Maurice Duruflé
Requiem, Opus 9

MAURICE DURUFLÉ was born in Louviers, France, on January 11, 1902, and died in Paris June 16, 1986. He composed the first version of the Requiem—for full orchestra, organ, soprano and baritone soloists, and chorus—in 1947, subsequently making several other arrangements of the piece (see below). The premiere of the first version was a radio broadcast of a performance from the Salle Gaveau in Paris on November 2, 1947. Roger Désormière conducted the Orchestre National, Chœurs de la Radio, vocal soloists Hélène Bouvier, mezzo-soprano, and Camille Maurane, baritone, and organist Henriette Roget.

IN ADDITION TO CHORUS AND SOLOISTS, the score of Duruflé’s Requiem calls for two flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets and bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, cymbals, bass drum, tam-tam, celesta, harp, organ, and strings. The organist in these concerts is Heinrich Christensen.

When composer and organist Maurice Duruflé completed his Requiem in 1947, he joined a weighty lineage of composers who wrote a Mass for the Dead based on the Latin liturgical texts. And yet, while the Mass settings by composers such as Mozart and Verdi are known in part for their formidable depictions of fear and judgment, Duruflé’s Requiem is suffused with a luminous quality, uniquely expressed in a blend of French harmony and Gregorian chant that is both serene and powerful. The resulting work is a subtle and moving contemplation of the mystery of the afterlife, and an intimate reflection of the composer’s deeply held religious beliefs.

Duruflé’s fascination with liturgical music began during his time at a choir school serving the Rouen cathedral. He spent many unhappy years at this strict Catholic institution, where his parents had enrolled him against his wishes when he was ten years old. He later recalled, however, with what awe he encountered the religious music of the cathedral, writing in his memoirs, “It was there, in this display of grandeur, surrounded by these liturgical and musical riches, that I had my calling as an organist.” He went on to study with some of the greatest French organists of his time, first with Jules Haelling in Rouen, then with Charles Tournemire and Louis Vierne in Paris, assisting the latter at Notre Dame. He entered the Conservatoire de Paris in 1920, studying organ with Eugène Gigout and composition with Paul Dukas, and won premier prix in five subjects. He later taught harmony at the Conservatoire from 1943 to 1970, and toured as a performer with his wife, organist Marie-Madeleine Duruflé; together they also shared the role of organist for Saint-Étienne-du-Mont in Paris.

As a composer, Duruflé wrote mostly for organ, piano, or choir, although his meticulous and exacting process resulted in very few published pieces. This carefully selected oeuvre became an important part of the Gregorian chant revival in 20th-century French music. The renewed interest in medieval music had gradually resulted from efforts by the Church to stem the decline of liturgical practice, and the preservation of chant was even one of the founding principles of the Schola Cantorum, one of Paris’s premier music institutions. By the time Duruflé began composing, the revival had fostered significant developments in reconciling chant to the constraints of contemporary compositional technique. Because medieval chant has no meter, the challenge lay in adjusting it to modern systems of rhythmic division without compromising its...
inherent fluidity and sense of freedom. Duruflé drew from the method devised by the Solesmes monks, which groups notes into units of two or three, displacing them from a regularly occurring pulse and retaining the suppleness of the musical line.

Duruflé had been working on an organ suite based on chant melodies from the Mass for the Dead when the Durand publishing company approached him for a symphonic poem, motivating him to develop the suite material into a Requiem. He worked with characteristic fastidiousness, proceeding slowly and hampered by self-criticism, but he completed it in September 1947, dedicating it to the memory of his father. It was only after consulting many others for encouragement and advice, including Nadia Boulanger and Marcel Dupré, that he deemed it worthy of public consumption. Even then, he nearly withdrew it from publication. In spite of his doubts, however, the Requiem became his most popular work.

