

NAXOS RECORDING CRITICAL ACCLAIM
December 2011 to January 2012

Steven Ritter

Audiophile Audition, January 2012

It has moments of great power and beauty, featuring ethereal and delicate moments to overpowering full choral passages of tremendous force. Lancino, who spent much of his life working in electronic music, displays a real talent for dramatic communication and even some lovely, albeit intense, melodic passages.

I think that even those allergic to modern music will find much to enjoy here, as the composer's style is not irrevocably wedded to dissonance for dissonance's sake, but only in the service of the dramatic element, with many more familiar tonal characteristics wedded as well. Definitely worth a hearing.

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Steve Holtje

Culture Catch, January 2012 - Best of 2011: #4

Thierry Lancino (1954–) gives us the wildest Requiem in decades, a multi-culti affair that's certainly not suitable for church use but makes for a most bracing musical experience.

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December 2011

Lancino's Requiem is a powerful work and a difficult one on several levels—not especially easy to listen to or to think about. It is a piece that challenges rather than reassures the audience, and in so doing shows the power of modern choral composition within a more-or-less traditional form.

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Grego Applegate Edwards

Gapplegate Classical-Modern Music Review, December 2011

I was pleasantly rewarded lately by listening a number of times to...Requiem (Naxos) as performed by the massed forces of Chœur de Radio France, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, soloists and conductor Eliahu Inbal.

It's a 70-plus minute journey into an expressively modern treatment of the requiem form. The soloists express themselves with musicality and passion, the choir and orchestra are artfully served with a score that bubbles over like a cauldron of molten fire at times, and other times indulges in pianissimo murmurs that fit the sorrowful expression of the text by the solo vocalists. The orchestra reinforces and underscores the choir and soloists, as is fitting in such a work.

The performance is spirited and excellent. Lancino's music has undoubtedly some considerable merit. I would most definitely like to hear more of it. It is undoubtedly a work and a performance that merit the attention of modern music lovers.

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Laurent Bury

Forum Opera (France), December 2011

No! Not any differently than the “Just of the Gradual,” Thierry Lancino has not to fear bad reputation: with this Requiem, he seems to be well established in the heavens of today’s best French composers. The CD Naxos just released will fulfill those who, having witnessed the premiere of the work, wished it immortalized by a recording.

Dies iræ, dies illa, Solvet sæclum in favilla, Teste David cum Sibylla! The desire of a dialog between the traditional text of the catholic liturgy and sources taken from the Old Testament (David) and even the pagan world (the Sibyl of Cumes) was born from the three first verses of the “Dies iræ.” He therefor asked the French specialist in antiquity who gets a great deal of media attention, Pascal Quignard, to conceive an ambitious set of texts which includes the well-known Latin poem, often reduced to its first verse of each part. This way, a new and complex ritual is born, admirably served by the musical score. Through various clanking and tinkling, in the midst of fierce bites from the brass, alternating climax and appeasing moments, Thierry Lancino produces here a masterly work in which moments of great dramatic forces are given to the choir and to the soloists. These moments let us imagine what an opera composer he would be (his personal site announces among his projects a short lyric work after Borges short story, “The Immortal”).

Noticed in several premieres of new music at the Bastille Opera (Salambô by Philippe Fénelon, Perelà by Dusapin), Nora Gubisch has the privilege to perform the two superb monologs of the Sibyl: all along the work, with an impressive vehemence, but with a voice constantly mastered, she calls for death with all her will, sometimes in French, sometimes in Greek. To this desire of annihilation, David answers by his desire of eternal life. The king of Israel is split into two performers: the simple mortal, anguished, is sung by a tenor; the warrior, self-confident, by a bass. Nicolas Courjal, in the past, a member of the troupe assembled at the Opéra Comique by Pierre Médecin, is today one of the rising French basses. His short solos are here always striking. The diction of Stuart Skelton is not perfect, but the bravery of his voice is never caught off guard in this role which requires a strong tenor (his repertoire includes heaviest Wagner and Strauss roles). In contrast to the other soloists the soprano is not identified as a specific character, she is simply the “human figure”. Heidi Grant Murphy succeeds—better in new music where she feels sheltered than in a more traditional repertoire—to soften the aging of her voice, even though her vibrato tends to hoot in high pitches forte. She delivers a poignant and sober “Ingemisco”, first a capella, then sustained by the celli. A few passages are given to the choir alone: the Kyrie, the Offertorium, the Agnus Dei: it is the opportunity for Radio France Choir to show the strength of its different sections, in the softness and the violence as well.

Without renouncing his Ircam experience, Thierry Lancino accomplishes, for the last few years, an authentic work on voice and declamation, without requesting the singers to be constantly in the extremes of their tessitura, and with great care for intelligibility. Here is a “spiritual” music which does not give in to the easy ways of a certain ecstatic minimalism, but goes for a quest for new sonorities, mixing timbers and textures for a result which is inspired and inspiring as well.

