



Johannes Brahms

Ein deutsches Requiem

St Margaret's Church
8pm, Saturday 31st January, 2009

Programme

Schubert *Psalm 23*

Brahms *Ein deutsches Requiem*

- i Selig sind, die da Leid tragen (*chorus*)
 Blessed are they that mourn
- ii Denn alles Fleisch es ist wie Gras (*chorus*)
 For all flesh is as grass
- iii Herr, lehre doch mich, daß ein Ende (*baritone & chorus*)
 Lord, make me to know mine end
- iv Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen (*chorus*)
 How lovely are thy dwellings

— interval of 20 minutes, at which wine will be served —
Please return your glasses to the tables before the concert resumes

- v Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit (*soprano & chorus*)
 Ye now therefore have sorrow
- vi Denn wir haben hier keine bleibende Statt (*baritone & chorus*)
 For here we have no continuing city
- vii Selig sind die Toten (*chorus*)
 Blessed are the dead

Schumann *Widmung*

arr. Saunderson

Summertown Choral Society

Registered Charity 900317

Duncan Saunderson, *conductor*

with

Susan Young, *soprano*

Tom Edwards, *bass*

and

Julian Littlewood, *piano*

Jack Ridley, *piano*



Summertown Choral Society was founded in 1961. New members are always welcome to this friendly and well-established choir. There is no audition and we offer trial membership. Singing is a natural way of relaxing; there are proven health benefits and it's fun! Rehearsals for our new season start at 7:30 on Thursday, 12th February at the URC church in Summertown. More information, including details of social activities, choir holiday and past repertoire can be found at www.summertownchoral.org.uk, from our brochure 'Singing in Oxford' or by contacting our Chairman on info@summertownchoral.org.uk or 01865 768069.

Our next concert includes Mozart's *Great Mass in C minor* and a newly commissioned work for SCS by Bill Ives (*Informator Choristarum* of Magdalen College, Oxford). See back page for more details.

Johannes Brahms

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg in 1833, six years after the death of Beethoven and five years after the death of Schubert. He was the son of a local musician and from early in life began to show his musical talent. At the age of seven he was taking piano lessons and in his teenage years was giving public performances in Hamburg, while taking up the study of musical theory and composition. In 1853 he was given an introduction to Robert Schumann, the foremost composer of the time, and his wife Clara, an eminent concert pianist and composer in her own right. Schumann issued a remarkable testimonial predicting Brahms' future pre-eminence as a composer, but in the face of considerable scepticism among the growing musical school of the German Romantics, it was some years before he was accepted as an important composer in the Classical tradition. After Schumann's death in 1856, Brahms spent some years in Hamburg and Detmold, conducting choirs, teaching and writing music, and in 1863 he was appointed as the director of the Singakademie in Vienna, where he made his home until his death in 1897.

The early 1860s saw the start of Brahms' truly creative period as a composer, initially of chamber music his first piano concerto having had a disastrous reception in 1859. To the modern musical public he is better known for his orchestral works and his *Requiem*, but during his life-time his chamber music was more popular, in keeping with the contemporary fashion for music-making at home and in salons: works for piano, strings, clarinet and horn (unusually), and over 200 songs. Most of his orchestral works, his four symphonies, the second of his two piano concertos, his violin concerto, and other works such as the *Variations on the St Anthony Choral*, he wrote in the 1870s and 1880s. He often performed his own works, for example the first performances of his two piano concertos. By the time of his death in 1897 his popularity and reputation as a composer in the Classical tradition of the 18th century was well established in both England and America as well as in Europe.



