

Seven Last Words of Christ

2007-2008

A Cantata for High Voice, Choir and String Orchestra

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Revised and Edited August 2008

Approximate Duration: 50 minutes

Texts

I. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do

Luke 23, 34

Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver;
Let him rescue the one in whom he delights
Psalm 22, excerpt

Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me;
Still, not my will but yours be done.
Luke 22, 42

Tenebrae
Lux

Abba, Father, all things are possible to you. Take this cup away from me, but not what I will but what you will.
Mark 14, 36

Tenebrae
Lux

My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, not as I will, but as you will.
Matthew 26, 49

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me? Why so far from my call for help, from my cries of anguish?...
Many bulls surround me; fierce bulls of Bashan encircle me. They open their mouths against me, lions that rend and roar.

Psalm 22, excerpt

Crucifige illum
Crucifige eum
Phróphetiza nobis Christe
Quis est, qui te percussit?
Ave, Rex
Crucifigatur
Vah!
Salva, temestipsum, si Filius Dei es descendere de cruce
Tolle, crucifige illum
Excerpts from the four Gospels

Father Forgive them, for they do not know what they do

II. Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise

Luke 23, 42-43

Jesu, memento mei, cum veneris in regnum tuum.
Jesus, remember me.
Jesu Christe

Paradiso
Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.

III. Woman, behold your Son...Behold your Mother

John 19, 26-27

Woman, behold, your Son...

Stabat Mater dolorosa
Dum pendebat Filius
juxta crucem lacrimosa
Missale Romanum Excerpt from the Sequence for Our Lady of Sorrows or Stabat Mater

Behold, your Mother.

IV. Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani

Matthew 27, 46; Mark 15, 34

Like water my life drains away;
All my bones grow soft.
My heart has become like wax,
It melts away within me.

As dry as a potsherd is my throat;
My tongue sticks to my palate;
You lay me in the dust of death.

A pack of evildoers closes in on me. So wasted
are my hands and feet that I can count all my
bones. They stare at me and gloat; they divide
my garments among them; for my clothing they
cast lots.

But you, Lord,
Do not stay far off;
My strength, come quickly to help me

But I am a worm, hardly human,
scorned by everyone, Despised by the people.

All who see me mock me;
they curl their lips and jeer;
they shake their heads at me;

"You relied on the Lord,
let him deliver you;
If he loves you, let him rescue you."
Psalm 22, excerpts

Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?

V. I thirst

John 19, 28

Sitio.
I thirst.

Whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst.
John 4, 14

VI. It is finished

John 19, 30

It is finished.

Pange, lingua, gloriósi,
Cóporis mýstérium
Sanguinisque pretiósi,
Quem in mundi prétium
Fructus ventris generósi
Rex effúdit géntium.
Amen
Thomas Aquinas, 1227-1274, excerpt from Pange, lingua gloriósi

VII. Father, into your hands I commend my spirit

Luke 23, 46

Abba
Father, into your hands I commend my spirit

Program Note

This work is a series of seven musical meditations on the messages and the universal resonances of Jesus' Seven Last Words, or phrases, spoken from the cross.

I. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do

Luke 23, 34

This movement is a reflection in three parts on the crucifixion of Jesus.

Whispered fragments of Psalm 22 surround the music of the first section, which portrays Jesus' deep anxiety stemming from his knowledge that the moment of his betrayal is at hand. The words he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane, asking that his Father spare him if possible, yet that also express ultimate faith in his Father's will, are recalled by the soloist in three statements.

The music in the second section meditates on the pain and suffering of the crucifixion. The choir here is assigned the taunts and epithets that were hurled at Jesus in the events leading up to and during the crucifixion as recorded in the Gospels.

The focus in the third section is on Jesus' utterance of the remarkable first word, a cry for forgiveness for those at whose hands he suffers.

Through certain references this movement pays tribute to the late Claude Vivier, a composer whose work I greatly admire.

II. Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise

Luke 23, 43

The 'good thief', who has also been crucified, pleads 'Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom.' In this movement the choir repeatedly sings his petition while the soloist vocalizes on the word 'amen.' The basses sing his words in Latin and their line functions as a ground bass upon which the upper voices are laid. The tenors, altos and sopranos sing the text in English and their lines are set in counterpoint to the ground bass. As the music progresses, the choir's supplication becomes more intense and their counterpoint more chromatic and florid until the tension is broken by the soloist who gradually voices the second word accompanied *a capella* by the choir.

