

Ildebrando Pizzetti - Messa di Requiem

Edmund Rubbra - Tenebrae Responses



**London Concord
Singers**

conductor Malcolm Cottle

7.30pm

**Thursday
April 10th 2003**

Alberto Ginastera - Lamentations of Jeremiah

Edmund Rubbra (1901 - 1986) Tenebrae Motets Op 72 - First Nocturne

Born in Northampton in 1901, despite his modest circumstances he was encouraged to learn the piano and he composed music from an early age. Leaving school at 14, he continued his musical studies whilst working as a clerk for the London North Western Railway. He discovered the music of Cyril Scott and at the age of 17, organised a concert of Scott's music in Northampton. This led to his becoming a pupil of Scott and subsequently of Gustav Holst.

During the Second World War he was called up to serve in the Royal Artillery and he formed a piano trio with Joshua Glazier and William Pleeth. This trio played at camps throughout Britain and continued performing until the 1950's. After the war Rubbra was a lecturer at Worcester College, Oxford for 20 years and from 1961 he was professor of composition at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. He continued to compose throughout his life, reaching a total of some 164 opus numbers, and at the time of his death in 1986 was working on a twelfth symphony.

Best known as a symphonist, Rubbra's status as a composer was largely established by his first three symphonies, all written in the late 1930's. He was also a prolific composer of chamber music. Following his conversion to Catholicism in 1948 he wrote a Latin *Missa in honorem Sancti Dominici*, as well as some settings of Eastern texts.

Rubbra saw the composer's art as the use of common, ordinarily accepted sounds in an uncommon, poetic way. Whilst not discovering new sounds, nor extending aural frontiers, he exploited existing ones in greater depth. Though working within established traditions, he displayed a personal, mystical interpretation of Christianity which was rare among contemporary composers. He also displayed a reasoned, consistent and refined attitude to tonality. Both these factors led to his choral music having a medieval, timeless flavour.

'Although it is often said that Rubbra's music is not of our time it could not have been written in any other...' (GRAMOPHONE, 1992)

Tenebrae, in the Roman Catholic Church, is a ceremony which was performed on the Wednesday and following evenings of Holy Week. The choir chanted and a number of candles were extinguished one by one until only one remained. The last candle was hidden behind the altar, and in the darkness a noise was made, symbolising the convulsion of nature at the Crucifixion.

The traditional plainsong for the ceremony was much esteemed, and the 9 Latin responsories have been much set by composers.

Rubbra's nine Tenebrae motets are all grouped under one opus number, but they were written 10 years apart. The first three (the First Nocturne) were written in 1954, the remaining six (the Second and Third Nocturnes followed in 1963). The texts of the motets do not follow a logical sequence.

Rubbra's symphonies are characterised by closely argued musical development and a sober spiritual searching. There is something of this in these short settings. They are a masterly concentration of the *a capella* style. Sober and unshowy they represent the composer at his most intense. The parts move mainly homophonically in black chords, reminiscent of the sombre chord-spacing of Monteverdi, Rubbra felt this was most apt for the solemnity of Holy Week. The motets stand out from Rubbra's considerable choral output as the most emotionally powerful of his compositions.

First Nocturne

I. He prayed to his Father on Mount Olives: Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: The Spirit is indeed ready but the flesh is weak. Watch and pray, that ye may not enter into temptation. The Spirit indeed is ready but the flesh is weak.

II. My soul is sorrowful to death: stay here and watch with me: now ye shall see a multitude that will surround me: Ye shall run away, and I will go to be sacrificed for you. Behold the time draws near and the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of sinners. Ye shall run away and I will go to be sacrificed with you.

III. Behold we have seen him disfigured and without beauty: his aspect is gone from him: he has borne our sins and suffered for us: and he was wounded for our iniquities, and by his stripes we are healed. Has has truly borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows and by his stripes are we healed.

(The choir will perform Rubbra's Tenebrae Motets - Third Nocturne after the interval.)

