

Hexham Orpheus Choir
&
The Priory Singers

Conductor – Glenn Davis

BRAHMS
A German Requiem



Saturday 22nd May 2004
Hexham Abbey



The Priory Singers

Hexham Orpheus Choir & Priory Singers gratefully acknowledge the financial support for this concert through the Arts Council Lottery Fund, The National Federation of Music Societies and Cogito Books Hexham.

Tonight's Soloists



Kathryn Jenkin – Soprano

Kathryn was educated in Hertfordshire, gaining her early professional solo experience with local choirs and opera companies. She studied music, drama and education at Warwick University, where she held a Choral Scholarship for four years, and widened her experience of solo, concert and recital work. She also studied on both the opera and early music courses at the Royal Academy of Music.

She now enjoys a broad range of singing work both at home and abroad, encompassing every genre from early music, through opera, to musicals and films. Her oratorio career has caused her to travel extensively, performing regularly in Scotland, Wales and overseas. Recent engagements include Bach's B Minor Mass at St. James Piccadilly, Handel's Dixit Dominus at St. Martin in the Fields, Mozart's C Minor Mass and Beethoven's concert aria 'Ah Perfido!' in Jersey. She has

appeared with soloists from the Royal Opera House in a tribute to Verdi at the Linbury Theatre, Covent Garden, and at the Chatelet Theatre in Paris, and in Berlin, in the premiere of John Adam's opera "El Nino". Kathryn's operatic roles include Tatyana (Eugene Onegin), Despina (Così fan Tutte), Anne (The Merry Wives of Windsor) and Lucy (The Telephone – a comic opera by Menotti).

Kathryn sings and records with the Royal Opera House Extra Chorus, London Voices, BBC Concert Singers and the Maida Vale Singers. Future events include recitals with her singer husband Phillip Conway-Brown, a new production of Gounod's 'Faust' at the Royal Opera House and performances at the London Prom Concerts.



Robert Seaton (Bass)

Robert has performed in many major choral works including Beethoven's Choral Symphony, Haydn's Creation and The Seasons, the Requiems of Mozart, Brahms, Faure and Verdi, the Passions of Bach together with his Christmas Oratorio and B Minor Mass, and the many choral works of Handel. He has also sung Rachmaninoff's The Bells, in Russian, and Bloch's Sacred Service in Hebrew. His wide recital repertoire embraces Lieder and French Melodie together with a special emphasis on the works of British composers. His career has included recitals with the pianist Keith Swallow, appearances at the Ashington and Cambridge Festivals, a performance of Verdi's Requiem in the Crucible Theatre Sheffield, as well as celebrity and charity concerts in Devon, Cheshire, Lancashire and the North East.

An extensive Concert repertoire includes Operatic Arias, Light Opera, Victorian Ballads, Spirituals, Folk songs and Light Music. Recent performances have included Mendelssohn's Elijah - Stockton on Tees, and future engagements include Haydn's Creation at Lanercost Priory, and the Five Mystical Songs by Vaughan Williams and Haydn's Nelson Mass in North Shields.



Glenn Davis (Conductor)

Choral music has been a major part of Glenn's life since singing in the school choir of Newcastle R.G.S. under Jack Wolstenholme, (where he first encountered Brahms' Requiem at the tender age of sixteen!) After years as a choral singer Glenn was given the chance to direct a small and highly successful madrigal group (the Tynemouth Consort) between 1974 and 1982, and has been the choral trainer and conductor of the Priory Singers since its formation in 1979. In January 1998 Glenn took on the directorship of the Hexham Orpheus Choir, and was keen to take up their suggestion of joint concerts, offering the opportunity for both choirs to combine for works requiring larger forces than either could manage individually. The result to date has been two performances: Rossini's Stabat Mater and Brahms' Song of Destiny in Hexham Abbey in 2000, and an equally successful Elijah two years later in the hall of King's School, Tynemouth, attracting an audience of over 300. Over the whole period he has developed his own and both choirs' standards of performance, particularly after his experience of summer schools in choral conducting at Canford with Simon Halsey (now the Priory Singers' Honorary President), and the late Simon Johnson. He is a regular member of the Association of British Choral Directors and sings with the Sinfonia Chorus. He has recently attended the two-week orchestral conducting course at Canford under an international team of teachers led by George Hurst.

Special thanks to our rehearsal accompanist Margaret Huntington

PROGRAMME

1. A group of Part-Songs:
 - (a) O schöne Nacht
 - (b) Spätherbst (from the Four Quartets, Op.92)
 - (c) O love, they wrong thee much
 - (d) Music, when soft voices die
- Johannes Brahms (1833-97)
- Charles Hubert Hastings Parry (1848-1918)

Piano: Margaret Huntington

2. Tragic Overture, Op.81
- Brahms

INTERVAL

(A glass of wine or a soft drink is available at the rear of the nave)