III. Woman, behold your Son...Behold your Mother

John 19, 26-27

The first portion of the third word, *Woman Behold your Son*, is sung a number of times by the soloist at intervals throughout the movement. The text of the first verse of the *Stabat Mater dolorosa* (*Our Lady of Sorrows*) is divided into ostinato figures sung by the choir and is superimposed upon Christ's words as sung by the soloist. Again, a ground bass, this time outlining an unresolved cadential figure, is sung by the basses and embellished by the low strings. It supports the contrapuntal layers that are added above in the choral and instrumental parts. The music eventually culminates with the remainder of the third word, *Behold your Mother*, sung by the soloist.

IV. Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Matthew 27, 46

This movement is a meditation on Christ's extended suffering in desolate silence upon the cross. God is distant and the Apostles have fled. Musically, the wide distance between the emotionally detached music in the upper strings and the pedal tones in the double bass portrays the vastness of the desolation of the cross while two solo cellos and a solo viola express the anguish. The passing of time is marked by the recitation of additional fragments of Psalm 22 and by periods of silence. The fourth word emerges *tutti* from silence near the end of the movement.

V. I thirst*John 19, 28*

Desiccated, Christ begs the Roman soldiers to quench his unbearable thirst. In this movement the soloist sings the sixth word in Latin while the choir provides a faint reverberation of the soloists' pitches. The strings, at intervals, interrupt the texture with sharp agitated, chordal attacks. The choir then recalls Jesus' words recorded earlier in John's Gospel, 'whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst.' Shortly thereafter, a melodic line emerges in the upper voices as the tenors and the basses insistently declare the sixth word in English.

VI. It is finished*John 19, 30*

The tenors sing St. Thomas Aquinas' chant *Pange, lingua gloriōsi* (Of the glorious Body telling, O my tongue, its mysteries sing) over a drone pitch held by the basses. Over this, a solo viola at first and eventually a string trio presents a rhythmically displaced modal setting of Hans Leo Hassler's Passion Chorale, *O Sacred Head, Now Wounded*, which Bach had used in his *St. Matthew Passion*. Superimposed upon this textural counterpoint is the voice of the soloist uttering Christ's words on a pitch foreign to the prevalent mode. The choral *amen* that concludes Aquinas' chant emerges from within the texture and gradually evolves into a *tutti* which concludes the movement.

VII. Father, into your hands I commend my spirit*Luke 23, 46*

The choir, repeatedly singing the word *Abba*, a personal word for God as Father, accompanies a solo violin melody that gradually moves from a low to a higher register. The solo voice enters singing the seventh word while the strings and the choir enunciate together an ever-expanding breathing gesture. The piece concludes with an echo of the opening of this movement as the soloist alone sings *Abba*, this time on a pitch outside of the mode, thus reserving a sense of harmonic resolution while symbolizing the beginning of the period of waiting for Easter morning.

Instrumentation and Performance Notes

High Voice: can be sung by a soprano, male soprano or countertenor*

Mixed Choir: minimum 16 voices 4/4/4/4

String Orchestra: minimum 5/4/3/2/1**

*Note on the Solo Voice Part

Depending on the voice type of the soloist there might be notes in the part that lie outside his or her range. For instance, if the soloist is a countertenor there might be some notes that are too high, while if the soloist is a soprano or male soprano there might be some notes that are too low. To accommodate the multiple voice-type options for the solo part *ossia* pitches are provided at times. They appear as reduced note heads on the same stem as the principal pitch.

**Note on the Double Bass Part

A five-string bass is recommended.

However, if a standard four-string bass is used it is recommended that the E string is replaced with a C string so that it is tuned C, A, D, G at the nut. This is to facilitate the four double bass solos that occur in the fourth movement. These solos are all scored for the instrument's contra register from low C - G, or so. This option was utilized in the premiere of the work.

Accidentals function in the traditional manner. However, cautionary accidentals are frequently indicated.

Microtones are used at times in the instrumental parts. They are indicated as follows:

Quarter tone sharp

Three quarter tones sharp

↓ Quarter tone flat

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The *Seven Last Words of Christ* was commissioned by Soundstreams Canada as part of their celebratory 25th Anniversary 2007-2008 Season. It was premiered at 3:00 pm on Palm Sunday, March 16, 2008 in St. Anne's Anglican Church in Toronto. Ivars Taurins conducted the Tafelmusik Chamber Choir and a virtuoso string orchestra. Michael Maniaci was the male soprano soloist.

Financial support for this work was graciously provided by the Canada Council for the Arts and the Ontario Arts Council.

