

Cantique de Jean Racine

Gabriel Fauré (1845 - 1924)

Perhaps because he was already renowned as an outstanding organist and teacher, Fauré only slowly gained recognition as a composer. Although he wrote several works involving a full orchestra, his particular talent lay within the more intimate musical forms – songs, piano music and chamber music. His somewhat austere style and highly individual, impressionistic harmonic language contrasts markedly with the music of the Austro-German tradition which dominated European music from the time of Beethoven until well into the twentieth century.

The subtlety of Fauré's music, and his concentration on the small-scale, led many to criticise him for lacking depth, a judgement based on the mistaken premise that the bigger and bolder a composer's music the more worthwhile it must be. Fauré deliberately avoided the grander kind of orchestral music that could easily have brought him fame and fortune. He preferred instead to embrace an elegant and subtle musical language that has won him increasing numbers of admirers.

The *Cantique* is a setting of words by the 17th century dramatist and poet Jean Racine. It was Fauré's first significant composition, written in 1865 whilst he was in his final year at the École Niedermeyer, the 'École de musique religieuse et classique'. He submitted the piece for the composition prize, and won, though it was only published eleven years later, with a full orchestral version following in 1906. Fauré went on to write other religious music – most notably the *Requiem*, written in 1888 – but of the shorter sacred pieces it is the *Cantique* that has particularly captured the affections of choirs and audiences.

programme notes by John Bawden

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Verbe égal au Très-Haut,
notre unique espérance,
Jour éternel de la terre et des cieux,
nous rompons le silence,
Divin Sauveur, jette sur nous les yeux!

Répands sur nous le feu de ta grâce puissante,
que tout l'enfer fuie au son de ta voix,
Dissipe le sommeil d'une âme languissante,
qui la conduit à l'oubli de tes lois!

O Christ, sois favorable à ce peuple fidèle pour te bénir maintenant rassemblé.
Reçois les chants qu'il offre à ta gloire immortelle,
Et de tes dons qu'il retourne comblé!

*O divine Word above,
our hope and consolation,
Eternal light of the heavens and the earth,
our voices greet the morning;
Look down, O Lord, and hear thy people's prayer!*

*Inspire us, Lord, we pray, with the power of thy Spirit, that hell may flee before thy mighty word,
From slumber waken us, our weary souls reviving, that we may never forget all thy laws!*

*Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on thy congregation, now gathered here in the sight of thy throne.
Receive the hymns they offer to thy endless glory,
Renewed by thy gifts may they go forth in peace.*

