



LOUISVILLE
masterchorale

BRAHMS REQUIEM



Sunday, November 6, 2022 at 3:00 p.m.

HOLY SPIRIT CATHOLIC CHURCH

IN MEMORIAM



Allan Brockway Morris
1943-2020

Allan, husband of Master Chorale member Nancy Morris, was a generous contributor to the Louisville Master Chorale from its inception. He co-founded CompDent Dental Plan, founded Overstock Furniture, owned Burdorf Interiors and was named Ernst and Young Entrepreneur of the Year.

AND IN MEMORY OF ALL THOSE WE HAVE LOST IN RECENT YEARS

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 do follow them.

From the Requiem

BRAHMS AND VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

SERENADE TO MUSIC

Ralph Vaughan Williams

EIN DEUTSCHES REQUIEM

Johannes Brahms

Elizabeth Burmeister, Soprano
Josiah Davis, Baritone

John H. Dickson, Guest Conductor

Sunday, November 6, 2022
HOLY SPIRIT CATHOLIC CHURCH



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LOUISVILLE
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PRECONCERT PROGRAM



Dr. John R. Hale has been offering pre-concert lectures since the founding of the Louisville Master Chorale. This year we will be posting his lectures online the week before each concert, which will make these presentations available to a wider audience and also allow Dr. Hale to complement each lecture with copious illustrations that include portraits of the composers themselves, and images of the historic settings in which these masterpieces were originally performed. Dr. Hale is a graduate of Yale University, with a Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge, and is both a distinguished instructor and author. He has published reports on his research in *Antiquity*, *The Journal of Roman Archaeology*, *Scientific American*, and other journals. In addition, his archaeological fieldwork and discoveries have been featured in documentaries on the Discovery and History channels. When his first book, *Lords of the Sea: The Epic Story of the Athenian Navy and the Birth of Democracy*, was published in 2009, *The New York Times*

reviewer called John Hale "an intellectually serious historian who knows how to tell war stories." His engaging speaking style and commanding knowledge of the classical music repertoire are appreciated by concertgoers throughout our community.

TEXT:

RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS

Serenade to Music (1938)

Text from Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, Act V scene 1

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony...
Look how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
There's not the smallest orb that thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings,
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.
Come, ho! and wake Diana with a hymn!
With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear,
And draw her home with music.

I am never merry when I hear sweet music.

The reason is, your spirits are attentive...
(V.1.54-70)

The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted. Music! hark!
(V.1.83-88)

It is your music of the house...
Methinks it sounds much sweeter than by day.
Silence bestows that virtue on it.
(V.1.98; 100-101)

How many things by season season'd are
To their right praise and true perfection!
Peace, ho! the moon sleeps with Endymion
And would not be awak'd.

Soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
(V.1.56-57)

JOHANNES BRAHMS

Ein Deutsches Requiem

Brahms, Ein Deutsches Requiem (1861-1868, 1st performance 18 February 1869)

The German from Martin Luther's translation (1534), English from the King James Version (1611)

The verse number differences between the German and the English in the texts that come from the Psalms are because in Luther's German translations the beginning description of each Psalm is counted as a verse, while in the KJV they are not.

I
Selig sind, die da Leid tragen, denn sie sollen
getröstet werden. (Matthäus 5:4)

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.
(Psalm 126, 5-6)

II
Denn alles Fleisch ist wie Gras,
und alle Herrlichkeit des Menschen
wie des Grases Blumen.
Das Gras ist verdorret und die
Blume abgefallen.
(1 Petrus 1:24)

So seid nun geduldig, lieben Brüder,
bis auf die Zukunft des Herrn.
Siehe, ein Ackermann wartet
auf die köstliche Frucht der Erde

I
Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall
be comforted. (Matthew 5:4)

They that sow in tears
shall reap in joy.
He that goeth forth and weepeth,
bearing precious seed,
shall doubtless come again with rejoicing,
bringing his sheaves with him.
(Psalm 126, 5-6)