Availability

Score: for purchase from the Canadian Music Centre

Performance Materials: for hire from the Canadian Music Centre

Solo 5 *p* accel. - - - - - *mf* rit. - - - - - *mp*
 if you are wil-ling, take— this cup from me; still, not my will but

Vln. I 1 accel. - - - - - *a tempo* rit. - - - - - *a tempo*
Vln. I 2
Vln. I 3
Vln. I 4
Vln. I 5
Vln. II (div.)
Vla. *ppp* < *mp* >
Vlc. 1 *ppp* < *mp* >
Vlc. 2
Db.

8

yours — *be* — *done.*

stagger breathe
pp

Solo: *mf*, *mp*

S: —

T: —

B: —

Vln. I 1: —

Vln. I 2: —

Vln. I 3: —

Vln. I 4: —

Vln. I 5: —

Vln. II (div.): —

Vla.: —

Vlc. 1: —

Vlc. 2: —

D. b. —

11

Soprano (S) vocal line: dynamic *p*, melodic line with eighth-note pairs.

Tenor (T) vocal line: melodic line with eighth-note pairs.

Bass (B) vocal line: melodic line with eighth-note pairs.

Vln. I (Violin I): dynamic *pp* (div.), melodic line with sixteenth-note pairs.

Vln. II (Violin II): dynamic *pp* (div.), melodic line with sixteenth-note pairs.

Vla. (Cello/Violoncello): dynamic *pp* (div.), melodic line with sixteenth-note pairs.

Vlc. 1 (Double Bass): melodic line with eighth-note pairs.

Vlc. 2 (Double Bass): melodic line with eighth-note pairs.

Db. (Double Bass): melodic line with eighth-note pairs.

Text: Lux, Te - ne - brae, Te - ne - brae.

16

Soprano (S) vocal line: melodic line with eighth-note pairs.

Alto (A) vocal line: melodic line with eighth-note pairs.

Tenor (T) vocal line: dynamic *p*, melodic line with eighth-note pairs.

Bass (B) vocal line: dynamic *p*, melodic line with eighth-note pairs.

Text: Lux, Lux, Te-ne-brae, Te-ne-brae, Te-ne-brae, Te-ne-brae.

Vln. I (Violin I): melodic line with sixteenth-note pairs.

Vln. II (Violin II): melodic line with sixteenth-note pairs.

Vla. (Cello/Violoncello): melodic line with sixteenth-note pairs.

Vlc. 1 (Double Bass): dynamic *mp*, melodic line with eighth-note pairs.

Vlc. 2 (Double Bass): dynamic *mp*, melodic line with eighth-note pairs.

Db. (Double Bass): dynamic *mp*, melodic line with eighth-note pairs.

Text: < *mf*, < *mf*, < *mf*, < *mf*.

urgent

Solo 25 *mf* *f* *mp* *allargando* *a tempo*

Take _____ this cup a-way from me, ___ but not what I will but what you will.

S

T

B 1

B 2

Vln. I 1 25 *allargando* *a tempo*

Vln. I 2

Vln. I 3

Vln. I 4

Vln. I 5

Vln. II (div.)

Vla.

Vlc. 1

Vlc. 2

Db.

accel. ----- , *a tempo*

Solo 34 Fa - - - - ther, if it is pos-si-ble, — let this cup pass from me; — yet,

accel. ----- *a tempo*

Vln. I 1 34 *ppp* *mp* < *f*

Vln. I 2 *ppp* *mp* < *f*

Vln. I 3 *ppp* *mp* < *f*

Vln. I 4 *ppp* *mp* < *f*

Vln. I 5 *ppp* *mp* < *f*

Vln. II *ppp* *mp* < *mf*

Vla. *ppp* *mp* < *mf*

Vlc. 1 *ppp* *mp* < *mf*

Vlc. 2 *ppp* *mp* < *mf*

Db. *ppp* *mp* < *mf*

Solo 36 3 3 f
not as I will, but as you

Vln. I 1 36 ppp p
Vln. I 2 36 ppp p
Vln. I 3 36 ppp p
Vln. I 4 36 ppp p
Vln. I 5 36 ppp p
Vln. II 36 ♫: ♫:
Vla. 36 ♫: ♫: ppp p
Vlc. 1 36 ♫: ♫: ppp p
Vlc. 2 36 ♫: ♫: ppp p
Db. 36 ♫: ♫: ppp p

Senza Misura
ca. 30"

Solo 38 will. rit. -----

all voices *Whispered*
In unison, using arrhythmic speech rhythms

My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?
Why so far from my call for help, from my cries
of anguish?...

