

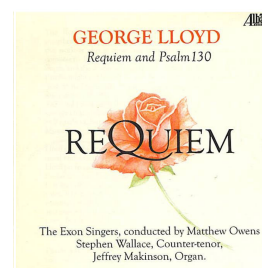
## CD Reviews:

### George Lloyd *Requiem and Psalm 130*

The Exon Singers

Matthew Owens ; Jeffrey Makinson

Albany Records TROY 450 (2002)



### International Record Review December 2002/January 2003

**G**eorge Lloyd's *Requiem* is inscribed to the memory of Princess Diana, but it was written in part for himself: he knew when he wrote it that he didn't have long to live. It was begun in autumn 1997, finished in late January 1998, and the score proofed in May; two months later he was dead. The brief (and anonymous) booklet note explains that 'the simple scale of the forces' - countertenor, small chorus and organ - 'reflects Lloyd's realization that he might not be able to complete a large orchestral score in the time he had remaining to him'.

He fashioned himself a most touching headstone: the work is unemphatically moving - it doesn't have the epic sweep of the best of his symphonies, nor the rather overblown quality of the *Symphonic Mass* (TROY 100); instead, it speaks with a sober, understated dignity. Its composer being the man he was, the musical language is immediately accessible and unashamedly melodic - his tunes melt in your ears. The harmonic world is less individual than much of the orchestral music, but I wonder whether that wasn't part of his design - a retreat of the individual before something larger and more important. And somehow the sentiment survives the relative anonymity of the language. Lloyd does use plenty of dramatic contrast, though: his chorus exclaim as well as whisper; soloists step forward from their ranks; the style ranges from richly Romantic to false-Medieval (in the 'Hostias' and 'Sanctus'); the organ subtly underpins here and thunders there. *Psalm 130* (1995) is an *a cappella* pendant, growing from gentle beginnings into flowing, broad movement;

there's some fine solo work here, too, from one of the sopranos in particular, whose bright tone cuts beautifully through the textures.

**Matthew Owens and The Exon Singers produce an excellent account of both works, reliable in pitch, clear in diction, forceful in the climaxes, firm in the *pianissimos*, and countertenor Stephen Wallace and organist Jeffrey Makinson are no less assured;** Albany gives them good sound, too. This is the kind of work that choirs all across the world would enjoy singing, and I will not be surprised if it travels far and wide. This fine CD might well prove to be its boarding pass.

*Martin Anderson*

### Gramophone Awards Issue 2002

*Lloyd's final work, movingly performed*

**G**eorge Lloyd's *Requiem* is dedicated to the memory of Princess Diana, and it is presumably on this account that it opens with what I take to be a reference to the spiritual, *Amazing Grace*. Written at the very end of his life, the work was published only months before the composer's death in July 1998: it is not, however, either morbid or sentimental. If one looks for affinities, they are to be found at least as much with Fauré as with his beloved Verdi. The mood is contemplative and affectionate but exceeds these limits to include a vigorous 'Dies irae', a lively *Sanctus* and a colourful 'Osanna'. The choral writing is characteristically good for singing,

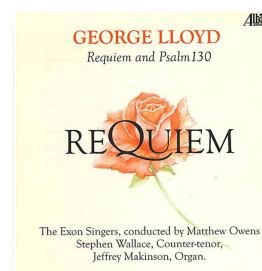
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could do with a more liberal infusion of polyphony but gains a less expected strength through an element of quasi-medieval organum.

A remarkable feature and a particular distinction of this first recording is the soloist's part, sung here by the excellent Stephen Wallace. He is a countertenor of an unusual kind and the voice is not only lovely in itself but suits the writing ideally well. **The booklet tells that the *Requiem* was in fact written with the Exon Singers and their conductor Matthew Owens in mind: certainly they give a fine account of it.** The organist's part also develops in interest, Jeffrey Makinson taking full advantage of the opportunities. The coupling with *Psalm 130* ('De profundis') dates from 1990, making an apt companion-piece with its development from the pessimism of its opening to the affirmative ending of 'in His word do I hope'.

John Steane

might beg comparison, Lloyd cuts it, opting to end the work on a positive note with the 'Lux aeterna', more a counterpoint, perhaps, to 'Candle in the Wind'. Not that Lloyd was aspiring to anything Verdian in scale. Completed two months before his own death, his *Requiem* is an essentially reflective Romantic chamber work for countertenor, choir and organ. It's accessibly melodic, with a modal, neo-medieval style - especially in the first 'Dies irae' - and swirlingly Gothic organ-writing; and it is atmospherically mysterious and sincere in its devotion.

**The 24 members of the Exon Singers**, the chamber choir attached to Exeter Cathedral, **sing with limpid purity of tone, their harmonies impeccably modulated and expertly disciplined.** But in his efforts to emote, the soloist Stephen Wallace can seem a little overwrought and slightly overdoes the fruity tone.

Claire Wrathall

## BBC Music Magazine November 2002

Performance \*\*\*\*

Sound \*\*\*\*

Completed in 1998, recorded in 2002 and released to coincide with the fifth anniversary of the death of Princess Diana, to whose memory it is dedicated, the late George Lloyd's last work is a setting of the Latin Requiem Mass. Perhaps precisely because Lynne Dawson's account of Verdi's 'Liberate me' was such a memorable part of Diana's funeral and

## The Penguin Guide to Compact Discs and DVDs Yearbook 2002/3

One rosette, \*\*\*

The *Requiem* was George Lloyd's final work and it represents the composer's infinitely touching farewell to life, which he always celebrated with vigour in spite of his many disappointments. It is written for countertenor and small chorus, although the choral writing is as rich in melody and harmony as anything in the *Symphonic Mass*. Indeed at

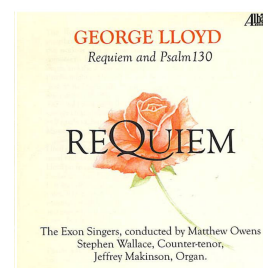
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50 minutes the *Requiem* is hardly less ambitious, and one does not sense a smaller scale. The pencil score was begun in 1997 and the final proofing was completed in January 1998, only two months before Lloyd's death. Because of his realization that he would not have enough time to complete a large orchestral score, Lloyd turned to the organ, and that proved one of the work's principal strengths, for the organ writing is often thrilling and always imaginatively resourceful. The *Confutatis*, for instance, brings a surging bravura organ passage and then the *Dies irae* (using the medieval chant) makes its thrillingly exuberant choral entry. But the work is predominantly lyrical, and the serene mood of the opening of the *Kyrie* returns radiantly at the *Lacrimosa*. The jaunty, scalic *Hostias* and the following, comparably rhythmic *Sanctus* demonstrate that the vitality of Lloyd's inspiration was undiminished, and after a touching solo *Agnus Dei*, finely sung by Stephen Wallace, the work closes peacefully and optimistically with a seraphic *Lux eterna*, quoting the celestial rocking theme from the *Kyrie*. **The work is splendidly sung and played (the organist, Jeffrey Makinson, deserves his own rosette). It is inspirational in feeling, with that special quality that almost always comes with a first recording.** The simple *a capella* setting of *Psalm 130*, written in 1995, makes an apt coupling. **The recording itself**, made in the Church of St Alban the Martyr, Holborn, **is first-class**, but black marks for the documentation which provides no translation of the Latin text of the *Requiem* and omits the words of the *Psalm* altogether.