

ECSTASY / GRIEF

Choral-Orchestral Cries

Program Notes by Michael Moore

Saturday, October 24, 2026 · 4:00 PM · The Church of the Holy Trinity, Rittenhouse Square

Franz Schubert (1797–1828)

Mass No. 2 in G Major, D 167 (1815)

Franz Schubert was an enormously versatile and prolific composer. While he often complained about the difficulty of composition, he also could write with exceptional speed and fluidity, finishing one work and immediately beginning another for hours on end. Despite his tragically short life, his catalog of works is staggering – nearly 1000 compositions, including 9 symphonies, 6 masses, 21 piano sonatas, 15 string quartets, 7 *singspiels*, 9 operas, a melodrama, the intricate music for the play *Rosamunde* (which included an overture, incidental music, 3 choruses, and 3 ballets), overtures, chamber music, choral works, and more than 600 song settings.

Schubert was born in a suburb of Vienna, the son of a schoolmaster of some repute and an avid amateur musician who provided Schubert with his first musical instruction. He quickly outstripped this tutelage and was sent to Michael Holzer, music director of the local church at Lichtental, for lessons in voice, organ and theory. At age 9, he auditioned for Antonio Salieri, Kapellmeister at the imperial court, and was accepted into the imperial court choir, although he had to wait two years for a vacancy. The position also included a scholarship to the Stadtkonvikt (City Boarding Seminary), and Schubert developed friendships with several fellow students who later provided important financial and social support for his career.

Schubert joined the school's orchestra as a violinist, quickly rising to first violin and occasional conductor of the ensemble. The orchestra's repertoire included Beethoven's first and second symphonies and some overtures, and Schubert developed an abiding admiration of Beethoven's music and compositional skills. He began to try his hand at composition and some of his music was rehearsed by the orchestra. Salieri followed his progress with great interest and began to give Schubert private composition instruction. (Salieri had been orphaned at 13, and was taken in by composer Florian Leopold Gassmann, who gave him composition lessons, funded his other education, introduced him to the imperial court in Vienna, and arranged for his debut as an opera composer. Salieri paid his mentor's kindness forward by providing music instruction gratis to talented students.) Salieri tried to steer Schubert toward opera, which to him meant setting Italian text. Schubert didn't take much nudging, since he already had a great affinity for vocal music, but he had little interest in setting Italian verse. He had acquired a copy of Johann Rudolph Zumsteeg's *Kleine Lieder und Balladen* (*Short Songs and Ballads*) and

became fascinated by Zumsteeg's settings of German language poetry. He reset some of Zumsteeg's texts and even suggested a project to reset the entire *oeuvre* in a more modern style. Their artistic differences about the merits of setting German versus Italian poetry became significant enough that Schubert and Salieri parted company eventually in 1817.

Schubert left the *Stadtkonvikt* in 1813 and returned home to join the family business of teaching. He took a year-long course at a teacher training college, passed the qualifying test, and joined his father and brothers at their school. He was put in charge of the youngest children and soon found he had little aptitude or pleasure in teaching. He spent most of his free time composing at a furious rate. Being home, he was able to rejoin the family string quartet (he played viola), and he was eventually able to put together enough musicians to form a small orchestra which rehearsed some of his music. Most significantly, he had the opportunity to have the first public performances of his compositions. In 1814, he was invited to compose a mass for the centenary celebration of the Lichtental parish church. He composed the *Mass in F*, a complex and brilliant setting for two sopranos, two tenors, alto and bass soloists, chorus, and a full orchestra of strings, winds, horns, trumpets, trombone, timpani and continuo (cellos, basses and organ). The *Gloria* was divided into six sub-movements of varying character. There was a great deal of repetition of text in the longer movements (*Gloria* and *Credo*), with some fugues and polyphonic textures applied. At the premiere, Schubert's brother Ferdinand played the organ, his old teacher Holzer led the singers, and Salieri is thought to have been in attendance. The *Mass* was received enthusiastically, Salieri was delighted, and the *Mass* was reprised ten days later at the Church of St. Augustine, the official church of the Viennese court. All in all, it was an impressive debut.

