

Benjamin Britten *War Requiem*
Latin Requiem Mass and Poetry of Wilfred Owen

I. Requiem Aeternam

CHORUS

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine:
Et lux perpetua luceat eis

Rest eternal grant to them, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon them.

CHILDREN'S CHOIR

Te decet hymnus Deus in Zion,
et tibi redetur
votum in Jerusalem:
exaudi orationem meam,
ad te omnis caro veniet.

A hymn befits thee, O God in Zion,
and to thee a vow
shall be fulfilled in Jerusalem.
Hear my prayer,
for unto thee all flesh shall come.

TENOR SOLO

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries for them from prayers or bells,
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of good-byes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of silent minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

CHORUS

Kyrie eleison,
Christe eleison,
Kyrie eleison.

Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy,
Lord have mercy.

II. Dies Irae

Dies irae, dies illa,
Solvat saeculum in favilla:
Teste David cum Sibylla.

Day of wrath, that day
shall dissolve the world into embers
as David prophesied with the Sybil.

Quantus tremor est futurus,
Quando Judex est venturus,
Cuncta stricte discussurus!

How great the trembling will be,
when the Judge shall come,
the rigorous investigator of all things.

Tuba mirum spargens sonum
Per sepulcra regionum
Coget omnes ant thronum.

The trumpet, spreading its wondrous sound
through the tombs of every land,
will summon all before the throne.

Mors stupebit, et natura,
Cum resurget creatura,
Judicanti responsura.

Death will be stunned, likewise nature,
when all creation shall rise again
to answer the One judging.

BARITONE SOLO

Bugles sang, saddening the evening air,
And bugles answered, sorrowful to hear.

Voices of boys were by the river-side.
Sleep mothered them; and left the twilight sad.
The shadow of the morrow weighed on men.

Voices of old despondency resigned,
Bowed by the shadow of the morrow, slept.

SOPRANO SOLO AND CHORUS

Liber scriptus proferetur,
In quo totum continetur,
Unde mundus judicetur.

A written book will be brought forth,
in which all shall be contained,
and from which the world shall be judged.

Judex ergo cum sedebit,
Quid-quid latet, apparebit:
Nil inultum remanebit.

When therefore the Judge is seated,
whatever lies hidden shall be revealed,
no wrong shall remain unpunished.

Quid sum miser tunc dicturus?
Quem patronum rogaturus,
Cum vix justus sit securus?

What then am I, a poor wretch, going to say?
Which protector shall I ask for,
when even the just are scarcely secure?

Rex tremendae majestatis,
Qui salvandos salvas gratis,
Salva me, fons pietatis.

King of terrifying majesty,
who freely saves the saved:
Save me, font of pity.

TENOR AND BARITONE SOLOS

Out there, we've walked quite friendly up to Death;
Sat down and eaten with him, cool and bland,—
Pardoned his spilling mess-tins in our hand.
We've sniffed the green thick odour of his breath,—
Our eyes wept, but our courage didn't writhe.
He's spat at us with bullets and he's coughed
Shrapnel. We chorussed when he sang aloft;
We whistled while he shaved us with his scythe.

Oh, Death was never enemy of ours!
We laughed at him, we leagued with him, old chum.
No soldier's paid to kick against his powers.
We laughed, knowing that better men would come,
And greater wars; when each proud fighter brags
He wars on Death—for Life; not men—for flags.

CHORUS

Recordare Jesu pie,
Quod sum causa tuae viae,
Ne me perdas illa die.

Remember, merciful Jesus,
that I am the cause of your sojourn;
do not cast me out on that day.

Quaerens me, sedisti lassus:
Redemisti crucem passus:
Tantus labor non sit cassus.

Seeking me, you sat down weary;
having suffered the Cross, you redeemed me.
May such great labor not be in vain.

Ingemisco, tamquam reus:
Culpa rubet vultus meus:
Supplicanti parce Deus.

I groan, like one who is guilty;
my face blushes with guilt.
Spare thy supplicant, O God.

