

An American Premiere: Michael John Trotta's *Seven Last Words*

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With its Carnegie Hall premiere on May 27, 2017, Michael John Trotta (b. 1978) entered the ranks of composers who have set the *Seven Last Words*, commencing with Schütz and proceeding through Haydn, Gounod, Franck, Dubois, and MacMillan. Trotta's *Seven Last Words* contributes another American voice to this tradition. Only a handful of other American composers have assayed this text, including Robert James Dvorak (b. 1919), Douglas Allanbrook (1921–2003), Jerome Malek (b. 1937), Nancy Hill Cobb (b. 1951), and Benjamin Cornelius-Bates (b. 1978). To the best of this author's knowledge, this is the first time that a feature-length setting of the *Seven Last Words* by an American composer has been performed at Carnegie Hall.

Composer and conductor Michael Trotta has had commissions performed at multiple major conventions such as ACDA, NAFME, AGO, and TMEA. The holder of a Doctorate in Choral Conducting from Louisiana State University where he studied with Ken Fulton, Trotta has previously worked in elementary, middle school, and high school positions, as well as serving as Director of Music for several churches in Philadelphia, PA and Baton Rouge, LA. He received both Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from Rowan University in New Jersey. He has taught at Oklahoma State University,

Louisiana State University, Rowan University, and most recently as Director of Choral Studies at Virginia Wesleyan College. He currently works as a full-time composer in New York City where he lives with his wife Rachel. He frequently works as a composer-in-residence with ensembles throughout the country. There are already four CD recordings devoted solely to his music.

Trotta's *Seven Last Words* was commissioned by a consortium of four churches: Highland Presbyterian in Louisville, KY, Ladue Chapel Presbyterian in St. Louis, MO, Westminster Presbyterian in Greenville, SC, and White Memorial Presbyterian in Raleigh, NC. It is scored for soprano and baritone soloists, SATB choir, and small orchestra (flute, oboe, horn, 2 trumpets, harp, tympani, and strings (7.7.5.3.1)). With seven movements, the work lasts approximately 40 minutes.

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The text is provided in both English and Latin, which allows for performance in either sacred services or a concert venue, depending on the needs of the choir. The composer himself writes in the notes to the orchestral score,

As musical settings of this important text are significantly underrepresented in the English language, this work was set in English for those wishing to use the work in conjunction with a religious service. Alternately, to acknowledge the rich history and universal nature of the text, this work was also set in Latin for those who may be those [sic] wishing to use the work in a concert setting. Of course, religious services may use the Latin and concert settings may use the English without diminishing from the work.

Trotta's *Seven Last Words* repeatedly uses two musical motifs to achieve a remarkable degree of compositional unity. The first is a combination of two ascending intervals, a perfect fifth and a second higher (usually a minor second but sometimes major), and the second is four notes in a descending scalar passage. This article introduces readers to this new work by examining each movement in turn and by discussing salient musical excerpts from the score, pointing out the frequent uses of these unifying motifs.

The First Word: Father, Forgive Them

The work opens with the overtone series: unison, octave, fifth (measures 1–2), which establishes both the tonality and the somber mood. This also lays the foundation for the initial presentation of the motif which Trotta uses as a basis for the entire composition: two ascending intervals, a perfect fifth and a minor second, returning to the fifth. This theme is hocketted between the cello and violas on their entrances as they play the only notes heard over the pedal point F# in the basses, but is more obviously presented by the violins, horn, first trumpet, and flute in turn; their staggered imitative entrances already hinting at the fugue which closes the first movement. The choir's unison entrance in bar 20 also utilizes this motif (Figure 2), and in bar 24 presents the motif again a fourth lower in a complimentary phrase.

Figure 1 on next two pages.

