

Conditor alme siderum

(Creator of the Starry Heavens)

(2022)

for soprano and string orchestra



Benjamin Gabbay (b. 1995)

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Text: Anonymous, 7th century

Duration: 5"30"

The 7th-century Latin vesper "Conditor alme siderum" is an ancient Advent prayer with several, more modern, incarnations, including the 17th-century "Creator alme siderum" and many 19th-century English hymns along the lines of "Creator of the Starry Height." I was drawn to set the original Latin text not only for its poetic majesty, but also for its comparative proximity to the time of the earliest Christians. It was my hope, in setting this ancient text to an original melody, that I might be able to conceive and convey to contemporary ears something of the awe and hope felt by those who first experienced Christ's birth.

The piece opens on the scene of the poem's "siderum" ("stars"), depicted by the scintillating harmonics of the upper strings, with the solo voice far beneath. With every stanza, the sweeping gestures of the strings swell and fall until ultimately coming to rest in their lowest registers—painting the miraculous descent of Christ from Heaven to Earth.

Conditor alme siderum
aeterna lux credentium
Christe redemptor omnium
exaudi preces supplicum

*Kind creator of the stars,
eternal light of believers,
O Christ, Redeemer of all,
hear the petitions of your supplicants.*

Qui condolens interitu
mortis perire saeculum
salvasti mundum languidum
donans reis remedium.

*You are the one, condoling
with our race doomed to perish,
Who saved the fainting world,
giving the remedy to all things.*

Vergente mundi vespere
uti sponsus de thalamo
egressus honestissima
Virginis matris clausula.

*When the world's evening drew near,
as a bridegroom from his chamber,
He came forth from the most honored
womb of a Virgin Mother.*

Cuius forti potentiae
genu curvantur omnia
caelestia, terrestria
nutu fatentur subdita.

*To Whose almighty power
all bow on bended knee,
all things of Heaven and Earth
submit themselves to His command.*

Sit, Christe rex piissime
tibi Patrique gloria
cum Spiritu Paraclito
in sempiterna saecula.
Amen.

*To you, O Christ, King most loving,
and to the Father be glory
with the Spirit, the Paraclete,
for everlasting ages.
Amen.*

- Anonymous, 7th century*

- Adapted from a translation by Ken Myers,
www.canticasacra.org

*The 5th stanza of the original text has been omitted in this setting