II
For all flesh is as grass,
and all the glory of man
as the flower of 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 husbandmen waiteth
for the precious fruit of the earth,

und is geduldig darüber,
bis er empfahe den Morgenregen und Abendregen.
(Jakobus 5:7)

Aber des Herrn Wort bleibet in Ewigkeit.
(1 Petrus 1:25)

Die Erlöseten des Herrn werden wieder kommen,
und gen Zion kommen mit Jauchzen;
ewige Freude wird über ihrem Haupte sein;
Freude und Wonne werden sie ergreifen
und Schmerz und Seufzen wird weg müssen.
(Jesaia 35: 10)

III

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 vird.

Nun Herr, wess soll ich mich trösten?
Ich hoffe auf dich.
(Psalm 39, 5-8)

Der Gerechten Seelen
sind in Gottes Hand
und keine Qual rühret sie an.
(The Wisdom of Solomon [Apocrypha]:3:1)

IV

Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen,
Herr Zebaoth!
Meine seele verlanget und sehnet sich
nach den Vorhöfen des Herrn;
mein Leib und Seele freuen sich
in dem lebendigen Gott.
(Psalm 84, 2-3)

Wohl denen, die in deinem Hause wohnen,
die loben dich immerdar.
(Psalm 84, 5)

and hath long patience for it,
until he receive the early and latter 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

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 shew:
surely they are disquieted in vain:
he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who
shall gather them.

And now, Lord, what wait I 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.
(The Wisdom of Solomon [Apocrypha]:3:1)

IV

How amiable are thy tabernacles,
O Lord of hosts!
My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth
for the courts of the Lord:
my heart and my flesh crieth out
for the living God.
(Psalm 84, 1-2)

Blessed are they that dwell in thy house:
they will be still praising thee.
(Psalm 84, 4)

V

Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit;
aber ich will euch wieder sehen
und euer Herz soll sich freuen
und eure Freude soll niemand von euch nehmen.
(Johannes 16:22)

Ich will euch trösten,
wie Einen seine Mutter tröstet.
(Jesaia 66:13)

Sehet mich an:
Ich habe eine kleine Zeit
Mühe und Arbeit gehabt
und habe großen Trost funden.
(Eccleasticus [Apocrypha]: 51:27)

VI

Denn wir haben hie keine bleibende Statt,
sondern die zukünftige suchen wir.
(Hebräer 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 is verschlungen in den Sieg.
Tod, wo ist dein Stachel?
Hölle, wo ist dein Sieg?
(1 Korinther 15:51-55)

Herr, du bist Würdig
zu nehmen Preis und Ehre und Kraft,
denn du hast alle Dinge geschaffen,
und durch deinen Willen haben, sie das Wesen
und sind geschaffen.
(Offenbarung 4:11)

VII

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.
(Offenbarung 14:13)

V

And ye now therefore have sorrow;
but I will see you again,
and your heart shall rejoice,
and your joy no man taketh from you.
(John 16:22)

As one whom his mother comforteth,
so will I comfort you.
(Isaiah 66:13)

Ye see
how for a little while
I labor and toil,
yet have I found much rest.
(Eccleasticus [Apocrypha]: 51:27)

VI

For here have we no continuing city,
but we seek one to come.
(Hebrews 13:14)

Behold, I shew 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 be changed.
Then shall be brought to pass
the saying that is written,
Death is swallowed up in victory.
O death, where is thy sting?
O grave, where is thy victory?
(1 Corinthians 15:51-55)

Thou art worthy, O 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

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 do follow them.
(Revelation 14:13)

ORCHESTRA

VIOLIN

Kim Tichenor-
Concertmaster
Julia Cash
Jane Halliday
Cheri Kelley
Nancy Staidle
Charles Brestel
Sarah Hill
Anna Blanton
Becca Newley

