

Consolation

Requiem for Newtown

for SATB Choir + Chimes (Tubular Bells)

Music by
John Muehleisen

Poem by
Elizabeth Barrett Browning
(1806–1861)

*Co-commissioned by Great Falls High School
and Charles M. Russell High School,
Patrick Ryan and Lynn R. Ryan, Choral Directors*

*Dedicated to the memory of the 20 children
and 7 adults slain in the
Sandy Hook Elementary School Massacre
in Newtown, CT on Dec. 14, 2012
and to those who mourn their loss*

Consolation

All are not taken; there are left behind
Living Belovèds, tender looks to bring,
And make the daylight still a happy thing,
And tender voices, to make soft the wind.
But if it were not so—if I could find
No love in all the world for comforting,
Nor any path but hollowly did ring,
Where 'dust to dust' the love from life disjoin'd,
And if, before those sepulchres unmoving,
I stood alone (as some forsaken lamb
Goes bleating up the moors in weary dearth),
Crying 'Where are ye, O my loved and loving?'...
I know a Voice would sound, 'Daughter, I AM.
Can I suffice for HEAVEN, and not for earth?'

– Elizabeth Barrett Browning (1806–1861)

Requiem Mass, Introit

**Réquiem aetérnam
dóna éis Dómine:
et lux perpétua,
lúceat eis**

*Rest eternal
grant to them, O Lord:
and let perpetual light
shine upon them.*

Program Notes

NOTE: The following text, which is the backstory of the creation and premiere of *Consolation*, is intended to give the conductor and the performers context for the work and deeper insight in order to enhance and enrich the performance of the work. Conductors should feel free to excerpt as program notes whatever sections they feel would be helpful for their audiences.

Reflecting on “Consolation”

Consolation (Requiem for Newtown), for choir and chimes (tubular bells), was co-commissioned by the two high schools in Great Falls, Montana: Great Falls HS (Patrick Ryan, choral director) and Charles M. Russell HS (Lynn Ryan, choral director). The piece was composed less than three months after the tragedy and was premiered on April 9, 2013 by nearly 100 high-school singers to an audience of well over 600. The work is about 12 minutes long and is intended as a Requiem in miniature for the victims and as a beacon of hope and comfort to the family and friends of those who lost their lives.

The key to the work is the texts: Elizabeth Barrett Browning's powerfully appropriate sonnet titled "Consolation" and the first line of the Latin Requiem *Introit*.

The Event. When the Sandy Hook shootings occurred in Dec. 2012, and the number of victims—as well as their names, ages, and pictures—began appearing on our TV screens, I was completely overwhelmed and wept every time they would appear on the screen. I had never before reacted with such intense emotion to a tragedy like this. I'm sure it had to do with the intersection of the innocence of those young children, their sweet countenances reflected in the photos, the sheer number of people killed, the intense and open grief of their parents and loved ones, and the heroism of the adults who came to their aid. At the time, I had an intense desire to react to this tragedy musically, not so much to express my outrage (which was most certainly present), but to create a musical balm, something to memorialize and honor the lost and to comfort the survivors. My desire to react musically to the event brought to mind Leonard Bernstein's famous quote that formed his own reaction to the assassination of President John F. Kennedy: “This will be our reply to

violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before.” What a profound reaction to violence!

Searching for a Text. As I talked to Patrick Ryan about the vision he and his wife had for the piece, he indicated that there was no particular occasion or theme they had in mind. He essentially gave me *carte blanche* to write whatever was in my mind and on my heart, something that can be both a gift and a curse for a composer, as many of us know the dread of “the blank canvas” of infinite possibilities. As Stravinsky said, “The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees one’s self.” One of my self-imposed constraints when faced with such a myriad of possibilities is to turn to the writings of women poets of the Victorian age, in whose poetry I almost always find inspiration. So I began reading through poems by Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and even Sara Teasdale. After reading through a number of poems, I stumbled upon Browning’s sonnet, *Consolation*.

