

Choral Reviews

John C. Hughes, Editor

Pietà

John Muehleisen

(b. 1955: 2012; revised 2014, 2015)

Soprano and Tenor Solos, SATB Choir div.,
Male Chanters, Treble Choir, 2 Oboes (dbl.
English Horn and opt. Oboe d'Amore),
2 Percussion, Organ (c. 90')

Six sections; twenty-four movements:

Prologue, Scene One (The Son), Scene Two
(The Mother), Scene Three (Calvary), Scene
Four (Pietà), Epilogue

Texts: John 14:1, homily by the Rev. Anne E.

Kitch, Orthodox Hymnology for Holy
Week, Jack Kipling, Rudyard Kipling,
George F. Root, Wilfred Owen, William
Blake, Robert Bode, Jacopone da Todi/Pope
Innocent III (attributed), John Muehleisen,
Violet Fane, Luke 2:29–32, Romans 12:9–10,
12–19a, 20–21, Henry W. Baker

Score available from the composer:

<http://johnmuehleisen.com>

Archived webcast of performance:

St. Olaf Choir, Magnum Chorum, Anton
Armstrong, conductor. May 1, 2016. [http://
www.stolaf.edu/multimedia/play/?e=1402](http://www.stolaf.edu/multimedia/play/?e=1402)

At the beginning of John Muehleisen's chamber oratorio *Pietà*, the choir sings a passage from the Gospel of John: "Do not let your hearts be troubled." (John 14:1), to which the soprano soloist replies: "How can we not let our hearts be troubled?" (This text comes from the homily given by the Rev. Anne E. Kitch at Matthew Shepard's Celebration of Life service.) *Pietà* grapples with a fundamental question—how are we to respond to the ever-present and seemingly growing atrocities, injustices, and

divisions within contemporary society? In his extended notes, the composer states that he aims to "provoke listeners to think about how they treat one another...Do we respond with anger, despair, revenge, apathy, criticism, and judgment, or with compassion, forgiveness, mercy, and love?" Over the course of this ninety-minute composition, the listener experiences a transformation from despair to renewed purpose as Muehleisen offers his answer to the soprano soloist's question—we are to respond with love.

Robert Bode commissioned Muehleisen to compose *Pietà* for Choral Arts Northwest in 2012. Since the premiere, Conspirare, Schola Cantorum on Hudson, and the St. Olaf Choir with Magnum Chorum have also performed the work (in 2014, 2015, and 2016 respectively). The piece's title can be literally translated from Italian as "pity"; however, given the sometimes-negative connotation of this word, Muehleisen prefers to focus on its connections to "mercy" and "compassion," attributes that grow out of love.

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Many might associate the word “pietà” with one of Michelangelo’s most famous sculptures (Figure 1). This masterpiece, which portrays Mary holding her son after he died on the cross, certainly inspired Muehleisen’s composition. Another piece of visual art, *Our Lady of the Fallen Soldiers of Iraq and Afghanistan*, further prompted Muehleisen to explore the love between mothers and sons as an exemplar of compassion. This painting stages a woman cloaked in blue with the stars of the United States flag adorning her head holding a dead soldier wearing camouflage. The pair’s pose replicates that of the Michelangelo sculpture, and the woman’s blue clothing further evokes the Virgin Mary. While referencing existing

works, *Our Lady of the Fallen Soldiers of Iraq and Afghanistan* is at the same time appealing to issues in contemporary society.¹ In *Pietà*, Muehleisen similarly draws from Christ’s death as well as contemporary issues to “use the central image of the compassion and love between mothers and sons as a metaphor and a vehicle for exploring the ways in which the virtues of compassion, mercy, and love can lead to healing many aspects of our relationships with one another.”

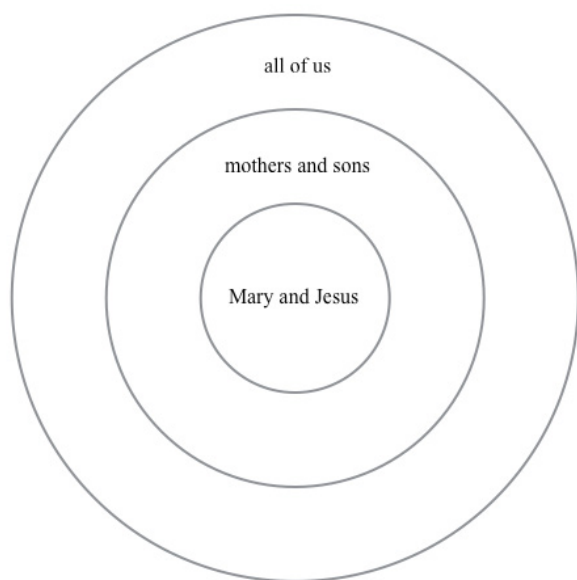
¹ This painting was displayed as a shrine in the Hollywood Memorial Cemetery. More information and an image of the painting are available through an October 29, 2007 blog post by Gerald R. Fecht for The Museum of the San Fernando Valley: <http://museumsanfernandovalley.blogspot.com/2007/10/our-lady-of-fallen-soldiers-of-iraq-and.html>.

