

Shiloh, a Requiem Program Information

Instrumentation

- 3 Flutes (1st Flute doubles on Piccolo)
- 2 Oboes
- 1 English Horn in F
- 2 Clarinets in B \flat
- 1 Bass Clarinet in B \flat
- 2 Bassoons
- 1 Contrabass Bassoon
- 4 Horns in F
- 3 Trumpets in B \flat
- 2 Trombones
- 1 Bass Trombone
- 1 Tuba
- 1 Timpani
- 3 Percussion (Tubular chimes, suspended cymbal, crash cymbals, tam-tam, bass drum, snare drum, triangle)
- 1 Harp
- Strings

Performance Notes

Performance time: approximately 19 min.

Program Listing

Shiloh, a Requiem (2014)

John M. Tarrh (b. 1947)

Program Notes

Shiloh, a Requiem (2014), commissioned by the New Philharmonia Orchestra for the celebration of their 20th season, is a symphonic fantasy after Melville. When I was invited to write this piece I had just finished my second symphony, a nine-movement work for orchestra and chorus on the theme of freedom, which sets various texts associated with the American Revolutionary War and the American Civil War. The seventh movement, based on Herman Melville's poem *Shiloh, a Requiem*, particularly moved me. I was thus inspired to create the current work as a set of orchestral variations on this movement.

Shiloh, a Requiem

Skimming lightly, wheeling still,
The swallows fly low
Over the field in clouded days,
The forest-field of Shiloh –
Over the field where April rain
Solaced the parched ones stretched in pain
Through the pause of night
That followed the Sunday fight
Around the church of Shiloh –
The church so lone, the log-built one,
That echoed to many a parting groan
And natural prayer
Of dying foemen mingled there –
Foemen at morn, but friends at eve –
Fame or country least their care:
(What like a bullet can undeceive!)
But now they lie low,
While over them the swallows skim,
And all is hushed at Shiloh.

The two-day Civil War Battle of Shiloh, fought April 6 – 7, 1862, in southwestern Tennessee, was the deadliest battle in United States history up to that time. With a total of nearly 20,000 killed and wounded, few could imagine there would be three more years of war and even larger and more deadly battles to come. Melville's poem describes the scene after the first day of battle. The horrors of the battlefield are intensified by Melville's juxtaposition of tranquil images of swallows and April rain.

The music opens with an arrangement that closely follows the original version, with a serene setting using primarily harp and strings, joined by upper winds. Seven variations follow, each typically highlighting a soloist or a particular section or sections of the orchestra. The characters of these variations are generally different, ranging from serene to warlike.

The first variation, for upper winds, pizzicato strings, harp, and timpani, is reminiscent of a lively dance. The second, in the character of a march, features brass and lower winds, with French horns answering the trumpet's melody. The third is a cadenza for solo violin, while the fourth is an energetic variation for winds and French horns.

The fifth variation, with harshly clashing dissonances, most closely depicts the battle itself. A repeated bass line and insistent rhythmic pattern represents the implacable relentlessness and intensity of war. A quiet middle section portrays the overnight pause in battle, with the repeated bass line still present but extended in time. The sixth variation is a re-orchestrated return to the serenity of the opening statement. An energetic variation for full orchestra brings the work to an exuberant conclusion.

John M. Tarrh