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## The Dies Irae ("Day of Wrath") and Totentanz ("Dance of Death"): Medieval Themes Revisited in 19th Century Music and Culture

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## THE *DIES IRAE* ("DAY OF WRATH") AND THE *TOTENTANZ* ("DANCE OF DEATH"): MEDIEVAL THEMES REVISITED IN 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY MUSIC AND CULTURE

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### Abstract:

During the pivotal November 2002 football game of Arkansas vs. Georgia in the SEC conference championship, the Georgia marching band struck up their defensive rallying song. Instead of a typical "defense" song, the band played an excerpt of the Gregorian Sequence *Dies Irae* ("Day of Wrath") from the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass. Drastically dissociated from its original medieval milieu, this musical Sequence still manages to elicit the same effect of fear and foreboding nearly a thousand years later. Precisely because of its deep musical and cultural roots, the *Dies Irae* occupies a significant place in history, closely intertwined from early on with the medieval folk motif *Totentanz* ("Dance of Death"), widely depicted in medieval art, and dramatically revived in 19<sup>th</sup> century music, art, and literature.

This multi-disciplinary study focuses on the history of art and music of these two medieval themes during their development, and then moves on to study them in 19<sup>th</sup> century culture. Specifically, the manipulation of the original Gregorian chant and the incorporation of the idea of a medieval dance are analyzed in the music of Hector Berlioz, Franz Liszt, and Camille Saint-Saens. Numerous other contextual links are explored as well, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Victor Hugo, Henri Cazalis, William Blake, and Alfred Rethel, all of whom created 19<sup>th</sup> century artistic or literary masterpieces derived from the thematic seeds of the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz*. Although neither of these ideas endured in their original form during the Romantic era, the inherently compelling nature of these themes that center on the macabre but inevitable end of life captivated the Romantic geniuses and continue to intrigue us to this day.

### Editor's note:

Space precluded publication of the entire thesis in this journal. However the work in its entirety can be found on the *Inquiry* website.



Picture: Reinhold Hammerstein. *Tanz und Musik des Todes: die Mittelalterlichen Totentanze und ihr Nachleben*. Bem: Francke Verlag, 1980. Plate 179. "Beinhausmusik."

Chronologically, this study divides into two main areas of focus; the genesis and permutations of the Requiem Sequence, *Dies Irae*, and the "morality dance-with-verses", the *Totentanz*, and the revitalization and metamorphosis of these themes in the Romantic era. Certainly neither the *Dies Irae* nor the *Totentanz* completely ceased to exist in the time between the Middle Ages and the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Various alterations in the original ideas

associated with both musical Sequence and the folk motif continually occurred during this lengthy time period. Each generation found its own personal method of dealing with the eternal questions of death and its consequences. Yet the fascination with both the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz* as products of the medieval mindset has endured for almost a thousand years.

In November 2002, the Arkansas Razorback football team played the Georgia Bulldogs in the Southeastern Conference championship game. At every key defensive point in the game, the Georgia band struck up their rallying song. A typical choice for this kind of “mood” music at a football game is the “Jaws” theme or the “Darth Vader” music - but instead the Georgia band played an excerpted version of the initial section of the Gregorian Sequence *Dies Irae* (“Day of Wrath”) from the Mass for the Dead. Few recognized its original source, but the intent of the music was still clear to all those who heard it. Even today, in 2003, a marching band can play an excerpt from the *Dies Irae* and generate the same feelings of trepidation and premonition of evil. Twentieth-century composers following the first World War similarly found the *Totentanz* (“Dance of Death”) an effective metaphor for the horror they felt concerning the Nazi regime. Obviously these ancient artistic concepts still hold sway over us today, as an enduring legacy of the human mind’s attempts to answer eternal questions. The *Dies Irae* is definitely no ordinary sacred tune; it carries a rich history of cultural implications, such as the *Totentanz*, and even achieved an individual importance in music and art throughout the ages.

Initially, the first section of this thesis offers a brief introduction into the history and specific format of the Roman Catholic Mass, and particularly its variant, the Requiem Mass. While the Mass itself took several centuries to coalesce into its precise form, once it achieved this form it became an extremely important cultural institution in Europe. The immense centralized power of the Catholic Church during the medieval era made the Latin Mass an important unifying device across ethnic and linguistic boundaries. The Requiem Mass, (“Mass for the Dead”), was also codified so as to offer the “definitive” Catholic medieval ideology concerning death. As such, the Requiem Mass contained several special components; the *Dies Irae* was one of these, formally added to the Mass in 1570. This medieval text penned by Thomas of Celano during the late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> century, offers a graphic depiction of the horrors of Judgment Day for sinners. The New Catholic Encyclopedia states that, “The Preface for the Dead emphasized the joyful aspects of the Resurrection. The medieval Sequence, however, stresses fear of judgment and condemnation.”<sup>1</sup>

The second chapter of this thesis indeed concerns the background and evolution of the medieval poem, *Dies Irae*, and also in particular examines the unique Gregorian chant music associated with the text. The origins of the poetic text are traced through both biblical prophecy and the idea of “repentance sermons.” The philosophies of redemption and repentance were

central to medieval Catholic ideology, and thus the *Dies Irae* was meant to serve as a warning to both the pious and the wicked. The musical iconography of the *Dies Irae* indicates this as clearly as the Latin text, if not more so. The rhythm, text-music relationship, modality, method of cadencing, and specific interval patterns all led to complete identification of the text of the *Dies Irae* with its Gregorian chant counterpart. So much so, in fact, that much later Romantic composers were able to “quote” segments of the music of the *Dies Irae* to indicate both the text and the general aura of Judgment Day.

The following chapter discusses a related European folk motif, the *Totentanz* (“Dance of Death”). This medieval movement was widely based in Europe during the Middle Ages; although most prevalent in France and Germany, examples also occurred in Italy and Spain. In its simplest form, the *Totentanz* was really a dance, albeit one depicted in frescos and woodcuts. The central idea was that death visits us all eventually, regardless of social station or age. Other art forms based on the *Totentanz* gradually evolved, including elaborate woodcuts depicting every social station, accompanied by texts detailing “Death”’s personal message to each. The *Totentanz* served as a type of secular yet religiously based motif centered on the uncertainty of life in the Middle Ages. Death was ever-present during these times of plague and war, so communities in the Middle Ages could not afford to shy away from it. Instead, a vital art form was created out of the somehow satisfying idea that death comes to all, regardless of earthly advantages.

The *Dies Irae*, the *Totentanz*, and the general belief in Judgment Day were all recreated many times in art during the medieval era. The fourth chapter of this study focuses specifically on the tympanum of Gisleburtus at Autun (c. 1130), the Pisan fresco *Triunfo della Morte* attributed to Bonamico Buffalmacco (c. 1350), Guyot Marchand’s woodcuts of a French *Dance of Death* in 1485, Albrecht Dürer’s 1498 *Apocalypse* woodcuts, Hans Holbein’s 1538 set of 41 *Dance of Death* prints, and Hieronymus Bosch’s depiction of Hell in his triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, dating from approximately 1510-1515. Each of these medieval artists offered a slightly different outlook on these themes, but all created medieval masterpieces based on the current conceptions of death, Hell, and judgement.