VIOLA

Jack Griffin
Megan Casper
Michael Hill

CELLO

Ian Schroeder
Chris Skyles
Yooni Choi-Reich

BASS

Karl Olsen
Vincent Luciano

FLUTE

Don Gottlieb
Jake Chabot

OBOE

Katherine Alberts
Jennifer Potochnic

CLARINET

Marilyn Nije
Destiny Lerma

BASSOON

Francisco Joubert
Eve Parsons

HORN

Emily Britton
Diana Morgen
Allie Swarens
Steve Causey

TRUMPET

Stacy Simpson
Erica Howard

TROMBONE

Brett Shuster
Logan Myers
Anastasi Fafalios

TUBA

Clint McCanless

TIMPANI

Michael Launius

PERCUSSION

Terry O Mahoney

ORGAN

Debbie Dierks

***Rental music by Ralph Vaughan Williams Serenade to Music provided by Boosey and Hawkes Inc. 250 West 57th Street, New York, NY 10107

LOUISVILLE MASTER CHORALE

SOPRANO

Elisabeth Burmeister
Ashley Cissell
Conra Cowart
Laura Lea Duckworth
Catherine Knott
Jan Margerum
Nancy Morris
Sahara Myers
Randy Peters
Grace Salsman
Stephanie Smith
Tami Stoecker
Jodi Swanson
Peyton Walker
Ruth J. Wright

ALTO

Theresa Bauer
Kathy Collier
Carole Dunn
Barbara Ellis
Mary Gordon
Jeanne Marie Groene
Lisa Kros
Lisa Lewis
Hanne Mehler
Julie Nichelson
Nancy Nikfarjam
Lauren Pauley
Miriam Pittenger
Marsha Roberts
Rebecca Russell
Shiela Wallace
Brenda Weeks
Judith Youngblood

TENOR

Rob Carlson
Millard Dunn
Brytner Evangelista
Patrick Koopman
Stuart McCloy
Ethan Murphy
Jonathan Smith
Gregory Spear
Wesley Thomas
Claude Wise
Thomas Wobbe

BASS

Louie Bailey
Daniel Blankenship
John R. Hale
Frederick Klotter
John O'Neil
Laurence Pittenger
Ben Ragsdell
Hans Sander
William Schauf

ARTISTIC LEADERSHIP



MARK WALKER, Louisville Master Chorale's Conductor and Artistic Director, has extensive experience in Choral Conducting, Organ Performance, Choral Music Education, and Liturgical Church Music. He currently serves as Director of Music and Organist at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in nearby La Grange, Kentucky. He has served parishes in Kentucky, Tennessee, Texas, and North Carolina and has taught in schools in Kentucky and North Carolina. Walker has a Bachelor's Degree in Music from Western Kentucky University and a Master's Degree in Organ Performance from East Carolina University.

His conducting experience with extended choral-orchestral works includes the works of Bach, Beethoven, Handel, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Vaughan Williams, Vivaldi, Rheinberger, Pergolesi and contemporary composers Tavener, Lauridsen, Paulus, and Rutter. As an organ recitalist, Walker has performed extensively throughout the Eastern and Southern U.S. He currently serves regularly as conductor and organist for various Diocesan events in Louisville, and during the summer of 2011 served as both choral conductor and guest organ recitalist for the National Associations of Pastoral Musicians Conference. He also served as Dean of the Louisville Chapter of the American Guild of Organists in 2011-13.



DEBBIE DIERKS is Louisville Master Chorale's Music Associate. In that role she works with the Artistic Director in the preparation and performance of the season and accompanies the group in rehearsal and in concert. She has a wide and varied background in the Louisville musical world and beyond, including as lecturer, vocal coach and accompanist at the University of Louisville. She has been engaged with Youth Performing Arts School and various professional and semi-professional local music groups, most notably Voces Novae. She has performed with the Choral Arts Society, the former Bach Society, Metropolitan Opera auditions, Governor's School for the Arts and NATS competitions. Professional recitalist and collaborator, Deborah has performed across the US and Europe. She is currently Music Director at Jeffersontown Christian Church. She received her undergraduate

degree from the University of Cincinnati College Conservatory of Music and her graduate degree from the University of Louisville.

