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Respectful music-making: composer Mary Bichner performs by the grave of James Russell Lowell at Mount Auburn Cemetery



Day of reckoning: Don Giovanni

Dead serious

Works set in graveyards

Perhaps opera's most widely remembered graveyard scene is in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, when the anti-hero and his servant find themselves in the cemetery where the Commendatore, murdered by Don Giovanni, is buried. Giovanni defiantly invites the Commendatore to dinner – with literally fatal consequences.

Ancient catacombs have since featured in music, including those of Paris in Musorgsky's *Pictures at an Exhibition*, or those conjured by Respighi's tenebrous orchestration in *Pines of Rome*. There are also dozens of songs with graveside settings, including Berlioz's spooky 'Au cimetière' (from *Les nuits d'été*), and similarly titled songs by Fauré and Hahn. Darker and yet touching are Schubert's songs including 'Schwestergruss' (Sister's greeting), and those in *Winterreise* where the spurned lover longs for the grave, only to find in the metaphorical 'Das Wirtshaus' (The Inn) that all the 'rooms' are taken.

In our own time, Stephen Hough (see p26) has written *Three Grave Songs*: two tenderly expressive settings frame a wry Thomas Hardy poem on money intended for a tombstone being spent on drink and merry-making!

Laurel Hill has hosted movie nights, an annual 'Market of the Macabre' and performances by punk band the Dead Milkmen. Other historic cemeteries take a more restrained approach.

'In general, our programming stays away from anything spooky,' says Jessica Bussmann, director of education and visitor services at the 174-acre Mount Auburn Cemetery in Cambridge, Massachusetts, opened in 1831 and the prototype for rural American cemeteries since. 'This is an active cemetery. People are still burying their loved ones here – so it's definitely not abandoned or scary in anyway.'

Mount Auburn has run an artist-in-residence programme since 2014, billed as the first of its kind at an American cemetery. Mary Bichner, a Boston composer, took its second residency in 2016-17. As she recalls, 'I visited the cemetery at least once a week, but sometimes more. The first year I focused mostly on observing and taking it in. I was welcome to visit a few times after the cemetery was closed and locked for the evening, which was very powerful.'

In two chamber suites, Bichner captured impressions of flower gardens and dells, autumn foliage and stained-glass windows. A handful of pieces set the words of poets buried in Mount Auburn. The music was premiered on location and recorded for use on the cemetery's walking tour app. Her residency concluded with a concert in the Gothic revival Bigelow Chapel.

Historic chapels often attract audiences.

The 150-year-old Lakewood Cemetery in Minneapolis launched a concert series in 2018 featuring string quartets, gospel, folk and South

Indian music in its opulent, Byzantine-style chapel. 'It's really about inviting people to enjoy the space and to appreciate it as more than just a sad place,' says Julia Gillis, director of marketing and outreach. Supernatural themes are avoided. 'We are an active cemetery and have funeral services and burials happening here daily. A family who is in a state of grief is not in the same place as a person who is in more of an entertainment mindset.'

The most freewheeling programming, perhaps not surprisingly, can be found at America's West Coast cemeteries, among them Mountain View Cemetery in Oakland, California, which hosts a summertime guitar series, and Los Angeles's Hollywood Forever Cemetery, a longtime venue for rock concerts, film screenings and yoga classes. LA's edgy offerings are well-established, though a recent Instagram photo of a graveside yoga session drew several angered responses. 'When I go visit my family's graves and ashes,' wrote peglovecaligirl, 'I do not want to see people in their yoga pants laughing and talking all loud.'

Hollywood Forever did not respond to requests for a comment, but Knight-Fochs of Laurel Hill says recreational events are consistent with cemeteries' historical missions: 'A lot of people will ask, "Isn't it disrespectful that you have these various types of events in the cemetery?" My response is, "Do you know anything about the rural cemetery movement?" The idea was always for the cemetery to be used as a place of recreation as well as peaceful contemplation and grief and mourning. People purchased lots here knowing they would be recreated upon.'