The original scoring calls for chorus and mezzo-soprano and baritone soloists. Some performances, including the present ones, employ a children’s choir for certain passages and replace the solo roles with the choral ensemble, as Duruflé sometimes requested when on tour. The accompaniment exists in three versions: full orchestra and organ, reduced orchestra and organ, and organ solo, written in that order but published in 1950, 1961, and 1948, respectively. The work was premiered in its full orchestral version as part of a program broadcast on national radio to commemorate All Souls Day on November 2, 1947. The performance took place at the Salle Gaveau in Paris, with the Orchestre National conducted by Roger Désormière and the Chœurs de la Radio directed by Yvonne Gouverné, featuring soloists Hélène Bouvier and Camille Maurane, and organist Henriette Roget.

One reviewer commented that the Requiem was “outside of time,” aptly describing the effect of combining medieval melody with 20th-century harmonic scaffolding. The ancient modes used in chant blend with a typically French musical language, marked especially by key centers that shift by a third and block chords that move in parallel motion. Duruflé allows the liturgical texts to dictate the form of each movement, and a chant-like style remains at the core of the work’s conceptualization even when the original melodies are less explicitly invoked. An overall sense of serenity is due in part to Duruflé’s large-scale structural choices: he omits the wrathful Dies irae, keeping only its imploring Pie Jesu couplet, and adds the In Paradisum as the closing movement, shifting the focus from the threat of eternal damnation to the promise of forgiveness and eternal rest. In this way, his Requiem resembles Gabriel Fauré’s setting more than those of other major composers, and the two works are often compared to one another. While the overall effect is peaceful, however, the Requiem is full of nuance and shadow. As Duruflé remarked, “This Requiem is not an ethereal work which sings detached from worldly anxiety. It reflects, in the unchangeable form of Christian prayer, the anguish of man facing the mystery of his last ending.... It tries to translate the human feelings in front of their terrifying, inexplicable, or consoling destiny.”

The nine movements begin with the Introit. Tenors and basses open with a chant melody, answered by sopranos and altos with the vowel “ah” and supported by a flowing sixteenth-note accompaniment. The effect is of a gentle blossoming. A sustained pedal point leads directly into the Kyrie, which employs more complex contrapuntal technique for the layered vocal entrances while trumpets and trombones sound the chant in lengthened note values. The entire ensemble joins in for a joyous crescendo before a return to its initial calm.
The Domine Jesu Christe is the longest and most dramatic movement, one of the few sections that depict the terror of punishment. It begins mysteriously with low, dark tones in the orchestra, but bursts forth in agitation at “Libera eas de ore leonis” (“Deliver them from the mouth of the lion”), leading into a passage of rapidly shifting meters and key centers. The remainder of the movement is tinged more with mysticism than apprehension; the ensemble seems to hold its breath for a ghostly passage with tremolo in the strings and male voices expressing the sanctity of “Hostias et preces tibi” (“Sacrifices and prayers to Thee”). In contrast, the Sanctus is radiant and simpler in structure. It begins with a glimmering sixteenth-note viola accompaniment while the chant melody is repeated three times by sopranos and altos, ascending with each repetition. In the central section, all forces build exultantly with “Hosanna in excelsis!”

The Pie Jesu features only female voices, organ, and low strings, but its simple orchestration carries profound emotional depth. With its earnest supplication arriving at the mid-point of all the movements, it is a central moment of poignant introspection, made more intimate by the smaller ensemble. The Agnus Dei continues solemnly, building layers through repetition of the chant melody, followed by the Lux aeterna, which is structured with alternating instrumental and vocal passages. A soothing sense of peace is imparted by the altos’ wordless accompaniment on “ou” and the intonation of “Requiem aeternam” on a single pitch as though in prayer. The brass opening to the Libera me, however, signals the return to heightened distress, again expressed through more animated passages. Yet still there remains a sense of restraint, which tempers the return of the “Libera me” text at the close.

The last movement, In Paradisum, describes the final resting place. It opens with angelic voices and builds softly before fading away. All is gentle and calm, but the final cadence is unresolved. Even here, complete closure is not to be found, imparting a final sense of mystery to this Requiem’s quiet meditation on faith and spirit.