GUEST CONDUCTOR & SOLOISTS



JOHN H. DICKSON, GUEST CONDUCTOR, is Professor Emeritus and former Director of Choral Studies at Louisiana State University. Recently retired after forty-four years of collegiate teaching, he continues his conducting through workshops, festivals, and as the founding artistic director of *Coro Vocati*, one of Atlanta's most accomplished professional chamber choirs.

As a conducting pedagogue, he has presented masterclasses before the Association of British Choral Directors, the American Choral Directors Association, the Royal Northern Music Conservatory (Manchester), and the Russian State Music Conservatories of St. Petersburg and Moscow. He has conducted festivals

and workshops in England, Wales, Scotland, Finland, France, Italy, Hungary, Austria, the Czech Republic, Mexico, Canada, and throughout the U. S. For three decades his choirs have been featured at conventions of the ACDA, ABCD, Texas Music Educators Association, and the National Collegiate Choral Organization.

A Visiting Fellow of Wolfson College, Cambridge University, Dr. Dickson sang with Sir David Willcocks and The Bach Choir; a second post-doctoral fellowship allowed him to serve as David Hill's assistant conductor. He is the Founding Director of the Oxbridge C. S. Lewis Choral Institute.



ELISABETH BURMEISTER, soprano, Originally from Chicago, Illinois, Elisabeth Burmeister graduated from Lawrence University with her Bachelors of Music and German minor in 2017 and Masters of Music from the University of Louisville in December 2019. Last summer, she performed the role of Countess Almaviva in Mozart's *Le Nozze di Figaro* at the Monastero dell'Annunziata in Saluzzo, Italy, and ended her year as contracted student and performer with the Rodolfo Celletti Belcanto Academy and Festival della Valle d'Itria in Martina Franca, Italy.

This year, Elisabeth used the Schumann set *Frauenliebe und Leben* and selected Gregorian chants to produce and perform a fundraiser recital benefitting the Center for Women and Families in Louisville and a dance therapy organization called Ballet

After Dark, a dance therapy organization that provides somatic interventions, trauma informed care and holistic methods to encourage survivors of various levels of abuse to heal their bodies using movement. This will be a yearlong fundraiser that she will perform a total of six times in Louisville between now and May 2023.

Elisabeth is elated to be a guest artist at the Yukon Summer Chamber Music Festival in the fall of 2023, and a soprano soloist with the Louisville Master Chorale for the 2022-2023 season.



JOSIAH DAVIS, is twenty-four-year-old Dramatic Baritone from Louisville. Josiah most recently performed the role of Pizarro in Beethoven's *Fidelio* with Opera Seabrook and Iago in Verdi's *Otello* with the Atlantic Coast Opera Festival. He recently performed the double role of Tetzl / Spalatin in the world premiere of *Tapestry*, by Marilyn Thompson. Josiah has also performed with Tri-Cities Opera, singing the role of Dater #2 in Michael Ching's *Speed Dating Tonight*, Wagner in Gounod's *Faust*, Fiorello in Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia*, and Bertrand in Tchaikovsky's *Iolanta*. At the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, Josiah performed as Dr. Falke in Johann Strauss' *Die Fledermaus*, Guglielmo in Mozart's *Così fan Tutte*, Gasparo in Donizetti's *Rita*, Dr. Dulcamara in John Davies' *Pinocchio*, Wolfgang Bigbad in John Davies' *The Three Pigs*, and The Big Bad Wolf in John Davies' *Little Red's Most Unusual Day*. Josiah

received his Masters of Music in Opera from Binghamton University in May, and prior to that completed his Bachelors of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor.

