

Memento Mori

A Guide to Contemporary Memorial Music

Robert Chase



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Introduction

Elements of the ancient Gregorian requiem mass have been around for more than 1,500 years, the liturgy of which was completed with the addition of the medieval sequence hymn, *Dies irae*, at the time of the Tridentine Council (1543–1553). The first extant polyphonic requiem was penned by no less a figure than Johannes Ockeghem. During the early Renaissance, only a handful of such works were created. In the high Renaissance, a much larger number of polyphonic requiems were composed. During the baroque and classical eras, the production of the decorative requiem continued and expanded greatly.

In the middle years of the nineteenth century, an attempt to restore to the liturgy the musical purity and aesthetic ideals associated with Gregorian chant and Renaissance polyphonic choral style was begun by Franz Xavier Witt (1834–1888). This reform was known as the Caecilian Movement. While the movement experienced some success, it was never able to stem the flood of new, grandiose, concert versions of the romantic requiem mass. The requiem mass, envisioned originally as a modest yet serious liturgical celebration of human life and death, was gradually transported, during the romantic era, from the church sanctuary into the concert hall setting.

Despite the enormous influence of war, materialism, and secular humanism, there have been numerous requiem settings written during the twentieth century. The topic and text has not yet lost its ancient appeal.

The first half of the twentieth century witnessed a flourishing of the ultraconservative “Caecilian” style of requiem setting. These compositions are practical, liturgical pieces based on Gregorian chant or a polyphonic Renaissance style that was widely used in churches that possessed

choirs of modest or large size. Typical examples of this style are the works of Austrian and German composers, such as Vincenzo Goller, Joseph Gruber, Peter Griesbacher, and Johann Meurer, as well as the Italians Pietro Yon, Vincenzo Tommasini, Lorenzo Perosi, and Agostino Donini. The large number of church musicians influenced by Cecilianism allowed for the creation of dozens of such pieces.

At the same time, “concert” versions of the requiem, composed in late romantic style, appear to be somewhat more rare. Included in this latter group are compositions of Otto Olsson (1901), George Henschel (1901), Healey Willan (1912–1918), Ildebrando Pizzetti (1922), Guido Guerrini (1942), Maurice Duruflé (1947), and Lucien Aube (1947).

There are only a few requiem settings dating from this era that possess independent texts—texts that eschew traditional Latin poetry. Included are works by Alexander Kastalsky (1916), Frederic Delius (1913–1916), Hugo Kaun (1921), and John Foulds (1920).

Benjamin Britten seems to be the first composer to “gloss” the traditional Latin text with nonliturgical poetry (in this case, the war poems of Wilfrid Owen) in his *War Requiem* (1961). Just two years later, Dimitry Kabalevsky composed a version of the war requiem, one based completely on a text of Robert Rozhdestvensky. Without doubt, Britten’s watershed work established new textual norms and opened up vistas for composers wishing to write ever more personal settings of the venerable Latin requiem text. Finally, and most importantly, it led to the production of more personal requiem settings for the concert hall.

In fact, the bulk of compositions described within the covers of this book were composed in the last half of the twentieth century and the beginning years of the twenty-first. If the first half of the century appears to be somewhat quiescent, its second half witnessed a virtual explosion of styles and colors. The contemporary concert requiem of this period has many faces and sonorities. Within the vast panorama of twentieth-century musical style, virtually every “ism” has been utilized by one or another composer. Impressionism is represented by the requiem settings of Desire-Emile Inghelbrecht (1940–1941), Maurice Duruflé (1947), and Jean-Marie Bernard (2003). Among those who explored expressionism were Boris Blacher (1958), Rafael Kubelik (1961), György Ligeti (1963–1965), Eric Urbanner (1982–1983), Renaud Gagneux (1982), Andrew Imbrie (1984), Volker David Kirchner (1988), Vidmantis Bartulis (1989), and Erkki Sven Tüür (1994). Modern, mainstream, dissonant tonality was employed by a majority of composers, including Jean Rivier (1953), Elinor Warren (1966), Joonas Kokkonen (1979), Roger Calmel (1979), James Stevens (1984), Franco Mannino (1987), Krzysztof Penderecki (1980–1993), Osvaldas Balakauskas (1995), Remigijus Šileika (1997), Antonio Anichini (2001), John Harbison (2001), and Peter Sculthorpe (2003–2004).

