



AMERICAN CLASSICS



Randall
THOMPSON
Requiem



The Philadelphia Singers • David Hayes

Randall
THOMPSON
(1899-1984)
Requiem (1958)

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Randall Thompson (1899-1984)
Requiem

Randall Thompson is a composer with whom few American choral singers and conductors are unfamiliar. More than thirty years after his death, several of his choral works continue to be performed with regularity, most notably his *Alleluia* (1941), which at one point had more copies in print than any choral work in history. Thompson was part of a generation of American composers who sought to define a musical heritage distinct from Europe, each realizing it in their own way. Rather than relying on folk melodies or jazz idioms, Thompson forged his path primarily through the use of American texts, specifically in larger works like *The Testament of Freedom* (texts of Thomas Jefferson), *Americana* (from an American periodical), and his most popular *Frostiana* (poems of Robert Frost).

It was not merely this text selection that endeared Thompson to American choirs. He wrote nearly every one of his works in response to a commission, and with deference always paid close attention not only to the specific choir for which he was writing, but also the occasion of the commission (a consideration that sometimes led to him rejecting requested texts). In addition to those pieces that are clearly American in theme, many of his works are sacred settings of scripture, and here his Americanism is just as evident. Thompson's ability to capture the rhythm and nuance of the English language with his prosody – whether setting poetry or prose – is a quality that makes his music distinctly American. For choirs, that skill produced music that is both dramatic and extremely satisfying to sing.

If English text-setting was Randall Thompson's greatest asset as a composer, then the *Requiem* (1958) is his masterpiece. It was written at a time in his career with freedom like no other, pure inspiration, and a personal connection to the subject matter. Consequently, no other work in his oeuvre so completely exhibits his ability to select and set texts, and the resulting work is a Requiem entirely unique within American music history or the Requiem tradition as a whole.

At no other point in his career did Thompson have a creative opportunity like that with the *Requiem*. In an unusual chronology for him, Thompson had the concept of the work fully formed by the end of 1954, three years before he received a commission that fit. He had been personally touched by death, first that of a terminally ill young choral director whom Thompson found to be incredibly passionate about the choral art, and second by that of a personal friend whose death Thompson witnessed.

Beyond personal inspiration, another potent contextual influence for the *Requiem* was time. Like an increasing number of composers in the 20th century Thompson was a career academic, holding positions at several prestigious universities throughout the country before finally settling at Harvard, his *alma mater*, for the remainder of his career. He rarely composed during the academic year, so it was difficult to find time to compose a work of substantial length or complexity. But, following a term as department chair, Thompson was anticipating a sabbatical for the 1957-58 academic year, and was able to consider taking on a project of some magnitude.

The *Requiem* was ultimately written in response to a commission from one of Thompson's former institutions, the University of California, Berkeley, with almost no stipulations whatsoever on the nature of the piece to be composed. At no other time in Thompson's career had these three influences coincided – purely inspired concept, time for work, and a free commission – and the outcome was a Requiem unlike any other, Thompson's personal statement on life and death. It was premiered in May of 1958 at the University of California and presented again in 1959 at Harvard, in a performance advised by Thompson and conducted by Elliot Forbes.

By the mid-20th century, Requiem settings had been becoming increasingly personalized by composers for more than a hundred years. Texts had been added, subtracted, or even wholly replaced by composers to use the genre as a personal statement, all while remaining

under the Requiem mantle. Even within that context, Thompson's *Requiem* is entirely unique. He was inspired by the dramatic madrigal cycles of the Italian Renaissance, and had already applied that concept to a sacred work in *Peaceable Kingdom*. For the *Requiem* he expanded the concept, crafting a dramatic dialogue between two choirs concerning the reality of eternal life. It was this concept which Thompson had formed years before the commission. To construct the libretto for this dialogue, Thompson used only scripture, but far more selectively than Brahms had. Though every word is biblical, verses are often not used in their entirety, sometimes taken far out of context, and assembled carefully to deliver an entirely personal message.