Pamela Feo

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THE ONLY PREVIOUS BSO PERFORMANCES OF DURUFLÉ’S REQUIEM were given in November 1983: Andrew Davis conducted, with mezzo-soprano Catherine Robbin, bass-baritone Michael Devlin, the Tanglewood Festival Chorus, John Oliver, conductor, and organist James David Christie.
DURUFLÉ Requiem, Opus 9

I. Introit

Requiem aeternam  
dona eis, Domine,  
et lux perpetua luceat eis.  
Eternal rest  
grant them, O Lord,  
and may perpetual light shine upon them.

Te decet hymnus, Deus in Sion,  
et tibi reddetur  
votum in Jerusalem;  
A hymn, O God, befits you in Zion,  
and to you shall be made  
a vow in Jerusalem;

exaudi orationem meam,  
ad te omnis caro veniet.  
may perpetual light shine upon them.

Requiem aeternam  
dona eis, Domine,  
et lux perpetua luceat eis.  
Eternal rest  
grant them, O Lord,  
and may perpetual light shine upon them.

II. Kyrie

Kyrie eleison,  
Christe eleison.  
Kyrie eleison.  
Lord have mercy,  
Christ have mercy,  
Lord have mercy.

III. Domine Jesu Christe

Domine Jesu Christe, rex gloriae,  
libera animas omnium fidelium  
defunctorum de poenis inferni  
et de profundo lacu.  
deliver the souls of all the faithful  
departed from the punishments of hell  
and from the deep abyss.

Libera eas de ore leonis,  
ne absorbeas eas tartarus,  
ne cadant in obscurum.  
Deliver them from the lion’s mouth  
so Tartarus does not engulf them,  
and so they do not fall into darkness.

Sed signifer sanctus Michael  
repraesentet eas  
in lucem sanctam,  
which long ago you promised  
into the holy light,  
to Abraham and his offspring.

Hostias et preces tibi, Domine,  
laudis offerimus.  
Sacrifices and prayers of praise,  
O Lord, we offer you.

Tu suscipe pro animabus illis,  
quarum Hodie  
memoriam facimus,  
which today  
fecas, Domine,  
we hold in memory,  
de morte transire ad vitam  
grant them, Lord, to pass  
quam olim Abraham promisisti  
as you once promised  
et semini ejus.  
to Abraham and his offspring.
IV. Sanctus
Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth, pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua. Hosanna in excelsis! Benedictus, qui venit in nomine Domini. Hosanna in excelsis!

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory, Hosannah in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, Hosannah in the highest.

V. Pie Jesu
Pie Jesu Domine, dona eis requiem sempiternam.

Blessed Lord Jesus, grant them eternal rest.

VI. Agnus Dei
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona eis requiem sempiternam.

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

VII. Lux aeterna
Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine, cum sanctis tuis in aeternum, quia pius es. Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis.

May eternal light shine on them, Lord, with your saints forever, because you are merciful. Eternal rest grant them, O Lord, and let eternal light shine upon them.

VIII. Libera me
Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna, in die illa tremenda, quando coeli movendi sunt et terra, dum veneris judicare saeculum per ignem. Tremens factus sum ego et timeo dum discussio venerit atque ventura ira, quando coeli movendi sunt et terra. Dies illa, dies irae, calamitatis et miseriae, 

Deliver me, Lord, from eternal death on that dreaded day when the heavens and the earth are moved, when you will come to judge the world through fire. I am made to tremble and to fear when the reckoning comes and the impending wrath, when the heavens and earth are moved. That day, the day of wrath, of calamity and misery,
a great day
and most bitter.
Eternal rest
grant them, O Lord,
and let eternal light shine upon them.

IX. In Paradisum

Into Paradise
may the angels lead you,
may the martyrs receive you at your arrival
and bring you into the holy city
Jerusalem.

May a choir of angels receive you,
and with Lazarus, once a beggar,
may you have eternal rest.