



# Cacophony

Issue 64, August, 2022

Newcastle University Choir PRESENTS

An afternoon with  
**Brahms**  
featuring  
**A German Requiem**

SUNDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 2022  
2.30PM - Christ Church Cathedral Newcastle

Conductor: Dr Christopher Allan  
Soprano: Petah Cavallaro  
Baritone: David Greco  
Piano: Erin Sweetman  
Claire Howard Race

Adult \$40 Concession \$35 Student \$20  
Tickets available at [www.TryBooking.com](http://www.TryBooking.com)  
[www.newcastleuniversitychoir.org](http://www.newcastleuniversitychoir.org)

NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY CHOIR  
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sound. The *Requiem* calls for two strong and expressive soloists and the choir is thrilled to be joined by rising star Soprano Petah Cavallaro and renowned Baritone David Greco. The *Requiem* will be sung in German, its original language.

This newsletter highlights program content and background about the composer. There is much more in total, a feast for the ears and eyes, at the Cathedral.

Tickets are \$40 adult, \$35 Concession, \$20 Student, They can be obtained from [www.TryBooking.com](http://www.TryBooking.com). **Please buy tickets on-line ahead of time.** Ticket sales at the door will be very limited. We cannot accept ticket orders by telephone.

On Sunday afternoon, 4 September at 2:30 pm the Newcastle University Choir (NUC) will perform *The German Requiem (Ein Deutsches Requiem)*, by Johannes Brahms, as the second half of a concert titled *An Afternoon with Brahms*. The location is Christ Church Cathedral. The first half of the concert will include Bach chorales from cantatas and the St John Passion, as well as songs by Brahms and Robert Schumann.

Conducted by Musical Director, Dr Christopher Allan, the Newcastle University Choir presents the work accompanied by piano four hands. The two pianists are Erin Sweetman and Claire Howard Race. The four-hand piano version wasn't originally arranged by Brahms, but he endorsed the arrangement. It allows for a very full and orchestral



Johannes Brahms

Johannes Brahms was born in Hamburg, Germany in 1833, and died in Vienna in 1897. His performance debut as a pianist occurred in Hamburg in September 1848, at the age of 15. He was educated at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. During his early adult years, he earned a living by teaching piano and performing in a range of venues. These

included taverns and theatres, often to audiences at the lower levels of society.

In 1853, he was given a letter of introduction to both Franz Liszt (pianist and composer) and to Robert Schuman (composer). By this time Brahms had begun composing. Praised as a musical genius by Schuman, he then became a teacher to royalty, and a choral conductor.

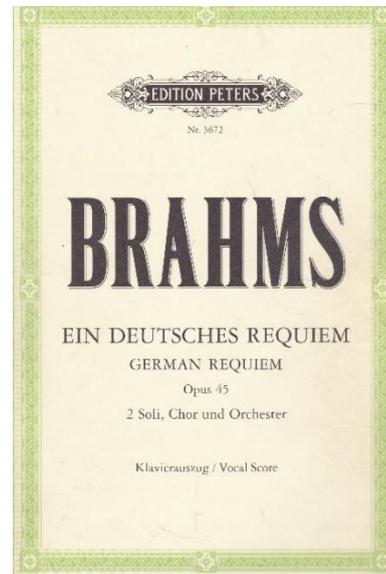
A classical traditionalist, he opposed “new methods” of composing by famous musicians such as Liszt and Wagner. Brahms was considered the “polar opposite” to the then Wagnerian school of music. His early compositions were not very successful, until *Ein Deutsches Requiem*.

1862 was his first visit to Vienna, where he lived until his death. Here, in 1872, he was appointed artistic director of Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde (Society for Friends of Music), a post he held until 1875. Most of the rest of his life was devoted composing and the occasional piano tour.

Brahms is often linked with J.S. Bach and L. von Beethoven as one of the greatest European composers (“The three Bs”). He wrote 4 major symphonies, 5 concertos, a wide range of chamber music, and many piano and organ works. His vocal achievements include nearly 200 chorales, song-cycles, and a large number of songs. Surprisingly, he never wrote an opera. His music is performed all over the world, and is loved for romantic nature, with many novel theme developments. If there was one word to describe his music, I would choose “beautiful”.