Spoken
In unison, using arrhythmic speech rhythms.

Many bulls surround me; fierce bulls of Bashan
encircle me. They open their mouths against me,
lions that rend and roar.

Vln. I 1 38 rit. ----- ca. 30"

Vln. I 2 6 pppp

Vln. I 3 6 pppp

Vln. I 4 6 pppp

Vln. I 5 6 pppp

Vln. II pppp

Vla. pppp

Vlc. 1 pppp

Vlc. 2 pppp

Db. pppp

savage and cruel

S 41 *fff* div.

Cru - - ci - - - Cru - - ci - fi - - - ge

A div. *fff*

Cru - - ci - - - Cru - - ci - fi - - - ge

T div. *fff*

8 Cru - - ci - - - Cru - - ci - fi - - - ge

B div. *fff*

Cru - - ci Cru - - ci Pro - phe - ti - za no - bis Chris - te

fff > mf < fff

Vln. I 1-3 non div.

fff > mf < fff

Vln. I 4-5 non div.

fff > mf < fff

fff > mf < fff

Vla. 1-2 non div.

fff > mf < fff

fff > mf < fff

Vla. 3 non div.

fff > mf < fff

fff > mf < fff

Vce. non div.

fff > mf < fff

fff > mf < fff

Soprano (S) vocal line:

44 unis Cru - - - ci - - - fi - - - ge il-lum!

Alto (A) vocal line:

Cru - - - ci - - - fi - - - ge il-lum!

Tenor (T) vocal line:

Cru - - - ci - - - fi - - - ge il-lum!

Bass (B) vocal line:

Quis est, qui te per - cus-sit?

Chorus (1-3) vocal line:

44 IV (fff)

Chorus (4-5) vocal line:

IV (fff)

Chorus (II iv.) vocal line:

IV (fff)

Chorus (1-2) vocal line:

IV (fff)

Chorus (a. 3) vocal line:

IV (fff)

Chorus (ce.) vocal line:

IV (fff)

46

S
Cru - - ci - - fi - - ge
simile

A
Cru - - ci - - fi - - ge
A - ve!

T
simile
8 Cru - - ci - - fi - - ge
A - ve!

B
Quis est, — qui te per - cus - sit? —
cru - - - - ci - - - - fi - - - -

Vln. I 1-3
Vln. I 4-5
Vln. II (div.)
Vla. 1-2
Vla. 3
Vlc. 1
Vlc. 2
Db.

very heavy, dig!

very heavy, dig!

very heavy, dig!

very heavy, dig!

6:8

6:8

6:8

6:8

6:8

6:8

6:8

fff

49

S Vah! Vah! Cru - - - ci - fi - ge!

A Cru - - ci - fi - ge, Cru - - ci - fi - ge,

T 8 Cru - - ci - fi - ge, Cru - - ci - fi - ge,

B

Vln. I 1-3

Vln. I 4-5 div.

Vln. II (div.)

Vla. 1-2

Vla. 3

Vlc. 1

Vlc. 2

D. b.

50

Solo

fff

Fa - - - - ther!

Vah! Vah! il - - lum!

Cru - ci - fi - ge il - - lum!

Cru - ci - fi - ge il - - lum!

B Vah! Vah! —

Vln. I 1-3

Vln. I 4-5

Vln. II (div.)

Vla. 1-2

Vla. 3

Vlc. 1

Vlc. 2

Db.

Solo

52

Suddenly faster $\text{♩} = \text{♪} = 82$

Fa - ther!

S Cru - ci - - fi - - ge il - lum!

A Cru - ci - - fi - - ge il - lum!

T $\frac{8}{8}$ Cru - ci - - fi - - ge il - lum!

B Vah! Vah!

Pro - phe - ti -

Vln. I 1-3

Vln. I 4-5

Vln. II

Vla. 1-2

Vla. 3

Vlc. 1

Vlc. 2

Db.

Suddenly faster $\text{♩} = \text{♪} = 82$

non div. *simile*

div. *unis*

non div. *simile*

non div. *simile*

non div. *simile*

non div. *simile*

fff

54

S A-ve! Cru-ci-fi - ga-tur! Rex, A - - ve! Cru-ci-fi - ga-tur!

A A-ve! Cru-ci-fi - ga-tur! Rex, A - - ve! Cru-ci-fi - ga-tur!

T 8 A-ve! Cru-ci-fi - ga-tur! Rex, A - - ve! Cru-ci-fi - ga-tur!