Ein deutsches Requiem

Schumann died in 1856, and his closeness to both Robert and Clara Schumann must have led Brahms to think more deeply about death and life after death. His mother died in February 1865, and it appears to be generally agreed among scholars that by early 1865 Brahms had clear in his mind the concept and structure of the *Requiem*, the choice of texts and early drafts of the music. He wrote the finished form of the greater part of the work, five movements, during 1865 and the first half of 1866, and after revisions and more work over the next 18 months, he conducted the first public performance in Bremen Cathedral on Good Friday of 1868 in a version with six movements. During the year he wrote a seventh movement, no. 5, and the first public performances of the *Requiem* in its final form with seven movements were given in Cologne on 16 February 1869 and in Leipzig two days later. It was well received and gained early popularity, though more so in Protestant northern Germany and in England and the United States than in Catholic countries such as France and Italy.

Brahms was brought up in the Protestant tradition of the German theologian and church reformer, Martin Luther, and in his title for the work, *Ein deutsches Requiem*, he is saying two things: his work is not a setting of the liturgical Requiem Mass of the Roman Catholic Church, and its text is not in the Latin of the Roman liturgy, but in the German of his native tongue. Brahms wrote to his publisher that his *Requiem* "cannot be sung in place of a Requiem Mass in church" and it was thus primarily for the concert platform. Scholars are of the view that Brahms may have been, perhaps was, agnostic in his religious beliefs.

Nevertheless Brahms' choice of texts, from the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha in Luther's translation, are a meditation on the rest, peace and comfort which can be found in the Christian scriptures when contemplating the inevitable circumstance of death. They make no mention, as in the Catholic Mass, of the day of wrath and of final judgement and they have no prayer to Christ for the rescue of the faithful from the pains of hell. They speak rather of comfort for those who mourn and of the transitory nature of this life, expressing a firm belief in life after death and the blessed state of those who 'die in the Lord', a belief that after the trials and troubles of this mortal life there comes a life of peace and joy where 'sorrow and sighing shall flee away'

Except for the short fourth and seventh movements, Brahms chose verses for the text of each movement from different books of the Bible and, despite this variety of sources, combined them to complement each other in their message and to set out his own vision and understanding of his *Requiem*. But it is the varied musical colour and structure both of the work as a whole and as reflected in each movement, which

deepens and enhances the meaning of the text. As Brahms understood so clearly, music adds its own deeper dimension and fullness to the meaning of words.

In the opening movement the music states clearly and firmly that those who mourn shall come again with joy. In the second movement the chorus sternly likens this life to the withering grass and dying flower of the field, following this with a lyrical passage in which the patient husbandman waits expectantly for the rain which brings the harvest. The chorus repeats its stern likening to the flower of the field and then, after a few transitional bars, launches into a confident fugue celebrating the joy which awaits the 'ransomed of the Lord'. In the third movement, the baritone solo introduces a sombre tone taken up by the chorus which dwells on the frailty and shortness of this life, and then in a few bars the music reaches a swelling climax and the darkness gives way to hope for 'the souls of the righteous' in a triumphant fugue over a driving D major pedal.

In the fourth movement the music returns to the certainty and serenity of the opening. The fifth movement, added after the first performance in 1868, is a quiet and calm personal meditation by the soprano, supported by the chorus, on the comfort in sorrow which only a mother can provide. In the sixth movement, after another sombre opening, the baritone leads a longer transition to the proclamation of victory over death and another majestic fugue celebrating the glory of God who 'has created all things'. The last movement returns again to the serene mood of the opening and the blessed state of those who rest from their labours.

So in his own *Requiem* for the dead Brahms opens with music which offers a clear message of comfort for those who mourn, passes in the middle movements to depicting the tribulations of this life, belief in the blessings of the life to come and the joy of comfort in sorrow, and closes with a return to the serene and confident music of the opening.

In 1869, very soon after the publication of the full orchestral and vocal score of the Requiem, a piano arrangement for four hands by Brahms himself was published, and it is this which we perform tonight. It was not a reduction for piano of the orchestral score, as used for rehearsals, but a reworking of the full score as a piano composition in its own right, with directions in the piano version not found in the orchestral version. Though some of the colour and variation in texture of the orchestral score is not to be found in the piano score, the piano has its own directness, precision and clarity of sound. The piano version is by no means a lesser version, it is a different version. Such piano transcriptions were not uncommon in the 19th century, providing a means of hearing, in drawing-rooms and musical salons, works written for increasingly large orchestras, and Brahms, as a composer of chamber music, knew well how to write for the more intimate venue. The English première of the *Requiem*, at a private house in 1871, was in this piano transcription for four hands.

