



# THE KASTALSKY REQUIEM PROJECT

A Musical Tribute to the Heroes of the First World War



# THE KASTALSKY REQUIEM

## A Fraternal Service of Remembrance

**I**N THE FALL OF 1914, not long after Europe had descended into the chaos of war, Alexander Kastalsky began drafting a monumental Requiem to commemorate the allied slain who were giving their lives in defense of freedom and country. In the composer's own words, "The ever-strengthening brotherhood and unity of the nations of the Entente and their mutual fraternal help in the present war naturally give rise to the idea of a fraternal service of remembrance for soldiers who have fallen for the common cause." His vision was to compose a universal memorial, one that would echo the various faith traditions of all the Allies. To that end he began collecting musical themes from the Latin and Anglican liturgies, from the Serbian Orthodox tradition, and from his own Russian Orthodox musical heritage, with the intent of using these melodies as the basis of a new Requiem.

Director of the prestigious Moscow Synodal School of Church Singing, Kastalsky was widely recognized in Russia and abroad as the leader of a rising school of thought in Russian Orthodox choral music. Taking inspiration from medieval chant and folk melodies, Kastalsky was involved in forging a uniquely Russian musical identity, influencing many along the way, including Rachmaninov, Gretchaninov, Chesnokov, and many others. If any composer of the day was equipped

to weave the indigenous chant traditions of various nations into a unified and deeply moving musical tapestry, it was Kastalsky.

Towards the end of 1916 Kastalsky finished an initial version of the score, which comprised fourteen movements, and called it *Fraternal Commemoration*. The piece was premiered at the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg on January 7, 1917, to great critical acclaim, being hailed as the most important sacred work by a Russian composer since Rachmaninov's *All-Night Vigil* (1915). However, as the war showed no signs of abating, and as nations continued to join the Entente, Kastalsky added three more movements in honor of India, Japan, and the United States, writing instrumental movements based on themes from Japanese and Indian music, and basing the movement for the U.S. on the hymn tune, "Rock of Ages." This final seventeen-movement version of the Requiem has never been performed.

Kastalsky's Requiem, scored for chorus, large orchestra, and soloists, is a work of epic dimensions. With masterful skill and a distinctive musical voice that manages to simultaneously challenge and invite the listener, the composer encapsulates both the tragedy and the hope of the "war to end all wars." Furthermore, the work is perhaps the only one of its kind—a Requiem for the slain of World War I written during

the war by a composer who knew the horrors of battle and yet continued to hope in the strength of brotherly love evinced by the heroism of the Allied nations. And unlike any other Requiem written before 1917, Kastalsky's work is truly ecumenical, giving a musical voice to various Christian confessions, as well as to non-Christian faiths, all of whom are duly honored as brothers in arms and fellow sufferers. In the preface to a published version of the score, we find the following description of Kastalsky's universal vision for the piece as a solemn religious commemoration of the departed:

AROUND THE SPOT where the worship service is taking place, units of Allied armies are gathered; funereal chants of different nations are heard intermittently, at times Russian, at times Catholic, now Serbian, now English; one language supplants another; from time to time trumpet calls of different armies are heard, along with drum beats, and the sound of artillery; in the distance one can hear the sobs and lamentations of the widows and mothers who have lost their sons; from the side of the Asian armies one hears strains of Japanese and Hindu melodies. As "Memory eternal" is intoned, the military bands join in, one hears artillery salutes, and the music takes on the bright colors glorifying the fallen heroes.

### THE PROJECT

**I**N MAY OF 2017, just over a hundred years after the initial version of Kastalsky's Requiem sounded for the first—and last—time, three conductors, a producer, a project manager, and the executive director of a major American choir met in Kansas City to discuss a possible revival of the piece as a way of commemorating the centennial of the Armistice in 2018. The result of that meeting was a plan, eagerly embraced by all, to give the full seventeen-movement version of the work its world premiere performance and recording in the fall of 2018, with performances in New York, Washington, and Kansas City.

In the weeks leading up to the meeting, the United States Department of State voiced their enthusiastic intention to co-sponsor the project, making it a major diplomatic event; a leading American orchestra announced their interest in being a partner; and Vladi-

mir Morosan, one of the world's foremost experts in the music of Kastalsky and his contemporaries, and in Russian choral music generally, offered his assistance in helping to prepare the first performance edition of the full version of the piece. In the weeks that have followed, other influential figures have come on board, including a major American conductor, who has expressed a desire to lead the project as music director, conducting the concerts and the recording; and the head of the Orthodox Church in America—His Beatitude, Metropolitan Tikhon—who said that his church would lend its full support, speaking even of the possibility of inviting the Patriarch of Moscow to attend. The project is quickly building momentum.

As we stand a century removed from the end of the Great War, a conflict that shaped our modern world at the most fundamental level, we remain uncertain as to what the future holds, aware that a lasting peace across the globe is by no means guaranteed. Political tensions between the world's great powers remain high; volatile regions are becoming more volatile; and long-stable friendships between nations are being strained. In such a climate it seems not only fitting, but urgent, that we allow ourselves to be reminded of both the horrors of global war and the real capacity of nations to set aside their differences and join together in friendship and "fraternal commemoration." There is no better medium than music, the universal language, by which to sound such a call, and we believe Kastalsky's Requiem, in all its profound beauty and hopefulness, can be the theme.

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