

Schola Cantorum Sings a Commissioned Requiem

Local composer Walter T. Marshall, III wrote all of the music performed by Schola Cantorum on May 8, 2010 at Eastern Shore Chapel Episcopal Church (repeated at 3 other venues later in the month). Marshall's six motets composed in 1999 through 2005 and his requiem in F minor composed in 2010 commissioned by Schola Cantorum featured solo voices enhanced by Schola's chorus divided in two, four and sometimes six voices. The demands on the singers are fearsome with many key changes and with nothing but unaccompanied voices, requiring that the singer find and stay on pitch.

The sound is "glorious and spiritual" as Director Agnes Mobley-Wynne described it. The communication of the text has a natural simplicity no matter that the music is complex and complicated for the singers. Mr. Marshall's settings enhance the sound of natural speech. There is a relaxed respect for the meaning of the words, with nothing stagey and no high melodrama. Marshall seems to tap into the wellspring of human voicing.

The motets use Bible texts except for *O Sacrum Convivium* from St. Thomas Aquinas (c.1260). The ancient text is in a modern jazz-influenced choral setting "slightly reminiscent of the Olivier Messiaen version of this text" say the program notes prepared by the composer. It features many altered chords, diminished chords and suspensions not found in conservative (editor's note: often boring) liturgical music.

God Is Gone Up On High (Psalm 47: 5-6 and 68:18) is of short duration using word painting with an ascending melody on each voicing of "gone up" with the climax a high triumphant ending on "gone up on high."

In *Christus Factus Est* the soprano, alto, tenor and bass (SATB) lines are stacked one on the other creating an ever richer sound. In *Iustorum Animae* the voices create a unified wave of sound that carries all before it, an overwhelming flood of beauty. The text for *Nunc Dimittis* is the song of Simeon (Luke 2:29-33) in a setting of enhanced natural speech.

This was the premier public performance of the *Requiem in F minor* in eleven sections for a cappella four-part chorus and soloists. Mr. Marshall worked closely with the group, coming to every rehearsal where his written notes became live music through the twenty-six voices of Schola, under the direction of Agnes Fuller Wynne. There were only four tenors with solos by Joe Brown and recently returned to the group Joe DeBeasso who has a rich, powerful instrument. Ken Wright and usual baritone Bob Miya completed the four.

In the *Rex Tremendae Majestatis* the tenor and bass singers voice four parts, reprising the opening two measures of *Tuba Mirum*, this time in a major key. It ends with "a ghastly bass solo" sung by Lyle Foelle superimposed over the opening section sung by the other low voices. A quartet of sopranos sang the *Kyrie*. A solo soprano states the *Introit* theme and a second soprano adds a descant. This becomes a double descant with the fourth soprano's entrance. The group sings in unison the beginning of *In Paradisum*, a simple repetition of the *Introit* bringing the requiem to its resting place, an expected minor chord into a major third.

The audience we were a part of was small but much larger at subsequent performances. It was an excellent musical afternoon.

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