BRAHMS’S GERMAN REQUIEM

Charleston Gaillard Center
Martha and John M. Rivers
Performance Hall

June 5, 7:30pm

Conductor
Joe Miller

Soprano
Natalia Pavlova

Baritone
Alexander Dobson

Charleston Symphony Orchestra
Chorus Director
Robert Taylor

Supertitles
Bruno Ingram

Westminster Choir
Charleston Symphony Orchestra Chorus
Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra

1 hour, 15 minutes | Performed without an intermission
Sung in German with English supertitles

Program

I. Selig sind, die da Leid tragen

II. Denn alles Fleisch, es ist wie Gras

III. Herr, lehre doch mich
    Alexander Dobson, baritone

IV. Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen

V. Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit
    Natalia Pavlova, soprano

VI. Denn wir haben nie eine bleibende Statt
    Alexander Dobson, baritone

VII. Selig sind die Toten

Program Note

Following a disappointing performance of sections of the work, the world premiere of Brahms’s Requiem in 1868 (minus the still-to-be-written fifth movement) marked a watershed in his career, pushing Brahms to the forefront of composers to whom attention must be paid. This was in an age when choral music flourished, with choral societies providing an important artistic outlet for non-professional musicians.

The title, Ein deutsches Requiem (“A German Requiem”), points to the unusual nature of the work—the largest in Brahms’s catalogue—vis-à-vis the long-standing tradition of musical settings of the Requiem Mass for the Dead. Even such freethinkers as Giuseppe Verdi contributed masterpieces to the Requiem tradition known from Roman Catholic liturgy (Verdi’s came a little later, in 1874.) Though born into the Protestant tradition, Brahms, too, was a freethinker and translated his undogmatic humanism into a new-fangled design of his own. The “German” in the title refers to the language of the texts Brahms culled for his libretto, in lieu of the ancient Latin texts, but he also referred to the work as “a human Requiem.”

The composer’s source was Luther’s German translation of the Bible, from which Brahms wove an eclectic tapestry. The sources include the Psalms, Isaiah, the Book of Wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, and the New Testament. As a “Requiem,” Brahms obviously draws a connection to the longstanding liturgical tradition of a Christian Mass in memory of a deceased person. Yet none of

This performance is made possible in part through funds from the Spoleto Festival USA Endowment, generously supported by BlueCross BlueShield of South Carolina, Wells Fargo, and Bank of America.
the movements of *Ein deutsches Requiem* correspond exactly to those familiar in the settings of, say, Mozart or Verdi. The dramatic *Dies irae* depicting Judgment Day, for example, is conspicuously absent from Brahms's score.

Brahms's approach of making his own selection of texts was not entirely unprecedented. In fact, Handel's *Messiah* used a similar method of piecing together various scriptural selections to trace the narrative of the nativity, passion, and resurrection of Jesus. Other composers of the Renaissance and Baroque—eras of intense interest to Brahms as a student of music history—similarly anticipated this method of using selected texts to create a musical memorial. In the contemporary scene, this “collage” approach has been boldly employed by Peter Sellars in his librettos for John Adams, as anyone who experienced Spoleto Festival USA's staging of *El Niño* in 2014 will recall.

Brahms made a point to avoid doctrinal references to Christianity—a strategy that troubled even his admiring peers who wanted a more orthodox point of view. Karl Reinhailer, the Lutheran organist at Bremen Cathedral, where the premiere took place, remarked: “For the Christian mind, however, there is lacking the point on which everything turns, namely, the redeeming death of Jesus.”

Brahms's Requiem shifts the focus from pleading for the redemption of the deceased to consolation of the living. For him, the initial impetus was to honor his mentor, Robert Schumann, who had died in 1856 following a horrible struggle with mental illness. The death of Brahms's mother in 1865 was another motivation, which led him to expand the score with what became the fifth movement (for solo soprano). The result is a uniquely personal cantata that addresses the same ultimate questions as does the traditional Requiem, but without its established ideological framework. Brahms's work is thus especially well-suited for the concert hall. You could almost say that the Brahms Requiem represents the ultimate “crossover” work of sacred to secular music.