Figure 1: Michael J. Trotta's Seven Last Words

Movement	Measure Numbers	Forces Employed*	Text and Source	Tonal Center(s)
1. Father, Forgive Them	1–15	Introduction	none	F# minor
	16–52	SATB choir	Father forgive them, for they know not what they do (Luke 23:34)	
	53–78	interlude	none	D minor, g minor, F# minor
	79–109	SATB choir	Father forgive them...	F# minor
	110–117	Kyrie fugue (SATB Choir)	<i>Kyrie eleison</i>	
	118–136		<i>Christe eleison</i>	
	137–149		<i>Kyrie eleison</i>	
2. Today You Will Be With Me	1–4		Harp	none
	5–8	Men and strings	Today you will be with me in paradise (Luke 23:43)	
	9–31	interlude	none	F# minor, D major
	32–73	Women (SA)	Remember me, when you come into your kingdom, O Lord, hear me! (Luke 23:42)	D major
	74–93	SATB choir	Remember me! Today, you will be with me in paradise!	E major
3. Behold Your Son	1–8	Introduction	None	A Major
	9–16	Soprano solo	Behold, your son (John 19:26–27)	
	17–24		At the cross her station keeping, stood mourning mother weeping. (<i>Stabat Mater</i>)	
	25–32		Behold, your son	
	33–40		At the cross her station keeping...	
	41–48		Behold, your son	
4. I Thirst	1–6	Introduction	none	E minor
	7–27	Baritone soloist	"I thirst" (John 19:28)	
	28–34	interlude	none	E Major
	35–43			
	44–53			
	54–73	SATB choir	"If you are Christ, come down from the cross, that we might see and believe." (Matthew 27:40, Mark 15:32) "If you are King, save yourself..." (Luke 23:37)	A minor
	74–83	Conclusion	none	A major, E Major
84–96				

*** orchestra assumed unless otherwise specified**

Figure 1 (continued): Michael J. Trotta's Seven Last Words

Movement	Measure Numbers	Forces Employed*	Text and Source	Tonal Center(s)
5. My God, Why Have Your Abandoned Me?	1–8	Introduction	none	C# minor
	9–28	Choir	My God, why have you abandoned me? (Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34)	
	29–32	interlude	none	
	33–37	Choir <i>a cappella</i>	My God	
	37–49	Conclusion	none	
6. Into Your Hands I Surrender My Soul	1–27	Choir <i>a cappella</i>	Into your hands I surrender my (whole) soul (Luke 23:46)	E Major
	28–46		Not mine, but your will be done (Matthew 6:10)	
	47–79		Into your hands I surrender my soul	
7. It is Finished	1–4	Introduction	None	C# minor
	5–8	TB Choir	And with a loud voice, Jesus cried, exclaiming	
	9–12	SATB Choir		
	13–20		Baritone soloist	
	21–32			
	33–52	SATB Choir	Darkened was the sun, darkness covered the earth, torn was the veil, (Luke 23:44-45) the earth did quake (Matthew 27:51).	
	53–70	Interlude	None— <i>Stabat Mater</i> theme	
	71–82	SATB Choir	All of the graves were opened wide! (Matthew 27:52)	C# Major, E Major, A Major
	83–101	Baritone soloist	Truly this man was the Son of God! (Matthew 27:54)	B minor
	102–110	SA Choir		
	111–117	TB Choir		
	118–130	SATB Choir		
	131–143	Interlude		None
	144–162			
	163–190	SATB Choir	Truly this man was the Son of God!	F# minor
	191–198		All of the graves were opened wide!	
	199–204	Interlude	none	F# Major
	205–230	SATB Choir	Truly this man was the Son of God!	

* orchestra assumed unless "*a cappella*" specified

This first motif is answered immediately by the second motif, a series of four descending scalar notes, which can be transposed and sequenced as presented in the soprano part of Figure 3.

A steady build-up is evident in the score: the choir first sings in unison, accompanied only by strings (16–27) before breaking into four parts (measure 28), after which the brass rejoin (measure 34). The orchestral interlude develops the later half of the principal motive, the interval of the second, in a manner reminiscent of Beethoven’s Fifth symphony. Note the upper string parts sets over the principle theme in the viola part in Figure 4.

The orchestral interlude briefly develops the theme in distantly-related keys (d minor measures 53–55; g minor measures 57–59), but the central key of F# minor is soon reaffirmed (bar 60), and the opening material is recapitulated starting in bar 71. This time the choral entrance in measures 79 is in four parts; this expands to six parts in bar 91. From this climactic point, both choir and orchestra gradually reduce forces until the choir sings *a cappella* (measures 103–4); the opening motive here can be easily seen in Figure 5 in octaves in measures 101–102, and then again, more hidden, hocketted between the lower (B & A) and upper (T & S) parts in measures 103–104.

Figure 2. Trotta’s Seven Last Words Movement #1, choral parts only, measures 16–27.

Figure 2 shows a musical score for measures 20 to 27. The score is written for a unison vocal line. The tempo is marked *f Unison*. The lyrics are: "Fa - ther, for - give - them, for they know not, know not what they do. Pa - ter, di - mit - te, non e - nim sci - unt quid fa - ci - unt."

Figure 3. Trotta’s Seven Last Words Movement #1, choral parts only, measures 28–33.

Figure 3 shows a musical score for measures 28 to 33. The score is written for four vocal parts: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The tempo is marked *Div. mp* and *mf*. The lyrics are: "Pa - ther, di - mit - te, Pa - ter, di - mit - te, Fa - ther, for - give - them, Fa - ther, for - give - them."

