

Fauré's Requiem

Insula orchestra/Equilbey

Start time: 7.30pm

Approximate end time: 8.45pm, with no interval

Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

Programme

Charles Gounod *Saint François d'Assise*

Part 1, La cellule

Part 2, La mort

Gabriel Fauré Requiem

1. Introit

2. Kyrie

3. Offertoire

4. Sanctus

5. Pie Jesu

6. Agnus Dei

7. Libera me

8. In paradisum

Sacred masterpieces by Gounod and Fauré are brought viscerally alive through the period-instrument timbres of Insula orchestra together with Mat Collishaw's haunting projections juxtaposing images of nature and grief.

'Do not weep! It is death itself that flees away.' Charles Gounod

A quiet, radiant confidence hangs over both Gabriel Fauré's Requiem and Charles Gounod's *Saint François d'Assise*. These are works – one familiar, the other all but unknown, one imbued with faith (Gounod almost gave up music for the life of a priest) and one composed 'for fun' – that look death in the eye with the certainty of salvation, of resolution, of peace.

Composed within a few years of one another at the very end of the 19th century, they speak of a new relationship between God and congregation. Verdi's hellish chorus of the damned, Berlioz's battering Judgment Day fanfares and volleys of timpani are banished, and in their place we find a new gentleness and intimacy: music to comfort the living as much as mourn the dead.

For over a century Gounod's final oratorio *Saint François d'Assise* was only a story and a name. Composed for the regular sacred concerts of Paris's Société des Concerts du Conservatoire, where it was premiered in March 1891, the manuscript was subsequently lost – only rediscovered in the 1990s in a convent library – and recorded for the first time by accentus in 2016.

The work arrived in the composer's imagination as a pair of images – a diptych 'after the manner of the primitive painters'. Two musical movements take inspiration from Murillo's *St Francis Embracing Christ* and Giotto's *The Death of St Francis* respectively: the first tender, the image of the crucified Christ softened by pastels and hazy sfumato; the second starkly ceremonial, perspective flattened, the dead saint surrounded by reverent crowd of clergy.

Mirroring the spirit, if not the style of each, Gounod gives us two contrasting musical panels. Strings conjure a cloudy sort of plainsong for the start of 'La cellule', setting the tone for an instrumental prelude that paints medieval piety with the rich brushstrokes of the 19th century.

Soon the circling shapes coalesce into a wordless chorale or hymn, before St Francis himself (a solo tenor) first speaks in flexible, lyrical recitative, taking up the hymn in a suddenly passionate outpouring. Faced with such rapturous devotion, the Crucifix comes to life (as a solo baritone) and answers – a miracle that stirs the music not to new intensity but simplicity, a harp now gilding the gentle strings.

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Part 2 – ‘La mort’ – sees St Francis on his deathbed. Musically the lights have dimmed, brass and woodwind adding shadowy depth. The saint addresses his followers, reassuring them as they (male chorus) chant their sombre prayers of intercession. Just as Francis promises, at the moment of his death darkness is banished. The harp returns, joined by an angelic chorus of female voices who waft him upwards – the hopes of the opening hymn (reprised in the orchestra) tenderly and wonderfully fulfilled.

Premiered just a few years earlier in 1888 (though heard complete for the first time in 1893) Gabriel Fauré’s Requiem re-set the course of death-music so effectively that it’s now impossible to hear it with the same shock as those first listeners. ‘I wanted to do something different,’ the composer declared.

To those steeped in tumultuous spiritual drama, in the struggle between light and dark played out so violently from Verdi onwards, both the liturgy and the sound-world of Fauré’s ‘lullaby of death’ were alien. What should listeners make of the sober restraint and ‘sweet nature’ of a work that did away with the ‘Dies irae’ altogether, made significant cuts to the text of the ‘Offertorium’ and borrowed the ‘In paradisum’ from the burial service, a Mass that ends not on the hopes and pleas of the Agnus Dei but with a sublime vision of heaven achieved?

It’s a battle between tradition and innovation that we hear in the work’s opening bars. A *fortissimo* D minor chord in woodwind and strings jolts the ‘Introit’ into stentorian life. But the choir refuses to be drawn, entering instead at *pianissimo*. The two worlds tussle for a while, before the tension resolves into the soaring ‘Requiem aeternam’ melody.

If the Requiem is a lullaby, then the ‘Kyrie’ sets the rocking tempo, setting its pleas (‘Lord have mercy’) to a lulling hymn heard first in tenors and subsequently taken up by the whole choir. Desperation breaks through in the ‘Christe eleison’ but its tensions are short-lived.

The extended ‘Offertoire’ glances back to the same medieval world as the Gounod in music that nods both to plainsong and polyphony without ever actually imitating either. Its shifting moods find repose on the surer ground of the echoing ‘Sanctus’ and the stillness of the ‘Pie Jesu’ – a moment of exquisite purity for solo soprano, or as here, a fluting treble voice.

