



Gabriel Fauré

Requiem

Cantique de Jean Racine

Madrigal

Gabriel-Urbain Fauré (1845-1924)

Musically talented from an early age, Swiss composer and teacher Louis Niedermeyer accepted Fauré as a pupil, before he was sent away to Paris, aged nine, to study to become a church organist and choirmaster. A few years later, composer Camille Saint-Saëns took interest in Fauré's progress and piano studies, introduced him to the contemporary music of Schumann, Liszt and Wagner and encouraged him to compose.

In 1863, whilst still a student, Fauré composed his first work for piano and in 1871 became a founding member (alongside Saint-Saëns, Bizet, Chabrier, Franck and Massenet) of the Société Nationale de Musique, formed to promote new French music and at whose concerts many of Fauré's works were first presented. In 1896 he became professor of composition at the Paris Conservatoire, becoming its director in 1905 through until 1920. His students included Ravel, Enesco and Boulanger.

Fauré excelled not only as a great song-writer but also as a composer in every branch of chamber music. He wrote more than 100 songs, incidental music for several theatre plays, music for orchestra alone, and enriched the literature of the piano with a number of highly original and exquisite works (nocturnes, barcaroles and impromptus).

Although he had a deep respect for traditional forms of music, Fauré delighted in infusing those forms with a melange of harmonic daring and a freshness of invention. One of the most striking features of his style was for daring harmonic progressions and sudden modulations, invariably carried out with supreme elegance and a deceptive air of simplicity. His compositions are refined and gentle and his style influenced the course of modern French music; linking the end of Romanticism era with the beginnings of the Modern era.

Fauré was hugely popular in Britain, visiting often and even playing at Buckingham Palace in 1908. By 1920 he was recognised in France as the leading French composer of his day and received the Grand-Croix of the Légion d'Honneur, a rare honour for a musician.

Cantique de Jean Racine Opus 11

Jean Racine (1639-99) was one of Europe's leading dramatists, and one of the few French classical playwrights to have had any success outside their own country. His other writings are less often remembered, and it is only because of Fauré that anyone except a literary specialist is aware that in 1688 he published translations of a series of Latin hymns for the days of the week.

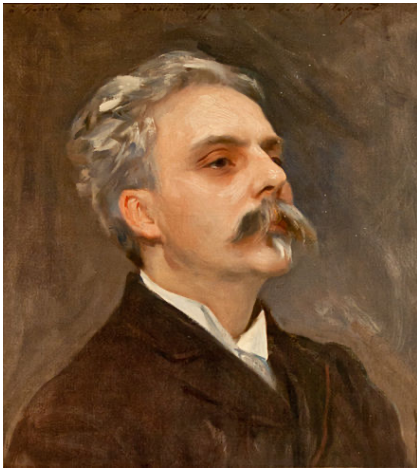
"Verbe égal au Très-Haut" is a free version of *Consorts paterni luminis*, the hymn for Tuesday matins, which was thought at the time to be by St Ambrose, the 4th Century bishop of Milan. Matins was sung, at least in strict monasteries, during the night and the words refer to breaking the night's silence with praise to God, putting to flight dark's evil spirits and driving away sloth, though Racine's classical phraseology is less specific than the original.

Fauré wrote his setting of the text, for four vocal parts and piano/organ, in 1864-5, at the end of his student days, when he was nineteen, for a composition competition at the École Niedermeyer de Paris. Its "dignity and refined simplicity" won him first prize. It was first performed in 1866 and published c.1875-6.

Fauré named his calm and flowing composition after Racine, not the Latin original, possibly because he preferred the "elegant and rather florid" French text. In notes dedicated to the work, it is described as "transparent and well-balanced". "The long sweeping melodies and strong melodic and harmonic appoggiaturas are testament to the Romantic side of the piece". After ten years of training at the school of liturgy, Fauré was able to set "the inspiring text with a gorgeously restrained and respectful charm".

Verbe égal au Très-Haut, Notre unique espérance,
Jour eternal de la terre et des cieux, De la paisible nuit,
Nous rompons le silence, Divin Sauveur jette sur nous les yeux!
Repands sur nous le feu de ta grâce puissante,
Que tout l'enfer fuie au son de ta voix,
Dissipe le sommeil d'une âme languissante,
Qui la conduit al'oubli de tes lois,
O Christ sois favorable a ce peuple fidèle
Pour te bénir maintenant rassemble,
À ta gloire immortelle
Et de tes dons qu'il retourne comblé.

Word equal to the Most high, our only hope,
Eternal day of earth and sky, Of peaceful night,
We break the silence, Divine Saviour, cast Thine eyes on us!
Cast on us the fire of Thy mighty grace,
That all Hell may flee at the sound of Thy voice,
Cast sleep from a languishing soul
Thou who bears it to the limit of Thy laws,
O Christ, look favourably on this faithful people
Who gather now to bless Thee,
Receive the songs they offer To Thy immortal glory
And Thy gifts which they return manifold!



Painting by John Singer Sargent.

As one of a group of devoted friends and patrons Sargent promoted Fauré in London, organising studio concerts that included his music. This portrait, a testament to their friendship, is said to capture Fauré's charismatic personality and good looks. His expression is somewhat imperious; gazing into the distance with his chin lifted up, looking very much a 'creative genius'.

