



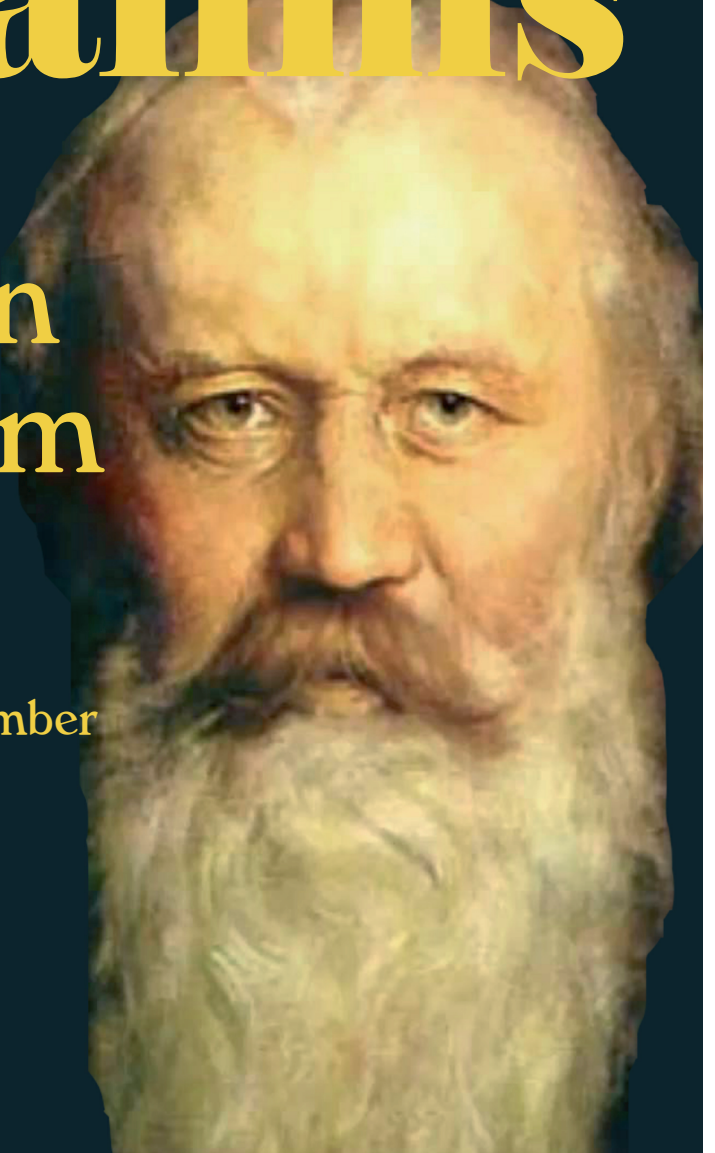
QUEEN'S PARK
SINGERS

Brahms

German Requiem

Sunday 10th December
2017

St Mark's Church
Hamilton Terrace



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A German Requiem

by Johannes Brahms

Sung in English by:

Aimee Presswood
soprano

Robert Brooks
baritone

Queen's Park Singers

with
Gamal Khamis,
Hamish Brown
piano

Oliver Till conductor

Sunday 10th December
2017
St. Mark's Church
Hamilton Terrace

Concert management:
Rebecca Sheridan

Programme notes &
editing:
Glyn Jones

Dear Friends,

Welcome to this performance of Brahms's *A German Requiem*.

At first sight this might not seem to be appropriate music in the run up to Christmas but the piece does not follow the usual setting of a requiem mass. It is based on readings from the Lutheran bible and concentrates on the living rather than the dead, how man in suffering and sorrow seeks hope and comfort from the Lord, which is appropriate in this season of Advent and preparation for the joy of Christmas. Brahms himself said he would have gladly called it "A Human Requiem"....and the music is full of joy.

The Choir has enjoyed working with our conductor Oliver Till and appreciates the enormous amount of work both he and our accompanist, Hamish Brown, have put into the preparation of this concert.

We would like to thank Mother Christine and the staff of St Anne & St Andrew's Church for their hospitality in offering rehearsal space and everyone at St Mark's who have welcomed us in this Church.

We hope you enjoy the evening as much as we have enjoyed preparing for it.

