

L O S   A N G E L E S

# MASTER CHORALE



# MUSIC TO ACCOMPANY A DEPARTURE

ELECTRONIC PRESS KIT

“ART THAT MAKES YOU SAD YET  
GRATEFUL FOR EVERY MINUTE OF  
LIFE, AS THIS “DEPARTURE” DID,  
IS ART THAT RISES HIGHEST.”

— MARK SWED, LOS ANGELES TIMES



MUSIC TO ACCOMPANY A DEPARTURE

# MUSIC TO ACCOMPANY A DEPARTURE

FOR 24 VOICES AND CONTINUO

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABOUT THIS PRODUCTION  
5

VIDEO  
6

PHOTO GALLERY  
7-8

PROGRAM NOTES AND BIOS  
9-14

PRESS QUOTES AND REVIEWS  
15-18

## TOUR REPRESENTATION

David Lieberman / Artist's Representatives  
[info@dlartists.com](mailto:info@dlartists.com) • [www.dlartists.com](http://www.dlartists.com)







# MUSIC TO ACCOMPANY A DEPARTURE

The Los Angeles Master Chorale and acclaimed director Peter Sellars have once again created a stirring, searing and thoroughly contemporary work from an ancient source. *Musikalische Exequien* by Heinrich Schütz, the most formidable German composer prior to J.S. Bach, is a musical response to the plagues of his time. It was the first German requiem, and the writing for solo voices is often florid in the Italian Baroque manner, while the choral sections build upon the German chorale tradition.

For over an hour, 24 singers, with as many as 18 taking the solo parts at various points, gather for quiet, sober, beautiful, and tender communal grieving. Symbolically, this staging encapsulates the message of the *Musikalische Exequien*—the term “exequies” deriving from the Latin word for a “train of followers.” In Schütz’s singularly moving dramaturgy, they/we are gathering, learning to accompany a departure.

Through its innovative use of solo and choral sections, the work powerfully conveys what it means to say goodbye and to have faith that the departed’s presence remains with us. With its reflective interludes and passionate outbursts, this performance captures both the beauty of life and the mystery of death, serving as both lamentation and celebration. The result is a stirring piece that reminds us that grief and transformation are eternally linked, and that saying farewell can be a source of inspiration and strength.





## TRAILER



*Music To Accompany A Departure* excerpt

## BEHIND-THE-SCENES



*Music To Accompany A Departure* excerpt



Rehearsal footage

Videos will be made available for sharing and embedding from YouTube and Vimeo. Presenters may request to view the entire 75-minute archival recording by making arrangements with the Los Angeles Master Chorale.

## PHOTOGRAPHY







## IMAGES

The photography shown may be used for promotional materials in print and online. All photos are high res and will be made available to presenting organizations.

## PHOTO CREDITS

Courtesy of the Los Angeles Master Chorale/Brian Feinzimer

## MEDIA CONTACT

For additional questions about media, please contact Cameron Reeves, Marketing Manager at 213-972-3182 or [creeves@lmasterchorale.org](mailto:creeves@lmasterchorale.org)

# MUSIC TO ACCOMPANY A DEPARTURE

## GRANT GERSHON

Kiki & David Gindler Artistic Director

## JENNY WONG

Associate Artistic Director

## REENA ESMAIL

Swan Family Artist-In-Residence

LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE

GRANT GERSHON, conductor

PETER SELLARS, director

JAMES F. INGALLS, lighting designer

DANIELLE DOMINGUE SUMI, costume design

LISA EDWARDS, portative organ

EVA LYMENSTULL, viol de gamba

World Premiere performance of *Music to Accompany a Departure* took place on Sunday, November 20, 2002, at Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, California.

*Music to Accompany a Departure* is made possible by generous support from Lillian Pierson Lovelace, Patrick R. Fitzgerald and Ron Myrick.

Co-commissioned by Los Angeles Master Chorale, Cal Performances at University of California, Berkeley, Stanford Live at Stanford University, and Krannert Center for the Performing Arts at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Musikalische Exequien

Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672)

## I.

Concert in Form einer teutschen Begräbnis-Missa  
*Concerto in the form of a German Funeral Mass*

## II.

Motette: Herr, wenn ich nur dich habe  
*Motet: Lord, if I only have you*

## III.

Canticum B. Simeonis: Herr, nun lässest du deinen Diener in Frieden fahren  
*The Song of Simeon: Lord, let your servant now depart in peace*

# REIMAGINING THE REQUIEM

THOMAS MAY



On February 4, 1636, the funeral services of Prince Heinrich II Posthumus of Reuss took place with musical accompaniment composed by his younger friend (and namesake) Heinrich Schütz. Prince Heinrich, an admired and enlightened ruler during an era of almost unimaginable devastation in Central Europe, had prepared meticulously for his own death.