Schubert: *Psalm 23*

The opening work in tonight's concert is a setting of *Psalm 23* in four parts for soprano and alto voices by **Franz Schubert**. Born in 1797 into a musical family in Vienna, Schubert had little formal musical education and yet, by the time he died in 1828 at the age of 31, he had produced an extensive corpus of major works, orchestral, operatic and sacred, together with song cycles, chamber music and works for solo piano. Perhaps because he died young, from syphilis or typhus, it was not until after his death that he acquired his reputation as one of the great composers in the classical tradition.

The calm confidence of *Psalm 23* and Schubert's setting of it, written in 1819-20, with the steady $\frac{4}{4}$ tempo of the vocal parts against the running triplets in the piano's right hand, is a fitting introduction to the view of this life and the next which Brahms conveys in his *Requiem*.

Schumann: *Widmung*

Tonight's concert closes with a short piece by **Robert Schumann**, a song dedicated to his new wife, Clara, on the occasion of their marriage in 1840. Schumann was born in 1810 at Zwickau in Saxony, the son of a book publisher, and in 1830 began taking piano lessons with the renowned piano teacher, Freidrich Wieck. Two years later he did serious damage to a finger of his right hand and turned to writing rather than playing music. Most of his compositions until 1840 were for solo piano, when he widened the scope of his work to include song cycles, chamber music, and choral and orchestral works. His mental health began to deteriorate until, in 1854 not long after Brahms' arrival in the Schumann household, he tried to commit suicide and was placed in a mental asylum, where he died in 1856.

In 1840, after a long courtship and against her father's wishes, Schumann married Clara, the daughter of his piano teacher. The song *Widmung* which he dedicated to her is a setting of a poem by Friedrich Rückert (1788-1866), German poet, linguist and translator of Oriental poetry, who inspired several later composers including Brahms. The melody has echoes of a setting by Schubert of 'Ellen's Song', a maiden's prayer to the Virgin Mary in Walter Scott's narrative poem 'The Lady of the Lake', often known as Schubert's 'Ave Maria'. Did Schumann feel it to be a worthy setting for Rückert's poem through which he was expressing his own dedication to and love for Clara? (Written for soprano solo, the second and third verses have been arranged for four parts by our conductor, Duncan Saunderson.)

Johannes Brahms: Ein deutsches Requiem

I Chorus

Selig sind, die da Leid tragen,
denn sie sollen getröstet werden.

Die mit Tränen säen, werden mit Freuden ernten.
Sie gehen hin und weinen, und tragen edlen Samen,
und kommen mit Freuden
und bringen ihre Garben.

*Blessed are they that mourn,
For they shall be comforted.* St Matthew 5.4

*They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.
They that go forth and weep, bearing precious seed,
Shall come again with rejoicing,
Bringing their sheaves with them.* Psalm 126.5-6

II Chorus

Denn alles Fleisch es ist wie Gras, und
alle Herrlichkeit des Menschen wie des Grases Blumen.
Das Gras ist verdorret
und die Blume abgefallen.

So seid nun geduldig, lieben Brüder,
bis auf die Zukunft des Herrn.
Siehe ein Ackermann wartet auf die köstliche Frucht
der Erde und ist geduldig darüber,
bis er empfahe den Morgenregen und Abendregen.

Aber des Herrn Wort bleibt in Ewigkeit.

Die Erlöseten des Herrn werden wiederkommen,
und gen Zion kommen mit Jauchzen;
Freude, ewige Freude wird über ihrem Haupte sein;
Freude und Wonne werden sie ergreifen,
und Schmerz und Seufzen wird weg müssen.