With best wishes

Monica Healy

Chair

Queen's Park Singers

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A German Requiem *to Words of the Holy Scriptures op. 45*

by Johannes Brahms (1833 - 1897)

I
Blest are they that sorrow bear
Chorus

II
Behold all flesh is as the grass
Chorus

III
Lord, make me to know that the measure of my days is set
Baritone & chorus

IV
How lovely are all thy dwellings fair
Chorus

V
Ye now are sorrowful
Soprano & chorus

VI
Here on earth have we no continuing home
Baritone & chorus

VII
Blessed are the dead which in the Lord are sleeping
Chorus

The performance will last approximately 65 minutes. There is no interval. You are cordially invited to join us for seasonal refreshments after the concert.



A human requiem

In 1853 Robert Schumann wrote of the young Brahms, "When he brings down his magic wand on massed forces of choir and orchestra which will endow him with power, we can expect wondrous glimpses into the world of the spirit". That moment was to come on Good Friday 1868 when Brahms conducted the first performance of his *German Requiem* before a capacity audience in Bremen Cathedral.

Strictly speaking this was *not* the first performance; the first three movements had been given in an unsatisfactory rendering at a concert in Vienna some months previously. Nor was it the first *complete* performance, as Brahms had not yet written the lovely movement for soprano soloist and chorus which was to become movement number five. But it

was a triumph. Clara Schumann was in the audience, and in describing the event she alluded to her late husband's prophesy, stating that it had been definitively fulfilled. With this performance of his choral masterpiece under his own baton, Brahms had made his mark and from now on would be acknowledged and fêted as one of the great musicians of his day.

The Requiem's British premier took place in July 1871 at the London home of the distinguished surgeon and polymath Sir Henry Thompson. This performance used a version for piano four hands, with Sir Henry's wife, Kate Loder, playing one of the piano parts. It is not known whether Brahms prepared the piano duet accompaniment specially for this occasion, or if had already composed it some years earlier as a stand-alone piano piece for domestic use, but in any case it became known as the "London version" (*Londoner Fassung*) of the piece. It is substantially this version that you will hear this evening.

The work is very different in character from the great requiem settings of the classical tradition. This is not a prayer for the souls of the dead, nor a dreadful warning of the impending Day of Wrath. Brahms's message is addressed to the living, offering comfort to the bereaved and a coming to terms with our own mortality. Instead of setting the words of the Latin mass for the dead Brahms makes his own selection of texts from the Bible in the German translation by Martin Luther. Brahms is not concerned with narrative thread (unlike Handel in



Brahms aged 20



his setting of biblical texts for *Messiah*) but with highlighting certain recurring motifs: present suffering contrasted with the promise of future joy; the transience

A German Requiem – in English?!

Brahms drew his texts for the Requiem from Luther's translation of the Bible, which has a comparable position in German culture, and a similarly profound influence on the development of the language, as the King James Bible has in English speaking lands. Nevertheless, he wrote that he "...would gladly leave out the word *German* [in the title] and replace it with *Human*". This was in a letter to the conductor Carl Reintaler, who had pointed out to Brahms that there is no mention of Christ in any of his chosen texts. Brahms's reply indicates that he wished to avoid any specifically doctrinal interpretation. It also shows that in calling his work a *German* requiem he did not intend to express any nationalistic sentiment. The crucial point was that this was *not* the Latin mass for the dead, nor indeed any kind of liturgical work. When *A German Requiem* was first performed in Britain in 1871 it was sung, as it will be this evening, in English.

The translation used in our performance is by Michael Pilkington. As he states in his preface to the Novello edition of the vocal score, his priorities were to fit Brahms's rhythms as closely as possible while remaining faithful to the meaning of the biblical text. At the same time he was at pains "to allow breathing points at the same places as the original, and to ensure singable vowels on high notes".

of earthly life set against the eternal bliss to come. The overarching theme is consolation: the offer of comfort to those who suffer patiently, and calm resignation in the face of our own inevitable passing.

To convey these messages Brahms takes snippets of text, rarely more than a single verse in length, from the Old and New Testaments and the Apocrypha. It is through the music, of course, that these disparate texts are woven into a satisfying whole, both in the organic flow of one idea into the next and in the vertical juxtaposition of different texts between separate voices in the chorus or between soloist and chorus.

The work is symmetrical in structure. It opens with a setting of words from the Sermon on the Mount. The orchestral tone is sombre; no violins are used for the whole of this movement, and the mood is subdued except for brief animated sections in which the chorus alludes to the harvest of joys to come.