At an hour in length, the work is grand in scope, particularly for the medium of double choir, a *cappella*. Furthermore, there are several sections of the piece that require each choir to divide again, to a maximum of sixteen parts. The piece is arranged in five large dramatic scenes, all but one with multiple movements within them. Throughout, one choir portrays a "chorus of mourners," lamenting the loss of a loved one, and the other choir represents the souls of those dead, a "chorus of the faithful," returning to comfort the mourners and convince them of the reality of eternal life.

Part I, *Lamentations*, introduces the characters and the drama. The mourners weep uncontrollably using the word "mourn" while the faithful bring messages of peace and comfort. Thompson's excellence in text selection and setting are fully on display, as the two emotionally divided characters share nothing musically either: poetic rhythm, meter, harmonic content, articulation, or *divisi*. This opening movement also shows Thompson excellently utilizing small themes in large-scale musical structure, akin to a movement in sonata form that often opens a symphony. In the end, the characters resolve nothing.

The heart of the drama is contained in the lengthy second part, *The Triumph of Faith*, wherein the choirs engage in a vigorous debate over the reality of eternal life. Again, the musical and textual contrast between the choirs is stark as they debate opposing positions. In *What man is he that liveth?* the mourners are desperate,

employing accented, harmonically sparse homophony. They are in turn answered by the faithful in calm, chorale-like statements of peace, including the introduction of a musical theme which returns several more times in the work to represent eternal life. The debate continues until the distressed mourners stand awestruck and are finally convinced, after which the faithful entreat them to put on "the garment of praise," which is the means of their comfort.

Though convinced of the reality of eternal life, the mourners are still not relieved from their distress, so in Part III, *The Call to Song*, the faithful implore the mourners to sing praises, using a succession of increasingly complex choruses. The increasing intensity and vocal acrobatics of the faithful are unconvincing, as the mourners remain silent, until in *Utter a song* the faithful resort to simple, direct, recitative-like homophony. The mourners can resist no longer and burst into a song of praise, and in a brilliant climax, the two choirs share all musical material for the first time.

Part IV, *The Garment of Praise*, is an extension of what was begun at the end of Part III. Now convinced that singing praises to God will bring comfort, the two choirs sing together what Thompson called a "cumulative paean." With the choirs finally operating as partners, Thompson was able in this part to employ a multitude of double-chorus techniques within a series of three praise choruses. Each outburst of praise reaches farther than the one before: first the mountains and forests, then the whole earth, and finally the entire heavens. In these choruses, Thompson's uses of text-painting and madrigalisms are most clearly seen, both in melodic gesture and overall texture. When the praises have concluded, Thompson has the mourners symbolize their acceptance of the message by precisely quoting the music of the faithful that opened Part IV.

With the principal conflict of the story resolved – the mourners being comforted – Part V, *The Leave-taking*, shows the characters exiting the scene and returning home. First, they sing the chorus *Ye were sometimes darkness* together, which functions as the positive reflection of the *Lamentations* from the beginning. In the

remaining choruses, rich with musical symbolism, the characters return to their respective ends: the faithful ascend back to heaven, physically and musically, in *Return unto thy rest*, and in *Thou hast given him* the redeemed mourners remain, singing the "everlasting life" life motive from Part II by themselves. The entire work closes with an ebullient double-fugue whose theme quotes Bach's *Mass in B minor*.

Due to the cohesiveness of the drama, few of the movements are able to stand alone out of context, making partial performances impractical at best. And though the harmonic language and general difficulty of the work is

consistent with Thompson's smaller works enjoyed by amateur choirs, the totality of the *Requiem* – its emotional content, dramatic intensity, and vocal stamina required – makes it a daunting piece to perform well. This and other various influences, such as the almost immediate overshadowing of *Frostiana* (1960), have kept the *Requiem* from regular performance. Hopefully this first-ever complete recording of the work will inspire listeners, conductors, and choirs to recognize its excellence, and lead to a revival of this American masterpiece.

