

## **Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes**

**May 5-6-7, 2017**

**91st Season / Subscription Concert No.8**

**Michael Allsen**

Our closing concert features two works, beginning with the rarely-heard *Concert Piece for Organ and Orchestra* or by Charles Villiers Stanford. Playing the Overture Hall concert organ is Nathan Laube, who last performed with the Madison Symphony Orchestra in 2014, as soloist in Jongen's *Symphonie Concertante*. We then turn to Brahms's most profound choral work, the *German Requiem*. Joining the MSO and the Madison Symphony Chorus are two soloists making their MSO debuts at these concerts: soprano Devon Guthrie and bass-baritone Timothy Jones. The *German Requiem* is an uplifting meditation on death, redemption, and comfort for the living.

### **Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1925)**

#### **Concert Piece for Organ and Orchestra, Op.181**

*Stanford completed this work on April 15, 1921. It was not performed until 1990, when it was premiered and recorded by organist Gillian Weir and the Ulster Orchestra. This is our first performance of the work. Duration 21:00.*

Charles Villiers Stanford was one of the leading figures in what has sometimes been called the "Second English Musical Renaissance"—a move in the late 19th century by British composers to create a distinctly English musical style, distinct from the German Romantic works that dominated England's concerts in this period. Stanford and his colleagues—particularly his most important contemporary Hubert Parry—exerted influence both as successful composers and conductors, but also as teachers: both taught at the Royal College of Music, and both held professorships, Stanford at Cambridge University, and Parry at Oxford. Stanford's students included many of the most important English composers of the next two generations, most notably Herbert Howells, Gustav Holst, and Ralph Vaughan Williams.

Born in Dublin, Stanford was raised in a music-loving family—his father was one of the city's most prominent lawyers, and hosted regular private concerts. Their home was also a regular stop for prominent soloists from throughout Europe who performed in Dublin. Stanford studied music at Cambridge, and while still a student in 1874, he was appointed organist of Cambridge's Trinity College, a position he would hold for nearly 20 years. He would become a prolific composer, writing seven symphonies, several operas, dozens of orchestral and chamber works, and a host of vocal pieces—including many works for the Anglican service that are still very much in use today. Stanford remained fiercely proud of his of his Irish heritage, and many of his works, including his

six *Irish Rhapsodies* for orchestra, use Irish settings and folk music. Musically, he was a staunch and outspoken conservative—supporting the music of Brahms and Dvorák and his more conservative English contemporaries, but railing against the music of Wagner, and despising the more modernist music of the early 20th century.

By the time he composed his *Concert Piece for Organ and Orchestra* in 1921, Stanford was a deeply respected figure in British music, but his heyday as a popular composer was decades past. He continued to compose in all genres, but was particularly devoted to the organ, composing a several substantial organ works during the years around the first world war. Though Stanford gave his *Concert Piece* an opus number, it was never performed or published during his lifetime—in fact a later note from his agent indicates that it was rejected by eight different publishers. It was not resurrected until 1990, when organist Gillian Weir recorded it for the first time.

The *Concert Piece* is score for brass, percussion and strings. There are several distinct sections, beginning with a compelling minor-key *Allegro moderato*, with a bold statement from the organ punctuated by the brass. This tragic mood subsides for a more lyrical hymn from the organ (*Andante con moto*)—the beginning of a long central slow section. After a stormy transition Stanford introduces a rather chromatic and questing new idea. After extensive development of this idea, the mood changes again with a strident statement from the brass, and this new idea is forcefully worked out by organ and brass. The piece ends with a grand reworking of the opening music, and a blazing coda.

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

*Brahms worked on his Ein deutsches Requiem (A German Requiem) between 1857 and 1868. There were incomplete performances in 1867 and 1868, but the first complete performance was at the Leipzig Gewandhaus on February 18, 1869. This is our sixth performance of the work: the first was in 1952, and the most recent, in 1994, was part of the farewell concert of the late Maestro Roland Johnson—Music Director of the MSO from 1961-1994. Duration 68:00.*