The fifth chapter, “‘New Themes’ in the Romantic Era,” begins the second major section of the thesis. This chapter presents a general overview of the Romantic age, with emphasis on the interconnected nature of the arts during this period. Also of interest are the specific attributes and interests of the Romantics that made revitalization of medieval themes so attractive. Paris in the 1830s is especially important, as many of the artists pertinent to this topic were active there at this time, such as Hector Berlioz and Franz Liszt. Other non-musical artists contributed greatly in both inspiration and encouragement to these composers, so men such as Victor Hugo, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Eugene Delacroix are also discussed. It was the

particular attitude of the Romantic era that allowed for the revival of the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz*; these themes dealt with medieval and macabre ideas, which made both of them captivating to many Romantic artists.

Following the Romantic chapter, a group of four successive chapters (Chapters VI-IX) submits most of the musical analysis of the thesis, as well as the most concrete examples of Romantic manipulation of our themes. Respectively, these sections concern Hector Berlioz and the final movement of the *Symphonie Fantastique*, Franz Liszt and *Totentanz: Paraphrase über Dies Irae*, Camille Saint-Saëns' *Danse Macabre*, Franz Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*, and Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 2*. Berlioz is probably the most famous for his inclusion of part of the chant of the *Dies Irae* in his secular composition. Although this was undoubtedly meant as a sort of parody in view of the program assigned to the symphony, Berlioz's use of the motive still bears extensive examination. It is extremely interesting in its rhythmic, thematic, and modal characteristics. Berlioz does not merely quote the chant verbatim; he instead rhythmically augments it, creating a similar feeling to the augmented bass line of a motet. The same "lengthening" phenomenon has been documented in other types of Western music as well as in Eastern music, such as medieval Chinese dance-tunes performed at the Japanese court today. The *Symphonie Fantastique* also creates an ingenious mixture of perceptions, as it fuses the fragment of the *Dies Irae* with a wild witches' round dance- perhaps an indication of the universality of "dance" as a part of death.

Franz Liszt's *Totentanz* is quite different; this composition is an incredible melding of a theme and variations and a virtuoso piano concerto. Liszt was very much influenced by Berlioz's symphony, yet Liszt's devout Catholicism likewise led him in new directions involving the *Dies Irae*. The first three lines of the Gregorian chant serve as the "theme" in Liszt's work, which are then split off and treated in a wholly Romantic fashion. Liszt also composes the same type of rhythmic augmentation as Berlioz, although not as extreme. Furthermore, the somewhat modal character of the beginning of this piece at least suggests that Liszt attempted to be historically accurate in his initial statements of the Gregorian sequence.

Camille Saint-Saëns was active slightly later as a composer than Hector Berlioz, and was a younger associate of Franz Liszt's. However, his music bears the influence of both in many ways. His symphonic poem, *Danse Macabre*, plays upon several threads of previously mentioned themes. He uses the *Totentanz* of Goethe and the *Danse Macabre* by Henri Cazalis as inspiration- both of these 19<sup>th</sup> century poems exhibit the relatively new Romantic idea of skeletons dancing in the graveyard at midnight. But Saint-Saëns too includes a musical quote of the *Dies Irae* in his *Danse Macabre*. He also manipulates the interesting ethnomusicological association of Death as a violinist or fiddler. This motif is common in many cultures, and is briefly discussed during this chapter.

The final musical analysis section features short commentaries on the works of two other 19<sup>th</sup> century composers, Franz Schubert and Gustav Mahler. Neither uses the *Dies Irae* or the *Totentanz* in as straightforward a manner as the previous three composers. Yet the works of these two men submit interesting adjuncts to the main topic of this study. Franz Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*, a short 19<sup>th</sup> century lied, proffers an alternative to the view of "Death" as a terrifying experience. This song instead depicts a young maiden who is seduced by the calmness and certainty of "Death"- he will take her to a kinder place than this cruel world. The idea of death as alleviating earthly pain was present even in the Middle Ages, and Schubert's song reinforces this surrogate view of our ultimate end. Gustav Mahler's *Symphony No. 2* is a much more complex and personal use of the *Dies Irae* in music. This massive symphony creates a programmatic journey through death, remembrance, fear, resurrection, judgment, and finally, a move to eternal bliss. The *Dies Irae* is used as a mighty symbol of the day of reckoning that Mahler felt all had to face before the ultimate salvation. This highly personal interpretation of the "Day of Wrath," reflects Mahler's individual ideology as well as a late Romantic example of gargantuan symphonic music.

The final chapter of the body of this work affords several examples of how the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz* were promulgated in non-musical 19<sup>th</sup> century art. Specifically, the artwork of William Blake, Victor Hugo's poem *The Dance of Demons*, Goethe's poem *Totentanz*, and Alfred Rethel's woodcuts of *Death as a Cutthroat* and *Totentanz Auch ein Jahr 1848* are considered in this section. The Romantic era seemed to particularly value creativity and individuality, so it is not surprising that all of these artworks are conspicuously characterized by their creator. Yet, the common threads running through these works of art as well as the earlier mentioned musical compositions are remarkable; the incredible renewal and concentration on the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz* during the Romantic era is unique in European cultural history.

The two themes of the *Dies Irae* Sequence and the *Totentanz* have both enjoyed a long, intertwined history. Each evolved as different reactions to the universal human questions of what happens after death. However, the longevity and recycling of these ideas throughout the history of art of all kinds is a testimony to their artistic worth. The *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz* were not constantly quoted and used solely because they dealt with death; both are valid artistic triumphs of the human intellect. The *Dies Irae* survived not only because of its subject matter, but also because it is a beautiful, symmetric poem set to an equally appropriate and balanced melody. The *Totentanz* spread over Europe as a popular secular movement because of its intrinsic message, but also offered a wonderful glimpse into the complicated social hierarchy of the late Middle Ages. The later, concentrated use of both of these originally medieval themes in 19<sup>th</sup> century orchestral masterpieces reflected the fascinating

social mores and ideals of the Romantic mindset. The *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz* offered the works of Berlioz, Liszt, and Saint-Saëns both a grounding in a rich artistic tradition and an aid to "Romanticize" the eternal themes of life and death.

**End note:**

<sup>1</sup> A. Cornides. "The Liturgy of the Requiem Mass." *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 12. Rome: 1967. p. 384.

**Faculty comment:**

Ms. Brooks' faculty mentor, in her letter to the publication board extolling the importance of Ms. Brooks' research, makes the following comments:

Erin's chosen topic for her Honors Thesis in Music History - the borrowing of the medieval chant *Dies Irae* ("Day of Wrath) from Mass for the Dead and the interlacing of the medieval *Totentanz* ("Dance of Death") as *topoi* in Romantic orchestral works - has led her deep into interdisciplinary, cross-cultural study. Tracing the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz* through the visual, literary and performing arts of medieval Europe - the concern of the first part of her thesis - involved reading widely beyond the field of traditional musicology (in biblical and liturgical studies, in art history, folklore, literary studies, historical dance studies, historical ethnomusicology, and musical iconography). In respect to the *Totentanz* in particular, this also required extensive dealing with the mainstream scholarly studies in German, Dutch, and French. Her final account of the medieval development of these themes is a well researched and skillful, selecting and drawing together from a vast (and in certain aspects controversial) scholarly field of those strands relevant for her particular emphasis/evidence, and especially on iconographical and structural musical grounds, for why an ancient chant associated with death rituals of the Roman Catholic Church can endure so tenaciously, inspire artists across centuries, and still evoke in us today the emotions it was presumably intended to evoke at the time it came into being.