Nascent Lutheran tradition allowed the personal selection of religious texts for one's funeral, but the scope of Prince Heinrich's arrangements was unprecedented. At least a year before his death, he secretly ordered a copper coffin to be made, on which an array of 25 quotations—sourced from the Bible together with various church hymns—was inscribed on all sides, surrounded by exquisite painted decorations. This collection of texts also served as the basis for the *Musikalische Exequien* that Schütz was commissioned to compose—a sonic “translation” and amplification of the message embodied by this unique sarcophagus and an integral part of the process of saying goodbye.

“Over the last two and a half years, we have experienced the trauma of losing loved ones and oftentimes not being able to be there with them during their last weeks, days, hours,” says Grant Gershon, Kiki & David Gindler Artistic Director of the Los Angeles Master Chorale. “So we saw this piece as a perfect way to explore what it means to say goodbye and what it means to have faith that the departed's presence will

still be with us.” For director Peter Sellars, the goal is “to create a gathering that could acknowledge the passing of so many people from our lives across these last two years” through music that “touches the emotional depth that we've denied ourselves.”

A well-educated humanist with a special passion for music—he liked to take part in performances at his court by singing bass—Prince Heinrich had largely managed to keep the ravages of the Thirty Years War at bay from his domain, which was centered around Gera in the heart of Germany. Schütz, born within his sovereignty in nearby Köstritz in 1585, had recently been forced by the chaos of the war to interrupt his longtime position as Kapellmeister in Dresden and to find other courts where he could continue his life as an artist.

Although the Prince commanded only a fraction of Dresden's resources, his policies brought economic prosperity. He had earlier consulted with Schütz to improve musical life at the court and churches and seems to have developed a close friendship with the composer. Whether the commission for the *Musikalische Exequien* came directly from Prince Heinrich or from his widow following his death—some accounts contend that the Prince actually heard performances of the music in his final months—Schütz constructed an innovative requiem memorial that remains a landmark of music history.

In his preface to the *Exequien*, which he published at roughly the midpoint of his career, the composer noted that he had “brought together and set to music in one concerted work” the scriptural quotations and hymn verses engraved all around the Prince's special coffin. The texts in question, which encompass the Old and New Testaments, convey a theological message of overcoming the bitterness of death through the consolation and hope of the promise of eternal life.

But instead of the cosmic, metaphysical journey of the departed soul mapped out by the Latin Requiem, the carefully culled German texts of the *Exequien* suggest something more personal and intimate—the assurance of salvation for the departed meant to provide solace to the grieving left behind on earth, in this “vale of tears.” And Schütz has found a way to express this in music that, as described by director Peter Sellars, is “quiet, sober, beautiful, tender, heartfelt, and very modest”—at a far remove from sentimentality as well as from the “histrionics” of our own time.

If that sounds familiar, it may be because Brahms achieves something comparable in his early masterpiece *A German Requiem*, which sets a similarly bespoke juxtaposition of scriptural texts. But Schütz, the most important German predecessor of J.S. Bach, got there more than two centuries before, in a time rent by plague as well as horrific warfare, indelibly marked by tragic losses in his personal life that gave him “a very deep understanding of death as a process of living,” according to Sellars.

Conditions had altered drastically since his youthful years, early in the 17th century, when Schütz studied music in Venice with Giovanni Gabrieli. “Imagine how spectacular it must have seemed when he arrived: the 360-degree, immersive sound universe of choruses amid the blazing golds and incredible mosaics of San Marco—music not as presentation, but as immersive,” Sellars observes.

Upon returning to Germany and receiving his appointment to the court in Dresden, Schütz proceeded to combine stylistic currents from Northern Europe with these Italian influences—the latter represented, above all, by the polychoral splendor of Gabrieli, but also the subtle word painting of Monteverdian madrigal.

Aspects of both inform the *Musikalische Exequien*, albeit on a far more modest scale in comparison with the extravagant resources called for in earlier works of Schütz. He limited himself in this funeral music to a tutti choir scored for six to eight parts (these can have more than one voice to a part), which alternates with varying configurations of soloists. From the ensemble of 24 singers performing as the choir in

tonight's performance (three or four on a part), as many as 18 take the solo parts at various points in the piece in order to convey the “sense of communal grieving and also of the sharing of personal stories” that characterizes the work, as Gershon explains.

