



Johannes Brahms

Ein deutsches Requiem



The Shenandoah Valley Choral Society

and

The Richmond Symphony

Jacques Houtmann, music director

Sharmane Davis, soprano

In Dal Choi, baritone

Kenneth Nafziger, conductor

Sunday, March 15, 1981, 7:30 p.m.
Wilson Auditorium
James Madison University

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TRAGIC OVERTURE, Op. 81

JOHANNES BRAHMS
1833–1897

Johannes Brahms, by the summer of 1880, had already achieved international acclaim, and in response to an honorary doctorate from the University of Breslau, he composed the light-hearted **Academic Festival Overture**. *In that same summer, Brahms also composed the somber* **Tragic Overture**. *There is no indication of a tragic event or idea which might have inspired this overture. One need perhaps search no further for explanation than the observation that Brahms frequently produced new works in pairs, and these two overtures from the summer of 1880 are perfectly contrasting companions.*

The **Tragic Overture** *is written in D minor, a key often associated with apprehension. The overture is composed in the sonata allegro form common in symphonic first movements. The musical materials from which Brahms constructs the work include the massive chords which are heard at the very beginning, a D minor melody introduced first by the unison string section, a gentle and consoling melody played first by the trombones and tuba, a warm F major melody introduced by the first violins, and silence -- dramatic and energetic silence. From these materials, Brahms fashions a brief composition in which a spectrum of thought and feeling about tragedy is presented, synthesized and resolved impressing the listener that, while tears may have been shed, there is no capitulation in the face of this unnamed tragedy.*

EIN DEUTSCHES REQUIEM, Op. 45

JOHANNES BRAHMS

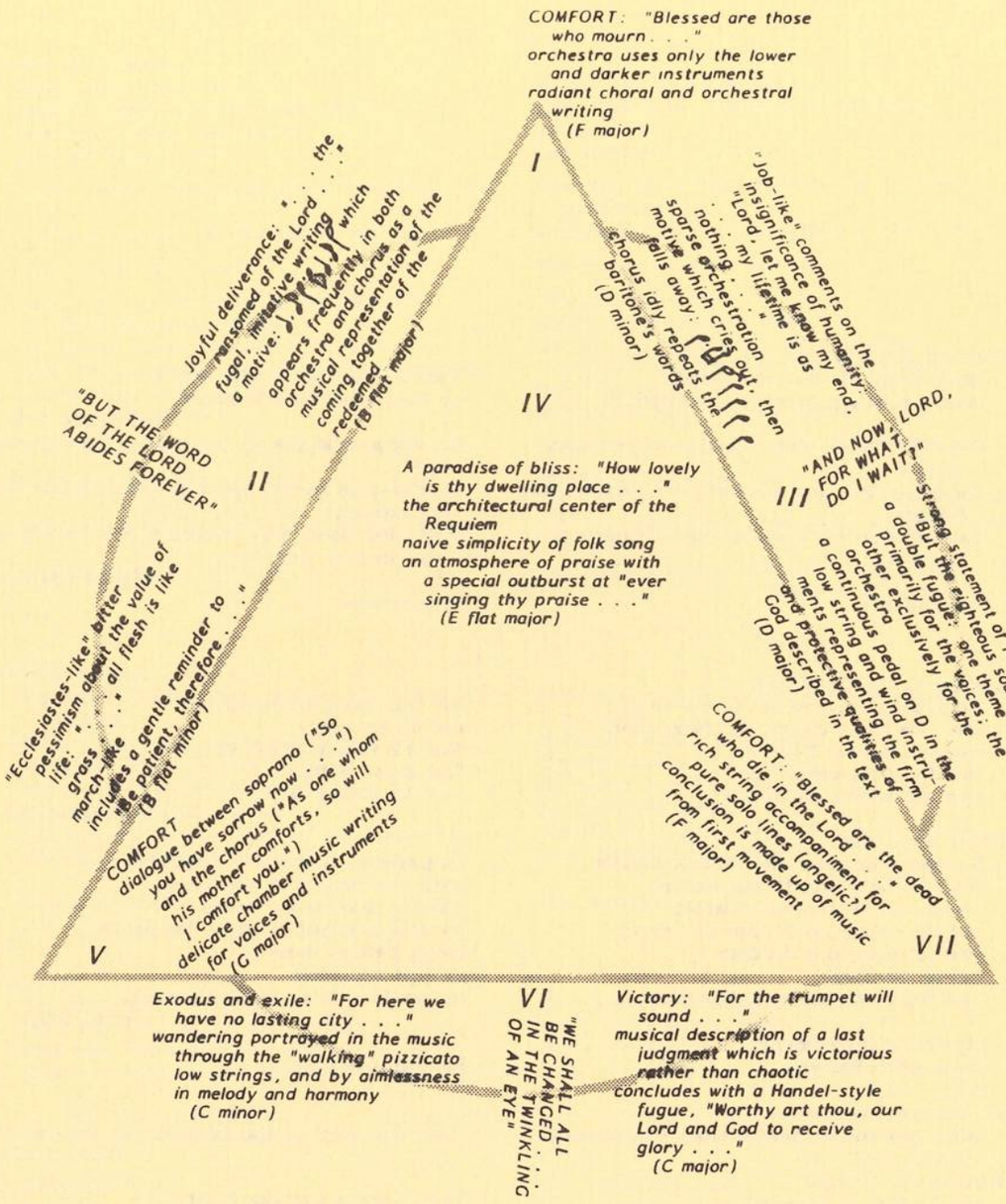
When the first three movements of **Ein deutsches Requiem** *were premiered in Vienna in 1867, the Vienna audience hissed its disapproval! One can only speculate why such an ugly response was provoked, especially since the work has come to be regarded as one of Brahms' masterpieces. Perhaps it was because Brahms was still regarded as an outsider by the Viennese musical establishment, or perhaps it was because the choir and orchestra were ill-prepared for the performance, or it may have been that Catholic Vienna was not prepared for the ideas which the Lutheran Brahms had selected for this work.*

