revolution. In this special UK performance, Niquet conducts two deeply mournful, yet beautiful and fascinating Requiem masses, composed for Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette respectively. With the latter, this programme opens a window to the highly emotional impact of Marie Antoinette's trial and execution on a composer who had known her as a child.

Luigi Cherubini's *Requiem in C minor* for Louis XVI and Charles-François Plantade's *Requiem in D minor* for Marie Antoinette will be heard either side of Hector Berlioz' rarely-performed *Tristia*, marking 150 years since Berlioz' death. Reflection, and respect, paired with a plaintive lament for pre-revolutionary France permeate this programme.

Of the three works comprising this rare, and yet monumental programme created together with Palazzetto Bru Zane, Cherubini's *Requiem in C minor* is the most recognisable – regarded by both Beethoven and Berlioz as a masterpiece. Preceding Cherubini in the programme is Berlioz's seldom-performed *Tristia*, most commonly known for its *Marche funèbre pour la dernière scène d'Hamlet (Funeral March for the final scene of Hamlet)*, a piece Berlioz himself never heard performed. Rarer still is Plantade's *Requiem in D minor for Marie Antoinette*. In fact, Niquet and Le Concert Spirituel's recording of this requiem remains the only record in existence of both this piece and, quite possibly, any of Plantade's compositions. Written by one of Marie Antoinette's contemporaries, this piece not only shines a light on the effect the young Queen's death had on Plantade, but is also a classical rarity. Niquet comments: "*The surprise of a real 'find' is still as amazing as ever [...] Plantade wrote a work brimming over with emotion, very feminine as befits its dedicatee, but also one of ineffable gentleness, unspeakable brutality and respectful sweetness, which left us speechless after the final chords.*"

Following the execution of her husband, Louis XVI, in January 1793, in October of the same year, Marie Antoinette endured a rapid trial and, upon even swifter verdict, was transported to the guillotine in an open cart (a dishonor not bestowed upon Louis). Despite all of this, many accounts document the dignity with which she faced her persecution. Considering that Plantade was, at just seven years old, specially selected by none other than Gluck to sing duets with the young Marie Antoinette, the emotion in his work following her ignoble end is unsurprising.

With Plantade's requiem setting the tone for the programme, the following two works continue in a similar vein. Despite being, in his own words, "*a convinced republican*", Niquet nevertheless comments that "*these two requiem masses commemorating two sovereigns martyred by the French revolution set each other off to perfection*".

Le Concert Spirituel was the first private concert association in France, founded in the early 18th century and dissolved during the French revolution. Fitting therefore that Niquet took the name for this period instrument ensemble in 1987 and now, with the reincarnated outfit, performs a selection of works picking up where their 18th century counterparts left off.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

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