Figure 1. Michelangelo Buonarroti, *Pietà* [edited: cut out and cropped]. c. 1498–1500, Marble, 5’ 9” x 6’ 5”. St. Peter’s Basilica, The Vatican. Source: Stanislav Traykov, 2008. Digital Image. Available from: Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pietà#/media/File:Michelangelo%27s_Pieta_5450_cut_out_black.jpg (accessed June 29, 2016).



At the risk of sounding trite, “journey” best describes the experience of listening to *Pietà*. Muehleisen creates a dramatic arc in part through his instrumentation, which begins in dissonance and evolves into bright, jubilant colors. Additionally, he skillfully combines a variety of text sources including Christian Scriptures, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox liturgies, letters, poetry by Robert Bode, Wilfred Owen, and William Blake, and excerpts of the homily from Matthew Shepard’s funeral to create an overarching narrative. Events occur in three timelines: present day (Prologue and Epilogue), World War I (Scenes One and Two), and Jesus’ passion and death (Scenes Three and Four, as well as the Passion Interludes [discussed below]). Muehleisen describes three concentric circles that are congruent with these timelines and that demonstrate mutual love and compassion (Figure 2). Mary and Jesus are the models of love, which radiates out to “all of us.”

Figure 2.



Pietà begins with a procession of the SATB choir from the rear of the performance space to the front; the Male Chanters and Treble Choir are already in position in the rear balcony (or

wherever the performance space allows). One of the percussionists leads the procession while playing the semantron, an instrument commonly used in monasteries as a call to prayer or to gather together. The semantron serves a similar function in *Pietà* as it calls the audience members into community with each other. Bells also ring, and the tenors and basses of both the SATB choir and the Male Chanters sing a wordless chant. This beginning creates a solemn, mystical atmosphere, one rooted in centuries of tradition. Dissonant music for the oboe and English horn (discussed below) breaks the placidness and jars the listener into modernity. Muehleisen refers to such moments as “cinematic-style cuts,” and their occurrence throughout the composition reminds the listener of the universality of suffering, not only across the work’s three timelines but also throughout human history.

The aesthetic of the whole work is interesting, engaging, and novel. Muehleisen writes some quite dissonant, angular passages but balances them with rich colors, particularly from the SATB choir. The writing for the vocal soloists and instrumentalists provides much of the work’s discordant sounds and appears to be quite challenging. The choral writing is more approachable as it employs predominantly homophonic textures and syllabic text setting. Nonetheless, it is not easy, and the work requires a high level a rhythmic acuity and the ability to sing complex harmonies. *Pietà*’s variety makes it especially interesting; a performance of the ninety-minute work goes quickly because the piece moves between thick choral writing, unison singing, four-part chorales, and solos in short order. Furthermore, transitions between movements are mostly taken *attacca*. The overall impression of the work is a stream of sounds, colors, and stories that combine into a single exhortation for peace and understanding without the work ever approaching self-serving affectation.

Another reason that this work is successful is that Muehleisen is quite familiar with the history of Western choral music and references music of the past in a non-anachronistic manner. The music of Johann Sebastian Bach and other contributors to the Passion-Oratorio idiom greatly inspired *Pietà's* form (Figure 3). The work's first and final sections are connected textually, forming a chiasmic structure, a clear reference to Bach's music. Each of the piece's four central sections (2 through 5) contains a Passion Interlude and chorale. For the Passion Interludes, Muehleisen uses Eastern Orthodox chant, both Russian and Byzantine, from Holy Week services arranged in *parlando* style for four-part men's voices (sung by the Male Chanters). Chorales 1, 2, and 3 use

retexted music of J.S. Bach in keeping with the *contrafacta* tradition. Specifically, Chorale 1 sets Wilfred Owen's *Soldier's Dream* to Bach's *Wie wunderbarlich ist doch diese Strafe!* (St. Matthew Passion, BWV 244, #46); Chorale 2 is based on *Wenn ich einmahl soll scheiden* (St. Matthew Passion, BWV 244, #62) with text from Wilfred Owen's *At a Calvary Near the Ancre*; and Chorale 3 borrows from Bach's motet setting of *Jesu, meine Freude* (BWV 227) and one of his harmonizations of the *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* chorale (BWV 302) texted with William Blake's *On Another's Sorrow*. For the final chorale (4), Muehleisen sets an excerpt of a poem by Violet Fane with original music.

Figure 3.

1.	Prologue
	1.1 Processional
	1.2 Exhortation and Questions: "Do not let your hearts be troubled."
2.	Scene One (The Son)
	2.1 Passion Interlude 1 (The Son): "Today the Master of Creation..."
	2.2 Jack Kipling's Final Letter: "Just a hurried line..."
	2.3 Song: "Just before the battle, Mother"
	2.4 Chorale 1: <i>Soldier's Dream</i> ("I dreamed kind Jesus fouled the big-gun gears")
3.	Scene Two (The Mother)
	3.1 Passion Interlude 2 (The Mother): "Today the blameless Virgin saw Thee..."
	3.2 <i>My Boy Jack</i>
	3.3 Chorale 2: <i>At a Calvary Near the Ancre</i> ("One ever hangs where shelled roads part")
4.	Scene Three (Calvary)
	4.1 Passion Interlude 3 (The Crucifixion): "Today He who hung the earth..."
	4.2 The Passion of the Son
	4.3 Lament
	4.4 The Passion of the Mother
	4.5 Chorale 3: <i>On Another's Sorrow</i> ("Can I see another's woe?")
5.	Scene Four (Pietà)
	5.1a Passion Interlude 4: "Give me this Stranger"
	5.1b Passion Interlude 4 (continued): "...in her waiting arms"
	5.2 Lullaby (<i>Mary's Song</i>)
	5.3 Duet: "Do not lament me, O Mother"
	5.4 Passion Interlude 5 (Burial): "The Noble Joseph"
	5.5 Resurrection: "Show us Thy Glorious Resurrection"
	5.6 Chorale 4: "Let me arise and open the gate"
6.	Epilogue
	6.1 Answers and Exhortations
	6.2 Alleluia
	6.3 Closing Hymn: "God of Love, King of Peace"