The second movement begins with a funeral march in triple time to the words "for all flesh is as grass", first intoned quietly over gentle accompaniment, then repeated with a driving insistence. This gives way to a plea for patience set to a gentle, pastoral melody; as the farmer waits for the fruit to ripen so must we wait for our heavenly reward. The movement finishes with an acclamation of joy, like an echo of Beethoven's setting of Schiller's Ode in the Ninth Symphony.

The third movement begins with a personal supplication, in a minor key, sung by the baritone soloist and echoed



by the chorus. This gives way to an agitated plea for consolation “And now Lord how am I to be comforted?” which is answered by a resolute fugue announcing the promise of salvation and freedom from torment.

The fourth movement is the centre around which the structure of the piece is balanced. This is the only movement (except, arguably, the last) in which there is no contrasting of textual or musical ideas, and the only one (except the last), in which all the text is taken from a single biblical source: Psalm 84, “How lovely are thy dwellings”. It is as if the heavenly abode is a place of relative calm around which the rest of the work flows.

The fifth movement, like the third, begins with a soloist – this time a soprano. She sings, to a beautiful soaring melody, of how present sadness will give way to a joy which no one can take away from us. The chorus accompanies her with a gentle refrain, “For I will comfort, like as a mother giveth comfort”. This was the last movement to be written and, whereas the fourth movement is the structural centre of the work, this is surely the emotional centre. It has been suggested that in setting this text Brahms is alluding to his own mother who had died in 1865. He had certainly been deeply affected by this loss and perhaps he needed to complete the rest of the work before he could confront his feelings. What comes across in the writing for chorus is not the tragic sense of the mother’s absence, but the tender recollection of her consoling presence.



Johanna Henrika Christiane Nissen
(1789 - 1865), Brahms’s Mother

The opening of the sixth movement, like the second, evokes the transience of human existence – “Here on Earth have we no continuing home” – and with a similarly insistent rhythmical drive. Then the baritone soloist announces that “... the trumpet shall be sounded ... and we shall all be changed”. What follows is the closest that Brahms gets to the terror of the last judgment, the *Dies Irae* of the Latin requiem mass. The music is stormy, but the agitation here is exultant, not terrifying. This is our victory over death.

The opening words of the work – “*Blessed are..*” – are heard at the beginning of the final movement, sung by high sopranos, like a choir of angels. The promised reward, this time, is rest from our labours. The music returns to the theme of the opening movement before itself finally coming to rest.



The text

With indications of Brahms's biblical sources, translation by Michael Pilkington

I

Blest are they that sorrow bear, for to them shall be given comfort.

Matthew 5:4

They that sow lamenting shall reap a joyful harvest.

Who goeth forth with weeping, and beareth precious seed for sowing, shall come home rejoicing and bring his good sheaves with him.

Psalms 126:5-6

II

Behold all flesh is as the grass, and all the goodliness of man is as the flower that fadeth. The grass is now withered and the flower thereof is fallen.

1 Peter 1:24

Now therefore be patient, my dear brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. See how the husbandman waiteth for the earth's precious fruit to ripen, and long he waiteth with patience, until the coming of morning rainfall and evening showers.

James 5:7

But yet the Lord's word standeth for evermore.

1 Peter 1:25

And the ransomed of the Lord shall return with singing, unto Zion coming rejoicing. Unending gladness forever on their heads shall be. Pleasure and gladness ever shall possess them, and grief and sorrow, they shall vanish.

Isaiah 35:10

III

Lord, make me to know that the measure of my days is set; that my life hath an ending, and I must go hence.

Surely, all my days here are but a span long to thee, and my whole life is as naught to thee. Ah, as nothing every man living, he trusts himself but vainly.

He walketh about as a shadow; he is disquieted and is greatly troubled in spirit; his riches, he knoweth not who shall gather them.

Now Lord, wherein is my comfort? My hope is in thee.

Psalms 39:4-7

For the righteous souls are in the hand of God, and no more pain touches them now.

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1

IV

How lovely are all thy dwellings fair, O Lord of hosts!

For my soul now is yearning and longing sore for the blest courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh cry out for joy unto the living God.

Psalms 84:1-2

How blest are they that in thy house are dwelling; they give thee praise evermore.

Psalms 84:4

V

Ye now are sorrowful, but yet I will again behold you and then your hearts shall be joyful, and this your joyfulness no man taketh from you.

John 16:22

Now behold me: I had but for a little while labour and trouble to bear, and yet great comfort now I have found.

Ecclesiasticus 51:27

For I will comfort, like as a mother giveth comfort.