Schubert revised the *Mass in F* early in 1815, replacing the *Dona nobis pacem* with a more extensive version for a third performance. (The weightier *Dona nobis pacem* may have had something to do with Napoleon's escape from Elba and the prospect of the resumption of war after a brief ten months of peace.) Schubert also began work on a *Mass in G*, which he completed in just six days. In many ways, it is the polar opposite of the *Mass in F*. It is more lightly scored: soprano, tenor and bass soloists, chorus, and an orchestra of strings and organ. The *Gloria* and *Credo* are presented in a straightforward fashion, without being broken into separate sections or using substantial textual repeats. The solo parts are not separate but rather merge seamlessly with the choral writing. The overall design of the *Mass in G* bears some similarity to Beethoven's 1807 *Mass in C*. It is not known if Schubert was familiar with the *Mass in C*. It had been last publicly performed before Schubert arrived at the *Stadtkonvikt*, but it was published in 1812, while he was still a student, and the orchestra might have had a copy. While the two works are conceptual cousins, the *Mass in F*, with its wealth of beautiful melodies and occasionally quirky modulatory passages is uniquely Schubert.

The opening *Kyrie* has a gentle, almost pastoral feel. Schubert's characteristic harmonic adventurousness is evident even in this early work. There are unexpected harmonic progressions and some very interesting dissonances encountered on the way to harmonic resolutions. The *Gloria* is set in the bright and joyful key of D and opens with a sort of musical misdirection, something he learned from Beethoven. It opens with a Mannheim rocket, a rapidly

ascending scale (here D major), a traditional bit of word painting foreshadowing the text *in excelsis* (in the highest), and you might expect the *Gloria* to immediately open on the tonic D major chord. But the rocket leads to yet another D major scale, this time in quarter notes, slower but still ascending, and Schubert arranges it such that the choral entrance falls on the seventh tone of the scale, making a cadence, something usually reserved for the ending of a line rather than the beginning. It makes a contrast between the word accent and the musical accent which helps propel the music forward, but it also makes you re-think the role of that opening rocket. As the *Gloria* unfolds, you find that that rapid scale motif forms the principal material of the orchestral music, and in that context the opening cadence was actually well-placed, a double deception.

The *Credo* is perhaps the most interesting movement in the *Mass*. It opens very softly, again somewhat reminiscent of Beethoven's *Mass in C*, but unlike Beethoven's *Credo*, the music never swells to that affirmation of belief. Schubert also makes some textual modifications which would appear in his later mass settings as well. He does not set the phrases mentioning the "one, holy catholic and apostolic church" and the "resurrection of the dead," text that he set in the preceding *Mass in F*, and if this represents some deep-seated personal conviction, Schubert was silent on that score. In contrast to the songs from that period, Schubert generally resisted tone painting in the *Mass*, but he indulges himself slightly in the *Credo*. The *crucifixus etiam pro nobis* text (he was also crucified for us) is set in the darker key of B minor, with long, sustained pitches for the chorus and an ominous, walking bass ostinato in the orchestra. The following *et resurrexit tertia die* (and he rose on the third day) moves to the brighter D major, with an ascending line in the orchestra. And on the text *cujus regni non erit finis* (his reign will have no end), the chorus holds a unison C for four measures as the orchestra wends its way to an unexpected resolution in B major.

The *Sanctus* features another unusual choral opening. The orchestra establishes the D major tonic, but the chorus enters on a very unexpected D7 chord, and the music takes a very idiosyncratic harmonic path to the *Osanna*. Here Schubert yields to convention and begins the *Osanna* as a brisk fugue, but breaks off after the first subject to finish with a homophonic statement. The *Benedictus*, with its long, lyrical vocal lines, is set for solo trio. It concludes with the same truncated *Osanna* fugue.

The *Agnus Dei* may be the most personal of the movements of the *Mass*. It begins with slightly agitated music by the strings, somewhat reminiscent of the same movement in the Mozart *Requiem*. The soprano and bass soli take turns invoking the *Agnus Dei* text, with the chorus quietly adding its assent. The last phrase, *dona nobis pacem* (grant us peace) is repeated four times, almost sotto voce. The Austrian empire had been embroiled in the Napoleonic wars for almost the entire time Schubert had been alive. Vienna had been occupied twice by French troops, and his own school had been shelled by the French while he was in attendance. The plea for peace in the face of renewed war following the escape of Napoleon from Elba was sincere and heartfelt.

