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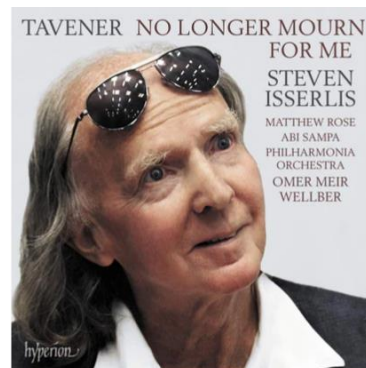
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# Tavener: No longer mourn for me

Steven Isserlis (cello), Matthew Rose (bass), et al;  
Philharmonic Orchestra/Omer Meir Wellber  
(Hyperion)

## Our rating

★★★★★ 5.0



## Tavener

No longer mourn for me – *Preces and Responses*; *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*; *Mahamatar*;  
*Popule meus*; *Three Shakespeare Sonnets* – No longer mourn for me  
Steven Isserlis (cello), Matthew Rose (bass), Abi Sampa (vocals); Trinity Boys Choir;  
Philharmonic Orchestra/Omer Meir Wellber, et al  
*Hyperion CDA68246 71:17 mins*

These are among **Tavener's** most powerful works. They are magnificently performed. Those simple points could easily be lost in the necessity of charting not just the diverse range of music and influences, but also the profoundly personal nature for Steven Isserlis of this remarkable disc. The works are all from Tavener's final years and, as is clear from his touching, sometimes eloquently confessional booklet notes, Isserlis has a particular association with each piece.

His effective arrangements of two choral pieces for an ensemble of eight cellos frame the disc. The unsung words of priest and congregation are palpable in the Anglican intercessory prayers of *Preces and Responses*, Tavener's last completed work. Similarly, the cello octet is adroit in conveying the assuaging sentiment of *No longer mourn for me*, the last of Tavener's *Three Shakespeare Sonnets*, composed after his 2007 heart attack.

Written shortly before that devastating event, *Popule meus* features aggressive timpani repeatedly rejecting the appeasing resolution proffered by Isserlis's cello and **orchestra**. The solo cello represents the 'All-Compassionate One' and has enough development in its phrases to ensure this essentially episodic work never becomes predictably mundane.

Here, as elsewhere, the Philharmonia under Omer Meir Wellber are assured advocates, the unnamed timpanist convincing in the increasingly erratic phrases depicting the antagonism of 'modern man' towards God.

*Mahámátar* is, by contrast, a beautifully sustained outpouring of wordless praise. The solo cello's chanting over long-breathed orchestral chords is entwined with the improvised ululations of a Sufi singer, here the mesmerising Abi Sampa, while the distantly placed Trinity Boys Choir provides a subtly shimmering aural halo. Wellber ensures the extraordinary, uplifting coming together of these diverse elements is seamless without losing their individuality. The result is a magical 15 minutes.

*Mahámátar* was originally written to accompany a film about pilgrimage, but this version was first heard at a 2013 concert in Manchester devoted to Tavener's music given shortly before the composer's death. That event also featured the premiere of *The death of Ivan Ilyich*, an intense, unflinching setting of Tolstoy's story of a dying man's painful anguish. This monodrama features two prominent parts for a pair of trombones, percussion and strings. While the latter produce the familiar sweet chords, they also skitter and screech unnervingly in response to the stuttering yelps of the text. Putatively sung by a bass-baritone, the singer is required to growl in the depths and glide around in eerily high falsetto. And yet, as is clear from Matthew Rose's devastating performance, these technical challenges are as nothing alongside the fierce emotional commitment required to convey this gripping soliloquy. Culminating in a hard-won 'glimpse of light', *The death of Ivan Ilyich* was written in memory of Isserlis's wife Pauline and is the compelling centrepiece to a deeply moving disc.

*Christopher Dingle*

<https://www.classical-music.com/reviews/chamber/tavener-no-longer-mourn-for-me-etc/>