Isaiah 66:13

VI

Here on earth have we no continuing home, rather we seek one to come.

Hebrews 13:14

Lo, I will show unto you a mystery: we shall not all slumber, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, the twinkling of an eye, at the sounding of the last trumpet.

Then the trumpet shall be sounded, and the dead shall all be raised up incorruptible, and we shall all be changed.

I Corinthians 15:51-52

Then shall be fulfilled the word that is written thus: Now death is swallowed up in victory;

Death, where is thy victory? Hades, where is thy sting?

I Corinthians 15:54-55

Lord thou art worthy to gather praise and honour and power, for it is thou hast all things created, and for thy will's sake they are and have their being, and were created.

Revelation 4:11

VII

Blessed are the dead, which in the Lord are sleeping from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, they may rest now from all their labours; their works shall follow after them.

Revelation 14:13

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Aimee Presswood

recently completed her Masters in vocal performance at Trinity Laban Conservatoire in London where she studied singing with Sophie Grimmer. Whilst at Trinity Laban,

she won the Roy Pleasance Competition and the English Song Prize and was joint winner of the Elisabeth Schumann Lieder Prize. She previously completed a music degree at the University of Manchester, where she also played the violin and viola. Aimee lives in London where she combines performance and teaching work. She regularly performs song recitals and oratorio, including a recent Poulenc *Gloria* with Oldham Choral Society and Vivaldi's *Gloria* with the Exeter Bach Society. She sings in various choirs and consorts, and recently toured to China with The Sixteen. Aimee teaches singing at St Marylebone's School and St Helen's School, Northwood and leads choirs and musicianship classes for Wandsworth Music Service. She grew up in Hong Kong, South Africa, and later in Birmingham.



Robert Brooks

is a baritone, conductor and composer based in Manchester. As well as recital and concert appearances, he directs the Preston Cecilian Choral Society, the Manchester

Singers and the Abney Orchestra, and is currently a conducting scholar with the Leeds Festival Chorus.

Robert began his musical education in London, where he attended Junior Guildhall studying piano and guitar. After moving to Oxford, he started to play the cello and sang as a treble in New College Choir, under Edward Higginbottom. At Abingdon Boys School he began to study conducting and composition, and played in the Thames Vale Youth Orchestra. Robert then completed a music degree at Manchester University, where he directed the chamber choir Ad Solem and was given an award by the university for services to choral conducting. During this time he also sang in the third Genesis Sixteen choral programme.

After graduating, Robert directed the Leeds College of Music Choral Society and the Edinburgh University Chamber Choir, and was last year a member of the National Youth Choir Fellowship - an octet of exceptional young singers selected to form a flagship ensemble for the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain. Robert is thrilled to be singing with the Queen's Park Singers for the first time, and has been looking forward to the Brahms as it is one of his favourite pieces.





Hamish Brown was born in 1993 and grew up in Marlborough, Wiltshire. From 2011-14, he read music at the University of Manchester, studying piano with Andrew Wilde,

graduating with First Class Honours.

He continued his studies as a postgraduate at the Royal College of Music, where his support included a Help Musicians UK Harrison Award, studying Piano Accompaniment with Simon Lepper and Roger Vignoles, graduating in July 2016 with Distinction. During his studies, he won first prizes for accompaniment in all of the RCM vocal competitions.

In June 2016, he was selected as a student of the Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme in Aldeburgh, supported by a Viola Tunnard Scholarship. Hamish has also performed at the Leeds Lieder, Oxford Lieder and Deal festivals, and at venues including Cadogan Hall, Wigmore Hall, V&A Museum, Royal Over-Seas League, Royal Festival Hall and Elgar Room.



After gaining a degree in Mathematics at Imperial College London, **Gamal Khamis** completed his formal musical education at the Royal College of Music, where he studied with Niel Immelman, Simon

Lepper, Ashley Wass and Andrew Ball. He was introduced to the piano aged 4, and was 10 when he first performed at the Wigmore Hall. He has since appeared at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, Purcell Room, Cadogan Hall, Sage Gateshead, Oxford Lieder Festival, Leeds Lieder Festival, Buxton Festival and Chipping Campden Festival, as well as on BBC Radio 3 and Radio 4. He has participated in festivals across Europe and North America and has been lucky to receive guidance from musicians including Mitsuko Uchida, Richard Goode, Paul Badura-Skoda, Leon Fleisher and Robert Levin, among many others.