The second part of the thesis is devoted to the remarkable surge of interest in both the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz* among leading artists, composers, and writers of the Romantic Period. Just as the inextricability of the two themes in the medieval period demands a multi-pronged approach to their study, the unified artistic movement of the Romantics in general, and intellectual cross-fertilization ensuing from contacts and friendships among the key figures in this story in particular, also require broad-based enquiry. Erin again draws from across many fields to address both themes as borrowed in 19th century music, art, and literature. While the letters of the three

principal composers who worked with the *Dies Irae* and/or the, *Totentanz*—Berlioz, Liszt and Saint-Saëns—are central to her fascinating accounts of how each came to borrow the medieval themes, of direct and indirect mutual influencing, and of contacts with and inspiration from Goethe (and especially from *Faust*), Hugo and others, her technical musical analyses of relevant passages from Berlioz' *Symphonie Fantastique*, Liszt's *Totentanz (Danse Macabre)*, and Saint-Saëns' "*Danse Macabre* provide explicit demonstrations of how the modal melody of the *Dies Irae* is actually used in Romantic tonal environments. Erin makes a number of original and thought-provoking observations. Perhaps among the most significant of these is that the perfect symbiosis of music and text in the original chant is so powerful that even in "wordless" 19th century idioms, text-structure holds sway. Consequently the overwhelmingly strong association between "death, darkness, and the underworld" and the key of D-minor may well be linked ultimately with the mode of the medieval Requiem chant, *Dies Irae*.

While the historical ethnomusicologist in me probably lured Erin far afield from her intended path, particularly in her following the *Totentanz* and its relationship with actual European dance-types (folk and courtly) of the time, and (certainly by the end of her research) in her fearless taking-on of secondary literature in German, French, and even Dutch, what has come out in the multidisciplinary wash is a very fine and cohesive study. Indeed, a good deal of what is covered as contextualization has not been dealt with in such detail in English before. This alone indicates the value of the essay. But Erin's particular approach to the way text/melody balance intrinsic to the original *Dies Irae* chant perseveres at the structural level when "borrowed" and incorporated by Romantic composers will probably stand as the hallmark of her original contribution to this piece of musical history. Here it is the underlying structure that defies change and, no matter in which other genres and contexts it may appear and whatever encrustations it may now bear, testifies to the "old" and the "new" being "the same piece". I take Erin's lead in pointing to the history of the *Dies Irae* in our own musical tradition as an instance of an almost 1,000 year-old liturgical item that has persevered as a musical structure both in the Requiem Mass and in the secular domain - admittedly assisted by its particular poignancy and power for the ephemeral human - to be significant. While the undergraduate textbook in Music History may simply acknowledge that Berlioz, Liszt, and Saint-Saëns "quote" from the *Dies Irae*, Erin has delved far beneath the surface, even into the psychology of the composers themselves, to try to elucidate how and why this particular chant evidently holds such a spell over us.

THE *DIES IRAE* ("DAY OF WRATH") AND THE *TOTENTANZ* ("DANCE OF DEATH"): MEDIEVAL THEMES REVISITED IN 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY MUSIC AND CULTURE

By Erin Brooks  
Department of Music

Faculty Mentor: Elizabeth Markham  
Department of Music

Abstract:

During the pivotal November 2002 football game of Arkansas vs. Georgia in the SEC conference championship, the Georgia marching band struck up their defensive rallying song. Instead of a typical "defense" song, the band played an excerpt of the Gregorian Sequence *Dies Irae* ("Day of Wrath") from the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass. Drastically dissociated from its original medieval milieu, this musical Sequence still manages to elicit the same effect of fear and foreboding nearly a thousand years later. Precisely because of its deep musical and cultural roots, the *Dies Irae* occupies a significant place in history, closely intertwined from early on with the medieval folk motif *Totentanz* ("Dance of Death"), widely depicted in medieval art, and dramatically revived in 19th century music, art, and literature.

This multi-disciplinary study focuses on the history of art and music of these two medieval themes during their development, and then moves on to study them in 19th century culture. Specifically, the manipulation of the original Gregorian chant and the incorporation of the idea of a medieval dance are analyzed in the music of Hector Berlioz, Franz Liszt, and Camille Saint-Saëns. Numerous other contextual links are explored as well, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Victor Hugo, Henri Cazalis, William Blake, and Alfred Rethel, all of whom created 19th century artistic or literary masterpieces derived from the thematic seeds of the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz*. Although neither of these ideas endured in their original form during the Romantic era, the inherently compelling nature of these themes that center on the macabre but inevitable end of life captivated the Romantic geniuses and continue to intrigue us to this day.

Prologue

December 7, 2002- The pivotal football game of the Arkansas Razorbacks versus the Georgia Bulldogs in the Southeastern Conference Championship is underway.

Unfortunately, the underdog Razorbacks are immediately decimated by Georgia's potent defense at the beginning of the game. Surrounded by 75, 835 screaming fans, the

University of Georgia Redcoat Marching Band attempts to fire up the crowd even more. After every defensive stand by the Georgia football team, the marching band strikes up their defensive rallying cheer. A typical choice for this kind of “mood music” is the “Jaws” theme or the “Darth Vader” theme from *Star Wars*, two common defensive songs. Instead, the University of Georgia marching band plays an excerpt from the Gregorian chant Sequence *Dies Irae* (“Day of Wrath”) from the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass. Certainly not every one of the fans present recognizes the derivation of this tune. A few persons may place it as part of Hector Berlioz’s borrowed rendering of the *Dies Irae* in his *Symphonie Fantastique*; to other fans it may merely sound slightly familiar. Yet the enormous crowd immediately perceives the intended emotional effect of this music. But how is it that a Gregorian chant so far removed from its original context still has meaning? Significantly, this particular Sequence holds a singular place in the history of Gregorian chant. The unique aural qualities of even a short excerpt of the *Dies Irae* provide an evocative example of how perfectly this music portrays the text that accompanies it. Even in drastically divorced settings, the music of the *Dies Irae* is able to indicate the mood of its medieval text. Evidently, the *Dies Irae* is no ordinary sacred tune; it carries a rich intertwined history and even achieved an individual importance in secular music, art, and literature. While not readily recognized in current scholarship in the separate disciplines of art history, literary and liturgical studies, etc., from a music-based approach, it appears that the *Dies Irae* was intricately intertwined with another medieval theme, the *Totentanz* (“Dance of Death”). This secular folk motif, associated with actual dance-forms of the time and manifest in both the literary and visual arts, was also obsessed with Death and the eternal price for sin. Indeed, the intense interest in both

the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz* exhibited by the Romantics- including writers and artists, but especially composers- provided the initial rationale for tracing the two themes from the point of their being merely different representations of a single idea.

