**Missa Brevis Pacem**

*Missa Brevis Pacem* (literally a ‘Short Mass for Peace’) was commissioned by the National School Band Association, and received its first performance at the Snape Maltings Concert Hall in April 1988 in a performance conducted by the composer. It is scored for large forces: boys’ voices (often divisi), baritone soloist and large symphonic wind ensemble with an array of percussion.

The idea of writing a work for boys’ voices, baritone solo and symphonic wind came about as a gradual process. In the back of my mind was the wonderful Stravinsky Mass of 1948 for similar (though smaller) forces. Stravinsky’s preference in his mixed choir was for the purity of boys’ treble voices. For a long time I had wanted to set the text of the Latin Mass, but in themselves the words were too abstract for my purpose and so, gradually, the idea of a central English text emerged, as did the thematic element. The concept of Peace (particularly of finding a personal peace) became the basis of this text, and was written by my wife, Susan Gregson.

The final words of the Mass are, of course, *Dona nobis pacem* (Give us Peace). The entry of the baritone in English at the close of the work is mirrored by the entry of the boys’ voices with the Latin words at the end of the baritone solo.

The Mass is structured in an arch shape, with the baritone solo acting as the central emotional core of the music. The work begins and ends quietly, pivoting on the pitch of E both times. The opening *Kyrie* is full of foreboding with its middle *Christe eleison* suddenly faster and rhythmic. The *Gloria* is highly-charged but joyful, ending in a blaze of G major, whilst the *Sanctus* is majestic and centered on B flat (a tritone away from the opening E), but moving upwards to a triumphant C major for the *Osanna in excelsis*. The *Benedictus* unashamedly unfolds a simple and expressive melody sung by a solo treble. The final *Agnus Dei* returns to the unsettling atmosphere of the *Kyrie* with harsh brass fanfares and jagged rhythms from the orchestra, whilst the boys’ voices mirror this with chromatic phrases and low intoned B flats on the words *Miserere nobis*. The music moves back to the opening E of the *Kyrie* and the peaceful conclusion the work has been waiting for.

Throughout the Mass there are references to other musical sources – a deliberate attempt to create aural memories for the listener. Hence the ghosts of Bach, Britten and Stravinsky are never far away (the B minor Mass, the War Requiem and the 1948 Mass respectively). It is no coincidence that the first performance was in the very place that Britten himself created as part of his own musical dream.

**Peace in our Time** (Baritone Solo)

‘Peace in our time’

Or so they said.

Words just words

To a fanfare of guns

To the cries of the dead.

Peace is elsewhere.

Loud proclamations!  
Their promises, our hopes,

Falling, dying in the air

As men fall

And die  
For this word

This manufactured peace.  
  
Peace is elsewhere.

Not with the dead but with the living

Is Peace

No dusty dream dreamed

In the night. But

As light in the morning comes

As the seasons’ rhythms run

So within us

Is Peace.

Peace is here.

Peace is within our hearts.

Dona nobis pacem.

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