Qui Mariam absolvisti,
Et latronem exaudisti,
Mihi quoque spem dedisti.

You who absolved Mary [Magdalene],
and heeded the thief,
have also given hope to me.

Inter oves locume praesta,
Et ab haedis me sequestra,
Statuens in parte dextra.

Grant me a favored place among thy sheep,
and separate me from the goats,
placing me at thy right hand.

Confutatis maledictis,
Flammis acribus addictis,
Voca me cum benedictis.

When the accursed are confounded,
consigned to the fierce flames:
call me to be with the blessed.

Oro supplex et acclinis,
Cor contritum quasi cinis:
Gere curam mei finis.

I pray, suppliant and kneeling,
my heart contrite as if it were ashes:
protect me in my final hour.

BARITONE SOLO

Be slowly lifted up, thou long black arm,
Great gun towering toward Heaven, about to curse;

Reach at that arrogance which needs thy harm,
And beat it down before its sins grow worse;

But when thy spell be cast complete and whole,
May God curse thee, and cut thee from our soul!

CHORUS AND SOPRANO SOLO

Dies irae, dies illa,
Solvat saeculum in favilla,
Test David cum Sibylla.

Day of wrath, that day
shall dissolve the world into embers,
as David prophesied with the Sybil.

Quantus tremor est futurus,
Quando Judex est venturus,
Cuncta stricte discussurus!

How great the trembling will be,
when the Judge shall come,
the rigorous investigator of all things!

Lacrimosa dies illa,
Qua resurget ex favilla,
Judicandus homo reus.
Huic ergo parce Deus.

O how tearful that day,
on which the guilty shall rise
from the embers to be judged.
Spare them then, O God.

TENOR SOLO

Move him into the sun—
Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home, whispering of fields unsown.
Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning and this snow.
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds,—
Woke, once, the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides,
Full-nerved—still warm—too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?
—O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth's sleep at all?

CHORUS

Pie Jesu Domine,
dona eis requiem. Amen.

Merciful Lord Jesus,
grant them rest. Amen.

III. Offertorium

CHILDREN'S CHOIR

Domine Jesu Christe, Rex gloriae,
libera animas omnium fidelium defunctorum
de peonis inferni et de profundo lacu:
libera eas de ore leonis,
ne absorbeat eas tartarus,
ne cadant in obscurum.

Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory,
liberate the souls of all the faithful departed
from the pains of hell and from the deep pit.
deliver them from the lion's mouth;
let not hell swallow them up,
let them not fall into darkness.

CHORUS

Sed signifier sanctus Michael
repraesentet eas in lucem sanctam:
Quam olim Abrahae promisisti,
et semini ejus.

But let Michael, the holy standard-bearer,
bring them into the holy light,
which once thou promised to Abraham
and to his seed.

BARITONE AND TENOR SOLOS

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and a knife.
And as they sojourned both of them together,
Isaac the first-born spake and said, My Father,
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,
But where the lamb for this burnt-offering?
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
And builded parapets and trenches there,
And stretchèd forth the knife to slay his son.
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him. Behold,
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.
But the old man would not so, but slew his son,—
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

CHILDREN'S CHOIR

Hostias et preces tibi,
Domine, laudis offerimus:
tu suscipe pro animabus illis,
quarum hodie memoriam facimus:
fac eas, Domine,
de morte transire ad vitam.

Sacrifices and prayers of praise,
O Lord, we offer to thee.
Receive them, Lord, on behalf of those souls
we commemorate this day.
Grant them, Lord,
to pass from death unto life.

CHORUS

Quam olim Abrahae promisisti,
et semini ejus.

Which once thou promised to Abraham
and to his seed.

IV. Sanctus

SOPRANO SOLO AND CHORUS

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus,
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt caeli et terra
gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis.

Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God of Hosts.
Heaven and earth are full
of thy glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

Benedictus qui venit
in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis.

