

APPROACHES TO THE GERMAN RECEPTION OF VERDI'S *MESSA DA REQUIEM* THROUGH METADATA ANALYSIS AND HORIZONTAL READING

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UDK / UDC: 070(430):783.29Verdi, G
DOI: <http://doi.org/10.21857/y26kec37k9>
Izvorni znanstveni rad / Research Paper
Primljeno / Received: 1. 7. 2017.
Prihvaćeno / Accepted: 16. 11. 2017.

Abstract

This paper develops an aspect of my doctoral thesis which focuses on the German reception of Giuseppe Verdi's *Messa da Requiem*. It analyzes the critique and commentary in German newspapers and music journals from the period of the first performances in Austria, Germany and Switzerland (1874–78) and outlines two ways of working with a corpus of heterogeneous texts by mostly unknown authors: Metadata analysis helps to distinguish the different scopes of music journals and newspapers, and a »horizontal reading« approach based on viewing the context of individual semantic entities in parallel gives in-

sight into the spectrum of the reception in all sources together.

Keywords: music reception, music critique, Giuseppe Verdi, funeral mass, German 19th-century music, metadata analysis, horizontal reading, digital humanities, digital musicology, text encoding (TEI).

Ključne riječi: recepcija glazbe, glazbena kritika, Giuseppe Verdi, pogrebna misa, njemačka glazba 19. stoljeća, analiza metapodataka, horizontalno čitanje, digitalna humanistika, digitalna muzikologija, kodiranje teksta (TEI).

1. Introduction

My recently submitted dissertation dealt with the German reception of the *Messa da Requiem* by Giuseppe Verdi, a grand musical work composed in memory of the Italian writer Alessandro Manzoni. I concentrated on the period of the first performances which took place world-wide between 1874 and 1878. Verdi's composition follows the classical-romantic tradition of the »concert requiem« and

is linked to the Requiem settings by Cherubini, Mozart and Berlioz.¹ Due to the work's scenic character, which many critics considered inadequate to the religious text, it was often evaluated disparagingly. In many cases the conceit of German musical criticism came to light, expressing itself sometimes more, sometimes less drastically. To give a relatively neutral example, a critic from Cologne said that the work was »however, not a requiem in the German style«.²

This dichotomous demarcation of a 'German style' against an 'Italian style' is only partly to be understood as an influence of Wagnerism and *Kulturkampf* in the young German Empire.³ Romantic church music aesthetics in particular played a decisive role here by applying strict idealistic standards.⁴ For example, it was considered reprehensible for the music of a funeral mass to stir up or frighten the audience, as well as present a scenically determined, 'realistic' music. Emotionality did not seem to have been appropriate for the subject of a mass for the deceased, while critics expected the music to support a spiritual atmosphere leading to the consolatory idea of eternal rest.

Concerning Verdi's *Messa da Requiem*, the quality of the composition was generally appreciated, and German critics praised Verdi's alleged attempt to emancipate himself from the operatic style of his *Rigoletto* or *Trovatore*. At the same time, many critics wanted to identify compositional flaws in the fugues (*Sanctus* and *Libera me*) or deprecate various musical effects in the *Dies irae* sequence as »theatrical«. Even in Austria, where liberal voices dominated, conservative criticism was present. Frequently, stereotypes such as »Italian« and »German« were brought into play and were often linked to a so-called »southern« temperament and ebullient emotionality on the one hand, and a brave »Nordic« disposition and spiritual seriousness on the other.⁵

Because of these qualities, the function of the work itself was often questioned. Verdi had composed the *Messa da Requiem* as a dedication to his countryman Alessandro Manzoni, who was an important figure for Italy's linguistic identity and the Risorgimento, the Italian unification movement. After the work had been

¹ Cfr. Uwe SCHWEIKERT: *Messa da Requiem*, in: Anselm Gerhard and Uwe Schweikert (eds.): *Verdi-Handbuch*, Kassel: Bärenreiter; Stuttgart/Weimar: Metzler, 2013 (2nd revised and extended edition), 557–565.

² »Verdi hat allerdings kein Requiem nach deutscher Art geschaffen«, August GUCKEISEN: [Report on the performance of the first performance of Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* in Cologne], in: *Musikalisches Wochenblatt*, 10 March 1876 (vol. 7, no. 11), 137f.

