Eastman Philharmonia
Eastman-Rochester Chorus
Eastman Chorale

Jerry Blackstone, conductor
Colin Mann, conductor

Catherine Creed, soprano
Allyson Arenson, soprano
Holden Turner, baritone

Friday, May 3, 2024
Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre
7:30 PM

~ PROGRAM ~

Gloria, FP 177 (1959)  
Francis Poulenc  
(1899-1963)  
25’

I. Gloria in excelsis Deo
II. Laudamus te
III. Domine Deus
IV. Domine Fili unigenite
V. Domine Deus, Agnus Dei
VI. Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris

Catherine Creed, soprano
Colin Mann, conductor

~ INTERMISSION ~

Dona Nobis Pacem (1936)  
Ralph Vaughan Williams  
(1872-1958)  
40’

I. Agnus Dei
II. Beat! Beat! Drums!
III. Reconciliation
IV. Dirge for Two Veterans
V. The Angel of Death has been abroad
VI. O man, greatly beloved

Allyson Arenson, soprano
Holden Turner, baritone
Jerry Blackstone, conductor
Honey Meconi

The work, “Deus Pater omnipotens” (extraordinarily calm, without dragging) to provide a serene conclusion to the brass. Those two movements feature the soprano soloist, who returns at the necessary slow contrast, where Poulenc changes the orchestration by cutting back with its single phrase of text, zips by in a flash, and three and five provide the character: the opening and closing movements each commence “majestically” uneven in the amount of text they use, they generate three pairs in terms of movement, for example, sets a mere five words. Yet while the movements are in musical settings. Poulenc created six very unequal divisions textually: the fourth movement, however, is innovative in mingling Latin and English, grant us peace—conclude the tripartite Agnus Dei portion of the Catholic Mass.

The six movements flow together without pause. The words “dona nobis pacem”—grant us peace—conclude the tripartite Agnus Dei portion of the Catholic Mass. Vaughan Williams’s work, however, is innovative in mingling Latin and English, sacred and secular texts—a precursor to Britten’s practice in the War Requiem. In the opening movement the choral text is restricted to “dona nobis pacem,” but the soprano soloist, who begins the piece, also sings the words that precedes it in the mass: “Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi.” For the next three movements Vaughan Williams turned to American poet Walt Whitman, who had worked as a nurse during the Civil War and was deeply familiar with war’s evils. The all-choral second movement expresses the madness of calls for war in its jagged harmonies and insistent rhythms; the harmonic chaos mirrors war’s chaos.

The third movement provides a sharp contrast. The baritone solo introduces this achingly beautiful movement that uses Whitman’s “Reconciliation.” The final choral line conjures the astonishingly poignant images of “the sisters Death and Night” washing “again and ever again this soiled world,” interrupted by the solo soprano’s “dona nobis pacem.” Her solo leads in turn to the fourth movement, a funeral march setting of Whitman’s “Dirge for Two Veterans.” This extremely effective movement was not created for Dona nobis pacem, however. Vaughan Williams composed the work before the first World War and never published it, possibly because both his teacher Charles Wood and his good friend Gustav Holst also set the text.
The somber fifth movement combines three different texts. The first, sung by the solo baritone, comes from an extremely unlikely source: a speech given by John Bright in the House of Commons immediately before the Crimean War. The almost monotone setting of this text gives way to a crashing choral return of “dona nobis pacem,” joined by the soprano soloist, before the mood shifts again for verses from the biblical book of Jeremiah (8:15–22), bewailing the woes fallen upon the land. But in a typical Vaughan Williams move, sunshine breaks forth from the clouds for the final movement. The text is an aggregate of biblical excerpts—Daniel, Haggai, Micah, Leviticus, the Psalms, Isaiah, and Luke—set to a corresponding aggregate of keys, until we reach a bright C major for “good will toward men.” At this point the soprano solo returns, as does the “dona nobis pacem” text. By the close, the chorus dynamic has faded away to ppp, but it is the soprano who concludes the work—not on the tonic pitch C, however, but rather on the third, E, for a touch of incompleteness, as if Vaughan Williams knew that uncertainty lay ahead for all. It is unbearably sad that this incredible work remains so relevant today.

