

## Mat Collishaw: A dystopian vision of Fauré's Requiem

FEBRUARY 17, 2023 | BY JEAN-MARIE CHAMOULARD

On February 15 and 16, 2023 Insula Orchestra and the Accentus Chamber Choir perform, under the direction of Laurence Equilbey, the Oratorio Saint François d'Assise by Charles Gounod and the requiem by Gabriel Fauré, brought to life by the video of the British artist Mat Collishaw.

Death as deliverance. It is the culmination of a religious exaltation for Charles Gounod, an appeasement for Gabriel Fauré. Charles Gounod (1818-1893) wrote his Oratorio "Saint François d'Assise", in Rome at the end of his life. The manuscript was lost, then found in a convent in 1996 and premiered the same year at the Auvers sur Oise festival. Tonight we hear the orchestral version of Fauré's Requiem, created at the Trocadero Palace in 1900 when its composition had begun in 1887. Mat Collishaw is British, photographer and visual artist. The requiem is accompanied by his video "Sky Burial", a burial in the sky. It is inspired by a practice that takes place in Tibet when the frozen ground and the lack of wood do not allow for burial or cremation. The sky and the Vultures then served as burial places for the deceased. Mat Collishaw thus wants to question our relationship to death and nature. The Insula Orchestra and the Accentus Ensemble are directed by their founder, Laurence Equilbey. Sober, precise, elegant steering.

An oratorio animated by religious passion:

Saint Francis of Assisi is in prison. The strings alone begin a haunting chant, then joined by the organ. Tenor Amitai Pati begins the Agnus Dei, the saint's prayer to his saviour. Her voice is soft warm very melodious. "As the deer sighs", François aspires to sacrifice. It is a very beautiful love song that is both tender and exalted. He gets Christ's answer: baritone Samuel Hasselhorn sings Christ from the first balcony, dominating the stage. Reassuring, he talks to her like a son. Plucked strings, wood, timpani, the atmosphere of the second part is gloomy. Francis must die. While the orchestra translates the concern, the saint blesses the city of Assisi. A song of great sweetness, of great serenity. The choirs of men implore God to save Francis. "Take flight to the skies" sings the women's choir. Death is a consolation, a deliverance. François moves away from the stage and the orchestra plays alone, peaceful. Such beautiful music, delicate and poetic

Requiem aeternam.

The first chords of the orchestra are dramatic but from the introit, the choirs of great sweetness. It is a plea, the search for consolation. The offertory is a moment of

contemplation. The melody brings peace, the baritone solo highlights the depth of Samuel Hasselhorn's voice. During the sanctus, the choirs of men become powerful and majestic, to the glory of God, then the Hosannah gradually move away. A child from the Hauts de Seine choir sings the famous Pie Jesus A voice of great purity in the service of this so beautiful, so famous melody. A moment of great emotion for the listener. Serenity is complete. The "libera me" is a plea, painful, worried. The baritone's voice seems to come from beyond, the orchestra evokes an emotional storm, it is the most dramatic part of the work. But serenity is found in the final chorus "In Paradisum"

#### A disturbing video

Mat Collishaw's video intensifies the dramatic dimension of the Requiem. Its dystopian character contrasts with the serenity of Fauré's music. The work is contrasting: the images of flying birds and rivers evoke the harmony of nature. The large tower, of which only a carcass remains, suggests a recent misfortune. It contrasts with the beauty of the landscapes. The camera penetrates into the rooms of the dying. It's impressive, the spectator touches death very closely as it is rarely represented in our societies. This vision of old people at the end of life can be disturbing even if the dying are calm, not seeming to be in pain, surrounded by their loved ones. The vulture feast is an anthropological transgression. The scene is very hard almost unbearable and could have been simply suggested. But as in the Requiem calm returns with the final views of the sea where everything dissolves, ending the cycle of life.

The harmonious and contrasting union of the mass for the dead and the film gives great emotional intensity to this evening. The listeners were all frozen, impressed. A concert that questions us about our relationship to nature and confronts us with our mortal destiny. As rarely. But with the beauty of the music of Gounod and Fauré as a consolation.