

It was an apt idea, too, to programme *Metamorphosen*, Strauss's grief-stricken lament for doomed Germany and shattered Munich, composed in 1945. Despite its Bachian amplitude, the work's unpredictable flow can feel almost as opaque as Schoenberg. The not-too-slow paces and intense string tone couldn't quite emulate the emotive power of Klemperer's agonised Philharmonia reading: here it never ached, as the work must. Yet this was a thoughtful, articulate handling of Strauss's gorgeous and mesmeric work for 23 strings, offering a rightly sober prelude to the new Mass.

Carl Rüttli's oeuvre, like Mahler's, has often dwelt on death. What I admired in this Requiem was the flair of the choir's delivery, the tenderness of the solo singing (Katharine Fuge, joined by the baritone Edward Price), and the imaginative, unusual approach that Rüttli takes, like his versatile Classical predecessors, to setting the texts of the Latin *missa pro defunctis*.

What lingers most is the extraordinary disembodied effect of Rüttli's opening (Introitus), with the unaccompanied soprano – albeit in clacking high-heels – advancing down the aisle, intoning alone. A pleading interlude for double-stopped cello (the magnificent Moray Welsh) heralds the Kyries; and a glistening aubade (or perhaps crepusculade) concludes the work, as a taped sound like a blackbird or song-thrush disconcertingly folds in and blithely rules the roost, as if hovering in Winchester's rafters.

The hushed Lux Aeterna matched the Bach Choir's sensitive *Ave Verum* for stilled pianissimo singing. The nicely disjointed triple-time 'Hostias' was tensely atmospheric, just as the eerie upward unfolding of a lightly chromaticised plainsong-like sequence, an image of the soul advancing to be embraced by God (it is no surprise that Mr Rüttli has set the poems of Rilke) informed the preceding Offertorium, and is echoed in the Sanctus.

Rather than racing through the Requiem text, Rüttli (despite an overstretched opening, with shades of slightly tamed Duruflé and an ingenious emphasis on the words 'omnis caro'), uses text repetition judiciously: not least, in the lulling slow lollipop of the In Paradisum's final journey ('Et perducant te... chorus Angelorum') to a heavenly Jerusalem.

With laudable additions from harp (Tanya Houghton) and organ (Jane Watts), this very singable new Requiem setting is broad and breathes. Delicate and varied, it proves a considerate and considerable treatment of a key devotional text. Mr Rüttli has arguably made his case: there is no reason why other choral societies should not pounce on it.

The Bach Choir sings Rüttli's Requiem in Douai Abbey at 7.45 on Saturday 1 March, and Bach's St Matthew Passion in the Royal Festival Hall at 11 a.m. on Sunday 9 March. They perform Vaughan Williams's The Pilgrim's Progress in the Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House, on Thursday 27 March at 8; and three performances of Verdi's Requiem in Melbourne on 3-6 April.

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