Honey Meconi

I. Agnus Dei

Agnus Dei,
Qui tollis peccata mundi,
Dona nobis pacem.

Lamb of God,
That taketh away the sin of the world,
Grant us peace.

II. Beat! Beat! Drums!

Beat! beat! drums! — blow! bugles! blow! Through the windows—through the doors—burst like a ruthless force, Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation, Into the school where the scholar is studying; Leave not the bridegroom quiet—no happiness must he have now with his bride, Nor the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing his field, or gathering in his grain, So fierce you whirr and pound you drums—so shrill you bugles blow. Beat! beat! drums!—Blow! bugles! blow! Over the traffic of cities—over the rumble of wheels in the streets: Are beds prepared for sleepers at night in the houses? No sleepers must sleep in those beds; No bargainers’ bargains by day—Would they continue? Would the talkers be talking? would the singer attempt to sing? Then rattle quicker, heavier drums—you bugles wilder blow. Beat! beat! drums!—Blow! bugles! blow! Make no parley—stop for no expostulation; Mind not the timid—mind not the weeper or prayer; Mind not the old man beseeching the young man; Let not the child’s voice be heard, nor the mother’s entreaties; Make even the trestles to shake the dead, where they lie awaiting the hearses, So strong you thump, O terrible drums—so loud you bugles blow.

Walt Whitman

first published in Drum-Taps (1865)

III. Reconciliation

Word over all, beautiful as the sky, Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost, That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly, softly, wash again and ever again this soiled world; For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead, I look where he lies white-faced and still in the coffin—I draw near, Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

Walt Whitman

first published in When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom’d (1865), later in Drum-Taps

IV. Dirge for Two Veterans

The last sunbeam Lightly falls from the finished Sabbath, On the pavement here, and there beyond it is looking Down a new-made double grave. Lo, the moon ascending, Up from the east the silvery round moon, Beautiful over the house-tops, ghastly, phantom moon, Immense and silent moon. I see a sad procession, And I hear the sound of coming full-keyed bugles, All the channels of the city streets they’re flooding As with voices and with tears. I hear the great drums pounding, And the small drums steady whirring, And every blow of the great convulsive drums Strikes me through and through. For the son is brought with the father, In the foremost ranks of the fierce assault they fell, Two veterans, son and father, dropped together, And the double grave awaits them. Now nearer blow the bugles, And the drums strike more convulsive, And the daylight o’er the pavement quite has faded, And the strong dead-march enwraps me. In the eastern sky up-buoying, The sorrowful vast phantom moves illumined, ’Tis some mother’s large transparent face, In heaven brighter growing. O strong dead-march you please me! O moon immense with your silvery face you soothe me! O my soldiers twain! O my veterans passing to burial! What I have I also give you. The moon gives you light, And the bugles and the drums give you music, And my heart, O my soldiers, my veterans, My heart gives you love.

Walt Whitman

first published in When Lilacs Last in the Door-yard Bloom’d (1865), later in Drum-Taps
V. The Angel of Death has been abroad

The Angel of Death has been abroad throughout the land; you may almost hear
the beating of his wings. There is no one as of old... to sprinkle with blood the
lintel and the two side-posts of our doors, that he may spare and pass on.

John Bright (1811–1889)

Dona nobis pacem.
We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble!
The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan; the whole land trembled at the
sound of the neighing of his strong ones; for they are come, and have devoured the
land... and those that dwell therein...
The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved...
Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? Why then is not the health
of the daughter of my people recovered?

Jeremiah 8:15–22

VI. O man, greatly beloved

O man greatly beloved, fear not, peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong.

Daniel 10:19

The glory of this latter house shall be greater than the former... and in this place
will I give peace.

Haggai 2:9

Nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.
And none shall make them afraid, neither shall the sword go through their land.
Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.
Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven.
Open to me the gates of righteousness, I will go into them.
Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled;
and let them hear and say, it is the truth.
And it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues.
And they shall come and see my glory. And I will set a sign among them,
and they shall declare my glory among the nations.
For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me,
so shall your seed and your name remain for ever.

Adapted from Micah 4:3, Leviticus 26:6, Psalms 85:10 and 118:19,

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