Madrigal Opus 35

Fauré had a liking for Armand Silvestre's poems and set several of them. This one, titled "Pour un chœur alterné" by the author, is from Silvestre's 1878 collection, 'La chanson des heures'.

With its theme of young men and women accusing each other of selfishness and cruelty in affairs of the heart, Fauré wrote his four-part setting as a mischievous wedding present for his friend and ex-pupil André Messager, who was the dedicatee.

It is commented that the song has "the wittiness and suggestiveness of a speech by the best man at a wedding".

The opening line quotes a theme by J.S. Bach which may have had some private significance between the two friends.

The work was first performed in 1884, at a Société Nationale de Musique concert and published the same year.

(Les jeunes gens)

Inhumaines qui, sans merci,
Vous raillez de notre souci,
Aimez ! Aimez quand on vous aime !

(Les jeunes filles)

Ingrats qui ne vous doutez pas
Des rêves éclos sur vos pas,
Aimez ! Aimez quand on vous aime !

(Les jeunes gens)

Sachez, ô cruelles Beautés,
Que les jours d'aimer sont comptés.
Aimez ! aimez quand on vous aime !

(Les jeunes filles)

Sachez, amoureux inconstants,
Que le bien d'aimer n'a qu'un temps.
Aimez ! aimez quand on vous aime !

(Ensemble)

Un même destin nous poursuit
Et notre folie est la même :
C'est celle d'aimer qui nous fuit,
C'est celle de fuir qui nous aime !

(The young men)

Inhuman women, who mercilessly
Mock our cares,
Love! Love when we love you!

(The young women)

Ungrateful men, who do not suspect
The dreams you provoke as you go,
Love! Love when we love you!

(The young men)

Know, O cruel beauties,
That the days of love are numbered.
Love! Love when we love you!

(The young women)

Know, fickle lovers,
That true love lasts a single season
Love! Love when we love you!

(All)

The same destiny pursues us
And our folly is the same:
It is loving those who flee us,
It is fleeing those who love us!

Requiem Opus 48

Introit & Kyrie - Offertoire - Sanctus - Pie Jesu - Agnus Dei - Libera me - In paradisum

Fauré began composing his Requiem in 1887 and revised and expanded it over the years, until its final version in 1901.

He had an intense dislike of the large-scale effects, lack of religious feeling and dramatic Dies irae poem which so dominates the Requiems of Berlioz, Mozart and Verdi.

Fauré's early iteration, was even smaller at only five movements – and first performed in 1888 at the Madeleine in Paris for the funeral of a member of the congregation.

However, the impetus for the work is said to have been the death of Fauré's own mother on the last day of the previous year.

The Offertoire was composed in 1889 and included in a performance in 1893, along with a setting of Libera me, which had been written as an independent piece in 1877.

Both new movements included sections for a baritone solo.

The Libera me brings in a few lines of 'Day of terror, day of judgement', but Fauré handles it with great restraint and the music remains within the scale of the rest of the work.

For the most part, the tone of this timeless piece is elegiac and calm, and the key word is *requiem* "rest"; with the work beginning and ending with it.

Of it, Fauré said "Everything I managed to entertain by way of religious illusion I put into my Requiem, which moreover is dominated from beginning to end by a very human feeling of faith and eternal rest." He saw death as a "happy deliverance, an aspiration towards happiness above, rather than as a painful experience."

Fauré is generous with his melodies – not just for sopranos. After the chant-like opening, the Introit and Kyrie gives the tenors the main theme, to which the sopranos reply with *te decet hymnus*... A brief *Kyrie*...uses the same melody before subsiding gently into silence.

The *Offertory* starts with an eerily soft canon between altos and tenors. A baritone soloist, accompanied by mildly syncopated rocking figures, takes over with *Hostias et preces*... The three lower voices repeat the opening section and after "Save them, Lord from the darkness of hell", a distant, but typically graceful key change, shines a redemptive light on the final *Amen*.

In the *Sanctus*, after a tentative entrance, the sopranos and tenors gradually gain confidence leading up to a full-blooded *Hosana in excelsis*. This tranquillity is maintained in the familiar *Pie Jesu*, in which the angelic soprano line only rises up occasionally to *mezzoforte* in the repeated supplications of *dona eis requiem* 'grant them rest'.

The tenors return to centre stage again in the *Agnus Dei*, interrupted halfway by the beguiling harmonies in all four voices. Via a sustained *Lux* in the sopranos, Faure then takes us on a sinuous journey back through the more subdued keys of the previous two movements in preparation for one of the few loud passages in the work; "with all thy saints in endless glory for thy mercy's sake". This heralds the return to the opening *Requiem aeternum*.

Libera me begins with a plaintive baritone solo. The choir responds very timidly at first but becomes alarmed and fearful in the work's only direct reference to the Day of Judgement, *dies illa, dies irae*. But the music gradually climbs out of this tense darkness into a sharper, brighter key for *lux perpetua* "eternal light". Fauré once again expressing optimism in the face of death. The *libera me* plea is repeated and the movement ends quietly with widely-spread chords.

In paradisum gives the sopranos the last word. This delightful movement acts as an epilogue, summing up the work's reassuring message. There is delicacy and refinement throughout. While a "chorus of angels" "sings us to our rest", the other voices merely provide harmonic support at the 'semi-colons' during the movement, and at the final cadential 'full-stop'.

The work was performed at Fauré's own funeral in 1924.

Credit to: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Classic FM, Wiki, C. Bartlett, T. McCahill