

## PROGRAM NOTES

### **Template for Improvising Trumpeter & Orchestra**

RAND STEIGER

Born June 18, 1957, New York City

*The following note has been provided by the composer.*

*Template for Improvising Trumpeter & Orchestra* is a collaborative work that relies on the performers to make a significant creative contribution. Almost the entire solo trumpet part is improvised, with only a few brief notated phrases (or prescribed rests) appearing at key moments in the score. There are opportunities for others in the ensemble to improvise at particular times as well—sometimes in a brief solo, sometimes in groups of various sizes—which enables me to explore a kind of cross-fading of creative control from my predetermined contributions to those made by the performers in real time.

### **Yet Unheard**

COURTNEY BRYAN

Born August 16, 1982, New Orleans

*The following note has been provided by the composer.*

“What happened to Sandra Bland?” is a question that has been repeated without a satisfactory answer. The mystery and the tragedy of what happened to Sandra Bland brings up complicated questions. What is the value of black lives in our society? What can be done to have a sense of justice for the lives affected by police brutality? As vocalist, composer, and activist Abbey Lincoln asked, “who will revere the Black woman?”

As an artist, the best way for me to deal with emotions brought on by these questions is through music. Through music, my aim was to mourn the tragedy of what happened to Sandra Bland and her unfinished contributions to the world, and yet to celebrate the strength of her spirit, and to recognize her humanity.

Collaboration was a very important element in the creation of *Yet Unheard* for orchestra, chorus, and soloist Helga Davis. At the beginning of the process, founder of The Dream Unfinished, Eun Lee, and I discussed the direction for the piece. Over a number of months, poet Sharan Strange and I collaborated on the intention, direction, and elements of the piece, confirming that we were in sync every step of the way. Vocalist Helga Davis collaborated with

Sharan Strange and me on musical interpretation of the poem. After composing the piece, my conversations with conductor James Blachly on the intention of the piece were important in the final stages of the physical manifestation of the piece. We all felt a need to honor Sandra Bland in a meaningful way. In its chamber version, *Yet Unheard* remains true to the original composition, yet with a greater focus on the individual voices. Conductor Steven Schick and Helga Davis bring a powerful spirit to the piece.

*“What Sandy Speaks wants to do is let my kings and queens know, ‘you can do it, we can be successful, it is up to us.’ I love you all dearly. I hope you have a great day. I hope you have a successful and prosperous day. Do what is necessary to establish your kingdom and queendom, and just be great! Go out there and be the greatest thing that you can, and I guarantee it will turn your life around. Sandy speaks.” – Sandra Bland, Sandy Speaks podcast*

### **Lonely Woman**

ORNETTE COLEMAN

Born March 9, 1930, Fort Worth, Texas

Died June 11, 2015, New York City

**Arr. Asher Tobin Chodos**

*The following note has been provided by the arranger.*

Ornette Coleman’s *Lonely Woman* is a challenging piece. Its melody, though haunting and unforgettable, is disjointed and somehow inscrutable. Its formal structure occupies a middle ground between specificity and discrepancy. Perhaps most challenging of all from the perspective of a symphonic arrangement, it is deeply connected to the musical context in which Ornette Coleman first offered it to us: on his groundbreaking 1959 release, *The Shape of Jazz to Come*. There, Coleman and his ensemble challenged some of the jazz world’s most cherished musical values. In its relationship to instrumental virtuosity, in its treatment of rhythm and harmony, in its novel take on musical form, in its reframing of the blues – in nearly every way, this album represented something truly new (and, for many, something truly threatening). In many ways, *The Shape of Jazz to Come* really did deliver on the promise of its title. Even so, its embedded challenges remain vital and provocative, even if their meanings are different today

from in 1959. This arrangement is an attempt to reckon with those challenges as I understand them, to create a musical space in which an orchestra and four soloists can do the same, and, of course, to communicate some of the remarkable beauty that imbues Coleman's original with such undeniable power.

### **Requiem, Opus 48**

GABRIEL FAURÉ

Born May 12, 1845, Pamiers, France

Died November 4, 1824, Paris

Setting the Requiem Mass for the Dead to music is one of those challenges that make certain composers reveal their deepest nature, and when we hear their Requiem settings, we peer deep into their souls. From the self-conscious pageantry of the Berlioz *Requiem* to the lyric drama of Verdi, from the independence of Brahms (who chose his own texts to make it a distinctly *German Requiem*) to the anguish of Britten's *War Requiem*, a setting of the Requiem text can become a spectacularly different thing in each composer's hands. What most distinguishes the *Requiem* of Gabriel Fauré is its calm, for surely this spare and understated music is the gentlest of all settings. Where Berlioz storms the heavens with a huge orchestra and chorus (*and* four brass bands!), Fauré rarely raises his voice above quiet supplication. Verdi employs four brilliant soloists in an almost operatic setting, but Fauré keeps his drama quietly unobtrusive. While Brahms shouts out the triumph of resurrection over the grave, Fauré calmly fixes his eyes on paradise. Britten is outraged by warfare, but Fauré remains at peace throughout.

