
GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD

God So loved the World is the central, and most popular, movement of *The Crucifixion* by Sir John Stainer. It is often performed as a stand alone piece by choirs of all standards. It is a gem. Stainer was highly regarded during his life time.

He wrote songs as well as cantatas, services, anthems, and other music for the church service. He also published treatises on the organ and music theory and collaborated on a dictionary of musical terms. Organist at St. Michael's College, Tenbury and St. Paul's Cathedral he was professor of music at Oxford at the end of his career. John Stainer died on 31st March 1901 (120 years ago this year).

God So Loved the World is a setting of words from St. John's gospel:

"God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." (Chapter 3, verses 16 and 17).

These are Jesus' prophetic words in an answer to questions about who he might be from Nicodemus.

The setting is in two distinct sections, the second only two bars longer than the first. The first section delivers the entire text while the second only has the first verse repeating everlasting life four times, ending with three, contemplative repetitions of the first line. The first 21 bars of both sections are virtually identical.

Apart from four bars in the middle of the first section and two in the second the whole piece is in four homophonic parts with all the voices singing the same words simultaneously. It is in a typical Victorian, Romantic style with conventional harmonies with occasional chromatic notes setting up predictable, short term modulations. It is in the very bright, joyful key of D major but the chromaticism introduces a bitter sweet note. The second half of the first section starts in the relative B minor, ending up in F# minor.

The guidance at the beginning is **Andante, ma non lento** - a moderate pace but not slow. It is an emotional piece with an underlying joy and exhilaration at the prospect of *everlasting life*. I think that it is often sung too slowly and too sadly.