Figure 4. Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #1, string parts only, measures 64–65.

Figure 5. Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #1, choral parts only, measures 101–104.

The section ends with the choir singing as they began, in unison accompanied only by the harp. But when the strings and flute enter only on the final measure, the flute playing an unresolved 9th of the strings' F#- minor chord hints that all is not concluded. What commences here is a fugue that uses the original motif as its subject over a

descending chromatic counter-subject, perhaps inviting comparison to Bach (see Figure 6).

The strings play *colla parte* with the voices for the final contrapuntal section. Both of these textual and textural elements (a *Kyrie*, and a fugue)

are novel in comparison to previous settings of the Seven Last Words: while polyphony or imitative entrances have been previously utilized (e.g. Gounod), a full fugue is new; similarly, this is to this author's knowledge the first setting of the Seven Last Words which incorporates the traditional opening text of the Mass. The movement ends on an "historic" open fifth, making aural associations with medieval music.

*The Second Word:
Today You Will Be With Me*

The movement opens with a solo harp (Franck and Dubois also featured the harp in their settings of the Seven Last Words), after which the basses and tenors intone a B pedal point while the strings

take over the harp's previous melodic material. The ensuing orchestral interlude transitions into D major (measure 24), whereupon the flute and the oboe duet a canon on the original motif. The starting notes of each motif outlines a diatonic version of the theme in retrograde: B (flute measure 25), A (oboe measure 26), and D (flute measure 27), as outlined in Figure 7.

When the choir re-enters in bar 32, the sopranos sing a retrograde version of the first motif antiphonally with the altos, who sing the principle motif in minor (see Figure 8).

Monteverdian suspensions sequence from tonic to dominant; the harp here summarizes all parts, as voices and strings supply the same pitches (Figure 9).

Figure 6. Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #1, choral parts only, measures 110–114.

The musical score for choral parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) of Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #1, measures 110–114. The score is in 4/4 time with a tempo marking of quarter note = 66. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#). Measure 110 shows the Soprano and Alto parts with rests. Measure 111 shows the Tenor and Bass parts with lyrics "Ky - ri - e e - lei - son, Ky - ri - e e -" and "Ky - ri - e e - lei - i - son." respectively. Measure 112 shows the Soprano and Alto parts with lyrics "Ky - ri - e" and "Ky - ri - e e" respectively. Measure 113 shows the Soprano and Alto parts with lyrics "Ky - ri - e" and "son, Ky - ri - e e" respectively. Measure 114 shows the Soprano and Alto parts with lyrics "Ky - ri - e" and "Ky - ri - e e" respectively.

Figure 7: Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #2, flute and oboe part, measures 24–27.

24 **Lightly** (♩ = ca. 72) 25 26 27

Flute

Oboe

mf

Figure 8: Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #2, soprano and alto only, measures 32–35.

32 *mf* 33 34 35

Soprano

Alto

Me - mem - to me - i Do - mi - ne,
Re - mem - ber me, *mf* re - mem - ber me.

Me - mem - to me - i Do - mi -
Re - men - ber me, re - mem - ber

Figure 9: Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #2, harp part only, measures 54–55.

54 55

Harp

The women conclude their part before the men re-enter singing a pedal point again, this time on a C#. Christ's promise, "Today, you shall be with me in paradise," frames the women singing the Good Thief Dismas' plaintive cry "remember me," acting both as prophecy and reassuring response.

This explains the text for the Second Word being out of chronological order, as Jesus' promise to the Good Thief Dismas here comes before he requests it. One could note, however, that this is the same order in which both Franck and Dubois chose to present these verses in their oratorios as well.

The Third Word: Behold Your Son

The Third Word presents a soft, light, and floating solo for soprano with orchestral accompaniment, which gives the choral forces a vocal break and the audience a refreshing change of aural timbre. As in the second movement, the harp again opens the movement with a four-measure solo. The harpist repeats this harmonic underlay in measures 5–8 (see Figure 10)

where now it supports the main motif, introduced in major by the oboe (measure 5), repeated (measure 6), and then in its original minor form (measure 7). In measures 5 and 6 this motif is echoed immediately by the first solo violin.

The soprano soloist enters in bar 9, singing this same four-bar phrase, first with only the harp as accompaniment, then with the oboe echoing. The movement unfolds in regular sets of two

Figure 10: Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #3, Oboe part only, measures 5–8.



Figure 11: Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #3, soprano and strings, measures 17–24.

