

Brahms: Ein deutsches Requiem

North Carolina Master Chorale
Alfred E. Sturgis, Music Director

Marlissa Hudson, Soprano
Gerard Sundberg, Baritone
Symphony Orchestra

Sunday, January 29 at 3pm
Meymandi Concert Hall
Duke Energy Center for the Performing Arts

Program

Tragische Ouvertüre, Op. 81

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Ein deutsches Requiem, Op. 45 (*A German Requiem*)

Brahms

*Please refer to the text insert for individual movements.
This program will be presented without intermission.*

Notes

Ein deutsches Requiem, Op. 45

Early in 1865 Johannes Brahms' mother died of a stroke in Hamburg at the age 76. Notified of her illness, he raced to her bedside but arrived too late. His years away in Vienna had created a distance from his parents, who were of humble, working-class origin and whose marriage had disintegrated despite his attempts to reconcile them. Left with the responsibility for his mother, he nevertheless had always regarded her as a source of strength and support. Her death appears to have been a catalyst for the finalization of an idea that had been with him for several years, probably since the tragic final illness of his friend and mentor, Robert Schumann. In an entry in his diary, Schumann had contemplated the idea of a mass for the dead with a more gentle, comforting text than that of the Catholic requiem mass.

In response, nearly a decade before his mother's death, Brahms made sketches (lost with all his other working papers) for a four-movement funeral cantata, which finally came to fruition in the *Requiem*. The slow movement for a discarded symphony in D minor, which also supplied material

for the First Piano Concerto, provided the basis of the *Requiem's* second movement funeral march, "*Denn alles Fleisch es ist wie Gras*" (For all flesh is as grass). Amassing all of these earlier musical and textual ideas, Brahms formally started work on *Ein deutsches Requiem*, finishing it in August 1866 except for the fifth movement, "*Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit*" (And you now have sorrow), which he added in 1868 after the premiere. The *Requiem* was to be his longest work and the first to garner him international recognition.

The *Requiem* is a personal statement of faith, intentionally distanced from institutional religion. The German of the title refers only to the language from which the texts were taken and it is meant neither to apply to a single nation nor to a specific religion. Brahms selected a group of Scriptural texts from Martin Luther's translation of both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures, and the Apocrypha, shaping the work in keeping with his own spiritual and musical vision.

The Catholic Requiem mass opens with a prayer for the eternal rest of the deceased, but by far the largest portion is dominated by the sequence “*Dies irae*,” a poetic depiction of the soul’s terror on the Day of Judgment. In contrast, Brahms’ *Requiem* is a memorial to the dead, a comfort to those left behind and the promise of eternal redemption. Far from soothing sentimentality, the *Requiem*, addresses the complexities of the meaning of life, death and resurrection.

The work as a whole is a grand arch of which the apex, Movement 4, is the choral description of the joy of eternal life. Surrounding it are movements reflecting the pain of death and the search for meaning, as well as teachings on God’s cosmic order. The funeral march of the second is balanced by the theme of the resurrection in the sixth movement. Similarly, the baritone solo in the third balances the soprano solo in the fifth. Framing the work as a whole are Movements 1 and 7, using much of the same music and offering peace and comfort to the living and the dead. At the apex of the arch is a chorus expanding on the soul’s final resting place with God:

1. The opening movement introduces the premise of the entire work, “*Selig sind die da Leid tragen*” (Blessed are they that mourn), focusing on the mourners rather than on the deceased. Brahms also uses the chorus’s opening three-note motive on the word “*Selig*” as the mortar that fuses the building blocks of the arch.
2. This funeral march is the darkest and longest section of the work, reminding the mourners of the inevitability of death – although without the terror of damnation. In the middle section, beginning as an a cappella chorus, “*So seit nun geduldig...bis auf die Zukunft des Herrn*” (Be patient...for the coming of the Lord), Brahms presents the final Judgment as redemptive and switches the mode from minor to major accompanied by an increase in tempo. A return to the funeral march is followed by a dramatic choral fugue, “*Aber des Herrn Wort bleibet in Ewigkeit*” (But the Word of the Lord is eternal), promising eternal salvation. Brahms’ use of climactic fugues – there are three in

the *Requiem* – has its source in the tradition of fugal movements in Baroque and Classical settings of the mass.