Brahms draws the listener into this music through his balance of lyricism and drama. His compositional genius is apparent in the large-scale construction, which forms an arch, as well as in the local details. An organically unifying basic idea, for example, is heard when the chorus first enters: the three-note cell F-A-B♭. The final movement is similarly slow and echoes the beginning. The second and sixth movements provide dramatic highlights, the second resembling an apocalypse in slow motion and the sixth (with its addition of solo baritone) a depiction of existential dread, a more subjective take on the *Dies irae* sensibility. Movements three and five juxtapose the solo human voice with the chorus. The psalm set in the fourth movement becomes the serene center of the Requiem, around which everything centers.

The principle of a music of consolation returns in the final moments, uplifting those left to mourn with the promise of what is now a musical memory that Brahms has created and is recalling—the artist's version of immortality.

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**Artists**

**JOE MILLER** (conductor) is the director of choral activities for Spoleto Festival USA and conductor of two of America’s most renowned choral ensembles: the Westminster Choir and the Westminster Symphonic Choir. He is also director of choral activities at Westminster Choir College of Rider University and director of The Philadelphia Orchestra’s Philadelphia Symphonic Choir. Performances by the Westminster Choir and Joe Miller at Spoleto Festival USA have earned critical praise. *The New York Times* described their 2014 performance of John Adams’s *El Niño* as “superb” and wrote, “Meticulously prepared … the chorus was remarkable for its precision, unanimity and power.” *The Post and Courier* wrote about their 2015 performance of Bach’s *St. Matthew Passion*, “This was an evening of near-flawless execution and many moments of ravishing beauty and power. It will go down as a highlight (maybe even THE highlight) of this year’s festival.” As conductor of the Westminster Symphonic Choir, Miller has collaborated with some of the world’s leading orchestras and conductors, earning him critical praise. *The New York Times* wrote about Symphonic Choir’s performance of Mahler’s Symphony no. 2 with the Cleveland Orchestra, “Joe Miller’s Westminster Symphonic Choir was subtle when asked and powerful when turned loose.” Recent seasons have included performances with the Philharmoniker Berliner and Sir Simon Rattle; The Philadelphia Orchestra and Yannick Nézet-Séguin; and the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela and Gustavo Dudamel. Miller is also founder and conductor of the Westminster Summer Choral Festival Chamber Choir, a program that offers professional-level choral and vocal artists the opportunity to explore challenging works for one week each summer on the Westminster campus in Princeton.

**ALEXANDER DOBSON** (baritone) is renowned on opera and concert stages for his artistry. Recent major roles include the title role in *Wozzeck*, conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin with Théâtre du Nouveau Monde and Orchestre Métropolitain du Grand Montréal; Masetto in *Don Giovanni* with Calgary Opera and Milwaukee’s Florentine Opera; and Guglielmo (*Cosi fan tutte*), Belcore (*L’elisir d’amore*), and Ned Keene (*Peter Grimes*), all with Opera de Montréal. Concert performances of note include Walton’s *Belshazzar’s Feast* with Toronto Symphony Orchestra and Sir Andrew Davis; Mahler’s *Songs of a Wayfarer* with Orchestre Métropolitain; Fauré’s *Requiem* with the Windsor Symphony Orchestra; Mahler’s Symphony no. 8, with Yannick Nézet-Séguin conducting the combined National Arts Centre Orchestra and Orchestre Métropolitain; Bach’s *Magnificat* with Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, and Haydn’s *The Seasons* with The Cleveland Orchestra.
NATALIA PAVLOVA (soprano) is a rising star of the Mariinsky Theatre. She has worked under the guidance of such musicians as Valery Gergiev, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Vladimir Spivakov, Teodor Currentzis, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Fuat Mansurov, Ennio Morricone, and Yuri Bashmet. Her repertoire onstage includes Violetta in *La traviata*; Mimi in *La bohème*; Marguerite in *Faust*; Micaëla in *Carmen*; the title role in *Rusalka*; Tatyana in *Eugene Onegin*, which she performed at Spoleto Festival USA in 2017; Tamara in *The Demon*; Marfa in *The Tsar's Bride*; Donna Anna in *Don Giovanni*; the title role in *Iolanta*; and Nastasya in *The Idiot*. She performs regularly in concert and semi-staged productions of Soviet operas, including Gemma in Spadavecchia’s *Letter to a Stranger*, Lisa Brichkina in Molchanov’s *Dawns Here Are Quiet*, Natalia in Khrennikov’s *Into The Storm*, Natasha in Shchedrin’s *Not Only Love*, and Suzanne in Shostakovich’s *Orango*. In November 2017, she debuted at the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg as Anne in Grigori Frid’s mono-opera *Diary of Anne Frank*.

