

TEXT and TRANSLATION

War Requiem, op. 66 (1961)

Music by Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Words from the *Missa pro defunctis* and the poems of Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)

I. REQUIEM AETERNAM

Chorus

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Grant them eternal rest, O Lord,
and may perpetual light shine upon them.

Children's Chorus

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

Thou shalt have praise, O God, in Zion
and homage shall be paid to Thee in Jerusalem;
hear my prayer, to Thee all flesh shall come.

Chorus

Requiem aeternum dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Grant them eternal rest, O Lord,
and may perpetual light shine upon them.

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 upon us,
Christ have mercy upon us,
Lord have mercy upon us.

II. DIES IRAE

Chorus

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

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

Tuba mirum spargens sonum
Per sepulchra regionum
Coget omnes ante thronum.

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

Baritone

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.

Judex ergo cum sedebit,
Quidquid latet, apparebit:
Nil inultum remanebit.

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

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

This day, this day of wrath
Shall consume the world in ashes
As prophesied by David and the Sibyl.

What trembling there shall be
When the Judge shall come
To weigh everything strictly!

The trumpet, scattering its awful sound
Across the graves of all lands,
Summons all before the throne.

Death and nature shall stand amazed
When creation arises
To answer to the Judge.

A written book shall be brought forth
That contains everything
Whereby the world shall be judged.

When the Judge takes his seat,
All that is hidden shall appear:
Nothing shall remain unavenged.

What shall I, a wretch, say?
To which protector shall I appeal,
When even the righteous is barely safe?

King of awful majesty,
Who freely saves the redeemed,
Save me, fount 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 chorused 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Remember, gentle Jesus,
That I am the reason for Thy time on earth:
Do not cast me out on that day.

Seeking me, Thou didst sink down wearily:
Thou didst redeem me by enduring the cross:
Such travail must not be in vain.

I groan, like the sinner that I am:
And my face reddens with guilt:
Spare the supplicant, O God.

Thou, who pardoned Mary,
And heard the prayer of the thief,
Hast given me hope as well.

Give me a place among the sheep,
And separate me from the goats,
Placing me on Thy right hand.

When the damned are cast away,
And consigned to the searing flames,
Call me with the blessed.

Bowed down in supplication I beg Thee,
My heart as contrite as ashes:
Take Thou my ending into Thy care.

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!

Soprano Solo and Chorus

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

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

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

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.

This day, this day of wrath
Shall consume the world in ashes,
As prophesied by David and the Sibyl.

What trembling there shall be,
When the Judge shall come,
To weigh everything strictly.

Oh this day full of weeping,
When from the ashes arises
The guilty man, to be judged,
Have mercy upon him, O Lord.

Merciful Lord Jesus, grant them rest. Amen.

III. OFFERTORIUM

Children's Chorus

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

Chorus

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

Tenor and Baritone 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 Chorus

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

Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory,
deliver the souls of the faithful departed
from the pains of hell and the deep pit:
deliver them from the mouth of the lion,
that hell may not engulf them and they
be plunged into darkness.

But may the holy standard-bearer Michael
lead them into the holy light, as Thou didst
promise of old to Abraham and his seed.

In praise we offer to Thee, O Lord,
sacrifices and prayers,
do Thou receive them: on behalf of souls of
those whom we remember this day:
allow them, O Lord, to pass from death to life.

IV. SANCTUS

Soprano Solo and Chorus

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua,
hosanna in excelsis.
Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis.

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory,
glory to God in the highest.
Blessed is he who cometh in the name of
the Lord. Glory to God 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, that taketh away
the sins of the world, grant them rest.

Tenor Solo

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.

Chorus

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

Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of
the world, grant them eternal rest.

Tenor Solo

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.

Chorus

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

Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of
the world, grant them eternal rest.

Tenor Solo

Dona nobis pacem.

Grant us peace.

VI. LIBERA ME

Soprano Solo and Chorus

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 eternal death
in that awful day:

When the heavens and earth shall be moved:
when Thou shalt come to judge the world
by fire.

I am seized with fear and trembling,
until the trial shall be at hand and the wrath
to come, when the heavens and the earth
shall be moved.

This day, this day of wrath, of calamity and
misery, a great day and bitter indeed.
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..."

Soprano Solo, Chorus and Children's Chorus

In paradisum deducant te Angeli:
in tuo adventu suscipiant te Martyres,
et perducant te in civitatem sanctam
Jerusalem.
Chorus Angelorum te suscipiat,
et cum Lazaro, quondam paupere aeternam
habeas requiem.
Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine:
et lux perpetua luceat eis.
Requiescant in pace. Amen.

May the angels lead you into paradise:
may the martyrs receive you at
your coming, and lead you into the holy city
of Jerusalem.
May the chorus of angels receive you,
and with Lazarus, once poor may you have
eternal rest.
Grant them eternal rest, O Lord:
and may perpetual light shine upon them.
May they rest in peace. Amen.