Much like a Bach cantata, *Pietà* concludes with communal singing of the hymn “O God of Love, O King of Peace,” for which Muehleisen adapted the tune HESPERUS with text by Henry Baker. Everyone in attendance is invited to join the choirs, soloists, and organ in this resounding hymn. Each of the hymn’s four verses concludes meaningfully with “Give peace, O God, give peace again.” Much like the playing of the semantron at the beginning of the work, the communal singing of this hymn at the piece’s conclusion functions to gather and unite the audience.

In addition to borrowing music for the chorales, Muehleisen interpolates, quotes, and transforms music by J.S. Bach and Antonio Caldara. The fact that he repurposes Baroque composers’ music is a nod to the era in and of itself and further associates *Pietà* with the ethos of the Baroque Passion-Oratorio tradition. *Exhortation and Questions* (1.2) immediately follows the *Processional* and opens with music for oboe and English horn inspired by the opening of Bach’s *St. John Passion* (Figures 4 and 5). Muehleisen retains some of Bach’s chromaticism and suspensions but creates a more modern, discordant aesthetic by incorporating octave and rhythmic displacement.

Figure 4. Johann Sebastian Bach, *Johannes-Passion, Parte prima*, 1. Chorus, mm. 1–19 [oboes only]. *Neue Bach-Ausgabe*, II/4, edited by Arthur Mendel. Copyright 1973 Bärenreiter, Kassel, Germany. Reproduced with permission.

The image displays three systems of musical notation for oboes from the first chorus of Johann Sebastian Bach's *Johannes-Passion*. The first system covers measures 1 through 19, with the top staff labeled 'Flute traverso I / Oboe 1' and the bottom staff 'Flute traverso II / Oboe 2'. The second system covers measures 6 through 13, with the top staff labeled 'Ob. 1' and the bottom staff 'Ob. 2'. The third system also covers measures 13 through 19, with the top staff labeled 'Ob. 1' and the bottom staff 'Ob. 2'. The music is written in G minor (two flats) and common time (C). The notation includes various note values, rests, and phrasing slurs, illustrating the chromatic and suspensive qualities mentioned in the text.

Figure 5. John Muehleisen, *Pietà*, 1.2. Exhortation and Questions, mm. 1–28 [oboe/English horn only]. Copyright 2012 John Muehleisen, www.johnmuehleisen.com. Reproduced with permission.

Andante risoluto ♩ = 84

The musical score is presented in three systems. The first system (measures 1-7) shows the Oboe and English Horn parts with dynamic markings *p*, *f*, *mf*, and *f*. The second system (measures 8-16) includes the Oboe and English Horn parts with dynamic markings *sf*, *p*, *p*, *sf*, *mf*, *f*, and *mf*. The third system (measures 17-23) features the Oboe and English Horn parts with dynamic markings *f*, *f*, *ff*, *ff*, *f*, and *ff*. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, accents, and dynamic hairpins.

He also uses and expands upon a four-note motive from Caldara’s setting of the *Stabat mater* as a recurring lamentation theme. Caldara’s piece begins with three descending notes followed by an ascending minor second, and this motive is imitated in each entrance (Figure 6). Although written centuries ago, this motive sounds somewhat contemporary given its angular shape and tonal ambiguity. When Muehleisen first introduces this borrowed motive in *Pietà*, he

aptly uses it to set the text “Have you news of my boy Jack,” sung by the soprano soloist (Figure 7). This is sung from the perspective of Caroline Balestier Kipling, wife of Rudyard Kipling, whose son was missing-in-action during WWI and was eventually presumed dead. Muehleisen compellingly couples this reference to the *Stabat mater*, which deals with Mary’s anguish during Christ’s crucifixion, with the tormented waiting of a mother whose son is away at war.

Figure 6. Antonio Caldara, *Stabat mater*, I, mm. 1–5. Copyright 2012 Bärenreiter, Kassel, Germany. Reproduced with permission.

Adagio

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Trombone 1

Trombone 2

Soprano
Sta-bat ma - ter do - lo - ro - sa,

Alto
Sta-bat ma - ter do - lo - ro - sa,

Tenor
Sta-bat ma - ter do - lo - ro -

Bass
Sta-bat ma - ter do - lo -

Organo e Basso
6 6 9 7

Figure 7. John Muehleisen, *Pietà*, 3.2 *My Boy Jack*, mm. 21–24 [soprano solo only]. Copyright 2012 John Muehleisen, www.johnmuehleisen.com. Reproduced with permission.

