

What was I thinking?

January 28, 2021



It's a small world

I've said before, every year we think once Christmas is behind us, things will slow down in January and get easier. Yet that never seems to really happen. I haven't written in a while because I've had some other things calling for my time and energy.

Our choir family, our church, and our community are heartbroken over the loss of Jill Crim. The Crims are part of our choir family, and I know we all have them in our prayers. It's hard to lose a loved one at any time, but our current situation doesn't permit us to gather in person as we normally would, and that makes grief much harder. Let's do anything and everything we can to support the Crims in their journey through grief.

As Ryan Baer said, if these were in "normal times," there would have been a packed choir loft and plans for overflow seating for Jill's service, but these aren't "normal times." Instead of dwelling on what we couldn't do, we had to turn our attention toward what we could do. Matt Crim and I had several conversations about music. You probably know Matt is a great lover of music, and for his sake and Jill's, not just any music would do. Matt told me about some music he had been listening to that had been healing for him, and of course, that was included.

I told Matt about a piece I learned and played after my mother died. *In Memory – H. H. L.* by North Carolina composer Dan Locklair, was written in memory of his mother. I learned about Locklair's music when I was in school at Indiana because my organ teacher there is a great champion of his music as well as a friend of his.

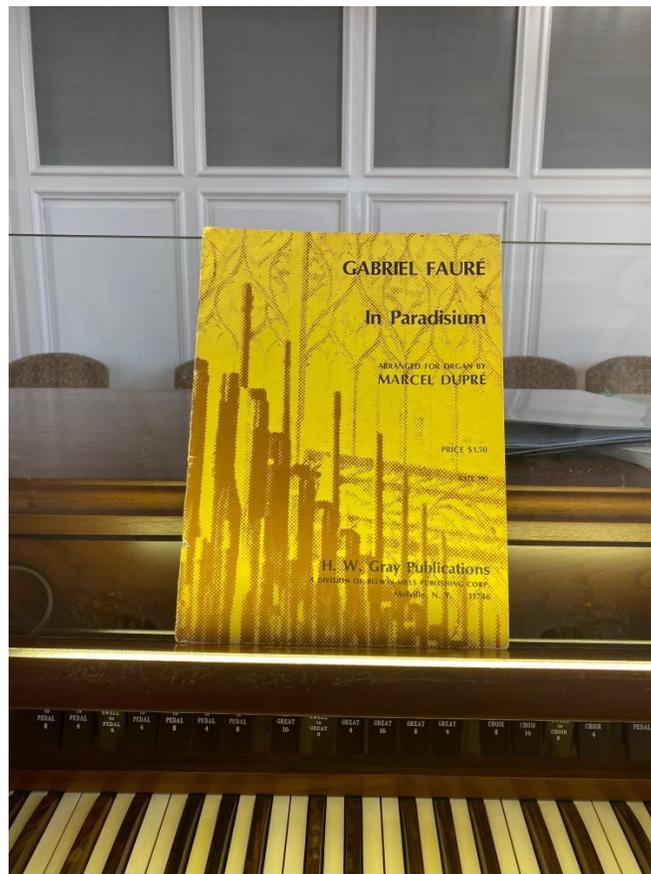
During my time in Winston-Salem, NC, where Locklair lives, I met him and have had some wonderful conversations with him. I first heard *In Memory – H. H. L.* in a lecture he gave about his compositions. It was originally for strings. He explained the symbolism in the music, including what's called a "plagal cadence," sometimes known in church as the "amen cadence" because we used to sing "amen" to those chords at the end of hymns. He thought that was an appropriate symbol of the finality of his mother's earthly life. He also includes a few notes of *Jesus Loves Me* near the end, because his mother was a Sunday school teacher of young children. Locklair later arranged the piece for organ solo. I heard my teacher play it on recitals so I bought the music, but it sat on my shelf until after my mother died. It was then that I started learning it, and it was a healing for me to do so. I told Matt that story and sent him a link to a recording, and he said "yes" to playing it as part of Jill's service.

Then I remembered another piece sitting on my shelf, purchased but untouched. Gabriel Fauré's *Requiem* is a favorite and meaningful piece for many of us. I've studied, sung, accompanied, and directed it many times over the years. We sang it here in 2018. When I think back to who was in the choir then, I remember in particular Leita Cobb and John Kipp. I also remember one of our instrumentalists for that performance, a bass player named Diogo Baggio Lima. It's easy to think of hired musician as people playing a "gig" and getting a check, but professional musicians are people too. I still have the very nice e-mail Diogo sent to me after our performance in which he wrote: "It was a true pleasure for me to play such a terrific piece. Every work by Fauré I've played left me a beautiful memory. I wanted to tell you that I received the sad news that one of my most beloved teachers in Brazil had passed away minutes before we played the *Requiem*. I think there wouldn't be a better way for me to pray for him than our concert yesterday." Wow.

In 2019, I was asked to play the organ for a performance of Fauré's *Requiem* at UGA. At the time, I knew my mother was getting near the end of her life. I was surprised several times when I got into my car, and if I didn't select a piece of music to listen to, iTunes would "randomly" select Fauré's *Requiem*. I couldn't decide if that was a coincidence or if God had turned my iTunes into a modern-day burning bush.

A Canadian organist, Jan Overduin, wrote a book on organ improvisation. I've never met him in person, but his book was part of my dissertation, and I interviewed him over the phone. In 2019, Overduin posted a recording of himself playing an organ solo arrangement of *In Paradisium*, the last movement of Fauré's *Requiem*. I never knew the arrangement existed, and I learned it was out of print. I called my great music dealer in Nashville who has a reputation for finding hard-to-find music. She just

happened to have one old used copy in a collection of music donated to her shop. I bought it for \$1.50.



When it came, I put it on the shelf where it stayed untouched, until just over a week ago.

While feeling the frustration and helplessness of not being able to gather as a choir and sing as we would in “normal times,” I remembered the organ solo arrangement of Fauré’s *In Paradisium*. I told Matt about the idea and he said “yes.” So I started practicing, and I could hear the words:

May the angels lead you into paradise; may the Martyrs welcome you on your arrival, and lead you into the holy city of Jerusalem. May a choir of angels welcome you, and, with poor Lazarus, may you have eternal rest.

It’s hard to sing for funerals. Your throat gets a lump in it, you can’t see the music through your tears, but somehow, we do it. It was sad that we couldn’t do it together for Jill, but I know we were all “together” in spirit. It became my job to represent all

of us and to “sing” Fauré’s music through the organ. I still had trouble seeing through the tears.

The words above mention being welcomed by a choir of angels. We sometimes talk of a heavenly choir of saints and angels. I don’t know who gets to be in that choir. (I hope there’s not an audition!) But maybe that heavenly choir that welcomed Jill included Leita Cobb, John Kipp, Wayne Middendorf, John Reed, and many, many others. We don’t know. I guess we’ll find out when we get there.

God be with you till we meet again.

John