WAR REQUIEM, OP. 66

Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)

Words from the *Missa pro Defuntis* and the poems of Wilfred Owen

**I**

***Requiem aeternam***

**CHORUS**

*Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine,* Rest eternal grant them, Lord;

*et lux perpetua luceat eis* and may everlasting light shine upon them.

**TREBLE CHOIR**

*Te decet hymnus, Deus in Sion;* Songs of praise are due to Thee, God, in Zion;

*et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem;* and prayers offered up to Thee in Jerusalem;

*exaudi orationem meam,* hear my prayer,

*ad te omnis caro veniet* all flesh shall come to Thee.

**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.

[‘Anthem for Doomed Youth’]

**CHORUS**

*Kyrie eleison* Lord have mercy,

*Christe eleison* Christ have mercy,

*Kyrie eleison* Lord have mercy.

**II**

***Dies irae***

**CHORUS**

*Dies irae, dies illa,* Day of anger, that day,

*Solvet saeclum in favilla,* Shall dissolve this generation into ashes,

*Teste David cum Sibylla.* With David and the Sibyl as witness.

*Quantus tremor est futurus,* How much quaking there will be,

*Quando Judex est venturus,* When the Judge will come,

*Cuncta stricte discussurus!* To weigh all things strictly.

*Tuba mirum spargens sonum* The trumpet pouring forth its awful sound

*Per sepulchra regionum* Through the tombs of the lands

*Coget omnes ante thronum.* Drives everyone before the throne.

*Mors stupebit et natura,* Death shall be stunned, and nature,

*Cum resurget creatura,* When life shall rise again,

*Judicanti responsura.* To answer for itself before the Judge.

**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.

[untitled]

**SOPRANO SOLO AND CHORUS**

*Liber scriptus proferetur,* A book inscribed shall be brought forth,

*In quo totum continetur* In which all is contained,

*Unde mundus judicetur.* From which the world shall be judged.

*Judex ergo cum sedebit,* When the Judge, therefore, shall sit,

*Quidquid latet, apparebit:* Whatever is concealed shall appear:

*Nil inultum remanebit.* Nothing unavenged shall remain.

*Quid sum miser tunc dicturus?* What am I, a wretch, to say then?

*Quem patronum rogaturus,* To whom as defender shall I entreat,

*Cum vix justus sit securus?* Since the just man is scarcely safe?

*Rex tremendae majestatis,* King of fearful majesty,

*Qui salvandos salvas gratis,* Who freely savest those who are to be saved,

*Salva me, fons pietatis.* Save me, fountain of compassion.

**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.

[‘The Next War’]

**CHORUS**

*Recordare Jesu pie,* Recall, kind Jesus,

*Quod sum causa tuae viae:* That I am the reason for your being:

*Ne me perdas illa die.* Lest Thou do away with me on that day.

*Quaerens me, sedisti lassus:* Searching for me, Thou didst sit exhausted:

*Redemisti crucem passus:* Thou hast redeemed me by suffering the cross:

*Tantus labor non sit cassus.* So much toil should not be in vain.

*Ingemisco, tamquam resu:* I sigh, so great a sinner:

*Culpa rubet vultus meus:* Guilt reddens my face:

*Supplicanti parce Deus.* Spare the supplicant, God.

*Qui Mariam absolvisti,* Thou who hast forgiven Mary,

*Et latronem exaudisti,* And hast listened to the robber,

*Mihi quoque spem dedisti.* And hast also given hope to me.

*Inter oves locum praesta,* Set me down amongst the sheep,

*Et ab haedis me sequestra,* And remove me from the goats,

*Statuens in parte dextra.* Standing at Thy right hand.

*Confutatis maledictis,* With the damned confounded,

*Flammis acribus addictis,* To the crackling flames consigned,

*Voca me cum benedictis.* Call me with your saints.

*Oro supplex et acclinis,* I pray, kneeling and supplicant,

*Cor contritum quasi cinis:* My heart worn away like ashes:

*Gere curam mei finis.* Protect me at my ending.

**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!

[from ‘Sonnet: On Seeing a Piece of Our Artillery Brought into Action’]

**CHORUS AND SOPRANO SOLO**

*Dies irae, dies illa,* Day of anger, that day,

*Solvet saeclum in favilla,* Shall dissolve this generation into ashes,

*Teste David cum Sibylla.* With David and the Sybil as witness.

*Quantus tremor est futurus,* How much quaking there will be,

*Quando judex est venturus,* When the Judge will come,

*Cuncta stricte discussurus!* To weigh all things strictly.