Upon reading the beautifully appropriate opening four lines, I immediately knew I had found the text and the concept for the piece sprang to life almost immediately. Not only would it be a memorial to those who lost their lives, even more so it would be a balm of comfort to those left behind, an acknowledgement that, even as we grieve individually for those we have lost, we also need to seek comfort for ourselves among the living, and we need to comfort and console our loved ones. As I thought through that web of mutual comfort amongst the survivors, the poem and the title *Consolation* took on ever-deeper meaning. Those first four lines made me think in particular of the siblings left behind, those who were “not taken,” those “Living Belovèds, tender looks to bring, And make the daylight still a happy thing, And tender voices, to make soft the wind.” I just sobbed after reading those lines before even making it through the rest of the poem, which is equally powerful in Browning’s description of what might be described as “ultimate consolation.”

Composing *Consolation*. Very early on, as I thought through the poem and the concept for the piece, two key elements came to mind: (1) I knew that I also wanted to use some text from the Latin Requiem Mass, and (2) I heard the chimes as a fundamental component of the sound world of *Consolation*, beginning with funereal tolling of single notes and ending with a joyous pealing of bells, a bright blur of sound describing the *lux perpetua*, the eternal light described in the Requiem Introit. Thus, the dark, funereal character of the chimes early in the work is transformed into a bright wash of heavenly light, amplified by the shimmering choral sonorities of the coda.

Narratively, the work opens with the choir singing a textless musical gesture of increasing grief, anger, and despair; moving into an obsessive expression of overwhelmed disbelief at the scope of the tragedy; working its way through coming to grips with what happened, accepting the loss, and realizing the need to console others and to seek consolation for oneself; culminating in the comforting image of the “eternal light.” As I worked on the overall concept and form of the work, I certainly had in mind the various and widely accepted Stages of Grief, including Shock, Emotional Release, Anger, Guilt, Hopefulness, Acceptance, and Moving Forward. On a certain level, *Consolation* is a musical meditation on these various stages.

The other component I wanted to include in the concept of this Requiem was a recitation of the names and ages of each of the children and adults killed in the tragedy. Because of my intense personal experience of hearing the names and ages read on numerous television reports following the tragedy, I felt strongly that I did not want this to be an “anonymous” Requiem, especially because the empathic effect of hearing the names and ages of each victim make the event very real, very personal, and very present regardless of one’s physical and temporal distance from it. At one point, I had to ask myself, “Why is this important to me?” The answer I came up with was that, as time passes after these tragedies, we tend to remember the tragedy itself and to forget the names and memory of those who were lost, especially in the wake of the political and cultural resonance of the tragedies. But it is exactly the personal nature of the tragedy—the people themselves—that compels us to do all we can do to ensure that these tragedies do not occur again. As we forget the names of the lost, the event itself becomes generic and blurs into the fog of history and memory, getting lost in the political and social fallout, which also tends to blur and subside over time. It seems to me that retaining the names of those who were killed is one of the ways to not only honor their lives, but also to keep the event present in our minds and to remind us to continue to work to prevent such tragedies from occurring again. In the famous words of the 18th-century Irish Statesman and Philosopher Edmund Burke, “Those who don’t know history are destined to repeat it.”

Ultimately, *Consolation* is just what the title implies, a work intended to console the grief-stricken and to give them and all of us hope for a brighter future in which the human capacity for compassion and love governs our hearts and minds, even when our culture, society, and policies fail us.

The Response: The occasion of the premiere was one of the big surprises to me, in two ways. First of all, the concert on which *Consolation* was premiered was not one of the regular concerts of the school year; it was a special joint concert presented by choirs from both high schools and arranged in part for the premiere of the commissioned work. Appropriately, the theme of the concert was Remembrance, with recently programmed repertoire chosen accordingly. Because it was a joint concert, we had expected about 200 people to attend, a pretty good turnout for a special concert that wasn't on the regular school schedule. As the starting time for the concert drew closer that evening, we were surprised by the seemingly unending mass of people streaming into the church. By concert time, there were more than 600 people crowding into the seats of the spectacular modern interior of Holy Spirit Catholic Church, more than triple the number expected. Needless to say, we quickly ran out of programs.