Schubert had bigger plans for the *Mass in G*. In 1818, he added trumpet and timpani parts, and sent the revised score to the important abbey at Klosterneuberg in the hope that the Mass would be performed there. His hope went unrealized and the score languished until 1844, sixteen years after Schubert's death, when an otherwise undistinguished Czech composer named Robert Führrer obtained a copy of the manuscript and had it published under his own name in Prague. When Schubert's brother Ferdinand saw the published score, he was furious and engaged in a protracted and often acrimonious negotiation with the publisher to have the score corrected. The score was eventually republished under Schubert's name, and with additional wind parts written by Ferdinand and clearly indicated as such, and it has become one of Schubert's most beloved and frequently performed sacred works.

Dominick DiOrio (b. 1984)

Weaver of Eternities (2023)

Text by Jacqueline Goldfinger

Although a conservatory-trained flautist, Adolphe Sax (1814–1894) became a highly successful and innovative designer of musical instruments. At age 24, he designed the modern bass clarinet and improved the ophicleide (a pre-tuba low register brass instrument you may have heard in historically informed performances of Berlioz's *Symphonie Fantastique*) before turning to instruments of his own design. In 1841, he demonstrated his prototype saxophone, an instrument designed to combine the agility of a woodwind with the projection of a brass instrument. His stable of inventions also included the saxhorn (a valved bugle, still popular today), the saxotromba (a sort of valved French horn designed for a mounted band) and the saxtuba (a valved instrument shaped like the Roman military horn or cornu, the ancestor of the modern Sousaphone). If not the father of branding, Sax was certainly an early and enthusiastic adopter!

The saxophone was immediately adopted by military bands, and eventually spread to concert bands, wind bands, dance bands, and ragtime, rhythm and blues, jazz and rock bands. Virtuoso jazz players like Charlie Parker and Philadelphia's own John Coltrane showcased the saxophone as a solo instrument of great expression and versatility. Sax had expected the saxophone to be as quickly accepted in classical music, but despite (or perhaps because of!) an enthusiastic endorsement by Hector Berlioz, it was originally considered more of a novelty than a serious instrument. By the early 20th century, classical composers were increasingly using saxophones for their unique color, but as late as 1956, Ralph Vaughan Williams lampooned the general perception of saxophones in his notes for his 9th Symphony, whose scoring included three saxophones: "[they] are not expected, except in one place in the scherzo, to behave like demented cats, but are allowed to be their own romantic selves."

Composer Dominick DiOrio was fortunate to have an extraordinarily talented saxophonist, Otis Murphy, as a colleague at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, and he conceived of a piece featuring Murphy and his own chorus NOTUS. DiOrio turned to playwright and poet

Jacqueline Goldfinger for a libretto. The two had previously collaborated on *A Bright Morning Dawns*, commissioned by Mendelssohn Chorus. DiOrio provides the following program notes: "*Weaver of Eternities* is commissioned by NOTUS, Indiana University Contemporary Vocal Ensembles, and dedicated to saxophonist Otis Murphy, Professor of Music (Saxophone) at the IU Jacobs School of Music. The work is a positive and joyous musical expression of poet Jacqueline Goldfinger's evocation of family: a value centered and most dear to Otis, Jackie, and myself. Its propulsive outer sections are matched by the intensity of feeling in the contrasting middle section, where the saxophone is featured as a concerto soloist, complete with a cadenza flourish of warmth and virtuosity." Librettist Jacqueline Goldfinger adds, "I wrote *Weaver of Eternities* specifically for Dominick and [this commission]. While I write my own work as a poet, I also specialize in writing poetry for composers who are looking to create unique choral work that fits their thematic interests. In the past, I've written pieces that include: the winter-themed *Halcyon Days* for Composer Melissa Dunphy and VOCES8's Live from London Christmas Concert, and the family-themed *Letters to Our Children* for Composer Justine F. Chen and Resonance Works' Everyday Heroes Series. I find it meaningful to collaborate with these brilliant composers as they add contemporary work to the choral canon, offering audiences an opportunity to see the modern world reflected within the larger context of historical choral music." Goldfinger was mindful of her own children when she wrote *Weaver of Eternities*, which gives the text a special warmth, and has dedicated the poem to her twins Hava and Ezra Goldfinger.

