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WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

FRANK FERKO
STABAT MATER

HIS MAJESTIE'S CLERKES

Anne Heider, director

Nancy Gustafson, soprano

Stabat Mater

Frank Ferko (b. 1950)

- | | | | | |
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HIS MAJESTIE'S CLERKES

Anne Heider, director

Nancy Gustafson, soprano

TT: (54:37)

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Commentary on Stabat Mater

by Frank Ferko

The twentieth century has produced relatively few concert settings of the *Stabat Mater*, a text that inspired so many composers in previous eras. When asked why I chose this ancient Latin hymn over other texts, the answer was simple. I saw in the *Stabat Mater* words that spoke of the pain and death of a young man, the grieving of his mother, and the hope of life after death. In my own mind, there was an immediate connection between this text and events from our time, and I wanted to compose a piece that would connect the *Stabat Mater* with the present.

At this point in history, and particularly in looking retrospectively at the twentieth century, it would be difficult for anyone to ignore the overwhelming number of children and young adults whose lives have been lost to the ravages of war, murder, suicide, and crimes of hatred, as well as to disease and tragic accidents of all kinds. For most of these premature deaths, there was a parent who grieved over the lost life. Upon reading the text of the *Stabat Mater*, one is immediately struck by the very somber, even morbid words that speak of pain and suffering, beating and torture, and eventually death. These ideas are repeated over and over again in an ever-changing poetic Latin vocabulary. There is also a feeling of waiting: the mother of Jesus waiting as her son slowly and painfully dies in front of her eyes. She is helpless in the situation, and can only stand and watch as the inevitable happens. How many peo

ple in our own time have had a similar experience, in a

hospital room, on a battlefield, on a playground, or in the streets? To present the *Stabat Mater* in a way that would relate the medieval text to certain life experiences, I chose five additional texts — in English as it turned out — to interpolate into the context of the Latin hymn. I wish to point out that these interpolated pieces are optional additions and do not have to be included in any given performance. However, the work as a whole will lose a significant dimension of meaning and a connection with the present if the interpolations are omitted.

This work has its compositional roots in the past. It consists of 25 miniature pieces (20 Latin stanzas and 5 interpolations) that fit together much like a mosaic. The materials used include such old-fashioned concepts as tonal centers, church modes, major and minor keys, counterpoint, and melody. The music does digress into realms away from the tonal center (especially Stanza No. 13, which is atonal), but there is a basic tonal framework for the entire composition.

At the outset, the Introduction establishes the key of E minor, and E as the principal tonal center. Through various devices, the tonal center gradually shifts to the very distant key of B-flat minor, which we reach in Stanza No. 12, after which everything begins moving back to E minor. However, the final stanza, which expresses the hope of life after death, has been placed in the very "bright" key of D major; it acts as a kind of chorale, much like the chorales Bach used to

conclude his Passions. Thus we have two arches: one progressing from E to B-flat, and the other progressing from B-flat back to E — and beyond, in the final chorale.

Throughout this work there is a constant interplay between musical whole steps and half steps. The rearrangement of these intervals has resulted in some interesting scales, such as the whole tone scale (which has no half steps at all) used in Stanza No. 9 ("Eia Mater") and the octotonic scale introduced at the soprano soloist's entrance in "Andromache's Lament." The very colorful octotonic scale is comprised of regularly alternating half steps and whole steps. It appears in an altered form in stanzas 5 and 6, sung by the women of the chorus, and is presented in its pure form in Stanza 11, as the chorus sings a melody written in that scale, based on the note B-flat. This stanza presents the very thin texture of the entire chorus singing in unison without any harmony — a sort of modern-day chant. A rhythmic feature of this stanza, and one that reappears later, is the grouping of a sixteenth note followed by two eighth notes and another sixteenth to form a short-long-long-short pattern.