“*Requiem*” is a Latin word meaning “rest” or “repose.” In Catholic tradition, the *Requiem* is the funeral Mass or Mass for the Dead, a powerful collection of Latin texts from the 13th century and earlier, filled with terrifying visions of the Last Judgement and pleas for intercession on behalf of the souls of the dead and the living. This Latin text served as a source of inspiration to composers for centuries, and there are hundreds of settings by composers such as Ockeghem, Palestrina, Mozart, Berlioz, Verdi, and many others. When a young Johannes Brahms began work on his own *Requiem* in 1857,

he broke with this venerable tradition by abandoning the Latin text in favor of a collection of texts drawn from Luther's German translation of the Bible. It took four years of work to complete a four-movement cantata that was a prototype for the larger work. He set this cantata aside for another four years before taking it up again in 1865. After three more years of composition, Brahms completed this large work for chorus and orchestra, giving it the title *Ein deutsches Requiem, nach Worten der Heiligen Schrift* ("A German Requiem, from Words of the Holy Scripture"). More than any other work, his *German Requiem*, which was first performed in its entirety in 1869, served to bring Brahms to the attention of the wider musical community in Europe—it is the *Requiem* that marks the end of Brahms's long musical apprenticeship.

For whom did Brahms compose this masterwork? There is no dedication in the score, but in his classic biography of the composer, Karl Geiringer suggests that it was the death of Brahms's mother Johanna in 1865 that spurred him to complete the *Requiem*. The original inspiration seems to have come from the death of his beloved mentor, Robert Schumann, however. The Schumanns, Robert and Clara, had been important figures in Brahms's early development as a composer, offering friendship, patronage, and criticism. When Robert Schumann died in 1856, Brahms sketched out a symphony in D minor in Schumann's honor. He never completed it, but he later reworked two of its movements: one became the opening movement of his D minor piano concerto, and the other became the second movement of the *German Requiem*. A few years after the *German Requiem* was completed, Brahms wrote to his friend Joseph Joachim to complain that the *Requiem* was not included on a program in honor of Schumann's memory, saying: "I felt in my utmost heart that it would be quite natural that it be sung for him."

The texts chosen by Brahms tell us a great deal about his spirituality. In its seven movements, the *German Requiem* sets sixteen excerpts from both Old and New Testaments, and the Apocrypha. (Most editions of Luther's translation included the Apocrypha, texts appended to the end of the Old Testament.) Where the text of the Latin *Requiem* focuses upon the souls of the dead, the scripture passages chosen by Brahms put death in different light, emphasizing comfort and fulfillment for the living. Brahms's selections from the Bible reflect a deep religious feeling that is not specifically Christian: for Brahms, God's salvation is all-inclusive, rather than exclusive—he once remarked that his work should really be called A "*Human*" *Requiem*. This inclusive, ecumenical spirit bothered some listeners: in one early performance, the conductor inserted the aria "I Know that my Redeemer Liveth" from Handel's *Messiah* to "correct" Brahms's omission of Christian doctrine. It is clear that Brahms meant to say exactly what he did, however. An example of Brahms's careful editing of texts is heard in the sixth movement, which details the Last Judgement. Rather than using the terrifying imagery presented in the *Dies irae* ("Day of wrath")

from the Latin *Requiem*, he sets the more gentle vision from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. However, he carefully leaves out the final passage in this chapter, which would be necessary to a Christian interpretation—"The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (I Corinthians 15: 56-57)—substituting a less specific passage from the Book of Revelation.

The *German Requiem* is an immense musical arch, with its foundations firmly planted in the first and seventh movements. These outer movements trace a circle from life ("Blessed are they that mourn") to death ("Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord"), and the connection between these anchor-points made apparent by musical connections between the movements. In the second and sixth movements, there is a progression from despair to exaltation, again with close musical connections between the two movements. The parallels between the third and fifth movement are even more striking: each begins with a solo voice, the baritone of the third movement expressing grief and the soprano of the fifth promising consolation. The keystone of this arch is the sublime fourth movement. This may be the most intensely personal moment in the *German Requiem*: Brahms's prayer for both his mother, and his musical father, Schumann.

The musical style of this work is clearly Brahms's own: his characteristic rhythmic vitality, his impeccable tonal and formal planning, and his painstaking orchestration all come through in this work. But the most noticeably "Brahmsian" feature of the *German Requiem* is its wonderful counterpoint. Brahms spent many hours copying and studying the works of older masters like Palestrina, Frescobaldi, and J.S. Bach, and this careful study shows in amazing contrapuntal feats like the 38-bar pedal point that concludes the third movement, or the magnificent double fugue at the close of the sixth.