The second surprise related to the premiere of *Consolation* was the audience reaction. The conductor of the Great Falls HS choir—Patrick Ryan—and I had discussed various scenarios for bows and composer acknowledgement, the standard post-premiere protocol, but we never anticipated what actually happened. The premiere of *Consolation* was in the next-to-last slot on the concert, to be followed by Dan Forrest's heartbreakingly beautiful *Good Night, Dear Heart*, which is dedicated to the deceased 4-month-old adopted daughter of Dan's brother and sister-in-law. Here's the surprise: even though *Consolation* deals very directly with the tragic loss of the 20 children and 7 adults in the Newtown shootings, it ends with a great sense of hope and healing. As mentioned earlier, whereas the piece begins rather shockingly and in a dark mood, it ends with bright chords and an exuberant pealing of bells. Naturally, with that "big hopeful ending" we assumed that the audience would be so relieved after the earlier meditation on the tragic events that they would burst into applause. How wrong we were! The reaction was a stunned, reverent, and respectful silence, except for the occasional sound of sighs and sniffing clearly indicating many people were crying. At first I was stunned by the silence, such an unusual reaction; then I realized that it was an entirely appropriate reaction to what the audience had just experienced, many of them holding their own children close to them with heads nestled against their parents' arms and shoulders. At this point in the concert, Patrick was supposed to yield the podium to his wife, Lynn, who was to conduct Dan's piece. After slowly lowering his arms, Patrick and the singers stood motionless for well over a minute. Lynn was wise enough not to come forward, and Patrick eventually started Dan's piece, which made stunning coda to *Consolation* and to the concert. It was truly one of the most moving experiences of my composing career, and I'm very grateful to Patrick, Lynn, and the wonderful singers of Great Falls and Charles M. Russell High Schools for commissioning the work, for their fabulous premiere performance, and for sharing their hearts with me and with one another during my residency with them in April 2013. I will always remember and treasure my time with them.

Afterthought. Writing these notes over the past few days following so closely after the 12th Anniversary of the 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington, D.C. leads me to the hope that *Consolation* can apply to that tragedy as well, and to other tragedies, despite being so specific to the Newtown shootings. As those who have lost loved ones in other tragedies hear the consoling text of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnet, may they be consoled and comforted. As they hear the names of the children and adults killed in Newtown read aloud, I hope they will feel free to insert the names of their own loved ones in order to enter more fully into the musical memorial in a personal way as well. May this work be a comforting balm to all who have lost loved ones and are in need of consolation.

John Muehleisen
Sept. 15, 2013
Mukilteo, WA

Consolation

(Requiem for Newtown)

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Dedicated to the memory of the 20 children and 7 adults slain in the
Sandy Hook Elementary School Massacre in Newtown, CT on Dec. 14, 2012
and to those who mourn their loss

Poem by Elizabeth Barrett Browning
Latin text from Requiem Mass Introit

John Muehleisen
2013

stagger breathing (all parts)

Largo doloroso ♩ = 60

ff *f* *p* *mp* *mf* *f* *ff*

Soprano
* See note Ah

Alto
* See note Ah

Tenor
Ah * See note Ah

Bass
Ah * See note Ah

Chimes
f *mp* *mf* *f* *ff*
sed. sempre

* Piano
Largo doloroso ♩ = 60
p *f* *mp* *mf* *f* *ff*

* for rehearsal only

* PERFORMANCE NOTE: The lower x-shaped notehead represents a loud stomp, while the upper x-shaped notehead represents a clap. These two gestures are the only references in the work to the actual shooting. They do not represent the shooting itself as much as they do the shock of the event in the context of what was otherwise a normal day in Newtown, represented by the two preceding measures of placid, sustained Ds in the men's voices. The stomp-clap gesture should be a shock to the audience, as the shooting was a shock to the community. To ensure the surprise of the stomp-clap, the singers should remain absolutely motionless during the first two measures and should minimize any preliminary movements prior to the initial stomp so that even the preliminary movements are a shock when they occur.

