



BRAHMS REQUIEM

May 21 • 7 PM



DEAR FRIENDS,

Welcome! We're excited to present the incredible Brahms' *Requiem*, which occupies a place in sacred choral music second only to Handel's *Messiah*.

While it may seem odd to be excited about a piece on the topic of death (it is titled as a Requiem), this work is a piece about life—namely, how we as people can find comfort during difficulty, sorrow, loss, and yes, death. At the core of the Brahms' *Requiem* is the question: "Where do we find our comfort?" The music answers: "My hope is in Thee."

We're also very excited for two additional aspects of this concert. First, we welcome the Chancel Choir and musicians from our sister EPC church, Central Presbyterian of St. Louis, Missouri, who are performing with us today.

We are also honored to sing this piece using a special adaptation into the English language created by choral giant Robert Shaw just before his passing in 1999. This version was created for and recorded posthumously by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and then shelved and largely forgotten.

Recent scholarship has brought this version to light, and we hope that the magnificent combination of the text and music will powerfully convey the depth of this masterpiece most directly to our heart, mind, and soul.

Soli Deo Gloria,

Samuel Metzger
Director of Music
Second Presbyterian Church

Calvin Ellis
Associate Director of Music
Second Presbyterian Church

PROGRAM NOTES

Johannes Brahms composed *Ein deutsches Requiem* (*A German Requiem*) between the years of 1865 and 1868. Though there was no single event that led Brahms to compose the piece, speculation that the death of Brahms' mother in 1865 and also the earlier death of his friend, composer Robert Schumann in 1856, lent inspiration and cause for the creation of this monumental work.

It was first composed as a six-movement work and performed as such in the Bremen Cathedral on Good Friday (April 10) of 1868. The performance was a success, establishing both the work and the composer's career. One month later, in May 1868, Brahms added what is now the fifth movement, completing the piece into the seven-movement work known today.

Brahms deliberately departed from the conventional genre of a musical "requiem" foremost by not setting the standard Latin requiem mass text handed down from the Roman Catholic tradition (as in the Requiems of Mozart, Berlioz, Verdi, Fauré, and others). Rather, Brahms compiled a unique libretto in his vernacular language, drawing entirely from the German Bible. Further, his use of the word "German" in the title highlights not just the use of the German language, but his intention that that this work would be "for all people."

Brahms himself once stated he would have gladly called the work "A Human Requiem." The music and text of the work focuses on themes of comfort and consolation in the midst of grief and loss, beginning with the words "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted," and concluding with "Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord, ... that they may have rest from their labors."

While primarily sung in German for concert settings, the *Requiem* has frequently been adapted into other languages for performance. The work has previously been adapted into English by several different translators, each treating the musical and textual challenges (and subsequent trade-offs) in their own way.

In 1999, conductor Robert Shaw created a new English adaptation, drawing on his extensive experience conducting the piece both in German and English. This new version was to be recorded by Shaw himself and the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, but tragically, Shaw died only a few weeks prior to the recording date.

In honor of Shaw's work and legacy, the decision was made to move forward with the recording as planned, with Craig Jessup conducting the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Because Shaw's version was never published, the performing materials for this unique version have not previously been available. However, thanks to the research and scholarship of Cory D. Wikan, Shaw's adaptation is now being prepared in a new critical edition and looks forward to publication.

A GERMAN REQUIEM

According to Words from the Holy Scriptures, Op. 45

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Adapted into English by Robert Shaw

presented by

The Chancel Choirs of
Second Presbyterian Church, *Memphis*



Central Presbyterian Church, *St. Louis*

Calvin Ellis and A. Matthew Mazzoni, *conductors*

Valetta Brinson, *soprano*

Carlos Romero, *baritone*

- I. Blessed are they that mourn**
- II. Behold, all flesh is as the grass**
- III. Lord, make me to know**

Pause

- IV. How lovely is thy dwelling place**
- V. Ye now are sorrowful**
- VI. Here on earth we have no continuing place**
- VII. Blessed are the dead**

I.

Forming a foundational pillar on which the entire arch of the piece rests, a short orchestral introduction built on throbbing bass reminiscent of a heartbeat gives way to the choir's first words, sung a cappella, and then developing into a lyrical tapestry as a consolation for those who have suffered loss.