The *Musikalische Exequien* comprises three parts, offering a personalized, Protestant alternative to the Roman Catholic Requiem Mass. The first, which Schütz calls “Concerto in the Form of a German Funeral Mass,” is several times longer than the other two combined and corresponds to the Kyrie and Gloria movements of the traditional Latin liturgy. “Concerto” is used here in the contemporary Italian sense of a composition for voices accompanied by basso continuo (rendered in all three parts by a portative organ and viola da gamba).

The six-part choir sings the Lutheran equivalent of the Latin rite's tripartite Kyrie plea, interspersed by settings of Biblical verses for changing groups of soloists. This pattern of alteration continues in the much longer, symmetrically constructed, 16-part section that paraphrases and entirely rewrites the Latin Gloria using verses from contemporary chorales (sung by the choir) and scriptural passages (sung by an ever-changing assortment of soloists).

After this would have followed the sermon—a moment recreated in this performance by Alice Goodman's newly written text. Part Two sets Psalm 73 (which also appears at the center of the “Gloria” section) in the manner of a motet for double choir: the exchange between each choir is a nod to what Schütz had absorbed from the polychoral style of his mentor Gabrieli during his time at San Marco.

Part Three calls for an especially unusual scoring. A five-part choir sings the Song of Simeon from the Gospel of Luke—a quintessential prayer of peaceful leave-taking—while a trio of soloists responds with other scriptural passages and represents the “blessed soul” of the departed (baritone soloist) being escorted heavenward by two seraphim (soprano soloists). Schütz ingeniously makes use of the performance space to differentiate these musical forces and to suggest “the little group gathered around the coffin, singing to the person inside, being answered by the universe,” says Sellars.

Symbolically, this setup encapsulates the message of the *Musikalische Exequien*—the term “exequies” deriving from the Latin word for a “train of followers.” In Schütz's singularly moving dramaturgy, they/we are gathering, learning to accompany a departure. As Sellars puts it: “You feel there's nobody in that coffin anymore: that being is now in the air and the sunlight and has reentered the universe in every raindrop, in every bud on every tree.”

*Thomas May is the program annotator for the Los Angeles Master Chorale.*

# LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE

The Los Angeles Master Chorale is the “the finest-by-far major chorus in America” (*Los Angeles Times*) that turns “precision into wonder” (*The New Yorker*). Hailed for its powerful performances, technical precision, and artistic daring, the Chorale is led by Grant Gershon, Kiki & David Gindler Artistic Director; Associate Artistic Director Jenny Wong; and President & CEO Jean Davidson. Its Swan Family Artist-in-Residence is Reena Esmail.

Created by legendary conductor Roger Wagner in 1964, the Chorale is a founding resident company of The Music Center and choir-in-residence at Walt Disney Concert Hall. The fully professional choir is a diverse and vocally dynamic group that reaches over 175,000 people a year through its concert series at Walt Disney Concert Hall, its international touring of innovative works, and its performances with the Los Angeles Philharmonic and others.

In 2022, the Chorale won a Best Choral Performance Grammy for the Los Angeles Philharmonic’s Deutsche Grammophon recording of Mahler’s *Symphony No. 8* (with the National Children’s Chorus, Los Angeles Children’s Choir, and Pacific Chorale). Other recordings include *The Sacred Veil* by Eric Whitacre (Signum Records) and *national anthems / the little match girl passion* by David Lang (Cantaloupe Records). The Chorale is featured on the soundtracks of many major motion pictures, including *Jungle Cruise*, and the Star Wars films *The Last Jedi* and *The Rise of Skywalker*.

Throughout 2018 and 2019, the Chorale toured its production of *Lagrime di San Pietro*; directed by Peter Sellars, it

earned rave reviews across the globe. *Süddeutsche Zeitung* called the 2019 Salzburg Festival performance “painfully beautiful,” while the *Sydney Morning Herald* praised *Lagrime di San Pietro* as “stunning...Their voices soared to the heavens.” After the Chorale performed in London, The Stage called *Lagrime* a “balm for the soul.” In the 2022–23 season, the Chorale will perform its second collaboration with Sellars, *Music to Accompany a Departure*.

Committed to increasing representation in the choral repertoire, the Chorale announced in 2020 that it will reserve at least 50% of each future season for works by composers from historically excluded groups. This commitment to inclusion runs through the entire organization, which recently ratified a five-year plan to improve representation at the staff and board levels, to build a more diverse roster of singers, and to reach a wider audience.

The Chorale’s education programs include Voices Within residencies that encourage students to write and perform their own songs, and an expansive Oratorio Project for high school students. The Chorale also presents an annual High School Choir Festival, which brings teenagers from around the Southland to perform in Walt Disney Concert Hall. In May 2019, the High School Choir Festival celebrated 30 years as one of the longest-running and widest-reaching arts education programs in Southern California. The Chorale returned to Grand Park last July for the first time in three years to host Big Sing 2022, the cherished group-sing event enjoyed from people throughout Los Angeles.

