

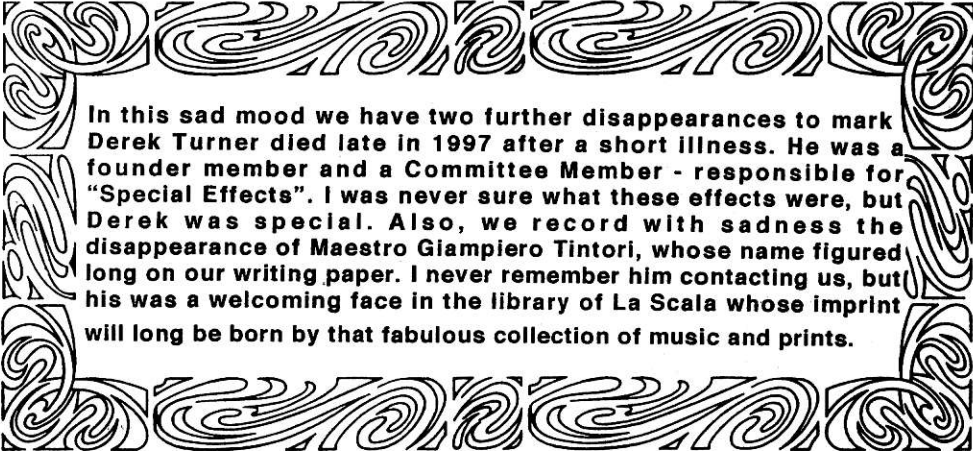
and another Requiem...

Aachener Dom 2nd April 1998

A visit to Aachen, planned to take in two performances of *Don Sebastiano*, had as an unexpected bonus a (badly advertised) performance of the *Requiem* written for the death of Bellini by Donizetti, given to commemorate (and only six days short of) the 150th anniversary of the composer's own death. It turned out to be more memorable than the opera. The forces were the Sinfonie Orchester and Städtischer Chor of Aachen, and five soloists unknown to me except for Johannes Piorek, who was singing in *Don Sebastiano*, and who created the most favourable impression in the *Requiem*. The location was the twelve hundred year old octagonal basilica of the Cathedral - a relatively small space, but filled to capacity by a hugely appreciative audience. The conductor was Elio Boncompagni, standing in front of Charlemagne's shrine. The setting heightened one's sense of occasion, and the impact of the performance was overwhelming.

Everyone, but especially Boncompagni, who gave an account of the score which was by turns thrillingly dramatic, rapt and noble, seemed to be inspired by the solemnity of the evening. I feared, at first, that the basilica might have too much of an echo, but it proved not to be excessive. Although the fugato passages at the close of the *Requiem aeternam* and the *Lacrymosa* lacked ideal clarity, the sonority of the acoustic enhanced the work's most dramatic moments by lending extra terror to the *Dies irae* and by increasing the majesty of the *Rex tremendae*, while the plangent opening of the *Ingemisco* can never have sounded more heartbreaking. The brass were prominent but mellow, and none of Donizetti's daring instrumentation, especially in the *Dies irae*, was masked in any way. The chorus and orchestra were superb. Although they all gave a decent account of themselves it might have been possible to imagine a better team of soloists; but, in the total sum of things, this mattered little and it would not be easy to imagine a performance more imbued with reverence for its composer. Donizetti may well have few more fitting tributes to mark the anniversary of his death. It is incomprehensible that this piece is so neglected. In many ways a clear precursor of Verdi's *Requiem*, it deserves to be much better known.

Alex Liddell



In this sad mood we have two further disappearances to mark Derek Turner died late in 1997 after a short illness. He was a founder member and a Committee Member - responsible for "Special Effects". I was never sure what these effects were, but Derek was special. Also, we record with sadness the disappearance of Maestro Giampiero Tintori, whose name figured long on our writing paper. I never remember him contacting us, but his was a welcoming face in the library of La Scala whose imprint will long be born by that fabulous collection of music and prints.