³ Cfr. Gundula KREUZER: »Oper im Kirchengewande«? Verdi's Requiem and the Anxieties of the Young German Empire, in: *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 58 (Summer 2005) 2, 399–450.

⁴ Cfr. Winfried KIRSCH: Kirchenmusikreform, Cäcilianismus und Palestrina-Renaissance, in: Wolfgang Hochstein – Christoph Krummacher (eds.): *Geschichte der Kirchenmusik*, vol. 3, Laaber: Laaber, 2013, 56–71.

⁵ Cfr. Bernd SPONHEUER: Über das ‚Deutsche‘ in der Musik. Versuch einer idealtypischen Rekonstruktion, in: Hermann Danuser – Herfried Münkler (eds.): *Deutsche Meister – böse Geister? Nationale Selbstfindung in der Musik*, Schliengen: Edition Argus, 2001, 123–150.

initially performed in a liturgical setting to celebrate the anniversary of Manzoni’s death (22 May 1874), all subsequent performances took place in opera and concert halls (with extremely rare exceptions when excerpts were played in arrangements for organ and choir). Verdi and his publisher Ricordi benefited from the revenues, which led to the suspicion that Verdi wanted to make a good deal with the setting of the sacred text.

A certain ambivalence in the understanding of the work has persisted to the present day. Still, it seems to stand in a twilight zone between spiritual and secular concert music, which supports discussions about interpretation and appropriate performance practice. Reflecting on historical concepts and conceptions gives us the opportunity to question our current positions and their origins. This is the starting point of my investigation.

2. Material

In preparing the groundwork for my research I compiled a corpus of German-language texts on the *Messa da Requiem* from the years 1874–78. It was my intention to provide the largest possible basis for the investigation without making a pre-selection of certain authors or music critics. This is a unique feature in comparison to previous investigations. There were only two criteria for the selection of the texts: the German language and, secondly, a reference to the *Messa da Requiem* within the period under consideration. Altogether, the final corpus consists of 320 texts, which mainly come from German-speaking music magazines and daily newspapers.

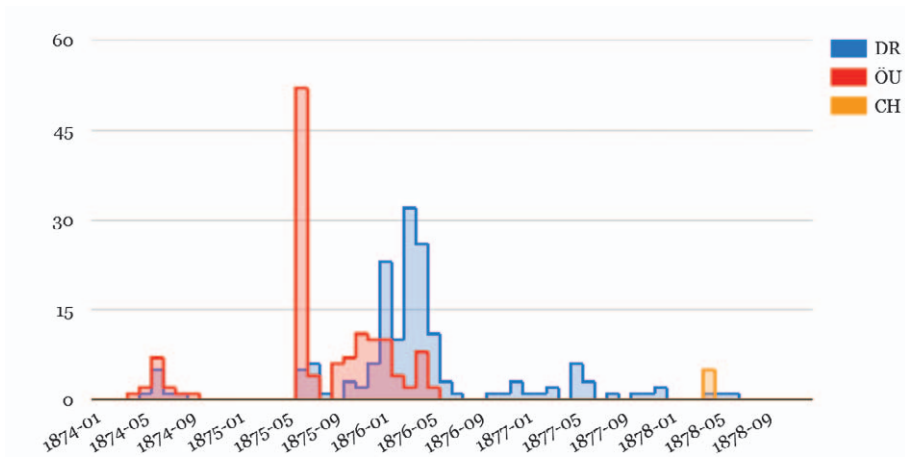


Figure 1: Number of publications by time and country (DR: German Empire, ÖU: Austria-Hungary, CH: Switzerland).

The overview (Figure 1) shows the chronological statistics, which distinguishes between three countries with relevant German-speaking communities (German Empire, Austria-Hungary and Switzerland). The chronological view shown here compares the number of publications by time and country (cf. Figure 1). The frequency of press commentary on the Requiem is typically strongest in the months of the first performances in a country or region, and is strongly amplified by the composer's presence in Vienna (May 1875), while his visit in Cologne (May 1877) did not produce a similar effect. In addition, it is clearly visible that the press coverage in the German Reich, where court operas and concert halls are widespread all over the (feudally structured) country, stretches over a longer period than in Austria, where Vienna clearly dominates as cultural centre. The diagram also reflects the fact that the first performance in the German Empire occurred about half a year after the Austrian premiere. In mid-1874, there is also a small reflection of the first performances in Milan and Paris, which took place one year before the first performances in a German-speaking country, and it seems that the interest was moderately higher in Austria. Concerning Switzerland, the low number of recorded articles raises the question of how many sources have not yet been discovered; however, the amount of hints is scarce indeed.

