

BRIEF STUDIES AND REPORTS

ALTO OR TENOR TROMBONE: OPEN OR CLOSED CASE?

Benny Sluchin

Last December I was called to join a chamber orchestra to play Cherubini's Requiem in D Minor. I admit I have never before played anything written by this composer, and decided first to place him in historical context.

Cherubini Luigi (born Florence, 8 or 14 Sep 1760; died Paris 15 March 1842). Italian composer, theorist, teacher and administrator belonging mainly to the French school. He was a dominant figure in French musical life for half a century. He made a minor contribution to French operatic history and had a lasting influence on music education, both in France and abroad." (*New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*)

Now my concern was: do I have to use my alto trombone for this occasion or should I manage with my tenor? I might add that personally I feel my duty is to use the alto in every situation in which the part was originally conceived for this particular instrument. But it is very important to inform the conductor, who might never have heard an alto trombone. It is also essential to show colleagues how enjoyable it can be to play the alto, as well as how valuable it is to be acquainted with it.

In this case, the issue seems quite clear. The part is written in tenor clef and the tessitura is not extremely high (Figure.). The score I have consulted, designated as an *Urtext*-original with no editing (Edition Peters)—indicates three trombones: the first and the second on the same staff use the tenor clef, the third uses the bass clef. There is no tuba part. Knowing that three different trombones were frequently used around this period to support voices in a religious context, and wanting to have a completely clear conscience on the issue, I decided to ask a French colleague. He clearly indicated that the first trombone part should be played on the tenor.

In other pieces by Cherubini the situation is different; they show clearly the presence of the trombone trio: alto/tenor/bass, leaving no doubt as to the instruments required. This particular Requiem uses a male chorus composed of tenor I, tenor II, and bass voices. His earlier Requiem in C Minor, for mixed choir and orchestra, had provoked objections by the Archbishop of Paris in 1834 because its performance required a woman to take part in the funeral ceremony. This led Cherubini to compose the latter Requiem, which was to be performed at his own funeral. The composition was completed in Mon tignon in 1836, and the first performance in 1838 at the Societe de Concerts in Paris. The Requiem was sung at Cherubini's funeral in 1842.

I decided to consult earlier copies of the score preserved at the Bibliotheque Nationale. Comparison between my score and the earliest available publication shows practically no

differences in the instrumentation or the layout. The work, entitled *Deuxieme Messe de Requiem pour voix d'hommes avec accompagnement a grand Orchestre ou piano*, was very popular; there are no fewer than five extant copies of the score, none of them dated, published by Schlesinger in Paris (Figures 2, 3). One of these is signed and contains a portrait of the composer (Figure 4).

I was fortunate to discover two sets of manuscript parts which were used in early performances of the piece. In the first set there is a joint part for alto trombone and *taille* trombone and a separate one for bass trombone (Figure 5). The second set, dated 1837, was used on many occasions by the Societe de Concerts du Conservatoire. It includes three trombone parts: trombone alto in alto clef (Figure 6), trombone *taille* in tenor clef, and bass trombone in bass clef. *Mille* is an early French designation for the tenor voice, which can be divided into *haute-* (= "high") and *basse- taille*. This set includes also an ophicleide part which doubles the bass trombone (Figure 7).

One might surmise that when preparing the printed score, the alto and tenor trombones were put on the same staff and the tenor clef was chosen probably because of the particular composition of the choir. Since the printed parts in use today are based only on this score, some valuable information had been lost. (This is also true of the horn parts.)

Which case should I then open, the alto's or the tenor's?

