

By Lana Elsehemi

Lament and Light: Fauré's *Requiem* and Hailstork's *Lachrymosa*

On Friday, December 6th, I chose to whip out my least-worn pair of slacks and immerse myself in the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's latest program. Despite the unpredictable traffic delaying my arrival, I was fortunate enough to catch the last two pieces of the evening. **Adolphus Hailstork's *Lachrymosa*** and **Gabriel Fauré's *Requiem*** had a distinct yet complementary reflections on grief and transcendence, providing a rich emotional arc that closed the program.

Adolphus Hailstork's *Lachrymosa* performed as a Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra premiere, captivated the audience with its reflective simplicity. The **Mendelssohn Choir of Pittsburgh**, under the sensitive direction of **Manfred Honeck**, delivered intricate vocal textures infused with emotional depth. The sparse yet poignant instrumentation—featuring two clarinets, two bassoons, and strings—enhanced the meditative quality of the work, creating a serene, contemplative atmosphere. Rooted in the Latin Requiem text, **Hailstork's** modern interpretation bridges sacred tradition with contemporary expression, offering a poignant reflection on grief and healing.

While I recognized the work's emotional sincerity, I found it somewhat limited in impact. At just five minutes, the piece felt extended due to its repetitive thematic material, which lacked the dynamic development or contrast necessary to sustain full engagement. Though it wasn't the most compelling use of the orchestra's capabilities, its quiet elegance left a meaningful impression, serving as a thoughtful prelude to the program's climactic conclusion.

The evening concluded with Fauré's *Requiem*, a work celebrated for its serene contemplation of death and eternal peace. Honeck's deliberate pacing and nuanced phrasing allow the orchestra and choir to achieve a shimmering radiance. Soloists **Jeanine De Bique** (soprano) and **Joshua Hopkins** (baritone) bring palpable intensity to the work, making it one of the emotional high points of the program. The orchestra's delicate balance of textures and dynamics beautifully complements the choir's ethereal harmonies, particularly in movements like the *Pie Jesu* and *In Paradisum*, where **Fauré's** vision of eternal peace comes to life.

Soprano **Jeanine De Bique** offers a breathtaking rendition of the *Pie Jesu*, her voice soaring with purity and warmth, embodying the angelic qualities of Fauré's writing. The choir's precision and emotional resonance capture the work's spiritual essence, offering profound beauty and transcendence.

As the final notes of the *In Paradisum* fade, the audience is left in a contemplative stillness, a testament to the power of **Fauré's** music to provide comfort and healing. This performance of the *Requiem* stands as a radiant highlight, a fitting and moving conclusion to an evening of choral masterworks.

While I found the *Requiem* to be profoundly moving, its 38-minute duration occasionally felt prolonged. The slower tempos, while deliberate and meditative, occasionally tested my focus, making me wish for more variety in pacing. Even so, the luminous beauty of the performance, particularly in the closing *In Paradisum*, left the audience in a state of contemplative stillness—a powerful testament to **Fauré's** ability to offer comfort and healing through music.

Under **Honeck's** inspired leadership, the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra's program offered a thoughtful journey through grief, healing, and hope. Though I preferred the *Requiem*, both pieces succeeded in their own right, leaving a lasting impression. A fine use of slacks, if you ask me.