

Sarisbury Choral Society

NEWSLETTER

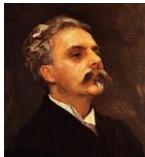
THURSDAY 1ST APRIL 2021

Welcome to another edition of ramblings from the conductor!

I hope the newsletter continues to find you well.

The French Connection

Way back in the first newsletter of January 2021, I rambled a bit about the history of Faure's Requiem and I said that I would be writing more about it in a future newsletter. That future newsletter is today!



I mentioned before about the first version (from 1888) of Faure's Requiem consisting of five movements. It continued to be performed in this version until the end of the 19th century, but Faure also prepared an expanded version for the use of grander occasions. The expanded version, first given in January 1893, included two extra movements; the Offertoire (composed in 1889) and the Libera me. Both of these movements need the services of a baritone soloist. The Libera me was actually composed as early as 1877, the original version of this movement was an independent composition for baritone and organ. Faure also added extra instruments (trumpets and horn) to the orchestration, which was originally bassoons, strings, harp, timpani and organ.

In July 1900, the Requiem was "premiered" at the Trocadero Palace during the Paris World Exhibition, in a version with full orchestra. Why this version came about is not entirely clear, but it appears that Faure's publisher Hamelle, urged him to prepare a "version symphonique" in order to secure more performances, thus taking the Requiem from the church to the concert hall. I personally question how sensible it is to perform it in the version for full orchestra; many of the wind and brass instruments only make appearances in single movements... the cost of a full orchestra is considerably higher than using the reduced original instrumentation... performance venues with space for full orchestra (never mind a choir or in the case of WCMF choirs) are few and far between... and there's also the problem of "the orchestra's too loud"! Having said all that, I think the publishers were right to suggest a full orchestra version and I do wonder whether Faure's Requiem would be as well known and loved as it is, without this version.



My personal favourite recording of Faure's Requiem is this one, dating from 2007 and recorded live in a concert from the Barbican. The soloists are Elin Manahan Thomas and Roderick Williams, the choir is The Sixteen, the orchestra is the Academy of St. Martin in the Fields all conducted by Harry Christophers. A winning combo! [click here to listen](#). I'm slightly biased as I was in the audience for the concert!





In the first newsletter of 2021, I wrote a little bit about the French composer **Maurice Duruflé (1902 - 1986)** and I promised that I would be coming back to Duruflé in a future newsletter. That newsletter has also arrived!

As I mentioned previously, Duruflé became a chorister at the Rouen Cathedral Choir School, where the choral plainsong tradition at Rouen became a strong and lasting influence. In 1920, Duruflé entered the Conservatoire de Paris, studying composition with the French composer Paul Dukas (1865 - 1935) (best known for composing "The Sorcerer's Apprentice"). Like  Paul Dukas, Duruflé spent considerable time re-working his compositions until they achieved what he felt was the correct level of perfection; in fact, there are only 14 published works to his name!

In May 1941, Maurice Duruflé was one of a number of French composers commissioned by the collaborationist Vichy regime to write extended works for a monetary award, such as 10,000 francs for a symphonic poem, 20,000 for a symphony, and 30,000 for an opera. Duruflé, commissioned to compose a symphonic poem, decided to compose a Requiem and was still working on it in 1944 when the regime collapsed. He completed it in September 1947. At the time of the commission, Duruflé was working on an organ suite using themes from Gregorian chants. He incorporated his sketches for that work into the Requiem, which uses numerous themes from the Gregorian "Missa Pro Defunctis" (Mass of the Dead). The composer dedicated the Requiem to the memory of his father. On completion of the Requiem, Duruflé received 30,000 francs, instead of the 10,000 of his commission, because of the complex nature of his work and inflation during that time.

There are quite a few parallels between the Requiems of Duruflé and Faure. Both composers choose to avoid the extravagant drama of the Dies Irae (a la Berlioz and Verdi) in favour of the consolatory texts of the Pie Jesu and In Paradisum. There are three orchestrations of the Duruflé as well, one for full orchestra, one for organ only and one for small orchestra. The two soloists (mezzo soprano and baritone) in the Duruflé appear in almost exactly the same places as the Faure. However, the setting by Duruflé sounds very original. For me, the Duruflé stands out through its wonderful use of plainsong woven throughout the work. Duruflé's harmonic language is absolutely outstanding; the harmony (chords) are very much in the idiom of Debussy and Ravel.

I can't remember the first time I heard the Duruflé, I think it was about 20 years ago, after singing and enjoying the Faure, I borrowed the vocal score and CD from Southampton Central Library. I guess that something must have stuck back then and have loved the Duruflé ever since. It will probably not surprise you that this makes **number one of my favourite choral works** and I doubt if it will ever be pushed off the top spot. I hope to conduct it in Romsey Abbey for the Festival sometime... I would like the Pie Jesu and In Paradisum at my funeral, I would be quite content to end my life on an unresolved dominant ninth chord.

Here is a link to an excellent version of the Duruflé (sung liturgically) by [Trinity College Cambridge](#) and if you don't mind spending some money, I recommend [this recording](#) which was the one I borrowed from the library 20 years ago... and this [1959 recording](#), conducted by the composer!

That's all for this week folks, except to tell you about the next zoom session on the next page! Stay safe and keep singing, *Graham*



ONLINE SINGING SESSION

Wednesday 12th May

7:45pm – 9pm

Edward Elgar: Ave Verum

“From the Bavarian Highlands”

John Stainer: God so loved the world

Hubert Parry: I was glad

Links to scores and learning files in the members section of the choir websites