ROBERT TAYLOR (director, Charleston Symphony Orchestra Chorus) is the director of choral activities at the College of Charleston, the founding artistic director and president of the Taylor Festival Choir (TFC) and Taylor Music Group (TMG), and the director of the Charleston Symphony Orchestra Chorus and Chamber Singers. Called a “rising star in the international choral scene” and a “true master of his craft” (*Charleston City Paper*), Taylor has also earned accolades for his ensembles, which have been described as sounding “more musical than would seem possible” (*The Post and Courier*) and have received numerous plaudits from critics for their technical proficiency, musicality, and beautiful sound production. Taylor’s ensembles have performed throughout the United States and Europe. They have been featured in numerous festivals, conventions, and special concerts, including the 2005 and 2009 American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) National Conventions, the 2008 and 2011 National Collegiate Choral Organization National Conventions, and multiple appearances in regional and state ACDA and AGO conventions.

THE CHARLESTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA CHORUS is composed of auditioned, volunteer singers from the Charleston, South Carolina area. Founded in 1978 by Miss Emily Remington as the Charleston Singers Guild and now directed by Dr. Robert Taylor, the full Chorus performs a diverse choral repertoire to nurture and educate audiences and future singers. The 2017 – 18 performance season included two Charleston Symphony Orchestra Masterworks appearances: Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony and Ralph Vaughan Williams’s *Toward the Unknown Region*; and Holiday Pops on December 16, 2017. For additional information see CSOChorus.com.

WESTMINSTER CHOIR is composed of students at Westminster Choir College in Princeton, New Jersey, and has been setting the standard for choral excellence for 98 years. It has been the chorus in residence for Spoleto Festival USA since 1977, performing both in concert and as the opera chorus. The ensemble’s 2017 – 18 season has included performing at the World Symposium on Choral Music in Barcelona, a concert tour of the Midwest, and performances and broadcasts at its home in Princeton. It also made its fourth recording with Joe Miller, Frank Martin’s *Mass for Double Choir*, which will be released in September. The choir’s debut recording with Maestro Miller, *Flower of Beauty*, received four stars from *Choir & Organ* and earned critical praise from *American Record Guide*, which hailed the Westminster Choir as “the gold standard for academic choirs in America.” Praised by *The New York Times* for its “full-bodied, incisive singing,” the Westminster Choir also forms the core of the Westminster Symphonic Choir, which has performed and recorded with the leading conductors and orchestras of our time.

THE SPOLETO FESTIVAL USA ORCHESTRA appears at the Festival in many different configurations, performing in opera, symphonic, choral, chamber, and contemporary music performances. Formed anew each year through nationwide auditions, the orchestra is largely comprised of young professionals or players in advanced degree programs. Alumni of the Spoleto Festival USA Orchestra are on the rosters of leading orchestras throughout the world, including the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, LA Phil, and San Francisco Symphony, among others.

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