PROGRAM NOTES

JOHANNES BRAHMS: *Ein Deutsches Requiem*
RALPH VAUGHAN WILLIAMS: *Serenade to Music*

There are interesting similarities and significant differences between the lives and music of Brahms and Vaughan Williams. Brahms's biographer Jan Swafford tells us that "Though he was to be a freethinker in religion, [the young] Johannes pored over the Bible beyond the requirements for his Protestant confirmation." Brahms's father was a musician, and like the lives of many musicians, money was tight. Brahms as a boy had to play the piano in taverns and other adult entertainment establishments, which many believe played a large part in shaping his personality and his relationships with women. On the other hand, Ralph Vaughan Williams's maternal grandfather was Josiah Wedgwood. Vaughan Williams would say of himself that he was born "with a very small silver spoon in my mouth." When he was born his father was vicar of Down Ampney, in Gloucestershire. Throughout his boyhood, the young Ralph thought of himself as an atheist. This did not prevent his taking a job when he was a young man as organist of South Lambeth Church, London (by which time he was willing to admit to being an agnostic).

This job led to his being chosen to edit the music for *The English Hymnal* (1906), and to writing several hymns for the book, including *Sine Nomine* ("For all the saints, who from their labors rest) and *Down Ampney* (Come down, O love divine, seek thou this soul of mine).

Brahms, who had become, as well as a famous composer, a serious scholar of the history of music and a collector of manuscripts, had edited several works for his publisher, among them Mozart's *Requiem*.

Both Brahms and Vaughan Williams were interested in folk songs. Brahms arranged German folksongs, and Vaughan Williams English folksongs. Both of them considered the music of the folksongs much more interesting and more important than the words.

The story of the young Brahms meeting Robert and Clara Schumann for the first time on 31 October 1853—he was 20 years old—is famous. Almost every historian and critic agrees that the meeting was the most important in Brahms's young life. There are several reasons. The first was the friendship that developed between Brahms and both Schumanns. When Robert Schumann opened the door, he ushered Brahms to the piano, and asked him to play something he had written. Whatever he played, and many believe it was his Piano Concerto in C major (which was later published as Brahms's Opus 1), Schumann stopped the young man and said that he would have to call his wife, who was at that time one of the most famous concert pianists in Europe. The Schumanns fell in love with his playing, his compositions, and with the young man himself. As one critic put it, they all but adopted Brahms. And when Robert Schumann had to be hospitalized after a mental breakdown that led to his trying to drown himself in the Rhine, Brahms came to Clara's aid, helping her with the house, with her children, and with her finances.

Soon after they had first heard Brahms play, Schumann contacted his own publisher to arrange for them to publish Brahms's music. And Schumann wrote his famous letter to the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*, in which he declares the young Brahms as the forerunner of "new paths" in German music: "We were drawn [Schumann wrote] into ever more magical circles. [We heard a complete genius playing], that made of the piano an orchestra . . . There were sonatas, [and] veiled symphonies [*verschleierte Symphonien*] . . ." Thus Robert Schumann anticipated Brahms's later writing for the orchestra after hearing only the young man's earliest compositions for piano.

Brahms's idea for a requiem in German may also have come from Robert Schumann. After Schumann died, Brahms stayed close to Clara and her children. Clara had to return to touring as a concert pianist in order to support her family. Brahms unselfishly took care of her household. Clara returned the favor years later when Brahms, now rich from the publication of his music, notoriously generous to others, and extremely frugal in his own circumstances, was clearly not prepared to take care of his own money. Clara took over and invested his money for him, partly perhaps to prevent his giving it all away to struggling young musicians or others in need. Brahms also helped her take care of Robert Schumann's estate, and in one of Schumann's notebooks he found a reference to "A German Requiem." There's no evidence that he and Schumann ever discussed such a work, but that too is a possibility. And we know that Brahms began work on his Requiem within a few years of Schumann's death.

