

The Gift of Life

The Gift of Life was written early in 2015 as a result of a chance conversation at a choral convention in 2013 with an old friend, Terry Price. He was planning to retire from his position as Minister of Music at a church in Dallas, and his church wanted to give him an appropriate gift to mark his many years of service; I was already thinking I would like to write a fairly substantial new choral work with orchestra, and these two thoughts came together. Terry's church immediately agreed that this new work would be the right gift, and a theme soon suggested itself: in 1985 I had written a Requiem – which, like any Requiem, inevitably reflects on death – why not write the opposite, a work celebrating life?

Unlike a Requiem, where a set form of words is laid down in Catholic liturgy, no framework exists for a celebration of life, and I had to choose (and in three cases, write) texts which were appropriate to a theme rarely expressed in music since Haydn's wondrous oratorio *The Creation* in 1798. The six movements of *The Gift of Life* reflect different facets of the miracles of creation and of life, and I was happy to be able to include as the third of them my *Hymn to the Creator of Light*, originally written in 1992 as an unaccompanied double-choir motet in memory of the composer Herbert Howells on the occasion of the dedication of his new memorial window in Gloucester Cathedral. I had always felt slightly wistful that this piece was somewhat of an orphan on its own, and here was an opportunity to give it a home as part of a larger work. I added a discreet orchestral accompaniment to enrich the texture and to make it more consistent with the other five movements.