Ildebrando Pizzetti (1880 - 1968) - Requiem Mass

Born in Parma, Pizzetti studied at the Conservatoire there. In 1908 following the performances of D'Annunzio's "La Nave" with Pizzetti's music, the composer became well known. He took up a teaching post at Florence Conservatoire and directed the Conservatoire from 1917 to 1923. Following further important performances, including his incidental music to D'Annunzio's play "La Pisanella" and the first performance of the Requiem Mass, he became director of the Conservatoire in Milan. He then went on to the Academy of Saint Cecilia in Rome.

In addition to his work as a composer, he also wrote (as a critic and a music historian), directed his own symphonic and theatrical music in Italy and on tour in the USA. In 1949 he became president of the national Academy of Saint Cecilia.

An essentially dramatic composer, he initially started working within traditional conventions, but he quickly developed a style in which dramatic expression was paramount. He articulated his theories in a number of articles. Essentially, he called upon the composer and the poet to both sacrifice parts of their art to the furtherance of dramatic effect. The composer was thus supposed to abandon all striving after purely musical charm and to reduce the function of the orchestra to that of enforcement of the dramatic emotions. His opera "Fedra" (first performed in 1915) to a text by D'Annunzio, first shows the developments in this direction. Perhaps his most successful work was "Assassinio nella cattedrale" (1958) based on Eliot's tragedy. He was generally his own librettist and wrote 12 operas.

Pizzetti has in recent years suffered some neglect, due, in part, to his natural conservatism in an age of experiment. The traditional image of him is of a cantankerous old man who relished being out of step with contemporary music. Today's critics argue, however, that Pizzetti's operas lack vocal characterisation, dramatic flair and orchestral colour.

However, without actually hearing them in performance it is difficult to tell. Pizzetti's style of operatic writing can be seen as a reaction against the 'excesses' of Puccini, Mascagni and the other Italian composers of the Verismo school.

Whether his operas will ever come to be appreciated is debatable. But what cannot be argued is Pizzetti's mastery at handling the chorus. Long after "Fedra" fell out of favour, the choral prelude to the last act continued to be performed. It is perhaps notable that Pizzetti's incidental music for "La Nave", his first big success, contained choral writing of sublime beauty. In his teens Pizzetti was introduced to Gregorian chant, 15th and 16th Italian polyphony by the musicologist Giovanni Tebaldini and he took this music as his principal stylistic model. Pizzetti's tendency to frequently change the number of vocal parts within a piece originated from the tradition of improvised polyphonic folk-singing of his native north Italian region of Emilia Romagna. In the Requiem the choir varies from a simple 4-parts (in the Agnus Dei) to 12 parts (in the Sanctus). Given Pizzetti's skill at writing choral music, it is perhaps surprising that this Requiem was his only major liturgical music.

The Kyrie opens with a flowing, plainchant like melody sung by the basses and only at the words 'et lux perpetua' does the music expand into a full 5-part choral texture. The Dies Irae is by far the longest movement. Initially the movement stays very close to the plainchant Dies Irae with just a subdued counter-melody sung by the tenors and sopranos. Only a quarter of the way through the movement does this two-part texture expand into a full 8-part polyphonic texture at the words 'Quid sum miser'. For the Sanctus, Pizzetti divides the choir in to 3 choirs of 4-parts (1 choir of women's voices, 2 choirs of men's voices). It is in this movement that we hear Pizzetti's debt to the polychoral music of the 16th century. The Agnus Dei is a gentle 4-part piece and the Requiem concludes in the 5-part texture that it started, with the Libera Me'. This movement is marked to be sung 'with profound fervour'

Curiously Pizzetti's Requiem was written in 1922, the same year as one of the great 20th Century unaccompanied masses, the Mass by Frank Martin. Martin's Mass remained secreted in a draw for 40 years, so it is unlikely that the writing of Pizzetti's Requiem was a related event. Also in 1922, the Mass in G minor by Vaughan Williams received its first performance, having been written the year before.

Introit: Requiem Aeternam

Eternal rest grant to them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.
To thee is due a song of praise, O God, in Sion, and to thee a vow shall be paid in Jerusalem;
grant my prayer; to thee all Flesh shall come.
Eternal rest grant to them, O Lord, etc.