A certain amount of free chromaticism occurs, particularly in "Andromache's Lament" and Stanza 13, "Fac me tecum." Stanza 13, written in ABA form, presents the densest music of the whole composition. It consists of a series of tone clusters (the A section) with a large 8-part static cluster (the B section) that gradually changes at the discretion of the conductor, concluding with the women singing a half-step cluster and the men singing a whole-step cluster (after which the A

section is repeated). This is the only portion of the work that has no clear tonal center. The seemingly endless wall of sound begs for a resolution, and we wait for that resolution just as Mary waited as she watched her son slowly dying. Musical resolution does not come until the next stanza, which then projects the piece into its journey back towards the key of E minor. As tonal stability returns, certain compositional procedures also resurface. In Stanza 16, "Fac ut portem," we hear another chant-like single-line melody, sung by the tenors. This is followed immediately by a 4-voice isorhythmic motet in which the tenors sing the chant melody again but in very long note values. The counterpoint is similar to the counterpoint presented in stanzas 3 and 12, and the short-long-long-short rhythmic pattern also reappears as a feature of Stanza 16. Following the final interpolation, "Elegy," the tenor melody from "Fac ut portem" forms the basis of Stanzas 17 and 18, which affirm the key area of E minor.

My main criterion for selecting English texts for interpolation were their relationship to the basic meaning of the Latin *Stabat Mater*. Set as an optional introduction to the whole work, the first text is taken from the Gospel According to St. Luke. It is Simeon's prophecy at the Presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple. Simeon warned Mary that her son would cause her much suffering: "you too will be pierced to the heart." The second interpolated text, excerpted from a speech in Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, expresses the horror of innocent people being killed in wartime. In this scene, the Greeks have won the Trojan War and have begun taking Trojan women and chil-

dren back to Greece as slaves. The Greeks have declared that no children of Trojan heroes may be allowed to live. Thus, they have taken the young son of Andromache, wife of the slain hero Hector. They will kill the boy by throwing him from the top of the wall that surrounds the city onto the rocks below. Andromache has requested one final visit with her baby before he is to die. Her speech has been set for soprano solo and chorus.

The third interpolated text, titled *The Mother*, was written by the Irish poet Padraic Pearse (1879-1916). It tells of a mother whose two sons have gone to fight in a war for just causes. Although she does not begrudge them and respects them for their deed, both are killed. The mother ends up alone, grieving for her sons. Padraic Pearse was himself executed for his part in the fight for Irish independence following the Easter Rebellion of 1916. The fourth interpolation sets four short poems by Charlotte Mayerson, from her book *The Death Cycle Machine*, inspired by the loss of her son to AIDS in 1990. The viewpoint is very different from the preceding poems in that the author expresses both grief and anger: anger at the disease, anger with her son for not caring for himself as the disease progressed, and anger with God for allowing it all to happen. The final interpolation is a setting of Sally M. Gall's *Elegy*, a poem in which the cause of the child's death is only hinted at (drowning). The viewpoint is that of both the child and the parents. It provides a calmer view

of death than the preceding texts and offers hope for something more beyond death.

The musical settings of the interpolated texts are entirely independent from those of the Latin text, even though their literary content is related to the *Stabat Mater*. The first, third, and fifth interpolations serve, in part, as tonal pillars, or reference points, for the singers. Thus, these interpolations are set homophonically, with very traditional harmonic progressions. The first serves to establish the tonal center of the whole piece; the third provides a reference point in the middle of the increasing chromaticism of the Latin stanzas.

The fifth interpolation, with its text expressing hope for life after death, foreshadows the final stanza and reflects the tonal stability that the main (Latin) work is gradually re-establishing. The second and fourth interpolations present highly dramatic texts requiring some use of chromaticism, dissonance, and rhythmic energy. Their musical settings provide a contrast to the surrounding music, but use musical constructions that have been heard earlier in the work. Of course, the second through fifth interpolations are also linked to each other through the timbral consistency of the added solo soprano voice.

Score of Frank Ferko's *Stabat Mater* available through:

E.C. Schirmer Music Company (Catalog No. 5445)
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www.ecspublishing.com • 617.236.1935

T e x t s & T r a n s l a t i o n s

① *Introduction*

Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother:
This child is destined to be a sign that will be rejected;
and you too will be pierced to the heart.