SOPRANO  
Kelci Hahn\*  
Elissa Johnston\*  
Anna Schubert\*  
Sunmi Shin\*  
Addy Sterrett\*  
Andrea Zomorodian\*

ALTO  
Mindy Ella Chu\*  
Callista Hoffman-Campbell\*  
Shabnam Kalbasi  
Laura Smith Roethe  
Nike St. Clair  
Ilana Summers

TENOR  
Casey Breves\*  
Matthew Brown  
Adam Faruqi\*  
Dermot Kiernan\*  
Edmond Rodriguez\*  
Gregorio Taniguchi\*

BASS  
Derrell Acon\*  
James Hayden\*  
Luc Kleiner\*  
Chung Uk Lee\*  
Ben Lin  
Brett McDermid\*

\*Soloists

The singers of the Los Angeles Master Chorale are represented by the American Guild of Musical Artists, AFL-CIO, Elyse Willis, AGMA Delegate.

# GRANT GERSHON

KIKI & DAVID GINDLER ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



Hailed for his adventurous and bold artistic leadership, Grant Gershon, Kiki & David Gindler Artistic Director, celebrated his 20th anniversary season in 2021-22 with the Los Angeles Master Chorale, which he has turned into the “finest-by-far major chorus in America.” (*Los Angeles Times*)

Gershon, who elicits technically precise and expressive performances from musicians, is committed to increasing representation in the choral repertoire, and in 2020 he announced that the Chorale will reserve at least 50% of each season for works by composers from historically excluded groups in classical music. For his career-spanning leadership in the field of choral music, Gershon received Chorus America’s 2022 Korn Founders Award. Gershon was named Outstanding Alumnus of the USC Thornton School of Music in 2002 and received the USC Alumni Merit Award in 2017.

In July 2019, Gershon and the Chorale opened the famed Salzburg Festival with *Lagrime di San Pietro*, directed by Peter Sellars. The Salzburg performances received standing ovations and rave reviews by such outlets as the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, which called *Lagrime* “painfully beautiful.” In 2022–23, Gershon will collaborate again with Sellars in the Chorale’s production of *Music to Accompany a Departure*.

Gershon’s discography includes Grammy-winning Best Choral Performance for Mahler: Symphony No. 8, “Symphony Of A Thousand”, Grammy-nominated recordings of *Sweeney Todd* (New York Philharmonic Special Editions) and Ligeti’s *Grand Macabre* (Sony Classical), and commercial recordings with the Chorale that include *Glass-Salonen* (RCM), *You Are*

(Variations) (Nonesuch), *Daniel Variations* (Nonesuch), *A Good Understanding* (Decca), *Miserere* (Decca), and *the national anthems* (Cantaloupe Music). He has also led the Chorale in performances for several major motion pictures soundtracks, including, at the request of John Williams, *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* and *The Rise of Skywalker*.

As resident conductor of LA Opera, Gershon conducted the West Coast premiere of Philip Glass’s *Satyagraha* in November 2018. He made his acclaimed debut with the company with *La Traviata* in 2009 and subsequently conducted *Il Postino*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Carmen*, *Florencia en el Amazonas*, *Wonderful Town*, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, and *The Pearl Fishers*. In 2017, he made his San Francisco Opera debut conducting the world premiere of John Adams’s *Girls of the Golden West*, directed by Peter Sellars, who also wrote the libretto, and made his Dutch National Opera debut with the same opera in March 2019.

In New York, Gershon has appeared at Carnegie Hall and at the historic Trinity Wall Street, and he has performed on the Great Performers series at Lincoln Center and the Making Music series at Zankel Hall. Other major appearances include performances at the Ravinia, Aspen, Edinburgh, Helsinki, Salzburg, and Vienna festivals, the South American premiere of the LA Opera’s production of *Il Postino* in Chile, and performances with the Baltimore Symphony and the Coro e Orchestra del Teatro Regio di Torino in Turin, Italy. He has worked closely with numerous conductors, including Claudio Abbado, Pierre Boulez, James Conlon, Gustavo Dudamel, Lorin Maazel, Zubin Mehta, Simon Rattle, and his mentor, Esa-Pekka Salonen.

