

Requiem l'homme armé (2018)

for SATB choir and piano

by Benjamin Gabbay

Duration: 11"00"

Commissioned for a choral work on the subjects of war and reconciliation, I assembled a mélange of texts that I believe captures the essence of both and bridges the gap between them—the bombastic Renaissance song "L'homme armé doit on doubter..." ("The armed man should be feared..."); Rupert Brooke's "The Dead," lamenting the young departed; Wilfred Owen's darkly dramatic "Anthem for Doomed Youth"; and the well-known "Prayer for Peace" attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, in French (as it was originally published). The work's tight motivic structure sees a handful of distinct themes—first set in stark, belligerent contrast—become transformed and ultimately reconciled in the final prayer. The designation of a "requiem," despite the lack of any traditional mass text, is a suggestion of the work's ultimate purpose as a prayer for, and remembrance of, the dead.

*L'homme armé doit on doubter.
On a fait partout crier
Que chacun se viegne armer
D'un haubregon de fer.
L'homme armé doit on doubter.*

- Traditional

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries for them; no prayers nor bells,
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds

- "Anthem for Doomed Youth"
by Wilfred Owen (1893-1918)

These hearts were woven of human joys and cares,
Washed marvellously with sorrow, swift to mirth.
The years had given them kindness. Dawn was theirs,
And sunset, and the colours of the earth.
These had seen movement, and heard music; known
Slumber and waking; loved; gone proudly friended;
Felt the quick stir of wonder; sat alone;
Touched flowers and furs and cheeks. All this is ended.

- From "The Dead" by Rupert Brooke (1887-1915)

*Seigneur, fais de moi un instrument de ta paix,
Là où est la haine, que je mette l'amour.
Là où est l'offense, que je mette le pardon.
Là où est la discorde, que je mette l'union.
Là où est l'erreur, que je mette la vérité.
Là où est le doute, que je mette la foi.
Là où est le désespoir, que je mette l'espérance.
Là où sont les ténèbres, que je mette la lumière.
Là où est la tristesse, que je mette la joie.*

- Attributed to St. Francis of Assisi
(c. 1182-1226)

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This work was commissioned by the Mississauga Summer Chorale for their 2018 season.

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