When Brahms showed the nearly-completed score of the *German Requiem* to Clara Schumann in 1867, she responded with a letter that sums up its impact: "I must tell you that my mind is quite full of your *Requiem*—it is a really powerful work, and takes hold of me as few other things have. The way in which deep seriousness is combined with all the charms of poetry is extraordinarily effective, at once striking and moving. As you know, I always have trouble putting things into words, but I know from the bottom of my heart that rich treasure is to be found in this work—the inspiration which lights up each movement moves me so profoundly that I cannot help but speak of it."

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## Texts and Translations

### I. CHORUS

*Selig sind, die da Leid tragen,  
denn sie sollen getröstet werden.*

Blessed are they that mourn:  
for they shall be comforted.  
(Matthew 5: 4)

*Die mit Tränen säen, werden mit  
Freuden ernten. Sie gehen hin und  
weinen und tragen edlen Samen,  
und kommen mit Freuden  
und bringen ihre Garben.*

They that sow in tears shall reap  
in joy. He that goes forth  
and weeps, bearing precious seed,  
shall doubtless return in joy,  
bringing his sheaves with him.  
(Psalm 126: 4-5)

### II. CHORUS

*Denn alles Fleisch es ist wie Gras,  
und alle Herrlichkeit des Menschen  
wie des Grases Blumen. Das Gras ist  
verdorret und die Blume abgefallen.*

For all flesh is as grass, and  
all the glory of humankind is as the  
flower of grass. The grass  
withers and the flower falls away.  
(I Peter 1: 24)

*So seid nun geduldig, lieben Brüder,  
bis auf die Zukunft des Herrn.  
Siehe, ein Ackersmann wartet auf  
köstliche Frucht der Erde und ist  
geduldig darüber, bis er empfahe  
den Morgenregen und Abendregen.*

So be patient, beloved brethren,  
until the coming of the Lord.  
Behold: a farmer waits for the  
precious fruit of the earth, and is  
ever patient, until he receives  
the early and late rains.  
(James 5: 7)

*Denn alles Fleisch es ist wie Gras,  
und alle Herrlichkeit des Menschen  
wie des Grases Blumen. Das Gras ist  
verdorret und die Blume abgefallen.  
Aber des Herrn Wort bleibet in Ewigkeit.*

*Die Erlöseten des Herrn werden  
wiederkommen, und gen Zion kommen  
mit Jauchzen; ewige Freude wird  
über ihrem Haupte sein; Freude und  
Wonne sie ergreifen, und Schmerz  
und Seufen wird weg müssen.*

For all flesh is as grass, and  
all the glory of humankind is as the  
flower of grass. The grass  
withers and the flower falls away.  
But the Word of the Lord endures forever.  
(I Peter 1: 24-25)

And the ransomed of the Lord shall  
return, and come to Zion  
with gladness; everlasting joy shall  
be upon their leaders; they shall have  
joy and gladness, and sorrow  
and sighing must flee away.  
(Isiah 35: 10)

### III. BARITONE SOLO AND CHORUS

*Herr, lehre doch mich, dass ein Ende  
mit mir habe muss, und mein Leben  
ein Ziel hat, und ich davon muss.  
Siehe, meine Tage sind einer Handbreit  
vor dir, und mein Leben ist wie nichts  
vor dir. Ach, wie gar nichts sind alle  
counts  
Menschen, die doch so sicher leben.  
Sie gehen daher wie ein Schemen, und  
machen ihnen viel vergebliche Unruhe;  
sie sammeln und wissen nicht  
wer es kriegen wird. Nun, Herr,  
wess soll ich mich trösten?  
Ich hoffe auf dich.*

*Der Gerechten Seelen sind in Gottes  
Hand und keine Qual rühret sie an.*

Lord, teach me to know my ending  
must surely come, and that my life has  
a measure, and that I must perish.  
Behold: all my days are but a handbreadth  
before You, and my life is as nothing  
before You. Ah, truly all humankind  
for nothing, living in vanity.  
They move about like shadows, and  
surely are disquieted in vain;  
they pile up riches, and do not know  
who will gather them up. And now, Lord,  
what do I wait for?  
My hope is in You.  
(Psalm 39: 4-7)