To gather all these sources, intensive archive research was unavoidable. However, this work has been facilitated in the last decade by the still advancing digitization of daily newspapers. Auxiliary functions such as full text research made it possible to find previously unknown performance dates and concert reviews. As a result, about 250 texts could be extracted from digitized collections (for the most part ANNO,⁶ SPO,⁷ Europeana,⁸ and Wikisource⁹). 70 texts, for which no digital version was publicly available, were discovered in the traditional way through newspaper archives (supported by catalogue data in ZEFYS¹⁰). The latter is more complex, since you often have to follow vague hints or even a suspicion, until you (luckily) have rediscovered a longer review. To give an example: A lapidary entry in the concert calendar of a music magazine can lead to a review of this concert in a local day newspaper. If you work manually, the systematic inspection of whole newspaper volumes can only be executed in weekly magazines at best. To put it in a nutshell, rewarding archival research requires either luck or effort. Machine readable news-

⁶ AustriaN Newspapers Online <<http://anno.onb.ac.at/>>, last access: 01. 07. 2017.

⁷ Schweizer Presse Online <<http://newspaper.archives.rero.ch>>, last access: 01. 07. 2017.

⁸ Europeana Newspapers <<http://www.theeuropeanlibrary.org/tel4/newspapers>>, last access: 01. 07. 2017.

⁹ Wikisource lists a number of freely available sources, cfr. <[https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Zeitschriften_\(Musik\)](https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Zeitschriften_(Musik))>, <[https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Zeitschriften_\(Theater\)](https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Zeitschriften_(Theater))>, and <<https://de.wikisource.org/wiki/Zeitung>> last access: 01. 07. 2017.

¹⁰ ZEFYS, digitized newspapers by the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin <<http://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/list/>>, last access: 01. 07. 2017.

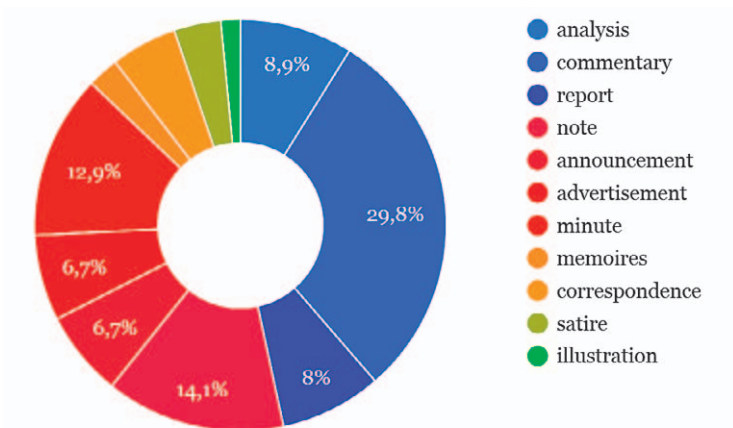


Figure 2: Text categories and their proportional share of the corpus (by count)

paper, however, has the power to ameliorate these circumstances and provides a lot of material that has not yet been taken into consideration.

Due to the open selection criteria (language and mention of the *Messa da Requiem*), the corpus contains texts of very different genre and quality (Figure 2). The texts cover the spectrum from lapidary concert advertisements to detailed work reviews with numerous notes. The texts fulfil different purposes depending on their classification: shorter texts mainly contain notes on events and serve to reconstruct the performance history or lead to further sources of interest, while longer, more detailed texts contain much more material for the actual investigation of the reception history. It is important to consider that texts in the blue categories (about 150 in total) make up for 80% of the texts included.

3. Analysis

In this paper, I want to give two examples of how this digitized material can be used to support musicological research, and how this revises typical approaches. My first example uses metadata to analyse the corpus structure and general phenomena. The second one deals with the texts themselves, using an approach which I metaphorically call »horizontal reading«. I will explain all the technical and methodical terms in each section in detail.