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2
Presto

Trbne III
Trbne II
Trbne I
P

f *ff* *ff* *ff*

Q
ff Lento $\text{♩} = 50$ Andantino $\text{♩} = 66$ *fff*

R
Grave, ma non troppo lento $\text{♩} = 69$
f *f*

S
fp *fp* *fp* *fp* *fp* *fp* *fp* *fp* *fp* *f*
T_{in.2} U V ♯ ♯
f

IV

Offeritorium

Andante con moto $\text{♩} = 88$
f

A

Figure 1
Cherubini: Requiem in D Minor, trombone I part



13:rXi4:nie l essede Requieni

(TO

gartb 6Ditfie;frc

or 1I>>0

J au tpo.te'e Sla V'

iftErs1N

*Membre du Collège de France, Officier de l'Ordre Royal de la Légion d'Honneur,
Bibliothécaire de l'Académie de Médecine, Conservateur des Archives de l'Académie de Médecine,
et Directeur de l'École de Médecine de Paris.*



Cherubini

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RIS

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Cherubini



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1;••:lfly:\
1873

L. 4605

Figure 2
Cherubini: Requiem in D Minor (Paris, Schlesinger), title page

OFFERTOIRE.

23

Andante con moto. (♩ = 88.)

Grande Flûte.

Petite Flûte.

Hautbois.

Clarinettes.
en Ut.

Cors en Ut.

Cors en Fa.

Bassons.

1
2
3
Trombones.

Violons.

Altos.

1^{rs} Tenors.

2^{ds} Tenors.

Basses.

Violoncelles.

Contrebasses.

PIANO.

Figure 3

Cherubini: Requiem in D Minor, "Offertoire"



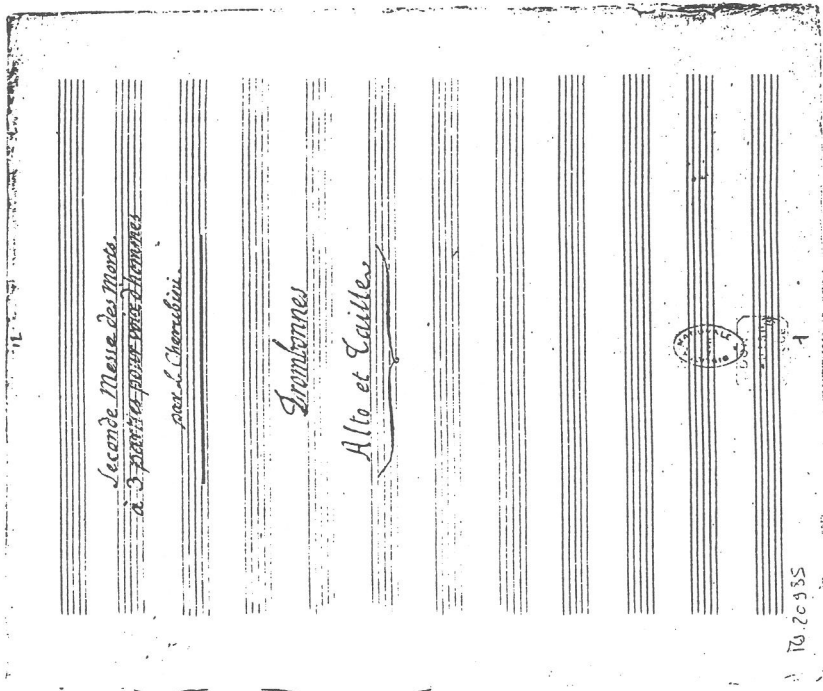
CHERUBINI.

Figure 4
Luigi Cherubini

11

Seconde Messe des Morts.
à 3 parties pour trois Chœurs.
par L. Cherubini.

Trombones
Alto et Taille.



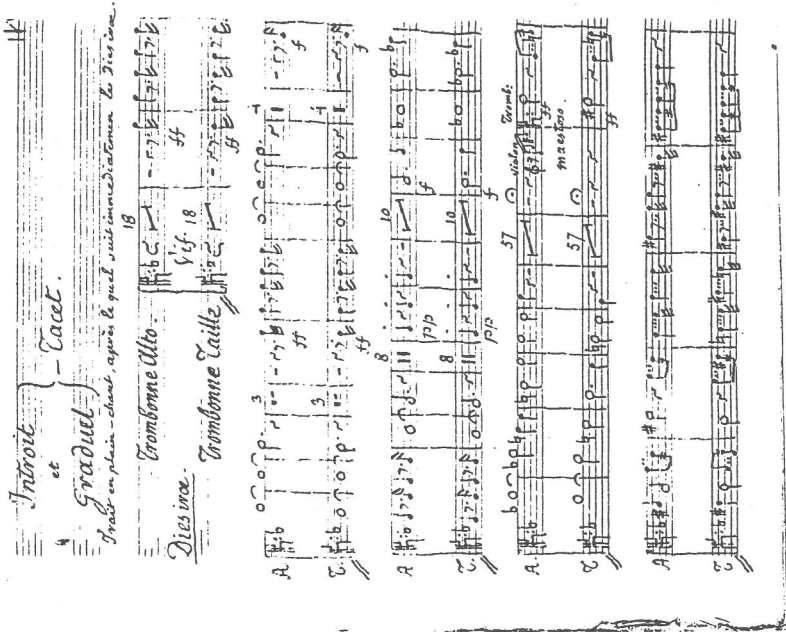
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Andoito
et
Grave
Poch en plein-chant, après lequel suit immédiatement le Trisone.