Echoes of the musical past can be heard in the neo-Renaissance and neomedieval settings of Georges Migot (1953), Humphrey Clucas (1988), Javier Busto (1997), Morten Lauridsen (1997), Amaral Vieira (1998), Jean-Pierre Sciau (1998), Robert Hugill (2000), and Patricia Van Ness (2004), while neoromantic sensibilities make their reappearance in the work of Roman Maciejewski (1945–1959), Marc Eychenne (1989), and Somtow Sucharitkul (2002).

The repertory of war requiem is peculiar to the twentieth century, an era of so many wars and so much bloodshed. Among the World War I requiems are those by Alexander Kastalsky (1916), Frederic Delius (1913–1916), and John Foulds (1920). For World War II, an even greater number of war requiems are on record: Yuri Levitin (1946), Benjamin Britten (1961), Dimitry Kabalevsky (1962–1963), Rudolph Mauersberger (1947–1948), Rolf Schweizer (1995), and the massive *Requiem of Reconciliation* (1995), written by a collective of composers. Mirrors of the century, they reflect the carnage of both great world wars. A subset of the war requiem is the Holocaust requiem. Examples include Ronald Senator's *Holocaust Requiem* (1981) and Zlata Razdolina's *Requiem: The Song of the Murdered Jewish People* (1997).

For the September 11, 2001, attack on the World Trade Center, there is the requiem setting of Somtow Sucharitkul (2002). Period-appropriate requiems for the victims of AIDS include James Adler's *Memento mori* (1996), Christopher Lacy's *Requiem* (1989), and Gareth Valentine's *Requiem* (1992). Jazz-influenced requiems include those settings by Nils Lindberg (1992) and Ladislav Simon (1992). A spectacular setting that includes rock, jazz, and reggae was penned by William Harper (1996). Paweł Łukaszewski made a setting of the *Requiem Vespers* (1995).

Among the most novel of the twentieth-century requiem settings are those of Virgil Thomson (1960), who used the whole-tone scale and bitonality; Luboš Fišer (1968), who bequeathed to Iron Curtain Czechoslovakia an aleatoric requiem; Toby Twining (1999), who employed just intonation to an unaccompanied chorus; and Agostino Donini (1901), who used the texts of the Ambrosian rite.

While the requiem is generally considered to be a Christian ritual, there exists a wide variety of memorial music that embraces a diversity of religious philosophies. There are the two major Buddhist requiems, one a setting of the *Amitabha Sutra* by Chien Nan-Chang (2001) and one a setting of the *Lotus Sutra* by James Stevens (1984); three Armenian memorial works, two by Khachatur Avetisyan (late 1980s and 1989) and one by Hampartzoum Berberian (1972); and a concert version of the Greek Orthodox liturgy, composed by Mikis Theodorakis (1985). Jewish memorial works include those of Eric Zeisl (1944–1945), Max Helfman (1965), Max Janowski (1966), and Wilfrid Josephs (1965).

Protestant-style requiems are defined as those appropriate to worship in mainline Protestant (Congregational, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist) churches. The texts for these works include free prayers, prayers from the *Book of Common Worship*, and psalms but none of the traditional Latin texts associated with the Roman Catholic liturgy. Settings by Richard Smith (1998), Craig Phillips (1997), John Leavitt (1998–2000), and Nancy Hill Cobb (1996) fall within this category, as do the several Latvian requiems (Viktors Baštiks, Emīlis Melngailis) contained within this volume.

The only entry in this volume for the Anglican-style memorial service is the *Requiem* for unaccompanied voices and soli, composed by Eleanor Daley in 1993. Other contemporary works in this tradition were penned by Henry Davies (1915), Herbert Howells (1936), John Rutter (1985), and James Bingham (1998–1999).