The opening stanza of the text references the first part of the prayer *Shema Yisrael* (Hear, O Israel), which contains the essence of Jewish belief and is recited twice daily. One of its commands is to teach the *Shema* to your children, which the opening stanza shows in a wonderful tableau, the mother nursing the newborn, providing physical sustenance, and the father whispering a beautifully crafted paraphrase of the *Shema* to the infant, providing spiritual sustenance. DiOrio's expressive music has an almost cinematic quality to it. The opening saxophone solo is marked as an invocation and has a sound suggestive of the ram's-horn shofar that ushers in important days in the Jewish calendar. The piano and marimba add a sparkle to the succeeding propulsive music, the wonder and magic of a new-born child. DiOrio indulges in some tone painting, the ever-ascending line of "rising up" and the orchestral crescendo into the fortissimo wailing of the infant. There is a main theme, the joyous, exuberant melody setting the words from the *Shema*, sung with unison voices and saxophone and reprised at the end of the piece.

James MacMillan (b. 1953)

Seven Last Words from the Cross (1993)

The *Seven Last Words* is a compilation from the four Gospels of the last phrases Jesus uttered during his crucifixion. They are not part of the canonical Good Friday liturgy, but they are used in the Stations of the Cross, often observed during Lent, and are popular material for homilies. Vocal and choral arrangements date back at least to the 16th century. Haydn was famously

commissioned to provide orchestral meditations on that text for a Good Friday service, which he later reset variously for piano, string quartet, and eventually as an oratorio.

In 1993, BBC Television commissioned a setting to be performed in seven nightly episodes during Holy Week of 1994, and turned to Scottish composer James MacMillan. MacMillan received his B Mus degree in composition from the University of Edinburgh in 1981 and his PhD in composition from Durham University in 1987. He briefly served on the faculty of the Victoria University of Manchester before returning to Scotland and devoting himself to composition. He is a highly regarded and prolific composer of orchestral, chamber, theatrical and choral music with numerous prestigious commissions and awards. A Lay member of the Dominican Order since his undergraduate days, he is a committed and sometimes vocal Catholic, and his faith and sense of social justice inform many of his works. His music is often complex in structure, with multiple, often contrasting, layers of music. MacMillan may be best known for his sacred choral music, but he is even able to insert the sacred into his purely orchestral music, including his first percussion concerto *Veni, veni Emmanuel*, *Symphony: Vigil* and *Symphony No. 3: Silence*. Musically, he is strongly influenced by traditional Scottish folk music and by the highly ornate music of the 16th century Scottish cleric and composer Robert Carver. MacMillan was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 2015, and King Charles III appointed him one of only sixteen Knights in the Order of the Thistle earlier this year.

While the BBC presented *Seven Last Words from the Cross* episodically, MacMillan always considered the work as a unified piece and it was given its concert premiere in that format even before the broadcasts were completed. MacMillan supplements the *Seven Last Words* text material from other sources including the Good Friday service, the Tenebrae service (an evening service often held on the Wednesday of Holy Week in which candles lighting the church are extinguished one by one after each reading, and concluding with a loud noise, signifying either the cataclysm following the death of Jesus or the closing of his tomb with a stone) and the Reproaches (a series of antiphons optionally chanted during the Good Friday veneration of the cross and set in the first person, Jesus recounting how the benevolence of God was answered with his suffering and death).

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

The first movement opens with a three-note motif in the orchestra like a sigh or soft moan. It forms an ostinato that supports the opening melody in which the soprano and alto voices enter sequentially. MacMillan borrows this motif from the end of his otherwise spiky and angular 1991 clarinet quintet *Tuireadh* (Lament), where it is used in the same fashion, and it will become a unifying element in this work. MacMillan creates an additional musical layer with the addition of the divisi tenors and basses. The text is the exuberant welcome of Jesus to Jerusalem two days earlier, with the people shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David, the King of Israel," as recounted in the Gospels of Mark and Luke. There is an irony to the text, since the same people who welcomed Jesus so effusively were calling for his execution just two days later. This text, however, is in Latin, and the overlapping, rapid-fire, highly rhythmic scoring makes it more of a percussive undertone, contrasting the slower, more lyrical soprano and alto music. MacMillan

introduces one more text, a responsory from the Tenebrae service based on Jeremiah 12:7-11 – “The life I held dear I delivered into the hands of the unrighteous...” This is sung by the sopranos as a plainsong chant, with the lower voices singing “Forgive them” over and over, softly underneath.