Many in Israel will stand or fall because of him;
and so the secret thoughts of Mary will be laid bare.

— *Luke 2:34-35*

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|---|---|--|
| ② | 1. Stabat Mater dolorosa
Juxta crucem lacrimosa,
Dum pendebat Filius. | <i>The sorrowful Mother stood weeping
beside the Cross
where her Son was hanging.</i> |
| ③ | 2. Cujus animam gementem,
Contristatam et dolentem,
Pertransivit gladius. | <i>A sword of sorrow pierced
her lamenting soul,
suffering and grieving.</i> |
| ④ | 3. O quam tristis et afflicta
Fuit illa benedicta
Mater Unigeniti! | <i>O how sad and how afflicted
was that blessed Mother
of the only-begotten Son!</i> |
| ⑤ | 4. Quae maerebat et dolebat,
Pia Mater, dum videbat
Nati poenas inclyti. | <i>How painfully she mourned,
the tender Mother, when she saw
the torments of her noble Son.</i> |

6 I. *Andromache's Lament*

Oh darling child I loved too well for happiness,
your enemies will kill you and leave your mother forlorn.
Your own father's nobility, where others found
protection, means your murder now.

I lived
never thinking the baby I had was born for butchery
by Greeks, but for lordship over all Asia's pride of earth.
Poor child, are you crying too? Do you know what they
will do to you? Your fingers clutch my dress. What use
to nestle like a young bird under the mother's wing?

Yours the sick leap head-downward from the height, the fall
where none have pity, and the spirit crushed out in death.

O last and loveliest embrace of all, O child's
sweet fragrant body. Vanity in the end. I nursed
for nothing the swaddled baby at this mother's breast;
in vain the wrack of labor pains and the long suffering.
Now once again, and never after this, come close
to your mother, lean against my breast and wind your arms
around my arms and put your lips against my lips.

— Euripides
from *The Trojan Women*
(translated by Richmond Lattimore)

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|---|---|
| <p>7 5. Quis est homo qui non fleret,
Matrem Christi si videret
In tanto supplicio?</p> | <p><i>Who is the man who would not weep
if he could see the Mother of Christ
in such great agony?</i></p> |
| <p>8 6. Quis non posset contristari,
Christi Matrem contemplari
Dolentem cum filio?</p> | <p><i>Who could not be saddened
to contemplate Christ's Mother
grieving with her Son?</i></p> |
| <p>9 7. Pro peccatis suae gentis
Vidit Jesum in tormentis,
Et flagellis subditum.</p> | <p><i>For the sins of her own people
she saw Jesus in torment,
subjected to the lash.</i></p> |
| <p>10 8. Vidit suum dulcem natum
Moriendo desolatum,
Dum emisit spiritum.</p> | <p><i>She saw her own sweet child
deserted, dying,
as he breathed his last.</i></p> |

11 II. *The Mother*

I do not grudge them: Lord I do not grudge
My two strong sons that I have seen go out
To break their strength and die, they and a few,
In bloody protest for a glorious thing,
They shall be spoken of among their people,
The generations shall remember them,
And call them blessed;
But I will speak their names to my own heart
In the long nights;
The little names that were familiar once
Round my dead hearth.
Lord, thou art hard on mothers:
We suffer in their coming and their going;
And though I grudge them not, I weary, weary
Of the long sorrow — And yet I have my joy:
My sons were faithful, and they fought.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>12 9. Eia Mater, fons amoris,
Me sentire vim doloris
Fac, ut tecum lugeam.</p> | <p><i>O, Mother, wellspring of love,
make me feel the force of your sorrow,
that I may grieve with you.</i></p> |
| <p>13 10. Fac ut ardeat cor meum
In amando Christum Deum,
Ut sibi compleceam.</p> | <p><i>Make my heart to burn
in the love of Christ our God,
that I may be pleasing to him.</i></p> |
| <p>14 11. Sancta Mater, istud agas,
Crucifixi fige plagas
Cordi meo valide.</p> | <p><i>Holy Mother, do this:
fix the wounds of the Crucified
powerfully within my heart.</i></p> |
| <p>15 12. Tui nati vulnerati,
Tam dignati pro me pati,
Poenas mecum divide.</p> | <p><i>Share with me the pains
of your wounded Son
who digned to die for me.</i></p> |

III. From 'The Death Cycle Machine'

16 *Layout*

I didn't consider
When I chose your name
How it would look
On a tombstone.

