

## STANFORDIAN THOUGHTS

A periodical series of reflections on recorded and unrecorded works by Stanford  
by Christopher Howell

### 26. The Requiem in Chicago

Stanford's Requiem has been in the news recently after the issue of a second recording under Martyn Brabbins. This marked, by general consent, an improvement on the already very satisfactory version conducted by Adrian Leaper<sup>1</sup>. The Requiem was completed on 1 September 1896 and first performed at the Birmingham Festival on 6 October 1897. Both Hudson<sup>2</sup> and Smith<sup>3</sup> note that it achieved a well-received performance in Düsseldorf in 1905. Smith also describes the first London performance, by Royal Academy students under Mackenzie in December 1897, and what he believes to have been the third performance, by the Bach Choir under Stanford himself in March 1898. But Chicago? It was with considerable amazement that I stumbled upon the following:

#### APOLLO CLUB

*PRODUCTION OF VILLIERS STANFORD'S REQUIEM FEBRUARY 21 – FIRST TIME IN AMERICA*  
*Critics, singers, musicians and artists from all parts of the country will assemble in the Auditorium in Chicago, when the enterprising Apollo Club, with its time-honoured leader W. L. Tomlins, gives the first American representation of the remarkable Requiem composed last year by Dr. Villiers Stanford. The event is not only one of extraordinary interest in the annals of music in Chicago, but appeals in the very strongest way to the musical public in America. ... This has been somewhat heightened by the report that Dr. Stanford would be present on the occasion and might possibly conduct.*

Musical Courier 9 February 1898

On further investigation, I found that the Chicago Tribune had already announced the event:

*Dr. Charles Villiers Stanford is coming to Chicago to attend the first performance of his "Requiem" in this country. The work will be sung by the Apollo club on Feb. 21, an occasion which will be one of the most memorable in its history.*

*Dr. Stanford' "Requiem" was sung for the first time at the Birmingham, England, Musical Festival last October. The impression it created was profound, and the work has been accepted as the most notable choral one by a contemporary composer in Great Britain.*

*The forthcoming performance, which will be attended by Dr. Stanford, will also be attended by delegations from Boston, New York, and other cities. ... Whether Dr. Stanford or Mr. Tomlins will conduct is not yet known.*

Chicago Tribune, 22 January 1898

Stanford's planned visit to America in 1914, and the reasons for its cancellation, has been amply discussed in Stanford literature, but I had never heard that a trip to Chicago in 1898 was on the cards. Certainly, it never came about and, with just eleven days to go, the Chicago tribune reported that

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<sup>1</sup> Reviewed for MWI by [Nick Barnard](#) and [John Quinn](#). Both reviews make comparisons with the earlier recording.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Hudson, *A New Catalogue of the Works of Charles Villiers Stanford 1852-1924, compiled from the original sources*. Typescript, 1994, A17. The link to a PDF copy which I have given in previous articles seems no longer to work.

<sup>3</sup> Peter John Smith (2008), *The Choral Music of Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924) and the Press c.1875-1925*. Masters Thesis, Durham University. Available at Durham E-Theses Online: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/2542/>, pp. 172-87.

*Dr. Villiers Stanford has telegraphed Mr. Tomlins of the Apollo club that it will be impossible for him to come to Chicago for the first production in America of his "Requiem". The work, now actively in rehearsal by the Apollo club, will be sung on Feb. 21. M. Plancon has postponed his return to France by special arrangement in order to sing the bass solo music on that occasion.*  
Chicago Tribune, 10 February 1898

