

Trinity Church Calls; Composers Respond



Karsten Moran for The New York Times

Chiara String Quartet performed on Thursday in one of the Sept. 11 memorial observances at Trinity Church.

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By Steve Smith

In the days leading up to the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks, on Sunday, Bach, Brahms, Mahler and their ilk have once again been pressed to serve, their historically distant, emotively durable works lending voice to public expressions of grief in manners broad enough to enfold diverse beliefs and perspectives.

Some contemporary composers have expressed hesitation to tackle head-on the enormity of that day's events: what personal gesture could give voice to so profound and raw a tragedy, or bind together the experiences of the disparate souls affected?

Still, many have felt compelled to respond; in his remarks before a concert at Trinity Church on Thursday evening, Julian Wachner, the church's music director, said that thousands of pieces had been offered for performance during a week of memorial events there.

The night before, the Trinity Youth Chorus had given the public premiere of Robert Moran's "Trinity Requiem," a work it had recorded previously for a CD that was released recently. Mr. Moran, commissioned by the Trinity Church organist Robert P. Ridgell, who has since left, to write a piece for this week's observances, turned like countless composers before him to the text of the Latin Requiem Mass.

After an initial crashing organ chord, the piece takes a tone of cool contemplation. Young, peeling voices sing largely tonal lines over a luminous mix of organ, cello quartet and harp. Mr. Moran deploys gentle dissonances and nervous repetitions to potent effect. He reinforces textural expressions of grief and redemption deftly and subtly, as when, midway through an instrumental offertory based on Pachelbel's Canon, the organ drops out, leaving the cellos to conclude with a palpable sensation of diminishment and loss.

Simple enough to suit young singers yet complex enough to engage them, Mr. Moran's elegant, potent writing was pitched perfectly to the occasion. Melissa Attebury, making her first public appearance as the director of the chorus, elicited a secure, moving performance, one that ought to have been heard by more than the few dozen audience members on hand for this 30-minute program, on which the Requiem was the sole work.

Thursday's concert by the Chiara String Quartet included two purely instrumental works, Richard Danielpour's String Quartet No. 6 ("Addio") and Robert Sirota's "Triptych." Mr. Danielpour's work, composed in 2009 and presented here without explanation or program notes, conveyed personal, interior dimensions of loss and remembrance.

That Mr. Danielpour's stylistic borrowings were identifiable — Shostakovich's angst; the unease of early Schoenberg; the cinematic thrust of Philip Glass; melodies with the refulgence of Italian arias — did not detract from their emotional efficacy. The first movement, saturated with the melancholy heard in Strauss's "Metamorphosen," is among Mr. Danielpour's best creations.

Mr. Sirota's "Triptych," first performed by the Chiara String Quartet at Trinity Church in 2002, is more explicitly descriptive, with literal representations of crashing tumult, blaring sirens and speeding emergency vehicles in its first movement. Thematically linked to three paintings by Deborah Patterson displayed behind the performers, the work proceeds through unease and lamentation to end with a tone of resilience and hope.

The Chiara players were ideal advocates for both pieces, their care and precision enhanced with tangible commitment and abundant heart.

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/10/arts/music/trinity-church-brings-new-music-to-911-remembrance.html?_r=3