Ben Finane

Listen: Life with Classical Music, December 2011

“Thierry Lancino’s audacious work keeps in the tradition of the Requiem but is by no mean traditional, reconceiving the form as a sacred oratorio, or in the words of the composer, “an epic fresco.” Inspired by the liturgical text “Dies iræ...teste David cum Sibylla” (“Day of wrath...as announced by David and the Sibyl”), Lancino’s Requiem unfolds as a dialogue between the pagan Sibyl—from the Greek “Sibylla,” meaning “prophetess”—and the biblical David. With the choir functioning as a Greek chorus of sorts, the four soloists are the oratorio’s principal actors. David is sung by the tenor and the Sibyl by the mezzo-soprano. The soprano (Heidi Grant Murphy) is the mortal, suffering Everyman, and the bass represents the warrior side of

David. Challenging but approachable, the musical landscape is wide and far-reaching, yet the work's lexicon steers clear of any dogmatic or academic approach. In collaboration with librettist Pascal Quignard (*Tous les matins du monde*), Lancino's *Requiem* makes for a thoughtful meditation on Death and Time."

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Sylviane Falcinelli

L'éducation musicale, December 2011

Another *Requiem* ? No! Rather a transfiguration—at a metaphysical and symbolic depth—which would find its place in the category of oratorios. Indeed, the unfolding of the work, conceived by Thierry Lancino and conveyed in the libretto by Pascal Quignard, interpolates the Latin liturgy with the incantations of the Sibyl (in ancient Greek and French) as well as lines of *The David* shared by two singers, in order to reflect the contrasting two sides of his psychology. This idea is indeed original and takes its source from a verse of the *Dies Irae* which until now was never given any attention. These pagan relics, along with whiffs of human condition, take life in the margin of the Catholic canon which had concealed them in its folds. Rather than margin, I should actually speak of counterpoint and opposite movement, allegorically: the Christian aspiration for eternal life clashes with the "I want to die" calls of the Sibyl, punished to perpetual aging by Apollo.

After he spent years dedicated to electroacoustic and Ircam, the composer has found his own balance in a style of writing which deliberately claims melodic beauty and dramatic expressiveness in a language which does not betray in the least bit modernity. On the contrary, it opens it to human and spiritual resonance, and vectors of deep emotions. His challenge was to re-create timelessness within the theme of eternity using present musical means; his way of evoking antiquity by using stylization and sonorities of our time reminds of Stravinsky's approach in *Oedipus Rex* (but—let me get that straight—with a totally different personal language). The use of the percussion and exotic instruments adds to this spiritual journey. Emotion uses multiple paths: the exposure of a pure vocal line (the soprano solo of the *Ingemisco*) or the poignant harmonic chords in the innermost depths of the chorus (*Lacrimosa*) ; at an other place the sculpting of malleable orchestral timbers and clusters from which voices arise (*Sanctus*) ; lastly the resolution of all previous conflicts through a subtle infiltration of a "classic" counterpoint in the *Dona eis requiem*.

The premiere of this work, at the Salle Pleyel, was recorded by Radio France on January 7 and 8 of 2010. The release of the recording uses the material from the concerts. Let us congratulate the performers for having so brilliantly mastered "live" from such a complex and immense work (72 minutes of music). The vocal casting is better on the female side: the role of the Sibyl falls to Nora Gubisch whose flamboyant temper on stage and warm voice excel in exceptional characters (she embodied an unforgettable Pythonisse in Honegger's *Roi David* at the Palais Garnier last March) ; a vibrating innocence radiates from Heidi Grant Murphy who embodies the suffering of a simple mortal. The singers of Radio France Chorus (prepared by Matthias Brauer and Sébastien Boin) demonstrate their total commitment to the drama as a real characters. The *Orchestre Philharmonique* is at ease in new music, and Maestro Inbal is particularly fond of ambitious frescos. Let's prophesize (please, Sibyl, forgive us!) that such a rich and so sincerely thought out work will have access to eternal life by entering the repertoire. This work will always make its own resonance on the constant questioning from the human soul because it shows pure inspiration—beyond divides of a "dated" aesthetic—and imagines creative force of the the moment with a universal dimension.

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Steve Holtje

eMusic, November 2011

If you want a challenging mix of bracing dissonance, stark beauty and non-standard techniques, this Koussevitzky Music Foundation commission premiered in 2010 is perfect. Quignard sets up "desire for

annihilation and desire of eternity” alongside each other; the clashing sounds and styles reflect the clashing philosophies of the Psalmist David (dually portrayed by tenor and bass soloists and the pagan Sibyl (mezzo-soprano), plus Everyman (soprano), while the choir acts as Greek chorus. This work reaches far beyond the parameters of a standard Requiem, becoming an epic, multi-cultural oratorio.

