Requiem Program Notes:

Overall, the work is a prayer for rest ("Requiem") for the living, as much as for the deceased. It's a "grant US rest", even more than a "grant THEM rest".

The whole work is tied together motivically by the opening three notes that you hear- they form the basis of all the development in the first movement, the pitch material of the accompaniment figure in the second movement (alluding to the traditional Dies Irae plainchant, even though I'm not using the Dies Irae text), the opening of the fourth movement (obviously) where the descent goes one note farther, and starts to find a destination/goal/"rest" if you will), the recap moments throughout the fifth movement, and then, in one last gesture, the final three notes of the entire work are those three pitches, now ascending (instead of descending), as if reaching the heavens.

The first movement pours out the grief of the Requiem and Kyrie prayers, facing grief head-on and grappling with the sorrow that is common to all human existence.

The second movement bitterly portrays the problem of pain that we all wrestle with, and which causes a crisis of faith for many people. It expounds on the "vanity of vanities, all is vanity" refrain from Ecclesiastes, with no small amount of anger and bitterness and "rage against the machine". The middle section quotes Job, who is the best biblical example we have of the problem of pain, and even he says, in his darkest moment, it would have been better if I hadn't been born."

The third movement is the Agnus Dei, out of its traditional order, because at that point in the narrative, I need to see the Lamb of God, who died to redeem mankind from all fallenness- this vanity and pain and sorrow and destruction.

It's only after recognizing the Lamb of God that we can then turn, in this narrative, to the Sanctus. It becomes a response to the Agnus Dei, instead of prelude to it as in the normal liturgical order. Interestingly, I see the phrase "heaven and earth are full of Thy glory" as not merely a worship moment, but actually a part of the Divine answer to the problem of pain. Looking to Job again, God's answer to the problem of pain is literally, "Look at my works of creation- see my transcendent power and majesty" and of course Job is then humbled by the realization. So my vocal score includes a quote of Job 38 at the top of this movement- where God says to Job "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth...when the stars sang together for joy?" As you can see, then, this movement depicts the wonder of the heavens and earth (pleni sunt caeli et terra gloria tua) as a Divine answer to the problem of pain. My setting of the Sanctus text is literally a depiction of God's wondrous glory in three different places: the universe (inspired by that Deep Field picture from the Hubble Telescope), earth as viewed from the International Space Station (there are fantastic videos on Youtube), and finally, mankind, God's wondrous image-bearers, who demonstrate his glory even more directly than all the rest of this. There are three sections to the piece which are inspired by these three thoughts- an ethereal section for the Hubble image, a warmer section with more motion that grows very majestic for the view of Earth, and then a bustling energetic final section, teeming with the life and energy of a city full of image-bearers.

The final movement is simply an arrival at rest and peace, not just in the realization of the "eternal light" which God offers those who seek him, but even here and now, for us, the living, on earth- our Requiem, our Rest, is found in Christ. I purposely quoted "Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you....REST", because it's the answer to the opening prayer for rest. The answer to that prayer is already given, there, in Matthew 11- Christ is our rest. I purposely, then, lined up the English word "rest" with the return of the Latin word "Requiem" in this final movement- you can see it in the score, or hear it in the performance when the tenor solo ends and the choir begins again, "Requiem aeternam".

Musically, a major work like this allowed me to work out ideas on a much larger scale than I can in, say, a typical 3-4 minute choral anthem. The first movement allowed me to unfold one idea’s possibilities, developing it slowly over a much longer span. The second movement, because of the subject matter, was a great opportunity to write something stern or even a bit “nasty”, instead of sicky-sweet or sappy. By the time I was done, it contains octatonicism, unexpected rhythmic figures, even great big tone clusters for the organ pedals. The third movement was actually very difficult to write even though it sounds simple and direct- it took a while to get all the musical ideas to feel inevitable, proportionate, and properly paced as they unfold over time. The fourth movement allowed me to experiment with some polymeter, with those groupings of 3 in the harp and percussion while the choir floats over top of them in their own meter; I also had a great time carefully managing the huge buildup of energy throughout, that culminates in the explosion of energy in the final section. And of course the fifth movement just needed to pull everything together, tie up loose ends motivically, and usher us off into eternal rest.

The work was written over a period of probably 16 months or so, from early 2012 through mid-2013. Frankly, most of my effort was spent discarding ideas that were bad, or mediocre, or clichéd, or decent, or even “pretty good”, in the hopes of only using ideas that were really, truly inspired. It’s a daunting task to set these ancient texts in a modern setting. I strove to write something appropriate to their gravity, and something that would make a lasting impression. I hope the end result does, indeed, profoundly affect the listeners- and performers as well.