Chronologically, this study divides into two main areas of focus; the genesis and permutations of the Requiem Sequence, *Dies Irae*, and the "morality dance-with-verses", the *Totentanz*, and the revitalization and metamorphosis of these themes in the Romantic era. Certainly neither the *Dies Irae* nor the *Totentanz* completely ceased to exist in the time between the Middle Ages and the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Various alterations in the original ideas associated with both musical Sequence and the folk motif continually occurred during this lengthy time period, as each generation found its own personal method of dealing with the eternal questions of death and its consequences. Yet the fascination with both the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz* as products of the medieval mindset has endured for almost a thousand years. A marching band can play an excerpt from the *Dies Irae* (therefore from the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass) and generate the same feelings of trepidation and premonition of evil. Twentieth-century composers following the first World War similarly found the *Totentanz* ("Dance of Death") an effective metaphor for the horror they felt concerning this apocalyptic struggle. Obviously these ancient artistic concepts still hold sway over us today, as an enduring legacy of the human mind's attempts to answer eternal questions.

### Part I: Intertwined Themes of the Medieval Age

While the Mass itself took several centuries to coalesce into its precise form, once it achieved this form it became an extremely important cultural institution in Europe.

The immense centralized power of the Catholic Church during the medieval era made the



Latin Mass an important unifying device across ethnic and linguistic boundaries. The Requiem Mass, (“Mass for the Dead”), was also codified so as to offer the “definitive” Catholic medieval ideology concerning death. As such, the Requiem Mass contained several special components; the *Dies Irae* was one of these, formally added to the Mass in 1570, but known as a musical item in the earlier part of an extant collection of notations from the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, and probably having even earlier musical roots<sup>1</sup>. The medieval text itself, possibly penned by Thomas of Celano during the late 11<sup>th</sup> or early 12<sup>th</sup> century, offers a graphic depiction of the horrors of Judgment Day for sinners. The New Catholic Encyclopedia states that, “The Preface for the Dead...emphasized the joyful aspects of the Resurrection. The medieval Sequence, however, stresses fear of judgment and condemnation.”<sup>2</sup>

References in the poetic text of the Sequence may be traced through biblical prophecy, especially in the prophecies of Zephaniah and Isaiah, both strongly linked with the idea of a wrathful God, as well as the idea of “repentance sermons.” Still, the rewards for those who lived a just life were also evident by this point in time. The philosophies of redemption and repentance were central to medieval Catholic ideology, and thus the *Dies Irae* was meant to serve as a warning to both the pious and the wicked. The musical iconography of the *Dies Irae* indicates this as clearly, if not more so, than the Latin text. The distinctive melody to which the *Dies Irae* is set became so recognizable that hundreds of years later, 19<sup>th</sup> century composers were able to quote parts of it to create a

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<sup>1</sup> Kees Vellekoop, *Dies Ire, Dies Illa: Studien zur Frühgeschichte einer Sequenz* Bithoven: A.B. Creyhton, 1978. pp. 62-76, 185. Vellekoop codified his version of the *Dies Irae* from the following manuscript: Neapel, Biblioteca Nazionale- Hs. VII D 36, f. 16r. Origin: Carmaninico, Benedictine. Dates from the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (oldest part). In the 15<sup>th</sup> century manuscripts from the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries were bound together in a collection- this *Dies Irae* dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century and is contained in this collection. (See Vellekoop, p. 29)..

specific effect in their compositions. The *Liber Usualis*, a compendium of prayers, lessons, and chants for the more important services of the Catholic Church, includes the entire text and melody of the *Dies Irae*. In addition, Kees Vellekoop has codified the standard version of the Sequence melody from the earliest surviving notated sources (Figure 1). There are several unique musical characteristics of the Sequence melody of the *Dies Irae*. The most distinctive segment of the melody is definitely that carrying the first two line of the Sequence, with the majority of later composers choosing to quote these lines nearly verbatim from the original chant. Rhythm, text-music relationships, modality, method of cadencing, and specific interval patterns all lead to complete identification of the text with its musical counterpart. Vellekoop argues that one of the reasons for the success and longevity of this Sequence is the perfect symbiosis between the music and the text. Vellekoop includes a lengthy diagram matching the stresses of the syllables with their counterparts in the chant melody and also provides a measured reconstruction of the way the rhythm might be performed (Figure 2). Of particular importance is the fact that each of the text-lines can be divided into two roughly four-“beat” sub-segments. The first line offers a good example: “Di-es ir-ae, Di-es il-la” is paired melodically with single quarter notes. Thus the melody naturally falls into a declamatory pattern that seems to imply subdivisions of both four and eight- beats. One specific reason for this is the unusually syllabic nature of the *Dies Irae*. Gregorian chant has traditionally been thought to be somewhat rhythmically amorphous, if for no better reason than the fact that the rhythm is not notated, or that if embedded has not been fully recognized by chant scholars. Early medieval performance practice is a tricky field, so

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<sup>2</sup> A. Cornides, “The Liturgy of the Requiem Mass.” *New Catholic Encyclopedia*. Vol. 12. Rome: 1967. p. 384.

we really still have an incomplete idea of how rhythmic or arrhythmic chant really was. Yet, this Sequence has a more inherently rhythmic structure than practically any other extant example of Gregorian chant. *Dies Irae* tends to avoid long melismas (with one word or syllable stretched out over many notes), and instead focuses on a simple, almost declamatory style of chant. This was possibly done intentionally by the original composers of the Sequence, in order to increase both its solemnity and dramatic effect: the important text would be more clearly articulated syllabically and neumatically than if set melodically. Certainly the skillful matching of the text and the melody is one attribute that must have helped the *Dies Irae* survive the Catholic Church's great purge of sequences from its Masses during the Council of Trent in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Only four sequences remained liturgically permissible after this council; the important subject matter of the *Dies Irae* Sequence probably also helped its chances.

1. Di - es i - re di - es i - re sol - vet se - dum in fa - vi - la te - ste da - vid cum si - bi - la

2. Quan - tus tre - mor est tu - tu - rus quan - do ju - dex est ven - tu - rus cum cæ - stri - cta dis - cis - su - rus.

3. Tu - be - mi - rum spar - get so - num per se - pul - chra re - gi - o - rum co - get om - nes in - te - thro - num.

4. Mors stu - pe - bit et na - tu - ra cum re - sur - get cre - at - tu - ra ju - di - can - do re - spo - su - ra

5. Li - ber so - lus pro - fe - re - tur in quo to - tum con - fi - ne - tur un - de mun - dus ju - di - ce - tur

6. lu- dex er- an- cum con-se- bit spic- quid lo- tet ap- po- se- bit nil in- ul- tum ho- ma- no- bit.

8. La- cri- mo- sa di- es il- la que re- sur- get ex- ta- vi- la.

10. lu- di- can- dus ho- mo re- us- tu- ic- er- go bit- te- de- us.

20. Pi- e ih- su- do- mi- ne do- na- e- is- re- qui- em A- - - - - man.

Figure 1. Sequence Melody. Kees Vellekoop. *Ibid.* pp. 62-76.