2. Woman, behold thy Son! Behold thy Mother!

In the Gospel version of this text, Jesus looks down at his mother and the apostle John, standing at the foot of the cross, and asks John to take care of her. The Gospels duly recount that from that moment John took her into his house and cared for her. The word “woman” might sound a bit harsh to us, but it was used as an affectionate honorific at the time.

MacMillan explores an alternative interpretation of this text. This movement opens with an a cappella setting of the first half of the text (“Woman, behold thy Son!”) richly harmonized in the style of a Bach chorale. (Not coincidentally, Bach wrote three settings of the Passion, and his *St. Matthew Passion* is considered one of the great compositions of the Western musical canon.) This opening statement is fortissimo, and is followed by an uncomfortably long pause, the absence of sound more striking after the loudness of the choral phrase. There is a reiteration of that text, again fortissimo and again followed by a long pause. There will be a total of eleven iterations of this text, with the harmonization gradually becoming more dissonant. The orchestra enters after the third iteration, initially softly but gradually becoming more and more strident and anguished. The stentorian choral phrases and agitated orchestration clearly do not fit the scriptural context. MacMillan uses the most obvious interpretation of the text, that Jesus is referring to himself (the capitalization of the word “Son” in the title would have been a dead giveaway, had we not been fixated on the scriptural story.) MacMillan has created his own version of the *Stabat mater dolorosa*, the famous Latin poem written by the 13th century Franciscan writer and hymnist Jacapone da Todi. Its opening verse translates as “The sorrowing mother stood weeping beside the cross upon which hung her Son,” and the poem is optionally recited or sung during the Good Friday service.

Something interesting is also going on with the musical setting of this text. The melody, in the soprano line, uses a five-note (pentatonic) scale, something common in Scottish folk music. The second iteration of the text features a new melody that begins on the second tone of the original melody, but still constrained to that same pentatonic scale. The melody in the third iteration starts on the third tone of the original melody, and this pattern continues. At the sixth iteration, the pattern repeats itself beginning with the original melody, and the final, eleventh iteration again features the original melody. It creates an underlying symmetry, with the original melody appearing three times, at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end, and the cyclic structure anticipates a larger cyclic structure in the piece that will become evident later.

The final phrase, “Behold thy Mother,” is given to unison tenors and basses, quietly gasped out with spaces between each word, as if exhausted.

3. Verily I say unto you, today you shall be with me in paradise

This story of the penitent thief appears only in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus is crucified between two thieves. One joins the crowd in reviling and taunting Jesus, but the other rebukes him, accepts responsibility for his actions, and asks Jesus to remember him when he enters into his kingdom. Jesus replies to the penitent thief that he will join him in paradise. A great deal of lore has accumulated about this penitent thief. The 4th century apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus gives his name as Dismas. On the basis of Luke's account, he acquired a feast day and is listed in the Catholic Church's Roman Martyrology. He is always depicted as being crucified on Jesus's right because that is where the righteous will be gathered at the last judgement according to the Gospel of Matthew, and the crucified Jesus is almost invariably depicted as facing right.

This movement opens with the Revealing of the Cross from the Good Friday service. The celebrant holds a cross which is covered with a cloth. He reveals a portion of the cross, singing "Behold the wood of the cross, upon which hung the Savior of the world." The congregation responds "Come, let us adore Him." This is repeated twice more, raising the pitch each time, until the cross is fully revealed. MacMillan sets the Latin version of the text, using bass, tenor and alto duets sequentially to augment the effect of raising of the pitch. Their text is chant-like, but with a highly decorated, Middle Eastern flavor. The choral response contains some of the most beautiful music in the piece, set for divisi alto, tenor and bass voices, intensely tonal and accompanied by string arpeggios. Once again, MacMillan layers the voices, each with its own rhythmic pattern and melody. The actual words of Jesus are saved until the end, a beautiful soprano duet supported by a pair of violins.

