

Great Sacred Music

Sunday, November 14, 2021

Gustav Holst, arr. Robert Prizeman: I vow to thee, my country
Libera, Robert Prizeman

Johannes Brahms: How lovely is thy dwelling place from A German Requiem
Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Robert Shaw

William Byrd: Miserere mei
Cambridge Singers, John Rutter

This familiar Remembrance Day hymn has words by Cecil Spring-Rice set to a tune from Holst's "Jupiter." Brahms wrote "A German Requiem" using a text which he himself assembled from the Lutheran Bible. English Tudor musician William Byrd (1540-1623) was a prolific composer of his time.

Traditional, arr. Gerre Hancock: Deep River
Saint Thomas Choir of Men and Boys, Jeremy Filsell

H. Walford Davies: Psalm 121 and Requiem aeternam
Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, Timothy Brown

Louis Vierne: Epitaph
Simon Lindley, organ

Dr. Gerre Hancock (1934-2012) was Organist and Master of the Choristers at St. Thomas' Church, New York from 1971-2004. Walford Davies was Organist at London's Temple Church where his assistant was none other than Leopold Stokowski. Simon Lindley was a classmate of mine at the Royal College of Music. He has been organist of Leeds Parish Church since 1975.

Commentary: Sir Stephen Cleobury

Maurice Duruflé: Domine Jesu from Requiem, Op. 9
King's College Choir; Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Sir Stephen Cleobury

John Ireland: Greater love hath no man
Guildford Cathedral Choir, Andrew Millington
Peter Wright, organ; Thomas Stockwell, treble; Nigel Edwards, baritone

French composer Maurice Duruflé scored his Requiem Opus 9 in three versions. The version which King's College Choir sings here is scored for small orchestra consisting of 3 trumpets, timpani, harp, organ, and strings. English composer John Ireland (1879-1962) used texts from the Song of Solomon, the Gospel of John and various letters of Peter and Paul for his anthem "Greater love hath no man" written in 1912.

Ralph Vaughan Williams: Prayer to the Father of Heaven
Elora Festival Singers, Noel Edison

Henry Walford Davies: Solemn Melody
William J. Weisser, organ
Aeolian-Skinner organ in St. Philip's Cathedral, Atlanta, Georgia

Ralph Vaughan Williams' Prayer to the Father of Heaven dates from 1948. Sir Henry Walford Davies' Solemn Melody is perhaps his most famous composition. It was written in 1908 for organ and strings and is heard here in an arrangement for solo organ alone by J. E. West.

J.S. Bach: Cantata 60, "O Ewigkeit, du donnerwort"
Holland Boys' Choir; Netherlands Bach Collegium, Pieter Jan Leusink
Sytse Buwalde, alto; Marcel Beekman, tenor; Bas Ramselaar, bass

This magnificent but relatively unknown cantata is essentially a duet between Fear (alto) and Hope (tenor). It was first performed in Leipzig on November 7, 1723. The German translates as "O Eternity, Thou Word of Thunder."

Esteban Salas y Castro: Requiem Mass
Exaudi Choir of Cuba; Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo De Silos, María Felicia Pérez
Christian Mouyen, organ

Cuban composer Esteban Salas y Castro (1725-1803) is but one of dozens of Latin American composers who flourished during the Baroque era following the conquest by Spain.

Alonso Lobo: Lamentations
Choir of Westminster Cathedral, Martin Baker

Alonso Lobo (1555-1617) was a Spanish composer of the late Renaissance who held the post of Organist at both Toledo and Seville Cathedrals during his lifetime.

Herbert Howells: Requiem
Corydon Singers, Matthew Best

In BBC Review Charlotte Gardner writes: "Herbert Howells' Requiem must be one of the most beautiful and searingly moving works in the entire English sacred musical canon. Written in the early 30s but not released until 1980, it is inextricably linked to untimely youthful death; Howells modelled it on Walford Davies' A Short Requiem of 1915, written in memory of those killed in the war. Later, he drew heavily from it for Hymnus Paradisi, his memorial to the nine-year-old son he lost to polio in 1935.

However, despite all this, the Requiem manages to express not just deep grief but also eternal hope, largely thanks to its unusual structure. It juxtaposes traditional "Salvator mundi" and "Requiem aeternam" movements with settings of three of the Bible's most encouraging passages: Psalms 23 and 121, and John's vision in the book of Revelation of the new heavens and the new earth."

Gabriel Fauré: Requiem, Op. 48
Cambridge Singers; Members of the City of London Sinfonia, John Rutter

Caroline Ashton, soprano; Stephen Varcoe, baritone
John Scott, organ; Simon Standage, violin

Gabriel Fauré's Requiem was first performed at L'église de la Madeleine, Paris in 1888.

W.A. Mozart: Requiem in D minor, K. 626
Chorus & Orchestra of the Academy of Ancient Music, Christopher Hogwood
Emma Kirkby, soprano; Carolyn Watkinson, contralto
Anthony Rolfe Johnson, tenor; David Thomas, bass

Austrian composer Mozart did not live to complete his monumental Requiem in D minor which he began to write in 1791. It is thought that Count Franz von Walsegg commissioned the work to mark the anniversary of his wife's death.