3a. Metadata Analysis

Metadata, in this case, is relevant information about sources, which is not contained in the text of the source itself. Usually it consists of a bibliographic or

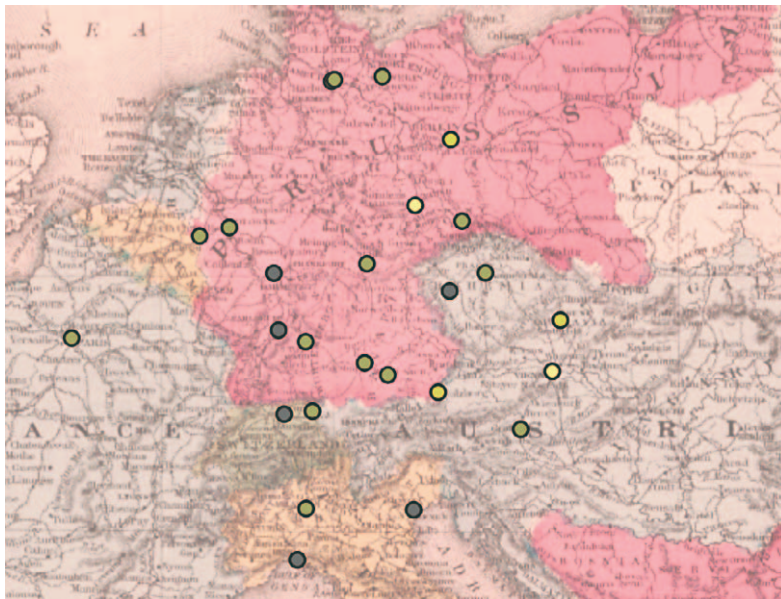


Figure 3: Publication places and their relative number (dark = 1, bright = 90). Note that a few publication places in France and Italy appear in this image, because the data collection contains also articles that were quoted in German articles or completely translated for German newspapers.

archival description, but it can go further and contain general information about the content, such as text classification or the place a report refers to. This information can be used to learn about the corpus, which is especially useful and important when the corpus contains heterogeneous texts. (The data was collected from TEI¹¹ metadata, indexed in an XML database and visualized with Google Chart API¹² and OpenLayers¹³ retrospectively.)

In the first example for metadata analysis, the diagram correlates the places of publication and the number of published articles by displaying them on a historical map (cf. Figure 2). It becomes clear that Austria, again, is focused on Vienna, with 90 publications there, while in Germany the most productive place was Leipzig, with 96 publications (both highlighted with the brightest dots). This is due to the fact that at least four important music journals were based in Leipzig, which were publishing reports from important performances not only on the local or regional level, but mostly from the German speaking countries and also from

¹¹ Text Encoding Initiative: P5: Guidelines for Electronic Text Encoding and Interchange, Version 3.1.0 (15. 12. 2016).

¹² Google Chart API, <<https://developers.google.com/chart/>>, last access: 01. 07. 2017.

¹³ OpenLayers, <<http://openlayers.org/>>, last access: 01. 07. 2017.

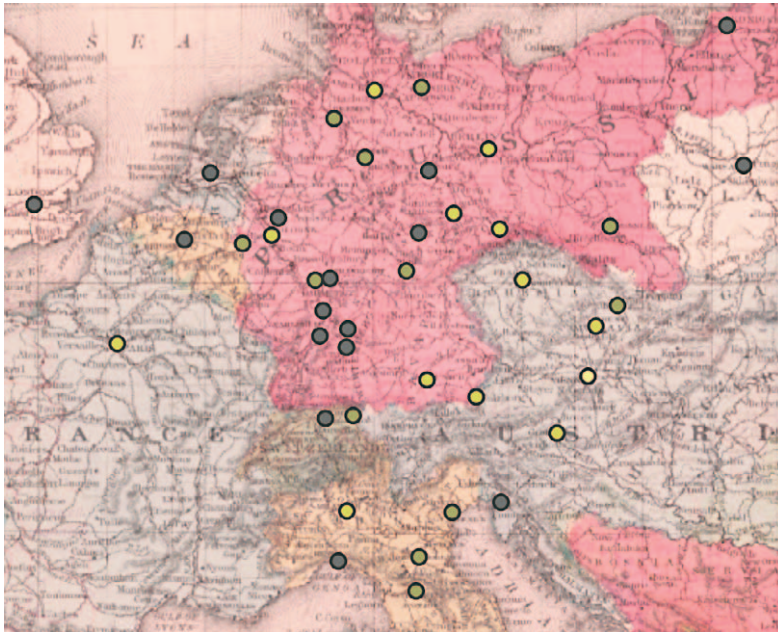


Figure 4: Correspondence places and their relative number (dark = 1, bright = 90)

selected foreign countries, mainly France and England. This points to the very different situations of the Austrian and German press.