S solo

mp as if in shock

'Have you news of my boy Jack?' *p*

Muehleisen's *Pietà* is remarkable in its construction. Combining ancient Scriptures and liturgies with contemporary texts, the work has a universal message of love and compassion. Hopefully, many readers will be interested in performing the work. The performance by the St. Olaf Choir and Magnum Chorum is magnificent and provides a wonderful sense of the work. An archived webcast of their performance is available online:

<http://www.stolaf.edu/multimedia/play/?e=1402>.

Given the small instrumental forces that are required to perform it, *Pietà* is budget-friendly if the required choral forces are already in place. Those interested in more information may contact the composer for a perusal score and his extended notes on the work. They should also consult an episode of the podcast Choir Chat, in which Muehleisen speaks at length about the creation of this work:

<https://soundcloud.com/choirchat/039johnmuehleisen>.

At the conclusion of this interview, Muehleisen references his artistic credo, a quotation by Robert McAfee Brown: “Where there is beauty apparent, we are to enjoy it; where there is beauty hidden, we are to unveil it; where there is beauty defaced, we are to restore it; where there is no beauty, we are to create it.” Considering how our fractured political climate is plagued with disparity and inequality, John Muehleisen has created a work of great beauty in *Pietà*. Rooted in tradition, the

work speaks to today and implores us to live with one another in love, compassion, and grace. No topic could be more profound or timely than this.

—John C. Hughes

Missa in h-Moll, BWV 232

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

Edited by Ulrich Leisinger

SSATB soli, SSAATTBB choir

3 trumpets, corno da caccia, timpani

2 flutes, 2 oboes (1st/2nd oboe d’amore),

2 bassoons, 2 violins, viola, continuo (c. 101’)

Text: Greek and Latin

Score: Carus Verlag 31.232

Recording: *J.S. Bach: Mass in B Minor*. Gächinger

Kantorei Stuttgart, Freiburger Barockorchester,

Hans-Christoph Rademann, conductor. Carus,

83.315. 2015.

Creating a definitive edition of a choral masterwork is an endeavor worthy of any skilled detective. Multiple sources, conflicting performance parts, and illegible autographs often leave scholars with more questions than answers regarding a composer’s intentions. Even the most carefully researched edition will acknowledge this dilemma in its attempt to create an historically informed score.

This investigatory process is utilized in several modern editions of Johann Sebastian Bach’s monumental *Misse in b-Moll*, BWV 232. Within the past two decades, four significant editions have been published: edited by Christoph Wolff for Peters (1994), Joshua Rifkin for Breitkopf (2006), Uwe Wolf for Bärenreiter (2010), and Ulrich Leisinger for Carus-Verlag (2014). While each edition represents the finest in choral research, they demonstrate the challenges facing scholars as they sift through countless extant sources.

The most recent contribution is edited by Ulrich Leisinger, who is Director of Research at the International Foundation at the Mozarteum in Salzburg. Prior to this post, Leisinger served as Research Fellow and Deputy Director of Research at the Bach-Archiv in Leipzig from 1992–2004. As Executive Director of the Neue Mozart-Ausgabe and Digital Mozart Edition, it is clear that Leisinger possesses the skills and acumen to create a trusted edition of Bach’s *Misse in b-Moll*.

In preparing this edition, Leisinger relied on four primary resources: the original autograph (Source A: *Staatbibliothek zu Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz*), two of the earliest copyists’ manuscripts dating between 1765–1770 (Source C and D), and a set of performing parts from 1773 of the “Kyrie” and “Gloria” (Source B: *Staat- und Universitätsbibliothek – Sächsische Landesbibliothek* in Dresden). In fact, Leisinger’s strong preference to source B is what separates his edition from its predecessors.

The history of these sources further illustrates the difficulty facing any scholar who attempts to create a definitive edition of BWV 232. Following Bach’s death in 1750, the autograph of *Misse in b-Moll* (source A) was passed on to his son Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach. Fifteen years later, Carl Philipp Emanuel gave the autograph to the close family friend Johann Friedrich Hering for

copying purposes. By this time, however, source A had deteriorated due to poor paper quality and excessive markings. Hering left blank many sections on his copy that were illegible (source C). Moreover, Carl Philipp Emanuel later added in the missing sections of music and made “improvements” to his father’s score. The second copy of Bach’s manuscript stems from 1769 when Johann Philipp Kirnberger borrowed the autograph to create his another copy (source D). According to Leisinger, sources C and D “reflect the state of Bach’s original score prior to 1770.”

What makes Leisinger’s edition unique is the attention given to a fourth source (source B). In 1733, Bach dedicated a Kyrie-Gloria Mass (which would later form the beginning sections of *Misse in b-Moll*) for the newly appointed Prince-Elector Frederick August II of Saxony (1696-1763). Ever the entrepreneur, Bach composed this work with the intention of receiving a court title, which was later bestowed on Bach in 1736 (*Compositeur bei der Hof Capelle*). Given the personal nature of this endeavor—it was not intended for his official duties in Leipzig—Bach did not use his regular copyists from Leipzig. Bach relied mostly on his family and himself to copy the performing parts (source B). In addition, as the Kyrie-Gloria Mass was a dedication to the Prince-Elector, Bach gave much attention to the readability and precision of these performing parts.

