



TeDeum

OCTOBER 19 AND NOVEMBER 1, 2020



BRAHMSREQUIEM

A German Requiem, Op. 45 Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897)

Brian Ming Chu, baritone
Ida Nicolosi, soprano
Elisa Bickers & Jan Kraybill, piano

1.

Text

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall have comfort. (Matthew 5:4)

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

Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall have comfort. (Matthew 5:4)

Listening Guide by Mark Ball

The pianos begin with a quiet “heartbeat” figure. Sopranos introduce the “blessed motif,” a three-note melody on the words “Blessed they.” This figure appears throughout the Requiem.

The first words – from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount – indicate this is not a typical Requiem. Brahms focuses on offering consolation to those who mourn, rather than the traditional Requiem Mass concerned with heaven and hell.

A change of key introduces the next section, promising that grief will be transformed. The biblical images are agrarian – planting and reaping.

The “blessed motif” returns with its promise of comfort.

Behold, all flesh is as the grass, and all the glory of mankind is as the flower of grass; for lo, the grass with'eth, and the flower thereof is fallen. (I Peter 1:24)

Now therefore be patient, O my brethren, unto the coming of Christ. See how the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience until he receive the early rain and the latter rain. (James 5:7)

Behold, all flesh is as the grass, and all the glory of mankind is as the flower of grass; for lo, the grass with'eth, and the flower thereof is fallen. (I Peter 1:24)

But still the Lord's word standeth forevermore! (I Peter 1: 25)

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return with singing unto Zion. Joy everlasting shall crown their heads forevermore. Gladness and glory welcome and embrace them, and grief and sighing shall flee from them. (Isaiah 35:10)

Lord, make me to know the measure of my days on earth, to consider my frailty, and I must perish. Surely, all my days here are as an handbreadth to Thee, and my lifetime is as naught to Thee. (Psalm 39:4-5a)

Verily, mankind walketh in a vain show, even his best state is vanity. He goeth about like a shadow. In his anxieties and in vain he heapeth up riches, but knoweth not who shall gather them. (Psalm 39:5b-6)

2.

A mournful procession in B-flat minor is sung very softly, accompanied by tolling bells. It is repeated in a thunderous forte.

Relief comes with a change to G-flat major, and another agrarian reference – a farmer waits patiently for the fruit of his labor. Listen – raindrops can be heard in the treble voice of the piano accompaniment.

The dreadful procession returns – two more times.

“But” changes everything! A bright major key signals a transition. The choir proclaims the text with confidence as the pianos introduce the main theme of the fugue which follows in march-like fashion.

An exuberant fugue, sometimes marching, sometimes dancing, illuminates the text from Isaiah. This refers to the joyful return of exiles to Jerusalem after seventy years of captivity in Babylon. Eventually the tempo and volume quiet to a tranquil conclusion.

3.

The baritone soloist ponders the fragility of life. His laments remind us of the book of Job. The choir, in the style of a Greek chorus, echoes these laments.

Now the accompaniment, the solo voice, and choral responses express more agitation.

Now, Lord, O what do I wait for?
(Psalm 39:7a)

My hope is in thee.
(Psalm 39:7b)

For the righteous souls are in the hand
of God, and ne'er shall harm reach unto
them.
(Wisdom of Solomon 3:1)

How lovely is Thy dwelling place, O Lord
of Hosts. For my soul, it longeth and
fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My
heart and flesh cry out for joy unto the
living God.

Blest are they who make Thy house their
dwelling.

They praise Thy name evermore.

How lovely is Thy dwelling place, O Lord
of Hosts. For my soul, it longeth and
fainteth for the courts of the Lord. My
heart and flesh cry out for joy unto the
living God.
(Psalm 84: 1,2,4)

The soloist asks a tortured question. The chorus joins with a pleading, impatient clamor of overlapping vocal lines.

The answer comes with the choir singing rising lines of affirmation as they shift to the hopeful key of D major – a musical sunrise.

Next, the Hand of God Fugue: thirty-six measures of four-part imitative choral singing rise above an unending emphatic low D. The main theme begins with the three-note “blessed motif.” The choral writing is rhythmically and tonally chaotic – pushing against the D major tonal center in an exuberant declamation of the text. Finally, the disparate parts give in to the unrelenting “grace” of the low D and all is resolved in a satisfying, forte, D major conclusion.

4.

The most familiar of the seven movements, this work provides a keystone in the arch-like form of the whole. The three-note “blessed motif” sets the melody in motion.

Brahms uses one of his favorite techniques - displacing rhythmic structures to create a sense of timelessness – to portray the experience of those “who make Thy house their dwelling.”