Instead, comparing the places of performances mentioned in all articles (cf. Figure 4), the coverage is much broader, representing the most important venues (Berlin, Dresden, Hamburg, Cologne, Leipzig, Munich, Prague, Salzburg, Vienna) with a relatively high number of reports. The Vienna peak emerges again, while the large number of reports published in Leipzig were obviously not self-referring, but reported from other venues for the most part. Leipzig played an important role in the musical press coverage of the German speaking area, as for a relevant number of venues, the only available article in the corpus was published there. (Another visible phenomenon is the low number of articles for the eastern German provinces – this is, on one hand, due to the availability of sources, but also to a less intense cultural activity; otherwise the coverage through Leipzig ought to have been greater.)

The difference in press coverage become more obvious when the places of correspondence are analysed for one single publication place. Comparing Berlin, Leipzig and Vienna retrospectively, it appears that Vienna focused mostly on local events and only marginally on events outside of Austria, concentrating only on Italy and France, and ignoring the German Empire completely. Berlin, instead, published articles on events in the Empire and from European capitals as well, but

with only a few reports on Austria. Berlin and Vienna seem to have divided the German-speaking regions according to their jurisdiction. Leipzig instead, where most of the German music journals were published, demonstrated a broad geographic scope that covered not only all German-speaking regions, but also many places in other European countries, including locations apart from their capitals. This points to a very general tendency of newspapers to concentrate on local or national issues, while specialized press maintains an international perspective.

3b. Horizontal reading

It is considered one of the basic principles of reception historiography that it is necessary to go beyond listing only facts, but rather to investigate the backgrounds and conditions of the processes of reception. Using newspapers as sources, however, we mostly do not know the authors of the texts. In the case at hand, it was typical to publish anonymously or to hide one's identity with pseudonyms or acronyms. Only in every third text was the author's name given or could be discovered through secondary research, and in many cases there is no further information on that person available (rare exceptions are persons such as Eduard Hanslick, Heinrich Adolf Köstlin and Emil Naumann, famous music historians of their time). This means that it is impossible to reveal the conditions of reception on the level of the individual author. The idea leading to my alternative method here is that the carrying-out of comprehensive research on a large corpus of text allows for the positioning of an author, even anonymous, within a broader spectrum of opinions and ideas.

The text analysis uses a method that keeps a certain distance from the investigation into individual texts and instead focuses on points of reference common to all texts. Such a reference may be a particular part of a composition, for example the *Sanctus*, or a certain place where a performance took place, or a typical concept like »realism«. After selecting one point of reference, the surrounding context of all references in all texts from the corpus is extracted and grouped together to form a parallel view. I call this method »horizontal reading«, in reference to the term »distant reading« introduced by Franco Moretti¹⁴ (that term, however, points to stilometry, which is why I do not adopt the term). Horizontal reading here means to read all contexts of one single semantic entity in a larger corpus in parallel. This semantic line of sight through the whole corpus opens up the possibility of comparing different receptions directly to each other.

As practically every person, every place, every performance and every composition mentioned in the texts could, for some investigative reason, become one

¹⁴ Cfr. Franco MORETTI: *Distant Reading*, Konstanz: Konstanz University Press, 2016.

reference point for a horizontal reading, this approach requires some technical aids to function efficiently. First, all texts should be transcribed in full text for quickly finding recurring terms. In the present case, all texts were encoded (based on digital copies or photocopies of the original) according to the guidelines of the TEI (Text Encoding Initiative). Altogether, the 320 texts comprise about 950,000 characters of text. However, not only the text itself, but also the semantic reference points need to be identifiable (that is, independently from their orthography in the individual texts) for my horizontal reading approach. These were marked in the texts and provided with a unique identifier (using the corresponding TEI elements such as *persName*, *placeName*, and so on). In the present corpus, a total of 8,000 reference points were identified in the texts, which refer to 530 unique persons, 142 performances, 96 localities and 135 works in total. By deep semantic tagging, the mass of text becomes a corpus of »smart data«.¹⁵

To demonstrate my approach, I give two horizontal readings of the *Mors stupebit* from the *Dies irae* sequence and the introductory piece *Requiem aeternam* (the German texts are quoted after the original). Both pieces reflect different ideas of death – one was perceived more figurative and the other one more idealistic, and, as the quotes demonstrate, they were appreciated very differently.