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Christian Morris

Composition: Today, November 2011

When Radio France, the Koussevitsky Foundation and the French Ministry of Culture commissioned Thierry Lancino to write a new work in this genre, they wanted him ‘to renew the tradition of the Requiem’. Like Britten’s clever use of Wilfred Owen’s poetry fifty years ago, Lancino brilliantly achieves this by taking as his starting point the opening of the long Dies Irae text: ‘Dies irae...teste David cum Sibilia’ (Day of wrath...as attested by David and the Sibyl’). This moment, he notes in interview, adds a pagan touch to the Christian poem; the Cumaean Sibyl was granted near eternal life by the god Apollo but, after she refused his love, he denied her eternal youth, her body withering away and shrinking until it was eventually kept in a jar. The Requiem therefore unfolds as ‘as a dialogue between the pagan Sibyl and the biblical David’. The Requiem text is preserved in its original order, but like the Britten, is interspersed with a secondary text, here in Latin, French and Greek—the languages to an extent representing the protagonists—by Pascal Quignard. The twist here is that the libretto explores the idea of David begging for eternal life, whilst the Sibyl begs for death as oblivion, a release from her torment.

The musical language of this splendid new work places it more in the blood and thunder tradition of Verdi and Berlioz... One of the most musically striking passages is the Sanctus. Traditionally a moment of luminescence, here heaven and earth do not feel filled with glory but with an ethereal writhing of restless souls. The effect is both marvellous and disconcerting. The flow and interaction between the different planes—the more impersonal writing for chorus (who largely stick with the Requiem text) against the drama amongst the soloists—is expertly controlled throughout by the composer. More than anything, however, the work is about the relationship of the Sibyl to death, most movingly in the Lacrymosa, where her pitiful longing for oblivion appears alongside the lines ‘Dona eis requiem’, (‘Grant them rest’).

Chœur de Radio France, Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France and soloists Heidi Grant Murphy, Nora Gubisch, Stuart Skelton and Nicolas Courjal give white-hot, emotionally charged performances in this recording from Naxos. In particular I would single out mezzo-soprano Nora Gubisch; her portrayal of the desperate plight of the Sibyl is incredibly moving.

© 2011 Composition: Today

Michel Jakubowicz

ON Magazine (France), November 2011

Only few composers of today dare braving this grand form of sacred music which is the Requiem. Yet, it is without any complexes that Thierry Lancino tackles a genre in which Gilles, Mozart, Berlioz, Brahms, Verdi and many other famous composers who preceded him.

Ambitious in his aim, Thierry Lancino’s Requiem, based on a libretto by Pascal Quignard, proposes no less than exploring the immense unknown territories of Death and Time. Opening with a sound that has clear similarities with a mournful tocsin (Prologue), the work includes in its fold two quite extraordinary characters : on one hand the Sibyl, on the other David the warrior who leads us to the devastating Dies Irae, and closes with the Dona eis requiem.

This Requiem, premiered in January 2010 in Salle Pleyel under the baton of the precise and demanding conductor Eliahu Inbal, who was leading the Chœur and Orchestre of Radio France, reveals a composer who

is able to revive a sacred form which one thought was definitely obsolete, condemned to pure and simple disappearance. Such a complex, powerful work, was given life thanks to the commitment of the outstanding vocal soloists. This colossal challenge was achieved with great panache by the commanding cast that night at Pleyel... It included the mezzo-soprano Nora Gubisch, and soprano Heidi Grant-Murphy, along with tenor Stuart Skelton and bass Nicolas Courjal.

Another decisive element played quite a part in the Requiem by Thierry Lancino: namely Radio France Choir, which was perfectly integrated in the dramatic unfolding of the work.

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David Denton

David's Review Corner, November 2011

Composed two years ago, Thierry Lancino's Requiem challenges and questions our thoughts on the conventions surrounding the ending of mortality. The composer describes this long, and often highly charged score, as 'both an epic fresco and sacred ceremony' our experience of this performance telling us that the first part of that description is paramount. Setting out on a career in the world of electronic music, the French-born composer has had a mid-life change of direction and looks towards more conventional scores. For the Requiem we are in the world of Penderecki, though its roots are in the era of Honneger. By interspersing into the normal layout of the Catholic mass two characters—David, taken from the Biblical character, and the Greek mythological female, Sibyl—Lancino has created a score more akin to an oratorio. He uses three languages, Latin, Greek and French, the libretto supplied by Pascal Quignard, and scored for the conventional soprano, mezzo, tenor and bass soloists, large choir and orchestra with an enlarged percussion section including some modern 'toys' beloved by today's composers. In length a substantial work lasting well over seventy minutes, it has grown on me with repeated hearing, though its impact is striking even on first acquaintance. I guess it is an extremely challenging work to perform, not least on the choir in terms of pitching notes, and the solo voices are often singing against, rather than with the orchestra. In sum, this is a vivid and impressive work, and this world premiere recording from Radio France conducted by Eliahu Inbal, demonstrates an exceptional level of preparation.