Kyrie

Lord have mercy
Christ have mercy
Lord have mercy

Sequence: Dies Irae

Day of wrath and doom impending,
David's word with Sibyl's blending!
Heaven and earth in ashes ending!

Oh, what fear man's bosom rendeth,
When from heaven the Judge descendeth,
On whose sentence all dependeth!

Wondrous sound the trumpet flingeth,
Through earth's sepulchres it ringeth,
All before the throne it bringeth.

Death is struck and nature quaking,
All creation is awaking,
To its Judge an answer making.

Lo! the book exactly worded
Wherein all hath been recorded;
Thence shall judgement be awarded.

When the Judge His seat attaineth,
And each hidden deed arraigneth,
Nothing unavenged remaineth.

What shall I, frail man, be pleading?
Who for me be interceding,
When the just are mercy needing?

King of majesty tremendous,
Who dost free salvation send us
Fount of pity, then befriend us.

Think, kind Jesu, my salvation
Caused thy wondrous incarnation;
Leave me not to reprobation.

Faint and weary Thou hast sought me,

On the Cross of suffering bought me,
Shall such grace be vainly brought me?

Righteous Judge, for sin's pollution,
Grant thy gift of absolution,
Ere that day of retribution.

Guilty now I pour my moaning,
All my shame with anguish owning;
Spare, O God, thy suppliant groaning.

Through the sinful woman striven,
Through the dying thief forgiven,
Thou to me a hope hast given.

Worthless are my prayers and sighing,
Yet, good Lord, in grace complying,
Rescue me from fire undying.

With thy favoured sheep O place me,
Nor among the goats abase me,
But to thy right hand upraise me.

When the wicked are confounded,
Doomed to flames of woe unbounded,
Call me, with thy saints surrounded.

Low I kneel, with heart's submission!
See, like ashes my contrition!
Help me in my last condition!

Ah! that day of tears and mourning!
From the dust of earth returning,
Man for judgement must prepare him;

Spare, O God, in mercy spare him!
Lord, all pitying, Jesu blest,
Grant them thine eternal rest. Amen.

Sanctus, Benedictus

Holy, holy, holy,
Lord God of Sabaoth!
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.

Agnus Dei

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

Responsory: Libera Me

Free me, Lord, from eternal death, on that terrifying day,
When the heaven shall be moved and the earth,
When you will come to judge the age in fire.
I am made to tremble and am afraid.
That day, a day of anger, of disaster and of misery,
a great day, and one truly bitter.
When you will come to judge the age in the fire.
Grant them eternal rest, Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.

INTERVAL

Edmund Rubbra (1901 - 1986)

Tenebrae Motets Op 72 - Third Nocturne

Third Nocturne

I. I was like an innocent lamb; I was led to the sacrifice and I knew it not, mine enemies conspired against me saying, Come let us put wood into his bread and root him out of the land of the living.

All mine enemies contrived mischief against me, they uttered a wicked speech against me, saying, Come, let us put wood into his bread, and root him out of the land of the living.

II. Could ye not watch one hour with me, ye that were ready to die for me? Or see ye not Judas, how he sleppeth not, but maketh haste to betray me to the Jews?

Why sleep ye? Arise, and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. Or see ye not Judas, how he sleppeth not, but maketh haste to betray me to the Jews.

III. The Elders of the people consulted together: How they might by craft apprehend Jesus and slay Him: with swords and clubs they went forth as to a thief.

The Priests and Pharisees held a council, How they might by craft apprehend Jesus and slay Him: with swords and clubs they went forth as to a thief.

Alberto Ginastera (1916 - 1983) - Lamentations of Jeremiah

The Argentinian composer Alberto Ginastera is widely regarded as one of the most important and original South American composer of the 20th century. His attractive output skillfully combines folk Argentine rhythms and colours with modern composing techniques. Exhilarating rhythmic energy, captivating lyricism and hallucinatory atmosphere are some of the characteristics of his musical style.