17 *Haiku for an East Asian Scholar*

I didn't teach you to ride
A two-wheeled bike
That summer
So you could die.

18 *Ancho y Ajeno*

The world is wide and alien
And I side with those
Who roll to the edge
But would I rather have
A grandchild
Than my own child
Dead of AIDS?

19 *RSVP*

I didn't raise you to behave this way
I mean, all of your pals were here today
Singing, drinking wine . . .
It's been five years, for God's sake,
And you love parties
Couldn't you at least call?

— Charlotte Mayerson

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>20 13. Fac me tecum pie flere,
Crucifixo condolere,
Donec ego vixero.</p> | <p><i>Make me weep tenderly with you,
sharing the pain of the Crucified
as long as I live.</i></p> |
| <p>21 14. Juxta crucem tecum stare,
Et me tibi sociare
In planctu desidero.</p> | <p><i>To stand with you by the Cross
and join myself to your lament:
this is what I long for.</i></p> |
| <p>22 15. Virgo virginum praeclara,
Mihi jam non sis amara:
Fac me tecum plangere.</p> | <p><i>Radiant Virgin of virgins,
be not bitter to me now;
make me grieve with you.</i></p> |
| <p>23 16. Fac ut portem Christi mortem,
Passionis fac consortem,
Et plagas recolare.</p> | <p><i>Make me bear the death of Christ;
make me a sharer in his Passion
and mindful of his wounds.</i></p> |

24 IV. Elegy

My child has said her farewells.
She has stretched out her arms to the sun —
— Sun, will it be warm where I lie?
She has stretched out her arms to the moon —
— Moon, will you wrap me in silver?
She has stretched out her arms to the river
— River, do not flow over me long.
Now she is alone with the earth.
She lifts her face to the wind
and remembers orange-scented trees
— Earth, I shall bring you soft blossoms
unwithered and fragrant
and you shall not harm me.

— Sally M. Gall

- 26 17. Fac me plagis vulnerari,
Fac me cruce inebriari,
Et cruore Filii. *May I be wounded with his wounds,
inebriated with the Cross
and the blood of your Son.*
- 26 18. Flammiis ne urar succensus
Per te Virgo, sim defensus
In die iudicii. *Lest I burn in flames enkindled,
may I be defended by you, Virgin,
on the day of judgment.*
- 27 19. Christe, cum sit hinc exire,
Da per Matrem me venire
Ad palmam victoriae. *O Christ, when I go hence,
grant me, through your Mother,
to attain the palm of victory.*
- 28 20. Quando corpus morietur,
Fac ut animae donetur
Paradisi gloria.
Amen. *When my body dies,
may my soul be given
the glory of Paradise.
Amen.*

(*Stabat Mater* translations by Barbara Newman)

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About His Majestie's Clerkes

Since 1982, His Majestie's Clerkes has brought choral music, both familiar and unusual, to Illinois audiences in performances of the highest caliber. Although most of its repertory is a *cappella*, the group has enjoyed successful collaborations with period-instrument ensembles including the Newberry Consort, Orpheus Band, and Chicago Baroque Ensemble. His Majestie's Clerkes' concert series is now in its seventeenth year. The ensemble has also made guest appearances for the American Musicological Society, Performing Arts Chicago, Early Music from the Newberry Library, the American Choral Directors Association, and the Stratford-upon-Avon Music Festival.