*For all flesh is as grass,
And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass.
The grass withereth,
And the flower thereof falleth away.* 1 Peter 1.24

*Be patient therefore, brethren,
Unto the coming of the Lord.
Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit
Of the earth, and hath long patience for it,
Until he receive the morning and evening rain.* James 5.7

But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. 1 Peter 1.25

*And the ransomed of the Lord shall return,
And come to Zion with songs
And everlasting joy upon their heads;
They shall obtain joy and gladness,
And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.* Isaiah 35.10

III Baritone and Chorus

Herr, lehre doch mich, daß ein Ende mit mir haben muß,
und mein Leben ein Ziel hat, und ich davon muß.
Siehe, meine Tage sind einer Hand breit vor dir,
und mein Leben ist wie nichts vor dir. Ach,
wie gar nichts sind alle Menschen, die doch so sicher leben.
Sie gehen daher wie ein Schemen,
und machen ihnen viel vergebliche Unruhe;
sie sammeln und wissen nicht wer es kriegen wird.
Nun, Herr, wes soll ich mich trösten?
Ich hoffe auch dich.

Der Gerechten Seele sind in Gottes Hand,
und keine Qual rührt sie an.

*Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure
Of my days, what it is, that I may know how frail I am.
Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth,
And mine age is as nothing before thee. Verily,
Every man at his best state is altogether vanity.
Surely every man walketh in a vain show;
Surely they are disquieted in vain; he heapeth up riches,
And knoweth not who shall gather them.
And now, Lord, what do I wait for?
My hope is in thee.* Psalm 39.4-7

*But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,
And there shall no torment touch them.* Wisdom 3.1

IV Chorus

Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen, Herr Zebaoth!
Meine Seele verlangt
und sehnet sich nach den Verhöfen des Herrn:
mein Leib und Seele freuen sich in dem lebendigen Gott.
Wohl denen, die in deinem Hause wohnen,
die loben dich immerdar.

*How lovely are thy dwellings, O Lord of Hosts!
My soul longeth,
Yea fainteth, for the courts of the Lord.
My heart and soul cry out for the living God.
Blessed are they that dwell in thy house:
They praise thy name for evermore.* Psalm 84.1,2,4

V Soprano and Chorus

Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit, aber ich will euch wieder sehen,
und euer Herz soll sich freuen,
und eure Freude soll niemand von euch nehmen.

*Ye now therefore have sorrow, but I will see you again,
And your heart shall rejoice,
And your joy no man taketh from you.* St John 16.22

Ich will euch trösten, wie einen seine Mutter tröstet.

As one whom his mother comforteth, so I will comfort you.
Isaiah 66.13
*Look upon me: for a little time I have had labour and sorrow,
But I have found much comfort.* Ecclesiasticus 51.27

Sehet mich an: ich habe eine kleine Zeit
Mühe und Arbeit gehabt, und habe grossen Trost gefunden.

VI Baritone and Chorus

Denn wir haben hier keine bleibende Statt,
sondern die zukünftige suchen wir.

*For here we have no continuing city,
But we seek one to come.* Hebrews 13.14

Siehe, ich sage euch ein Geheimnis:
Wir werden nicht alle entschlafen, wir werden aber
alle verwandelt werden und dasselbige plötzlich
in einem Augenblick zu der Zeit der letzten Posaune.
Denn es wird die Posaune schallen,
und die Toten werden auferstehen unverweslich,
und wir werden verwandelt werden.
Dann wird erfüllet werden das Wort, das geschrieben steht:
Der Tod ist verschlungen in den Sieg.
Tod, wo ist dein Stachel?
Hölle, wo ist dein Sieg?

*Behold, I show you a mystery:
We shall not all sleep,
But we shall all be changed, in a moment,
In the twinkling of an eye at the last trump.
For the trumpet shall sound,
And the dead shall be raised incorruptible,
And we shall all be changed.
Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written:
Death is swallowed up in victory.
Death, where is thy sting?
Grave, where is thy victory?* 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, 54-55

Herr, du bist würdig
zu nehmen Preis und Ehre und Kraft,
denn du hast alle Dinge erschaffen,
und durch deinen Willen haben sie das Wesen
und sind geschaffen.

