

ASO Program Notes

Requiem, Op. 48

Gabriel Fauré (1845 - 1924)

Gabriel Fauré grew up in the French Pyrenees and began his musical education at a very early age. He studied organ, piano and choral music at increasingly more prestigious schools, ending up at the Niedermeyer School in Paris. His teachers included Camille Saint-Saëns. When he later became a teacher at the Paris Conservatory, Maurice Ravel and Nadia Boulanger were among his pupils. He served as organist and choirmaster at a number of large churches in Paris, and enjoyed an excellent reputation as a successful composer until he grew deaf and had to give up much of his musical life.

There have been many famous Requiems, and all have their own style. Verdi, Berlioz, and Brahms all composed glorious Requiems addressing the themes of death, resurrection and final judgment. The tone of their works is grand and even theatrical. Mozart's Requiem is moving and poignant. Fauré chose to make his gentler, full of solace and comfort for the mourners. It is also moving, but in a kinder, more consoling way. The awesome vision of "The Last Judgement" would have meant little to Fauré. In spite of the fact that most of his life had been dedicated to service to the church, he was an unbeliever, and so he focused more on the blessed rest for those whose life journey had come to an end. In Fauré's words,

"Everything I managed to entertain in the way of religious illusion I put into my Requiem, which is...dominated from beginning to end by a very human feeling of faith in eternal rest."

and at another time,

"I see death as a happy deliverance, an aspiration towards happiness above, rather than as a painful experience."

Although firmly agnostic, he was a spiritual man, and sought to compose a newer kind of church music, different from the heavily romantic style of the German composers dominating European music at the time. He opted for smaller ensembles rather than massive orchestras, and pared down his orchestrations to fewer instruments. He relied upon subtle shifts in dynamics, color and harmonies to achieve his intent. He departed from the standard liturgical sequence by omitting some of the most dramatic sections and adding new ones, the *Pie Jesu* and *Paradisum*, to create a mood of peacefulness and serenity.

Fauré's transcendent Requiem has been described as "a Requiem without the Last Judgement," and its quality of understatement adds to its appeal. Its ethereal beauty makes it one of the most powerful works in the Requiem literature.

Beryl McHenry