

O MAGNUM MYSTERIUM

LAURIDSEN

Morton Lauridsen (b. 1943): O Magnum Mysterium (1994)

For centuries, composers have been inspired by the beautiful O Magnum Mysterium text depicting the birth of the newborn King amongst the lowly animals and shepherds. This affirmation of God's grace to the meek and the adoration of the Blessed Virgin are celebrated in my setting through a quiet song of profound inner joy. – Morten Lauridsen

Morten Lauridsen set 'O Magnum Mysterium' to a commission in 1994, the same year in which he was appointed Composer in Residence at the Los Angeles Master Chorale, whose director, Paul Salamunovich, Lauridsen has described as one of the world's great practitioners of Gregorian chant. It became, appropriately, the first of Lauridsen's works to be performed by the Chorale, Salamunovich reciprocating Lauridsen's esteem by describing it as the twentieth century counterpart to Tomas Luis Victoria's sixteenth century setting of the same text. Although he claims never to have quoted from an existing chant, much of Lauridsen's music uses what he terms "the conjunct melodic ideas of chant as

a base". As a predominantly choral composer who has set major poetic texts (Graves, Rilke, Lorca), this is not surprising: the metric discipline of chant can complement that of verbal rhyme, both releasing and sustaining the lyricism of song – to which Lauridsen sees poetry as key. The strength of this outlook gives Lauridsen's choral work a distinctive structural integrity, whilst ensuring that the voice parts remain effectively differentiated: "I try to make every one of my lines gracious for that particular voice...to make sure that each part works and is interesting in itself".

The musicologist Nick Stimple has described Lauridsen as "the only American composer in history who can

be called a mystic", a claim which his setting of 'O Magnum Mysterium' supports. Although a very short work, and despite its directness, Lauridsen has said that it "was one of the most difficult pieces for me to write" because of the need to eliminate "extraneous" thoughts "perhaps too complicated for this particular setting". Its resulting serenity is complemented by the single accidental, a probing G sharp on the words 'beata virgo' at its very centre and by the anchoring pedal note of a low D required of the basses' 'alleluias'. They give the work what Stimple terms "an elusive and indefinable ingredient which leaves the impression that all the questions have been answered". PF

**O magnum mysterium,
et admirabile sacramentum,
ut animalia viderent Dominum natum,
jacentem in praesepio!
Beata Virgo, cujus viscera
meruerunt portare
Dominum Christum.
Alleluia.**

*O great mystery,
and wonderful sacrament,
that animals should see the new-born Lord,
lying in a manger!
Blessed is the Virgin whose womb
was worthy to bear
Christ the Lord.
Alleluia!*

TOTENTANZ

KARG-ELERT

Sigfrid Karg-Elert (1877-1933): Totentanz Op. 70 No.2

The German composer Sigfrid Karg-Elert (1877-1933) was introduced to the harmonium by the Berlin publisher and harmonium specialist Carl Simon in 1904. From then

on until his death he created one of the most significant catalogues of original works for this instrument. Karg-Elert's post-romantic style and eccentric personality are per-

fectly demonstrated in his *Totentanz* of 1907 with bizarre effects, rich chromaticism and virtuoso writing all combined in this short 'Orchestral Study'. JS

THIS IS PROPHETIC

ADAMS

John Adams (b. 1947): *This is Prophetic* from *Nixon in China* (1987)

Libretto Alice Goodman

At the opening of Act Two, Pat Nixon is on a guided tour of Peking. After visiting a factory and a commune, she arrives in the afternoon twilight at the Gate of Heavenly Peace, before the Summer Palace, where to warm and reflective music she sings 'This is prophetic'. Adams has always sought, in his operatic

works, to write for "singers with clear, unforced diction, free of the noxious vocal affectation so typical of operatic singing". In Pat Nixon's visionary soliloquy, he aims to bring "shadings of Whitman, Wallace Stevens, and Norman Rockwell together in an image of middle-American peace and plenty". At

the New York Metropolitan Opera's performances of ENO's acclaimed production, in February 2011, our patron Janis Kelly, who sings it for us this evening, made her Met début as Pat Nixon and was described as "wonderful" by the New York Times critic, Anthony Tommasini. PF

