

Writing the Requiem

May de la Rue

from

'Fifty Miles with my Dad'

Just as my musical life played a part in my faith, the opposite was also true. I was very taken by the requiem as a musical genre, and when I studied composition at school I had a stab at a piece based on the text of the *Sanctus*. I'd often arranged simple tunes for school bands, but this was a first attempt at something more serious.

It didn't occur to me then that one day, while still at school, I'd be invited to develop the piece into a full-scale requiem, for performance on Remembrance Sunday by our choral society with a professional orchestra.

A special joy was writing the *Benedictus* as a solo part for my friend Natalie Houlston. By now I knew her voice very well, and we discussed how far we could stretch her sustained high notes. The score amounted to a portrait of a wonderful singer, and when she saw it she was moved to tears.

In the Temple Speech Room – the Edwardian assembly hall where concerts were held – all seven hundred and fifty seats were booked. It was the school's 450th anniversary year, and its first known performance of such a piece by a resident pupil.

When the evening came, and I took my place in the choir, everyone on stage sang and played their hearts out. Natalie surpassed herself, and when we came to the front for our bows we fell into each other's arms. Everyone's efforts had made me the most privileged soul in the building.