By considering source B as the primary source for *Misse in b-Moll*’s Kyrie and Gloria, Leisinger created a “hybrid edition.” Unlike previous editions, which relied heavily on the autograph (source A), Leisinger’s edition adheres faithfully to source B in the “Kyrie” and “Gloria,” while the “Credo” through “Agnus Dei” is based mostly on source A (with sources C and D for verification purposes). This process provides valuable information not available in other editions. For example, Bach’s fully figured basso continuo is

added to the “Kyrie” and “Gloria.” Bach’s slurs and articulations are more prevalent in these movements. *Colla parte* instrumentation, which is not designated in the autograph, is specified. Also, Leisinger provides Bach’s later amendments to the “Quoniam tu solus sanctus” in an *ossia* staff; allowing performers the option of using either version.

As expected by Carus-Verlag, Leisinger’s edition is of the highest quality. Not only is the score clearly printed, but editorial additions are noticeably demarcated. With strong bindings and durable paper, this score will weather hours of score preparations and rehearsals. However, what makes this edition even more unique is the accompanying DVD-ROM, which provides a wealth of information regarding the edition and its completion. Every annotation in the digital score is cross-referenced with a link that provides critical information without having to page through the appendix. Also, the DVD-ROM provides digital copies of the various facsimiles involved in this edition; musicians can evaluate all sources to an annotation with just a simple mouse click.

It should be noted that Carus-Verlag published Leisinger’s edition in conjunction with conductor Hans-Christoph Rademann’s recording of the same score with the Internationale Bachakademie Stuttgart. Also included with this recording is a 30-minute documentary, “Bach’s Secret Legacy: Hans-Christoph Rademann in Search of the True B-Minor Mass,” a small video performance of selections from the *Missa in b-Moll*, and PDFs of the 1733 Dresden parts. A thorough review of this recording was provided by Dr. John Hughes in the September 2016 *Choral Journal*.²

In his forward, Leisinger states that *Missa in b-Moll* “cannot be said to exist in a definitive form.” While this is true of almost any masterwork, musicologists and performers are charged with the task of examining critically all of the extant sources that are part of a work’s genesis. Thankfully, Leisinger’s scholarly integrity allows modern and future musicians the ability to experience Bach’s “great Catholic Mass” in a more historically informed manner. Even if future research contradicts Leisinger’s work, this edition is a valuable 21st-century contribution to Bach scholarship.

—C. Michael Porter

(continued on next page)

² John Hughes, review of *J. S. Bach: Mass in B minor*, by Hans-Christoph Rademann, *Choral Journal* 57, no. 2 (September 2016): 70–73.

Salve Regina 2

Gabriel Jackson (b. 1962; 2004)

S.S.A.A.T.T.B.B. a cappella

Extended soprano solo

S.S.A.A. solo quartet

S.A.T.B. solo quartet

(c. 13')

Text: Antiphon to the Blessed Virgin Mary;

Anonymous (c. 1460) *The Pynson Ballad*, verse

21; Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343–1400), from

'The Prioress' Tale,' recomposed by William

Wordsworth (1770–1850); Anonymous (13th

century), from *Edu be the, Hevene Quene*,

recomposed by Peter Davidson (b. 1957)

Score: Oxford University Press, New Horizons

Series, \$14.00

Website: <http://gabrieljackson.london>

Recording: Jackson, Gabriel. *Not no faceless*

Angel. Polyphony, Stephen Layton. Hyperion,

CDA67708. January 2008. Compact disc or

MP3.

Composed to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the foundation of Beaulieu Abbey in England, Gabriel Jackson's *Salve Regina 2* is a stunning example of this composer's sacred concert music, as well as a brilliant homage to Tudor votive antiphons of the same text. It serves as an excellent introduction to Jackson's compositional style, even if it is only accessible to highly skilled choral ensembles.

Jackson is a prolific British composer and has become more popular in American circles over the last several years. Born in Bermuda in 1962, he was trained as a boy at Canterbury Cathedral and later at the Royal College of Music in London. His compositions for choir are especially well known and range in size from church anthems (which are well worth exploring) to his *Choral Symphony* (2012). *Salve Regina 2* is somewhere in between: an extended choral work that is neither

a typical church anthem or choral octavo nor a full-fledged symphony.

Salve Regina 2 is, at its core, an homage to Tudor, votive antiphons, like those in the Eton Choirbook. The Eton Choirbook was an early Tudor resource for the choristers and monks of Eton College, compiled primarily between 1490 and 1502. The compositions in this manuscript include music for the Catholic Church before the English Reformation. Many are devotional antiphons that had no place in the liturgy, but were sung following the office of Compline. These works were an expression of devotion rather than a liturgical act.

The *Salve Regina* is one of the most popular of these devotional texts; it is an anonymous Latin antiphon in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In the score, Jackson attributes it to Herman Contractus (1013–1054), a Benedictine monk, scholar, and musician.—However, most recent research suggests that the authorship is unclear.

The antiphon ends with three invocations; "O clemens, O pia, O dulcis Virgo Maria." New, but related words are often added before these interjections to elaborate on this preexisting text, a technique known as a "trope." Jackson maintains this tradition, but does not use the traditional tropes associated with this text in Medieval England, instead choosing three poems with Marian themes.

Sung before "O clemens," the first poem is a beautiful, but lesser known text—verse 21 of *The Pynson Ballad*. This devotional ballad recounts the appearance of the Virgin Mary to the Lady Richeldis, an event that led to the founding of the Shrine of Our Lady of Walsingham. The verse praises Mary, describes her mercy, and asks to bless those that devoutly seek her.