Piu mosso ♩ = 68

12 *mf* * See note below

S Charlotte, Rachel, Olivia
Josephine, Ana, Dawn, Madeleine
Catherine, Nancy, Grace

A *mf* * See note below
Anne Marie, Emilie, Caroline
Jessica, Avielle, Lauren
Mary, Victoria, Allison

T *mf* * See note below
Daniel, Dylan
Chase, Jesse

B *mf* * See note below
James, Jack
Noah, Benjamin

Chm. *f* *ff* *p*

Pno. *p*

PERFORMANCE NOTE: Using a stage whisper, speak all names in the box, starting with a random name and proceeding through the list. When you reach the end, begin with the first name in the box, read through list, and repeat until end of arrow.

21 *mp* *mf* *f* *ff*

S All All All All All All All

A *mp* *mf* *f* *ff*

T *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *mf* *f* *f* stagger breathing through m. 34 *ff*

B *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *mf* *f* *f* stagger breathing through m. 34 *ff*

Chm. *mp* *mf* *f* *ff*

Pno. *mp* *mf* *f* *ff*

mp *mf*

28

S *mf*
All are not tak - en; there are left be - hind

A *p* *mf*
All All All All All All there are

T *p*
All All All All All All

B *p*
All All All All All All

Chm. *ff* *

Pno. *p* *mf*

34

S *f*
Liv - ing Be - lov - èds, ten - der looks to bring, And make the day - light still a hap - py thing, —

A *f*
Liv - ing Be - lov - èds, ten - der looks to bring, And make the day - light still a hap - py thing, —

T *mf* *f* N.B.
All ten - der looks to bring, And make the day - light hap - py —

B *mf* *f* N.B.
All ten - der looks to bring, And make the day - light hap - py —

Chm.

Pno. *mf* *f*

40 *mf* *f* *p*

S And ten-der voic-es, _____ to make soft the wind. _____

A *mf* *f* *p*
And ten-der voic - es, _____ to make soft the wind. _____ the wind. _____

T *mp* *f* *p*
And ten-der voic - es, _____ to make soft the wind. _____

B *mp* *f* *p*
And ten-der voic - es, _____ to make soft the wind. _____ the wind.

Chm.

Pno. *mf* *mp* *f* *p*

46 **Poco Piu Mosso** ♩ = 76 *pp*

S _____ Ooo _____ Ooo _____

A _____ Ooo _____ Ooo _____

T _____ the wind. Ooo _____ Ooo _____

B _____ Ooo _____ Ooo _____

Chm.

Pno. **Poco Piu Mosso** ♩ = 76 *pp*

Poco Agitato ♩ = 88

S *p* *mf* *p* *f*
 — But if it were not so— if I could find No love in all the world for com-fort-ing,

A *p* *mf* *p* *f*
 — But if it were not so— if I could find No love in all the world for com-fort-ing,

T *p* *mf* *p* *f*
 — But if it were not so— if I could find No love in all the world for com-fort-ing,

B *mp* *f*
 — love in all the world for com-fort-ing,

Chm. *p* L.V.

Pno. *p* *mf* *p* *f*

S *p* *mp*
 Nor an-y path _____ did ring, And

A *p* *mp*
 Nor an-y path but hol-low-ly did ring, Where 'dust to dust' the love from life dis-join'd, And

T *p* *mp*
 Nor an-y path— but hol-low-ly did ring, Where 'dust to dust' the love from life dis-join'd, Ah

B *p* *mp*
 Nor an-y path but hol-low-ly— did ring, Where 'dust to dust' the love from life dis-join'd, Ah

Chm. *p* L.V.

Pno. *p* *mp*

Consolation

Quasi recitativo ♩ = 60

S if, be-fore those sep-ul-chres un-mov-ing, I stood a-lone (as some for-sak-en

A if, be-fore those sep-ul-chres un-mov-ing, I stood a-lone Ah

T I stood a-lone Ah

B I stood a-lone Ah

Chm. *p* L.V.