# GUEST ARTISTS



**PETER SELLARS**  
DIRECTOR

Peter Sellars has gained international renown for his groundbreaking and transformative interpretations of classics, advocacy of 20th century and contemporary music, and collaborative projects with an extraordinary range of creative and performing artists. He has staged operas at the Dutch National Opera, English National Opera, Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Opéra National de Paris, Salzburg Festival, and San Francisco Opera among others.

Earlier this year, Sellars created a staging of the *Roman de Fauvel* at the Théâtre du Châtelet in collaboration with musicologist and founder of the Sequentia Ensemble, Benjamin Bagby. Also in 2022 he staged composer Tyshawn Sorey's *Monochromatic Light (Afterlife)* for the Park Avenue Armory. A revival of Sellars' acclaimed production of *Tristan und Isolde*, with videography by artist Bill Viola, will be seen at the Paris Opera early in 2023.

Sellars is a Distinguished Professor in the Department of World Arts and Cultures at UCLA. He is recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, the Erasmus Prize for contributions to European culture, the Gish Prize, and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has been awarded the prestigious Polar Music Prize and named Artist of the Year by Musical America. In 2021 he was honored with the EBU-IMZ Lifetime Achievement Award for his body of opera video recordings.



**JAMES F. INGALLS**  
LIGHTING DESIGN

James F. Ingalls made his LA Master Chorale debut with *Lagrime di San Pietro*, with which he has toured internationally. His work for the LA Philharmonic includes last season's *Fidelio* with Deaf West Theatre and previous season's *Canata Criolla*, *El Niño* and *The Gospel According to the Other Mary*. Designs for Mark Taper Forum/Center Theatre Group include *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *The Price* and *A Parallelogram*. Most recently for Peter Sellars he designed *Monochromatic Light (Afterlife)* (Park Avenue Armory/NYC), *Oedipus Rex/Symphony of Psalms* (San Francisco Symphony) and *Le Roman de Fauvel* (Theatre du Chatelet/Paris).

Recent designs for dance include *Ibsen's House* (Singapore Ballet and Charlotte Ballet), *Raymonda* (Dutch National Ballet) and *Twyla Now!* (New York City Center). Recent theatre includes *Once Before I Go* (Gate Theatre/Dublin) and *The Seagull* and *Three O'Casey Comedies* (Druid Theatre/Galway).

He often collaborates with The Wooden Floor dancers in Santa Ana, California.



**DANIELLE DOMINGUE SUMI**  
COSTUME DESIGN

Danielle Domingue Sumi is a visual artist inspired by culture, spirituality, and humility. She is committed to promoting social well-being through costume design and expressive arts. Her creativity is explicated through diversity and social justice principles with an increased understanding, recognition, and response to multiethnic heritage.

A graduate of Clark Atlanta University, FIDMLA and Loyola Marymount University; with degrees in both design and art psychotherapy, Danielle is treasured for ingenuity and leadership skills in theatrical, fashion, dance, and opera costume production.

Danielle has created for The Fashion Institute of Design (LA), Theatre Forty, Los Angeles Opera, Music Academy of the West, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Perm Opera and Ballet, Los Angeles Master Chorale, East West Players, Japanese American Community and Culture Center, Halau Hula Moani'a'ala Anuhea, and Company One Theatre. Danielle worked as Resident Costume Designer with Nobles Theatre Collective. She is currently Costume Director with New Orleans Opera Association.

# PRESS QUOTES

“TRANSCENDENT”

“INCOMPARABLY MOVING”

“ART THAT MAKES YOU SAD YET GRATEFUL FOR EVERY MINUTE OF LIFE, AS THIS “DEPARTURE” DID, IS ART THAT RISES HIGHEST.”

- MARK SWED, LOS ANGELES TIMES

“THE ASTOUNDING, UNIFIED LUSTER OF THE MASTER CHORALE VOICES SHONE WITH RADIANCE”

CLASSICAL VOICE NORTH AMERICA

“THE SINGERS MASTERED ALL OF THE POLYPHONY AND DOUBLE CHOIR TEXTURES, AS WELL AS THE ENUNCIATION OF THE TEXTS”

“...I SENSED THAT THIS WAS A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME EVENT. IT'S SO IDEAL FOR OUR TIMES, AND THE CHORALE SHOWED OFF SOME ASTOUNDING SKILLS AT EMOTING WHILE SINGING WITH PLAINTIVE SIMPLICITY. CLARITY AND PRECISE BALANCE WERE EVERYWHERE IN EVIDENCE, AND SOLO VOICES HAD CHARACTER AND WARMTH.”