The souls of the righteous are in God's  
hand, and there, no pain shall touch them.  
(Apocrypha, Wisdom of Solomon 3: 1)

#### IV. CHORUS

*Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen,  
Herr Zebaoth! Meine Seele verlangt  
und sehnet sich nach dem Vorhöfen des  
Herrn; mein Lieb und Seele freuen sich  
in dem lebendigen Gott. Wohl denen,  
die in deinem Hause wohnen;  
die loben dich immerdar.*

How lovely is Your dwelling-place,  
O Lord of Hosts! My soul longs for,  
even faints for the courts of the  
Lord; my body and soul exult  
in the living God. Those who live  
in Your house are blessed;  
they praise You forever.  
(Psalm 84: 1, 2, 4)

#### V. SOPRANO SOLO AND CHORUS

*Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit; aber ich will  
euch wieder sehen, und euer Herz soll  
sich freuen, und eure Freueden soll  
niemand von euch nehmen.*

You are sorrowful now; but I will  
see you again, and your heart will  
be joyful, and no one will  
take your joy from you.  
(John 16: 22)

*Sehet mich an: ich habe eine kleine  
Zeit Mühe und Arbeit gehabt, und  
habe grossen Trost funden.*

Look at me: for a short time, I  
had sorrow and labor, and I  
have found great comfort.  
(Apocrypha, Ecclesiasticus 51: 27)

*Ich will euch trösten, wie einen seine  
Mutter tröstet.*

I will comfort you, as you would  
be comforted by your mother.  
(Isiah 66: 13)

#### VI. BARITONE SOLO AND CHORUS

*Denn wir haben hier keine bleibende  
Statt, sondern die zukünftige  
suchen wir.*

Here on earth, we have no eternal  
dwelling-place, but we seek the one  
that is to come.  
(Hebrews 13-14)

*Siehe, ich sage euch ein Geheimnis:  
Wir werden nicht alle entschlafen  
wir werden aber all verwandelt werden  
dasselbige plötzlich, in einem Augenblick  
zu der Zeit der letzten Posaune.  
Denn es wird die Posaune schallen*

Behold, I reveal a mystery to you:  
we will not all sleep,  
but we will all be changed  
suddenly, in the blink of an eye,  
at the time of the Last Trombone.\*  
At that time the Trombone will resound,

*und die Toten werden auferstehung  
unverweslich, un wir werden verwandelt  
werden. Dann wird erfüllet werden  
das Word, das geschrieben steht:  
Der Tod ist verschlungen in den Sieg.  
Tod, wo ist dein Stachel?  
Hölle, wo ist dein Sieg?*

and the dead will be raised,  
incorruptible, and then we shall be  
changed. Then will be fulfilled  
the Word, in which is written:  
Death is swallowed up in victory.  
Death, where is your sting?  
Hell, where is your victory?  
(I Corinthians 15: 51-52, 54-55)

*Herr, du bist würdig zu nehmen Preis  
und Ehre und Kraft, denn du hast alle  
Dinge erschaffen, und durch deinen Willen  
haben sie das Wesen und sind geschaffen*

Lord, you are worthy to receive praise  
and honor and power, for You have  
made all things, and through Your will,  
all things exist and were created.  
(Revelation 4: 11)

## VII. CHORUS

*Selig sind die Toten die in dem Herrn  
sterben, von nun an. Ja, der Geist  
spricht, dass sie ruhen von ihrer Arbeit;  
denn ihre Werke folgen ihnen nach.*

Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord,  
now and forever. Indeed—as the Spirit  
says—that they might rest from their labors,  
for their works shall follow after them.  
(Revelation 14:13)

[translations edited by Michael Allsen]

\* For Martin Luther and generations of German-speakers who used his translation of the Bible, the instrument blown by the Archangel Gabriel to signal the Judgment Day was not a *Trompete*, but a *Posaune*, or trombone. This passage from I Corinthians, and other references to Gabriel's *Posaune* was, in part, responsible for the solemn place reserved for trombones in the music of the German church. - M.A.