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| Tavener, John Kenneth (1944 – 2013) |
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| John Tavener was a prolific English composer whose style evolved from an early engagement with modernism, through its rejection, to his later “holy minimalism.” His absorption in the 1960s of the late serial style of Stravinsky had a profound effect on his subsequent development. The spiritual and musical crisis that Tavener underwent during the composition and disastrous première of his highly dissonant, expressionistic opera *Thérèse* was resolved by a change of religious orientation (he was received into the Orthodox Church in 1977) and a gradual change of musical style. |
| John Tavener was an English composer. He studied at the Royal Academy of Music in London, where his composition teachers were Lennox Berkeley and David Lumsdaine. His earliest success was with the cantata *The Whale*, first performed at the inaugural concert of the London Sinfonietta in 1968. This was followed by *Celtic Requiem* in 1969. Both works were recorded on the Beatles’ Apple label. Tavener began teaching at Trinity College in 1969.  Tavener was extremely prolific. Amongst his most significant compositions of the following decades are *Últimos Ritos* (1972), the opera *Thérèse* (1973-6), *Akhmatova: Requiem* (1979-80), *Ikon of Light* (1984), *Orthodox Vigil Service* (1984) and *Akathist of Thanksgiving* (1986-7). The huge unexpected success of *The Protecting Veil* for solo cello and orchestra (1987) brought his music to the attention of a wider audience than ever before. Subsequent large-scale works of significance are *Resurrection* (1989), *Apocalypse* (1993), *Fall and Resurrection* (1997), *Total Eclipse* (1999), *The Veil of the Temple* (2001), *Laila* (2004),[*Sollemnitas in Conceptione Immaculata Beatae Mariae Virginis*](http://www.johntavener.com/work/sollemnitas-in-conceptione-immaculata-beatae-mariae-virginis/) (2006) and *Requiem* (2007). Tavener was knighted in the 2000 honours list. Style Tavener’s early engagement with modernism was later very publicly rejected, but his absorption in the 1960s of the late serial style of Stravinsky had a profound effect on his subsequent development. In such works as *The Whale* and *Celtic Requiem*, the use of collage and quotation more than balances the quest for ritualized objectivity. The attraction towards sentimentality that has also been a constant in Tavener’s work is clearly audible in the Messiaen-influenced lushness of *In alium* and *Celtic Requiem*.  Quotation of earlier music continued to be of interest to Tavener, and was a particular feature of the vast *Últimos Ritos* and the song cycle *Canciones Españolas* (specifically Bach and 16th century Spanish songs). The spiritual and musical crisis that Tavener underwent during the composition and disastrous première of his highly dissonant, expressionistic opera *Thérèse* was resolved by a change of religious orientation (he was received into the Orthodox Church in 1977) and a gradual change of musical style.  Works written during this period, such as *Kyklike Kinesis* (1977), *Mandelion* for organ (1981) and *Prayer for the World* (1981) in spite of their connection to the world of Orthodox spirituality and their increasingly spare textures, continued to be constructed in much the same way as the music of the preceding years, using twelve-note melodic writing and a high level of dissonance. With the lengthy *Akhmatova: Requiem* (1979-80), the twelve-note technique had become much looser and more instinctive, but it was with shorter, unaccompanied choral works such as *Funeral Ikos* and *The Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete* (both 1981) that Tavener discovered a new, essentially tonal, simplicity and made a decisive break with modernism, connecting this change of vocabulary to his ever-deeper interest in liturgical and spiritual texts from the Orthodox Christian tradition, such as the Prayer to the Holy Spirit by St Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022), set in *Ikon of Light* (1984). This said, his use of modal elements from Eastern chant traditions has tended to be within the context of diatonic tonality.  