**This is prophetic! I foresee
A time will come when luxury
Dissolves into the atmosphere
Like a perfume, and everywhere
The simple virtues root and branch
And leaf and flower. On that bench
There we'll relax and taste the fruit
Of all our actions. Why regret
Life which is so much like a dream?
Let the eternal plan resume:
In the bedroom communities
Let us be taken by surprise;
Yes! Let the band play on and on;
Let the stand-up comedian
Finish his act, let Gypsy Rose
Kick off her high-heeled party shoes;
Let interested businessmen
Speculate further, let routine
Dull the edge of morality.
Let days grow imperceptibly
Longer, let the sun set in cloud;**

**Let lonely drivers on the road
Pull over for a bite to eat,
Let the farmer switch on the light
Over the porch, let passersby
Look in at the large family
Around the table, let them pass.
Let the expression on the face
Of the Statue of Liberty
Change just a little, let her see
What lies inland: across the plain
One man is marching—the Unknown
Soldier has risen from his tomb;
Let him be recognized at home.
The Prodigal. Give him his share:
The eagle nailed to the barn door.
Let him be quick. The sirens wail
As bride and groom kiss through the veil.
Bless this union with all its might,
Let it remain inviolate.**

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THE HARMONIUM

The name "Harmonium" was patented in 1842 by Alexandre Debain (1809-1877) of Paris for a keyboard instrument which used pressurised air (unlike the 'suction' system of American Organs) from bellows pumped by two foot pedals to produce sound from free-reeds (as found in the accordion and harmonica). The instrument had multiple stops, like an organ, and a divided keyboard so that the player

could choose different pitches and timbres in the bass and treble of a single keyboard. Victor Mustel (1815-1890), of Paris, emerged as the finest maker of harmoniums in the world and his relatively small output and exceptional craftsmanship won admiration from the greatest artists of the day. The instrument used this evening is a rosewood harmonium made in 1900 by Mustel - 1023-799. JS



AGNUS DEI

BARBER

Samuel Barber (1910 - 1981): *Agnus Dei* (1967) (Transcribed from *Adagio for Strings*, Op. 11, 1936)

Barber's *Adagio for Strings* became an instant success after its first performance in 1938 and has since become a staple of American ceremonial music. He set it to the text of the *Agnus Dei* for choral performance in 1967, since when it has become a central feature of the contemporary choral repertory.

In 1935, Barber was awarded both a Pulitzer Fellowship and the American Prix de Rome. This enabled him to make a second visit to Europe, where he composed his *First Symphony* in Rome and then moved, in the spring of the following year, to a rented cottage just outside Salzburg. It was in this tranquil environment that he composed his *String Quartet*, Op. 11, one of the strongest of his early works and which includes the *Adagio for Strings* as its second movement. Later that year, Arturo Toscanini, with whom Barber had become friends whilst in Italy, asked to see some of the composer's recent work and was so impressed by the 'Molto adagio' movement of the quartet that he suggested Barber make a free-standing arrangement of it for string orchestra. Barber completed this in 1938 and sent it to Toscanini, who, to Barber's consternation, returned it without comment, later sending word through a friend that he planned to perform the piece and had returned it because he had already committed it to memory. The premier took place in November of the same year as part of a radio broadcast by Toscanini with the NBC Symphony from New York, which also included Barber's *First Essay*

for Orchestra. The popularity of the *Adagio* was immediate, and has been continuous. The critic Alex Ross has remarked that whenever the American Dream suffers a catastrophic setback, Barber's *Adagio for Strings* plays on the radio. It is still frequently performed at state funerals in the US, and in 2001 was played at a ceremony to mark the deaths caused by the attacks on the World Trade Centre in New York, as well as at the Last Night of the Proms for the same reason. It is interesting to consider why, given its popularity, it took Barber a further thirty years before reworking it for choral performance and why, when he did, given his own Presbyterian background, he should have chosen part of the Catholic mass as a text. He was an accomplished composer of art song, a solo baritone who, as a young man, had performed (and later recorded) his own setting of Matthew Arnold's 'On Dover Beach' before an encouraging Vaughan Williams. The reasons may lie in his deep sorrow at the encroaching breakdown of the central relationship of his life, with Gian Carlo Menotti, from whom he had been inseparable since they had met as teenagers at the Curtis Institute in Pennsylvania. The sweet, melancholic and lingering depth of the orchestral work justifiably links it, and Barber's reputation, to such other great compositions for string orchestra as the *Adagietto* of Mahler's *Fifth Symphony*, Elgar's *Introduction and Allegro for Strings* and Vaughan Williams's almost contemporary *Variations on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*. It shares with the