*Blessed are they that mourn,
for they shall have comfort.*

Matthew 5:4

*They that sow in tears surely shall reap in joy
Who goeth forth and weepeth, and bearing precious seed
shall come with rejoicing, and bringing his sheaves with him.*

Psalm 126:5-6

II.

In three major sections, this movement opens with a Funeral March as the choir sings a melody reminiscent of a German chorale. A faster, hopeful madrigal-like section follows, using the image of sowing seeds for God to water as an image of future renewal. The funeral march returns, but after a dramatic vocal fanfare, the music becomes energized and rejoices at the future vision of redemption.

*Behold, all flesh is as the grass,
and all the glory of mankind is as the flow'r of grass.
For lo, the grass withereth, and the flow'r thereof is fallen.*

I Peter 1:24

*Now therefore be patient, my dear brethren unto the coming of the Lord.
See how the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth,
and with long patience he waiteth
'till he receive the early rain and also the latter rain.*

James 5:7-8

But still the Lord's word standeth forever more.

I Peter 1:25

*And the ransom'd of the Lord shall return
with singing unto Zion, coming rejoicing.
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

III.

The bass soloist represents our inner conscience pleading with God at the realization that our mortality is imminent. The music is dark, mysterious, and smoky, as though we are alone in prayer inside an ancient temple. As the text explores the vanity of life, the music becomes more enticing, but ultimately turns to chaos at the prospect of facing wrathful judgement.

However, the music turns very quietly towards hope and then erupts into an elaborate contrapuntal tapestry in the manner of J.S. Bach for the final lines of text (*For the righteous souls...*). The entirety of this section takes place over a single bass note that represents God's hand unshakably holding the souls of those who hope and trust in Him.

*Lord, make me to know, know the measure of my days on earth.
That my life is but frailty, and I must perish.
Surely, all my days here are as a handbreadth to Thee,
and my lifetime is as naught to Thee.
Verily, mankind walketh in a vain show, ev'n his best state is vanity.
He goeth about like a shadow.
In his anxieties and in vain he heapeth up riches,
but knoweth, nay, knoweth not who shall gather them.
Now, Lord, what then do I wait for?
My hope is in Thee.*

Psalm 39:4-7

*For the righteous souls are in the hand of God,
and ne'er shall harm reach unto them.*

Wisdom of Solmon 3:1 – Apocrypha

Following this movement, we will sit for a moment of silent reflection.

IV.

This movement serves as the centerpiece of the work. Rich, lyrical melodies convey a sense of peace as we contemplate dwelling in God's holy presence for eternity.

*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 [for] evermore.*

Psalm 84:1-2, 4

V.

The soprano soloist represents God's message of consolation through the words of Jesus as found in John's gospel. The serene music expresses motherly comfort, and many feel that this was Brahms' heartfelt lament as he mourned the death of his mother.

*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

*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 – Apocrypha

And I will comfort you, as one whom his own mother comforts.

Isaiah 66:13

VI. This highly dramatic movement is again in three major sections. At the opening, the choirs sing an almost ghostly procession that gives way to the bass soloist prophesying about the end times and God's ultimate judgement. At the sounding of the trumpet, the music erupts into a cataclysmic storm (*For the trumpet shall sound...*), but the storm halts at the question: "Death, where is thy sting?" Following is another joyful vocal fugue, in the style of Handel (*Lord, Thou art worthy...*) that expresses a true heart of worship.

*Here on earth have we no continuing place,
wherefore we seek one to come.*

Hebrews 13:14

*Lo, I will show unto you a mystery: we shall not all sleep here forever.
But we shall 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 all be raised incorruptible,
and we shall all be changed.
Then what the prophet long hath told, the saying, shall be brought to pass.
For death is swallow'd up in victory
Grave, where is thy vict'ry? Death, O where is thy sting?*

I Corinthians 15:51-55

*Lord, Thou art worthy of honor, praise and glory and might.
By Thee alone were all things created,
and by Thy good will all creatures have their being, and were created.*

Revelation 4:11

VII. After traversing the entire dramatic arc of the *Requiem*, this movement is the final pillar standing opposite to the first movement. With parting words of consolation, it functions as a spiritual epitaph, ultimately helping us to make peace with our grief and leaving us with a message of hope.

