Dan Forrest on his *Requiem For The Living*:

“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 Ultra Deep Field picture from the Hubble Telescope), earth as viewed from the orbiting International Space Station (there are fantastic videos
on Youtube where you can see the lights of cities (and nations!) at night, territorial boundaries, rivers, the northern lights, thunderstorms, and all sorts of things), and finally, mankind, God's wondrous image-bearers, who demonstrate his glory even more directly than all the rest of the wonders of the heavens. There are three sections to the piece which are inspired by these three thoughts- an ethereal section for the Hubble image, a warmer section that starts to “come down to earth” with more motion that eventually grows very majestic, and then a bustling energetic final section, coming right down into the middle of a city, teeming with the life and energy of a metropolis full of these image-bearers who are an even more wondrous part of creation than the heavens themselves.

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 Introit's 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, gradually adding texture and register and counterpoint until the grief just boils over. The second movement, because of the subject matter, was a great opportunity to write something stern or even a bit “nasty”, instead of sickly-sweet or sappy. By the time I was done, it contained octatonicism, unexpected rhythmic figures, even big tone clusters for the organ pedals. Even though I didn’t use the Dies Irae text, here, I still alluded to the famous Dies Irae chant, musically, all throughout the orchestral accompaniment figures. The third movement was actually very difficult to write even though it sounds simple and direct- it took a long time 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 perceived groupings of 3 in the harp and percussion while the choir floats over top of them in their own meter; I also had to carefully manage 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. At the risk of stating what many may have already observed, the final three notes in the orchestra are the meta-motive, scale degrees 3-2-1, now inverted into 1-2,...3 (!) where the 3 is major instead of minor. This is the final answer to our prayers for rest, musically speaking- we’ve found it. The door opens, finally, so to speak.

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 tried to write something appropriate to their gravity, and something that would make a lasting impression for some time to come. I hope the end result does, indeed, profoundly affect the listeners- and performers as well.”

-Dan Forrest
Meet Dan Forrest

Dan Forrest (b. 1978) has been described as “a composer of substance” (Columbus Dispatch), whose works have been hailed as “…magnificent, very cleverly constructed sound sculpture” (San Francisco Classical Voice), and “superb choral writing...full of spine-tingling moments” (Salt Lake Tribune). Since its first publication in 2001, Dan’s music has sold more than a million copies, and is already firmly established in the repertoire of choirs in the U.S. and abroad.

Dan’s choral works have received numerous awards and distinctions, including the ASCAP Morton Gould Young Composer’s Award, the ACDA Raymond Brock Award, a Meet The Composer grant, the ALCM Raabe Prize, and many others. His “A Basque Lullaby” for wind band has been selected for performance at numerous conventions and festivals in the U.S. and internationally. His commissioned choral works have been premiered in major venues around the world, ranging from the World Choral Symposium (Argentina) to Izumi Hall (Osaka, Japan) to Carnegie Hall, the Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, and ACDA conventions. His music has been broadcast multiple times on American Public Media’s “Performance Today”. His new Requiem for the Living has quickly become his best-known work, having received overwhelming acclaim since its 2013 premiere, and is receiving hundreds of performances in the US, Canada, South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and multiple performances in Carnegie Hall.

Dan is highly active in the music publishing industry, both in concert choral music (maintaining a choral series in his name with Hinshaw Music) and in church choral music (serving as associate editor at Beckenhorst Press), and has published with more than a dozen publishers. He has adjudicated numerous regional and national composition contests. Dan keeps a full schedule of commissions, workshops, recordings, adjunct professorships, and residencies with universities, churches, and community ensembles, collaborating as accompanist, presenting his music, and teaching composition and theory.

Dan holds a doctoral degree in composition from the University of Kansas and a master’s degree in piano performance. His academic background includes several years as a professor and department head (music theory and composition) in higher education.