While Tavener’s more recent interest in non-Christian religions, including Hinduism (*The Veil of the Temple*, 2001, *Laila*, 2004), Buddhism (*Shûnya*, 2002) and Islam (*The Beautiful Names*, 2003, *Two Hadiths,* 2007) and his return to Roman Catholic liturgical structures (*[Sollemnitas in Conceptione Immaculata Beatae Mariae Virginis](http://www.johntavener.com/work/sollemnitas-in-conceptione-immaculata-beatae-mariae-virginis/)*, 2006 and *Requiem*, 2007) brought a renewed lushness and a more saturated harmonic style to his work, his rejection of modernism remained a constant until the end of his career. Key Works This is a necessarily very incomplete list. Tavener was extremely prolific, and many more works from throughout his career are available for exploration.  *Genesis*, tenor solo, chorus, narrator, brass, percussion, organ, piano, string quartet 1962  Piano Concerto, piano solo, horns, timpani, strings 1962-3  *Three Holy Sonnets of John Donne*, baritone solo, brass, percussion, strings 1962  *The Cappemakers* 1964 (revised 1965)  *Cain and Abel*, 4 solo voices and orchestra 1965  *The Whale*, mezzo-soprano, baritone, chorus, narrator, orchestra, tape, loud hailers (1965-66)  *In Alium*, high soprano, Hammond organ, grand organ, piano, strings, tape 1968  *Celtic Requiem*, high soprano solo, children's chorus, adult chorus, orchestra 1969  *Little Requiem for Father Malachy Lynch*, chorus, flutes trumpet, organ, strings 1972  *Canciones Españolas*, 2 high voices, flutes, organ, harpsichord, percussion 1972  *Ultimos Ritos*, mezzo-soprano, 12 basses, SATB soloists, 5 male speaking voices, chorus, orchestra, tape 1972  *Thérèse* (opera), soprano, bass and 2 tenor soloists, chorus, children's chorus, orchestra 1973-76  The Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, celebrant and chorus 1976  *Kyklike Kinesis*, soprano, cello, chorus, orchestra 1977  *Akhmatova: Requiem*, soprano, bass, orchestra 1979-80  *The Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete*, chorus 1981  *Prayer for the World*, chorus 1981  *Mandelion*, organ 1981  *Funeral Ikos*, chorus 1981  *Doxa*, chorus 1982  *The Lamb*, chorus 1982  *Ikon of Light*, chorus and string trio 1983  Orthodox Vigil Service, celebrants, chorus, handbells 1984  *Akathist of Thanksgiving*, soloists, chorus, percussion, organ, strings 1986  *Resurrection*, soloists, chorus, recorders, brass, percussion, organ, string quartet 1988  *We Shall See Him As He Is*, tenor and soprano soloists, chorus, trumpets, percussion, organ, strings 1990  *The Apocalypse*, tenor, bass, soprano, mezzo and saxophone soloists, 7 male-voice choirs, 7 counter-tenors, children's choir, recorders, brass, percussion, handbells, organ, strings, string quartet 1991-2  *Song For Athene*, chorus 1993  *Funeral Canticle*, SATB 1996  *Eternity's Sunrise*, soprano solo, flute, oboe, lute, handbells, strings 1997  *Samaveda*, soprano, flute and tempura 1997  *Fall and Resurrection*, orchestra and soloists 1997  *Total Eclipse*, for treble, countertenor, tenor, saxophone, chorus & orchestra 1999  *Ikon of Eros*, soprano, baritone and violin soloists, chorus, orchestra 2000  *Lamentations and Praises*, male chorus, orchestra/ensemble 2000  *The Veil of the Temple*, soprano soloist, boy’s choir, chorus, ensemble 2001  *Lament for Jerusalem*, soprano and counter-tenor soloists, chorus, orchestra 2002  *Hymn of Dawn*, soprano, baritone, violin and flute soloists, orchestra 2002  *Shûnya*, chorus, temple bowl 2002  *The Beautiful Names*, tenor soloist, chorus, semi-chorus, orchestra 2003  *Schuon Lieder*, soprano, string quartet, piano, 4 temple bowls 2003  *Laila*, soprano and tenor soloists, orchestra 2004  *Lalishri*, violin, strings 2006  *Sollemnitas in Conceptione Immaculata Beatae Mariae Virginis*, soprano, string quartet, percussion, double chorus, tenor, 2 baritone, 4 bass soloists, orchestra 2006  *Towards Silence*, four string quartets, large Tibetan temple bowl 2007  *Requiem*, cello, soprano, tenor soloists, chorus, orchestra 2007  *Two Hadiths*, female chorus and renaissance bray harp 2007  *They are All Gone into the World of Light*, chorus 2011 |
| Further reading:  (Dennis)  (Griffiths, Tavener and Ultimos Ritos)  (Griffiths)  (Haydon)  (Martland)  (Moody)  (Moody, The Mystic's Point of View)  (Moody and Philips, John Tavener's Music for the Church)  (Moody, Music as a Sacred Art)  (Moody, The Mind and the Heart: Mysticism and Music in the Experience of Contemporary Eastern Orthodox Composers)  (Payne)  (Philips) |