Finally, there are a number of traditional Roman Catholic requiems designed for usage in the requiem mass. Those works include Malcom Archer (1992), Jean-Marie Bernard (2003), Cyrillus Kreek (1925–1927), George Lloyd (1997–1998), Colin Mawby (2002), Licinio Refice (early 1900s), Helen Tobias Duesberg (1999), and Raymond Torres-Santos (1995).

One of the most significant, contemporary developments in the requiem form is the personalizing of the liturgy by the addition of texts, both contemporary and ancient, to the traditional Latin text. These texts form a type of gloss (reflection) on the venerable words of the Roman Catholic requiem.

During the nineteenth century, the first, tentative attempts to replace the elegant Roman liturgy with other texts, more modern, took place. Friedrich Hebbel's (1813–1863) poem *Requiem* seems to be one of the earliest secular texts widely employed. Brahms employed various biblical passages in his beloved *Ein Deutsches Requiem*. Early in the twentieth century, Foulds and Kastalsky employed nonliturgical texts and Delius a secular text.

From such modest beginnings came the proliferation of traditional liturgical texts, glossed with modern poetry, prose, and prayer, from the middle of the twentieth century on. The first significant, influential gloss on the traditional Latin text is found in Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* (1961). In this work, the Latin liturgy is intermingled with the language of Wilfrid Owen's war poems. This stellar work has served as a model for a large number of later composers. Anichini glossed ecumenically with philosophical texts drawn from Sufi, Muslim, Hindu, Hebrew, and Taoist sources. Danielpour chose poetry of Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Michael Harper, and H. D. Doolittle. Somtow employed poems of Emily Dickenson and C. S. Lewis. Andrew Imbrie favored William Blake, George Herbert, and John Donne. Schweizer made an important statement in his *Requiem—23.02.1945 Für Tote und Lebende* by using "sacred" poetry

of five German poetesses: Lola Landau, Frohmut Schweizer, Gertrud von le Fort, Claire Goll, and Hildegard Wohlgemuth. John Tavener employed texts of St. Blathac, Henry Vaughan, and Cardinal Newman and an immense amount of children's nonsense rhymes and singing games. Robert Wittinger (*Maldoror Requiem*) engulfs the Latin text with a stream-of-consciousness text by Martin Grzimek, a free German paraphrase of Lautréamont's French original. The list goes on and on.

A number of composers have completely abandoned texts of the Latin rite and the Bible. Sandro Gorli wrote his own poetry. Edgar Grana set a major text by Kurt Vonnegut in his secular requiem setting. The Armenian composers Khachatur Avetisyan and Hampartzoum Berberian employed completely original poetry.

The number of women who have composed requiem (or memorial music) settings appears to be on the increase. My first book, *Dies Irae: A Guide to Requiem Music* (2003), listed only Elinor Remick Warren, who composed a requiem in 1966. This volume includes a greater number, including Eleanor Daley (1993), Teresa Procaccini (1984), Helen Tobias-Duesberg (2002), and Patricia Van Ness (2004).

Some readers will be surprised to discover that several of the more famous contemporary requiem settings are not described in this monograph. Such works include those of Rutter, Britten, and Duruflé. The omission of these works is not accidental; rather, these compositions were already discussed in my earlier requiem book, and I did not want to revisit this territory. There is one addition to the repertory discussed in this volume that dates from 1885. It is a work too good not to be mentioned in a requiem guide, so I chose to include *Requiem* by Alfred Bruneau. It is actually more "modern" harmonically than a large number of early twentieth-century requiem settings.

Although most of the compositions covered in this volume have been chosen because of a connection to the ancient requiem text, some possess independent texts, while others have both the ancient liturgical text glossed by a more recent poetry. It needs to be mentioned that there is a large number of contemporary requiem that do not employ the traditional Latin text. My own preference has been to discuss those works with ties to this medieval text. That this relationship to tradition remains notable and important is evident. The requiem mass, recently celebrated for the funeral of Pope John Paul II (March 2005), employed the 1,500-year-old Gregorian melodies of the early Christian church.

The question might be asked, Why a book on the contemporary requiem and memorial music? A major part of the response must be: to acquaint the present day choirmaster, choral director, orchestra conductor, and the musical public (however that may be defined) with an outstanding repertory that is little known by any of the previously mentioned individuals. In the

world of choral music, only a handful of memorial compositions get performed, often with mind-numbing regularity, while a perfectly wonderful repertory remains languishing for a public audition. Many of the works listed and described in these pages are truly excellent. Perhaps a handful may be genuine masterpieces.