The second poem, sung before “O pia,” is by Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1343–1400), perhaps the best known of all three authors. The poem is drawn from “The Prioress’ Tale,” a portion within Chaucer’s well-known *Canterbury Tales*. Jackson uses William Wordsworth’s translation into modern English for this composition to invoke her as a guide, not unlike Mary. He grandly describes her “goodness...magnificence...virtue ...[and] humility.”

Finally, before the concluding exclamation, “O dulcis Virgo Maria,” Jackson inserts a portion of a poem by an anonymous, 13th-century poet. The larger poem, *Edu be the, Hevene Quene*, was translated into modern English by Scottish scholar Peter Davidson. In four stanzas, it concludes the work by describing the great beauty and wonder of Mary.

These texts serve as the organizing structure for this 12-minute work and add greatly to Jackson’s artistic and musical interpretation of the *Salve Regina*. Jackson treats the original *Salve Regina* text and each new trope differently, creating seven separate and distinct sections of music separated by silence. Each of the sections is differentiated by meter, voicing, tonality, and texture. These differences and distinctions are used to create a formal structure that—with little classical sense of balance—is related to earlier votive antiphons.

Settings of the *Salve Regina* in the Eton Choirbook are often marked by dense and intricate polyphony, extreme vocal ranges, complex rhythms including syncopations, and textural shifts sometimes associated with changes from soli and tutti sections. Each of these stylistic features can be found in Jackson’s setting.

Salve Regina 2 opens with the bulk of the original, devotional text in one continuous, through-composed section. In this extended opening section, Jackson combines horizontal, melodic gestures, often imitated in several voices, with homophonic, accompanimental gestures in other voices. This might best be described as polyphony, but Jackson does not shy away from purely homophonic textures. In fact, he begins with an emphatic homophonic exclamation—“Salve!”—in the first two bars. He bookends the first 30 measures, gradually building to another exclamation of “Salve!” From here, he continues with complex syncopated, melismatic, and thrilling musical gestures that alternate between homophony and polyphony.

More important than the specific musical devices used is Jackson’s approach to the text—one rhetorical idea at a time, he communicates emotional content rather than simply delivering each syllable. “Salve” (“Hail”) is presented in a strong, homophonic declamation by full choir. “Suspiramus” (“do we sigh”), is set with a motive that rises and falls with glissandi, imitating a sigh. Melodic lines are often lyric but short, weaving through one another contrapuntally. Other times, the forward momentum waits as a soft homophonic section pleads for mercy (“Eia ergo, advocate...”). The music transitions seamlessly from expansive, shimmering melodies to dense, intricate harmonic and rhythmic gestures.

The opening 98 measures are a thrilling example of Jackson’s rhetorical prowess, contrapuntal skill, and harmonic grace. This section ends on an Eb Major 9 chord, functioning as a dominant into the next section. This chord, and the following silence, signal the most dramatic shift yet in the composition.

Suddenly, instead of constantly-shifting textures, the tenor and bass parts sing a four-bar, ostinato-like accompaniment. A new meter (3/8) invites constant shifts between duple and triple rhythms. Finally, over the accompaniment, a soprano soloist sings, in English, the first of the poetic tropes; *The Pynson Ballad*. The rhythmic intricacy of this section is hidden by the graceful ease of the solo line as it floats over the accompaniment. Jackson calls special attention to the rhetoric of the text, emphasizing important words with extended melodic lines.

Silence again signals the transition to a new section; a short five-bar, tutti exclamation in 4/4 of “O clemens” (O clement)—a full choral response to the trope preceding it. Silence follows.

The second trope, on Chaucer’s poetry, then takes center stage; sung by a soli, SSAA quartet. This section highlights one of Jackson’s favorite techniques, a sudden modulation to a new and distant tonal area. “O clemens” begins in the reigning Ab major tonality, ending on the predominant, Db major chord. This new soli section begins in A Major, a half step up from the last key and a full minor 6th (enharmonically) away from the previous chord.

Additionally, the meter returns to a compound time signature, though with an additional two beats per bar (5/8) as compared to the first trope. This new meter, combined with the forward motion of the polyphony, and the lovely harmonic motion, contribute to a subtle complexity. Combined with the sudden, and surprising, harmonic shift and soli writing, this section has a gossamer, floating quality.

Another structural break follows. Silence precedes the exclamation of “O pia” (“O holy”) that, aside from ornamental additions, is identical to the “O

clemens” section. Jackson returns to the pervading Ab major tonality, 4/4 meter, and *tutti* texture, drawing further attention to the structural importance of the text and this musical gesture.

The final poetic trope, Peter Davidson’s translation of *Edu be thu, Hevene Quene*, is sung homophonically by solo SATB quartet. This section continues the pattern of shifting to compound meters in solo/soli sections, this time to 7/8. The quartet’s music is among the most straightforward in this composition.

Underneath the quartet, the remainder of the choir sings the same text on a syncopated, melismatic line in unison octaves. This technique serves more as a textural undercurrent than harmonic support. The text sung by the choir can hardly be understood, but the line maintains the forward momentum of the music.

Following one final silence, an extended polyphonic tutti section on the text “O dulcis Virgo” concludes the work.