Pno. *f* *p* Quasi recitativo ♩ = 60 *mf*

S lamb Goes bleat-ing up the moors in wea-ry death), Cry-ing Cry-ing

A Cry-ing Cry-ing

T Cry-ing Cry-ing

B Cry-ing Cry-ing

Chm. *mf* *f*

Pno. *f* *p* Agitato ♩ = 70 *mf*

Molto Tranquilo ♩ = 66

83 *f* *ff* *pp* *p*

S Cry - ing 'Where are ye, — O my loved and lov-ing?'... I know a Voice would sound,

A Cry - ing 'Where are ye, — O my loved and lov-ing?'... I know a Voice would sound, mm _____

T Cry - ing 'Where are ye, — O my loved and lov-ing?'... I know a Voice would sound, mm _____

B Cry - ing 'Where are ye, — O my loved and lov-ing?'... I know a Voice would sound, mm _____

83 *ff* *pp* *p*

Chm.

Pno. *f* *ff* *pp* *p*

Molto Tranquilo ♩ = 66

91 *mp* *quasi-recitativo* *accel.* *mf* *molto rit.* *f* *p*

S 'Daugh-ter, I AM. Can I suf-fice for HEAV-EN, and not for earth?' _____

A _____ Ah _____

T _____ Ah _____

B _____ Ah _____

91 *mp* *mf* *f* *p*

Chm. *p*

Pno. *mp* *mf* *f* *p*

accel. *molto rit.*

Piu mosso ♩ = 68

98 *mf*
S All are not tak - en; there are left be - hind Liv - ing Be - lov - èds,

p *mf*
A All All All All All there are Liv - ing Be - lov - èds,

p
T All All All All All All

p
B All All All All All All

Chm.

Pno. *mf*
p

104 *mf* *f* *mf* *f*
S ten - der looks to bring, And make the day - light still a hap - py thing, And ten - der voic - es,

mf *f* *mf* *f*
A ten - der looks to bring, And make the day - light still a hap - py thing, And ten - der voic - es,

mf *f* *mp* *f*
T ten - der looks to bring, And make the day - light hap - py And ten - der voic - es,

mf *f* *mp* *f*
B ten - der looks to bring, And make the day - light hap - py And ten - der voic - es,

Chm.

Pno. *mf* *f* *p* *mf* *f*

111

S *p* to make soft the wind.

A *p* to make soft the wind. the wind.

T *p* to make soft the wind. the wind.

B *p* to make soft the wind. the wind.

Chm.

Pno. *p*

Poco Piu Mosso ♩ = 76

116

S *pp* Ooo

A *pp* Ooo

T *pp* Ooo

B *pp* Ooo

Chm.

Pno. *pp*

124 **Freely, not conducted** ♩ = c. 68

T

B

Chm. *p* solo thru m. 131
 Red. sempre al fine

Pno. **Freely, not conducted** ♩ = c. 68

PIANO: Between mm. 124–199, play vocal parts directly from the choir staves in rehearsal as there is no need for a reduction.
 Piano reduction begins again in m. 200.

Senza misura
mf in style of Gregorian chant

131

T

B

Chm. ♩ = c. 68

p CHIMES: Repeat pattern during chant, without variation in dynamics or tempo. Do not synchronize tempo or 8th-note speed of the chimes and the chant, which should be independent of one another. Finish with the four pitches after the arrow approximately when the men reach the final half note of the chant.