Più mosso

mp

Soprano

Sta - bat - Ma - ter do - lo - ro - sa
At the cross her sta - tion keep - ing.

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Cello

Double Bass

mf

S

jux - ta - crui - cem la - cri - mo - sa
stood mourn - ful moth - er weep - ing weep - ing.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

four-measures phrases, alternating between the “Behold, Your Son” (John 19:26–27) text and “At the cross her station keeping,” a translation of the *Stabat Mater*. The Third Word is set using the first motif, the *Stabat Mater* using the second descending scalar passage motif (see Figure 11).

The Third Word, where Jesus speaks to his mother, provides the perfect occasion to include the *Stabat Mater*, a thirteenth-century devotional text—both Franck and Dubois did so previously in their settings of the Seven Last Words as well. The *Stabat Mater* is thought to originate from Franciscan sources based on the striking parallels of this poem to the mysticism of St. Francis of Assisi: one of his main tenets was the immersion of the believer in the sufferings of the Lord. While the author is not known for certain, Pope Innocentius III, Pope Gregorius, Pope John XII, and Bernhard of Clairveaux are all mentioned as possibilities by scholars. That it was originally designed for private devotion can be concluded from the inclusion of the reader itself as the central point of view. Since the beginning of the 14th century, the *Stabat Mater* can be found in prayer books; the oldest reference in a liturgical source is a Breviary from Arezzo, a manuscript that dates from 1417. The medieval poem is made up of 20 stanzas of three short lines, each having only seven or eight syllables and rhymed in Latin according to the scheme AAB CCB. With twenty verses, the *Stabat Mater* is too long to include in its entirety, so it is not surprising that composers select only specific verses. Franck included three verses, Dubois two, and Trotta one. The verse that Trotta selected is one of the two that Dubois employed as well, also in the Third Word.

In lieu of a second verse, Trotta repeats the first verse of the *Stabat Mater* between reiterations of the Johannine text in a rondo form. This pattern continues until measure 41, where the final presentation of the Third Word is set in a descent to its own original melody. The soprano ends on a soaring high A5. One should also note that Trotta only sets the second half of the Third Word: there is no “Behold thy mother” component here. Thus, while the orchestral score supplies the textual source as John 19:26–27, only the last part of John 19:26 is actually set. Here again Trotta relies on the tradition of both Franck and Dubois, both of whom also only set the second half of the Third Word.

The Fourth Word: I Thirst

Trotta’s setting of the Seven Last Words departs significantly from previous settings in that he reversed the fourth and fifth words. He places “I thirst” as the fourth movement and “My God, why have you forsaken me” as the fifth. As Trotta says in the preface, this has been done “for both musical and dramatic reasons.” He preferred to place the “My God, Why Have You Abandoned Me” after Christ’s pleading of “I Thirst” and the jeering of the *turba* chorus. He goes on to state that “It is possible, for those who desire the traditional order to be retained, to restore the traditional order of texts in performance without loss of musical integrity.” As the Seven Last words are not found in any single Gospel, but rather are a unique combination of everything said by Christ between his crucifixion and death in all four Gospels, establishing their chronology can be difficult. The traditional order of text is based on Mark 15:33–37, which does not include “I thirst,” but does have Jesus being given drink (without specifically requesting it) after “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?*” (My God, why have you forsaken me?). One could also point out that

there is precedent for altering the orders of the words: both Dubois and Tournemire reverse the sixth and seventh words in their settings, placing “it is finished” after “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”

Trotta opens his Fourth word with his first motif appearing in the trumpets and harp (measure 1), flutes, oboes, and strings (measure 2), as illustrated in Figure 12.

The same principle motif also appears later with the muted horn (measures 15–16). “I thirst” is set for baritone soloist and SATB choir, which are also the forces that Franck utilized to set this text (Dubois added a tenor soloist to this list). The baritone part can be summarized as ABA, with the A phrase appearing in measures 7–11 and 23–27, and his B section from measures 12–19. The meter changes (from 4/4 to 6/8) in bar 35 when the trumpets introduce a new section with an E major fanfare, conjuring imagery of

Figure 12: Trotta’s Seven Last Words Movement #4, measures 1–3.

The musical score for measures 1-3 of Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #4 is presented in a multi-staff format. The instruments included are Flute, Oboe, Trumpet in C 1, Trumpet in C 2, Horn in F, Timpani, Harp, Baritone Solo, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The tempo is marked as quarter note = 60. The score shows the first three measures of the piece, with dynamics like *mp* and *mf* indicated. The key signature is one sharp (F#). The score is divided into three measures, with measure numbers 1, 2, and 3 clearly marked at the bottom.

