

**Hexham Orpheus Choir**

**&**

**The Priory Singers**

Conductor – Glenn Davis

# **BRAHMS**

## **A German Requiem**



**Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2004**  
**Hexham Abbey**



The Priory Singers

## 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 (Cosi 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.

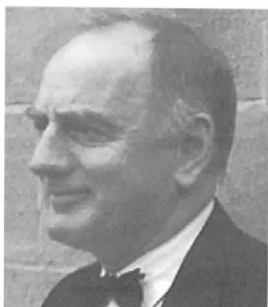
### Robert Seaton (Bass)



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 Hebre. 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 to 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  
Sarah Barker  
Evelyn Blenkinsop  
Dorothy Booker  
Ruth Brownlee  
Elspeth Christie  
Janet Davies  
Pip Emler  
Anne Firth  
Rosemarie Herdman  
Frances Hughes  
Ann Reed  
Elaine Rigg  
Nuala Rose  
Ann Skelton  
Judith Taylor  
Brenda Waton  
Roberta Waugh  
Carrie Winger  
Irene Chapman

June Gibbon  
Val Goldthorpe  
Sarah Gregson  
Audrey Guthrie  
Barbara Hogg  
Sylvia McDougale  
Miriam Nicholson  
Anne Otter  
Greta Oxley  
Rhiannon Perkins  
Chris Ramm  
Angela Robinson  
Gwyneth Robinson  
Marjorie Stewart-Robinson  
Margaret Wheeler

### Altos

Sheila Adams  
Margaret Bainbridge  
Marie Bridges  
Pat Crompton  
Sheila Dance  
Elizabeth Dixon  
Davina Dwyer  
Mary Gibson  
Val Hooker  
Mary Illingworth  
Anita Jeffries  
Judith Murray  
Dorothy Peters  
Patricia Phillips  
Pat Rose  
Jean Southwell  
Janet Storrie  
Catherine Stott  
Rachel Ward  
Jean Wilks

Margaret Barker  
Joy Campbell  
Margaret Danskin  
Mary Davis  
Susan Davis  
Jean Fisher  
Thelma Gilhespy  
Jean Hartwell  
Judith Kirkland  
Elizabeth Magee  
Shelagh May  
Alison Mood  
Anne O'Flanagan  
Vicky Scurfield  
Betty Stevens  
Gill Thompson  
Tina Tompkins  
Margaret Varley

### Tenors

John Barker  
Guido Bergen  
Keith Brunton  
Malcolm Chainey  
Tom Frost  
Tim Grew  
Susan Kent  
Peter Nevin  
David Barraclough  
Peter Bowyer  
Ronald Bridgett  
Alistair Moat  
William Rogers  
David Huntington

### Basses

Paul Berry  
Richard Dixon  
Robert Firth  
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 Bravey

### Tuba

Colin Harris

### Timpani

Andrew Booth