

“Sacrifices” by Patrick J. Lee

This project is designed to celebrate the forthcoming centenary of the 1914-1918 Great War. It grew from a keen and life-long interest in the poems of Rupert Brooke and a wish to set some of his five war sonnets to music (having previously set two other poems for SATB/TTBB chorus).

At first, it was difficult to understand the ‘mood’ of the British nation in 1914, specifically, how so many young men could, so willingly and enthusiastically, enlist in the army of volunteers which was to stop the advance of the German army in Belgium and France. Research in literary and historical commentaries has showed that there were many reasons why this was the case - not least of these that politicians actively encouraged well-known poets to write poems which promoted the war and encouraged young men to sign up – hence Rupert Brooke’s War Sonnets as well as the poetry of Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, Laurence Binyon and others. Before too long, the horrors of the Great War very quickly became all too obvious and many poets (Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Isaac Rosenberg, Charles Sorley, Edward Thomas and many others) wrote of their bitter experiences in the army and in the trenches.

The ‘thread’ or ‘story’ of this musical offering seeks to describe and reflect

- the patriotism and the appetite for adventure at the beginning of the war,
- the subsequent despair and disillusionment after experiencing the horror of the war, and moving finally and inevitably to
- the reason why we should still remember those who lost their lives during that conflict and, by extension, in the wars that have followed.

It is intentional that this work should have a resonance for those involved in current conflicts.

The work is scored for narrator, baritone soloist (who might well double up as the narrator), SATB chorus (occasionally *divisi*) and orchestra (2.1.2.2 : 4.2.3 : timps : harp : strings). It is designed such that the voices are at the forefront of the ensemble, with the orchestra fulfilling an accompanying role for the majority of the work.

There are eight poems set to music, all linked by the writings of men who lived and fought in the war. All texts are out of copyright (i.e. > 70 years since the death of the author) except for the Herman Hesse poems and the extract from a Richard Aldington short story. The inclusion of the Hesse poetry is by commercial arrangement with Surhkamp Verlag (publishers in Berlin) and the Aldington extract is included by kind permission of the Imperial War Museum, London.

This work should be performed without a break. Sometimes the narrator speaks with no orchestral accompaniment (such as between the third Brooke poem and Alan Seeger’s “Rendezvous”) and, at other times, the narrator’s script is carefully arranged to fit with finite passages of music. The eight songs (i.e. the words and the music) within the work offer considerable variety through their meaning, mood and form but they are linked and the work is bound together by the use and re-use of themes or ‘mottos’ either literally or as thematic transformations. This work should be seen as a whole, a single-movement work for soloist, chorus and orchestra.

A copy of the vocal parts with piano accompaniment (for rehearsal purposes only as this is an approximate transcription of the orchestral music) is available at this web link: -

<http://www.scoreexchange.com/profiles/patrickjlee>

and click on “Sacrifices”. The MP3 sound sample is a virtual performance of the vocal and orchestral music, created by Sibelius 6 software. The vocal parts can be distinguished by virtue of the fact that they use only the syllable “ah”; they do not enunciate words. A copy of the libretto can be obtained, free of charge, from the composer.