A requiem is a traditional Catholic mass for the dead, a series of prayers on behalf of the soul of the departed. Some of these prayers date back to the earliest days of western Christianity. There is an emphasis on the terrifying encounter between the soul and the Eternal Judge. In the large Romantic requiem settings by Verdi and Berlioz, much is made of that terrible day of reckoning. Brahms however, instead of using any of the ideas or lines from the traditional Latin text, selected verses from Luther's translation of the Bible, and titled his composition **Ein deutsches Requiem nach Worten der Heiligen Schrift (A German Requiem on words from the Holy Scriptures)**. *Some years later, Brahms voiced the wish that he had titled the work* **A Human (or Universal) Requiem**, *acknowledging that the work is more concerned with eternal human dilemmas than with a specific liturgical event.*

The writing of **Ein deutsches Requiem** *occupied Brahms for some fifteen years. By 1866, the work, except for the fifth movement, was completed, and in the following year was performed to enthusiastic response in Bremen. In 1868, the fifth movement was composed, completing the score as it is known today; its first complete performance was given on February 18, 1869 in Leipzig.*

There is no definitive answer to the question of why Brahms composed this work, though many have been suggested, such as personal disappointments, the deaths of his friends Robert and Clara Schumann, and others. The fifth movement is the only one for which clear evidence exists that an event prompted its composition. That event was the death of the composer's dearly loved step-mother in 1865. It seems natural that Brahms, a product of nineteenth century German Romanticism, would have devoted considerable attention to questions about life and death, mortality and immortality, suffering and consolation -- ideas which intrigued artists and philosophers of that era.

Brahms constructed the architecture of **Ein deutsches Requiem** *to emphasize a single point: the human spirit is subjected to no situations save those for which adequate hope and comfort exist. The movements of this symphony with words fall into two groups. The one describes comfort (I, V and VII), indicated at the three points of the triangle below; the other names various trials of the spirit together with appropriate spiritual counterbalances (II, III and VI), indicated in the exposed parts of the circle. In the geometric design below, it is significant that the fourth movement is placed in the center, as it occupies the architectural center of the entire work, and is further distinguished by its simple, naive expression of praise. It is also significant that the points of the triangle (which represents comfort) break into the circle (which describes various frailties of the human spirit.)*



The texts of the opening and concluding movements have obvious parallel structures, **"Blessed are those who mourn . . ."** *and* **"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord . . ."** *It may also be noted that the music at the end of the final movement is taken directly from the the first movement. Thereby, Brahms completes a cycle, both musically and emotionally, in which he seems to suggest that comfort and blessedness can exist whatever the earthly or heavenly condition of the human spirit be, or, in words drawn from the fifth movement,* **". . . no one will take your joy from you."**

Ziemlich langsam und mit Ausdruck

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

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.

Selig sind . . .

Langsam, marschmässig

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

Etwas bewegter

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

Langsam, marschmässig

Denn alles Fleisch . . .

Un poco sostenuto

Aber des Herrn Wort bleibet in Ewigkeit.

Allegro non troppo

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

I.

"Blessed are those who mourn,
for they shall be comforted."
(Matthew 5:4)

May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy!
He that goes forth weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy, bringing his sheaves with him.
(Psalm 126:5-6)

"Blessed are . . ."

II.

For "all flesh is like grass
and all its glory
like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
and the flower falls,
(I Peter 1:24)

Be patient, therefore, brethren,
until the coming of the Lord.
Behold, the farmer waits
for the precious fruit of the earth,
being patient over it
until it receives
the early rain and the late rain.
(James 5:7)

For "all flesh . . .