4. Eli, Eli, lama sabachtani?

Jesus is quoting from the beginning of Psalm 22, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" It is a cry of despair that reveals Jesus at his most human. Psalm 22 is an important psalm in the Passion story as it contains a foretelling of much of what happens during the Crucifixion – the mocking and taunting "He trusted in God that He would deliver him; let Him deliver him if He delight in him;" the piercing of his hands and feet; his clothing divided among his tormentors, who cast lots for his vesture; his mouth dry, his tongue sticking to the roof of his mouth. And even though much of Psalm 22 is indeed bleak and despairing, it ends as a song of steadfastness in time of need, faith, and praise.

This movement opens with the lament motif in the low register of the string bass. The text is presented as a canon, but with the words drawn out. The music starts with the bass section and rises slowly but inexorably by the addition of higher voice parts and the dropping out of lower, keeping the text always as a duet between two adjacent voice parts. The music reaches a climax with the full divisi chorus in what MacMillan calls an "impassioned, full-throated lament" of overlapping entrances and rhythms. The music unwinds in a mirror image of the opening, moving back down into the depths, closing with the lament motif, now reversed.

5. I thirst

In three of the Gospel accounts, Jesus is offered a sponge soaked in sour wine or vinegar and held up to him on a reed. According to the Gospel of John, this is to fulfill a scriptural passage, Psalm 69:22, "in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink."

Here MacMillan paints an evocative picture of desolation and emptiness. The music is sparse and chords are widely spaced. It is mostly quiet, but there are occasional short fortissimo outbursts in the orchestra or chorus, like a wind blowing through a desert. He intersperses the scriptural text with a passage in Latin from the Reproaches: I gave you water of salvation from the rock, and you have given me gall and vinegar to drink. These are either whispered or quietly chanted on pitch, usually with individually random entrances and tempos, producing a dry humming or buzzing sound.

6. It is finished

The Gospel of John records these as Jesus's last words. MacMillan has paired this with a responsorial from the Tenebrae service taken from three passages in the Book of Lamentations. This movement opens with the hammering of thick fortissimo chord clusters, reminiscent of the sound of Jesus being nailed to the cross, by tradition the time he spoke the first of the *Seven Last Words*. This is not an idle allusion, for MacMillan returns to the music of the closing part of the first movement. The three lower voices sing "It is finished" over and over again, supporting a beautiful setting of the Tenebrae text in the soprano voice. The lower voices eventually settle into a reprise of that supporting cadential phrase from the opening movement. Much of the choral part is unaccompanied, but when the orchestra first appears, you also hear the lament motif. At the end, the hammer chords supplant first the lower voices and finally the soprano melody to bring the movement to a close.

7. Father, into Thy hands I commend my Spirit

The Gospel of Luke records these as Jesus's last words. This movement opens with an agonized "Father," sung three times, slowly and triple forte, each followed by a long silence until the final repetition, which segues into the remainder of the text. This clearly mimics the second movement, and the soprano melody over the three repetitions of "Father" reprises the same pentatonic scale used in the second movement as well. The balance of the choral line descends slowly, becoming more and more quiet. It is not repeated. Instead, there is a long, meditative orchestral coda with a violin duet featuring music sounding like an old Scottish lament. The orchestra drops away at the end, leaving the two violins alone, playing a dissonant minor second in a high register that becomes shorter and with longer and longer pauses in between until finally there is silence, the last breath of Jesus.

The reuse of material from earlier movement here and in the previous movement helps unify the piece and provides a powerful sense of completion. But especially in this last movement, it also invites us to consider the context of the repeated music, its parallels and contrasts – Mother and Father, humanity and divinity, living and dying, a life "delivered into the hands of the unrighteous" and a return home to his Father. In his own notes, MacMillan wrote "it is inspiring

when one witnesses people weep real tears on Good Friday as if the death of Christ was a personal tragedy. In this final movement, with its long instrumental postlude, the liturgical detachment breaks down and gives way to a more personal reflection: hence the resonance here of Scottish traditional lament music."