

John Rutter (b. 1945) Requiem (1985)

Written in memory of his father, who died the year prior, Rutter described the work as “intimate rather than grand, contemplative and lyric rather than dramatic, consolatory rather than grim, approachable rather than exclusive.” Taking the liturgical plan of a traditional Catholic Requiem as a point of departure, Rutter chose to also include musical setting of texts that had personal meaning to him and ones associated with funeral rites of the Anglican church. As for the style of the work, he wanted it to be music “[his] father might have enjoyed listening to.” While not a trained musician, his father, a scientist, played piano by ear, and encouraged Rutter’s first efforts in composition. Rutter’s passion for choral music emerged when his parents sent him to Highgate School in North London, where the chapel choir sang each morning. There he wrote his first compositions and befriended John Tavener, a fellow classmate, who would also become a well-known British composer. Rutter continued his musical studies at Clare College, Cambridge, where he developed his distinct musical style which fuses elements of contemporary and classical traditions in a manner that has made him immensely popular with audiences worldwide. Many of his choral works have accompanied royal occasions. His music was featured in ceremonies for Queen Elizabeth II’s Golden, Diamond, and Platinum Jubilees, and, more recently, six his compositions were performed at the Coronation of King Charles III.

Describing his own influences and compositional style, Rutter has said:

I’m a bit of a musical magpie. I enjoy all kinds of music, from Gregorian chant right up to the present. I enjoy the traditions of popular music: jazz, blues, and in particular, the great Broadway songwriters of the mid-20th century. They have influenced me hugely because of the way they managed to make the music carry the sense of the words into the hearts of the listeners, which is a great gift.

While one typically associates a Requiem with sadness and grief, Rutter’s musical treatment communicates as well a profound sense of transition and peace. As he articulated his purpose as a composer, “I think what I’ve probably been brought into the world to do is to cheer people up. And maybe to bring consolation. And healing. People have said that my *Requiem* does bring them consolation and so forth, and that’s wonderful, but there’s also a need for joy—which is always there, always waiting to be released into our midst.”