Christ's triumphal entrance on Palm Sunday. This is soon abandoned (measure 44) in favor of a 7/8 section (consistently 2+2+3) in A minor, which introduces the *turba* chorus. The metronomic accompaniment here uses the first motive twice in each bar, first as it was originally presented but then followed immediately in retrograde inversion (see Figure 13). The strings here (specifically, the violins, violas and cellos) play the first motif at ascending pitch values in each successive bar.

The choir's entrance in bar 54 outlines an ascending tonic minor pentascale in octaves (Figure 14). Not only does this scale fill in the opening perfect fifth of the principle motif, but it also could be interpreted as the inversion of (or the tonal response to) the second motif. This section contains a stark contrast, juxtaposing a five note figure in the choir repeated four times (to different text) with a frenetic accompaniment

that builds in dynamic intensity. Dubois in his Fifth Word also used a minor melody to great dramatic effect here on the same text; his was under a pedal point (see Figure 15).

Trotta slowly builds, increasing the dynamic with each repetition (*mp-mf-ff*), but the conclusion is left to the orchestra, who rather suddenly revert (in measure 84) to A major (despite the key signature) and recapitulate the E major fanfare to conclude the movement (measures 88–96). The move is reminiscent of Brahms's *Shicksalslied*, wherein the orchestra is left to wordlessly redeem Hölderlin's bleak and depressing text. Trotta's majestic ending to this movement belies its desperate and contemptuous texts, leaving the listener to wonder whether it serves as a hint of hope amidst Christ's public rejection, or functions as a necessary harmonic transition to C# minor for the next movement.

Figure 13: Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #4, string parts only, measures 44–46.

The musical score for measures 44-46 of Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #4, string parts only, is presented in 7/8 time. The score is in A minor and features a metronomic accompaniment. The first motive is presented in its original form, followed immediately by its retrograde inversion. The dynamics range from *mf* to *ff*. The score is divided into three measures, with measure numbers 44, 45, and 46 indicated above the staves. The string parts are Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Contrabass. The Violin I and II parts play a melodic line with accents, while the Viola, Cello, and Contrabass parts play a rhythmic accompaniment.

*The Fifth Word: My God,
Why Have You Abandoned Me?*

The fifth movement opens with an 8-bar orchestral introduction, which introduces a melodic turn that is repeated in a descending sequence over a descending chromatic bass line. This is the same sinking chromaticism that characterized the countersubject in the Kyrie fugue of the opening movement, with the lower strings descending from tonic to dominant by half steps in half notes (measures 1–4). The choir enters singing the title text of this movement utilizing these same two themes (a melodic turn and a chromatically-descending harmony); first in two parts (SA, measures 9–16), then in three parts (ATB, measures 17–24), then in four (SATB measures 25–28). Both the melodic turn and the descending chromatic line are illustrated in the vocal and string parts in Figure 16.

The cadential point in bar 28 is one of the few moments in the entire work where the vocal writing splits into eight distinct parts. The melodic ornamental turn is sung by three parts successively: first the sopranos (measures 9–10), then the tenors (measures 17–18), and finally the altos (measures 25–26).

Trotta capitalizes on these recurring patterns in a way similar to those who have come before him. Cesar Franck utilized the turn as a motif that recurs several times in his 1859 setting *Les Sept Paroles du Christ sur la Croix*: in the first four measures of the piece, a turn is introduced in the horn part; the soprano later sings these notes to the words “*si est dolor*,” enabling us to associate this slow turn with both sorrow and anguish. Melodic (not ornamental) turns can also be seen in Franck’s First, Third, Fourth, and Sixth words. In most of Franck’s movements it appears

Figure 16: Trotta’s Seven Last Words Movement #5, measures 9–12.

The musical score for measures 9–12 of Trotta's *Seven Last Words* Movement #5 is presented in a multi-staff format. The vocal parts are Soprano and Alto, and the instrumental parts are Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo marking is *mp* (mezzo-piano). The Soprano part has lyrics in Latin and English: "De - us me - us, ut quid de - re - li - qui - sti - me? My - God, my - God, why have you a - ban - doned me?". The Alto part has lyrics in Latin: "De - us me - us, De - us me - us, My God, my God, my God, my God". The instrumental parts show a descending chromatic line in the lower strings (Viola and Cello) and a melodic turn in the violins (Violin I and Violin II).

in the opposite direction (ascending first, before dipping below the starting note and returning to it). Here, on the same text (“My God, why have you forsaken me?”) Franck reverses the direction of the turn, descending before ascending (see measures 7–9 of Figure 17). Coincidentally or not, Trotta uses the turn in the same direction when he sets the same text.