Blessed is he who comes
in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

BARITONE SOLO

After the blast of lightning from the East,
The flourish of loud clouds, the Chariot Throne;
After the drums of Time have rolled and ceased,
And by the bronze west long retreat is blown,

Shall life renew these bodies? Of a truth
All death will He annul, all tears assuage?—
Fill the void veins of Life again with youth,
And wash, with an immortal water, Age?

When I do ask white Age he saith not so:
“My head hangs weighed with snow.”
And when I hearken to the Earth, she saith:
“My fiery heart shrinks, aching. It is death.
Mine ancient scars shall not be glorified,
Nor my titanic tears, the sea, be dried.”

V. Agnus Dei

TENOR SOLO

One ever hangs where shelled roads part.
In this war He too lost a limb,
But His disciples hide apart;
And now the Soldiers bear with Him.

CHORUS

Agnus Dei,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona eis requiem.

Lamb of God,
who takest away the sins of the world,
grant them rest.

Near Golgotha strolls many a priest,
And in their faces there is pride
That they were flesh-marked by the Beast
By whom the gentle Christ's denied.

Agnus Dei,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona eis requiem.

Lamb of God,
who takest away the sins of the world,
grant them rest.

The scribes on all the people shove
And bawl allegiance to the state,
But they who love the greater love
Lay down their life; they do not hate.

Agnus Dei,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
dona eis requiem sempiternam.

Dona nobis pacem. (Grant us peace.)

Lamb of God,
who takest away the sins of the world,
grant them everlasting rest.

VI. Libera Me

CHORUS AND SOPRANO SOLO

Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna,
in die illa tremenda:
Quando coeli movendi sunt et terra:
Dum veneris judicare saeculum per ignem.

Tremens factus sum ego, et timeo,
dum discussio venerit,
atque ventura ira.
Quando coeli movendi sunt et terra.

Dies illa, dies irae,
calamitatis et miseriae,
dies magna et amara valde.
Libera me, Domine . . .

Deliver me, O Lord, from death eternal,
on that dreadful day:
when the heavens and the earth shall quake,
when thou shalt come to judge the world by
fire.

I am seized by trembling, and I fear
until the judgment should come,
and I also dread the coming wrath.
When the heavens and the earth shall quake.

On that day, day of wrath,
day of calamity and misery,
momentous day, and exceedingly bitter.
Deliver me, O Lord . . .

TENOR SOLO

It seemed that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which titanic wars had groined.
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
Lifting distressful hands as if to bless.

And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.
"Strange friend," I said, "here is no cause to mourn."

BARITONE SOLO

"None," said the other, "save the undone years,
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
Was my life also; I went hunting wild
After the wildest beauty in the world.

For by my glee might many men have laughed,
And of my weeping something had been left,
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,

The pity of war, the pity war distilled.
Now men will go content with what we spoiled.
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.
Miss we the march of this retreating world
Into vain citadels that are not walled.
Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,
Even from wells we sunk too deep for war,
Even the sweetest wells that ever were.

I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.”

TENOR AND BARITONE SOLOS

“Let us sleep now . . .”

CHILDREN’S CHOIR, CHORUS AND SOPRANO SOLO

In paradisum deducant te Angeli:
in tuo adventu suscipiant te Martyres,
et perducant te in civitatem
sanctam Jerusalem.

May the angels lead you into paradise;
May the Martyrs welcome you upon your
arrival, and lead you into
the holy city of Jerusalem.

Chorus Angelorum te suscipiat,
et cum Lazaro quondam paupere
aeternam habeas requiem.

May a choir of angels welcome you,
and, with poor Lazarus of old,
may you have eternal rest.

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.
Requiescant in pace. Amen.

Eternal rest grant to them, O Lord,
and let perpetual light shine upon them.
Rest in peace. Amen.

Poetry of Wilfred Owen as taken from the
Britten *War Requiem*, *Op. 66*, published by
Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd.

Translations of the Latin Requiem Mass from
*Translations and Annotations of Choral
Repertoire—Volume I: Sacred Latin Texts*
compiled and annotated by Ron Jeffers,
published by Earthsongs.