This year Gamal made his debut at the Marryat Players Chamber Music Festival and the Flatirons Chamber Music Festival, performed live on BBC Newsnight with the violinist Vilde Frang, and gave four recitals as part of the Royal Over-Seas League Edinburgh Fringe Series.

Gamal has been a Concordia Foundation Artist since 2010, a Park Lane Group Artist since 2013, a beneficiary of The Carne Trust since 2014, and is a member of the Lipatti Piano Quartet.



Oliver Till is a conductor and répétiteur praised by The Times for 'ambitious, intelligent programming'. Ollie is the Musical Director of the Asyla Ensemble and Queens Park Singers. His musical life started as a chorister at Westminster Cathedral. Having studied composition and piano at the Royal College of Music Junior Department, Ollie gained his bachelor's at the University of Manchester and received further training at Dartington, RNCM and the Järvi Academy, Estonia.

Productions he has conducted include *Don Giovanni*, *Die Zauberflöte*, *The Marriage of Figaro*, *The Cunning Little Vixen*, *Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda*, *The Mikado*, and *Liturgie* (Daniel Chappell), and he

has assisted for productions including *Dido and Aeneas*, *Renard*, *Il tabarro*, *Written on Skin*, *The Juniper Tree* (Philip Glass), *Don Giovanni* and *The Marriage of Figaro* at venues including Sadler's Wells and LSO St Luke's.

He has also conducted the London Sinfonietta Academy, Ensemble XY, Dartington Festival Orchestra, Nottingham Philharmonic, the Baltic Academy Orchestra, Vaganza Ensemble, St. Bartholomew's Orchestra and St. Albans Rehearsal Orchestra. As a pianist, Ollie regularly accompanies recitals, recordings, choral workshops and assists other opera or ballet productions.

Dedicated to new music Ollie has conducted over 60 works by living composers including 39 premières. Recent highlights include completing Janacek's incidental music for *Schluck und Jau* for The Asyla Ensemble, Handel's *Messiah* on period instruments, orchestrating Offenbach's *Orphée aux enfers* for mixed quartet and a programme of large ensemble works by Rameau and Steve Reich. Upcoming projects include C.P.E. Bach's *St John Passion* (1772) with Queens Park Singers, and his first solo piano recital in March 2018.



Messiah December 2016





QUEEN'S PARK SINGERS

Queen's Park Singers are a friendly choir based in Queen's Park London NW6. Our aim is to sing to a standard that gives pleasure to our audiences and is rewarding for us. Our repertoire ranges from choral music from the Tudor period to works by contemporary composers. We often perform with a chamber orchestra.

The choir was founded nearly 20 years ago by David Till and later directed by Peter Burt-Jones. Our Music Director since October 2016 is Oliver Till.

We usually give three concerts each season, in December, March/April and June. For each concert, we rehearse over a period of about two months, meeting on Sunday evenings at the Church of St Anne & St Andrew, 125 Salusbury Road, London NW6 6RG.

We welcome new members who share our aim of performing to a standard which will be rewarding for our audience. If you would like to sing with us please contact membership@queensparksingers.org.uk or via the contact form on our website www.queensparksinger.org.uk.

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Christine Cargill
Louise Clark
Gabrielle Crockatt
Hinda Golding
Gill Hallifax
Jo Hurley
Ruth McCurry
Grace McKinlay
Molly Moody
Una O'Gara
Katy Payne
Nicy Roberts
Stella Ruszczyński
Nikki Saunders

Alto

Julia Bell
Belén Bueno
Graziella Doardo
Rachel Donnison
Helen Dymond
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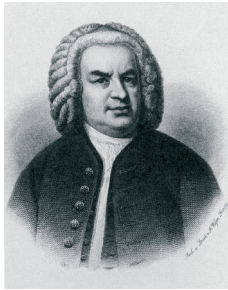
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Nick Dibb
Colm Doherty
Cathie Hammond
Théo Hénusse
Glyn Jones
Julie Krausz-
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Amanda Robinson
Kieran Seale
Seb Timpson
Paul Ver Bruggen

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Warming up





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Queen's Park Junior Singers is a choir open to children between the ages of eight and 18.

Serious choral skills are at the core of Queen's Park Junior Singers. The choir's director Mary Phillips imparts vocal training with the belief that children are quite easily capable of handling more challenging music than they are usually given credit for.

As well as performing in concert, children are also given the chance to take part in fully staged opera productions.

www.queensparkjuniorsingers.co.uk

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