*Lacrimosa dies illa,* That tearful day,

*Qua resurget ex favilla,* On which shall arise again from the ashes,

*Judicandus homo reus,* The sinner to be judged,

*Huic ergo parce Deus.* Spare him accordingly, 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?

[‘Futility’]

**CHORUS**

*Pie Jesu Domine,* Kind Jesus, Lord

*dona eis requiem.* grant them rest.

*Amen.* Amen.

**III**

***Offertorium***

**TREBLE CHOIR**

*Domine Jesu Christe,* Lord Jesus Christ,

*Rex gloriae,* King of glory,

*libera animas omnium fidelium* free the souls of all the faithful

*defunctorum de poenis inferni,* dead from the tortures of hell,

*et de profondo lacu:* and from the bottomless pit:

*libera eas de ore leonis,* free them from the mouth of the lion,

*ne absorbeat eas tartarus* that hell may not swallow them up,

*ne cadant in obscurum.* nor may they fall into darkness.

**CHORUS**

*Sed signifier sanctus Michael* But the holy standard-bearer Michael

*repraesentet eas in lucem sanctam:* shall bring them back into the holy light:

*quam olim Abrahae promisisti,* as Thou once didst promise to Abraham,

*et semini ejus.* and his offspring.

**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,

Issac 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.

[‘The Parable of the Old Man and the Young’]

**TREBLE CHOIR**

*Hostias et preces* Sacrifices and prayers

*tibi Domine laudis offerimus:* we offer to Thee, Lord, with praise:

*tu suscipe pro animabus illis,* receive them for the souls of those

*quarum hodie memoriam facimus:* whose memory we recall today:

*fac eas, Domine,* make them, Lord,

*de morte transire ad vitam.* to pass from death to life.

**IV**

***Sanctus***

**SOPRANO SOLO AND CHORUS**

*Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus* Holy, holy, holy

*Dominus Deus Sabaoth.* Lord God of Hosts.

*Pleni sunt coeli et terra Gloria tua,* Full are heaven and earth with Thy glory.

*Hosanna in excelsis.* Hosanna in the highest.

*Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.* Blessed is he who comes in the name of the

Lord.

*Hosanna in excelsis.* 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 hear shrinks, aching. It is death.

Mine ancient scars shall not be glorified,

Nor my titanic tears, the sea, be dried.’

[‘The End’]

**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,* Lamb of God

*qui tollis peccata mundi,* who takest away the sins of the world,

*dona eis requiem.* 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,* Lamb of God

*qui tollis peccata mundi,* who takest away the sins of the world,

*dona eis requiem.* grant them 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.

[‘At a Calvary near the Ancre’]

**CHORUS**

*Agnus Dei,* Lamb of God

*qui tollis peccata mundi,* who takest away the sins of the world,

*dona eis requiem sempiternam.* grant them rest everlasting.

**TENOR SOLO**

*Dona nobis pacem.* Grant us peace.

**VI**

***Libera me***

**CHORUS AND SOPRANO SOLO**

*Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna,* Free me, Lord, from eternal death,

*in die illa tremenda:* on that dreadful day.

*Quando coeli movendi sunt et terra:* When the skies and ground shall quake:

*Dun veneris judicare* When Thou comest to judge

*saeculum per ignem.* our generation through fire.

*Tremens factus sum ego, et timeo,* I am made to tremble, and am afraid,

*dum discussio venerit,* until the trial shall come,

*atque ventura ira.* and the anger arrive.

*Libera me, Domine, de morte aterna,* Free me, Lord, from eternal death,

*Quando coeli movendi sunt et terra.* When the skies and ground shall quake.

*Dies illa, dies irae,* That day, day of anger

*calamitatis et miseriae,* of disaster and misery,

*dies magna et amara valde.* a great day and intensely bitter.

*Libera me, Domine . . .* Free me, 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 . . .’

[‘Strange Meeting’]

**TREBLE CHOIR, CHORUS, AND SOPRANO SOLO**

*In paradisum deducant te Angeli:* To heaven may the Angels escort you;

*in tuo adventu suscipiant te Martyres,* on your arrival may the Martyrs accept you,

*et perducant te* and lead you

*in civitatem sanctam Jerusalem.* to the sacred city Jerusalem.

*Chorus Angelorum te suscipiat,* May the Choir of Angels receive you

*et cum Lazaro quondam paupere* and with Lazarus, once a pauper,

*aeternam habeas requiem.* may you have rest eternal.

*Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine;* Rest eternal grant them, Lord,

*et lux perpetua luceat eis.* and may everlasting light shine upon them.

*Requiescant in pace.* May they rest in peace.

*Amen.* Amen.