This composition demonstrates Jackson’s brilliant understanding of rhetoric. *Salve Regina 2* is a stunning example of his idiosyncratic harmonic and contrapuntal style, which he uses to emphasize ideas and words.

It shows a deep awareness of and appreciation for Tudor models. Jackson has composed an artistic study on Tudor music using counterpoint and other historical styles in a contemporary context. Rather than being esoteric, the resulting composition is an incredibly vibrant and exhilarating work.

In the end, Jackson created a modern-day votive antiphon that focuses on text. It is not simply another setting of words, nor does it focus exclusively on the intricacy of its counterpoint. Instead, he effectively sets his carefully selected texts to communicate an exuberant, euphoric idea of the Virgin Mary (or the Queen of Heaven), while maintaining an underlying feeling of awe.

While this work is absolutely worth preparing and performing, make no mistake, it is challenging. The work is consistently in eight parts and a cappella, which requires singers to be highly competent and independent. The solos require at least six highly proficient voices. Though in performance, I recommend using 9 separate soloists, a different group for each solo/soli section.

The intricate polyphony itself will take time for choirs to learn and truly perfect; it is vital that each musical gesture embody its rhetorical intent. Additionally, tuning will take time and effort to settle. In particular, the section for soli voices in A major often proves a difficult transition and recalibration for the choir. In fact, Jackson's harmonic language in general can prove challenging for choirs to immediately embrace.

It is best suited for advanced college, auditioned community choirs, and professional ensembles. Though sacred, its length and specific texts can make liturgical inclusion difficult. It could be sung at the end of Compline between Trinity Sunday and the final Saturday before Advent 1, as the current Roman usage, or offered as an anthem during a church service. However, because of its length and intricacy, it is best viewed as a wonderful addition to sacred concert repertoire.

Despite these challenges, this work is well-worth the time and effort. It is a vibrant, dramatic composition from an exciting living composer.

Jackson's use of extra-liturgical texts to support the devotional nature of the Salve Regina text is highly effective. His harmonic language, use of contrapuntal techniques, and rhetorical text setting are captivating for both audience and artist.

To gain an understanding of the full scope of this work, it is best to listen to the excellent recording available made by Polyphony and published on the Hyperion label. I truly commend this work to any advanced ensemble interested in exploring Jackson's vibrant, rhetorical style. He is truly a unique and important voice in modern choral music.

—*Christopher Windle*

(continued on next page)

Seven Last Words

Michael John Trotta (b. 1978, 2016)

SATB, with soprano and baritone soloists.

Piano, chamber ensemble (flute, oboe, horn, piano), or full orchestra (flute, oboe, 2 trumpets in C, horn, timpani, harp, strings).

(c. 40')

Seven movements: I: Father, Forgive Them

(*Pater, dimitte illis*), II: Today, You Will Be with Me (*Hodie mecum eris*), III: Behold Your Son Ecce filius tuus), IV: I Thirst (Sitis), V: My God, Why Have You Abandoned Me? (*Deus meus, ut quid dereliquisti me?*), VI: Into Your Hands I Surrender My Soul (In manus tuas), VII: It Is Finished (*Consummatum est*)

Text: English or Latin

Score available from: www.morningstarmusic.com

Recording: *Michael John Trotta: Seven Last*

Words. Kansas City Repertory Singers, Kansas City Repertory Orchestra, Ben A Spalding. ARSIS Audio, 70-390. 2017.

In his famous *Poetics of Music* of 1939, Stravinsky observes, “A real tradition is not the relic of a past that is irretrievably gone; it is a living force that animates and informs the present.” Michael J. Trotta’s *Seven Last Words* is a work solidly grounded in tradition, yet incorporates a musical language that, in George Gershwin’s words, “informs the thoughts and aspirations of the people and the time.”

Musical settings for the Seven Last Words date from at least the early 16th century, and composers of many style periods have contributed, including de Lassus (16th century), Schütz (1645), Haydn (1787), Frank (1859), Dubois (1867), and MacMillan (1993), and many others. (Although, as Trotta points out, settings in English are relatively rare.) Trotta adheres to the tradition, sometimes incorporating innovations in scoring or ordering of texts introduced by previous composers.

Musically, Trotta presents a broad range of musical conventions and devices, allowing the Words to “expose a gamut of emotions...in a way that distills the most poignant moments of the human condition.” Additionally, the setting interpolates liturgical texts not contained within the traditional set, “further expanding the story and the reaction of those present and witness to the Passion.”

An American composer, conductor, and clinician based in New York City, Trotta completed *Seven Last Words* in 2016. The work was commissioned by four churches: Highland Presbyterian in Louisville, Kentucky, Ladue Chapel Presbyterian in St. Louis, Missouri, Westminster Presbyterian in Greenville, South Carolina, and White Memorial Presbyterian in Raleigh, North Carolina. It will receive its premiere at Carnegie Hall on May 27, 2017. The dynamic interplay of time-honored musical gestures with present-day sonorities is present at the outset of the piece. The first Word, Father, Forgive Them, begins with an ominous sounding tonic in the lower strings, followed by an octave and then a fifth in succession, leading to an unexpected major seventh chord in m. 3. Emotionally, the contrast between somber gloom and reassuring light is established immediately. Musically, the gesture prepares for the statement of the main motive—a simple ascending line consisting of a perfect fifth and a minor second. This theme will recur throughout the work as a unifying element, in both minor and major (with a major second as the upper interval) guises.