The first three movements of the Requiem were premiered in Vienna on December 1, 1867. The six-movement (and presumably complete) version was premiered in the cathedral in Bremen on Good Friday, April 10, 1868. Brahms spent the next six weeks in Hamburg, at his father's house. There he wrote what would become a fifth movement, for soprano

solo and orchestra: “*Ihr habe nun Traurigkeit / aber ich will euch wieder sehen*” “You have now sorrow / but I will see you again.” His old teacher Eduard Marxsen advised him to add a soprano solo to the Requiem, and it clearly was in memory of and a tribute to his mother, who had died in 1865 (31 January). The fifth and sixth lines (are from Isaiah 66:13): “*Ich will euch trösten / wie Einen seine Mutter tröset*” “I will comfort you / as one his mother comforts.”

The addition of a movement near the heart of the Requiem allowed Brahms a perfectly balanced structure of seven movements, beginning with the Gospel of Matthew, “*Selig sind die, da Leid tragen*” and ending with The Book of Revelation, “*Selig sind die toten, die in dem Herrn sterben.*” The apex of the arc the Requiem makes is movement IV: “*Wie Lieblich sind deine Wohnungen.*” Brahms is quoted as saying about *Ein Deutsches Requiem*, “Above all the work is practical, in that every movement can be done alone.” And the fourth movement is probably done alone, as an anthem, more than any of the other movements in the piece.

According to biographer Jan Swafford, “After the *Requiem* . . . [Brahms’s] pedestaled place at the center of the European musical world was assured as long as he could maintain that level of work.” Brahms was thirty-four years old when the first three movements of his Requiem were premiered.

There was, even from its first premier, a question about the significance of the title: *Ein Deutsches Requiem*. Given the political turmoil in Europe during the 19th century, was there a political significance to the title? Brahms insisted that there was not and suggested to one questioner that he would just have soon entitled the piece *A Human Requiem*, but that he chose the title he did out of love and respect for his native language.

Similarly, Vaughan Williams worked throughout his life to promote English music, which he felt had been neglected and to some extent overshadowed by the music of German composers. And just as Brahms had chosen for the text of his Requiem Martin Luther’s translation of the Bible, a book that had both influenced and celebrated the German language (much like the King James Bible did for the English language seventy-seven years later), Vaughan Williams’s text came from a source almost as sacred as the Bible: the works of William Shakespeare. The difference is that for *Serenade to Music* Vaughan Williams did not choose the text.

In 1895, the manager of the new Queen’s Hall asked Henry Wood to conduct a concert in the hall. His goal was to make classical music more available to the British public. That concert was the first in a series that became known as the Proms, which began to be broadcast by the BBC in 1927. In 1937 Wood, by that time Sir Henry Wood, commissioned Vaughan Williams to write a piece for a concert to commemorate his career in music of fifty years. He was very specific about his commission. The text had to be specific lines from the fifth act of Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice*. And it had to be written for orchestra and sixteen specific singers, eight women and eight men, whom Wood had gotten to know during his career at the Proms. The instructions on our score (copyright 1938) read, in part, “This Serenade was performed for the first time on October 5, 1938, when the singers were . . . [and he lists the sixteen singers].” Vaughan Williams adds, “[W]hen the above singers (indicated by their initials in the score) may not be available, other singers will have to take their places. Four soloists will be sufficient, or all the solo parts may be sung in chorus.”

On the day after the initial performance, the BBC recorded the piece with the original orchestra and singers. You can find this performance on YouTube, which also has another webpage with three different recordings: (1) with four sopranos, four contraltos, four tenors, four basses, and orchestra; (2) with chorus and orchestra, and (3) a version for orchestra alone. Vaughan Williams composed *Serenade for Music* with the voices, the ranges and timbres, of Sir Henry Wood’s sixteen soloists in mind. But in any of these three different configurations it is a lovely, an extraordinary, a historic, piece of music.