The *Mors stupebit*, which depicts the amazement of death in front of the Last Judgement by a short rhythmic figure followed by the beat of the bass drum and a grand pause, was deprecated through association with categories like »realism« and »tone painting« and strongly criticized in almost all reports. Some critics tried to interpret this as a typical reflection of Italian temperament, while others tried to caricature the musical effect with horrifying descriptions (please forgive that I do not give translations here).

»wenn er [...] den leibhaftigen Tod vor lauter Schrecken fast sprachlos dastehen läßt, so steht eine derartig übertriebene Tonmalerei jedenfalls nicht im richtigen Verhältnisse zu Charakter der Messe, selbst wenn diese nicht unmittelbar den kirchlichen Zwecken dienen soll« (J. G. Wörz, Vienna)

»Das Stutzen und Staunen des Todes scheint mir hier denn doch nur zu derb realistisch ausgedrückt« (F. Stetter, Munich)

»mit [...] den humoristisch wirkenden Schlägen der großen Trommel« (*Norddeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, Berlin)

»Den Eindruck einer Tongrimmasse macht das wiederholte Bum! der großen Trommel bei dem aus dem Zusammenhange gerissenen Worte: 'Mors' (stupebit).« (*Kreuzzeitung*, Berlin)

¹⁵ Cfr. Christof SCHÖCH: Big? Smart? Clean? Messy? Data in the Humanities, *Journal of Digital Humanities*, 2 (Summer 2013) 3, 2–13.

»beim ‘mors’ stockte das Athmen des Tonkörpers, wie es handgreiflicher gar nicht zu machen war« (A. Dörffel, Leipzig)

»Bei uns im Norden wird man bei diesem drastischen Realismus sicherlich keinen eine Gänsehaut hervorrufenden kalten Schauer empfinden, sondern vielmehr ausrufen: ‘Bange machen gilt nicht!’« (E. Naumann, Dresden)

»gar zu äußerlich und auf leicht entzündbare italienische Gemüther berechnet« (*National-Zeitung*, Berlin)

»Manche seiner Effecte [...] erfordern geradezu scenischen Apparat [...] so trocken und nüchtern im Concertsaale mit brillanter Beleuchtung ausgehört, streift die Stelle [...] hart an der Grenze des Lächerlichen, weil nicht in Harmonie mit der Umgebung.« (A. Guckeisen, Cologne)

»Frappant wirken bei Verdi die nachschlagenden Pulse — ein Klangeffect, den er (der Erste) in glücklicher Weise aus Beethovens neunter Symphonie herübergenommen.« (A. W. Ambros, Vienna)

The comments on the *Requiem aeternam*, instead, give a totally different impression. The introductory piece thrilled the critics as well as the audience. The reports from Vienna described an intense, serious mood, and one critic from Munich tried to give associative descriptions. Only the reports from Berlin and Dresden were much more sceptical, however: Although the piece was generally admired, the distribution of the text was boldly criticized (again, I give the quotes only in German).

»ganz wunderschön, mit tief wehmüthiger Feierlichkeit« (*Neues Fremden-Blatt*, Vienna)

»entfaltet eine kirchliche Färbung« (E. Schelle, Vienna)

»ungemein schön in dem Ausdrücke ruhiger, gefaßter Trauer« (E. Hanslick, Vienna)

»versetzte die Zuhörer mit packender Gewalt sogleich in die erforderliche ernste Stimmung« (*Signale*)

»Wie ergreifend flüstern die Sänger das ‘requiem aeternam’« (J. G. Wörz, Vienna)

»einfache, fast lautlose Klage dahingeshiedener Seelen« (*Musikalisches Wochenblatt*)

»beginnt in elegisch weicher Stimmung von grossem poetischen und klanglichen Reize: der Schmerz um einen theueren Verstorbenen ist zwar wach in uns; der Glaube aber, dass der Dahingeshiedene sich himmlischer Verklärung erfreut, nimmt unserm Schmerze jede Herbheit« (F. Stetter, Munich)

»eine solch hohe Innigkeit, eine so vertrauensvolle Andacht [...] daß man schon an die besten deutschen Schöpfungen denken muß, um Gleichwerthiges nebeneinander zu stellen.« (A. Guckeisen, Cologne)

»von tief ergreifender Wirkung« (*Coburger Zeitung*)

»drückt das Gefühl der Trauer in treffender Weise aus« (*Brünner Zeitung*)