The opening measures also reveal the overall harmonic strategy of the piece—diatonic chords, sometimes employing sevenths or higher intervals, usually in functional succession. Strong bows to tradition also appear: at a point of transition just before the middle of the movement, two measures clearly recall the powerful rhythms (complete with tympani reinforcement) of Beethoven’s Fifth

Symphony. An even more direct historical gesture is heard in the inclusion of a fugue section later in the movement, aptly setting an interpolation of the Kyrie. The head motive of the subject is essentially the opening theme of the movement, but its expansion into a fugue subject makes it identical in character to the opening of Bach's Fugue in G Minor from book one of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*. Indeed, it is essentially the same subject with a reordering of the intervals of the head motive.

The inclusion of a circle of fifths in the harmonic motion of the fugue makes the Baroque reference complete. The final cadence of the movement is fascinating. Recall that the work opened with an octave followed by the addition of an open fifth. The closing gesture reflects that event by setting up a perfect authentic cadence in minor only to end on an open fifth. Oddly enough, the voicing of the chord, combined with the lingering sonorities in the memory, convinced me that I was hearing a major triad (Picardy third). It wasn't until I checked the score that I was aware of the missing third. The ambiguity perfectly portrays the mixture of despair and hope that permeates the texts.

The second Word, "Today You Will Be with Me," displays soft and reflective sentiments, featuring major harmonies and the prevalence of major seventh and ninth chords. Following an extensive orchestral introduction featuring harp and alluding to the original theme that permeates the work, the choir enters with the primary theme of this movement, which has been suggested but not quite stated by the harp. The new theme is built from the same fifth and minor second that comprised the original theme of the work, but in retrograde, starting on the tonic, and descending through the seventh and third of the key. While encompassing the same intervals, it couldn't be more different in character from its minor-

key parent. The tranquility of the movement is maintained by the steady harp accompaniment, and ends quietly with a "Broadway button" played by the lower strings.

The third Word, "Behold Your Son," features soprano solo with orchestra with the prevalence of harp once again. (The harp plays a prominent role throughout the entire work.) This short movement features symmetrical phrasing and a major-key theme adapted from the work's primary motive. Trotta has taken liberties with the text here: The second part of the Word, "Behold thy mother" is not heard. Instead, a verse from the Stabat Mater is interpolated, a strategy previously employed by Dubois.

The fourth Word, "I Thirst," is set in a minor key and scored for baritone solo, choir, and orchestra. The first half of the movement is reminiscent of a Handel aria, complete with ritornello, a quasi *da capo* form, and a strong Baroque feel. The contrasting second half, featuring choir and orchestra, is far more energized, with prominent brass figures, a vigorous section set in 7/8 time, and a final triumphant-sounding major chord played by the brass.

The fifth Word, "My God, Why Have You Abandoned Me?," is set in a minor key. The mood of despair that continues throughout is reinforced by a descending chromatic line in the bass, which previously served as the countersubject of the Kyrie fugue in the first Word. The restricted motion of the vocal parts and abundant chromaticism contribute to the depiction of Christ's weakness and anguish as he faces his approaching death. The orchestra ends the movement, concluding with a slowly fading final chord through the last five bars.

The sixth Word, “Into Your Hands I Surrender My Soul,” is the only completely unaccompanied movement is the composition. It begins with staggered entrances, but homophonic motion prevails throughout, albeit peppered with abundant suspensions and moving inner lines. The overall form is ABA, which the shorter, middle B section set to an interpolated text, “Not, mine, but your will be done.”

The seventh Word, “It is Finished,” is the longest movement by far, and serves as a musical summary of the entire composition. It begins with a statement of the main motive by the horn, accompanied by an energetic rhythmic figure also derived from the first movement. References to previously stated material are abundant, sometimes appearing as exact melodic statements with different words. For example, parts of the solo melody from the third Word reappear in with full choir with the identical orchestral accompaniment. The memorable “Remember me” theme from the second Word returns in the seventh Word with the interpolated text “Truly this man was the Son of God.” Other significant gestures that return in this movement include the 7/8 meter of the fourth Word, this time in 7/16, and the Fifth-Symphony reference from the first movement. The movement concludes with a recapitulation, referencing not of the beginning of the movement, but of the opening of the entire composition, reinforcing the observation that the work constitutes one cohesive musical statement.

Trotta’s *Seven Last Words* is a composition that appeals on many levels. The overall harmonic color is accessible, rich and varied, and one that is familiar to modern-day ears. It wouldn’t be a stretch to observe that several extended passages are reminiscent of what might be heard in a contemporary film score. At the same time, allusions to musical gestures and conventions drawn from the Western classical tradition

are ubiquitous, and can only add to the appreciation of the work by those well steeped in the literature. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the work is highly integrated, with inner logic and connections that even the general listener can appreciate.

It is important to note that the work was commissioned by churches for performance by church choirs consisting of non-professional performers with limited and varied resources. Trotta responded directly to his charge by producing a work that is appealing, adaptable, and within the capabilities of any competent ensemble. *Seven Last Words* is a significant achievement, a worthy participant in the choral tradition, and a welcome contribution to the literature.

—Robert Rawlins