Presumably Stanford explained his reasons to Tomlins, if not by telegraph then with a subsequent letter. I have searched the biographies by Dibble and Rodmell for some event on a personal level, such as the death of a loved relative, that might have prevented him from leaving. I have found nothing, but since Stanford jealously guarded his private life, this does not mean there was nothing. He was certainly busy in this period, apart from his RCM teaching duties. On 30 December 1897, he was in Amsterdam to conduct the Dutch première of his Fifth Symphony with the Concertgebouw Orchestra. On 9 January he was in Brussels, conducting the Ysaye orchestra in a British programme including works by Mackenzie, Parry and his own Third Symphony. On 12 February, his cycle of vocal quartets, "The Princess", had its first performance at the Northern Polytechnic Institute. Stanford was not directly involved – the pianist was Fuller-Maitland – but doubtless would have liked to attend (the Musical Times review does not say whether he did or not). On 3 March, he conducted the pianist George Liebling in Liszt's E flat concerto and a concerto by Liebling himself. As noted, he conducted the Requiem with the Bach Choir on 8 March. On a date in March not clear from the Musical Times review, he conducted the RCM orchestra in the British première of Martucci's Symphony in D minor, as well as Dvořák's "In Nature's Realm" and the Brahms Double Concerto<sup>4</sup>.

Could he have fitted in a trip to Chicago?

So far as I can discover, around 1898 the steamer from Liverpool to New York took between seven and ten days, depending upon the ship and the weather, likely to be rough in February. The railroad trip from New York to Chicago was down to twenty hours by then, and there was also the four-hour railway journey from London to Liverpool. So 10 February, the date of Stanford's telegraph, would have been the latest date on which he could leave London and reasonably expect to arrive in Chicago to conduct, or at least hear, his Requiem on the 21<sup>st</sup>. If he went back straight afterwards, the not-very-important engagement with Liebling would have been off but, provided he had not suffered the Atlantic storms unduly, he should have been able to conduct the Requiem on 8 March. It sounds an awfully gruelling programme for a single engagement, however. A clutch of appearances across and around the States would have been more of an incentive.

I wondered if Tomlins, having failed to obtain Stanford's presence, postponed the performance for a putative future visit by the composer, but the première went ahead and was fully reported in the Chicago Tribune:

*The first performance in America of Dr. Charles Villiers Stanford's "Requiem" was given by the Apollo club under Mr. Tomlins' direction at the Auditorium last night. The effect produced upon the audience was a profound one. ...*

*Last night the soloists engaged were Miss Mina Schilling, Miss Mary Louise Carrie, Mr. George Hamlin, and M. Pol Plancon. The orchestra, as usual upon such occasions, was the Chicago organization, specially augmented; the organist, Mr. Wilhelm Middleschulte.*

*As to the "Requiem" itself, it is difficult to speak of a work of such noble proportions within necessarily limited space. It is undoubtedly to be placed with the greatest of its class. In this setting*

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<sup>4</sup> All these concerts are reported in issues of the Musical Times from January to April 1898.

*of the office for the dead by Dr. Stanford there is a faith greater and more dignified than has found expression in the treatment of the theme for many years. ...*

*It is seldom given to a modern composer to grasp a sacred theme in such spirit of understanding.*

...

*As to the performance of the Requiem much of praise is due to the Apollo club. ...*

*As a final word there must be advanced a hope, surely shared by many in attendance, that the Stanford "Requiem" may shortly be repeated.*

Chicago Tribune, 22 February 1898

It does not appear to have been repeated, or performed elsewhere. The promised delegations from Boston, New York and other cities were either unimpressed or did not turn up. The Chicago Apollo Club was one of the most distinguished choruses in Chicago. Initially a small, private group founded in 1872, with the appointment in 1875 of London-born William Tomlin (1844-1930) it rapidly grew in numbers and prestige. However, in 1898, the decision was made to replace Tomlin with Harrison M. Wild. Maybe the new director had less enthusiasm for Stanford's work. It would seem he was not alone:

*If enthusiastic, demonstrative applause signifies success then the mass must be accounted a failure, for it was received with little outward sign of approval. ... Consequently it may be said that the result hardly justified the immense amount of labor which the chorus and conductor had bestowed. The most notable feature of the mass is the orchestration, which has always been Dr. Stanford's chief characteristic, and this he displays throughout the entire work. Fortunate it is that this is so, for beyond the opening chorale there is nothing strikingly original or inspiring. The effect on the audience seemed to be one of boredom, the general impression being that the Apollo, while deserving all credit for the performance of the new requiem, might have devoted the time to a work of more favorable parts.*

