

Gabriel Faure

Requiem

Introit & Kyrie

Offertoire

Sanctus

Pie Jesu

Agnus Dei

Libera me

In paradisum

During his lifetime, Faure's music was regarded by the conservative elements in French music as being dangerously modern, and he did do much to encourage younger composers, including Ravel, for example, to develop their own personal identity, or at least a non-German identity. Yet his *Requiem* bears a closer relationship in spirit to Brahms's gentle and consolatory *Deutsche Requiem* than to the massed brass-and-drum artillery of Berlioz's apocalyptic *Grande Messe des Morts*. For Faure, a *requiem* is a preparation for eternal rest, rather than for eternal torment. So there is no daunting *dies irae* or menacing *tuba mirum* in the work. Instead we have a reserved delicacy and refinement.

The requiem's original 1887 version contained just five movements: the *Offertory* and *Libera me* were added in 1893. Various arrangements of this seven-movement work survive, one of the most popular being John Rutter's 1983 version.

Faure is generous with his melodies. It's not just the sopranos who get the good tunes; the tenors, in particular, do really well. After the chant-like opening, the *Introit and Kyrie* gives them the main theme, to which the sopranos reply with *te decet hymnus* – A brief *Kyrie* – uses the same melody before subsiding gently into silence.

The *Offertory* starts with an eerily soft canon between altos and tenors. A baritone soloist, accompanied by mildly syncopated rocking figures, takes over with *Hostias et preces* – The three lower voices repeat the opening section and, after "Save them, Lord, from the darkness of hell", a distant, but typically graceful, key change shines a redemptive light on the final *Amen*.

In the *Sanctus*, after a tentative entrance, the sopranos and tenors gradually gain confidence leading up to a full-blooded *Hosanna in excelsis*. The organ provides a serene ending. This tranquillity is maintained in the familiar *Pie Jesu*, in which an angelic soprano line only rises up occasionally to *mezzoforte* in the repeated supplications of *dona eis requiem* ("grant them rest").

The tenors return to centre stage again in the *Agnus Dei*, interrupted halfway by beguiling harmonies in all four voices. Via a sustained *Lux* in the sopranos, Faure then takes us on a sinuous journey back through the more subdued keys of the previous two movements in preparation for one of the few loud passages in the work, "with all thy saints in endless glory for thy mercy's sake". The masterly chromatic voyage ends up in a triumphant A major. This heralds a return to the opening *Requiem aeternum*. The optimistic D major of the organ *coda* suggests that Faure has faith in a merciful God.

Libera me begins with a plaintive baritone solo. The choir responds very timidly at first but becomes alarmed and fearful in the work's only direct reference to the Day of Judgement, *dies illa, dies irae*. But the music gradually climbs out of this tense darkness into a sharper, brighter key for *lux perpetua* ("eternal light"), Faure once again expressing optimism in the face of death. The *libera me* plea is repeated and the movement ends quietly with widely-spread chords.

In paradisum gives the sopranos the last word. This delightful movement acts as an epilogue, summing up the work's reassuring message. There is delicacy and refinement throughout. While a 'chorus of angels' 'sings us to our rest', the other voices merely provide harmonic support at the 'semi-colons' during the movement and at the final cadential 'full-stop'.