His Majestie's Clerkes has brought to Chicago distinguished guest conductors Sir David Willcocks, Simon Preston, Paul Hillier, David Hill, and Alice Parker. The ensemble has been recorded for broadcast numerous times by Chicago Fine Arts Station WFMT-FM and by National Public Radio's *Performance Today*. The Clerkes' recordings for the Cedille, Centaur, Harmonia Mundi, and Narada Media labels have garnered widespread acclaim in national and international journals. The group has been a regular winner of grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Illinois Arts Council, and the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. The Clerkes' dedication to 20th-century music has led them to commission and premier works by several contemporary composers including Frank Ferko, Daniel Tucker, and Eric Reese.

Founding singer in His Majestie's Clerkes, Anne Heider became the group's Artistic Director in 1989. Heider's expertise in historical performance practices, a *cappella* repertory, and choral blend have shaped the ensemble's distinctive sound. Heider holds a B.A. in music history and theory from Wellesley College, an M.A. in musicology from New York University, and a D.M.A. in conducting from Stanford University. She is Associate Professor of Choral Music and Director of Choral Ensembles at Chicago's Roosevelt University, where she teaches choral conducting and choral literature. Her research in early music has been supported by the Newberry Library, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and Roosevelt University, and her editions of early music have been published by A-R Editions and the Gregorian Institute of America.

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His Majesty's Clerkes

Photo: Bill Burlingham

ABOUT NANCY GUSTAFSON



Photo: Christian Steiner

Nancy Gustafson has sung leading soprano roles in the world's major opera houses including the Metropolitan Opera; the San Francisco Opera; Lyric Opera of Chicago; the Vienna State Opera; Deutsche Oper, Berlin; La Scala; the Royal Opera, Covent Garden; the Bastille Opera; the Bayerische Staatsoper, Munich; and the Glyndbourne Festival. Her signature roles include the title characters in Strauss's *Arabella*, Dvorák's *Rusalka*, Janacek's *Jenufa* and Kátia *Kabanová*, and Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*, as well as Violetta in *La Traviata*, Eva in *Die Meistersinger*, Alice Ford in *Falstaff*, Marguerite in *Faust*, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, Ellen Orford in *Peter Grimes*, Rosalinde in *Die Fledermaus*, and Musetta in *La Bohème*.

Miss Gustafson's other recordings include *Das Rheingold* with Christoph von Dohnányi and the Cleveland Orchestra for Decca; Mahler's *Symphony No. 2*, with Zubin Mehta and the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra; and *La Bohème* with Kent Nagano conducting, both for Teldec; and Lehár's *The Czarevitch* and *The Land of Smiles* for Telarc.

ABOUT FRANK FERKO

Frank Ferko (b. June 18, 1950, Barberton, Ohio) has worked for many years in Chicago in the double capacity of free-lance composer and organist/choral conductor. For more than twenty-five years he held the post of director of music at various churches in the midwest, most recently at the Church of St. Paul and the Redeemer in Chicago. He now devotes most of his available time to composition. Ferko received his Bachelor of Music degree in piano and organ performance from Valparaiso University in 1972, his Master of Music degree in music theory (with a minor in organ performance) from Syracuse University, and his doctorate in music composition from Northwestern University, where he studied with Alan Stout.



Photo: Chris Bach

Mr. Ferko's choral works have been performed by such distinguished artists as His Majesty's Clerkes, the Dale Warland Singers, the Lutheran Choir of Chicago, Chicago Choral Artists, and the American Repertory Singers, and through the sponsorship of New Music Chicago, the Chicago Composers' Consortium, and the American Composers Forum. Mr. Ferko has received numerous national awards in composition, including the 1989-1990 AGO/Holtkamp Award from the American Guild of Organists, and annual ASCAP awards since 1989. In 1991, he received grants from Meet the Composer and the Community Arts Assistance Program of Chicago; in 1995 and again in 1998, he received the coveted Composer Fellowship from the Illinois Arts Council; and in 1997, the Dale Warland Singers awarded Ferko their 1998-99 choral commission in their New Choral Works Program for Emerging Composers. His compositions are published by E.C. Schirmer, with which he has an exclusive publishing agreement. More than twenty of his works have been recorded on compact disc, primarily on the Arsis label and The Liturgical Press.