*Blessed are the dead
who from now on shall die in the Lord from henceforth.
Saith the Spirit:
That they rest now from all their labors
and that their works follow after them.*

Revelation 14:13

SOLOISTS



Valetta Brinson, *soprano*, is a native of Memphis, and has performed throughout the United States and abroad. She specializes in classical music, spirituals and contemporary music but enjoys singing jazz, neo-soul, and R&B as well.

She has performed with the Nashville Opera Association, Mississippi Opera Association, and Opera Memphis among others. In 2004, she debuted the role of Coretta Scott King in *The Promise*, an opera by Dr. John Baur chronicling the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She has also been musical/vocal director for musical theater productions and performed as a recitalist on projects in the UK, Japan, and the Caribbean.

Brinson has degrees from Morris Brown College, Middle Tennessee State University, and The University of Memphis, and currently serves on the faculty at Southwest Tennessee Community College.



Carlos Romero, *baritone*, is a Mexican-American who has been praised for his exceptional performance abilities in both the operatic and musical theater traditions.

A graduate of Centenary College of Louisiana, Carlos has taken on various roles ranging from Schaunard in Puccini's *La Boheme*, Pirate King in Gilbert & Sullivan's *Pirates of Penzance*, and Guglielmo in Mozart's *Così fan tutte*. Concert credits include Elijah in Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and Judas in J.S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* with the Shreveport Symphony, and scenes from Menotti's *Amahl and the Night Visitors* with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

During his time at Centenary, Carlos was named the NATS Southern Region winner and was a recipient of Spotlight on Opera's full scholarship two years in a row. Carlos is currently at the University of Memphis Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music for his MM in Vocal Performance

THE CHANCEL CHOIRS

Second Presbyterian Church & Central Presbyterian Church

Soprano

Ceci Bartels
Lolle Boettcher
Valetta Brinson
Suzanne Burgar
Jill Clayton
Patt Corbitt
Pat Denckhoff
Mary Edwards
Jauna Ellis
Anice Etz
Hannah Gibson
Emily Hale
Katie Hutcheson
Dominique Jones
Gay Rhodes
Leslie Shaw
Jessica Worley

Alto

Jennifer Chandler
Susan Cunningham
Sarah Froncek
Alissa Heirigs
Tina Holland
Lorraine Hughes
Susan Irvin
Ellen Jefferis
Julie Johnson
Betty Lu Jones
Susan Kerepecka
Allison Korte
Donna Lee
Jennifer Mazzoni
Laurie Niederbrach
Carol Overcast

Haley Overcast
Gay Rhodes
Jackie Robertson
Janet Rowden
Alexa Thomas
Paula Thweatt
Susan Warner
Mandy Webb
Christy Young

Tenor

Phillip Bond
Jerry Bowman
Eric Hale
Warren Jones
Randy Mayo
David McCoy

Matt Patterson
Brent Reed
Steve Tackett
Don Vieth

Bass

Shawn Campbell
Phil Chandler
Mike Farley
Fred Flinn
Alex Happ
Ben Hughes
George Klemm
Rob Liddon
Gregory Mason
Jonathan Pollmann
Carlos Romero
Sam Shaw

