

**Programme notes for Rheinberger *Abendlied* and *Mass for Double Choir*,
Op.109 and Brahms *Requiem*, *Op.45***

Abendlied
Mass in E flat major Op 109 'Cantus Missae'

Joseph Rheinberger (1839-1901)
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Rheinberger was born in Liechtenstein and had begun to compose by the age of seven; aged twelve he moved to Munich and by the age of twenty he had written over one hundred pieces, which he subsequently withdrew. Nowadays he is remembered as the composer of twenty organ sonatas, but he had a reputation as a superlative teacher of composition in his own time. Jeremy Summerly states that "Like Brahms, Rheinberger found it impossible to embrace many of the mid-nineteenth century's newer developments in music. In particular, Rheinberger disliked the music of Wagner and the New German School."

Abendlied is a setting of words from the Luke's Gospel, 24.29, where the downcast disciples meet the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus and invite him to "stay with us for it is almost evening and the day is nearly over".

The *Mass for Double Choir*, *Op.109* is Rheinberger's most famous work aside from the Organ Sonatas. Written in 1878 and dedicated to Pope Leo XIII, Rheinberger's mass was written just months after his rejection of the Cecilian movement - a conservative movement which sought to simplify the liturgical music of the Roman rite and to suppress individuality in the cause of bring the text to the fore.

Tonight we hear three movements of the mass and the listener will instantly observe the antiphonal writing harking back to the splendour of Venice's cori spezzati tradition, yet with a nod to Bach and Mendelssohn.

The Gloria right from its thrilling opening through to the concluding fugue holds the attention. The Sanctus, with its ethereal opening soon pits choir 1 against choir 2 at the words Pleni sunt coeli et terra leading into a thrilling Hosanna. The Agnus Dei with its carefully contrasted dynamics lead into an extended 'dona nobis pacem' whose rich textures lend a truly symphonic feel to the end of the mass.

Scott Farrell
Rochester Choral Society
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Abendlied

Bleib bei uns, denn es will Abend werden, und der Tag hat sich geneiget.

Mass in E flat major Op 109 'Cantus Missae'

ii Gloria
iv Sanctus
vi Agnus Dei

Gloria in excelsis Deo. Et in terra pax hominibus bonæ voluntatis.	Glory be to God in the highest. And in earth peace to men of good will.
Laudamus te; benedicimus te; adoramus te; glorificamus te. Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.	We praise Thee; we bless Thee; we worship Thee; we glorify Thee. We give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory.
Domine Deus, Rex coelestis, Deus Pater omnipotens.	O Lord God, Heavenly King, God the Father Almighty.

<p>Domine Fili unigenite Jesu Christe. Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris.</p> <p>Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis. Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram. Qui sedes ad dextram Patris, O miserere nobis.</p> <p>Quoniam tu solus Sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus Altissimus, Jesu Christe. Cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris.</p> <p>Amen.</p>	<p>O Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son. Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father. Thou that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Thou that takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer. Thou that sittest at the right hand of the Father, have mercy upon us.</p> <p>For thou only art holy, thou only art the Lord, thou only art the most high, Jesus Christ. Together with the Holy Ghost in the glory of God the Father.</p> <p>Amen.</p>
<p>Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus, Dominus Deus Sabaoth. Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua. Osanna in excelsis.</p>	<p>Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. Hosanna in the highest.</p>
<p>Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis. Agnus Dei. Dona nobis pacem.</p>	<p>Lamb of God, Who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy upon us. Lamb of God. Grant us peace.</p>

