

Song for Danny

by Robert Wallace

I

November 7, Christ Hospital, 5 p.m., bedside

Cool, cool as a creek
From a mountain stream,
Touching the arm of the living man I love
For the last time.

Electronic monitor:
Not the invisible one to protect from theft,
But the visible one to measure the pulse of a life,
Ebbing, unbelievably, away.

Like three musical staves in motion,
Three dancing red lines,
Each of them three peaks wide,
Each peak of the top line truncated, lopped,
Like a mountain with its top removed.
Ditto the second moving line of peaks,
Each cut off in a crooked plateau.

But that third moving line,
The spirit under the dust,
Rising in triune splendor,
Time after time,
One peak as perfect as the next,
As we will remember the love
Of this mentoring shepherd we have lost.

II

Three hours later, Music Hall, Symphonic Requiem by Benjamin Britten

The first movement is *Lacrymosa*,
For the requiem movement Mozart never finished,
Dying much too soon.

Bold drums, enough to wake the dead,
Strummed harps providing the subsequent rhythm:
Who said tender harpstrings
Cannot be strong as beaten leather?

This opening tempo is *Andante ben misurato*.
Danny, we measure your tempo with the living heart
You opened, always, to each and all.

The *Dies irae* is *Allegro con fuoco*,
 Speedy with fire,
 As were the composer and his partner Peter,
 Leaving the war-like Britain they could not abide,
 Residing in Amityville, Long Island,
 When the commission arrived from Japan,
 For a work of peaceful death in a world of war.

Requiem aeternam, eternal afterlife,
 Mellow, warm, soothing, sustaining,
 Everything you were for all of us,
 Ever unwavering until that blood vessel burst,
 Fixing your everlasting love in our hearts forever.

III

After intermission, German Requiem by Johannes Brahms

As if for you, one hundred thirty singers
 Ascend the risers deep on stage
 To sound the words a composer bereft
 Of his friend Robert and his mother Johanna
 Set to symphonic music.

Not from the classic Latin text,
 But from Luther's German bible,
 Lines from Peter, James, and John,
 From Isaiah and Psalms to Revelation,
 In this performance pivoting on the word *Geheimnis*,
 Sung by baritone Matthias Goerne in section six,
 "*Denn wir haben*"—where "we have here
 No lasting place to stay," from Hebrews,
 Is answered by this Corinthian affirmation:
 "Behold, I tell you a mystery;
 We shall not all sleep,
 But we shall all be transformed;
 And that quickly,
 At the sound of the last trumpet."

How lovely *is* thy dwelling place, Danny,
 Whose own baritone voice never held back that laughter,
 Whose hugging arms warmed even the most churlish,
 Whose home in our hearts is one thing in this restless world
 To hold secure,
 Knowing we have known, day after day,
 For many years more than most are blessed to know it,
 Beauty of the human spirit in endless acts of love.