

KASTALSKY Requiem

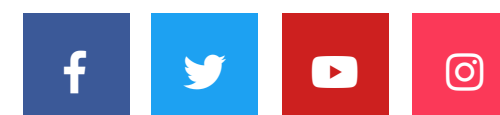
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Kastalsky's Requiem was written as a response to the First World War. Its genesis was complicated and it exists in a number of different versions. These are usefully detailed in Vladimir Morosan's informative booklet note, and one of them, based on the Orthodox service for the departed, has also been recorded by The Clarion Choir (Naxos, 10/18). This version, for considerably larger forces, is not only ecumenical but inter-religious. As well as the Orthodox texts in Slavonic one would expect from Kastalsky, there are movements in Italian, French, Latin, Greek and English; but more than this, there is material from Catholic and Anglican traditions, and reference to Asian participation in the conflict (notably the 'Hymn to Indra').

Morosan explains the composer's original plan, which 'envisioned a stage set depicting a church, the figure of a cardinal, youths in white vestments, three nurses – British, Romanian and Italian – a Greek clergyman, groups of Russian peasant women, Montenegrins, Serbs and Americans, Hindu soldiers and priests, a Japanese religious procession, as well as a choir that functioned both liturgically and as an ancient Greek theatrical chorus'. This version was never performed, however, and the subsequent political history of Russia naturally explains the disappearance of this extraordinary work until recently.

Kastalsky's monumental intentions are evident right from the beginning. There is a grandeur about the work, a breadth to its melodic writing and a richness of scoring that relate it not only to the Western tradition of concert Requiems such as Verdi's but make it a precursor of Russian settings of these texts by composers such as Artyomov and Schnittke. Its ambitious nature does not overwhelm it, and there are many moving moments of intimacy (the 'Confutatis' and 'Lacrymosa' are good examples). The three soloists and four choirs involved have really grasped what is needed to communicate this complex work, and Slatkin's driven direction of the Orchestra of St Luke's means that the tension never lets up. It may have had to wait until now to be revealed to audiences but this is an extraordinary work and this fine recording will, I am convinced, ensure that it acquires a permanent place in the repertoire.

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