

Requiem—Herbert Howells (1992-1983)

Requiem is a product of the composer's feverish creative output after losing his son, Michael, to polio in 1935, at the age of nine. It has an intimacy and an individual, sorrowful tone and is viewed as a private outlet for the composer's grief, as Howells did not take action until 1980 to have it published or performed.

Howell's music is complex: long, unfolding melodies are seamlessly woven into the overall textures. The harmonic language is modal, chromatic, often dissonant and deliberately ambiguous. The two Latin *Requiem aeternam* movements include poly-tonality, chord clusters and the simultaneous use of major and minor keys. In contrast, the psalm settings are simple and direct, the speech rhythms of the plain chordal writing arising out of the textual inflections. The overall style is free-flowing, impassioned and impressionistic.

One of the earliest and most fundamental influences on Howells was Gloucester Cathedral with its immense, vaulted spaces and glorious east window. Howells wrote of it a "a pillar of fire in my imagination." He consciously set out to mirror these essentially architectural elements of spaciousness and luminosity in his music, and these characteristics can clearly be heard in the *Requiem*. Significantly, the main climax of the work occurs at the words "et lux perpetua luceat eis" – 'let light perpetual shine upon them' – a symbol of hope and comfort, confirmed in the closing pages by the final release of tension and gradual transition to a simple, peaceful D major.