3. “*Herr, lehre doch mich*” (Lord, teach me that I must die) for baritone and chorus is a prayer in which the individual acknowledges his mortality and the vanity of earthly gratification, and, finally, commends his soul to God. It concludes with a double fugue, one subject for the chorus, the second subject for the orchestra, portraying the return of all righteous souls to the Lord in everlasting peace. Bearing witness to the universality of this prayer, whose text is from the Hebrew Scriptures (Psalm 39), are the many arrangements of this movement sung in Reform synagogues on *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement).
4. “*Wie lieblich sind Deine Wohnungen*” (How lovely is Thy dwelling place), is the central description and promise of eternal life. It is a simple ABA song form for the chorus, whose middle section is a passionate outburst of longing for God.
5. The soprano soloist, echoed by the chorus, promises comfort and eternal joy for those in mourning as well as for the dead. Musically as well, it is a counterweight to the baritone’s somber musings on the vanities of this world in the third movement.
6. “*Denn wir haben hier keine bleibende Statt*” (Here on earth we have no continuing place) celebrates the eternal kingdom of God. Brahms wrote a great deal of choral music and knew intimately the cantatas of Johann Sebastian Bach and the oratorios of Handel, who used the same text in Part III of *Messiah*. Like his predecessors, Brahms made extensive use of tone painting in keeping with the text.
7. The final movement returns to themes – both textual and musical – from the beginning of the *Requiem*; this time, however, it is the dead, rather than the mourners, who are blessed. The music, however, is more passionate as it sums up the message of eternal life that has been the principal focus of the entire work.

Despite a lukewarm reception in Vienna of the first three movements of the *Requiem* in 1867, the entire work – minus what is now the fifth movement – was premiered on Good Friday 1868 in the cathedral of Bremen to great acclaim. Brahms later added the fifth movement, dedicated

specifically to his mother, and the entire work was performed in February of 1869.

Program notes by:
Joseph & Elizabeth Kahn
wordprosmusic.com

Artist Biographies

Marlissa Hudson, Soprano

American soprano Marlissa Hudson has been described as a “superb lyric coloratura” (St. Louis Post-Dispatch). At home both on the operatic and concert stage, she made her professional debut while a student, performing *Summertime* from *Porgy and Bess* with the Baltimore Symphony Pops Orchestra under the baton of Marvin Hamlisch. Recognized as an international concert performer, Marlissa has been featured in Bulgaria and Paraguay, and has collaborated in the U.S. with such esteemed organizations as the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony Pops Orchestra, National Philharmonic Orchestra, Vocal Essence, the 92nd Street Y, and members of the Arianna Quartet. Recitals are a definitive niche, and she has performed as a recitalist across the continental U.S. and St. Croix US VI.

As a recording and performing artist, Marlissa has been featured on multiple labels singing the work of modern composers. Her discography also includes 2 albums, “*Libera*” and “*Lust*”, which was funded in part by a successful \$15,000 Kickstarter campaign.

Marlissa received her formal training at Duke University and the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University. She earned awards for music at both schools, including a Peabody Career Development Grant.

Gerard Sundberg, Baritone

Performances for the 2015-16 season included J.S. Bach cantatas *BWV 33 and 182* with The Minnesota Chorale and MN Bach Ensemble; Brahms *Ein deutsches Requiem* with The Chicago Master Singers; Handel *Messiah* with Duke University, North Carolina; Ralph Vaughan Williams *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* with The Minnetonka Choral Society, MN; Mendelssohn *Elijah* with The Apollo Chorus of Chicago; Fauré *Requiem* with Northside United Methodist Church, Atlanta, GA; Brahms *Ein deutsches Requiem* with the Two Rivers Chorale, Minnesota; and J.S. Bach cantatas *BWV 31, 66, 68* with the Peoria Bach Festival, IL.

This season (2016-17) will include Handel *Messiah* with the Atlanta Symphony and Chamber Chorus; Finzi *In Terra Pax* with Northside United Methodist Church, Atlanta, GA; Brahms *Ein deutsches Requiem* with the North Carolina Master Chorale, Raleigh, NC; Mendelssohn *Elijah* with Bel Canto Chorus, Milwaukee, WI; and TBA J.S. Bach cantatas with the Peoria Bach Festival, IL.

Dr. Sundberg is a graduate of Bethel College (St. Paul, MN), and holds both Master of Fine Arts and Doctor of Musical Arts degrees from the University of Minnesota where he studied voice with Clifton Ware and Roy Schuessler. He is presently Professor Emeritus of Voice at Wheaton Conservatory of Music (Wheaton, IL), where he taught studio voice and vocal pedagogy. He recently relocated to the Twin City area, and is an adjunct voice professor at Bethel University.