

Columbia Pro Cantare Program Notes

Rutter Requiem

The *Requiem* of **JOHN RUTTER (B. 1945)** is regarded as his greatest contribution to the world of serious choral music. The *Requiem* was written in 1985 and dedicated to the memory of his father, who had died the previous year. This gifted composer who has given us so much exceptional choral material shows his eminent skill and virtuosity once again in the creation of this monumental work, which is considered his most beautiful and exquisite composition.

It employs a non-traditional approach, including movements based on scriptural texts - Psalm 130 (Out of the Deep) and Psalm 23 (The Lord Is My Shepherd), and excerpts from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. The seven sections of the work form an arch-like meditation on the themes of life and death. There are grand moments such as the pleading "Agnus Dei" which build to an anguished forte, and the "Sanctus" as an affirmation of divine glory. It has a ravishing, "Pie Jesu" for treble solo and the closing "Lux aeterna" is a hauntingly beautiful movement that expresses serenity, light, and the promise of eternal rest. However, it is often the simple and elegant passages such as the plaintive "Requiem aeternam" and "The Lord Is My Shepherd" that capture the mood and the listener. Although using conventional harmonies, Rutter is not averse to throwing in a stinging dissonance for dramatic effect. Chant-like unisons suddenly burst into 8-part chords and chromatics are used to intensify rather than change keys.

John Rutter's thoughts on his Requiem: "The *Requiem* was written in 1985 and dedicated to the memory of my father, who had died the previous year. In writing it, I was influenced and inspired by the example of Faure. I doubt whether any specific musical resemblances can be traced, but I am sure that Faure's *Requiem* crystallized my thoughts about the kind of Requiem I wanted to write: intimate rather than grandiose, contemplative and lyric rather than dramatic, and ultimately moving towards light rather than darkness – the "lux aeterna" of the closing text. The composition of the *Requiem* was interrupted by other commitments and by illness. The first complete performance took place in October 1985 (in Dallas, as it happened), and no one, least of all the astonished composer, could have predicted the flood of performances which continued ever since. For me it stands as a clear sign of humanity's quest for solace and light amidst the darkness and troubles of our age. Art, Andre Gide said, must bear a message of hope – a message which is embedded in the age-old texts of the Requiem Mass, and also in the Burial Service, some of which I have interpolated into the structure of the work, using the incomparably resonant and glorious version from the 1662 Book of Common Prayer."

JOHANN PACHELBEL (1650-1706), born in Nuremberg, was a German composer known for his works for organ and was one of the great organ masters of the generation before J.S. Bach. The prolific composer's organ music includes 70 chorales, 95 Magnificat fugues and non-liturgical works such as toccatas, preludes, fugues and fantasias. His vocal music includes two masses and some important Vespers music as well as arias and sacred concertos. Pachelbel's fondness for variation form is demonstrated in the masterful *Ciccona in d for organ*. The "Canon," well-known to most audiences, is not a canon, but a set of variations on a repeating bass line. A short sequence of notes in the bass line is repeated 28 times with the three upper parts coming in at an interval of two bars, each entering and elaborating on a single theme as the piece gathers in strength and builds to a climax.

Born in Windischgraz, Styria, now Slovenj Gradec in Yugoslavia, **HUGO WOLF (1860-1903)** spent most of his life in Austria, as a writer, critic and a composer of over 200 songs with piano. He dedicated his composing to the art of framing and expressing the life of words. He became supreme in his ability to condense the dramatic intensity of opera into the song form. To express and set the texts of such poets as Heine, Eichendorf, Goethe, Moricke and Heyse became the focus and mission of his life. He composed *Sechs Geitliche Lieder* for chorus in 1881 while in despair over a broken relationship. Quite likely an infection of syphilis was the cause of alternations of feverish activity and despondent lethargy which eventually resulted in a mental breakdown and terminal illness.

A musical prodigy who began his career as a pianist, **MARCEL TOURNIER (1879-1951)** won first prize in harp at the Paris Conservatory after only four years of study on the instrument. Strongly committed to composition as well as performance, he also won both a prestigious Prix de Rome and a Prix de Rossini award at the Conservatory in the same year. Soon after these successes, the Paris conservatory appointed him to its composition faculty, and when a vacancy arose, to a professorship of harp. Tournier created the vast majority of his finely crafted, melodious works for harp, either alone or in combination with other instruments. Lush harmonies and opulent textures are evident in the *Berceuse Russe*.

The greatest musical figure in the French Romantic movement, **HECTOR BERLIOZ (1803-1869)** born at Cote St. Andre, was part of the group which included writers Hugo, Dumas and Balzac, the painter Delacroix, and musicians Chopin and Liszt. Berlioz infused an expressive poetic style into grandiose ceremonial outlines in such works as his *Grande Messe des Morts* and the *Te Deum*, which endowed them with individuality and striking beauty. The matching of space and sonority was one of his lasting obsessions which compelled him to orchestrate some of his works with enormous instrumental requirements. Using wide-spaced chords and an emphasis on color, he could also achieve intimacy. His other major works include the oratorio *La Damnation de Faust*, the dramatic symphony *Romeo et Juliette*, a viola concerto *Harold en Italie* and *Les Troyens* – a memorable opera to end all operas. His talents extended beyond the arena of composition, as he was known also for urbane writings that include critical essays, memoirs and an eminently readable treatise on orchestration.