

# all our numbered lives

Andrew Cusworth

## Introduction

Each day of the COVID-19 Coronavirus pandemic, we are confronted by statistical summaries of the progress of the virus in our communities: nations present official figures; studies suggest the unseen scale of transmission, sickness, death, and wider impact; models demonstrate how things might be in the near future, or might have been had different approaches been taken in the past. Behind these clinically analytical announcements and their apparent abstraction from our lived experience are innumerable lives lost or left in tatters and an unending landscape of broken dreams.

Written for Calmus' MOSAIK 2020 project, this piece draws its inspiration from the tension between the coldly statistical and economic terms through which COVID-19 is reported at a national or international level and the deeply human sorrows that are the true context of those words. It sets the language of statistical reporting, reduced over the last several months to the level of banal ritual through endless repetition and representation, as the backdrop to the first prayerful words of an older rite, the Mass for the Dead.

## Performance instructions

### General instructions

#### Approach

Scored for five voices, this piece is almost entirely flexible in nature, and can be performed, complete, in one minute, or incrementally over several minutes. It can be sung at any pitch, with any reasonable combination of five voices, at any tempo, and with any suitable dynamic scheme.

#### Text in the lower voices

The tenor, baritone, and bass voices should repeat the *italicised* text beneath each note in a rapid murmur in their own time to create a babbling, confused texture. Though clear enough to be discerned, the words should be almost mumbled so that the flow of tone through notes is not heavily interrupted by their consonants. When the note changes, the new note should coincide with the first strong syllable (indicated in **bold**) of the text beneath it, with the previous syllable in the text acting as an upbeat.

### Specific instructions for performance variants

#### One minute, MOSAIK 2020

The piece may be performed as it appears on the page at a tempo of around 60 beats per minute. The long repeat should be sung as indicated, with the 'Requiem aeternam' text sung the first time, and the 'et lux perpetua' text the second. In the Coda, the last repetitions of the word 'mortality' should break down into a long 'mmm', the repeat of the coda should **not** be sung and the pauses should be observed. The suggested dynamic scheme is broadly quiet, with the piece dying away at the end.

#### Outline

Bar 1, all

Bars 2-9, all, with repeat; Soprano and Alto 1st time lyrics line 1, 2nd time lyrics line 2

Bars 10-12, all, no repeat

### **Incremental performance I, c. 4-5 minutes**

After an initial statement of 'These are the data' by the Baritone voice, the Baritone should sing up to the first 'end repeat' mark in free tempo, before returning to the 'start repeat' mark, to sing through with the Tenor in strict tempo; this pattern should be repeated, again, adding the Bass. When the alto is introduced, the repeat should be observed so that the whole of the *Requiem* text is heard, and then the soprano should join, also observing the repeat. With the whole group singing, the whole text of the Requiem should be heard twice before proceeding to the coda, which may be repeated as many times as seems appropriate with the pauses and indication to hum observed on the last repetition. The suggested dynamic scheme is one of gradual crescendo and increasing intensity until a gradual decrescendo and dying away through the repetition of the coda.

#### **Outline**

Bar 1, Baritone

Bars 2-9, Baritone

Bars 2-9, Baritone, Tenor

Bars 2-9, Baritone, Tenor, Bass

Bars 2-9, Baritone, Tenor, Bass, with Alto singing 'Requiem aeternam', repeated with Alto singing 'et lux perpetua'

Bars 2-9, Baritone, Tenor, Bass, with Alto and Soprano singing 'Requiem aeternam', repeated Alto and Soprano singing 'et lux perpetua'. All repeated.

Bars 10-12, Baritone, Tenor, Bass, with Alto and Soprano, repeated as often as wished, observing pauses and indication to hum the last time.

### **Incremental performance II, c. 10 minutes**

After an initial statement of 'These are the data' by the Baritone voice, the Baritone should sing up to the first 'end repeat' mark in free tempo, before returning to the 'start repeat' mark, to sing through with the Tenor, now in strict meter; this pattern should be repeated, again, with the Bass. When the alto is introduced, the repeat should be observed so that the whole of the Requiem text is heard, and then the soprano should join, also observing the repeat. With the whole group singing, the full text may be repeated as many times as deemed appropriate before proceeding to the coda, which may also be sung freely. In the last two repetitions of the coda, the soprano voice should not sing, before the rest of the group return to the beginning of the main body of the piece. Now, the performance fades away in reverse order to its building: first, without soprano, the main section is sung observing the repeat to perform the whole of the text, before the alto stops singing; then, once through with all of the lower voices, once with Tenor and Baritone, and finally once with only Baritone. The Baritone should then repeat the Coda as many times as seems appropriate, ending with the word 'mortality' without humming.

#### **Outline**

Bar 1, Baritone

Bars 2-9, Baritone

Bars 2-9, Baritone, Tenor

Bars 2-9, Baritone, Tenor, Bass

Bars 2-9, Baritone, Tenor, Bass, with Alto singing 'Requiem aeternam', repeated with Alto singing 'et lux perpetua'

Bars 2-9, Baritone, Tenor, Bass, with Alto and Soprano singing 'Requiem aeternam', repeated Alto and Soprano singing 'et lux perpetua'. Repeated as wished.

Bars 10-12, Baritone, Tenor, Bass, with Alto and Soprano, repeated as often as wished.

Bars 10-12, Baritone, Tenor, Bass, with Alto, repeated once.

Bars 2-9, Baritone, Tenor, Bass, with Alto singing 'Requiem aeternam', repeated with Alto singing 'et lux perpetua'

Bars 2-9, Baritone, Tenor, Bass

Bars 2-9, Baritone, Tenor

Bars 2-9, Baritone

Bars 10-12, Baritone, repeated as often as wished without 'mmm'

*for Calmus*  
*to the memory of each life numbered*  
all our numbered lives

Andrew Cusworth  
1.11.2020

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Baritone

Bass

murmuring italicised text repeatedly

*These are the data:*

murmuring italicised text repeatedly

*These are the data:*

murmuring italicised text repeatedly

*These are the data:*

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S. Re - qui - em ae - ter - nam do - na e - is,  
et lux per - pe - tu - a lu - ce - at

A. Re - qui - em ae - ter - nam do - na e - is,  
et lux per - pe - tu - a lu - ce - at

T. *The data show: infection is... The data show: analysis...*

Bar. *The data show: infection is... The data show: analysis...*

B. *The data show: infection is... The data show: analysis...*

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S. do - mi - ne, lu - ce - at e - is.  
e - is,

A. do - mi - ne, lu - ce - at e - is.  
e - is,

T. *The data show: mortality is... mortality... mortality... mmm*

Bar. *The data show: mortality is... mortality... mortality... mmm*

B. *The data show: mortality is... mortality... mortality... mmm*

Coda