

***The Flower of Departure***  
***A Universal Requiem***

Commissioned by Harlan Lewis on behalf of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Bloomington

For two millennia, musical settings of the Roman Catholic Requiem texts have stood as monuments to human creativity and human will to honor the dead. Some composers have skirted particular issues of theology by omitting certain texts, such as the *Dies irae* (Day of Wrath). Some others without a Catholic viewpoint have undertaken similar works, notably Brahms *Ein Deutsches Requiem* (*A German Requiem*), which still derives from biblical texts in German. What's missing, even to the present day, however, is a musical setting that speaks to those who do not necessarily cleave to a particular theological view, and yet would be mindful and resonant with a "secular Requiem."

This project addresses that need. Here is a "universal requiem," a work to honor those who have passed while comforting the living, for those who may not necessarily ascribe to the Roman Catholic or other ostensibly religious rituals—and yet who may well find power, resonance, and comfort in the ritual and the musical experience.

Rituals of how we honor the dead and comfort the living help us to define who and perhaps even what we are as humanity—as thinking and self-aware beings possessing temporary corporeal residence in the cosmos. This work sets texts that speak of the human journey: we are born, we live, we love, we work, and we ultimately return to the ocean of time.

*The Flower of Departure* uses parts of the traditional Requiem (Introit, Kyrie, Gradual, Dies Irae, Offertory, Sanctus, Communion) as a model. Texts, while indicating some similar functions (call to service, nature of service, readings, etc>), the content and meaning differ.

—Cary Boyce

*The Flower of Departure* derives much of its philosophical and musical structure from the lovely Rilke text of the brief second movement. The text implies a return, our end is implicit in our beginning. This Requiem begins and ends with two virtually identical pillar movements, with the last movement arabesqued by memories of the musical journey between. The piece also embodies a blossoming. The opening motive opens out from a unison, and there are similar mirror-image motives throughout the piece. The entire "Kosmos" movement is structured around the orchestra moving apart, with the bass instruments moving down and the treble instruments moving up, expanding like the cosmos itself, while the singers hold their center and try to make sense of it with Walt Whitman's complex, questioning text. Throughout the piece there is an opening out, from the personal to the global to the universal.

*I. There Will Be Rest* (Sara Teasdale) begins with the individual creating meaning, looking to the stars for perspective. The text "I will make a world of my devising out of a dream in my lonely mind" is set as a complex fugue followed by a return to the opening motive and an inverted (mirror) setting of the "serene forgetting" text. The movement ends with a cascade of overlapping voices singing, "Above me

stars I shall find,” gradually slowing, slowing, and coming to rest. It is interesting to note that this movement ends, as several of them do, a half step away from where it began. The rising arpeggio that finishes the movement is reminiscent of Brahms’ *Requiem*.

II. *The Flower of Departure* (Rainer Maria Rilke) features mirror-image counterpoint, modal scales, and the half-step tension between F and G-flat. The “I” of the first movement becomes “we,” as we begin to contemplate the universality and inevitability of departure. It is sung by a chamber choir.

III. *The Night in Silence* (Walt Whitman) directly addresses Death as “dark mother” and “strong deliveress”. Death is to be welcomed, a “loving, floating ocean.” Harmonically, the piece undulates indeterminately, again exploiting half-step relationships, but blossoms into stable triadic harmonies at the direct invocations (“O vast and well-veiled death” and “Approach, strong deliveress”) and at the moments of return (“gratefully nestling close to thee” and “ever-returning spring”). Cary imagined a Latin-inspired rhythm underlying the piece, which is exploited more fully in the *Offertory*.

IV. *Dies Irae* is a brilliant combination of styles that slyly translate the Latin texts’ dire warnings of hellfire into an indictment on the greed of humanity. The chant-inspired music of the Latin text (punctuated by angry explosions) is interrupted by a sinister strip tease, signaling the “unmasking” in Leonardo da Vinci’s 400-year-old “Prophecy of the cruelty of man.” The entire strip tease cleverly integrates a repeated 4-note bass line, known in musical history as a “lament bass.” As in Baroque pieces, the upper parts create a moving dissonance over the insistent, repetitive bass line. The *Dies Irae* movement is the only harmonically stable movement in the piece, beginning and ending in the same key, and Cary has described it as the crux, or dramatic fulcrum, of the Requiem.

V. The *Offertory* is a jazzy instrumental version of *The Night in Silence*, exploiting swinging rhythms and using the wind and brass instruments soloistically.

VI. *Kosmos* returns to the meaning-making impulse introduced in *The Flower of Departure*, and is also sung by a chamber choir. A viola soloist (playing a very virtuosic part) embodies the restless questioning while the orchestra punctuates with its ever-expanding “cosmic” chords and bell-like fanfares (bells are traditional in the Sanctus movement).

VII. *There Will Be Rest* repeats the first movement in its entirety, with the voices of the soloists embroidering the texture.

**Artists:**

Susan Swaney, conductor

Amanda Biggs, soprano solo

Scott Hogsed, baritone solo

Nicholas Dold and David Ward-Steinman, pianists

The Choir and Orchestra of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Bloomington

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