



Centre panel from Memling's triptych Last Judgment (c. 1467–71)

Dies Irae, or “Day of Wrath,” is a latin hymn, dating back at least to 1200-1265. Some attribute it to St. Gregory the Great (d. 604).

A small segment of the English translation:

*“Day of wrath and doom impending.
David's word with Sibyl's blending,
Heaven and earth in ashes ending.”*

The gloomy, spooky, Gregorian Chant melody has endured so well, that it is frequently quoted in great classical works.

My favorite example is **Ysaye's “Obsession” for solo violin**. In that work, Ysaye juxtaposes Bach's famous E Major Partita with the Dies Irae theme.

Eugene Ysaye was a true pioneer in violin playing, pushing the expressive limitations of violin technique. Ysaye (1858-1931) is still regarded by some as the “King of the Violin.” Very advanced violinists will study Ysaye's Sonatas for Solo Violin, some of the most challenging works in the repertoire. The Franck Sonata was also dedicated to Eugene Ysaye.

Here's a short list of some other works that quote “Dies Irae:”

Hector Berlioz – Symphonie fantastique
George Crumb – Black Angels
Charles Gounod – Faust opera, act 4
Joseph Haydn – Symphony No. 103, "The Drumroll"
Gustav Holst – The Planets, movement 5, "Saturn, the Bringer of Old Age"
Franz Liszt – Totentanz
Gustav Mahler – Symphony No. 2, movements 1 and 5
Sergei Rachmaninoff – Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op. 43
Camille Saint-Saëns – Danse Macabre, Symphony No. 3 (Organ Symphony)
Stephen Sondheim – Sweeney Todd – quoted in the accompaniment to "Epiphany"[19]
John Williams - The Empire Strikes Back (1980)