latter work an enigmatic quality of remote melancholy, suspended in time through a metric device that Ross suggests Barber may have taken from Sibelius: "although the music streams by in a steady flow, the ear has trouble detecting where the bar lines fall. The result is something like a modern form of Gregorian chant". This may well be a further reason for its effectiveness as a setting to this text

Its association with mortal sadness, however, does less than justice to the intrinsic character of the music, whose sustained languor and rhythmic sensuousness surely evoke a mood more appropriate to the metaphysics of the little than the larger dying and thus effectively complements the redemptive yearning of the words of the *Agnus Dei* as a mark of Barber's personal sorrow. The melodic structure of the work is arch-like in form and consists of five short sections, which develop its long, ascending melodic line. This flows softly through a series of expanding variations as the constituent groups of the choir alternate differentiated isolation with integrative interrelation, building to a *fortissimo-forte* climax at their highest registers in the middle section, on the words "dona nobis pacem". This is followed by an abrupt, almost ecstatic silence, then a coda of darkening, descending chords dominated by the lower voices, before the final section returns to the original theme to conclude with a restatement of the opening of the initial melody, before the sustained closing notes. PF

Agnus Dei
qui tollis peccata mundi
miserere nobis.
Dona nobis pacem.

Lamb of God,
who takes away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us.
Give us peace.

PETITE MESSE SOLENNELLE

ROSSINI

Gioachino Antonio Rossini (1792 – 1868) : Petite Messe Solennelle (1864)

Good Lord, there it is, finished, this poor little mass. I do not know whether this music is musique sacrée or sacrée musique. I was born for comic opera as You well know. Little skill, some feeling and that's all. Therefore let me sing Your praises and grant me Your paradise. G. Rossini – Passy 1863. (Rossini's postscript to the completed score.)

With the composition of *Le Comte Ory* (1828) and *Guillaume Tell* (1829) Rossini brought to a close, at the age of 37, the brilliant career in which he had established the principles of Italian romantic opera which would be developed further by Bellini, Donizetti and Verdi. Granted a pension in 1829 by Charles X for his work over the previous five years at the Paris Opera, he retired to Bologna with the intention of recovering his increasingly poor health. He was afflicted by painful lumbago and persistent urethritis, the latter almost certainly a legacy of the severe gonorrhoea that he had contracted during his Parisian career. However the post-revolutionary constitutional monarchy in France was far from stable and a further revolution in 1830 dethroned Charles and suspended the contracts that had been made by his government. Rossini was forced to return to Paris in order to establish legal entitlement to his pension, which took some time and caused him much anxiety. It was at this time, also, that he began an affair with Olympe Pélissier that was to last for the rest of his life and may well have begun to bring him some calm – they eventually married in 1846. He continued to compose intermittently, however, producing a setting of 'Stabat Mater' which, though begun in 1831, was not finally completed until ten years later. In 1855 he returned to live in Paris and began composing again, mainly songs and piano pieces – the so-called sins

of his old age. In 1863, his friend, the Countess Louise Pillet-Will, asked him to write a solemn mass to be performed at the consecration of her private chapel. The *Petite Messe Solennelle* was the result, first performed at the chapel in Passy in March, 1864. It was an immediate success, leading Rossini to produce a full orchestration for performance in 1866.

The title 'petite' may have been attached in a mood of cheerful humility, as the dedicatory postscript to the work suggests, and he also referred to it as "the last mortal sin of my old age", but it also refers to the relatively small resources required for its performance in the

confined space of a private chapel: twelve singers ('the twelve apostles', as he playfully termed them), four of them soloists, who carry much of the most important material, and chamber instrumentation of two pianos and harmonium. For all that, it is a lengthy work, setting the full text of the high mass, which accounts for the *Solennelle* in the title, and adding a setting for solo soprano of 'O Salutaris Hostia', a hymn for the feast of Corpus Christi, as well as a 'Preludio Religioso' for the harmonium, to be played during the Offertory. The work is divided into two parts, each of seven numbers. The chorus sings seven of these, always with



PETITE MESSE SOLENNELLE

ROSSINI

soloists who are, in turn, given four movements to themselves in which to display the operatic talents required of them by the score: two to the soprano (one of which is the 'O Salutaris' addition) and one each to the tenor and bass. The mezzo-soprano is the lone soloist with the chorus in the closing 'Agnus Dei'. This extensive structure is further differentiated by subdivisions of several numbers into sections: the 'Kyrie' and 'Credo' each have three, the 'Gloria' six.