Ye now are sorrowful. Weep not, for I will see you again, and your heart shall be joyful, and your rejoicing no one taketh from you. (John 16:22)

And I will comfort as one whom his own mother comforts. (Isaiah 66:13)

Look on me then, for it was but a little time labor and trouble were mine. Yet I have found at last comfort. (Ecclesiasticus 51:35)

Here on earth have we no continuing place, wherefore we seek to come. (Hebrews 13:14)

Lo, I will show unto you a mystery: we shall not all sleep here forever. But we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the sound of the trumpet: For the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be all be raised incorruptible. Then what the prophet long hath told, the saying shall be brought to pass. For death is swallowed up in victory. Grave, where is thy victory? Death, where is thy sting? (I Corinthians 15:51-52, 54-55)

Lord, Thou art worthy of honor, praise, glory and might. By Thee alone were all things created, and by Thy good will all creatures have their being. (Revelation 4:11)

5.

Many believe the death of Brahms' mother in 1865 inspired this movement. He added it to the other six in 1867 after their initial performances.

The soprano soloist, representing a comforting, mothering God, sings words Jesus spoke to his disciples before his death. Fittingly, the disciple John was appointed by Jesus to care for his mother, Mary.

The chorus interweaves these words, spoken by the prophet Isaiah to those in exile, with those of the soloist.

A third text filled with maternal images for God continues in the interweaving of solo and choral singing.

6.

The chorus begins this massive movement expressing quiet longing.

The baritone soloist begins an extended dramatic recitation of a text from St. Paul. The choir, acting again as a Greek chorus, amplifies his words, building to a lengthy passage concluding with the question "Death, where is thy sting? Grave, where is thy victory?" This is Brahms at his most dramatic.

Here begins a massive double fugue in the tradition of Handel's oratorios. As in movements two and three, movement six concludes in an exuberant offering of praise.

7.

Blessed are the dead who from henceforth die in the Lord. Saith the spirit: they rest now from all their labors, and their works follow after them.
(Revelation 14:13)

The Requiem began with blessing for those who mourn. “Blessed are the dead” concludes the Requiem with the “blessed motif” inverted. The music of the first movement returns and the Requiem ends as it began – quietly, and with blessing.



A German Requiem

Brahms' Requiem is (among other virtues) the composer's heartfelt response to the deaths of two important people in his life: his friend and mentor, composer Robert Schumann, who died in 1856, and his own mother, who died in 1865. Even before Schumann's death Brahms had composed some fragments of music that would re-emerge in the Requiem and may have been at work on the “maternal” elements of the Requiem before his mother died.

In many ways this work is not a typical Requiem. Traditionally a Requiem was a musical setting of a Mass celebrated at a funeral. An important element of the typical Requiem is the “Dies Irae” (Day of Wrath and Judgment), but this emphasis would find no place in Brahms' gentler vision. Rather than organizing his work around the elements of the Mass, Brahms uses Bible passages befitting the chosen theme – “sorrow turned into joy.”

Brahms' overall theme of “sorrow turned into joy” can be seen even at the broadest and most symbolic levels as we look at the musical architecture. Arnold Schönberg said, “Aesthetic pleasure can be derived from form itself.” Brahms Requiem scholar William Westhafer states: “The Requiem is a landmark of musical architecture, serving as a monument not only to Brahms' excellent gifts in the formal aspects of composition, but also to the creative genius of the human mind.”

And it was Brahms himself who, in response to questions about the work being patriotic or nationalistic, stated that though he called it “A German Requiem,” he preferred to think of it as a “human” Requiem.

Forces

Most people experience Brahms' German Requiem listening to a performance by a full symphony orchestra and a chorus of 200 voices. However, our concert features 31 voices, accompanied by two pianos. But can his grand, complex sonic splendor possibly be conveyed by anything less than a full symphony orchestra? Brahms clearly thought they could. Brahms himself composed the piano version as not merely a reduction of the orchestral score, but as an independent composition with the first historically-documented performance occurring in England in 1871.

Text

I have chosen for this performance to offer the Requiem in English. The spirit that drove Brahms to write a “German” Requiem is the same spirit that guides my choice. Brahms wanted to write a “human” Requiem in the language of his audience so that they would receive with immediacy the impact of his comforting music. With our audiences being primarily English speaking, we wanted to offer the same experience of immediate impact that Brahms’ audiences might have had. And so I had to choose which English edition to use. I chose the 1998 edition by Robert Shaw. He is the first to state that he wasn’t trying to make a translation, but rather a new edition. Wanting to maintain the nobility of the original language and music, Shaw chose to use for his edition an equally noble translation, the King James Bible. I don’t think it’s possible to make a change from the composer’s initial intention without some apprehension, and Robert Shaw had his as well:

“While I am not ashamed of this adaptation of the King James English scriptures to Brahms’ German Requiem, I do feel I know its weaknesses, failings, and compromises as well as most who may encounter it. It pains me deeply not to have an appropriate English syllable where Brahms has placed one in German, or to add (less frequently) an English syllable where Brahms has none. I can only hope that, having conducted hundreds of rehearsals and performances of the German Requiem, I may somehow be guided – perhaps unconsciously – into solutions of English textual underlay which do the least possible harm to Brahms’ music, while allowing an English-speaking chorus, audience, or congregation to meet anew the mysterious communications of their richest linguistic community.”

