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Requiem for Peace

REQUIEM FOR PEACE was premiered at the Chan Centre (pictured above) in Vancouver, B.C. on December 3, 2005.

WHO: director Bruce Pullan, UBC Singers, Trinity Western University Chamber Choir (Dr. Wes Janzen-director), UBC Choral Union, UBC Symphony Orchestra; soloists: Grace Chan, Steve Maddock, Robyn Driedger-Klassen

Requiem for Peace, makes a universal statement in twelve languages. Composer, Larry Nickel, expresses his thoughts, (below).

THE REQUIEM MASS for the souls of the departed has been set to music on a grand scale hundreds of times since the days of Dufay and Ockegem. The Requiem is intended to honor the deceased and give comfort to the living.

During the summer of 2004, my wife, Edna, and I visited Rupert Jeffcoat, the music director at Coventry Cathedral. We spent quiet moments in the bombed out shell of the former structure, reflecting on the monument to peace. Britten's War Requiem had been premiered there. I've been inspired by his dramatic epic for many years.

With encouragement from Bruce Pullan and under the guidance of Steve Chatman, I undertook this Requiem project as my doctoral dissertation. Requiem for Peace honors the suffering civilians of this world who have been caught in the cross fire between warring nations, circumstances they have little control over. Integrating poetry in twelve languages, it is an

international call for reconciliation. Just as the writing of Wilfred Owen decried man's inhumanity to man, poets from every country have cried out the same sentiment through their poetry. Requiem for Peace includes texts in Hebrew, Farsi, Arabic, Greek, Mandarin, Japanese, French, Dutch, Russian, German and English. Continuity is provided by the traditional Latin liturgy. In Hiroshima Lacrimosa, for example, the choir sings "Dies Irae, dies illa, solvet saeculum in favilla", (the day of wrath shall consume the world in ashes) while the soloist sings in Japanese, "How could I ever forget that flash of light!"

I visited Rabbis and Priests, I was on the phone to Holland and e mailed contacts living in Hong Kong, Geisenberg, Singapore and Zurich. University colleagues Ekaterina Yurasovkaya, Yinan Song, Zohreh Bayatrizi, Dr. Maya Yazigi, Alexandra Henrique, Peter Rohloff, Farshid Samandari, Sandy Tang, Grace Chan, Ivan Tucakor, Gaku Ishimura and Tissaphern Mirfakrai, to mention a few, have been invaluable resources for this project: providing suitable poetry and then painstakingly helping me with transliteration and pronunciation. My brother, Gordon, who has a PHD in Islamic Studies has been a great help. I have made a web-page, which features each of poems being recited slowly/carefully and then at a normal pace, by people who actually speak the language. This should be helpful to the choir and soloists. The formidable task of singing a Requiem in twelve languages is mitigated in the way the soloists share the brunt of the verbose sections. The choir often sings a refrain or echoes phrases delivered by the soloists.

Faced with representing many cultures, music style became an issue from the start. For example, I realized that my effort to sound Chinese would likely sound like a poor parody. Including instruments from that country, such as the the Pipa or Erhu, (even though we have students at UBC who play those instruments well), would leave the listener expecting the other countries to also be represented with ethnic instrumentation. So, Bruce Pullan advised me to write for the standard classical orchestra, to make the Requiem a feasible project for choirs and orchestras elsewhere. As a result of these deliberations, the mandarin piece, Bing Chuh Shing, includes Chinese musical idioms, such as pentatonic passages and parallel open intervals, integrated with my conservative choral style. With an extended percussion section, the harp, pizzicato strings, piccolo, double reed woodwinds, etc. it is possible to at least emulate the desired timbres. I spent many weeks listening to music from these countries before starting each piece. It was so refreshing!

Remembrance, regret, remorse, repentance, reconciliation, redemption, renewal, requiem (rest); these are the themes that run through Requiem for Peace. It is a message of hope for this world. I believe that the city of Vancouver is an excellent model for unity in diversity. There are restaurants from 10 different ethnicity's within one block on Denman street! This multicultural attitude of tolerance and brother/sisterhood is well demonstrated within the UBC School of Music. It was so exciting to see many of the countries, which are represented by the texts of Requiem for Peace, also represented by our singers and instrumentalists.

The CD, "Requiem for Peace" became available in March, 2006. Please click on "discography" above if you are interested.

Larry Nickel



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