*Thou art worthy, Lord,
To receive glory and honour and power:
For thou hast created all things,
And for thy pleasure they are
And were created.* Revelation 4.11

VII Chorus

Selig sind die Toten, die in dem Herrn sterben, von nun an:
Ja, der Geist spricht, dass sie ruhen von ihrer Arbeit,
denn ihre Werke folgen ihnen nach.

*Blessed are the dead, which die in the Lord, from henceforth:
Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours,
And their works follow them.* Revelation 14.13

Schumann: *Widmung* (Dedication)

Du meine Seele, du mein Herz,
Du meine Wonn', O du mein Schmerz
Du meine Welt in der ich lebe,
Mein Himmel du darein ich schwebe,
O du mein Grab, in das hinab
Ich ewig meinen Kummer gab.

Du bist die Ruh, du bist der Frieden,
Du bist von Himmel mir beschieden,
Dass du mich liebst, macht mich mir wert.
Dein blick hat mich vor mir verklärt,
Du hebst mich liebend über mich,
Mein gutter Geist, mein bessres ich!

Du meine Seele, du mein Herz,
Du meine Wonn', O du mein Schmerz,
Du meine Welt in der ich lebe,
Mein Himmel, du darein ich schwebe,
Mein gutter Geist, mein bessres ich!

Friedrich Rückert

*You my soul, you my heart,
You my delight, O you my pain,
You my world in which I live,
My heaven, you wherein I float,
O you my grave, down into which
Eternally I lay my grief.*

*You are rest, you are peace,
You have been sent to me from heaven,
That you love me makes me worthy.
Your gaze transfigures me,
You lift me lovingly above myself,
My good spirit, the better me!*

*You my soul, you my heart,
You my delight, O you my pain,
You my world in which I live,
My heaven, you wherein I float,
My good spirit, the better me!*

trans. Gwen Sasse

Duncan Saunderson (*conductor*)

Duncan graduated from The Guildhall School of Music, as a countertenor, in 1985. He regularly deputised in the Choirs of Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral under some of the finest choral conductors in the world including John Scott, Simon Preston and Barry Rose. Duncan has also sung for distinguished choral conductors such as Sir David Willcocks, George Guest, David Hill, Stephen Darlington, Bill Ives, Robert King and Christopher Hogwood.

As a Lay Clerk in the Choir of New College, Oxford, he sings six nights a week under Dr. Edward Higginbottom, Oxford University's first, and newly appointed, Professor of Choral Music. With this distinguished and busy touring Choir, he has recorded over 50 discs including Highest-selling Classical Disc and Best Early Music Disc (International Gramophone awards 1998/2008). Duncan's own ensemble, *Liedertafel*, has given regular concerts with the countertenor James Bowman and the author/reader Colin Dexter in Oxford and Cambridge.

Susan Young (*soprano*)

Raised in Northumberland with qualifications from Durham and London Universities and Trinity College of Music, Susan is a versatile singer, winning critical praise for her 'immaculate diction and strong dramatic sense' and 'rich, warm sound'. Part of the original group of musicians who founded the Oxford Lieder Festival, she has worked with the pianists Julius Drake, Lindy Tennent-Brown, Iain Farrington, Alisdair Hogarth and Sholto Kynoch.

As a regular soloist with the Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford and London Musici, she has performed both Passions by Bach, Haydn's *Stabat Mater* and Mozart's *Requiem*. Amongst other concert appearances are Handel's *Messiah* and *Dixit Dominus*, Haydn's *The Creation* and *Nelson Mass*, Mozart's *Exsultate jubilate* and *Mass in C minor*, Beethoven's *Mass in C*, Brahms'

Ein deutsches Requiem, Poulenc's *Gloria* and more recently, Vaughan Williams' *A Sea Symphony* in Tewkesbury Abbey.