Ein deutsches Requiem, Op 45

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

The *Requiem* of Brahms is unlike almost any other requiem in the repertoire. Those of almost every other composer are firmly based on a selection of texts from the Roman Catholic Mass for the Dead, and use the Latin text which was the standard form from the mid-16th century Council of Trent until the reforms of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. The essential purpose of the *Missa pro defunctis* was to be an offering for the repose of the soul of the departed and a warning to the living of the consequences of a sinful life. For the composer, this provides a perfect opportunity for a wide range of styles from the pleading of the *Agnus dei*, through the high drama of the *Dies irae* to the peace of the *In paradisum*. Even in the 20th century, whilst making major modifications, most composers have used this ritual as a foundation (for example Britten's *War Requiem*). Brahms, however, chose to take a path which ignored completely this tradition, writing a piece which was based entirely on Biblical texts in Luther's German translation. Although brought up a Lutheran and having a great familiarity with Luther's Bible, as an adult Brahms was a "free thinker" and humanist, which would have made it almost impossible for him to have set the Catholic mass; its tenets of judgment, purgatory, hell and resurrection were utterly alien to him; indeed, in the *Requiem* he completely avoided any specific mention of Christ or redemption at the hands of God. He made this clear to Carl Martin Reinthaler, the music director at Bremen Cathedral, telling him he wished to capture a universal human experience rather than a narrowly doctrinal one. Reinthaler asked him to include some reference to "the redeeming death of Jesus Christ" but Brahms declined. He also explained that "German" referred only to the language in which the composition was to be sung; he would have gladly called it "A Human Requiem." Although there were some precedents for the use of a German text in Heinrich Schütz's *Musikalische Exequien* and the *Trauermesse* of Schubert, neither were widely known at the time. More importantly, Brahms' purpose is different from that of the usual Requiem. His is a work whose

essential purpose is to comfort the living: this is not a mass for the dead, but a piece for the living about the dead.

There seems to be no specific incident which triggered in Brahms the decision to write a requiem. It may well be that the gestation stemmed from the insanity and death of his great friend and champion Robert Schumann in the mid 1850s (he certainly sketched a funeral cantata which was never completed) but there can be little doubt that the death of his mother in February 1865 focused his mind on the project. By this time, Brahms had left his native Hamburg to live in Vienna. When he received the news of his mother's illness he rushed back to Hamburg, but arrived too late. The personal nature of his grief must surely also have influenced his decision to use his own selection of consoling Biblical texts rather than the Latin mass. As early as April 1865 a letter to Clara Schumann seems to indicate that he had decided upon the texts, and that the structure and some musical ideas for the Requiem were already advanced in his mind. He began composing intensively in February 1866 - exactly a year after his mother's death - completing the work in its original six movement form in August, though he continued to revise it until December.

The first performance was a semi-private affair in Catholic Vienna in December 1867 during a concert dedicated to the memory of Franz Schubert. At this time, the 34-year-old Brahms was still largely unknown, and the conductor, Johann von Herbeck, did not consider him sufficient "box office" to risk giving over an hour of the concert to his new piece. He therefore persuaded Brahms to allow him to perform only the first three movements. Although the performance had its problems (the timpanist misread the dynamic markings in the fugal ending of the third movement, playing the *pf* parts as *ff* throughout, drowning the chorus and the rest of the orchestra), but it was widely reviewed and caused considerable debate between the traditionalist and modernist factions, setting the scene for the Brahms v. Wagner polemics of the next quarter century.

The first full performance of the six-movement version took place in Protestant Bremen (where Brahms had wanted the premiere to take place all along) in the cathedral on Good Friday 1868, conducted by the composer. The concert had been well advertised and an audience of 2500 attended, giving the work such a hugely positive reception that a second performance had to be arranged for two weeks later. The experience of these performances convinced Brahms that the Requiem needed a greater variety of texture and sonority, so between April and June 1868 he composed what became the fifth movement "Ihr habt nun traurigkeit" with its glorious part for soprano solo.

The first performance of the Requiem in Britain in 1871 was a private performance and, like our performance tonight, was accompanied by piano duet. Brahms himself had made a piano duet version of the Requiem in 1869, but it was a version including all the choral parts and was neither intended nor suitable as it stood for use as an accompaniment to a choral performance. The first London performance was conducted by Brahms's friend, the singer Julius Stockhausen, who had been the baritone soloist in the Bremen performance. He used this piano duet version, but the copy he used survives, and wherever possible the parts which correspond to the vocal lines have been scored out by Stockhausen, otherwise everything sung would have been doubled by the pianos. Brahms had been very enthusiastic about the duet version, writing with typical jokey self-deprecation "I have devoted myself to a noble occupation: arranging my immortal work so that it can also be enjoyed by four-handed souls. Now it cannot perish. What is more, it has become altogether splendid". Later, however, he changed his mind, demanding of his publisher that his name be removed as arranger from the score: "I cannot look at the Requiem [arrangement] without becoming annoyed". We hope that tonight's performance will persuade you that he was being overly self-critical. The colour and richness of the full orchestral version are undoubtedly lost, but a clarity is gained which allows details and subtleties to become apparent which can be lost with full orchestra.

