

Written by Frederick Morden

Tuesday, 28 February 2012 06:44

- [Discount - Microsoft Office 2011 Home & Student Family Pack MAC](#)
 - [Discount - Adobe Creative Suite 6 Design & Web Premium](#)
 - [Buy Cheap Adobe Creative Suite 6 Design Standard MAC](#)
 - [Buy Cheap Autodesk Maya 2012 \(64-bit\)](#)
 - [Buy Cheap Roxio Copy & Convert 3](#)
 - [Buy Excel 2007 For Dummies Quick Reference \(en\)](#)
 - [Discount - Nik Software Complete Collection 2013 MAC](#)
 - [Download Ashampoo Movie Shrink And Burn 3](#)
 - [Download Adobe Edge Animate CC \(Full LifeTime License\)](#)
 - [Buy Microsoft Windows XP Professional SP3 \(32 bit\)](#)
- [\(en,it,fr,de,es,da,nl,ja,ar,bg,br,ch,cs,el,et,fi,he,hr,hu,ko,lt,lv,no,pl,pt,ro,ru,sk,sl,sv,th,tr\)](#)
- [Download Cheetah 3D 5 MAC](#)
 - [Discount - Excel 2013 All-in-One For Dummies](#)
 - [Buy OEM Infinite Skills - Learning Adobe Audition CC MAC](#)

The March concerts by the Quad City Symphony Orchestra feature just one work, and the imposingly somber title alone might give their potential audience pause: *War Requiem*. It is a difficult and complex work, and a mammoth undertaking for the symphony and its performance partners. But understanding composer Benjamin Britten's goals and methods can illuminate the experience of his anti-war masterwork and help attendees make the most of this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

While the Latin text for the requiem mass ("*Missa pro Defunctis*") has remained unchanged for hundreds of years, Britten's *War Requiem*

– written in 1961 – employs a rigorous and dynamic modern musical approach, from melodic counterpoint to the expansion of harmony, from a simple portable organ to the instrumental demands of a large-scale requiem. The forces Britten requires are massive: one large adult choir, one boy's choir, three vocal soloists, one small chamber orchestra, two organs, and a full symphony orchestra augmented with additional winds and percussion instruments – antique cymbals, vibraphone, castanets, Chinese blocks, and whip.

War Requiem comes with not only a contemporary sound but Britten's inventive insertion of English-language poems by British World War I soldier Wilfred Owen between the traditional Latin movements.

There are stark differences between the subject matter of the Latin and English texts. The Latin

Written by Frederick Morden

Tuesday, 28 February 2012 06:44

concerns the spiritual relationship between God and man's soul in sections titled "Day of Judgment," "Lamb of God," and "Deliver Me," while Owen's poems speak to the soldier's earthly concerns and experiences – political deceit, the sounds of war, death, and ruined lives – with titles such as "Anthem for Doomed Youth," "The Next War," and "Futility." This interweaving of both languages and their words creates tension between religious ideals and the realities of war.

Owen's religious references are often sharp, at one point describing a gun as "towering toward heaven, about to curse." Dark humor shows itself with "we whistled while he shaved us with his scythe." In one haunting simultaneous presentation, male soloists sing of the dead lost in World War I – "but slew half the seed of Europe, one by one" – while the boy's choir sings, "*Hostias et preces tibi Domine laudis offerimus*" ("Sacrifice and prayers we offer thee, Lord").

To further hone the differences between the liturgical and secular texts, Britten divides the musicians into three groups, placing them in different locations in the concert hall. The first group includes a large orchestra, choir, and soprano soloist using the traditional Latin text. Nearby is the second group, made up of the baritone and tenor soloists who perform Owen's English poetry accompanied by a small chamber orchestra. At a distance and with a second conductor, the third group – with the boy's choir and a positif (small, portable organ) – performs in Latin and symbolizes heavenly hosts and the innocent soldiers of the future. The groups alternate, interact, and eventually perform together near the end of the composition, and their separation and placement add a visually dramatic component to the performance.

For the Latin words, Britten used the traditional choral style of imitating a fixed melody, in one case developing into a fugue. This and other compositional techniques that represent the requiem's musical roots are combined with contemporary harmonies and irregular rhythmic meters. In stunning contrast, Owen's realistic poetry is small in scope and performed with a translucent chamber orchestra and clear, clean, single solo voices.

Britten's treatment of musical themes and text through their instrumental accompaniments reveals his understanding of the languages and the emotional weight he wants attached to their words. He adorns, satirizes, and affects their meaning much like an actor would do with timing and vocal nuance. Britten adjusts rhythms to hold out important words and stops the accompaniment abruptly when he wants an unequivocal message to be understood.

Written by Frederick Morden

Tuesday, 28 February 2012 06:44

Considering the musical forces at his disposal, Britten – in an act of great artistic humility – leads us reverently to the central theme of his requiem in the quiet “*Agnus Dei*” (“Lamb of God”) movement. Combining both English and Latin, he reveals his pacifist belief through a tenor solo singing, “But they who love the greater love, lay down their life: they do not hate” – referring to the teachings of Christianity. In the background, the choir softly sings, “

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi

” (“Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world”), and the music brings everything to a resolute F-sharp-major cadence. The tenor finishes the movement with a small codetta: “

Dona nobis pacem

” (“Grant us peace”).

This is genius at work here, a synthesis of centuries of liturgical and artistic tradition that coalesces into a plea from both the living and the dead against what Scottish poet Robert Burns called “man’s inhumanity to man.” Britten has fashioned a work of timeless significance, a requiem for every fallen soldier, every grieved heart, and everyone who wants to change our darker nature. His goal in the Latin text is to offer eternal rest for the souls of the dead, and in Owen’s poetry to bring peace to the Earth for the living.

If you’re a first-time *War Requiem* listener, I would strongly recommend the maestro’s “Inside the Music” discussion in the Davenport Club of the Hotel Blackhawk on Thursday, March 1, at 5:30 p.m. Also, in the concert hall an hour before each performance, “Concert Conversations” with Kai Swanson provide astute information. In the printed program, you’ll find the Latin-to-English translations that provide a good performance map and Dennis Loftin’s valuable contextual program notes.

War Requiem will be performed March 3 at the Adler Theatre and March 4 at Augustana College’s Centennial Hall. For more information, visit

QCSymphony.com .

Frederick Morden is a retired orchestra-music director, conductor, composer, arranger, educator, and writer who has served on the executive board of the Conductors Guild. He can be reached at f.morden@mchsi.com .