Two of the Requiem’s greatest melodies dominate the ‘Agnus Dei’ and the ‘Libera me’ that follows. The ‘Agnus Dei’ closes with a reprise of the opening Introit; to anyone familiar with the liturgy this must surely have seemed to be a full-circle ending. But Fauré adds a glorious coda in the form of the ‘Libera me’ – final doubts and fears voiced then dispelled by the surging baritone solo – and the closing ‘In paradisum’: a glimpse of an endless, unbroken musical horizon, D minor now transfigured into luminous D major.

© Alexandra Coghlan

Performers

Insula orchestra

Laurence Equilbey conductor

Oliver Barlow treble (Trinity Boys Choir)

John Brancy baritone

Amitai Pati tenor

Mat Collishaw filmmaker

accentus

Christophe Grapperon accentus associate conductor

Produced by the Barbican

Saint François d'Assise

Part 1: La cellule

St Francis

Mon sauveur adoré,
Seul amour de ma vie
Tout ce qui n'est pas toi
N'est plus rien pour mon cœur.

Ton mystère m'enivre
Et mon âme ravive,
Allume en tous mes sens
Une ineffable ardeur.

Tout ce qui n'est pas toi
N'est plus rien pour mon cœur.

Agneau de Dieu!
Sainte victime!
En toi, Jésus,
Mon cœur s'abîme!
De ton amour embrase-moi!
Tu meurs pour moi!
Je vis par toi!
De ton amour embrase-moi!

Comme le cerf soupire
Après l'eau des fontaines,
Ainsi mon âme a soif de toi, Seigneur!
C'est ton sang adoré
Qui coule dans mes veines
Et m'enivre déjà du céleste bonheur!

The Crucifix

Viens! viens, amant de ma croix!
Viens! ma douce victime!
En attendant la mort qui comblera tes vœux,
De mon amour pour toi
Touche, un instant, la cime, et vois,
Vois que, plus que toi, je veux ce que tu veux!

St Francis

Un miracle! Jésus!
Et jusqu'à cet excès!
Je ne suis plus à moi!
Je t'adore ... Et me tais!

Part 2: The death of St Francis

St Francis

Mes enfants! ... L'heure approche ...
Au séjour des élus,
Je vais donc voir, enfin, le doux Sauveur, Jésus!
Mais, avant que d'entrer dans la terre promise,
Une dernière fois je veux bénir Assise!

Chorus of Men

Père qui régnez dans les cieux!
Ô Dieu d'amour! Dieu de miséricorde!
Que votre grâce nous accorde
Ce qu'implorent de vous les larmes de nos yeux!
Par pitié pour notre misère
Par les clous vénérés de ses pieds, de ses mains,
Ne rappelez pas notre père,
Ne nous laissez pas orphelins!

Part 1: The cell

St Francis

My adored Saviour,
Sole love of my life,
All that is not Thee
Is henceforth as nothing for my heart.

Thy mystery enraptures me
And revives my soul,
Kindling in all my senses
An ineffable fervour.

All that is not Thee
Is henceforth as nothing for my heart.

Lamb of God!
Sacred Victim!
In thee, Jesus,
My heart is engulfed!
Inflame me with thy love!
Thou dost die for me!
I live through thee!
Inflame me with thy love!

Like as the hart
Desireth the water-brooks,
So longeth my soul after thee, O Lord!
It is thy beloved blood
That flows in my veins
And already intoxicates me with heavenly bliss!

The Crucifix

Come, come, lover of my Cross!
Come, my gentle victim!
As you await the death that will fulfil all your desires,
Touch, for an instant, the pinnacle
Of my love for you, and see,
See that, more than yourself, I desire what you desire!

St Francis

A miracle! Jesus!
And a supreme one!
I am no longer mine!
I adore thee – and am silent!

Part 2: The death of St Francis

St Francis

My children! The hour draws nigh.
In the abode of the chosen
I shall at last see the sweet Saviour, Jesus!
But before I enter the promised land,
For the last time I wish to bless Assisi!

Chorus of Men

Father who dost reign in the heavens!
O God of love! God of mercy!
May thy grace grant us
What the tears of our eyes implore of thee!
In pity for our misery,
By the venerated stigmata of his feet and hands,
Do not call our father to Thee,
Do not leave us orphans!

St Francis

Mes fils! Ne pleurez pas!
 C'est le jour qui commence!
 La lumière bientôt va dissiper la nuit! ...
 C'est la fin de l'exil, du deuil,
 De la souffrance, mes fils!
 Ne pleurez pas!
 C'est la mort qui s'enfuit!

