

## Elegy dedicated to victims of contaminated blood

By Andrew March



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I am a 39-year-old man with haemophilia living in the United Kingdom. I am also co-infected with Hepatitis C and HIV as a result of receiving contaminated blood products from the National Health Service (NHS).

I have lost count of how many have died through the ravaging effects of contaminated blood. Sometimes it seems as though someone dies every month. I would never have said that any of my friends with haemophilia enjoyed good health, but nothing could have prepared me for the loss of four of them within the space of one year. It was harrowing to see them progressively lose their fight for life. Until you see this happen, there's no true way of knowing how you will feel. For me, it left me with a sense of grief so profound that the only way of describing it would be to say that it felt as though I would never breathe air again of my own accord.

As a result of this traumatic experience, I became resolute that I had to find a way to do more, to do something to put this right. I was already fully involved in the United Kingdom's campaign for a judicial inquiry and for full restitution for the victims of contaminated blood and blood products, but it suddenly did not feel like enough. I kept asking myself why I could not have changed places with them, why them and not me?

I felt I needed to mark their avoidable deaths with what I hoped would be a lasting memorial in music. So in 2009, I composed an elegy for strings called *Sanguis Venenatus*, which translates as "Tainted Blood" after the British campaign group, TaintedBlood.info, of which I have been a part since it was founded. The resulting elegy is dedicated not only to those that I knew personally, but also to all those many thousands of haemophiliacs and others worldwide who have lost their lives as a result of contaminated blood and blood products.



*Sanguis Venenatus* was recorded in the Czech Republic by nearly 50 string players from the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra. I attended the recording sessions in July 2009. The orchestra filled the whole stage of the concert hall and I sat in the stalls listening attentively. Although the seats were empty, I did not feel alone. Instead, it felt to me that my haemophiliac comrades, for whom the elegy was written, had come to listen with me. I will not forget this poignant experience and right there and then I vowed to fight on for them and for their surviving family members; to achieve some justice and a public apology – the kind that can only come from those in power if they have a genuine heart and truly understand the scale of what has taken place in the contaminated blood scandal.

It is difficult to express in words exactly how I felt at losing so many of my friends, other than to say I was wracked with grief. As a composer, this build-up of emotion had to go somewhere and it is my wish that in writing the elegy, I have managed to capture some of this strength of feeling.

*Sanguis Venenatus* is available in stores and online. Some links include:

On amazon.fr: [http://www.amazon.fr/Dimensions-Works-String-Orchestra-Hutter/dp/B009IF13V8/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=music&ie=UTF8&qid=1359213842&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.fr/Dimensions-Works-String-Orchestra-Hutter/dp/B009IF13V8/ref=sr_1_1?s=music&ie=UTF8&qid=1359213842&sr=1-1)

On amazon.de: <http://www.amazon.de/Dimensions-Works-String-Orchestra-Hutter/dp/B009IF13V8>

On iTunes: <https://itunes.apple.com/de/album/dimensions-works-for-string/id572047245>