

PRIaulx RAINIER (1903 - 1986)

Requiem

David Gascoyne

for tenor solo and unaccompanied choir

Most Requiems are for the departed; some, like that of Brahms, are for those who survive. This is for neither. Instead it looks not backwards, but forwards, to the prospective victims of the world's lost ideals and hopes in the Second World War that was to come.

The poem was written specifically for Priaulx Rainier in 1938-40 by David Gascoyne, with a choral setting in mind. He had been a chorister in Salisbury Cathedral, and met Rainier in Paris in 1937, where she had gone for some lessons with Nadia Boulanger. The composition of *Requiem* took many years, and it was not performed until 16 April 1956 at the V and A Museum in London, when it was first sung by Peter Pears, and the Purcell Singers conducted by Imogen Holst. Its three parts are subdivided into 19 short sections, which alternate between chorus, semi-chorus, solo tenor integrated with the chorus in concertante style, and solo tenor in dramatic recitative, forming the link between sections.

The words are full of the unrealised yearning of the human spirit for the becoming of the Whole. Terms which frequently recur are 'hidden', 'invisible', 'buried', 'concealed'. In Part I the poet sees mankind in darkness; blind, as we wait 'in the great Park of crumbling monuments that is the World.' In Part II, clues which present themselves to those who long

for Thee' prove to be illusory. A figure with a gleaming chalice 'was not thy Angel'; an echo in a distant mountain cave 'was not thy voice'. In Part III human life is shown as 'glorious and vain'. Like a seed which is first buried, then nurtured until it finally springs into flower, we can only aspire to that 'core of glory' when our eyes are opened in death.

The music matches the words absolutely; in mood, as it aspires to a world beyond reach, and in the speech-rhythm with which the words are pointed and articulated. The choir sing together throughout, homophonically, and the melodic lines extend the tonal boundaries in a way that was new in British music; now in chords, now in unison; now in sections, now full. The pivotal note of Rainier's scale is the tritone. From this the music derives an ambiguous tonal inflection which gives a fresh source of colour and movement, occasionally coming to rest on a chord of explicit tonality, or a unison. The choir sections moreover are balanced and matched by the recitative of the solo tenor in a way that somewhat recalls the traditional style of plainsong.

The work displays a grandeur and eloquence that are unique. In the unfolding of Rainier's style it represents the end of a period. In it she uses the triad for the last time to any great extent; moreover it is the only choral work in her output.

Part I

- 1 O hidden Face! O gaze
fixed on us from afar and that we cannot meet:
Grant us who wait
in the great Park of crumbling monuments
that is the World,
that we may meet at last those eyes
in which black fires burn back to white with
perfect clearness,
and not blurred by fever or heat
nor in the sudden spasm of disintegrating fear
that rends the breasts of beasts and blinds the
blind and undefined.
And O instruct us how to ripen unto thee.

- 2 Hearts are unripe and spirits light as straw
that in thy light shall kindle like the straw and
flare to nothing on an instant breath of smoke.

- 3 Thy light is like a darkness and Thy joy is
found through grief.
And those who search for Thee shall find
Thee not.
And hidden in Thy mouth the blinding
benediction of the final phrase
which shall not fall upon a listening ear.

- 4 For they who listen at the secret door hear
only their own heart beat out its fault.

Part II

- 5 In the great Park a wanderer at sundown
by the weeping falls of pallid spume and high
prismatic spray
once saw from across the water in the last
illusory light
a figure with a gleaming chalice come...

- 6 But it was not Thy Angel!

- 7 And another heard a warning echo in a
mountain cave
reverberant with distance and the undertone
of guilt...

- 8 But it was not Thy Voice!

- 9 For silent and invisible are all Thy works
and hidden in the depths midway between
desire and fear.
And they who long for Thee and are afraid
of Life
and they who fear the clear stroke of Thy knife
obsessed with the pale shadows of themselves,
shall lose full sight and understanding of that
final mystery.

Part III

- 10 Tenebral treasure and immortal flower,
and flower of immortal Death!
O silent white extent of skyless sky
the wingless flight and the long flawless cry
of aspiration endlessly!

- 11 The seed is buried in us like a memory;
the seed is hidden from us like the omnipresent
Eye:
it grows within us through Time's flux both
night and day.

- 12 Darkness that burns like light,
black light and essence of all radiance.
O depth beyond confusion sunk.
The timeless nadir at the heart of Time
where all creative and destructive forces meet!

- 13 The seed is nurtured by involuntary tears;
by blood shed from Love's inmost wounds
its roots are fed by the concealed corruption
of unknown desires.

14 We cannot hear or see nor say the name;
Choir there is no light or shade,
nor place nor time
no movement, no repose,
but only perfect prescience of the Becoming
of the Whole.

15 The seed springs from us into flower,
Voice yet none can tell at what hour late or early
those concealed furled leaves and
multifoliate petals
shall outgrow their tender shell.

16 The hour is unknown:
Choir The hour endures:
The hour strikes every hour.

17 Each hour of life is glorious and vain.
Voice O thirst and
glorious unsatisfied lamenting cry!
How vain the short relief
And unabiding refuge from the tide
That nearer crawls each day across the sands
on which our house is founded!
Vanity of vanities all things held by our hands.

18 Beyond their reach with diamond rays
Choir and high above the furthest fields of aether
Voice lies the core of glory
only ascertained by inward opening of Death's
deep eye;
and outward flight of Spirit long sustained.

19 By wings the swift flames of the funeral pile
Choir are fanned.
Dead faces guard a secret smile.

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ALAN RAWSTHORNE (1905 - 1971)

Three partsongs

I A Rose for Lidice

Randall Swingler

Lidice is a mining village in Bohemia which was completely obliterated by the Nazis on 10 June 1942, its total male population massacred, the women and children sent to concentration camps. The 'Lidice shall live' Committee, first formed in Handley, Staffs., organized the gift of a rose-garden which was opened in the rebuilt village in 1956.

This partsong was first performed in June 1956 by the Purcell Singers conducted by Imogen Holst in Thaxted Church, Essex.

Lidice lay unknown
In the lap of a lying world.
Lidice worked alone in the core of stone
Lidice had grown from the blood of the earth;
Coal and steel were bone of Lidice's birth.

Fate chose it for Hate's gangrened fury.
Hate said: Wipe out the name!
History shall abjure it!

Ah, the brave dust blew round the world;
The air flooded with blood of roses.
Hate had ploughed up the soil, Love sowed it.
Where the murderer's heel stamped on the
eyes of children
The gardener's fingers fashioned them into
roses.
Love is a ring once broken proves all untrue.
But the shed petals are token of the bud's
renewal.

While man's love grows and blossoms in time's
ground
Lidice hangs, a garland round the cross of the
world.

II The Oxen Thomas Hardy

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.
"Now they are all on their knees",
An elder said as we sat in a flock
By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where
They dwelt in their strawy pen,
Nor did it occur to one of us there
To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave
In these years! Yet, I feel,
If someone said, on Christmas Eve
"Come; see the oxen kneel

In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
Our childhood used to know,"
I should go with him in the gloom,
Hoping it might be so.

III Canzonet Louis MacNeice

Cras amet qui nunqu'amavit
Quiqu'amavit cras amet

A thousand years and none the same
Since we to light and lovelight came;
A thousand years and who knows how
Bright flower breaks from charnel bough.

Tomb and dark grow light and green
Till blind men see, heart be seen;
A thousand years of flower and flame
A thousand years and none the same.

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