»Hoffnung athmende[n] Worte« (*Kölnische Zeitung*)

»wie ein milder Sonnenstrahl« (E. Hanslick, Vienna)

»wie ein milder Lichtschein« (*Kölnische Volkszeitung*)

»eine durchaus widersinnige Textzerreiung [...] Man wrde jeden deutschen Requiem-Komponisten bittere Vorwrfe machen, wenn er sich je so etwas zu Schulden kommen liee« (E. Breslaur, Berlin)

In the end, it becomes very clear which idea of death was preferred in German music aesthetics. While critics were emotionally appalled by the *Mors stupebit*, the *Requiem aeternam* seems to have met the right, consolatory tone. Coming to ideas about death and eternity, the German aesthetic ideals rejected concepts such as »realism« and preferred a puristic, spiritualizing effect in music, which was promoted by the restoration movement in church music. It is remarkable that this conception was only visible in the arena of concert criticism, since the *Messa da Requiem* was completely ignored by church music journals (e.g. *Musica Sacra* or *Siona*).

Horizontal reading not only reveals general differences between the German Empire and Austria, but also the regional and local differences. The reports from Berlin were strikingly sensitive to the relationship between phrase and melody, while the critics in Vienna and also in Cologne were more open to the effect of the work. Through a comprehensive comparison it is possible to identify and locate general tendencies the work's reception, even if the individual background of the authors is not known in each individual case.

4. Conclusions

Metadata analysis and horizontal reading are two ways to approach a historical text corpus that consists of heterogeneous texts by mostly unknown authors. It does not only give a general impression about the terms and ideas involved, but it strongly supports the creation of a historical narration. Based on the large corpus, it would be possible to conduct a single study on each part of the *Messa da Requiem*. It would also be possible to explore ideas and concepts in music criticism, or to

look at the situation in certain venues, such as at the city theatre in Hamburg, where the work was performed seven times with a stage set (a unique exception in Germany), or in Salzburg, where several musical associations joined together to perform the *Messa da Requiem* for charity, or in Leipzig, where the second performance took place in a nearly empty concert hall. Partially, these ideas were pursued in my dissertation, but there are many more facets of the reception history to be investigated.

Finally, I hope that in the near future projects will use digitally prepared texts for research, which could allow room for broader studies, for example, comparing the reception of funeral mass settings to each other, or to compare the material to other language areas or periods. To give other projects the possibility to utilize the data of my study, all files will be made freely available through an online publication (the location is still to be determined).

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Summary

PRISTUPI NJEMAČKOJ RECEPCIJI VERDIJEVE *MESSA DA REQUIEM* KROZ ANALIZU METAPODATAKA I HORIZONTALNO ČITANJE

Ovaj članak predstavlja dio doktorskog rada koji se fokusira na njemačku recepciju djela *Messa da Requiem* Giuseppea Verdija. Korpus teksta sadrži 320 tekstova iz njemačkih novina i glazbenih časopisa u razdoblju prvih nastupa u Austriji, Njemačkoj i Švicarskoj (1874-1878). S obzirom na to da su autori uglavnom nepoznati, a korpus se sastoji od heterogenih tekstova, u radu se predlažu dva načina olakšavanja historiografskoga rada. Prva je ideja analizirati metapodatke kako bi se upoznali sa strukturama korpusa, što je ilustrirano pregledom relevantnih publikacija i njihovih različitih geografskih područja. Druga ideja temelji se na semantičkim subjektima u tekstovima, kao što su osobe, mjesta, skladbe i izvedbe, a naziva se »horizontalno čitanje«, svrha kojeg je okupiti sve kontekste jedne zajedničke referentne točke u svim tekstovima (npr. početak skladbe) i usporediti ih jedne s drugima kako bi se upoznali s mogućim aspektima recepcije, kao i s općim tendencijama ili individualnim interpretacijama. To je prikazano kroz dva dijela, *Mors stupebit iz Dies irae*, te *Requiem aeternam* s početka *Messa da Requiem*. Ovi dijelovi bili su sagledani vrlo različito: dok je kritičare zaprepastio *Mors stupebit*, *Requiem aeternam* je, čini se, savršeno pogodno utješnu notu za kojom je njemačka glazbena estetika žudila. Oba pristupa podržavaju izradu povijesne naracije i dovoljno su fleksibilna da ih se prilagodi bilo kojoj definiranoj točki podataka.