A second goal is to make a historical record of the efforts of those composers who, during the past century, have put forth the painstaking labor to create a valuable testimony in the form of a requiem or memorial work, a form that has been with us longer than the quartet, piano sonata, or symphony. Furthermore, there appears to be a sustained, growing interest in this musical form that concerns itself with the "last things."

I have deliberately avoided labeling this or that work because one person's taste is a poor measure by which to judge the worth or value of a particular work, and it was never my intention to estimate the value of a composition. Obviously some pieces are better written than others, but virtually all compositions listed herein are worthy of our collective attention.

Chapter 1

James Adler, November 19, 1950

James Adler is a graduate of the Curtis Institute (piano, 1973, and master of composition, 1976). Compositions teachers were Myron Fink, Francesco Caruso, and Rudolph Ganz. He is currently on the faculty of Saint Peter's College, New Jersey. Known as a composer, conductor, and performer, he is the author of one of the several requiems devoted to those who died from AIDS.

Adler has composed for a variety of media: orchestra: *Suite Moderne for Strings*, *Classic Rag-time Suite*, *A Suite for Strings*; orchestra and solo instrument: *Concerto in G for Piano*; solo works: *Three Piano Transitions*; opera: *Herbie and Carnie: A Dinosaga* [children's "pOpera"]; chamber music: *Psalm for Michael* (oboe, cello, piano); film music: *The Hat Act*; vocal music: *Reflections upon a September Morn* (mezzo-soprano, oboe, English horn, piano), *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (TTBB choir, piano or chamber orchestra), *On the Rebound* (SATB or TTBB choir), *Canticle of Peace*, *Carols of Splendour* (SATB or TTBB choir, keyboard or orchestra), *A Winter Triptych* (SATB or TTBB choir, horn, harp, piano), *El Noi de La Mare* [Catalan Carol], *The Haunting* (soprano, clarinet, piano), *A Modern Psalm*, and *Memento mori*. Most works are published by AdlerOaks Music Library, Arista Music Co., Warner Bros., and Colle Voce Music.

Composed in the mid-1990s, *Memento mori* bears eloquent witness to the holocaust created by the AIDS epidemic of the late twentieth century. Its premiere took place on April 13, 1996, performed by the Atlanta Gay Men's Chorus, David Puckett, conductor. It is scored for TTBB chorus, mezzo-soprano and baritone soloists, and orchestra.

Two versions of the orchestral accompaniment exist: one for full orchestra and one for chamber ensemble. The harmonic language of *Memento*

mori is in the lineage of the traditional “modernist” style of Benjamin Britten, Leonard Bernstein, and Richard Rodney Bennett.

The pervasive mood of sadness, characteristic of this work, is relieved only by the somewhat lighter tone of the *Sanctus*. Choral voicings range from unison and two-part writing as well as four-part (*divisi*) arrangements. While much of the texture is chordal or homophonic, there exists a large portion of elaboration and imitative polyphony. *Judex ergo* is set as a fugue.

Fragments of the Gregorian *Dies irae* melody appear in the second movement. Glosses on the traditional Latin texts of this very personal requiem are provided by the poetry of Quentin Crisp and Bill Weaver as well as texts by Philip Justin Smith and Denise Stokes. The *Yizkor* prayer, recited on Yom Kippur Day, is employed in the third movement.

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 (Chamber Orchestration)
 European American Music Distributors (Rental Library)
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 New York, NY 10010
 1995, 2000
 155 pp.

Duration

Nine movements, 1,361 mm., ca. 75 minutes

Scoring

Two formats: Chamber orchestration (15 players) or full orchestration (23–27 players)

TTBB choir

Soloists: mezzo-soprano, tenor, baritone

Orchestra: string quintet, pic. fl., alto fl. (1 player), ob., Eh. (1 player), cl., bcl. (1 player), bsn., Fh., tpt., tbn., harp, piano, organ

Percussion: bass drum, glockenspiel, snare drum, suspended cymbal, tam-tam, temple blocks, timpani, triangle, tubular bells, wood block, xylophone

Structure

Requiem aeternam (181 mm.)