Dr. Zachary J. Vreeman

Requiem

I I: Lamentations

Choir I

Mourn not, weep not, cry not, grieve not.
(Nehemiah 8:9, Luke 8:52, Job 36:13, Ephesians 4:30)

Refrain thy voice from weeping
and thine eyes from tears.
(Jeremiah 31:16)

Neither shalt thou mourn nor weep,
Neither shall thy tears run down.
(Ezek. 24:16)

Grieve not, cry not, mourn not, nor weep.
(Ephesians 4:30, Job 36:13, Nehemiah 8:9)

Choir II

Lamentations, and mourning, and weeping.
(Ezekiel 2:10)

The joy of our heart is ceased;
Our dance is turned into mourning.
(Lamentations 5:15)

Mourn.

Mourn.

II: The Triumph of Faith

2 Why make ye this ado?

Why make ye this ado and weep?
(Mark 5:39)

Why make ye this ado and weep?

Why make ye this ado and weep?

Man that is born of a woman is of few days
and full of trouble.
(Job 14:1)

He cometh forth like a flower and is cut down;
He fleeth also as a shadow and continueth not.
(Job 14:2)

All flesh shall perish together
and man shall turn again unto dust.
(Job 34:15)

How is it that ye have no faith?
(Mark 4:40)

The just shall live by his faith.
(Habakkuk 2:4)

The eternal God is thy refuge,
and underneath are the everlasting arms.
(Deuteronomy 33:27)

Everlasting joy shall be unto them.
(Isaiah 61:7)

Everlasting joy shall be unto them.

Everlasting joy shall be unto them.

Everlasting joy shall be unto them.

Everlasting joy shall be unto them.

His anger endureth but a moment;
In his favour is life.
(Psalm 30:1)

Unto you is given the mystery of the kingdom of God.
(Mark 4:11)

3 What man is he?

What man is he that liveth and shall not see death?
(Psalm 89:48)

Behold we die, we perish, we all perish.
(Numbers 17:12)

Shall we be consumed with dying?
(Numbers 17:13)

The righteous perisheth
And no man layeth it to heart:

And merciful men are taken away.
(Isaiah 57:1)

By the blast of God they perish

and by the breath of his nostrils

are they consumed.
(Job 4:9)

How long, Lord? Wilt thou hide thyself forever?
Shall thy wrath burn like fire?
(Psalm 89:46)

Life?
Stay yourselves and wonder.
(Isaiah 29:1)

Stay yourselves and wonder.

O Lord, thou has brought up my soul from the grave,
Thou hast kept me alive.
(*Psalms 30:3*)

Behold ye, regard, and wonder marvelously.
(*Habakkuk 1:5*)

4 Good tidings to the meek

Good tidings to the meek;
He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted;
to comfort all that mourn;
to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning,
the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.
(*Isaiah 61:1,2,3*)

Behold ye, regard, and wonder marvelously.
(*Habakkuk 1:5*)

III: The Call to Song

5 Be filled with the spirit

Be filled with the spirit,
Singing and making melody
in your heart to the Lord.
(*Ephesians 5:18,19*)

None answered.
(*Judges 19:28*)

Be filled with the spirit,
Singing and making melody
in your heart to the Lord.

But none answered.

Be filled with the spirit,
Singing and making melody
in your heart to the Lord.

None giveth answer.
(*Job 35:12*)

6 O let the nations be glad

O let the nations be glad and sing for joy.
(*Psalms 67:4*)

But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear.
(*Jeremiah 7:24*)

7 Sing unto Him

Sing unto him.
Talk ye of all his wondrous works.
(*1 Chronicles 16:9*)

8 Utter a song

Utter a song...
(*Judges 5:12*)

Can I hear any more the voice
Of singing men
And singing women?
(*2 Samuel 19:35*)

Blessed be the Lord God,
Who only doeth wondrous things.
(*Psalms 72:18*)

IV: The Garment of Praise

9 Sing with the spirit

Sing with the spirit,
And sing with the understanding also.
(*1 Corinthians 14:15*)

I will sing with the spirit,
And I will sing with the understanding also.
(*1 Corinthians 14:15*)

10 Let everything that hath breath

Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.
(*Psalms 150:6*)

Let the inhabitants of the rock sing
Let them shout from the top of the mountains.
(Isaiah 42:11)

Choirs I and II
Break forth into singing ye mountains,
O forest, and every tree therein.
(Isaiah 44:23)

11 Let them give glory

Let them give glory unto the Lord
and declare his praise in the islands.
(Isaiah 42:12)