(He dies)

Chorus of angels

Prends ton vol vers les cieux,
 Bienheureux Séraphique!
 De la terre pour toi les liens sont rompus!
 Viens chanter pour toujours le céleste cantique!
 Entre dans la paix des élus!

Charles Gounod (1818–93)

St Francis

My sons! Do not weep!
 It is day that dawns!
 Soon the light will dispel the darkness!
 It is the end of exile, of mourning,
 Of suffering, my sons!
 Do not weep!
 It is death that flees away!

(He dies)

Chorus of angels

Take flight towards the heavens,
 Blessed seraphic Father!
 For you the bonds of earth are broken!
 Come and sing the celestial hymn for evermore!
 Enter the peace of the chosen!

Translation © Charles Johnston

Requiem**1. Introit**

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine;
 et lux perpetua luceat eis;
 Te decet hymnus, Deus, in Sion,
 et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem.
 Exaudi orationem meam:
 ad te omnis caro veniet.

2. Kyrie

Kyrie eleison.
 Christe eleison.
 Kyrie eleison.

3. Offertoire

Domine Jesu Christe, Rex gloriae:
 libera animas omnium fidelum defunctorum
 de poenis inferni et profundo lacu.
 Libera eas de ore leonis;
 ne absorbeat eas tartarus,
 ne cadant in obscurum.
 Sed signifer sanctus Michael
 repraesentet eas in lucem sanctam
 quam olim Abrahae promisisti et semini ejus.
 Hostias et preces tibi, Domine, laudis offerimus.
 Tu suscipe pro animabus illis, quarum hodie
 memoriam facimus.
 Fac eas, Domine, de morte transire ad vitam,
 quam olim Abrahae promisisti et semini ejus.

4. Sanctus

Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
 Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.
 Hosanna in excelsis!
 Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini.
 Hosanna in excelsis!

5. Pie Jesu

Pie Jesu Domine:
 dona eis requiem sempiternam.

1. Introit

Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord,
 and let perpetual light shine upon them.
 A hymn, O God, becomes thee in Sion,
 and a vow shall be paid to Thee in Jerusalem.
 Hear my prayer,
 all flesh shall come before thee.

2. Kyrie

Lord, have mercy.
 Christ, have mercy.
 Lord, have mercy.

3. Offertoire

O Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory,
 deliver the souls of all the faithful departed
 from the pains of hell and the bottomless pit.
 Deliver them from the jaws of the lion,
 lest hell engulf them,
 lest they be plunged into darkness;
 but let the holy standard-bearer Michael,
 lead them into the holy light,
 as once thou promised to Abraham and to his seed.
 Lord, in praise we offer thee sacrifices and prayers.
 Accept them on behalf of those whom we remember
 this day:
 Lord, make them pass from death to life,
 As once thou promised to Abraham and to his seed.

4. Sanctus

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

5. Pie Jesu

Merciful Lord Jesus, grant them rest,
 Grant them eternal rest.

6. Agnus Dei

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi:
dona eis requiem.

Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi:
dona eis requiem.

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

Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine.

Cum sanctis tuis in aeternam, quia pius es.

Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua
luceat eis.

7. Libera me

Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna,
in die illa tremenda:

quando coeli movendi sunt et terra
dum veneris iudicare saeculum per ignem.

Tremens factus sum ego et timeo,
dum discussio venerit,

atque ventura ira.

Dies illa, dies irae,

calamitatis et miseriae,

dies magna et amara valde

dum veneris iudicare saeculum per ignem:

requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

8. In paradisum

In Paradisum deducant te Angeli;

in tuo adventu suscipiant te Martyres,

et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Jerusalem.

Chorus Angelorum te suscipiat,

et cum Lazaro quondam paupere,

aeternam habeas requiem.

6. Agnus Dei

O Lamb of God, thou that takest away the sins of the world,
Grant them rest.

O Lamb of God, thou that takest away the sins of the world,
Grant them rest.

O Lamb of God, thou that takest away the sins of the world,
Grant them eternal rest.

Let light eternal shine on them, O Lord,

with thy saints forever, for thou art merciful.

Rest eternal grant them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine
on them.

7. Libera me

Deliver me, O Lord, for everlasting death,

On that dread day

When the heavens and the earth shall quake,

When thou shalt come to judge the world by fire.

I am seized with trembling, and I am afraid,

until the day of reckoning shall arrive

and the wrath to come.

That day, a day of wrath,

calamity, and misery,

the great day and most bitter,

When thou shalt come to judge the world by fire.

Rest eternal grant them, O Lord,

and let light perpetual shine upon them.

8. In paradisum

May the Angels lead you into paradise,

may the martyrs receive you in your coming,

and may they guide you into the holy city, Jerusalem.

May the chorus of angels receive you,

and with Lazarus, once poor,

may you have eternal rest.

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