The dramatic situation at this point is that the climax of the plot has already occurred, and the two young lovers, Jessica and Lorenzo, are at Belmont waiting for the principal characters to return from Venice. They are alone in the moonlight and they call for music. What follows are witty exchanges between the two, during which they speak meaningfully about music (see the Text). According to one biographer of Vaughan Williams, Simon Heffer, “It is a magical and appropriately serene piece, art for the sake of art, a work of poise, sensuality and great beauty.”

Hubert Foss says, “It is perhaps the most successfully integrated, the most concordant, the sweetest on the ear, of all [Vaughan Williams’s] inventions.”

And according to Frank Howes in *The Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams*, “When Shakespeare spoke of music in this passage he did what is virtually impossible—he fixed in words all the heart-easing qualities of the most volatile of the arts. Vaughan Williams has made a further distillation and presents us with the essence of music in music.” Brahms had demonstrated that essence profoundly seventy years earlier in his *Ein Deutsches Requiem*.

Program Notes by Millard Dunn

CONDUCTOR’S COMMENTS

I first conducted the Brahms *Requiem* at Southern Seminary in Louisville; I believe it was 1987. What did a young academic, thirty-four years of age, know about conducting a Brahms Requiem? I remember spending most of the summer studying and marking this intimidating score. When the concert day arrived, I can only remember being awestruck by the genius of this work — its solid architecture, powerful fugues, and fusion of Brahms’ love of lieder, his debt to Bach’s choral writing, his extensive knowledge of the Lutheran Bible, and his debt to Beethoven’s orchestrations.

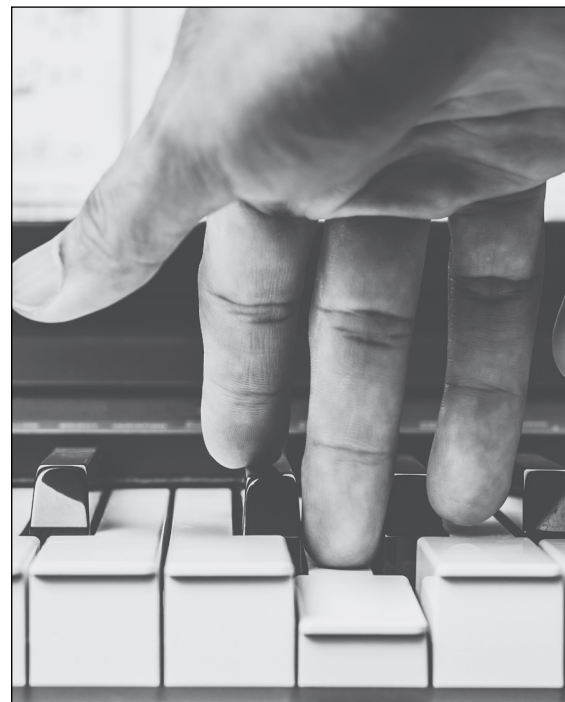
Thirty-five years and six Brahms *Requiem*’s later, I am still learning what this masterwork has to say to me. It has been a deeply spiritual pilgrimage in conducting and singing this work. Perhaps only the Bach’s Passions have taught me more as a musician. And now, I am most fortunate to have another opportunity to conduct it.

I hope you will take time to study Brahms’ choice of scriptures. To understand them, and their context in the Requiem, is to hear the music in a deeper way. The contrasting theme of sorrow and comfort that pervades the entire work highlights the macrocosmic reality of the great chasm between the mortal and the Immortal; between the corruptible and the Incorruptible; between the finite and the Infinite.

In addition, we celebrate the sesquicentennial of Ralph Vaughan Williams’ birth. I can think of no more beautiful representative than his *Serenade to Music*. And now,

*Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.*

John Dickson



Hands on.

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