Both Gounod and Dubois used descending chromatic lines in their settings: Gounod to the word “*Sitio*” (I thirst) in his Fifth word, and Dubois on the opening two lines of the *Stabat Mater*, which he (like Trotta) included in his Third Word. The descending half-step has for centuries been associated with death, and Trotta, Franck, and Gounod may similarly be using chromaticism to illustrate Christ’s diminishing strength and pain.

A descending *a cappella* line in measures 33–34 of Trotta’s Fifth Word allows the melody to recall the second melodic motif used in the First and Third Words, making textual

connections between use of this musical theme and Christ pleading. Compare Figure 18 to measures 32–33 in Figure 3 and measures 21–22 in Figure 11 above.

*The Sixth Word: Into Your Hands
I Surrender My Soul*

Trotta’s sixth movement is set entirely for *a cappella* ensemble, with *divisi* appearing periodically in the sopranos and basses. There are several choral-orchestral works which have entirely *a cappella* movements for the choir, but Rossini’s *Stabat Mater* may be the most direct inspiration. In this movement Trotta brilliantly juxtaposes two of Christ’s prayers: Christ’s words from the cross “[Father,] into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46 KJV) and “not mine, but your will be done.” The score claims as inspiration Matthew 6:10, which excerpts a line from the familiar Lord’s Prayer (“your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”), but these words more directly recall “[Yet] not as I will, but as you

Figure 17: Franck, Seven Last Words, Fourth Word, measures 2–9.

The musical score for Figure 17 consists of four staves: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat) and the time signature is common time (C). The score is divided into measures 2 through 9. Above the staves, measure numbers 2 through 9 are indicated. The lyrics are: "De us me us, De us me us, ut quid de re li qui sti me?". The Soprano part begins with a *p* dynamic and a fermata over measure 5. The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts also begin with a *p* dynamic. There are various musical markings such as accents, slurs, and fermatas throughout the score.

Figure 18: Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #5, choral parts only, measures 33–37.

Figure 18 shows the choral parts for measures 33-37 of Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #5. The score is written for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The dynamics are marked *mf*. The lyrics are: "De - us me - us, De - us me - us. My God, my God, my God, my God." The Soprano and Tenor parts have a melodic line with a slur over measures 35-36, while the Alto and Bass parts have a more rhythmic accompaniment.

will” (Matthew 26:39, NIV), which is the prayer that Jesus uttered in Gethsemane the night of his arrest. This novel textual interpolation, appearing in no previous setting of the Seven Last Words, becomes the middle section between reiterations of the sixth word proper, resulting in a textual ABA form for this movement. Musically the form is even more symmetrical: ABCBA, as the opening ten measures are repeated as measures 64–73 to introduce the coda.

The choir opens with canonic entrances of the main theme introduced in inversion by the sopranos and tenors, illustrated in Figure 19.

The sopranos later sing these pitches as an anacrusis into measures 20 and 56 as well, reinforcing the melodic use of this unifying theme. The textual trope commences in bar 28, with the sopranos singing the second theme

Figure 19: Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #6, choral parts only, measures 1–7.

Figure 19 shows the choral parts for measures 1-7 of Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #6. The score is written for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked *mp* with a quarter note equal to 72 (♩ = 72). The lyrics are: "In - to your hands I sur - rea - der In - ma - nus tu - as com - men - do". The Soprano part has a melodic line with a slur over measures 1-3 and 5-7. The Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts have a more rhythmic accompaniment.

(Figure 20), a descending diatonic line that we have now associated with Christ pleading, presented here in triple meter: compare in Figure 20 to the soprano lines in Figures 3, 11, and 18 above.

The Seventh Word: It Is Finished

With 230 measures, Troтта's Seventh Word is by far the longest movement in the set. It also incorporates more textual tropes than any previous movement. In putting "It is Finished" as the final movement, Troтта has now twice departed from the traditional order of the text. Most previous settings of the Seven Last Words, such as those by Haydn, Gounod, and Franck, place "It is finished" as the Sixth Word, but Dubois was the first to switch the order of the last two words and place "Father, Into Your Hands" before "It is Finished" instead of afterwards. Troтта here has aligned himself most closely with Dubois. The score identifies Psalm 75:9 as a further textual source, but this text is not included in the seventh movement.

Musically, the final movement pulls in elements of previous movements—similar to the fourth movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony—and becomes a compendium of previous melodic motives, like a conclusion that summarizes the main points of the essay. Troтта's Seventh Word opens with the main theme presented by the horn over a syncopated ostinato in the strings, similar to the rhythmic underlay presented by strings while the soprano solo sang the *Stabat Mater* in the Third Word (compare the string parts in Figure 21 to those in Figure 11 above).