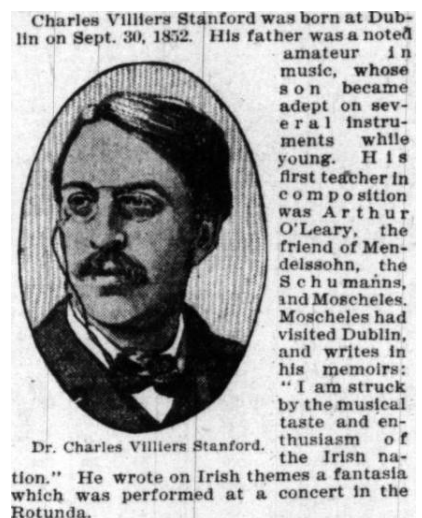
*... Every indication was given of careful rehearsal and the most abundant attention to the minutest details; so that the lack of interest must be ascribed to the composer and not to the interpreters ...*

*... A second hearing of Stanford's requiem mass might to an extent modify present impressions, but it could never be regarded as a valuable work for public presentation. There is a too intense monotony, a striving to unfold an idea which resolves into nothingness, and the consequence absolutely disappointing.*

Musical Courier, 2 March 1898

It is difficult to believe the two writers were speaking of the same work.

From the Chicago Tribune, at least, Stanford could count on strong support. Just over a year later, an anonymous article stretching to two columns, and including the illustration opposite, sang his praises. Though the coincidence is not mentioned, it was published on St. Patrick's Day. The first part gave a résumé of his career, in which the writer appeared well informed without telling us anything we did not already know except, perhaps, that "His beautiful home at Kensington is the favorite resort of the musical society of the British metropolis". There are various references to the Stanfords' "at homes", a social practice widespread among Victorian society, but I have not seen it suggested before that the Stanford home was the hub implied here. Perhaps more information will emerge. Particular mention is made of the recently-performed Requiem, which



*... left a deep impression. Its construction is characterized by originality, suavity and reverence. Free from blare and empiricism, scholarly, sincere and elevated, the orchestration charmed by its authenticity, the vocal readings by their nobility. It was a prayer for hope, a fervent plea for mercy, and unlike too many requiem masses, did not distract the listener from its avowed purpose into the domain of mere musical adventure. The "Dies Irae", unlike the most familiar Italian setting of the ancient hymn<sup>5</sup>, is majestic, somber and awesome. The Sanctus, in A major, through C sharp major and A minor, is certain to become familiar in church choirs. It would be difficult to conceive scoring more ideally apt than that and its tranquil and devout sequences, the Benedictus. The final Hosanna is not likely to be forgotten by those that heard it. It dies away from a fortissimo to a pianissimo, the lower voices gradually disappearing, while the upper parts and the violins rise to the keynote octave, which is drawn into the exquisite andante of the Benedictus.*

Chicago Tribune, 17 March 1900.

The writer then turns to the "Irish" Symphony, followed by a considerable dissertation on Irish traditional music and Stanford's revival of it. In conclusion:

*Inducements to come to America have not yet attracted Dr. Stanford, but he is expected next year.*

This, as we know, was not to be. Stanford's unfulfilled relationship with Chicago had begun with the Chicago Ode that did not make it to the 1893 World's Fair<sup>6</sup>. There was a production of "Shamus O'Brien" to which I hope to return in a future article. I have discussed his marginal involvement with the Irish Choral Society of Chicago<sup>7</sup>, whose performances of "The Voyage of Maeldune" should have been some inducement, though I also considered the reasons for which his relations with the Society might have been cautious. All in all, Chicago seems to have offered Stanford the best chance of an American base. Unless there emerges correspondence, for example with Tomlin or with representatives of the Irish Choral Society, we shall probably never know why he stayed away.

**Christopher Howell © 2024**

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<sup>5</sup> Presumably the reference is to Verdi.

<sup>6</sup> <https://musicwebinternational.com/2024/07/stanfordian-thoughts-25-east-to-west-in-chicago-and-cincinnati/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://musicwebinternational.com/2024/06/stanfordian-thoughts-24-stanford-and-the-irish-choral-society-of-chicago/>