“...IT DID FEEL LIKE I WAS UNDER THE SPELL OF SOME KIND OF NARCOTIC, AS IF BEING DRAWN TO THE LIGHT. WHAT A FASCINATING EXPERIENCE TO HAVE DURING THE FINAL BEAUTIFULLY LIT SCENE, WHICH HAD THE CHORUS MEMBERS GATHERED AROUND A GRAVE TO BURY SOMEONE THEY HELD DEAR.”

“WELL DONE. I CERTAINLY ENDED UP IN HEAVEN.”

STAGE AND CINEMA



## PETER SELLARS AND LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE FIND COMMUNAL CONSOLATION

**TOM JACOBS**  
NOVEMBER 15, 2022

Feeling a little raw these days? Between the pandemic and political instability, things sometimes seem to be falling apart—a deeply unnerving sensation.

Millions of Europeans felt much the same way in the mid-17th century, during the long and destructive Thirty Years' War. A few fortunate ones found deep solace in the music of Heinrich Schütz.

Generally considered the greatest German composer before Bach, Schütz created large-scale works early in his career, until the war made such performances impossible. Over the years, his compositions shrank in scale and became far more austere, distilled into what Peter Sellars calls “music of profound grief, but also illumination and comfort.”

Southern California audiences will have a chance to experience that communal consolation on Nov. 20, when members of the Los Angeles Master Chorale perform Schütz's *Musikalische Exequien*, or *Music to Accompany a Departure* in Walt Disney Concert Hall. Sellars will direct the production, which will be conducted by Artistic Director Grant Gershon.

“This is unlike any other experience I've had with our singers,” Gershon said. “There isn't a singer who hasn't experienced some real loss and an unresolved sense of parting. As artists, they are willing to share that vulnerability.”

“It feels like individuals or couples stepping forward and testifying,” added Sellars. “It feels impromptu, like it's improvised. It doesn't have the structure of a Mass. It feels more like a group of people sharing what they've been going through.”

The project was born during the early weeks of the pandemic, in the spring of 2020. Gershon and Sellars had just brought their highly acclaimed previous collaboration, Orlando di Lasso's *Lagrime di San Pietro*, to New Zealand. “We were in the last plane out of the airport before COVID shut everything down,” Sellars recalled.

Back home in L.A., he found himself listening almost continuously to the music of Schütz, which he first heard at Emmanuel Church in Boston when he was in his early 20s. He found himself particularly drawn to *Music to Accompany a Departure*, with its “incredible centeredness and concentration at a time when the world was a terrifying nightmare.”

He mentioned the work to Gershon during one of their regular phone conversations. Intrigued, the conductor got

a score and started to study it. “We talked again at the end of April, and I think it was at that point one or the other of us suggested this may be the next piece to explore with our singers,” Gershon recalled.

Believed to be written for a memorial service for one of Schütz's friends, the work sets scraps of text from various sources on the topics of earthly mortality and eternal life. “The opening words are ‘Naked I came into the world from my mother's womb’—which are, of course, the words of Job, after he has lost everything,” Sellars noted.

“It's a combination of the whole community singing together—primarily hymn text and passages from the Psalms—with a series of duets, along with a few solos and trios, accompanied in our case by just a small organ and viola da gamba,” added Gershon. “Those pieces in particular seemed to be about saying goodbye.”

With the number of singers not specified in the score, Gershon decided on 24, about half of whom also performed in *Lagrime di San Pietro*.

“We're doing a lot of experimentation with different tempos and different dynamics,” he said. “There are no tempo markings and virtually no dynamic markings in the score. So we spend a lot of time exploring what the music is saying to us—and that becomes the departure point for the staging. There's a lot of gesture that corresponds clearly to specific words in the text, in such a way that you see the counterpoint as well as hear it.”

The costumes will reflect the sorts of clothing people would wear to a modern-day memorial service, adds Gershon. That's because this staging—which the Chorale is planning to tour to other cities—is partly intended to fulfill a specific need: mourning the people who died in the pandemic and preparing ourselves for the next phase of the disease, whatever that may be.

“When it comes to COVID, nobody knows what's going to happen next,” Sellars said. “This piece is in that spirit. We're here now, on the edge of we don't know what. This is music of people who are searching, trying to understand.

“It ultimately offers deep comfort—just by acknowledging what we're feeling. The last movement is a little taste of the antiphonal choral work that Schütz knew in his youth when he studied with [Giovanni] Gabrieli. The singers are in some other realm. We hear other voices. We hear that we are not alone.”



