

PROGRAM NOTES



Requiem in D minor, Op. 48 Gabriel Fauré

Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924) was one of the foremost French composers of his generation, known for his refined, innovative harmonic style that many claim bridges the gap between late Romanticism and early modernism. Despite his non-musical (albeit cultured) roots, his musical affinity was apparent from a young age. When Fauré was just nine years old, his father sent him to the École Niedermeyer college in Paris to train as a church organist and choirmaster. Among his most influential teachers there was Camille Saint-Saëns, who became a lifelong friend and, later, an advocate for Fauré’s work. Although Fauré spent much of his early career as an organist, holding an esteemed post at the Église de la Madeleine in Paris working under Saint-Saëns, he felt that he had little time for composing. As a result, many of his most enduring works were composed in the later part of his life, including his Requiem in D minor.

Composed between 1887 and 1890, the Requiem stands apart from other settings of the Requiem Mass. Its focus on eternal peace, rest, and spiritual devotion—described by Fauré as a *lullaby* for the dead—contrasts with a more typical focus on fearful appreciation of divine judgment found in most settings of the Requiem Mass. Unlike many traditional Requiem settings, Fauré omitted most of the dramatic and fearful “Dies Irae” sequence, instead highlighting its serene closing couplet “Pie Jesu.” The Requiem closes with the luminous burial text “In Paradisum,” emphasizing Fauré’s focus on the soul’s peaceful transition to Heaven rather than its fear of retribution. The work was first performed at an architect’s funeral in La Madeleine in 1888, and Fauré continued to revise and perfect it over the next decade.

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Musically, the Requiem is notable for its understated beauty and subtle orchestration, favoring expressive tenderness over musical drama. The use of strings, harp, organ, and choir allows Fauré to create delicate and inviting atmospheres that draw listeners into an intimate and ethereal musical experience. From the opening “Introit and Kyrie” to the peaceful conclusion of “In Paradisum,” the work observes a wide emotional spectrum through a lens of calm, restrained contemplation, punctuated by intense moments that mark the seriousness of the soul’s journey in the hands of God.

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Romance, Op. 27

Camille Saint-Saëns



Camille Saint-Saëns (1835–1921), like the other composers on this program, has certainly become a household name. In addition to his composing, Saint-Saëns was a remarkable organist and pianist of astonishing precocity and intellectual breadth. He was indeed a man of wide-ranging interests, deeply engaged with literature, the arts, and the scientific developments of his day. A child prodigy, Saint-Saëns made his formal debut at the age of ten with a concert of Mozart and Beethoven piano concertos. As an encore, the ten-year-old offered to play any of Beethoven’s 32 piano sonatas from memory.

Saint-Saëns was, in his early years, quite keen on contemporary musical styles. His own compositions, however, reflect his status as a staunch defender of classical musical traditions, railing against the influences of Wagner and Debussy in his later years. In contrast to prevailing Romantic aesthetic ideals, Saint-Saëns valued musical structure and expressive clarity over overt passion, once remarking that true music lovers must find pleasure in “a simple series of well-constructed chords.” Despite his conservative ideals, Saint-Saëns remains celebrated for his mastery of orchestration and form, with works like *Samson et Dalila* and *Le Carnaval des animaux* standing as pillars of the French repertoire. The instrumental interlude for this program, Saint-Saëns’s romance, is characteristic of the genre. Its especially personal, tender qualities and charming compositional style appeals particularly well to Saint-Saëns’s aesthetic predilections.

Te Deum, LWV 55

Jean-Baptiste Lully



Jean-Baptiste Lully (1632–1687) was a central figure in shaping the sound of French Baroque music, particularly within the court of Louis XIV. Born in Florence, Lully was brought to France at the age of 14, where he quickly established himself as a skilled dancer, violinist, and composer. His artistry captured the attention of the artistically minded King Louis XIV, who appointed Lully as the Superintendent of Music in the Chamber of the King. In this position, Lully developed a close relationship with the king, composing numerous ballets, operas, and religious works that helped solidify the grandeur of Louis’s court over the next several decades. More than a court composer, Lully was a friend to the Sun King—the two often enjoyed dancing together in ballets that Lully wrote, deepening their bond. Despite Louis XIV’s affinity for Lully, he disapproved of Lully’s scandalous personal life, riddled with extramarital affairs and promiscuous

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encounters with performers. Lully's behavior often skirted the edge of royal tolerance—Lully's domestic and international influence, however, remained immense, adding intrigue to his role as the most powerful musical figure in France during this time.

One of Lully's most important contributions to French sacred music is his *Te Deum*, a dramatic masterpiece first performed in 1677 to commemorate his son's baptism. The *Te Deum* is one of Lully's grand motets, a genre particularly well-suited to match the ceremonial majesty the French court sought to convey. Requiring a substantial number of orchestral and choral forces (upwards of 300 musicians), the *Te Deum* is rarely performed today despite its enduring legacy. In Lully's life, however, the majestic *Te Deum* enjoyed immense success because of its massive scale, prompting Louis XIV to program the work at numerous court celebrations. One such celebration was that of the Sun King's recovery from a risky medical procedure in 1687, during which a tragic accident occurred. While conducting the *Te Deum* with his traditional conducting staff, Lully struck his foot, causing an injury that eventually became gangrenous. Despite his worsening condition, Lully refused amputation, fearing that he would no longer be able to dance. This refusal ultimately led to his death, marking the end of his extravagant and influential career.

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Musically, *Te Deum* exemplifies Lully's mastery of French Baroque grace and elegance. Written for a large choir, soloists, and orchestra, the work balances spiritual reverence with brilliant fanfare and pomp, using alternating sections to highlight the grandeur of the French royal court and the text's devotional veneration. Lully's command of musical contrast is on full display, as regal trumpet fanfares and vigorous rhythms are juxtaposed with more reflective, intimate choral passages. The work opens with a strikingly bold, stately proclamation from the timpani—an innovative choice in Lully's time—that immediately captures the *Te Deum's* celebratory spirit, setting the tone for the intricate interplay between chorus and orchestra that follows. As the work progresses and the musical dialogues weave together, Lully's masterful use of orchestral color and choral layering creates a powerful sense of both divine majesty and personal devotion, marking the *Te Deum* as one of his most enduring sacred works.

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