

## PROGRAMME NOTE

*At First Light* was commissioned by Eric Bruskin, a resident of Philadelphia, USA, in memory of his mother. Eric has a longstanding enthusiasm for my work and I was touched to be approached for a task that is both a privilege and a daunting responsibility. In a sense, no music can ever measure up to the weight of love or the hope of consolation vested in it under such circumstances – but in memory I carry the deaths of both my parents and was able to draw upon that. Eric's fondness for my Cello Sonata (itself written *in session*) led him to ask that I include a solo cello part in the new work – but his attachment also to my polyphonic sacred choral writing meant that he wanted a contrapiece which would be both a showcase of that approach and the celebration of a life well lived. Therefore, the seven movements of *At First Light* arrange themselves as a series of slow meditations surrounding an exuberant 9-minute motet in which the lamenting cello falls temporarily silent.

Eric's Jewish faith meant that approaching an agnostic humanist brought up within the Anglican tradition was hardly free of problems! Gradually, though, I was able to win his approval for a collated mosaic of texts. This embraces some liturgical Latin (necessary for the motet) as the shared preserve of a broad western culture, but balances it with a secular approach to loss, celebration, remembrance and the many shades of our mourning those whom we see no longer. Eric was adamant that he did not want the title 'Requiem', but what has emerged is still a form of semi-secular Requiem in all but name, taking its title instead from a phrase in the poem by Thomas Blackburn set as the third movement. This seemed to suggest succinctly how the loss of one very close to us is an awakening into an unfamiliar world where everything is changed. Following the exuberant central movement, the texts by the Lebanese-born Khalil Gibran and the US, Kentuckian poet Wendell Berry first address the departed loved one directly, then place us within an imaginary funeral cortège, where the personal and universal in human experience become personal without subscribing explicitly to any particular faith (or lack of it). The final text is a translation of a Hebraic prayer, requested and provided by Eric Bruskin, which serves to mirror its Latin counterpart heard at the outset.

Throughout, the lamenting cello represents a commentary on the experience articulated in the text. It evokes and, in a sense, tries to embrace and sanctify the individual existential journeys of the bereft, as they, in turn, seek to make their own sense of what the short-lived Second World War poet Alan Lewis called 'the unbearable beauty of the dead' (movement 5).

In a modern world hostage to ever greater menace, displacement, bloodshed and anguish, I hope fervently that this music not only brings a measure of solace to the person who commissioned it, but also makes its own small contribution to bailing out the sinking ship of humanity.

Francis Pott, 2018

Commissioned by Eric Bouclier  
in loving memory of his mother and teacher,  
Sandra ("Sanny") Bouclier

# At First Light

## 1. Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine

*Liberamente*

$\text{♩} = \text{ca } 56$

Vc. *Solo*  
*p* *pp* *p* *pp*

Vc. *p* *mp* *p*

Vc. *mf* *poco f*

Vc. *mp* *mf* *mp* *portando*

Vc. *mf* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *portando* *portando*

Vc. *acc.* *mp* *pizz.* *mp* *arco* *p*

Vc. *p* *mp cresc.* *poco f* *poco ten.* *p*

## Poco più mosso, tempo giusto

20  $\text{♩} = 64$ 

S.2 *pp sost.*  
Re - - - qui - ern ne - ter - -

A.2 *pp sost.*  
Re - - - qui - ern ne - ter - -

T.2 *pp sost.*  
Re - - - qui - ern ne - ter - -

B.2 *pp sost.*  
Re - - - qui - ern ne - ter - -

Vc. *mp* *portamento* *pp* *pp*  
[Sostenuto]

S.2  
ram - - - do - - - na e - - - is Do - mi -

A.2  
- ram - - - do - - - na e - - - is Do - mi -

T.2  
- ram - - - do - - - na e - - - is Do - mi -

B.2  
ram - - - do - - - na e - - - ram - - - is Do - mi -

Vc. *p*

## 3. Daybreak

Andante moderato  $\text{♩} = 68$ 

*p sostenuto, dolce e piacevole sempre*

S. There, there the sea birds come, there the sea birds

A. There, there the sea birds come, there the sea birds

T. There, there the sea birds come, there the sea birds.

B. There, there the sea birds come, there the sea birds

Vc. *pp*

*mp* *p*

come at first light in all weathers, on all days,

*mp* *p*

come at first light in all weathers, on all days,

*mp* *p*

come at first light in all weathers, on all days,

*mp* *p*

come at first light in all weathers, on all days,