## REVIEW: MUSIKALISCHE EXEQUIEN [MUSIC TO ACCOMPANY A DEPARTURE]

**TONY FRANKEL**  
NOVEMBER 23, 2022

### HEAVEN AWAITS

“Exequien” in German are funeral observances, and the three pieces of Heinrich Schütz's *Musikalische Exequien* were originally performed in February 1636 for the funeral of Heinrich Posthumus von Reuss, a prince and diplomat who was a personal friend of the composer. Funeral arrangements are likely to weigh heavily on your mind if you're gone through your life with the name ‘Posthumus’ von Reuss came by his name on account of being born after the death of his father, and his arrangements for his own funeral were precise to the letter, with every text and reading prescribed. Reuss commissioned the music from Schütz, providing him with German texts roughly analogous to the Latin requiem mass (the work was the first requiem in the German language). von Reuss went so far as to design his own copper sarcophagus inscribed with the text, which has been restored and put on public display in the Thüringen city of Gura.

Following the success of *Lagrime di San Pietro*, which had movement accompanying singing, the L.A. Master Chorale took on Schütz's gorgeous piece of music, and then had director Peter Sellars capture its emotional intensity by staging the 24 singers in various stages of grieving, loss, and comfort. As if at a homegrown memorial service, the ensemble was seated on simple chairs in six rows of four facing downstage left toward a non-specific table which served as a bier, a deathbed, etc. With music memorized, the group—wearing street clothes from black to dark pastel (Danielle Domingue Sumi, costumes)—would morph for each of the continuously variable passages, from ensemble to soloists. The latter was particularly effective when a chorale member would lie on the table while a mournful family member or friend would hold their hand as they departed.

You might think of this as the authentic performance among authentic performances. The continuo here is a small portative organ (played very softly like a flute by

Lisa Edwards) and a viol de gamba (exquisitely played by Eva Lymenstull), an arrangement apparently suggested by Schütz himself. The singers were continually warm, avoiding sharp singing even in the periodic harmonic clashes. Director Grant Gershon glided in and out of the scenes surreptitiously, so that his conducting was always in view.

The idea here is that we have so much to grieve—from mass shootings, war, and COVID—that this staging would assist audiences in letting go. (No doubt this piece will travel just as *Lagrime di San Pietro* has.) Even if it wasn't staged the singers mastered all of the polyphony and double choir textures, as well as the enunciation of the texts, which are a selection of scriptural readings and hymns with little obvious sense of musical or semantic coherence. Schütz's solution to his benefactor's texts is essentially episodic, with homophonic chorales interspersing recitative-like solo and small ensemble passages, all sung at a near pianissimo level (the acoustics at Disney Hall took care of the rest). James F. Ingalls' lights also changed, from a tight spot on the “bed” to a front light that projected shadows on the giant “French Fry” organ behind the players.

The result was a spiritual, meditative, and sometimes sad experience. For the first half of about 65 minutes, I sensed that this was a once-in-a-lifetime event. It's so ideal for our times, and the chorale showed off some astounding skills at emoting while singing with plaintive simplicity. Clarity and precise balance were everywhere in evidence, and solo voices had character and warmth. But something strange began to happen up until the end. I drifted. Not that the piece had a soporific effect, but it did feel like I was under the spell of some kind of narcotic, as if being drawn to The Light. What a fascinating experience to have during the final beautifully lit scene, which had the chorus members gathered around a grave to bury someone they held dear. I read that the deceased is represented by bass voices, while angels accompanying it to heaven are represented by the sopranos. Well done. I certainly ended up in heaven.



## LE MAÎTRE DE LA MISE EN SCÈNE PETER SELLARS REVISITE L’UN DES PREMIERS CHEFS D’ŒUVRE DE LA MUSIQUE BAROQUE, DANS UNE PERFORMANCE INTIME, ÉMOTIONNELLE, MÉTAPHYSIQUE.

**YANN PERREAU**  
JANUARY 23, 2023

Quand Henri II de Reuss-Gea comprit qu’il ne lui restait plus longtemps à vivre, sa maladie n’allant pas en s’arrangeant, le seigneur de Gera, Scheiz et Lobenstein, commaPhilnda à son compatriote et ami Heinrich Schütz les *Musikalische Exequien*. Ainsi le musicien allemand composa-t-il, en 1635, l’un des chefs d’œuvre de la musique baroque, méditation sur la mort et le destin de l’Humanité.

Cette messe à la composition parfaite, avec ses chœurs sublimes, toute en émotion retenue, sont à la base de la réflexion que menèrent de concert Peter Sellars et Grant Gershon pour concevoir *Music for a Departure*. Les deux artistes, auxquels on doit déjà un magnifique *Lagrime di San Pietro* d’Orlando di Lasso avec la même Los Angeles Master Chorale, expliquent dans le livret avoir voulu rendre hommage, à travers cette nouvelle création commune, aux victimes du Covid, “toutes ces personnes qui nous ont quittés trop tôt et trop seuls pendant la pandémie”.