The instrumental opening immediately challenges the anticipation of solemnity as a warm, rhythmic andante over eight bars introduces the chorus' triple repetitions, *sotto voce*, of "kyrie" and then, in a quick *diminuendo*, of "eleison". The dynamic fluctuates between *f* and *pppp* throughout this first section, before the basses begin the quiet, Palestrina-like *Christe "eleison"*, a *capella* throughout, until the return to a fuller elaboration of the 'Kyrie' completes the first number. In an appropriate contrast, the 'Gloria' opens with a triumphant declaration, followed by soloists interweaving through the text until

the chorus return to join them on "adoramus te" before closing the section, *sotto voce*, with "glorificamus te". Soloists then share the next five sections in various combinations before the chorus returns to join them in the 'Cum Sancto'. After a majestic instrumental introduction, this begins with a declaratory statement of the text before embarking on an energetic, contrapuntal fugue, interpolated by increasingly theatrical sequences of "amen" and an ecstatic restatement of "gloria in excelsis", before a return to the instrumental majesty of the opening brings the first part to an operatic conclusion.

The second part introduces the liturgical core of the solemn mass with the 'Credo', the word itself asserted strongly to a tempo oddly marked *Allegro Cristiano*, perhaps to indicate a briskness that dismisses doubt. The dynamic, however, drops immediately from *ff* to *pp* on "in unum Deum" and then to *ppp* for "patrem omnipotentem", echoing the fluctuating dynamics of the 'Kyrie'. This pattern continues throughout, as chorus and soloists alternately and together give

dramatic emphasis to this central text. The soprano soloist offers a fittingly sombre 'Crucifixus' before the chorus returns to announce the triumphant 'Et resurrexit', moving on to the quiet wonder of the ascension, before soloists and chorus alternate and interrelate to develop the creed in full. Rossini then displays again his consummate contrapuntal skill by turning the concluding phrase, "et vitam venturi saeculi, amen", into another breathtakingly elaborate fugue, eventually concluded in harmony by a *sotto voce* restatement of "in unum Deum" and declaratory "credo!". The 'Preludio Religioso' provides an interval of calm before the mystic awe of the 'Sanctus' begins quietly, rising to brief *crescendi* on "pleni sunt coeli et terra" and "hosanna in excelsis". The soprano soloist sings reverently the Corpus Christi hymn 'O Salutaris', before the solo mezzo-soprano's plaintiveness introduces the 'Agnus Dei'. As the chorus join her *sotto voce*, they alternate through changing dynamics to a forceful, rousing conclusion to the work on "dona nobis pacem". PF

1 Kyrie - chorus

Kyrie eleison.
Christe eleison.
Kyrie eleison.

2 Gloria - chorus and soloists

Gloria in excelsis Deo,
et in terra pax
hominibus bonæ voluntatis.
Laudamus te, benedicimus te,
adoramus te, glorificamus te.

3 Gratias – mezzo-soprano*, tenor, bass

Gratias agimus tibi
propter magnam gloriam tuam.

1 Kyrie

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

2 Gloria

Glory be to God in the highest.
And in earth peace
to men of good will.
We praise Thee; we bless Thee;
we worship Thee; we glorify Thee.

3 Gratias

We give thanks to Thee
for Thy great glory.

4 Domine Deus – *tenor*

Domine Deus, rex coelestis,
Deus pater omnipotens,
domine fili unigenite, Jesu Christe.
Domine Deus, agnus Dei
filius patris.

5 Qui Tollis – *soprano, mezzo-soprano*

*Qui tollis peccata mundi
miserere nobis.
Qui tollis peccata mundi
suscipe deprecationem nostram.
Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,
miserere nobis.*

6 Quoniam – *bass*

Quoniam tu solus sanctus,
tu solus Dominus,
tu solus altissimus, Jesu Christe.

