

Flanders Fields Reflections

for

String Orchestra

by

John Burge

Duration: Approximately 30 minutes

In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
 That mark our place; and in the sky
 The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
 Loved and were loved, and now we lie
 In Flanders fields,

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
 The torch; be yours to hold it high
 If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
 In Flanders fields.

-

John McCrae (1872-1918)

Sinfonia Toronto's recording of this work on Marquis Classics [81383] received the 2009 Juno Award for the Best Recording of a Canadian Classical Composition.

About the work...

Nurhan Arman, Music Director of the chamber orchestra, Sinfonia Toronto, commissioned *Flanders Fields Reflections* for the group's 2005-06 concert season. The composition was premiered in Toronto's Glenn Gould Studio on March 4th, 2006. In 2008, Nurhan and the orchestra subsequently recorded this work on a CD devoted entirely to some of Burge's music for string orchestra [Marquis Classics 81383]. *Flanders Fields Reflections* was the title track of this CD and the recording of this work received the 2009 Juno award for the Best Canadian Classical Composition.

That virtually all Canadian citizens and most English speakers in the Western world will immediately know that this musical work draws its inspiration from John McCrae's poem, "In Flanders Fields," is a good indication that this is perhaps the most famous poem ever written by a Canadian. Born in Guelph, Ontario, in 1872, Dr. John McCrae died in 1918 at Wimereux, France of pneumonia while on active service as a medical officer with the Royal Army Medical Corps in World War I. "In Flanders Fields," was first published in the magazine, *Punch*, in 1915, and later appeared posthumously in a small volume of his poetry that bears the same title.

Flanders Fields Reflections is scored for string orchestra and is in five movements, each of which is titled with a phrase taken from the poem. The poem is remarkable in the way that it follows the fixed poetic form of the rondeau (which requires the repetition of the opening phrase at the end of the second and third verses) while expressing the extreme emotional gamut of loss, despair, sacrifice, obligation and hope. When one hears this poem recited at a Remembrance Day service, the words resonate with a depth that is transcendental in its power to convey what Wilfred Owen, another World War I poet, described as, "...the pity of war." It is this resonance that the composer has tried to capture. At times, the music is literal in its approach, as with the wind effects in the first movement's, "The Poppies Blow," or the high, bird-like violin solo in the second movement's, "Still Bravely Singing." The middle movement's, "We Are The Dead," is captured in a slow funeral march while the final movement conveys the sentiment, "We Shall Not Sleep," with a melody that keeps returning and an extended series of endings. The work's most expressive music is found in the fourth movement's interpretation of "Loved and Were Loved." These few words represent so vividly, the individual tragedy that is contained within each and every death which is in stark contrast to the numerical tallies of war fatalities that can be summarized all too quickly. In this movement, a simple descending line of six notes is maintained throughout, as if to symbolically show that our search for love is perhaps humanities' most constant desire. As the poem makes clear, we cannot forget that we are alive and free today because of those who gave up their own lives or loved ones.

About the composer...

John Burge was born in Dryden, Ontario in 1961. He holds degrees from the University of Toronto (B.Mus. and M.Mus.) and the University of British Columbia (D.M.A.) where his composition professors included John Beckwith, Walter Buczynski, Stephen Chatman, John Hawkins and Derek Holman. Since 1987 he has been teaching at the School of Music, Queen's University where he is a Professor of Composition and Theory. In addition to teaching at Queen's, he was Composer-in-Residence for National Youth Orchestra of Canada during their three-week residency in Kingston, Ontario in 2001, 2002 and 2003. The National Youth Orchestra premiered Burge's composition, *Sonic Architecture*, on their tour of Canada in 2003. A passionate advocate of Canadian music, he was a member of the executive of the Canadian League of Composers for fourteen years, serving as President from 1998-2006.

Burge has written music for a variety of ensembles and instrumentalists but he is particularly recognized for his choral music, much of it involving orchestral accompaniment. Many of these works have been published by Boosey and Hawkes Music Publishers. His orchestral compositions include two symphonies, a piano concerto, a trumpet concerto, a clarinet concerto and a number of orchestral tone poems including: *Rocky Mountain Overture*, *Snowdrift* and *The Canadian Shield*. He has also composed a number of pieces for string orchestra, the most popular being his work, *Upper Canada Fiddle Suite*, which has been performed by ensembles across Canada.

Flanders Fields Reflections

I. The Poppies Blow	page 1
II. Still Bravely Singing	page 11
III. We Are the Dead	page 18
IV. Loved and Were Loved	page 22
V. We Shall Not Sleep	page 26

Performance Advice

The vocalization of “sh” at the end of the outer movements needs to be audible and with a small ensemble, the players may need encouragement. To make the exit of the violins visually effective, it would be advantageous if the second violins were on the conductor’s right hand side. In this way the first violins can move easily to stage left (or the left side of the hall) and the second violins to stage right (or the right side of the hall).

Flanders Fields Reflections

I. The Poppies Blow

Moderato (♩ = c. 84)

Play 2nd time only *con sord.*

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III. We Are The Dead

Adagio (♩ = c. 58)

con sord. *div.*

Violin I
pp *p* *pp* *mp* *pp* *mp*

Violin II
pp *p* *pp* *mp* *pp* *mp*

Viola
pp *p* *pp* *mp* *pp* *mp*

Cello
con sord. *sempre p*

Contrabass
con sord. *sempre p*

9

Vln. I
pp *mp* *pp* *mp* *pp* *mf*

Vln. II
pp *mp* *pp* *mp* *pp* *mf*

Vla.
pp *mp* *pp* *mp* *pp* *mf*

Vc.
pp *mp* *pp* *mp* *pp* *mf*

Cb.
pp *mp* *pp* *mp* *pp* *mf*

G (div. a 3)

17

Vln. I
p *f* (sub.) *(mp)* *f* *(mp)* *mf* *mf*

Vln. II
p *f* (sub.) *(mp)* *f* *(mp)* *mf* *mf*


Vla.
p *f* (sub.) *(mp)* *f* *(mp)* *mf* *mf*

Vc.
p *(sempre p)*

Cb.
p *(sempre p)*

senza sord. V

molto rall. **K** *a tempo*

rit. L *a tempo*
(V) 

19

I

Vln. I

mp

mf

p (no cresc.)

II

(no cresc.)

mf

p

mp

Vla.

cresc.

mf

p

Vc.

cresc.

mf

p

Cb.

cresc.

mf

p

V. We Shall Not Sleep

Non troppo lento (♩ = c. 60)
div. a 4 (only 4 players)

Violin I: *p* *no vib.* *mp* *p*

Violin II: *div. a 3 (only 3 players)* *p* *no vib.*

Viola: *solo (one player)* *mp espr.* *mf* *f* *p* *no vib.*

Cello: *p*

Contrabass: *p*

Violin I: *solo (one player)* *mp espr. (normal vib.)* *mf* *mp* *f* *mp* *mf* *p (sub.)* *mp*

Violin II: *mf* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp*

Viola: *mf* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *p* *mp*

Cello: *p*

Contrabass: *p*

Violin I: *p* *mf* *p* *tutti* *p* *normal vib.*

Violin II: *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *tutti* *p* *normal vib.*

Viola: *p* *mp* *p* *mp* *tutti* *p* *normal vib.*

Cello: *pizz. sempre p*

Contrabass: *p*