1-2  
7-9  
13-14  
Di- es i- re- di- es il- la sol- vet se- clum in- fa- vi- la te- ste do- mi- cum bi- bi- la

3-4  
9-12  
15-18  
Tu- da- mi- tam sor- get so- sur- re- ctu- ra re- gi- a- num co- get em- nes- se- ta- thronum

5-8  
11-12  
17  
Li- ber scrip- tus pro- te- re- fa- ci- que lo- tum con- ti- ne- rat- se- do- man- dus lu- di- ca- tal-

18-18  
H.C.  
La- cri- mo- sa di- es il- la que re- sur- get ex- ta- vi- la

19-19  
H.C.  
lu- di- can- dus ho- mo re- us- tu- ic- er- go- pat- i- ca- de- us

20-20  
Pi- e ih- su- do- mi- ne do- na- e- is- re- qui- em A- - - - - man

Figure 2. Kees Vellekoop. *Dies Ire dies Illa: Studien zur Frugeschichte einer Sequenz.* Balthoven: A.B. Creyghton, 1978. p. 185.

Finally, the *Dies Irae* simply offers a suggestive, easily recognizable melody. Perhaps the fact that the music is so evocative of the text is part of the reason why 19<sup>th</sup> century composers were drawn to this chant. Thus the singular structure and aural qualities of the *Dies Irae* offered later composers of “wordless” orchestral works an unique opportunity to suggest textual implications through music alone.

The origins of a “death dance” are a fascinating study in cross-cultural exchange, as this theme has echoed through various European cultures at different times in history. The *Totentanz* movement was widely spread during the Middle Ages; although most prevalent in France and Germany, examples also occurred in Italy and Spain. While literary seeds for the *Totentanz* have been suggested, in its simplest visual forms as murals and frescoes in graveyards and churches, the *Totentanz* was really depicted as a dance towards death, or towards the Charnel House (or *Beinhaus*, “Bone House”) in the medieval cemetery (Figure 3)



Figure 3. Reinhold Hammerstein. *Ibid.* Plate 179. "Bern, Dominikaner-Kirchhof, Totentanz des Niklaus Manuel, 1516/17-1519/20, zerstört, Aquarellkopie 1649; Beinhausmusik"

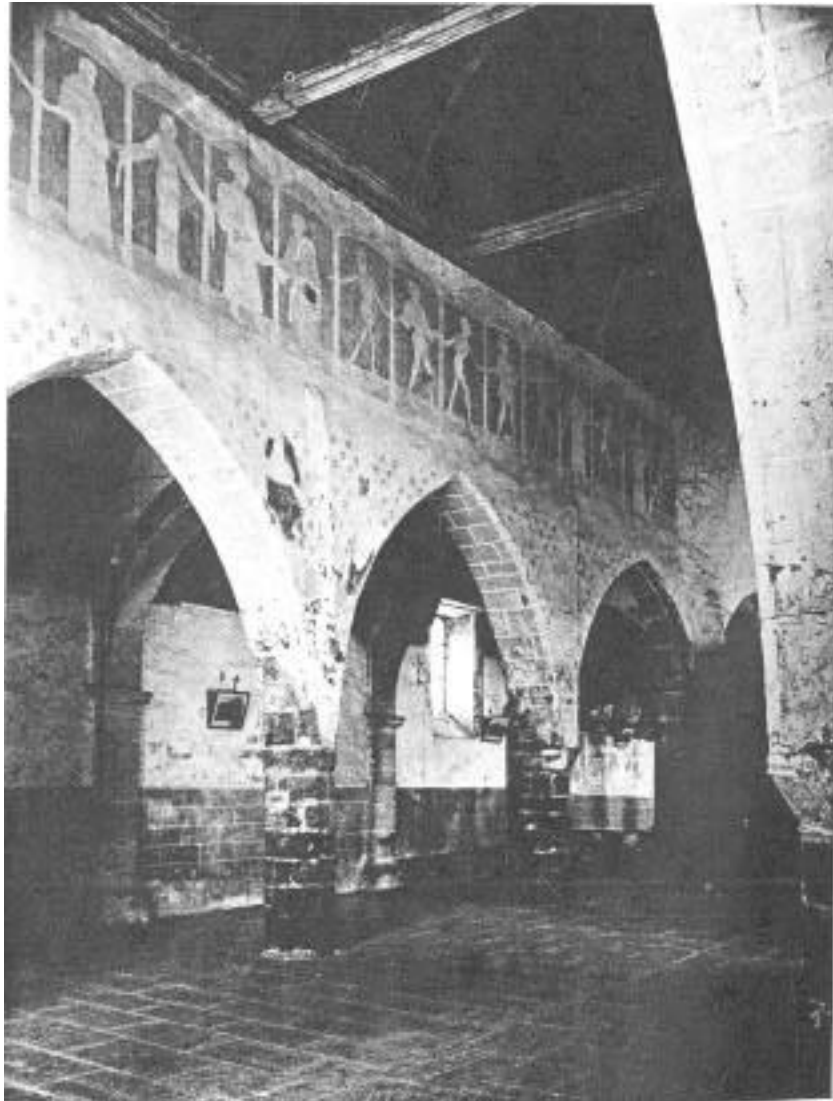


Figure 4. Reinhold Hammerstein. *Tanz und Musik des Todes: Die Mittelalterlichen Totentänze und ihr Nachleben*. Bern: Francke Verlag, 1980. Plate 45. “Kermaria, Notre Dame, Totentanz, um 1430, N-Wand des Schiffes.”

In the earlier *Totentänzen*, the procession towards death was depicted as a *reigen*, a dance category that includes both round-dances and chain-dances. The frescos in the church of Kermaria-in-Isquit dating from 1430 feature this kind of *Totentanz* (Figure 4). Literally a “reigen of death”, this fresco features couples, in each of which a representative of a trade, profession, or social class holds hands with a depiction of “Death,” who is consistently pictured as a skeleton. This kind of stately reigen, holding hands and

dancing towards the ultimate destination of death, contrasts greatly with the more frenzied kind of death dance found in some other *Totentänzen*. Thus there were two sides to the *Totentanz*: the procession or escort into death, and the wild, grotesque horror of the people surprised and dragged into death. This duality also fits in with the idea that sometimes Death comes as a friend and sometimes as a horrible enemy.

Through later *Totentänze* the chain-dance with held hands gradually moved to a procession of pairs, by which point the earlier reigen had all but disappeared from the visual aspects of the *Totentanz*. These developmental changes in the theme corresponded with those in actual dances of the era; from reigen, and in particular the branle, to basse danse and on to pavanne. The central idea was that death visits us all eventually, regardless of social station or age. Other art forms based on the *Totentanz* gradually evolved, including elaborate woodcuts depicting every social station, accompanied by texts detailing "Death"'s personal message to each. The *Totentanz* served as a type of secular yet religiously based motif centered on the uncertainty of life in the Middle Ages. Death was ever-present during these times of plague and war, so communities in the Middle Ages could not afford to shy away from it. As reasons for the rise of the *Totentanz* Reinhold Hammerstein offers widespread medieval ideas such as death as punishment for sin, fear of an unprepared death that would lead to Hell, the devil's escorting of the damned to Hell in Judgment Day iconography, and the associations of the Devil, Death, and the powers of the Musician.<sup>3</sup> The evolution of the visual, thematic, musical, and literary topos of the *Totentanz* may thus be seen as an intriguing adjunct to

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<sup>3</sup> Reinhold Hammerstein, *Tanz und Musik des Todes: Die Mittelalterlichen Totentänze und ihr Nachleben*. Bern und München: Francke Verlag, 1980.



the idea of the “Day of Wrath.” In particular, the links between Judgment Day iconography and music serve to connect the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz*.

