

Prayer for the Innocents (string orchestra version)

for String Orchestra

Composer: Avner Dorman

Year: 2009

Duration: 12 min

Orchestration: str

Publisher: G Schirmer Inc

Program Note

In September 2004, terrorists overran a school in Beslan, Russia, and held its pupils and teachers hostage for a number of days, culminating in the murder of at least 150 pupils. Thereafter, the Russian Archbishop eulogized them in a prayer he called "Prayer for the Innocents." The eulogy, and its circumstances, affected me deeply, and prompted me to dedicate the middle movement of my second string quartet to the memory of the children. I later revisited this music in 2008 when creating an octet version for the Keshet Eilon Music Center in Israel.

For this string orchestra version, I have expanded Prayer for the Innocents into a piece for a split string orchestra—two full string groups are seated on opposite sides of the stage. The piece consists of three sections, opening with a cadenza played by the left half of the first violins. The cadenza is based on a simple repetitive gesture, suggesting a person praying. The heart of the piece lies in the second section, in which the ensemble plays the prayer itself. Here I wanted to blend Western and Eastern music traditions so that the prayer would reflect the deep connection between these cultures despite the current apparent antagonism between them. The style of the prayer when it is first played (by the string grouping to the right) is similar to that of instrumental music of the late Renaissance or the early Baroque. Immediately thereafter, the second string grouping responds by repeating the same theme, but with the addition of Eastern

elements and using a Middle Eastern scale typified by quarter tones. Both string groups then explore the depth of the prayer and of the pain it expresses, until it is impossible to identify which is praying in a Western style and which in an Eastern style. The third section presents a recapitulation of the elements of the opening cadenza, this time not by the first violins alone but in the form of an eight-part canon, suggesting a desert wind.

Related works:

[Prayer for the Innocents \(string octet\)](#)

[Prayer for the Innocents \(string orchestra\)](#)

[String Quartet No. 2 - Mirage](#)

Performance Note:

As with the double quartet version of this work, the composer asks that the orchestra be split into two full string groups seated at stage left and stage right. If the basses are not equipped with C extensions they may transpose up an octave as needed.

Avner Dorman

G Schirmer Inc

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