Much of the serenity of Fauré's *Requiem* results from his alteration of the text, for he omits the *Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath) of the traditional text. Berlioz and Verdi evoke the shrieking horror of damnation, but Fauré ignores it—his vision of death foresees not damnation, but only salvation. While he reinserts a line from the *Dies Irae* in the *Libera me*, the effect remains one of quiet confidence in redemption. Fauré underlines this by concluding with an additional section, *In Paradisum*—that title reminds us of the emphasis of the entire work, and Fauré brings his music to a quiet resolution on the almost inaudible final word “requiem” (rest). Responding to criticism that he did not offer the traditional terror of death, Fauré defended himself: “That’s how I see death: a joyful deliverance, an aspiration toward a happiness beyond the grave, rather than a painful existence . . . Perhaps I have sought to depart from what is conventional because

for so long I was organist at services of interment. I'm fed up with that. I wanted to do something different.”

The Fauré *Requiem* has become one of the best-loved of all liturgical works, but it took shape very slowly. The mid-1880s found Fauré struggling as a composer. He had achieved modest early success with a violin sonata and piano quartet, but now—in his forties—he remained virtually unknown as a composer. For over twenty-five years he supported himself by serving as choirmaster and organist at the Madeleine, and it was during these years—particularly following the death of his father in 1885—that Fauré began to plan his Requiem setting. He was just completing the score when his mother died on January 31, 1887—the first performance took place at the Madeleine two weeks later, on February 16.

But the music performed on that occasion was very different from the version we know today: it was scored for a chamber ensemble and was in only five movements rather than seven. Over the next decade, Fauré returned to the score several times and changed it significantly—the orchestration began to grow, and he added two movements: the *Offertorium* in 1889 and the *Libera me* in 1892. The “final” version dates from about 1900. Fauré had been asked by his publisher to prepare a version for full orchestra, and it appears that he delegated that task to one of his students. This full-orchestra version has been criticized for its uncharacteristically thick sound (many parts are doubled), and in 1984 the English composer John Rutter attempted to create a more authentic version by re-scoring the seven-movement version for an ensemble more closely approximating Fauré's original instrumentation. It may not be possible to achieve an absolutely authentic version of the Fauré *Requiem*, and it is performed today in a number of versions (these concerts offer the music in the full-orchestra version of 1900). As always in these cases, the skill and sensitivity of the performers are more important in creating a satisfying performance than the choice of a particular edition.

The Fauré *Requiem* seems to come from a twilight world. There are no fast movements here (Fauré's favorite tempo markings—they recur throughout—are *Andante moderato* and *Molto adagio*), dynamics are for the most part subdued, and instrumental colors are generally from the darker lower spectrum. Violin sections were added only in the final version, and even here they remain silent in three of the seven movements. The chorus almost whispers its first entrance on the words “Requiem aeternam,” and while the movement soon begins to flow, this prayer for mercy comes to a *pianissimo* conclusion. At this point in a Requiem Mass should come the *Dies*

*Irae*, with its description of the horrors of damnation, the admission of man's unworthiness, and an abject prayer for mercy. Fauré skips this movement altogether and goes directly to the *Offertorium*, with its baritone solo at *Hostias*. This movement, which Fauré composed and added to the *Requiem* the year after its original premiere, comes to one of the most beautiful conclusions in all the choral literature as the long final *Amen* seems to float weightlessly outside time and space. Fauré does finally deploy his brass instruments in the *Sanctus*, but even this movement comes to a shimmering, near-silent close.

The *Pie Jesu* brings a complete change. In his *German Requiem*, Brahms used a soprano soloist in only one of the seven movements, and Fauré does the same thing here. The effect—almost magical—is the same in both works: above the dark sound of those two settings, the soprano's voice sounds silvery and pure as she sings a message of consolation.

At the start of the *Agnus Dei* the violas play one of the most graceful melodies ever written for that instrument, a long, flowing strand of song that threads its way through much of the movement. Tenors introduce the text of this movement, which rises to a sonorous climax, and at this point Fauré brings back the *Requiem aeternam* from the very beginning; the violas return to draw the movement to its close.

The final two movements set texts from the Burial Service rather than from the Mass for the Dead. The *Libera me* was composed in its earliest form in 1877, and Fauré adapted it for the *Requiem* in 1892. Over pulsing, insistent pizzicatos, the baritone soloist sings an urgent prayer for deliverance. The choir responds in fear, and the music rises to its most dramatic moment on horn calls and the sole appearance in the entire work of a line from the *Dies Irae*. But the specter of damnation passes quickly, and the movement concludes with one last plea for salvation.

That comes in the final movement. Concluding with *In Paradisum* points up the special character of the Fauré *Requiem*: it *assumes* salvation, and if Fauré believed that death was “a happiness beyond the grave,” he shows us that in his concluding movement. There is a surprising parallel between the conclusions of the Fauré *Requiem* and the Mahler *Fourth Symphony*, both completed in 1900: both finales feel consciously light after what has gone before, both offer a vision of paradise, and in both cases it is the sound of the soprano voice that leads us into that world of innocence and peace. Mahler's soprano soloist presents a child's unaffected vision of heaven, while Fauré has the soprano section take the part of the angels who draw us into paradise. Fauré “wanted to do something different” with his *Requiem* and he

achieves that in a finale that quietly arrives at “eternal happiness.”

Fauré’s *Requiem* has been called pagan rather than Christian, no doubt by those who miss the imminence of judgment. But it is hard to see this gentle invocation of Christ and the mercy of God—and confidence in paradise—as pagan. Rather, it remains a quiet statement of faith in ultimate redemption and rest, one so disarmingly beautiful as to appeal to believer and non-believer alike.

Fauré note by Eric Bromberger