Even in the earliest representations of the *Totentanz*, Death was often portrayed as playing a sort of straight-trumpet; Hammerstein suggests this is because of traditional Judgment Day iconography of the “trumpet sounding” to call souls to be judged.<sup>4</sup> However, Death was also often pictured playing “low”, dance instruments such as the kettledrum and various pipe and reed instruments (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Reinhold Hammerstein. *Ibid.* Plate 231. “Bleibach, Beinhauskapelle, Totentanz, 1723: Todesmusikanten.”

Thus, the visual representations of the *Totentanz* present a dichotomy between the actual “dance of death” and the more stylized association with Judgment Day and the *Dies Irae*. The verses that usually accompanied *Totentänzen* reflected this connection as well; Hans Holbein the Younger’s set of 41 woodcuts offers a particularly good example of this type of textural collage. His woodcuts feature a *Danse Macabre*, but also include a “Last Judgment”, under which the verse states:

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 112-130.

Before the mighty Judge's chair Comes  
reckoning for each man alive; Fear then,  
the judgments rendered there: You know  
not when He will arrive.<sup>5</sup>

Holbein is in fact only one of many artists during the medieval era that utilized these two medieval themes. The strength of the ideology concerning the "immortal soul" was immense during the medieval era, and the Catholic Church at this time consolidated its power by using images incorporating these themes to influence the largely illiterate population of Europe. Thus, there are a wealth of pictorial examples of the "Day of Wrath", the *Totentanz*, and Judgment Day dating from the medieval era. The *Dies Irae*, as an actual part of the Roman Catholic liturgy, was more of an "official" response to the eschatological question, whereas the *Totentanz* operated mainly as a folk motif, albeit one patronized by the Catholic Church. Famous medieval masterpieces such as Gislebertus's tympanum portal at Autun, Bonamico Buffalmacco's *Triunfo della Morte* in the Campo de Santo at Pisa, Guyot Marchand's 1485 *Dance of Death* woodcuts, Albrecht Dürer's 1498 *Apocalypse* woodcuts, and Hieronymus Bosch's famous triptych, *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (ca. 1510-1515) depict various permutations of these ideas.

## **Part II: The "New" Themes of the Romantic Age**

More than six centuries later, the Romantic age rediscovered the "romance" of the Middle Ages. For some musicians, artists, and writers, these "new" themes offered an exciting, innovative way to create highly personal art. Probably the most important aspects of Romanticism, however, were the synthesis of new and old ideas and the

merging of all the arts. For the first time, painters, playwrights, composers, poets, and actors were all part of a great movement that was independent of the old “hypocrisy” engendered by the aristocracy. It was this world, of men (and women) such as Hector Berlioz, Victor Hugo, Franz Liszt, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Eugene Delacroix, and many others, that became fascinated with the ideals of the ages of the distant past. A remarkable musical consequence of this interconnected movement was the new focus on music pertaining to both ancient and modern literature. The idea of expressing words or stories through music was of course an age-old rationale for the composition of music. This type of musical association continued during the Romantic era as well, but new genres of music linked with literature arose during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, such as program music, the symphonic poem, and art songs. In particular, the inspiration for the symphonic poems and program music is a telling portrait of the Romantic mindset. The unique atmosphere of the Romantic era, then, is what led to the revival of medieval themes such as the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz*: these themes dealt with medieval and macabre ideas, which made both of them captivating to many Romantic artists. Specifically, in three non-liturgical musical works by Hector Berlioz, Franz Liszt, and Camille Saint-Saëns, both the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz* become reinterpreted through the unique Romantic perspective.

The music and ideas of Hector Berlioz shaped the mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> century attitudes toward art, influencing both his generation and those who followed him. The most famous example of Berlioz’s genius for orchestral color is the *Symphonie Fantastique*, an early work written in 1830. While this entire piece is a showcase for Berlioz’s compositional innovations, only the fifth movement, *Songe d’une nuit du*

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<sup>5</sup> Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Dance of Death*. New York: Dover, 1971. p. 145.

*Sabbat* ("Dream of a Witches' Sabbath"), uses the Sequence *Dies Irae*. The connection with the Witches Sabbath introduces the Walpurgis Nacht as yet another motif of evident allure for the Romantics. Berlioz's reasons for including this unorthodox version of the *Dies Irae* appear to be manifold; it is frequently explained as a grotesque and symbolic parody of a well-known religious theme meant to shock the audience.

Another rationale for Berlioz's use of the *Dies Irae* in his secular composition was the increasing Romantic interest in mythical and fantastic ideas. Although this has been over-generalized in works about the Romantic era, many artists, writers, and musicians were suddenly interested in creating works about the Middle Ages, fantastical ideas, and myths. Jacques Barzun associates several of these threads of Romanticism with Berlioz's composition of the *Symphonie Fantastique*. He wrote:

Specifically, the transmogrified appearance of the beloved in the finale of the *Symphonie Fantastique* is a precipitate of several suggestions: in Goethe's *Faust*, the Brocken scene includes a ghostly appearance of the heroine, and later when she recognizes her guilt in church, the *Dies Irae* sounds, as in Berlioz's symphony. Not long before Berlioz began his piece, Hugo had published a volume of verse in which a *Ronde du Sabbat* is described in detail with its specters, beasts, and witches reveling in a mockery of religion: in Berlioz the *Dies Irae* is parodied. Finally, in the early months of 1830, Berlioz may have read De Quincey's *Opium Eater* in Musset's translation and adapted one of its ideas.<sup>6</sup>

Barzun's mention of Goethe's *Faust* is especially meaningful for both medieval themes (*Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz*). Not only did the *Dies Irae* occur in the Cathedral Scene of

*Faust* before Walpurgis Night, a festival traditionally allied with “witches’ orgies”<sup>7</sup>, but Goethe also penned the poem *Totentanz*. The influence of Goethe upon both Berlioz and Liszt cannot be overstated. The friendship between these two composers was actually in part sparked by Goethe’s writings. Berlioz wrote, “On the day before the concert, Liszt called on me. It was our first meeting. I spoke of Goethe’s *Faust*, which he confessed he had not read, but which he soon came to love as much as I. We felt an immediate affinity, and from that moment our friendship has grown ever closer and stronger.”<sup>8</sup>

The fact that Berlioz used the *Dies Irae* in this movement is widely recognized, yet he did not simply “quote” from the original Gregorian chant version. In the annotations within his score Berlioz was quite specific as to where the *Dies Irae* and the Witches’ Round Dance occur (and when the two are combined), and the manner in which Berlioz accomplished this musical quotation, fugue, and combination is fascinating.

Initially Berlioz chose not to quote the entire 19 strophes of the medieval sequence; instead he mostly used variations on the opening two “phrases,” that carry the first two lines of the first strophe. Respectively, these follow the text-lines:

*Dies irae dies illa*

*Solvat seclum in favilla*

Kees Vellekoop provides a measured reconstruction of the *Dies Irae* strophes into modern Western staff notation (see earlier reference). Each text-line in the model strophe is broken into quarter-note beats (or their equivalents), each carrying a single syllable of the 8-syllable text-line. Although the articulations of some syllables include what we

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<sup>6</sup> Jacques Barzun, “The Mind of the Young Berlioz.” *The Musical Quarterly*, 35 (1949). pp. 551-564.