"But the word of the Lord abides forever."
(I Peter 1:25)

The ransomed of the Lord
shall return,
and come to Zion with singing,
with everlasting joy upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.
(Isaiah 35:10)

III.

Andante moderato

Herr, lehre doch mich,
dass ein Ende mit mir haben 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.

Herr, lehre doch mich . . .

Ach, wie gar nichts sind alle 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, wes soll ich mich trösten?

Ich hoffe auf dich.

Der Gerechten Seelen sind in Gottes Hand,

und keine Qual rühret sie an.

"Lord, let me know my end,
and what is the measure of my days;
let me know
how fleeting my life is!

"Behold, thou hast made my days a few handbreadths,
and my lifetime is as nothing in thy sight.

"Lord, let me know my end . . .

"Surely every man
stands as a mere breath!
Surely man goes about as a shadow!
Surely for nought are they in turmoil;
man heaps up,
and knows not who will gather!

"And now, Lord, for what do I wait?

"My hope is in thee."
(Psalm 39:4-7)

But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,
and there shall no torment touch them.
(Wisdom of Solomon 3:1)

IV.

Mässig bewegt

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

Wie lieblich sind . . .

How lovely is thy dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs, yea, faints
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and flesh sing for joy
to the living God.
Blessed are those who dwell in thy house,
ever singing thy praise!
(Psalm 84:1-2, 4)

How lovely is . . .

V.

Langsam

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

"So you have sorrow now,
but I will see you again
and your hearts will rejoice,
and no one will take your joy from you."
(John 16:22)

Ich will euch trösten,
wie einen seine Mutter tröstet.

As one whom his mother comforts,
so will I comfort you.
(Isaiah 66:13)

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

See with your eyes
that I have labored little

and have found for myself much rest.
(Sirach 51:27)

Ich will euch trösten . . .

As one whom his mother comforts . . .

Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit . . .

"So you have sorrow now . . .

VI.

Andante

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

For here we have no lasting city,
but we seek the city which is to come.
(Hebrews 13:14)

Siehe, ich sage euch ein Geheimnis:
Wir werden nicht alle entschlafen,
wir werden aber alle verwandelt werden;
und dasselbige plötzlich, in einem Augenblick,
zu der Zeit der letzten Posaune.

Lo! I tell you a mystery.
We shall not all sleep,
but we shall all be changed,
in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,
at the last trumpet.

Vivace

Denn es wird die Posaune schallen,
und die Toten werden auferstehen unverweslich,
und wir werden verwandelt werden.
Dann wird erfüllet werden
das Wort, das geschrieben steht:
Der Tod ist verschlungen in den Sieg.
Tod, wo ist dien Stachel?
Hölle, wo ist dien Sieg?

For the trumpet will sound,
and the dead will be raised imperishable,
and we shall be changed.
Then shall come to pass
the saying that is written:
"Death is swallowed up in victory."
"O death, where is thy victory?
O death, where is thy sting?"
(I Corinthians 15:51-52, 54-55)

Allegro

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

"Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive
glory and honor and power,
for thou didst create all things,
and by thy will they existed
and were created."
(Revelation 4:11)

VII.

Feierlich

Selig sind die Toten, die in dem Herrn sterben von nun an.

"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth."

Ja, der Geist spricht,
dass sie ruhen von ihrer Arbeit;
denn ihre Werke folgen ihnen nach.

"Blessed indeed," says the Spirit,
"that they may rest from their labors,
for their deeds follow them."
(Revelation 13:14)

Selig sind die Toten . . .

"Blessed are the dead . . ."

(from The Holy Bible, Martin Luther's translation)

(from The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version)

The Soloists

SHARMANE DAVIS, *soprano, is a native of New Kensington, PA, and is currently a voice instructor at Eastern Mennonite College. Ms. Davis holds a B.A. in music from West Virginia University, and an M.M. from Ohio University. She has been active as a recitalist, as a soloist in numerous oratorio performances, and has sung operatic roles in* **The Magic Flute, The Medium, Madame Butterfly, The Marriage of Figaro, and Die Fledermaus.**

IN DAL CHOI, *baritone, holds a B.A. in voice from Yunsei University in Seoul, an M.A. from Manhattan School of Music, and is a doctoral candidate at Indiana University. He is currently a member of the voice faculty at James Madison University. Mr. Choi, born in Korea, is a naturalized American citizen, and has wide study and performing experience both in this country and abroad. His roles from operatic repertoire include* **The Marriage of Figaro, I Pagliacci, Tosca, Fidelio, Cosi Fan Tutte, and The Magic Flute;** *he has sung frequently in oratorio performances, and has appeared as a recitalist in New York City, Los Angeles, and Bloomington as well as locally.*

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