

Recalling the 1964 Requiem Mass for JFK

On Jan. 19, 1964, just two months after we lost our beloved President John F. Kennedy to assassins, a Requiem Mass was held at the Holy Cross Cathedral in Boston for the Kennedy family and guests. Maestro Erich Leinsdorf chose the Mozart Requiem in D minor, and invited Sara



Mae Endich, soprano; Eunice Alberts, contralto; Nicholas Di Virgilio, tenor; and Mac Morgon, baritone, to sing the solos. The 180-voice choir accompanying the Boston Symphony Orchestra included the New England Conservatory, the combined Harvard Glee Club-Radcliffe Choral Society, and the Chorus Pro Musica.

Nicholas Di Virgilio, the tenor soloist at that momentous event, regretting that he is unable to attend in person, sent this reminiscence to the Schiller Institute, on the occasion of its tribute to JFK, to be held exactly 50 years later, at the same Holy Cross Cathedral, featuring Mozart's Requiem in D minor.

The day of the memorial mass at Holy Cross Cathedral was somber, to say the least, and Maestro Leinsdorf's comment before the quick tempo run-through was that he chose Mozart's Requiem because both men were "young" at death, and for that reason, appropriate for the occasion. Cardinal Cushing was the officiate, aided by the Brother Monks singing Gregorian Chants; after each appropriate chant, the Boston Symphony, a large choral group, and we soloists, Sara Mae Endich, Eunice Alberts, Mac Morgon, and I, sang Mozart's corresponding part of the Mass.

The most telling moment for me was during the soloists' "Benedictus" section, which came during the communion distribution at the altar rail. The Kennedy family and close relatives, as well as close friends,

came to the altar to receive communion. Jacqueline Kennedy came to the altar and knelt no more than nine feet in front of me. To me, the "Benedictus" is the most beautiful and most moving part of Mozart's Mass, and a joy to sing under ordinary circumstances.

Seeing her kneeling in prayer, and seeing mascara streaming down her cheeks during the "Benedictus," struck me with such a strong emotional bolt that I had no recollection of having sung.

The Cathedral was filled to capacity by an invited congregation; the only member absent was Robert Kennedy, who was in the Far East.

Congratulations to all of you in remembering this occasion in this very appropriate way.

My best wishes to you and all pertaining to this project.

*Nicholas Di Virgilio
January 5, 2014*