<sup>7</sup> Charles E. Passage, Footnote to *Faust: Part One and Part Two*. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965. p. 135.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 139.

would consider “neighbor” notes or other small embellishments, the basic structure in this reconstruction contains 8 beats per phrase/ text-line.

The equivalent of the first two text-lines of the *Dies Irae* are initially stated in dotted half-notes in bassoons and ophicleides. This segment of the chant is then reiterated in mm. 147-157, except in dotted quarter-notes, halving the durational values of the first statement. In addition, this reduction in dotted quarter-notes starts on beat 2 of m. 147, creating a slightly lopsided feeling in the 6/8 meter. A further proportional reduction into the “6/8 dance-meter” associated with the Witches’ Round- Dance follows as a brief third illustration of the basic *Dies Irae* motif in mm. 157-161 (Figure 6). The upper strings and woodwinds exhibit a harmonized version of the first two lines of the chant, again, but the interval between the first two notes is generally a major 2<sup>nd</sup>, instead of the minor 2<sup>nd</sup> typically present in the initial segment of the chant. Also, the rhythm is further diminished in this third statement, as the text-lines are played in eighth and quarter notes. This rhythm completely alters the original equalization approach in the first two statements of the *Dies Irae* theme; however, the misplaced accents are retained because this third example again does not start on the strong beat of the measure.



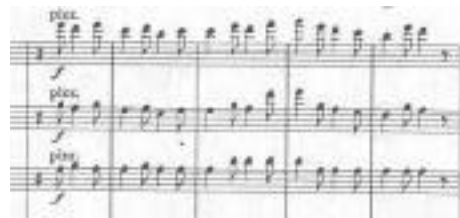


Figure 6. First Statement of the *Dies Irae* and the Manner in Which it is Rhythmically Contracted. Hector Berlioz. *Fantastic Symphony: An Authoritative Score, Historical Background, Analysis, Views and Comments*. Ed. Edward T. Cone. New York: W.W. Norton, 1971. pp. 155-156.

Here, Berlioz’s rhythmic treatment of the *Dies Irae* quote is interesting in the manner in which it is systematically “contracted” or diminished in meter. The intervals are what makes this quote hold together, as the rhythmic manipulation is somewhat difficult to hear. This contraction is further obscured by the fact that each of the diminutions occur on a weak beat, displacing the accents in both the meter and the “expected” accents of the *Dies Irae* quote. Each of the three main statements derived from the Gregorian chant is treated in this same rhythmic manner. Berlioz’s application of a version of the renowned

*Dies Irae* Sequence in his secular symphony was undoubtedly a novel idea, yet the real genius of this movement lies in the way he was able to combine this motive with the Witches' Round-Dance in such a cohesive manner. Structurally, the *Dies Irae* precedes the *Ronde du Sabbat*, which follows in a fugal treatment, then finally the two are combined (*Dies Irae et Ronde du Sabbat ensemble*). Moreover, each of these two themes is "framed" and foreshadowed by the other at every major structural junction. Thus, the Witches' Dance is "foreshadowed" before the entrance of the *Dies Irae*, the three entrances of the *Dies Irae* are divided by chromatic runs reminiscent of the Witches' Dance theme, and the Witches' Dance is also interrupted by the *Dies Irae*. The orchestration and the treatment of both themes in this final section of the *Symphonie Fantastique* is significant as well. The *Dies Irae* is here mostly confined to the woodwinds and brass, while the strings are always associated with the witches' dance. This division seems important, if merely for the fact that the brasses sound more like religious music than does the "profane" string section. Here again is a possible link between the diabolical connections of string instruments as opposed to the signaling capacity of the brass (especially trumpets).

Hector Berlioz revolutionized both symphonic music and the idea of "programme music" with this immense symphony. Even today this symphony is regarded as one of the early masterpieces of Romanticism, and is still startling in its use of the orchestra. The genius of this work definitely rests partially on the *idée fixe* and its program, but the unique brilliance of the final movement, with its complicated intertwining of the *Dies Irae* and the *Ronde du Sabbat*, has also undoubtedly led to the *Symphonie Fantastique's* enduring success.



This famous symphony fascinated Franz Liszt, the legendary piano virtuoso and composer, who transcribed it for piano and spread its fame over Europe. Liszt was initially heavily influenced by Berlioz's skills in orchestration, yet his attraction to the *Dies Irae* is even more multi-layered than Berlioz's. Liszt was drawn to the *Dies Irae* because of his own fervent Catholicism, his captivation with the Faustian legend, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's poem *Totentanz*, and the powerful affect of the *Triunfo della Morte* fresco in Pisa. This complex framework of thematic contributions led to the composition of his *Totentanz: Paraphrase über „Dies Irae,”* a gargantuan work for solo piano and orchestra. This work is a unique example of Liszt's compositional style, a piece that seems strangely torn between its theme and dramatic displays of pianistic virtuosity. Other important analytical concepts include how the *Dies Irae* plainchant is exploited as motivic tool in *Totentanz*, specific important treatments in the theme, Variation IV and the fugato, as well as Liszt's tonal characterization of the *Dies Irae*.

In his use of the Sequence, Liszt followed the original notation of the plainchant more closely than did Berlioz. While Berlioz abandoned the apparent perfect symmetry of the original 8-beat phrases in the *Symphonie Fantastique*, Liszt retained the natural 4-beat divisions dictated by the text-structure of each text-line of the Sequence. Liszt also appears to have only used the first strophe of the *Dies Irae* in his *Totentanz*. He split these three phrases into their 6 respective 4-beat sections. The same 4-note cadential formula is present in "in favilla" and "cum sybilla," so Liszt was really only left with five separate motivic fragments (Figure 7). The five motivic fragments are worked out rhythmically, harmonically, and intervallically during the course of *Totentanz*. Each 4-beat motive is easily aurally recognizable, so that Liszt was able to use these motives as

the linking entity for this massive piece. The formal structure of *Totentanz* is more complex, as Liszt initially commits to a theme and variations structure, but later “breaks down” this idea into increasingly complicated sets of variations and cadenzas. Thus, while the chosen formal structure does lend some musical integrity to *Totentanz*, it is really the motivic fragments of the *Dies Irae* that serve to unify this piece. *Totentanz* is a brilliant work of art in its own right, but the complex web of thematic inspirations for this composition is equally enthralling. Liszt’s work was perhaps the culmination of the intermingled Romantic revisitations of the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz*. Liszt himself was the perfect composer to realize this intermingling. As a deeply religious man, yet attracted by the macabre aspects of life, Liszt understood the warnings that the original ideas of the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz* contained for both the pious and the wicked.