7 Cum Sancto Spiritu – *chorus*

Cum sancto spiritu in gloria Dei patris.
Amen.

4 Domine Deus

*O Lord God, Heavenly King,
God the Father Almighty.
O Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son.
Lord God, Lamb of God,
Son of the Father.*

5 Qui Tollis

*Thou that takest away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.
Thou that takest away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer.
Thou that sittest at the right hand of the Father,
have mercy upon us.*

6 Quoniam

*For thou only art holy,
thou only art the Lord,
thou only art the most high, Jesus Christ.*

7 Cum Sancto Spiritu

*Together with the Holy Ghost in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.*

INTERVAL of 20 minutes

during which patrons are requested not to enter the
performing area nor to touch any of the instruments

8 Credo – *chorus and soloists*

Credo in unum Deum,
patrem omnipotentem,
factorem coeli et terrae,
visibilium omnium et invisibilium.
Credo in unum Deum,
et in unum Dominum, Jesum Christum,
filium Dei unigenitum,
et ex patre natum ante omnia saecula.
Deum de Deo, lumen de lumine,
Deum verum de Deo vero,
genitum non factum,
consubstantialem patri,
per quem omnia facta sunt,
Qui propter nos homines,
et propter nostram salutem
descendit de coelis.
Et incarnatus est de spiritu sancto
ex Maria virgine, et homo factus est.

8 Credo

*I believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
and of all things visible and invisible.
I believe in one God,
and in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only begotten Son of God,
begotten of the Father before all worlds;
God of God, light of light,
true God of true God,
begotten not made;
being of one substance with the Father,
by Whom all things were made.
Who for us men
and for our salvation
descended from heaven;
and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost,
of the Virgin Mary, and was made man*

PETITE MESSE SOLENNELLE

ROSSINI

9 Crucifixus – soprano

Crucifixus etiam pro nobis
sub Pontio Pilato,
passus et sepultus est.

10 Et Resurrexit – chorus and soloists

Et resurrexit tertia die
secundum scripturas,
et ascendit in coelum,
sedet ad dexteram patris,
et iterum venturus est cum gloria
judicare vivos et mortuos,
cujus regni non erit finis.
Et in spiritum sanctum,
dominum et vivificantem,
qui ex patre filioque procedit,
qui cum patre et filio simul
adoratur et glorificatur,
qui locutus est per prophetas.
Et unam sanctam
catholicam et apostolicam ecclesiam.
Confiteor unum baptisma,
in remissionem peccatorum.
et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum,
et vitam venturi sæculi.
Amen.

11 Preludio Religioso

12 Sanctus – chorus and soloists

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus,
dominus Deus Sabaoth.
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.
Osanna in excelsis.
Benedictus qui venit
in nomine domini.
Osanna in excelsis.

13 O Salutaris – soprano

O salutaris hostia
quae coeli pandis ostium.
Bella premunt hostilia
Da robur fer auxilium.
Amen

14 Agnus Dei – mezzo-soprano and chorus

Agnus Dei,
qui tollis peccata mundi,
miserere nobis.
Dona nobis pacem.

9 Crucifixus

He was crucified also for us,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
and was buried.

10 Et Resurrexit

And on the third day He rose again
according to the Scriptures,
and ascended into heaven.
He sitteth at the right hand of the Father;
and He shall come again with glory
to judge the living and the dead;
and His kingdom shall have no end.
I believe in the Holy Ghost,
the Lord and giver of life,
Who proceedeth from the Father and the Son,
Who with the Father and the Son together
is worshipped and glorified;
who spoke by the Prophets.
And I believe in one holy
catholic and apostolic Church.
I acknowledge one baptism,
for the remission of sins.
And I await the resurrection of the dead,
and the life of the world to come.
Amen.

11 Preludio Religioso

12 Sanctus

Holy, Holy, Holy,
Lord God of Hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is He that cometh
in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

13 O Salutaris

O saving victim
Who opens the gate of heaven,
Hostile wars threaten,
Give strength, bring aid.
Amen

14 Agnus Dei

Lamb of God,
who takes away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.
Give us peace