– Notes adapted from the writings of Bill Pasch. Notes about the text by Matthew Shepard



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Artistic Director

Matthew Christopher Shepard is a professional conductor, church musician, and guest lecturer based in Kansas City. His unique career path has led him to concert halls conducting both professional orchestras and choirs, to collegiate and secondary school classrooms to guest conduct and lecture in musicology, and to communities of faith to lead both Christian and Jewish worship services. His intellectual curiosity, fearless programming, and magnetic leadership has made him one of the most sought-after conductors in the region.

Mr. Shepard is founder and conductor of Te Deum, which has established itself as one of the premier choral ensembles in the region. He is frequently engaged as a conducting clinician, most recently with the University of Kansas and Mid America Nazarene University, and in the summer of 2020 will be the director of the American Choral Director's Association Kansas State Convention Honor Choir. With his growing reputation in the Early Music field, Mr. Shepard's work and contributions to the field were featured in *Early Music America*, both in a highlight article in their electronic publication, and in a featured article in their monthly magazine. He has also been a recent guest lecturer in music history and performance practice at William Jewell College and Baker University. With Te Deum he has given period performances of great pillars of baroque music including Buxtehude's *Membra Jesu Nostri*, J.S. Bach's *St. John Passion*, and Bach's *B-Minor Mass*.

As an orchestral conductor, Mr. Shepard has conducted several ensembles in the area, including The Philharmonia of Greater Kansas City, the Kansas City Civic Orchestra, and the Kansas City Baroque. He has also served as orchestra director at Benedictine College in Atchison, Kansas. In the summer of 2018 he was invited to conduct the closing orchestral concert of the American Guild of Organists National Convention in Helzberg Hall at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts.

Mr. Shepard also serves as the associate director of music at Village Presbyterian Church in Prairie Village, Kansas, where he leads adult choral and instrumental ensembles and leads their youth choir. Beginning his musical studies in woodwinds and voice, Mr. Shepard holds an undergraduate degree from William Jewell College and two master's degrees, studying both choral and orchestral conducting at the University of Missouri-Kansas City Conservatory of Music and Dance. He has also studied as a fellow at the Conductors Institute at Bard College Conservatory and at the Oregon Bach Festival Composers Institute.

Baritone

Acclaimed by the *Washington Post* for his "sterling performances", baritone Brian Ming Chu has established himself onstage as a dynamic interpreter of music from the Baroque to the Great American Songbook. Hailed for his "rich, authoritative tone" (*Kansas City Metropolis*), and "range, agility, and expressive storytelling ability" (*Monterey Herald*), he has been a featured soloist with the Bach Choir of Bethlehem, Brandywine Baroque, the Dryden Ensemble, The King's Noyse, Piffaro, the Choral Arts Society of Philadelphia, Portland Baroque Orchestra, Washington Bach Consort, the Caramoor and Carmel Bach music festivals, as well as Te Deum Choir and Spire Chamber Ensemble in Kansas City.

A specialist in oratorio and choral music, he has given numerous performances in the title role of Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, the Bach Passions, Haydn's *Creation*, the Brahms, Mozart and Verdi *Requiems*, and Handel's *Messiah* on three continents. Additional credits include Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Finzi's *In terra pax*, Vaughan Williams' *Dona nobis pacem*, and Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. He premiered the role of Rudyard Kipling in John Muehleisen's *A Kipling Passion* for the WWI centenary in Kansas City, and performed the role of Martin Luther in Ludwig Meinardus' 1876 oratorio, *Luther in Worms*, with the Bach Choir Eisenach and Dresden Singakademie, for the 500th anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. On

the operatic stage, he has performed with opera companies around the country, in signature roles including Marcello in *La Bohème*, the Count in *The Marriage of Figaro*, Figaro in *The Barber of Seville*, and Silvio in *Pagliacci*. He recently appeared in the title role of Anton Rubinstein's Russian opera, *The Demon*, at the Academy of Vocal Arts, in Mahler's songs from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* in Philadelphia, and in Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610* with the Choral Arts Society of Washington at the Kennedy Center.