B za no - - bis Chris - te, Chris-te: Quis est, qui te per-cus-sit? Pro - phe - ti -

Vln. I div. unis div. unis

Vln. II

Vla. 1

Vla. 2

Vla. 3

Vce.

Db.

57

S Rex! Cru - ci - fi - ga - tur! cru - ci - fi - ge il - lum!

A Rex! Cru - ci - fi - ga - tur! cru - ci - fi - ge il - lum!

T Rex! Cru - ci - fi - ga - tur! cru - ci - fi - ge il - lum!

B za, Pro - phe - ti - za no - bis Chris - te: Quis est, qui te per - cus - sit?

Vln. I

Vln. II div.

Vla. 1

Vla. 2

Vla. 3

Vce.

D. b.

59

S sal-va, sal-va, sal-va te - me - tip-sum; si Fi - li - us De - i es,

A sal-va, sal-va, sal-va te - me - tip-sum; si Fi - li - us De - i es,

T sal-va, sal-va, sal-va te - me - tip-sum; si Fi - li - us De - i es,

B div. unis *simile* sal - va, sal - va te - me - tip - sum; si Fi - li - us De - i es,

Vln. I non div.

Vln. II div. à 3

Vla. unis

Vlc. 1

Vlc. 2

Db.

Solo 61
 S 16
 A 16
 T 16
 B 16
 Vln. I 1 16
 Vln. I 2-5 16
 Vln. II 16
 Vla. 1 16
 Vla. 2 16
 Vla. 3 16
 Vlc. 1 16
 Vlc. 2 16
 Db. 16

fff
Fa-ther! —

de - scen - de de cru - ce! _____
 de - scen - de de cru - ce! _____
 de - scen - de de cru - ce! _____
 de - scen - de de cru - ce! _____
 sal - va te - me-tip-sum;
non div.

$\text{♪} = \text{♩} = 110$ Suddenly faster

64

Solo

S

A

T

B

Vln. I 1

Vln. I 2-3

Vln. I 4-5

Vln. II
(div.)

Vla. 1

Vla. 2

Vla. 3

Vce.

Db.

Cru-ci - fi - ge! Il-lum!

Cru-ci - fi - ga-tur!

Tolle! Cru-ci - fi - ga-tur!

Cru-ci - fi - ge! Il-lum!

Cru-ci - fi - ga-tur!

Tolle! Cru-ci - fi - ga-tur!

Cru-ci - fi - ge! Il-lum!

Cru-ci - fi - ga-tur!

Tolle! Cru-ci - fi - ga-tur!

de - scen-de de cru - ce!

Tol - le, tol - le, tol - le, cru - ci -

$\text{♪} = \text{♩} = 110$ Suddenly faster

solo

67

S
Tolle, cruci - fi - ge e-um!
A
Tolle, cruci - fi - ge e-um!
T
Tolle, cruci - fi - ge e-um!
B
fi - ge e-um!
B 2
Cru-ci - fi - ga-tur!

Vln. I 1
5
(fff)
Vln. I 2-3
(fff)
Vln. I 4-5
Vln. II (div.)
(div.)
Vla. 1-2
Vla. 3
Vce.
Db.

74 *mf*
 Solo senza vib.
 Fa - - - - ther, ____ Fa - ther for - give them
 ord. for-give them ____ Fa -

Vln. I 1 *mf*

Vln. I 2-3 *mp*

Vln. I 4-5 *mp*

Vln. II
(div.) *mp*

Vla. *mp*

Vlc. 1 *mf*

Vlc. 2 *mf*

Db. *mf*

78 *mp* *with intensity p*

Solo ther, for-give them Fa-ther, for-give them, for they do not know—

S, A — Fa-ther, for-give them, for they do not know—

T — Fa-ther, for-give them, for they do not know—

B — *pp* Fa-ther, for-give them, for they do not know—

Vln. I 1 78 *p* *unis* *ppp* *mf* *p* *ppp*

Vln. I 2-3 *p* *ppp*

Vln. I 4-5 *p*

Vln. II (div.) *p*

Vla. *p*

Vce. *p* *pp*

Db. *p* *pp*

82

gentle

Solo — what they do. For give them. For give them.

S, A — what they do. For - - give them.

T — what they do. For - - give them.

B — what they do. For - - give them.

Vln. I 1 82

Vln. I 2-3

Vln. I 4-5

Vlc. 1 $\frac{12}{15}$ ppp

Vlc. 2 $\frac{12}{15}$ ppp

Db.