



**BRAHMS**  
**Academic Overture**  
**German Requiem**

Autumn Concert  
10th November 1996

Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society

# Autumn Concert

## Brahms Academic Overture Brahms German Requiem (Sung in English)

Fiona Cameron                      Soprano

Jeremy Huw Williams              Baritone

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CHORAL SOCIETY  
Musical Director and Conductor: Derek Watmough

ROYAL TUNBRIDGE WELLS CHORAL SOCIETY  
ORCHESTRA  
Leader: Rita French

# Academic Festival Overture

This lively and engaging piece was composed as an act of gratitude to the University of Breslau, which had conferred on Brahms an honorary Ph.D. degree. It was given its first performance at the University in 1881.

The music is essentially a fantasia-like treatment of four German student songs. Of these, the third, Was kommt dort von der Hohe (What comes from afar) has a recognisable though very un-Brahmsian tune based on five repeated notes; but probably only the fourth, Gaudeamus igitur (Therefore let us rejoice) will be well known to an English audience. This comes at the end, ushered in triumphantly by the chorus in four-part harmony.

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## German Requiem

Brahms was much possessed by death - a theme which recurs constantly throughout his vocal and choral works. At as early an age as 24 he composed a Funeral Hymn for mixed voices and wind band; and a year or two before, in 1856, the tragically early death (following madness) of Robert Schumann, his friend and mentor, affected him deeply. It is not known for certain whether the Requiem was intended to be a memorial to Schumann; but it was at about that time that Brahms began a two-piano sonata, the slow movement of which forms the basis of the Requiem's second movement; "Behold, all flesh is as the grass".

The first four movements of what may have been planned as a cantata were completed in 1861, but it was probably the death of his mother in 1865 that induced Brahms to add a further two movements and offer the work in its present form, excepting only what is now the fifth movement: "Ye now have sorrow". This was added later, in 1868, and was acknowledged by the composer as a tribute to his mother's memory. The complete work was first performed in Leipzig in 1869.

"I have my faith" was Brahms' gruff conversation-stopping reply to a friend who unwisely quizzed him about his religious belief. It was not exactly a Christian faith, nor is the Requiem exactly a Christian work. It seems probable that its full title 'A German Requiem' was specifically intended to disassociate it from the Latin Requiem Mass, which it in no way resembles. There are no prayers for the dead and - more important - no reference to the redeeming death of Christ in whom "shall all be made alive". What we are offered is an impressive selection of texts culled from the Lutheran Bible, of which Brahms was a life-long student. Death is the unifying theme; but there is no unrelieved gloom and solemnity. In the words of Brahms' friend and pupil, Florence May, the text is arranged "to present the ascending ideas of sorrow consoled, doubt overcome, and death vanquished"; and it is set to music of overwhelming splendour, beauty and power.

There is space only space for a brief note on the individual movements.

**I. Blessed are they that mourn.**

The tranquil melody of the introduction - played by cellos and violas, without violins - is taken up by the choir. Comfort breathes in every bar of the music.

**II. Behold, all flesh is as the grass.**

The powerful tune, like a funeral march, is based on a German chorale often used by Bach. The mood changes to one of rejoicing: the ransomed of the Lord have joy and gladness, sorrow and sighing flee away.

**III. Lord, let me know mine end.**

The baritone solo's impressive declamation with choral accompaniment gives way to a great cry by the chorus: "Now, Lord, what then do I hope for?" followed by a fugue constructed on a low D pedal point which is held for all of the 36 bars.

### Interval

**IV. How lovely are Thy dwellings.**

A short movement for choir alone, providing a welcome 'light relief' - light in every sense of the word: the lovely luminous music seems to float in the air.

**V. Ye now have sorrow.**

The soprano soloist's glorious high-arching phrases return to the theme of sorrow while the chorus softly intones: "Thee will I comfort as one whom his mother comforts".

**VI. For we have here no abiding city.**

The choral opening is interrupted quite soon by the baritone's dramatic entry with the familiar text "Behold, I tell you a mystery". The trumpet sounds (trombones, actually!), death is swallowed up in victory, and the movement ends with an exhilarating fugue: "Worthy art Thou, Lord, of praise and honour, glory and power".

**VII. Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord.**

A great plunging - then soaring - theme is given first to the sopranos alone, then taken up by the male singers. The opening phrase of the first movement is recalled - but now violins are included - and the music moves to a quite close.

# Our Soloists

## Fiona Cameron

The Scottish soprano Fiona Cameron studied at the Royal Northern College of Music and the Guildhall School of Music in London. In 1987 she won the International Young Artist Competition in Royal Tunbridge Wells, and went on to win many other prizes including the 'S-Hertogenbosch International and the Luciano Pavarotti singing competitions. Her large concert repertoire includes Handel *Messiah*, Mozart *Requiem*, Haydn *Creation*, Britten *War Requiem* and Holst *Choral Symphony*. She has taken part in radio broadcasts with the B.B.C., Dutch Radio and Radio France, and has given recitals in Poland and Valencia. She has performed operatic roles with the English National Opera, the Opera Company of Philadelphia, Glyndebourne and Scottish Opera. We are pleased to welcome Fiona back to Tunbridge Wells to sing in Brahms' German Requiem.

## Jeremy Huw Williams

Jeremy studied at St. John's College, Cambridge, at the National Opera Studio and with April Cantelo. He has won a number of major prizes including the 1995 Marian Anderson International Voice Competition in the United States and he was European Finalist in the 1995 Luciano Pavarotti International Voice Competition. He has sung with the London Philharmonic, City of Birmingham and Halle' Orchestras and has performed the title role in *Don Giovanni*. He appeared as a soloist in Yehudi Menuhin's 80th birthday concert at Buckingham Palace. Jeremy is an Award winner under the NFMS/Esso Young Artists Award Scheme which is sponsoring him for this concert.

# Forthcoming Events

**Saturday 14th December 1996.**

St. Mary's Church, Goudhurst, 7.00pm

**Concert of Christmas Music**

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**Saturday 17th May 1997.**

Assembly Hall, Crescent Road, Tunbridge Wells, 7.30pm

**Lambert - Rio Grande**

**Bernstein - Chichester Psalms**

**Rutter - Magnificat**

(Joint concert with Wiesbaden Lutherkirche Choir)

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On Sunday 1st December 1996, **The Royal Tunbridge Wells Symphony Orchestra** are holding a concert entitled "Christmas Crackers" with **David Pyatt** (horn), and on 2nd February 1997 **Gyorgy Pauk** (Violin) will perform Beethoven's Violin Concerto and works by Wagner and Haydn. The programme for 1997 also includes concerts by **Andrew Marriner** (Clarinet) and **John Lill** (Piano). All concerts at the Assembly Hall, Tunbridge Wells, at 3.00pm.

# Royal Tunbridge Wells Choral Society

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