Arranged in three large sections, movement 1 begins with a setting of *Requiem aeternam*, set for TTBB chorus. The text unfolds in a solemn pro-

cession. The succeeding section, scored for mezzo-soprano solo, employs Quentin Crisp's *Now I Am Dead* . . .

Now I am dead; the cold, square house is shut.
Where once I used to live and wonder why,
And every dark, uncurtained eye,
Though bleak before, is now a shade more bleak.

Upon the blue-green lawns the starlings strut
Where once I stood and hoped that I might die;
They strut and lance with sudden beak
The blue-green blades that on one comes to shut.

And on the pathways, tended now no more,
The raindrops, gathered on the underside
Of leafless boughs, drip as they dripped before,
And here I walk and wonder why I died.

The ultimate section functions as a coda, with a nod to the *Kyrie eleison* text.

Dies irae (422 mm.)

The second movement is divided into three major sections, and only an abbreviated portion of the sequence text is employed. Section 1 is scored for TTBB chorus and employs verses 1–3 of *Dies irae*. Polyphonic texture and a variety of choral scorings are employed. Section 2, *Mors stupebit* (verses 4–5), is scored for eight unaccompanied singers, arranged in two ensembles (TTTBar/TTBarB), supported only by a double bass violin. The ultimate section is ushered in by an orchestral introduction, followed by a fugue on *Judex ergo* (verses 6–8). A brief coda on *Rex tremendae* concludes the movement.

Yizkor (82 mm.)

Movement 3 is scored for baritone solo, flute solo, piano, double bass, and TTBB chorus. While the baritone sings the *Yizkor* prayer in Hebrew, the men's chorus provides its translation into English. Most of the choral writing is unison, although there are occasional two-part passages. The baritone solo is written in an elaborate florid style, typical of cantorial cantillation.

May God remember the souls of those who have gone to their world.

In this merit, may their soul be bound in the Bond of life,

With the souls Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob;

Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah;

And with the other righteous men and women in the

Garden of Eden. And let us say: Amen.

Almighty, full of mercy, who dwells on high,
Grant proper rest on the wings of the Divine Presence,

In the exalted spheres of the holy and pure
 who shine like the glow of the firmament
 for the [friends of my soul] who have gone to their world.
 May the Garden of Eden be their resting place.
 Therefore, may the merciful one shelter them in the
 shelter of his wings for eternity;
 and bind their souls in the Bond of Life.
 May the Lord be their heritage, and may they
 rest in their repose in peace.
 And let us say: Amen.

The Wounded (Ingemisco) (106 mm.)

Movement 4 is a setting of *The Wounded* by Quentin Crisp. It is scored for mezzo-soprano solo, TTBB (eight parts), and orchestra.

What shall we say, who cringed and live,
 to those who fought and died,
 and what excuses shall we give?
 Where can we hide?

If there's a heaven, there they live.
 Our hell is at their side.
 Whether they blame or, worse, forgive,
 Where can we hide?

What can we do that will assuage,
 for those who live, blameless and their rage
 that it was vain?

There are no words that we can give
 to those who fought and died,
 to beg for pardon that we live.
 Where can we hide?

Lacrymosa (85 mm.)

Movement 5 is a setting of verses 18–19 of *Dies irae* (*Lacrymosa*), and its gloss comes from an unfinished play by Philip Justin Smith. After the TTBB choir sings two verses from the medieval sequence text, the baritone soloist narrates Smith's text.

I awoke that morning having slept for maybe two hours. I heard that sound.
 David was lying in bed with his mouth open and his eyes rolled back.
 The sound rose out of him like a dried gourd, slowly shaking.
 I knew today I was saying goodbye.
 I checked the condom catheter we used because he couldn't
 walk to the bathroom. It was full of blood.
 It had backlogged and when I tried to remove it,
 both David and I were covered in blood. Baptized.
 I held him in my lap, cradled him.