Let the earth rejoice,
Let the multitude of isles be glad thereof.
(Psalm 97:1)

12 Praise Him all ye stars of light

Praise him all ye stars of light.
(Psalm 148:3)

Let the heaven and earth praise him.
(Psalm 69:34)

The morning stars sang together
and all the sons of God shouted for joy.
(Job 38:7)

For they went at large like horses and leaped like lambs,
praising thee, O Lord.
(Wisdom of Solomon 19:9)

13 I am their music

I am their music.
(Lamentations 3:63)

And now am I their song.
(Job 30:9)

I will praise the Lord with my whole heart;
(Psalm 111:1)

Till he fill thy mouth with laughing and thy lips
with rejoicing.
(Job 8:21)

V: The Leave-taking

14 Ye were sometimes darkness

Ye were sometimes darkness,
but now are ye light in the Lord:
walk as children of light.
(Ephesians 5:8)

15 The Lord shall be unto thee

The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light,
and thy God thy glory.
(Isaiah 60:19)

16 Return unto thy rest

Return unto thy rest, O my soul;
for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.
(Psalm 116:7)

17 Thou hast given him

Thou hast given him his heart's desire,
and hast not withholden the request of his lips.
He asked life of thee,
and thou gavest him a long life:
Even for ever and ever.
(Psalm 21:2, 1 – from the Book of Common Prayer)

18 Amen and amen, alleluia

Alleluia.

Amen and amen, alleluia.
(Psalm 89:52)

The Philadelphia Singers



The Philadelphia Singers was founded in 1972 by Michael Korn as a fully professional 32-voice chamber ensemble that performed an extensive repertoire ranging from Renaissance to contemporary works. During the 1980s, the group rose to prominence with the Philadelphia premières of works by Poulenc and Gershwin and world premières of compositions by contemporary composers. David Hayes succeeded the recently deceased Michael Korn in 1992. Under his leadership the symphonic version of the chorus was named Resident Chorus of the Philadelphia Orchestra. The Philadelphia Singers performed its "Farewell Concert" in May 2015, completing 43 years as the pre-eminent choral ensemble of Philadelphia.

David Hayes



David Hayes was Music Director of The Philadelphia Singers from 1992 to 2015. He is also Music Director of the New York Choral Society, Music Director of the Mannes Orchestra and Professor of Professional Practice at Mannes College, The New School for Music in New York City, and a staff conductor of the Curtis Symphony Orchestra. He served on the conducting staff of The Philadelphia Orchestra from 2001 to 2011, making his Philadelphia Orchestra subscription début in 2003 at the request of Wolfgang Sawallisch. He has also served as a cover conductor for the New York Philharmonic as well as for Sir André Previn on the Curtis Symphony Orchestra's 1999 European Tour with Anne-Sophie Mutter. His guest conducting engagements have included concerts with The Philadelphia Orchestra, and with

other orchestras in the United States and elsewhere. David Hayes holds degrees from the University of Hartford (BM in Musicology) and the Curtis Institute of Music (Diploma in Orchestral Conducting), where he studied conducting with Otto-Werner Mueller. He also studied conducting with Charles Bruck at the Pierre Monteux School in Maine. He serves on the Scholarship Committee of the Edwin Garrigues Foundation and has served as a panelist for the City of Philadelphia Cultural Fund and as a member of the Board of Directors of Chorus America from 2000 to 2009.

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(1899-1984)

Requiem (1958)

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WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDING

The Philadelphia Singers
David Hayes

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

The sung texts can be found inside the booklet, and may also be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/559789.htm

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AMERICAN CLASSICS

Randall Thompson's choral works retain the affection of American choral singers and conductors alike. The *Requiem* is his masterpiece, written in response to the loss of close friends and colleagues. Using a wide-ranging selection of Biblical verses, it takes the form of a dramatic dialogue between two choirs, a 'chorus of mourners' and a 'chorus of the faithful', concerning eternal life. Recorded here for the first time in its complete form, this *Requiem* is an emotional and dramatically intense journey of conflict and resolution, and entirely unique within American music history and the requiem tradition as a whole.

www.naxos.com

Playing
Time:
55:16