The connection between the Seventh and Third Words is further reinforced later in the movement. The men enter singing the principle theme; they are soon joined by the women in octaves after their four-bar phrase (Figure 22).

Trotta follows this immediately with the chorus singing the second motive. This is the melodic material that was introduced by the soloist singing the *Stabat Mater* in the Third Word; here it is presented in four-part harmony, but the orchestral parts are identical. Compare Figure 23 below with Figure 11 above.

Figure 20: Troтта's Seven Last Words Movement #6, choral parts only, measures 28–33.

The musical score for measures 28-33 of Troтта's Seven Last Words Movement #6, choral parts only, is presented in four parts: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The music is in 3/4 time and features a descending diatonic line in the soprano part, with the other parts following in parallel motion. The lyrics are: "Not mine, but your will be done." The dynamic marking is *mf*.

Figure 21: Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #7, string and horn parts, measures 1–4.

Musical score for measures 1–4 of Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #7, featuring Horn in F, Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello. The score is in 4/4 time and F major. The Horn part (measure 1) starts with a *mf* dynamic. The string parts (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, and Cello) all start with a *f* dynamic. The string parts play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Horn part plays a melodic line. The score is numbered 1 through 4 at the top of each measure.

Figure 22: Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #7, chorus parts only, measures 9–12.

Musical score for measures 9–12 of Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #7, featuring Soprano (S) and Tenor/Bass (T) parts. The score is in 4/4 time and F major. The Soprano part (measure 9) starts with a *f* dynamic. The Tenor/Bass part (measure 9) starts with a *f* dynamic. The Soprano part is marked "Unison" and "Div." (divisi) at measure 11. The Tenor/Bass part is marked "Div." (divisi) at measure 11. The lyrics are: "et cla - mans, et cla - mans, Je - su vo - ce ma - gna dix - it: and with a loud voice, and with a loud voice, Je - sus cried, ex - claim - ing:". The score is numbered 9 through 12 at the top of each measure.

Figure 23: Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #7, measures 13–16.

Musical score for measures 13–16 of Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #7, featuring Soprano (S), Tenor/Bass (T), Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Contrabass. The score is in 4/4 time and F major. The Soprano part (measure 13) starts with a *mp* dynamic. The Tenor/Bass part (measure 13) starts with a *mp* dynamic. The string parts (Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Contrabass) all start with a *mp* dynamic. The string parts play a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The Soprano part plays a melodic line. The Tenor/Bass part plays a melodic line. The lyrics are: "Con - sum - tum est! It - in - is - fin - ished!". The score is numbered 13 through 16 at the top of each measure.

This is followed by the Baritone soloist singing two consecutive reiterations of the primary motif: In Figure 24, C#-G#-A is elided with an ornamented G#-D#-E.

The choir enters with ascending scalar passages that recall the angry *turba* chorus section from the Fourth Word (“I thirst”). Compare Figure 25 to Figure 14.

Trotta’s orchestral “earthquake” section is perhaps less distinctive than Dubois’ in his Seven Last Words, but more continuous due to a reappearance of the second motif (in octaves in the first violins, measures 63–64 of Figure 26). The change in meter in measure 151, from 12/8 to common time, commences to calm down the forces of nature.

Figure 24: Trotta’s Seven Last Words Movement #7, baritone part only, measures 21–24.

Figure 25: Trotta’s Seven Last Words Movement #7, chorus and strings, measures 33–36.

Figure 26: Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #7, string parts, measures 63–66.

The musical score for measures 63-66 is presented in two systems. The first system covers measures 63 and 64, and the second system covers measures 65 and 66. The instrumentation includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Cello, and Contrabass. The key signature is three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and the time signature is 4/4. Dynamics include *Div.* (Diviso), *fff* (fortissimo), and *ff* (fortissimo). Measure 65 features a complex, rapid sixteenth-note passage in the Violin I part.

Continuing the denouement, the harp plays the opening material from the Second Word (Today You Will Be With Me in Paradise) as an introduction to the final textual trope: “Truly this man was the Son of God!” The inclusion of the Centurion’s statement of faith in Matthew 27:54 was also the manner in which Eugene Gautier chose to complete his Seven Last Words in 1855, but Gautier did not use a theme that had already been previously introduced. This makes brilliant musical and theological connections between Dismas, the good thief who professed belief in

Christ before dying, and the centurion, whose was the first recorded confession of faith after Christ’s death. The fact that the baritone soloist sings a pedal B over this material, which is what the men sang in the Second Word, reinforces the connection. The choir follows by singing “Truly this man” to the same melody as “Remember me” in the Second Word, but with a different accompaniment. Here, the compound quadruple meter lends itself to recurring sets of the inverted principle motif in the harp: compare the vocal parts Figure 27 to those in Figure 8.

