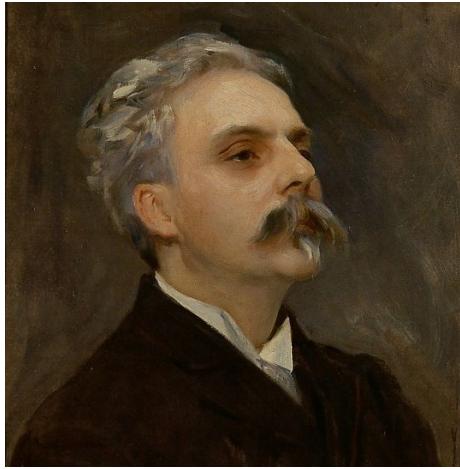


Program notes by Emily Hantman Tsai

Three Prayers: “Pie Jesu”



When Gabriel Fauré (1845–1924, *shown above*) wrote his *Requiem* between 1887 and 1890, he did not pen images of eternal damnation. Instead of the traditional full “Dies irae” (“Day of wrath”) invoking the final judgement, he composed a gentle “Pie Jesu” for soprano soloist, a prayer that says, “Blessed Lord Jesus, give them rest. Blessed Lord Jesus, give them eternal rest.”

Born shortly after Fauré completed his *Requiem*, the tragically short-lived composer Lili Boulanger (1893–1918, *shown at right*) was on her deathbed when she dictated her last work, “Pie Jesu,” to her sister Nadia. Like Fauré’s piece, Boulanger’s “Pie Jesu” is written for a solo soprano voice. It is a work of haunting beauty, and one cannot but imagine the composer pleading for her own peaceful eternity.

Maurice Duruflé (1902–1986) was clearly influenced by Fauré’s imagining of the traditional requiem as a work celebrating the

life to come. Fauré himself said, “It has been said that my *Requiem* does not express the fear of death, and someone has called it a lullaby of death. But it is thus that I see death: as a happy deliverance, an aspiration towards happiness above, rather than as a painful experience.” Like Fauré, Duruflé ended his *Requiem* with “In Paradisum,” a joyful reunion with the angels. And he, too, composed a “Pie Jesu” for solo female voice, giving his prayer to the warm, darker sound of a mezzo-soprano.

Today, March 15, 2020—the 102nd anniversary of Lili Boulanger’s tragic death—the City Choir of Washington’s audience will hear these three interpretations of “Pie Jesu,” performed by City Choir sopranos Linda Cirba and Rachel Tester singing the Fauré and Boulanger, respectively, and acclaimed mezzo soloist Madelyn Wanner Salazar singing the Duruflé.