He had been born in Buenos Aires on April 11, 1916, the son of Catalanian and Italian immigrants devoted to agriculture, trade, and crafts. His father being Catalan, preferred to pronounce his surname with a soft 'g' and his name means 'clump of broom' in Catalan.

Ginastera began his music studies at a very early age. When he was 12 he entered the Williams Conservatory. His oeuvre covers all music genres. He composed three operas, five ballets, orchestra works, one harp concerto, two piano concertos, two cello concertos, one violin concerto, two choir works, cantatas, works for piano, voice, organ, flute, guitar, and chamber music.

He also composed music for the theatre and for eleven films. His total repertoire contains fifty five works, but being perfectionist and meticulous as he was, many of them were withdrawn from his catalogue.

In 1969, finding himself out of sympathy with the prevailing political climate in Argentina (indeed, he was twice ejected from his academic posts because of his protests against the repressive regime), Ginastera left the country, settling in Geneva, where he stayed until his death.

Ginastera remains a composer who has only ever been sporadically appreciated in Europe. Isolated works have had some success, such as his orchestral 'Variaciones concertantes' of 1953. His opera 'Bomarzo' did, for instance, receive London performances. But there has been a strong tendency to regard him as a 'petit maitre', a sort of Argentinian Bartok. But folk-lore was only ever the starting point in Ginastera's sonorous music. He sought in the rich rural folk tradition of his country not just thematic materials but something essential in the folk idiom itself that became generative in his own compositional process. The smooth adoption of the 12-tone method in the second movement of the *Piano Sonata No. 1* (1952) – a technique he used with ingenuity in works like the *Violin Concerto* (1963) and *Don Rodrigo* (1964) – was followed by experimentation with indeterminacy in compositions up to and including *Milena* (1971). By the time of his late works the folk influences are fully subsumed into a rich and multi-coloured modern idiom.

The "Lamentations of Jeremiah" is one of only three of Ginastera's works for chorus. Composed without commission in 1946, its texts were freely compiled by the composer from the book of Lamentations, and describe the defeat and exile of the Israelites by the Babylonians in the 6th century B.C. The piece also may reflect Ginastera's personal situation at the time, as he had been blacklisted that same year by the Perón government in Argentina, stripped of his teaching position, and forced to seek refuge in the U.S. He stayed until 1947. He then journeyed widely in America and Europe, returning to Argentina in 1955 when Perón was overthrown. The first movement is a chorus of bitter wailing and then protest to God, with biting harmonies and excited rhythms. In the closing bars the choir screams the name of God three times in rhythmic unison, but no comforting answer is heard.

The second movement is a stark contrast, with its long notes and low register, as if the prophet is too exhausted to speak above a whisper. The setting is particularly poignant at the end, where the choir, stripped of the sopranos, once again invokes the name of the Lord, but this time in the lowest possible range and at the softest dynamic. The closing movement turns from anger to acceptance of God's will and omnipotence "from generation to generation." In the final bars, to create a parallel with the other movements, Ginastera returns to an earlier text that ends with the word "Domino" (Lord), and sets that final word symbolically to a triumphant, major chord.

I.

"O, all you who pass this way, behold and see if there be any sorrow like my sorrow.
For the Lord has afflicted me, as he said in the day of his raging anger.
See, Lord, I am troubled; my bowels are disrupted, my heart is turned within me.
For I am full of bitterness: abroad the sword destroys, and at home is death.
For that reason I lament, and my eye pours down water;
for the consoler is taken from me, and my mind whirls around.
My sons are ruined, and the enemy grows strong.
You persist in fury, and you grind down those under the heavens."

II.

"I am the man who sees my impoverishment by the rod of His indignation.
He has drawn me in and suspended me in darkness, and not in light.
He has made my skin and my flesh old; He has broken my bones.
He has put me in dark places, as if with the eternally dead.
But whenever I cry out and plead, He shuts out my prayer.
And I said: my strength and hope have perished because of the Lord."

III.

"Remember, Lord, what has come upon us; look and consider our disgrace.
Turn us around to you, Lord, and we will be turned; renew our days as in the beginning.
You, however, O Lord, will remain forever, your throne through the generations."