

RÜTTI Requiem • David Hill, cond; Olivia Robinson (sop); Edward Price (bar); Bach Choir; Jane Watts (org); Southern Sinfonia • NAXOS 8.572317 (55:02)

The music of Swiss composer Carl Rütti (b. 1949) is not particularly well known in America. Though many CDs devoted to his music have been released in Europe on small labels, this internationally distributed Naxos release should help to bring his work to wider and extremely well-deserved attention. Rütti's choral music is the most-performed part of his output, and his pieces have developed a following particularly in England where a number of significant choruses (especially the Cambridge Voices and the Choir of King's College, Cambridge) have featured his choral music in high profile contexts.

Rütti's Requiem is an extended work for soprano and baritone soloists, double chorus, strings, harp, and organ. He uses the traditional Latin text and, unlike a number of recent composers, he does not interpolate other texts into the narrative. The work was commissioned in 2005 by the Bach Choir of London, which performs it on this recording under the expert direction of David Hill. Though several of Rütti's previous pieces (notably a terrific Pavane for violin and organ, which is quoted in the Requiem) had been inspired by death, he was initially somewhat reluctant to write a Requiem. However, after reflecting on personal losses, he decided (like many composers) that such a piece would be a meaningful way to express what he felt. The result is an absolutely magnificent work, and the best new Requiem setting of the many that I have heard in recent years.

Though there is a definite "British choral" influence on Rütti's style, there are also Eastern European and Baltic characteristics that all combine to produce his personal voice. The resulting blend produces a truly wonderful mix of the practical melodic and modal character of much British music, and the poignant mysticism of many Baltic composers. The work begins and ends evocatively with an unaccompanied soprano solo, which the composer intends to represent the soul "alone before God." Particular highlights of the work include the transcendently beautiful choral writing in the mostly unaccompanied Introitus that follows the opening soprano solo. The powerful and urgent Kyrie is extremely memorable. The most extended movement is the central Offertorium, which is packed with spine-tingling climaxes and textures. A memorable recurring motive throughout the whole Requiem is a sequence of shifting chords with false relations on the word "Jerusalem"; it is particularly glorious.

The common danger with Requiem settings is that the overall quiet mood of the text causes there to be far too much slow music; and when there is occasionally something fast and powerful (think *Dies irae*), it ends up being earth-shattering. Rütti intentionally avoided a *Dies irae* because it did not fit with his beliefs about God. However, through a remarkable variety of texture and mood, Rütti manages to avoid this fatigue entirely. In the service of musical variety and dramatic shape, he ends up making some choices that other composers rarely do: the Kyrie, for example, is dramatic and powerful. Likewise, the main statement of the concluding "In paradisum" is thrillingly exciting and forms a major final climax to the work. The overall result is a perfectly balanced piece.

Perhaps what is most impressive to me about Rütti's piece is how much genuine musical interest and variety he creates, despite the small forces. In terms of the creative spirit (though only rarely the actual sound of the music), James MacMillan's seminal early pieces, such as *Seven Last Words*, are called to mind. In recent years, MacMillan's large-scale works tend to use enormous orchestral palates, which are very appealing; however, it's not nearly as difficult to create a lot of color with so many resources at one's disposal.

The performance and recorded sound are excellent. Though I was somewhat "jaded" upon receiving the disc to see yet another new Latin Requiem by a contemporary composer, Rütti's superb piece completely won me over. I cannot say enough in praise of this work, which is one of the finest Requiem settings of our time; I am absolutely convinced it will join the great ones from the past. It is a disc to which I will return frequently, and is Want List material, without doubt.

Carson Cooman
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