A passionate advocate for contemporary art song, Mr. Chu has been cited for "vocal and interpretive confidence" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*) in repeat appearances with the modern ensemble Network for New Music, collaborating with eminent American composers, such as Aaron Jay Kernis, Lori Laitman, Daniel Asia, and Steven Stucky. He has appeared in recital at Carnegie's Weill and Merkin Halls in New York, the Annenberg Center for the Arts, Washington's Phillips Collection, and as a US Embassy Cultural Artist in West Africa and Vienna, Austria. Mr. Chu did his graduate work in voice and opera at the Peabody Conservatory of Music, and holds a bachelor's degree in architecture from Cornell University. He teaches on the voice faculty of Muhlenberg College (PA), and has also taught at Haverford and Swarthmore Colleges, Lehigh University, and Rowan University.

Soprano

Ida Nicolosi, a "bright, beautiful soprano voice" (*Kansas City Star*) holds both her Bachelors in Music Education and her Masters in Vocal Performance and Pedagogy from Westminster Choir College in Princeton, New Jersey. She received her artist diploma from the Conservatory at the University of Missouri-Kansas City and was an apprentice with the Des Moines Metro Opera and the Janiec Opera Company in Brevard, North Carolina. Ms. Nicolosi has sung with the Spoleto Festival USA, Lincoln Center Festival in NYC, Kansas City Puccini Festival, Opera Iowa, Lyric Opera of Kansas City Educational Outreach Troupe, The Gotham Chamber Opera, The Des Moines Metro Opera, Brevard Music Center, Blacksburg Master Chorale, Kansas City Civic Opera, and the Kansas City Baroque Consortium. She has performed a variety of operatic roles including Lisette (*La Rondine*), La Rana (*La bella dormite nel bosco*), Despina (*Così fan tutte*), Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*), Sister Constance (*The Dialogues of the Carmelites*), Susanna (*Le Nozze di Figaro*), Mabel (*The Pirates of Penzance*), and Lucy (*The Telephone*).

Equally excelling in opera, oratorio, and early music, Ms. Nicolosi has performed the soprano solos for such works as Bach's B-Minor Mass and St. John Passion, Handel's *Dixit Dominus*, Gloria and Messiah, Mozart's *Solemn Vespers*, Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass*, Vivaldi's *Gloria*, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, and Vaughan-William's *Dona Nobis Pacem*. In February of 2012, Ms. Nicolosi made her Carnegie Hall debut as the soprano soloist for James Eakin's *Flowers over the Graves of War* presented by Distinguished Concerts International.

Ms. Nicolosi is also a sought-after performer of contemporary music and her performances of Olivier Messiaen's *Poèmes pour Mi* and George Crumb's *Apparitions* received high acclaim. She continues to present recitals and concerts around the US singing in a variety of different genres and styles. As a choral musician, Ida has sung with Armonia Early Music Ensemble, KC Collegium Vocale, Simon Carrington Chamber Singers and the LA based Cerulean Ensemble.

Ms. Nicolosi has taught voice privately and at the Conservatory at UMKC; and she currently teaches courses in music education and studio voice at Pepperdine University. She has a passion for teaching both privately and at the University level and also enjoys working with children choirs. Ida Nicolosi resides in Malibu, California with her husband and two young boys.

Pianists

Dr. Elisa Williams Bickers is associate director of music and principal organist at Village Presbyterian Church. She is also the keyboardist for the Bach Aria Soloists, a Kansas City chamber group dedicated to the works of Bach and those inspired by him. She has served on the faculties of the UMKC Conservatory and Washburn University as instructor of harpsichord and organ.

Dr. Bickers holds degrees in organ performance and church music from Texas Christian University and the University of Kansas. Her teachers have included Dale Krider, H. Joseph Butler, and Michael Bauer. While at KU, she received the Carlin Award for outstanding graduate teaching, the university's highest honor for graduate students. In 2015, Dr. Bickers earned the Associate certification from the American Guild of Organists. She is also the chairperson for New Music Commissions for the 2018 AGO National Convention, to be held in Kansas City.

Dr. Jan Kraybill is a GRAMMY®-nominated concert artist, musical leader, speaker, and enthusiastic advocate for the power of music to change lives for the better. She has performed as a soloist, collaborative musician, and hymn festival designer/leader in Australia, Europe, North America, Russia, South Korea, and Tahiti. In Kansas City she is Organ Conservator at the Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, Organist-in-Residence at Community of Christ headquarters, and organist at Village on Antioch Presbyterian Church. Her most recent solo recording, *The Orchestral Organ* (Reference Recordings), received three GRAMMY® nominations this year, including Best Classical Instrumental Solo album. Visit www.jankraybill.com for more information.

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