

Zac Flasch

Bohuslav Martinů's Cantata *The Field Mass* (Polní mše) (1939): A Musical Elegy for Czech Military Volunteers on the French Frontline in WWI

My research revolves around Czech composer Bohuslav Martinů's (1890-1959) cantata *The Field Mass* H. 279 (1939) (based on various biblical and poetry by Jiří Mucha). Using the musico-literary concept and existing theories of elegy, this research discusses Martinů's choice of a dark and somber orchestration and timbre, a tonally-centered but post-tonally infused use of harmonic color, as well as military topical associations to argue that Martinů's *The Field Mass* represents a poignant tribute to those Czech Military Volunteers who put their lives on the line in WW1. Using the concept of Elegy, I aim to unpack the various musical, compositional, poetic, and aesthetic techniques that were employed by Martinu as a composer and Mucha as a librettist in order to better understand the grim nature of war through a poetic perspective of those who were on the front lines of battle, far from home. I want to accomplish this by exploring the relationship between the biblical text and Mucha's poetry and the unique way in which Martinu paints these texts in a musical way that captures the grim sentiment of such a dark moment in human history. This research takes musicological works by Martinů scholars such as James F. Rybka and Jan Ledeč as well as scholarship on Jiří Mucha as a starting point and brings them together with music-analytical inquiry on the concept of elegy. By doing this research, the piece emerges in a new light particularly with regard to its humanity and creates a beautiful musical tribute to the soldiers who gave their lives for the greater cause of freedom and love of country.

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