Figure 27: Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #7, voices and harp, measures 106–110.

The musical score consists of two systems. The first system includes Harp, Soprano, and Alto parts. The Harp part features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, both marked *mp*. The Soprano part has lyrics: "Fi - li - us ve - re" and "Tru - ly this man". The Alto part has lyrics: "Fi - li - us" and "Tru - ly this". The second system includes Harp (Hp.), Soprano (S), and Alto (A) parts. The Harp part continues with a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand, both marked *mp*. The Soprano part has lyrics: "De - i e - rat is Son of te. God." and "was the rat is Son of te. God.". The Alto part has lyrics: "ve man, re" and "De - i e - rat of is God. te.".

The choir continues with the same transitional material that was first heard in the Second Word (the choir in measures 124–128 of the Seventh Word present the same pitches that were played by the orchestra in measures 16–20 of the Second Word), and then the orchestra transitions us back to F# minor, the key in which the entire work began. The orchestra is now free to reuse material from the First Word (measures 152–162 in the Seventh Word are identical to measures 64–74 in the First Word), which again introduces the choir's

entrance on the main theme. Compare Figure 28 to measures 20–23 of Figure 2.

The choir later incorporates the second theme as well: compare Figure 29 to Figures 3, 11, 18, and 20.

A coda restates the opening motif, the choir's final sentence punctuated by a 14-bar orchestral interlude. All forces are employed in the work's final bar as it comes to a *ppp* conclusion.

Figure 28: Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #7, chorus only, measures 163–166.

163 *Unison f* 164 165 166

S
A
T
B

Ve - re Fi - li - us De - i e - rat is - te.
Tru - ly this man was the Son of God.

f

Figure 29: Trotta's Seven Last Words Movement #7, chorus only, measures 191–194.

191 *f* 192 193 194

S
A
T
B

Mo - nu - men - ta a - per - ta sunt!
All of the graves were o - pened wide!

f

Summary

Trotta's *Seven Last Words* is one of the most approachable settings of these texts currently published. The score is entirely tonal and extremely accessible, intended for performance (as it was commissioned) by church choirs with small orchestras, or modest funds to hire instrumentalists. The chromaticism of the *Kyrie* that concludes the First Word and the *a cappella* Sixth Word may present some tuning challenges, but these movements also present opportunities for collective growth as ensembles. The music is appealing and accessible to listeners, as even untrained ears may hear musical connections between movements. That this music is more cinematographic than esoteric increases the score's mass appeal. In his inclusion of the *Stabat Mater* texts and ordering of the

last two words, Trotta's setting shares much in common with Dubois', which arguably is the most frequently performed of all settings of the Seven Last Words.

Further, progressive elements in the selected texts chosen for inclusion in this setting mark this contribution to the genre as a product of its time. For example, in both the Latin and English texts the use of Luke 23:37 ("If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!") in the Fourth Word omits "of the Jews" (*Judeorum* in Latin), making this setting less Anti-Semitic. The word "Father" only appears in the First Word, not again in the Sixth (Luke 23:46 supplies "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit). As it stands, Trotta's setting of the Sixth Word looks more akin to Psalm 31:5.

As his first major choral-orchestral commission, Trotta's *Seven Last Words* represents a landmark achievement for any composer—and to conduct a world-premiere of one's own composition in Carnegie Hall is an honor to which few can lay claim. Trotta's *Seven Last Words* has a remarkable amount of compositional unity, partly due to its two recurring motifs, and partly due to its re-presentation of previous musical material in the final movement. One can even approach the work as being in one extended sonata-allegro form, if you label the First Word the exposition (149 measures, with its primary and secondary themes), all interior movements the development (365 measures total), and the final movement the recapitulation (230

measures, and including both themes). Tonally, the work can be interpreted as commencing in F# minor (three sharps like Bach's *drei kreuze*), going on an extended journey and then returning to F# minor (bar 144 of the Seventh Word) before ending on a Picardy third in F# major. All of this provides a sense of continuity that reveals the drama of the Passion of Christ, and provides a satisfying ending that offers a glimpse of hope of Christ's resurrection to come.

Editor's Note: Vaughn Roste consulted with Michael John Trotta throughout the publication process for this article.

Works Cited

Trotta, Michael John. *Seven Last Words*. MorningStar Music Publishers, 2016.