133

T

B

Chm. 133

dó - na - é - is - Dó - mi - ne: et lux per - pé - tu - a

dó - na - é - is - Dó - mi - ne: et lux per - pé - tu - a

Senza misura *

135

S Charlotte Bacon Age 6

A

T 8 lú - ce - at é - is. Daniel Barden Age 7

B lú - ce - at é - is. *p* sempre stagger breathing Mm

Chm. 135 *mp* sempre

* CONDUCTOR NOTE: The **Senza misura** section should not be conducted. Instead, the conductor should set the pace by giving cues for each event. In order for each of the deceased to be properly honored and remembered, please take care to leave time after each toll of the bell before the next name is spoken, as well as time after each name before the bell tolls again. A count of approximately 1-2 quarter-note = 60 beats should be sufficient in both cases, which will also prevent the section from being too long. The duration of the initial section of spoken names and bell tolls from mm. 136-161 should be c. 1:00 in length.

The names and ages in each staff should be read by a single voice. Use different voices within the same staff for different names

140

S Olivia Engel Age 6 Ana Marquez-Greene, Age 6

A Rachel Davino Age 29 Josephine Gay Age 7 Dawn Hochsprung Age 47

T

B

Chm. 140

150

S Madeleine Hsu Age 6 Nancy Lanza Age 52

A Catherine Hubbard Age 6

T Dylan Hockley Age 6 Chase Kowalski Age 7

B

Chm.

150

160

a Tempo ♩ = c. 60

S

A Grace McDonnell Age 7

T Jesse Lewis Age 6 James Mattioli Age 6

B *p*
Re - qui - em mm ae - tér - nam mm Re - qui - em mm

Chm. *mp* sempre

PERUSAL DO NOT COPY SCORE

167

S Anne Marie Murphy, Age 52

A Emilie Parker Age 6

T Jack Pinto Age 6 Noah Pozner Age 6

B ae - tér - nam mm Re - qui - em mm ae - tér - nam mm

Chm.

174

S Caroline Previti Age, 6 Avielle Richman Age 6

A Jessica Rekos Age 6

T

B Re - qui - em mm ae - tér - nam mm Re - qui - em mm

Chm.

180

S. Mary Sherlach Age 56

A. Lauren Rousseau Age 30 Victoria Soto Age 27

T.

B. ae - tér - nam mm Re - qui - em mm ae - tér - nam mm

Chm. 180

186

S. Allison Wyatt Age 6

A.

T. Benjamin Wheeler, Age 6

B. Re - qui - em mm ae - tér - nam mm

Chm. 186

Largo Tranquillo ♩ = 54

quasi-chant solo thru m. 199
ethereal, serene

pp

192

Chm. 192

Adagio tranquillo ♩ = 66

200 *p* *mp* *mf* *f*

S Re - qui - em Re - qui - em Re - qui - em Re - qui - em

A Re - qui - em Re - qui - em Re - qui - em Re - qui - em

T Re - qui - em Re - qui - em Re - qui - em Re - qui - em

B Re - qui - em Re - qui - em Re - qui - em Re - qui - em

Chm. *pp* *p* *mp* *mf* *f*

Pno. *p* *mp* *mf* *f*

208 *mp*

S Re - qui - em ae - tér - nam dó - na é - is

A Re - qui - em ae - tér - nam dó - na é - is

T *p* stagger breathing
 Re - qui - em ae - tér - nam Re - qui - em ae - tér - nam Re - qui - em ae -

B *p* stagger breathing
 Re - qui - em ae - tér - nam Re - qui - em ae - tér - nam Re - qui - em ae -

Chm. *p* *mp*

Pno. *p* *mp*

213 *mf* *f*

S
Dó - mi - ne: et lux per - pé - tu - a lú - ce - at é - is,

A
Dó - mi - ne: et lux per - pé - tu - a lú - ce - at é - is,

T
mf *f*
tér - nam Re - qui - em ae - tér - nam Re - qui - em ae - tér - nam

B
mf *f*
tér - nam Re - qui - em ae - tér - nam Re - qui - em ae - tér - nam

Chm.
mf *f*

Pno.
f

218 *ff*

S
et lux per - pé - tu - a!

A
ff
et lux per - pé - tu - a!

T
ff
Re - qui - em ae - tér - nam

B
Re - qui - em ae - tér - nam

Chm.
ff *fff*

Pno.
ff

218