*Ein Deutsches Requiem* was composed between 1865-1868. The first three movements were performed in Vienna in 1867, and then Bremen in 1868. Encouraged by positive audience reaction, he finished the work in mid-1868. The first

complete performance occurred in Leipzig in 1869.



Certainly the most famous of his choral works, the *Requiem*'s structure is based on the Lutheran translation of the Bible rather than a setting of the Roman Catholic Mass for the dead. Brahms purposely omitted the text of the Mass, using instead words drawn from the Psalms which clearly had a personal meaning for him. Consisting of seven movements, it may have been inspired by the death of his mother in 1865.

Other, later composers were to use his idea of alternate words in a Requiem format and indeed the University Choir has performed John Rutter's 'Requiem' in which he inserts words from the Psalms as well as some of the text of the Requiem Mass and Howard Goodall's 'Eternal Light' which incorporates Hymns and poetry rather than traditional words.

Unlike a usual Requiem, the focus is on the living, rather than the dead. Brahms' idea was to remind us that we who remain need to find comfort as well as to remember those who have died. The music is therefore at times reflective and reverential, passionate and exciting – all the aspects of the human condition.

The most famous of all the movements is number 4, 'Wie Lieblich Sind Deine Wohnungen' (How Lovely is Thy Dwelling Place), which comes from Psalm 84:2. It musically describes God's dwelling place, Heaven. It has been performed separately by many choirs in both German and English and is included in many church hymn books.

Brahms, as mentioned earlier, was a 'traditionalist' who revered the works of J.S. Bach and Beethoven. Throughout the *Requiem* we find strong influences of this lineage of composition. Brahms uses chorale like sections with interesting harmonic configurations as well as strict fugal writing so reminiscent of Bach and Beethoven. Listen out, for example, for the exciting fugue in movement 3 at the words 'Der Gerechten Seelen sind in Gottes Hand' (The souls of the righteous are in God's hands). A four-part Bach-like fugue heard throughout the vocal parts is accompanied throughout by a deep low 'D' pedal note (a note that sounds continuously) which adds further complexity to the already exciting fugal layers above.

Later in movement 6, Brahms returns to the fugue form at the words 'Herr, du bist würdig zu nehmen Preis und Ehre un Kraft' (Lord, you are worthy to receive glory, honour and power). This time the fugue is much more like those of Beethoven. The fugue subject is short and clear with an exciting shorter note counter subject.

Each of the movements is, within itself, a complete 'work' consisting of various sections that are contrasting in nature. Movements 3 and 6 have extensive solos for the Baritone interspersed with choral moments (and both culminating in the fugues). The contrast is movement 5, the only movement which features the solo soprano. This is a movement of enormous

beauty with a meandering, soaring solo line based over a chorale-like tune heard in the choir. The soprano sings about those that are left. We feel great sorrow but have the promise of being reunited. For that we can rejoice and take comfort. Brahms uses the chorale (hymn) tune to provide a central basis over which the expressive solo line and constantly moving accompaniment can center.

Throughout the work we hear examples of the rich harmonic language of which Brahms was a master. As well, he has a habit of combining duple rhythms (groups of two) with triple rhythms (groups of three). This form of rhythmic complexity is found in many of his compositions and is a 'trademark'.

*Ein Deutsches Requiem* is a rich feast of beautiful music from the quiet contemplative opening to the concluding bars. It is a challenge to sing but the result is absolute pleasure. The acoustics of Christ Church Cathedral will enhance the music, to the enjoyment of all that attend.

*Howard Bridgman, Editor, with inputs from Dr Christopher Allan, Musical Director*

*(References: Oxford Dictionary of Music, Oxford University Press, 1985, pp 97-98, 196; Wikipedia sites for Brahms and Ein Deutsches Requiem)*