The first movement "Selig sind, die da leid tragen" sets the Second Beatitude from Matthew, chapter 4 and part of Psalm 126. In many ways, this opening text sets the premise of the whole work: "Blessed are those who mourn: for they shall be comforted", focusing straight away on the mourners rather than the deceased. After the inexorable, grief-laden tread of the instrumental opening the voices emerge from nothing with a rising phrase which seems to

promise consolation. The middle section lightens the texture, mirroring the Psalm's promise of joy after grief. The first section returns, but the movement ends with the words "sie soll'n getröstet werden" (they shall be comforted) first almost triumphantly, then in quiet certainty.

The second movement "Denn alles Fleisch es ist wie grass" sets texts from the First Epistle of St Peter, James chapter 5 and Isaiah chapter 35. This continues the theme of the first movement, describing the transience of human life in terms of the cycle of nature. Mankind needs patience, like the farmer who plants crops and must wait for the harvest. Like him, mankind will be rewarded by a joyful return to Zion. Musically, the movement begins with a funeral march whose quietly implacable tread moves into phrases of restrained despair. The chorus enter in an almost chant-like unison which again becomes despairing at the description of the withered grass and fallen flowers. A new section moves into the major, and the whole texture lightens as the words of James tell the mourner that he must await the coming of the Lord like the husbandman awaits the harvest. The music of the funeral march returns, but is interrupted by a shout of certainty in the return of the Lord and the funeral march become a march of victory.

Movement three, "Herr, lehre doch mich", sets verses from Psalm 39 and Wisdom chapter 3. Brahms introduces the first of the solo singers in this movement, which begins with the baritone's plea to know his destiny. He despairs at the transience of his life and its meaninglessness without God. These sentiments are echoed by the chorus; they are common to all mankind. But then a mysterious transition moves the music into an energetically joyous fugue at the knowledge that the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God.

The fourth movement "Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen" is the most well-known of all and is often sung as a separate piece. Its setting of verses from Psalm 84 is a great contrast to all that has gone before and is a delightful contemplation of the joys of heaven. The lilting, 3/4 time makes it positively waltz-like.

The text of "Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit" (the fifth movement, though the last to be added) addresses the listener directly for the first time. The texts from John chapter 15 and Ecclesiasticus chapter 51 again emphasise that joy will follow grief, but the use of Isaiah chapter 66 with its reference to the comforting mother, must have had an especial significance for Brahms (this movement is specifically dedicated to his mother). The use of the solo soprano voice for the only time in the *Requiem* brings a contrast of sonority and the glorious arching phrases are as balm. Particularly affecting is the ending, where the soprano repeats in heartbreaking simplicity "wieder sehen" (I will see you again), her part continuing a beat longer than the chorus, as though she cannot quite bear to leave her child.

Movement six, "Denn wir haben hie keine bleibende Statt", sets texts from Hebrews chapter 13, Corinthians chapter 15 and Revelations chapter 4. It begins with a steady march which tells of the impermanence of all things human. This is interrupted by the baritone soloist telling us in a text which will be very familiar from Handel's *Messiah*, that "in the twinkling of an eye" the last trumpet shall sound. The final section "Herr, du bist würdig" is a awe-inspiring fugue whose magnificence invokes the Apocalypse.

The final movement "Selig sind die Toten" sets a text from Revelations chapter 14 and is a fulfilment of the theme of the first movement (the movement begins with a theme from the first movement). The dead, who are now with the Lord, are indeed blessed as they have achieved the end that all believers desire. The music's calm, unhurried gait tells of the certainty of eternal life, and, indeed, in the central section "Ja, der geist spricht" time seems to stand still. The movement, and the work, ends with a *pianissimo* restatement of the belief that the dead are blessed.

Paul Steinson
Rochester Choral Society
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