18

Trombone Alto.
Trombone Taille.

Disinca.



A. *ff*
C.

8 10 *pp* *ff*
8 10

A. *pp* *mf*
C.

57 *rit.*
57 *rit.*
57

Figure 5 Cherubini: Requiem in D Minor (ms set of parts, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale), "Dies irae," part for trombone alto and trombone taille

Canonica. Alla

Ständchen der Cherubini

in 3 parts for voices & Horns

par L. Cherubini

D. 16740

Inhalt d. Gradual Cantate

tant en plainchant, sept le quat. les m. d. b. n. o. n. e. t. d. b. n. o. n. e.

Dieu in

Figure 6

Cherubini: Requiem in D Minor (second ms set of parts, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale), "Die irae," part for alto trombone

Allegro
Andante


Ophicléide

Seconde messe Deu. Marté.

à 3 Saxhodes

Pau-Deu. voix d'homme

Sad. S. Cherubini



D. 16740

Inkaid Gacel

Graduel Gacel

Après le trait on pleure chant on dit le morceau qui suit.

Dieu Irae

20

4

3

8

10

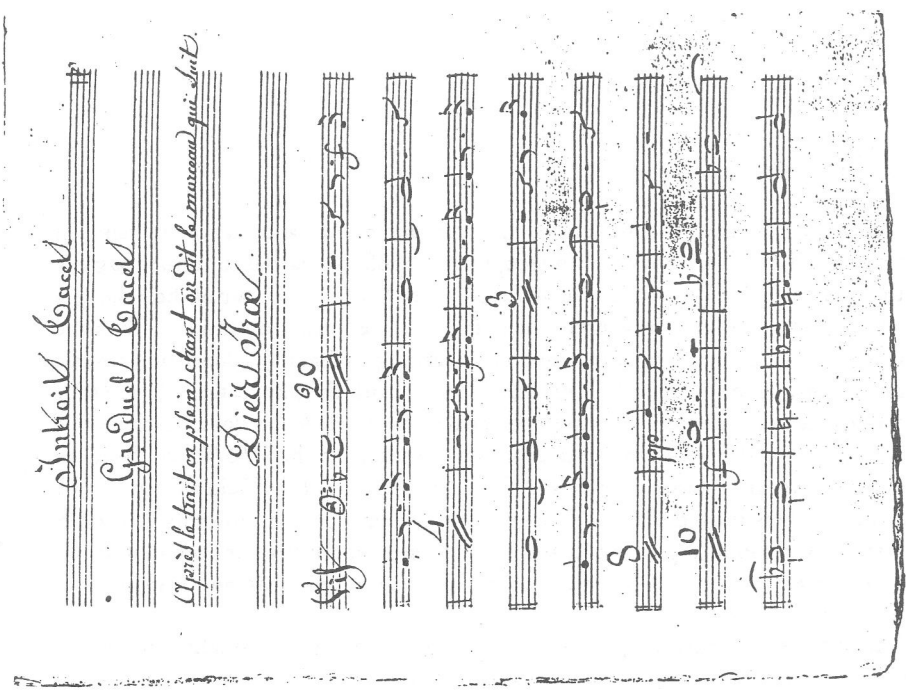


Figure 7 Cherubini: Requiem in D Minor (second ms set of parts), "Dies irae," part for ophicléide