That man who meant everything to me.
 And I sang "Hush, little baby, don't you cry . . ."
 And I prayed. Time passed without being noticed.
 The room became thick with bands of silver and gold light.
 It was as if all the people who had passed before had come to help my lover die.
 Breath like a cry and all the world adjusted itself to life without David.

Sanctus.Holy.Kadosh (99 mm.)

The *Sanctus* is the least somber movement of *Memento mori*. It is scored for soprano solo, TTBB chorus, and orchestra. While the soloist and choir sing the Latin *Sanctus* text, the choral baritones sing its Hebrew ancestor, *Kadosh*. The prevailing texture of *Sanctus* and *Hosanna* is polyphonic.

Pie Jesu (101 mm.)

This movement is scored for soprano solo, TTBB chorus, and orchestra and is divided into three principal sections. Following a brief orchestral introduction, the soprano soloist sings *Pie Jesu*. The two-part TT/BB choir presents the text, *Lamb of God (Agnus Dei)*. A concluding section interweaves both texts together.

Lux aeterna (165 mm.)

The penultimate movement of *Memento mori* is scored for tenor and soprano soloists. The first section employs the text *Lux aeterna*, set for tenor and orchestra, while the second section uses a narrative text, *The Park Flickers*, by Denise Stokes.

Today I went to the park. I molded with the crowd and lit my candle
 and began a journey. Blindly at first, I marched down Pennsylvania
 Avenue. Each step of my foot covering a moment in my mind.
 One foot forward and there was that little girl I used to know. Another
 short step and I knew that the shining armor and white horse were dreams of dust.
 One more foot and the last box of childhood joys was neatly packed away.
 Ahead, a flicker broke my reverie. It was then that I knew this was not a
 strange journey.
 I was strong then. For they knew where they were going . . . and they had
 already gone.
 Beside me there were flickers. It was then that I was angry.
 Angry at the injustice of it all.
 Somebody stole yesterday, cried rain on today and hid tomorrow's sun.
 All the malice that I must accept from you who watch my journey
 and pretend it's not yours too. Rage kept my feet one in front of the other.
 On I marched until I could feel the heat of so many flickers I was
 sure we were blazing. Behind me there were flickers.
 It was then that I was sad. Sad because fear has frozen
 your tongues and makes you answer your children's
 questions with still lips. And all those who are stricken
 by self-righteousness have barred the doors to the House of

God as if to deny us Heaven.
 Then, I turned and was drowned by that sea of flickers.
 Those that had followed. Those who marched, too.
 I pondered those those lives . . . all those lives.
 It was then that I knew what I must do.
 I carried my small flicker away from the others. Back out into the darkness.
 To those that were blinded by ignorance. To unbar the church door.
 To answer the children. To embrace my sister. To carry my brother.
 To hope that my flicker could help them to see, to know, to feel.
 Now there are many windy days. They try to silence me in a wisp of smoke.
 But nothing short of my last breath can do that.

Survival (120 mm.)

The final movement is scored for baritone and soprano soli, TTBB chorus, and orchestra. The poem, *The Survivor*, used here, is taken from *Plague Songs* by Bill Weaver. Adler has divided this movement into four principal sections. After an orchestral introduction, the narrator (baritone) begins the recitation *I am weary* . . .

I am weary of waking every day to the facts of AIDS.
 My spirit wilts, yet I must keep busy to cope.
 If holding him and pampering him could make it go away, then he'd be well.
 But well is a relative thing. Better, yes: well, no.
 This horrific virus can kill our bodies but not our souls.
 We will affirm life every day that we have left.

The second major section of the movement begins with the following:

I hate being a "short-time companion," I want a very long time for us.
 A glance over the edge terrifies me. I can't give him up;
 I'm not ready. Ready or not, here we go.
 Bless us God, we need help. Make me stronger than I feel.

Section 3, a setting of *Chorus angelorum*, is scored for soprano solo and orchestra.

Chorus angelorum . . .

The work concludes with *Requiem aeternam* scored for TTBB chorus and a passage for soprano solo (obbligato) that reaches up to a high D7 and concluding high B flat 6.

Discography

Albany Records. Troy 463. AmorArtis Chorale & Orchestra, Johannes Somary, conductor.