THE ORCHESTRA

Violin 1

Tim Shiu
Jordan Musgrave
Esther Humphries
Bianca Balderama

Violin 2

Jaimie Weaver
Libby Armour
Ramona Hong
Kenna Garcia

Viola

Mario Williams
Martin Palacios
Aaron Powell
Claude Zombor

Cello

Iren Zombor
Mark Wallace
Ash Zombor

Bass

Andy Palmer
Marcus Hurt

Flute

Jennifer Mazzoni
Elise Blatchford

Oboe

Michelle Vigneau
Courtenay Harter

Clarinet

Gary Buss
Amy Chambers

Bassoon

Chris Piecuh
Hannah Dickerson

Horns

Robert Fant
Juli Buxbaum
Leander Star
Eric Sorensen

Trumpets

Alex Schuettrumpf
Michael McKenzie

Trombones

Greg Luscombe
Wes Lebo
Mark Vail

Tuba

Joe Sellmansberger

Harp

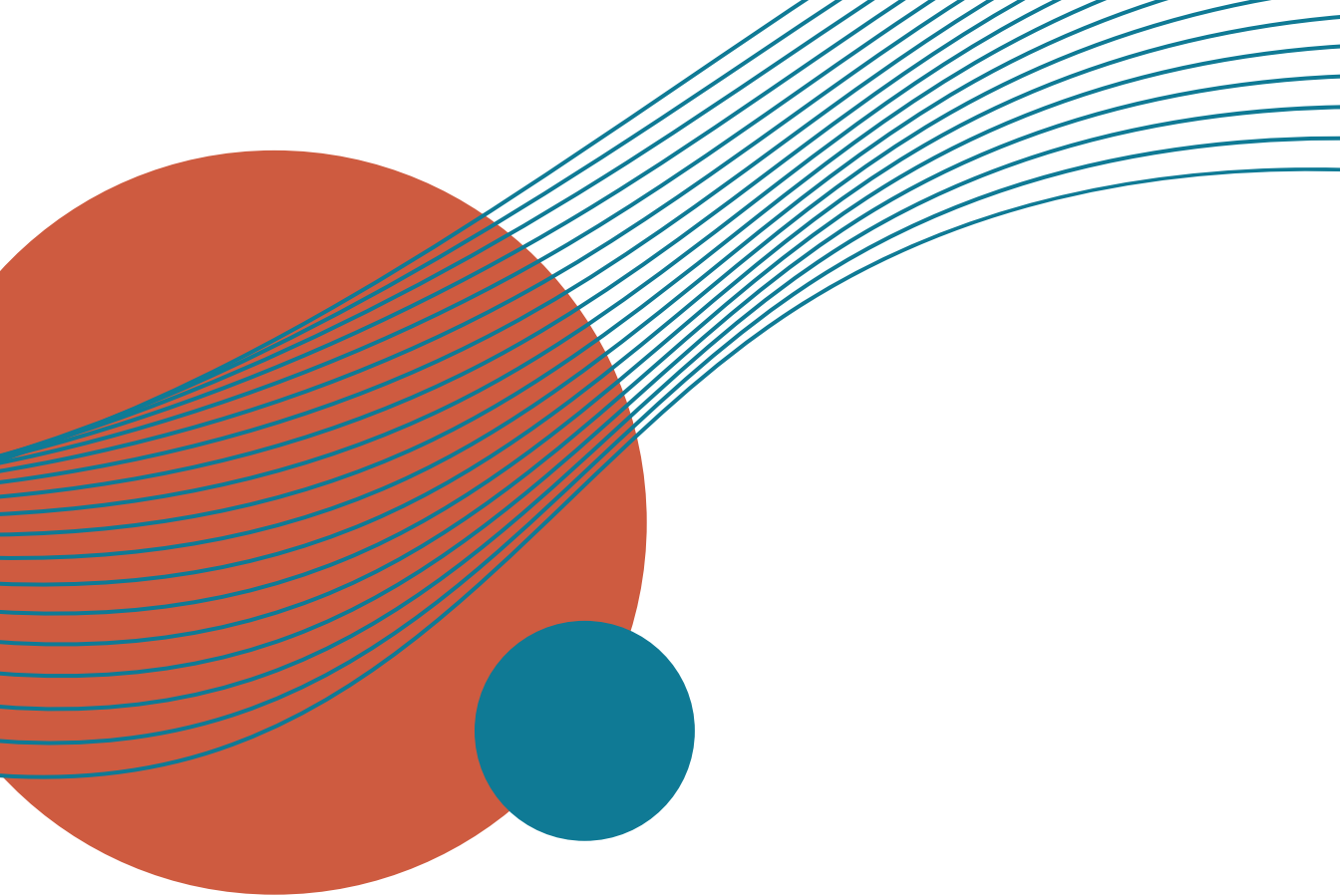
Marian Shaffer

Timpani

Michael Karcz

Organ

Samuel Metzger



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