3. Ein Deutsches Requiem (A German Requiem) Op.45
- Brahms

 - (a) Selig sind, die da Leid tragen
 - (b) Denn alles Fleisch es ist wie Gras
 - (c) Herr, lehre doch mich (with Baritone solo)
 - (d) Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen
 - (e) Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit (with Soprano solo)
 - (f) Denn wir haben hie keine bleibende Statt (with Baritone solo)
 - (g) Selig sind die Toten

PROGRAMME NOTES

How fortunate was the position of the keen musical amateur in the nineteenth century! Great composers still cultivated “popular” roots by writing music of real quality that was within amateur capacities, (with proper rehearsal, of course). Many modern recordings of Brahms’ Requiem seem to be monopolised by smallish semi-professional groups, but it is quite clear that Brahms expected a large amateur choral society. Two hundred vocal scores were printed for the first performance of the (nearly-complete) Requiem in Bremen on Good Friday, 1868. Likewise Parry wrote many of his part-songs for an amateur group, the *Magpie Madrigal Society* in London, and Brahms clearly intended his quartets for domestic music-making.

As a note of caution Max Kalbeck, who was Brahms’ friend and first biographer writes of the latter... *It is only under particularly favourable circumstances that they address themselves to a larger audience.* Let us hope that tonight is such a favourable occasion! The first two form a natural pair, in E major and minor, respectively, the first a romantic evocation of a spring night, the second a lament for the death of nature in autumn, (though ending in the major key). Parry, who was Brahms’ greatest English admirer, had just written an orchestral Elegy for the latter’s death in 1897 when he turned his attention to the part-song, choosing a mixture of Elizabethan and “modern” lyrics, i.e. settings of texts by nineteenth century poets. *O love, they wrong thee* is an anonymous sixteenth century set of lines of undiluted joy on the subject of love, while *Music when soft voices die* sets lines by Shelley on the theme of the permanence of memory and of human love, especially.

While the musical inspiration for the Requiem dates back to the seventeenth century at least, the model for the Tragic Overture was probably Beethoven. Brahms was clearly impressed by his “tragic overtures” like *Coriolan*. It is clear that Brahms had no specific tragedy in mind (and a man with his natural reserve may well have held back from any personal revelations, even if they played a part). However it is known that Brahms had been attracted to the idea of writing some incidental music for a production of Goethe’s *Faust*, and used sketches that date back a decade to the time of the *Alto Rhapsody*, itself a setting of Goethe. The result is a powerful piece that begins with two hammer-blows and develops the ideas of the first ten bars in an atmosphere of the utmost energy. Even the lyrical “second subject”, (played by the first violins, and then violas when it returns,) is followed by further stormy passages. It is also notable for its self-contained “slow movement”, starting with a plaintive theme on the Oboes and developing earlier material at exactly half-speed, before returning to the opening two-in-a-bar Allegro.

At the age of twenty Brahms had so impressed Robert and Clara Schumann with his early compositions and his piano-playing when he called at their house in Düsseldorf in 1853, that Robert was soon to hail Brahms as the man of the future: *“When he waves his magic wand where the power of great orchestral and choral masses will aid him, then we shall be shown still more wonderful glimpses into the secrets of the spirit-world”*. After this the alarming deterioration in Robert’s health, his attempted suicide, and subsequent death in an asylum in 1856 must have been a shattering experience for the young and sensitively-minded Brahms who acted as a surrogate father to the Schumann’s children, (complicated by his own deep but unconsummated attraction to Clara). The music for the funeral march that opens no.2 in the Requiem dates back to the mid-1850’s and it is almost certain that Robert’s death was the original inspiration for the work, even though Clara later said *We all think that he wrote it for her*, referring to the death of Brahms’ mother in 1865. Serious work took place between 1865 and 1867 until three movements were tried out in Vienna (December 1867). (As is well-known, the timpanist ruined the final fugue in No.3 by playing ff throughout and drowning the whole ensemble). The real premiere took

place in Bremen Cathedral on Good Friday, 1868 with all Brahms' friends, his father, and Clara present. The outstanding success of this performance encouraged him to add a final movement for Soprano solo, with words that undoubtedly relate to Brahms' loss of his mother. This was probably written already, but held back from the occasion at Bremen, which had broken up the Requiem with a performance of *I know that my Redeemer liveth*, sung by Amelie Joachim (plus violin solos from her husband). It is part of Brahms' deep knowledge of, and respect for his German predecessors, that *Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit* seeks to convey the same mood as Handel's famous aria.