**Motivic Fragment Diagram**

Franz Liszt

Motivic Fragment 1    Fragment 2    Fragment 3    Fragment 4    Fragment 5  
 Di-es Ir-ae    Di-es il-la    sol-vet sec-lem    te-ste dan-td    in fav-illa' cum sybil-la'

Figure 7. Motivic Fragments in *Totentanz*

Although Camille Saint-Saëns had his own unique compositional style, he was heavily indebted to earlier Romantic composers such as Berlioz and Liszt in both his oeuvre and inspiration. Saint-Saëns first met Liszt in 1851, when he was only fifteen years old. The two would later cultivate an immense professional admiration and friendship until Liszt’s death. Likewise, Berlioz and the young Saint-Saëns were acquainted in the Parisian musical scene. These two composers were perhaps

instrumental in Saint-Saëns' interest in the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz* (*Danse Macabre*), but he was inspired by other sources as well. Saint-Saëns originally conceived a song based upon the poem of Henri Cazalis entitled "Danse Macabre, or Egalité, Fraternité." This poem featured the midnight revel of skeletons dancing in the cemetery, a purely 19<sup>th</sup> century idea that originated with Goethe's poem, *Totentanz*. However, Cazalis's concept of death as the great leveler still retained some thematic aspects of the medieval *Totentanz*. Saint-Saëns' initial song was reworked in 1874 into an elaborately orchestrated symphonic poem, *Danse Macabre*. This new *Danse Macabre* definitely exhibits Lisztian influence, but it is uniquely Saint-Saëns' in the inspiration to combine so many different artistic threads. *Danse Macabre* integrates the ideas of Death as a fiddler, the medieval *Totentanz*, Goethe's *Totentanz*, and the *Dies Irae*.

The idea of Death as a fiddler, or more generally as a musician, is an extremely old and complex motif. Early *Totentanz* frescos often depicted Death as a musician, with the power to "call" people to him with his playing. The idea of the violin in particular as a diabolical instrument is a much more complex issue. In many European beliefs, Death (or a demonic individual) is the master fiddler who can enchant you with his playing. Saint-Saëns' casting of Death as the fiddler in *Danse Macabre* draws upon this long association. Saint-Saëns' symphonic poem was also allied with the medieval *Totentanz* through its use of a round-dance rhythm, and with Goethe's *Totentanz* as a result of the midnight dance of the skeletons, which Saint-Saëns imaginatively portrayed in his novel orchestral effects.

The inclusion of the *Dies Irae* in *Danse Macabre* creates a much more complex piece, both thematically and musically. The *Dies Irae* becomes one of the three themes

of this work, which are respectively, the chromatic solo violin theme, the dance theme, and the *Dies Irae*. The Gregorian chant is altered here in several significant ways. The two initial 4-note motives are spelled in way that creates a drastic change from the original intervallic pattern; while the Hyperdorian note-set of the original contained a minor 2<sup>nd</sup> between the first two notes of motive 1 and a major 3<sup>rd</sup> between the first two notes of motive 2, now certain notes are altered to yield a major 2<sup>nd</sup> and a minor third, respectively. Likewise, the rhythm is changed, creating a lopsided feel due to the accents found on the "wrong" beats in the overarching triple meter. This is actually quite similar to the second and third rhythmic reductions of Berlioz in his earlier *Symphonie Fantastique*. Thus, Saint-Saëns utilizes the fragment of the *Dies Irae* in a manner that radically varies from the original chant. In his reworking of the theme, he went even farther than either Liszt or Berlioz in divorcing the theme from its typical surroundings. Saint-Saëns' use of the *Dies Irae* is quite important as a later Romantic permutation of the medieval chant. However, it is really Saint-Saëns' fusion of the medieval *Totentanz*, earlier Romantic influences, Goethe's *Totentanz*, the concept of Death as fiddler, and the *Dies Irae* into a cohesive symphonic poem based on contemporary verses that offers such as fascinating example of the later Romantic's lingering fascination with these ideas.

Just as in the medieval era, the revival of the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz* in music was allied with representations in the other arts. The macabre and frightening aspects of the medieval *Totentanz*, the *Dies Irae*, and the general idea of Judgment Day represented a captivating link with the past to Romantic artisans. None of these themes held the same power of admonition as during their original inception, but they were all a part of European heritage. Even as the Romantic artists manipulated and reshaped these ideas

for their own time, some eternal truths linked with these concepts remained. In particular, Goethe's "Cathedral Scene from *Faust* and his *Totentanz* and Alfred Rethel's "Scenes *Auch ein Todtentanz aus dem Jahre 1848* and *Death as a Cutthroat* are significant examples of the lingering importance of these themes in Romantic art and literature.

Goethe's realization of the *Dies Irae* occurs in the "Cathedral Scene" of *Faust*, where he interpolates segments of the text of the medieval poem. The "Evil Spirit" torments Gretchen in the cathedral as the choir sings the *Dies Irae* sequence. Yet another link between the "warning" of the *Dies Irae* is the fact that the scene directly following the "Cathedral Scene" is set during "Walpurgis Night," a folk festival traditionally associated with witches' orgies. So, here, as in Berlioz, the juxtaposition of the *Dies Irae* with a devilish rite or a witches' dance is present. As earlier mentioned, Goethe's twisting of the original Dance of Death theme into a midnight revel of skeletons was a purely Romantic ideal that inspired both Liszt and Saint-Saëns.

Final artistic exemplars of these topoi were the paintings and woodcuts of Alfred Rethel (1816-1859), a celebrated German artist. Specifically, an interesting permutation of the *Totentanz* is his woodcut series entitled *Auch ein Todtentanz aus dem Jahre 1848*, which encompassed six woodcuts meant to serve as a warning for the people revolting all over Europe. The entire series includes terrifying visions of Death as the propagator of revolution; he is really the only one who wins in a revolution, as he greedily consumes all of the classes. This series of woodcuts uses the medieval theme of the *Totentanz* and imbues it with fresh horror as a contemporary scene in the bloody revolts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although many technological innovations improved the standard of living

during the Romantic era, the same technological breakthroughs led to increasingly ghastly casualties of European wars. Following the end of the Romantic age into the first World War, the immortal themes of the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz* were still a focus in European culture, but this time the art was driven by a true pessimism and despair in the ways of the world. Perhaps the Europeans of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries had no better alternative to death and its ugliness than did their forefathers seven centuries before.

### Epilogue

The two themes of the *Dies Irae* Sequence and the *Totentanz* have both enjoyed a long, intertwined history. Each evolved as different reactions to the universal human question of destination after death. However, the longevity and recycling of these mutual ideas throughout the history of art (of all kinds) is a testimony to their artistic worth. The *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz* were not constantly quoted and used solely because of their subject matter; both are valid artistic triumphs of the human intellect. These two related ideas in turn generated more artwork as the centuries progressed. The subject of death as an eventual visitor to us all will probably forever maintain a central place in the iconography of art. Yet the concentrated use of both these medieval themes in 19<sup>th</sup> century orchestral music, art, and literature is one of the great hallmarks of the century. Each reflects the fascinating social mores and ideals of the complex culture of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. The use of the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz* in non-liturgical music mutually mirrored the European attitude, but also undoubtedly augmented these 19<sup>th</sup> century masterpieces. The two medieval themes offered the works of Berlioz, Liszt, and Saint-Saëns both grounding in a rich artistic tradition as well as an aid to “Romanticize”

the eternal themes of death and resurrection. Perhaps it is through this Romantic “mirroring” of these themes that we in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are still able to understand the meaning of the *Dies Irae* and the *Totentanz*, albeit in surroundings drastically divorced from their original milieu.

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