Susan is now a member of English National Opera and will cover the role of Second Niece in their new production of *Peter Grimes* in 2009. Other future engagements include Mozart's *Requiem* and Bruckner's *Te Deum* in Salisbury Cathedral and Mozart's *Mass in C minor* in Cheltenham.

Tom Edwards (*bass*)

Born in France, Tom was educated in England, winning a choral scholarship to New College, Oxford in 1996, where he read Modern Languages. He has performed in major venues around the world with the Choir of New College, touring extensively throughout Europe, as well as farther afield in Japan and the United States. As a soloist, Tom has sung with a variety of artists and ensembles, including Rogers Covey-Crump, James Bowman and the Academy of Ancient Music. He performs frequently on television and radio both in the UK and abroad, most recently from the York Early Music Festival and the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern Festival in Germany.

Tom is currently a schoolmaster at Summer Fields School in Oxford, where he teaches languages; he is also one of the two bass Lay Clerks in the Choir of New College. When he is not working Tom lives in France, but at other times enjoys travelling, cooking and exploring fine vintages – often in the company of the other bass Lay Clerk, tonight's conductor Duncan Saunderson.

Julian Littlewood (*piano*)

Julian studied music at St Peter's College Oxford before taking a doctorate in Music Analysis at King's College London. He continues his academic interests both in print – as author of 'The Variations of Johannes Brahms' (2004) and editor of 'Towards a Poetics of Music and the Arts' (2005) and 'All the Gods: Benjamin Britten's *Nightpiece* in Context' (2006) – and as a teacher in Oxford, London and beyond.

He studies piano with Nelly Ben-Or (Guildhall, London), and has been organist or organ scholar at a variety of Oxford colleges and churches. An active member of the Oxford musical scene for two decades, he also performs across Europe as organist, pianist and conductor. Highlights have included trying to describe Palestrina to a bewildered DJ on World Radio Geneva, and being billed as 'Vegetable: Julian Littlewood' for a performance of the African *Missa Luba*.

Jack Ridley (*piano*)

Jack started learning the piano at the age of five. While at St Paul's, where he was a music scholar, he won various prizes for piano, and made his concerto debut playing Beethoven's 3rd Piano Concerto. A keen chamber musician, Jack has played with groups such as the Schubert Ensemble and developed a close association with Hyperion Records. In 2006, Jack took a gap year in which he began teaching children at local primary schools and was taken on by Hounslow Music Service as its principal accompanist. Now at Oxford, studying Classics, Jack is a regular performer at the Holywell Music Room, and has made concerto appearances with several college orchestras. He is President of Wadham Music Society and conducts the college orchestra as well as the Oxford Student Chorus, and has spent time shadowing the BBC Symphony Orchestra and the London Symphony Orchestra. Jack studies piano at the Royal College of Music with John Barstow MBE.

our next concert:

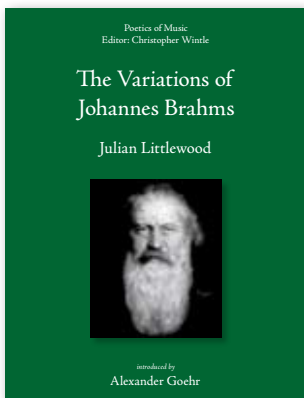
Mozart: *Great Mass in C minor*
Ives: *a new commission for SCS*

Our next concert will be held on Saturday 16th May in St Andrew's Church, Linton Road. Rehearsals start Thursday 12th February. New members welcome. See you website for more details:

www.summertownchoral.org.uk

The Variations of Johannes Brahms

Julian Littlewood



Plumbago Books, London (2004)
384 pp.; 451 musical examples,
31 figures and 11 illustrations

In this outstanding and very readable survey of Brahms's variations Julian Littlewood thoroughly explores every conceivable aspect of the composer's use of the form... This superbly produced volume is wholeheartedly recommended.

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