

Johannes Brahms: Ein Deutsches Requiem

Brahms wrote the first version of this masterpiece between 1865 and 1867 when he was 32. His mother's death in February 1865 had a profound emotional effect on him and the work was dedicated to her alongside his great friend and sponsor Robert Schumann, who had died a few years before. The first performance took place in Bremen to mixed critical acclaim. After seeking advice, Brahms completed the final version, which was performed in Leipzig's Gewandhaus in February 1869. It became an instant success with choirs throughout Europe.

Brahms intended a secular work. Nevertheless, his use of texts from the Lutheran Bible (reflecting his protestant upbringing in Hamburg) lends the Requiem considerable theological force. The overall tone of the work is joyous - not least because Brahms chooses texts that reflect on the Christian hope of eternal life in Christ. The fifth movement opens with Christ's words to his disciples in anticipation of his death and resurrection (John 16:22) - the historical events that form the basis for both the redemption (Isaiah 35:10, mvnt 2) and the eternal life of Christians believers (1 Corinthians 15:51-52, mvnt 6; Revelation 14:13, mvnt 7). Yet for all this positivity, there is no glib denial of human suffering, and Brahms reflects at length on the Bible's portrayal of both the frailty and mortality of human flesh (Psalm 39:4-7, mvnt 3); and the ubiquity of decay in the world (1 Peter 1:24; mvnt 2). The work's emotional and theological core is an extended reflection on the beauty of God's 'house' and the blessed, joyful, thankful state of all who dwell in it (Ps 84:1-4, mvnt 4).

Musically, the breadth of musical styles are eclectic, ranging from the funereal sarabandes of the second movement to the graceful, lyrical waltzes of the fourth. Handelian fugues end the third and fifth movements and the Requiem finishes in a state of transcendent - almost timeless - peace.

Ein Deutsches Requiem comprises 7 movements

There is no interval in this performance

Robert Bridge (piano) was a foundation scholar at the Royal College of Music where he won the RCM Chopin prize and was awarded a first class honours in the London BMus degree. He has given concerts at the Wigmore Hall, the Purcell Room, BBC lunchtime concerts and has performed twice in the BBC Proms at the Royal Albert Hall. He has accompanied masterclasses for Elizabeth Schwarzkopf, Ruggiero Ricci, Steven Isserlis and Gerard Souzay and has made numerous recordings for BBC Radio 3. He teaches piano to enthusiastic kids and rusty adults, is an Associated Board examiner and organises an annual series of Knitting Concerts in Putney, where he subjects unwitting audiences to Webern, Tippett, Janacek and Brahms whilst they read, sew, finish their crosswords and sometimes even listen.

Anna-Maria Raffa (piano) studied Music at the Royal Academy of Music and Southampton University. She has a successful piano teaching practice, and is sought after as an accompanist. A varied career has seen her accompanying choirs in the UK and many European countries, in venues such as Notre Dame Cathedral and Westminster Abbey. She is regularly pianist and MD for Musical Theatre, including shows by Sondheim, Tom Lehrer and Cole Porter, and is vocal coach for the choir Espresso Chorus. Anna has also studied and teaches West African drumming, and worked alongside master Djembefolas from Senegal and Guinea.

Oskar Palmblad is a Swedish baritone who graduated with an upper second-class BMus (Hons) from the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in 2012. His operatic experience includes performing the role of Ben Benny in Paul Bunyan (Britten) with British Youth Opera. Concert work has included the bass solo in Stravinsky's Mass with the LSO under Valery Gergiev, as well as a performance at Wigmore Hall with GSMD Voiceworks.

Ruth Vanni, an American Mezzo-soprano moved to the UK in 2003 to take a place at the Royal Academy of Music, London. After leaving the Academy with a PGDip and LRAM, she continued her training with coaches and conductors at La Scala, in Milan. During Mrs Vanni's time in Italy she sang roles such as 'Rosina' in "Il Barbiere di Siviglia" and 'La Ciesca' in "Gianni Schicchi". She has performed for several public and private events in Germany, UK, USA and most recently in Sweden. Ruth is currently teaching singing and music in Twickenham.