As I have suggested, the German Requiem is a very personal work. Though an agnostic, Brahms was deeply read in Luther's German Bible (he possessed one edition from the sixteenth century). Unlike nearly all other Requiems which are settings of the Catholic Mass for the Dead, (settings by Mozart, Verdi and Fauré, for example) Brahms put together his own compilation of Biblical texts, aimed very much at those who experience the death of others, as attempt to provide consolation for mourners. *As regards the title I will confess that I should gladly have left out "German" and substituted "Human".* The first text the choir sings is *Selig sind, die da Leid Tragen* – "Blessed are they that bear sorrow". The two movements that follow describe the bleak and temporary nature of life on earth, but after transition passages (*Aber des Herrn Wort in no.2, and Ich hoffe auf Dich* in no.3), they end with messages of hope – certainty in the salvation of God's redeemed and (in no.3) the permanence of God's protection. Just as J.S.Bach, (revered by Brahms), designed his works with the ideal of perfect symmetry, the composer then places his view of Heaven (strictly speaking, God's temple in Jerusalem) at the very centre of the work with the verses from Psalm 84 (no.4). Then, after the personal consolation of no. 5, we return to the theme of nos. 2 and 3. No.6 opens with our search for permanence, as we have no resting-place on earth. The vital text of Paul's Letter to the Corinthians (*Behold, I tell you a mystery...*) is then announced by the baritone soloist. The subsequent message, that Death has been conquered, is celebrated in a great (and vocally taxing!) song of triumph for the choir, finishing with a hymn of praise in the form of a gigantic fugue (*Herr, du bist würdig*). It even quotes from the Hallelujah Chorus in one place! The way is then prepared for Brahms' final message: that those who die "in the Lord" are blessed and that "They rest from their labours". The key structure of the work has lifted us up from movement to movement so that we end, as we began in F major, with the same word as opened the piece: "*Selig*".

THE CHOIR

Sopranos

Catherine Allen	June Gibbon
Sarah Barker	Val Goldthorpe
Evelyn Blenkinsop	Sarah Gregson
Dorothy Booker	Audrey Guthrie
Ruth Brownlee	Barbara Hogg
Elsbeth Christie	Sylvia McDougle
Janet Davies	Miriam Nicholson
Pip Emler	Anne Otter
Anne Firth	Greta Oxley
Rosemarie Herdman	Rhiannon Perkins
Frances Hughes	Chris Ramm
Ann Reed	Angela Robinson
Elaine Rigg	Gwyneth Robinson
Nuala Rose	Marjorie Stewart-Robinson
Ann Skelton	Margaret Wheeler
Judith Taylor	
Brenda Waton	
Roberta Waugh	
Carrie Winger	
Irene Chapman	

Altos

Sheila Adams	Margaret Barker
Margaret Bainbridge	Joy Campbell
Marie Bridges	Margaret Danskin
Pat Crompton	Mary Davis
Sheila Dance	Susan Davis
Elizabeth Dixon	Jean Fisher
Davina Dwyer	Thelma Gilhespy
Mary Gibson	Jean Hartwell
Val Hooker	Judith Kirkland
Mary Illingworth	Elizabeth Magee
Anita Jeffries	Shelagh May
Judith Murray	Alison Mood
Dorothy Peters	Anne O'Flanagan
Patricia Phillips	Vicky Scurfield
Pat Rose	Betty Stevens
Jean Southwell	Gill Thompson
Janet Storrie	Tina Tompkins
Catherine Stott	Margaret Varley
Rachel Ward	
Jean Wilks	

Tenors

John Barker	Paul Berry
Guido Bergen	Richard Dixon
Keith Brunton	Robert Firth
Malcolm Chainey	John Kent
Tom Frost	Tony May
Tim Grew	Owen McArdle
Susan Kent	Simon Partridge
Peter Nevin	Paul Procter
David Barraclough	Geoff Singleton
Peter Bowyer	Peter Stott
Ronald Bridgett	Larry Winger
Alistair Moat	Chris Campbell
William Rogers	Peter Kelly
David Huntington	Paul Kroener
	Keith Mallinson
	Tom McCoulough
	Ernest Scott
	Edwin Shield
	Richard Taylor
	William Weatherspoon

Basses

Paul Berry	John Flood
Richard Dixon	Paul Cooper
Robert Firth	Allan Bravay
John Kent	
Tony May	
Owen McArdle	
Simon Partridge	
Paul Procter	
Geoff Singleton	
Peter Stott	
Larry Winger	
Chris Campbell	
Peter Kelly	
Paul Kroener	
Keith Mallinson	
Tom McCoulough	
Ernest Scott	
Edwin Shield	
Richard Taylor	
William Weatherspoon	

THE ORCHESTRA

Violins

Julia Boulton (Leader)
Jill Blakey
Rachel Boyfield
Pam Bygate
Emma Davis
Ann-Britt Hedley
Jo Montgomery
Calum Moulton
Gary Thompson
Judith Thompson
Ruth Turner
Kathryn Wakefield
Michael Walton
Helen West

Violas

Eileen Evans
Laura Newton
John Pearce
Edgar Senior

Harp

Helen Kelly

Cellos

Julia Watson
Nigel Chandler
Richard Evans
Peter Richardson

Basses

Alan Johnson
James Bickel

Flutes & Piccolo

Robert McBlain
Stuart Inchliffe
Helen Tonge

Oboes

David Tomson
Robin Crinson

Clarinets

Jennifer Murray
Julie Door

Bassoons

Harriet Gilfillan
Phil Noble

Horns

Richard Stent
Tony Fairley
Rachel Leisk
Mary Walk

Trumpets

Alan Docherty
Paul Gledhill

Trombones

John Flood
Paul Cooper
Allan Bravay

Tuba

Colin Harris

Timpani

Andrew Booth