Cette messe, Peter Sellars la découvrit quand il avait 20 ans, à l’église Emmanuel de Boston. Et c’est à l’œuvre de Schütz que le célèbre metteur en scène et acteur se raccroche quand le monde s’arrête puis se referme, au printemps 2020, tandis que de dizaines de milliers de personnes meurent chaque jour d’une maladie qu’on n’arrive pas à comprendre. Il confie s’être retrouvé avec Gershon, dans le tout dernier avion à quitter la Nouvelle Zélande, où ils venaient de boucler la tournée mondiale triomphante de leur *Lagrime*, avant que le Covid ne stoppe le monde net dans sa course. De retour chez lui, à Los Angeles, il se repense à la musique de Schütz. *Musikalische Exequien*, qui signifie en français *Musique pour accompagner un départ*, n’a pas seulement été conçue comme une façon de dire au revoir à ceux qu’on aimait, et qui nous ont quitté.

Ces *Exequien* (“funérailles” en Allemand) sont aussi hantées par la guerre de Trente Ans au cœur de laquelle ils furent créés, une époque marquée par les champs de batailles et la violence, l’incertitude profonde quant à un avenir bien sombre, et les épidémies —la “peste suédoise” notamment— qui affectèrent tout le continent européen pendant trois décennies. Autant d’événements dramatiques avec lesquels on doit de nouveau vivre, en Europe, depuis quelques années. Sellars mentionne l’oeuvre à Gershon lors d’une de leurs conversations téléphoniques régulières. Intrigué, le chef d’orchestre obtient une partition et commence à l’étudier.

Ainsi les deux hommes créèrent-ils le spectacle auquel on assiste, ce 21 novembre, au Walt Disney Concert Hall, la

célèbre salle de concert conçue par Frank Gehry. Dès les premières notes, portées par les vingt-quatre voix splendides de la chorale la plus respectée des États-Unis, magnifiées par l’acoustique transcendante du lieu, on comprend l’obsession de Sellars et la fascination de Gershon pour cette messe.

“Nu, je suis venu au monde du ventre de ma mère”, se lance le chœur, reprenant les mots de Job après qu’il a tout perdu dans la Bible. Et si une tristesse profonde envahit le public, celle-ci est accompagnée d’un sentiment de joie étrange, une ardeur presque indicible, cet élan qu’on ne saurait qualifier de religieux (à chacun ses convictions) mais qui pourrait être défini comme sublime, tant l’émotion ressentie est un bouleversement, un choc. Il s’agit d’une musique sacrée, certes, mais tellement humaine par ailleurs. La mise en scène de Sellars orchestre les protagonistes et voix de cette messe comme autant de camarades, se soutenant les uns les autres, dans l’épreuve que constitue la perte d’un être aimé.

C’est par leur capacité à transcender notre condition de mortel, à déplacer sur une autre dimension l’expérience de notre existence, que les *Musikalische Exequien* trouvent leur beauté unique et intemporelle.

Le texte consiste principalement en hymnes et passages des Psaumes, avec une série de duos, ainsi que quelques solos et trios, accompagnés d’un orgue et d’une viole de gambe. Plusieurs gestes, mains levées au ciel ou posées sur un proche pour apaiser, consoler, correspondent à des mots spécifiques dans le texte, de telle sorte qu’on voit autant que l’on entend ce qui se joue. Dans la deuxième partie, les chanteuses et chanteurs sont recueillis à la façon d’une veillée funèbre, chacune et chacun assis sur leur chaise. Ils se penchent, lèvent les yeux puis les bras au ciel.

Sur une table, placé devant eux, le défunt est allongé. Des petits groupes s’approchent l’un après l’autre pour lui dire au revoir. Le dernier mouvement s’inspire d’un atelier que Schütz suivit dans sa jeunesse, lorsqu’il étudiait avec [Giovanni] Gabrieli. Les chanteurs semblent être parvenus dans une autre dimension. “Nous ne sommes pas seuls”, chantent-ils dans une capella à cinq voix (1 soprano, 1 alto, 2 ténors, 1 basse) qui contraste avec les trois voix solistes. Deux sopranos représentant deux séraphins, et baryton comme *Beata anima cum Seraphinis*, “l’âme bienheureuse avec les séraphins”, interviennent à plusieurs reprises sous la forme d’un chœur lointain.



### TOUR REPRESENTATION

David Lieberman / Artist’s Representatives  
+1 (714) 979-4700 • [info@dlartists.com](mailto:info@dlartists.com) • [www.dlartists.com](http://www.dlartists.com)