

Legendary piece a challenge for choir



Nantwich Choral Society members who are to perform Brahms's German Requiem.

RECOGNISED as one of the greatest choral works of all time, Brahms's German Requiem is a feat for any choir to undertake.

And conductor John Naylor is certain that Nantwich Choral Society is more than capable of doing this legendary work justice.

"There's no doubt that this is a very difficult piece of choral music to perform," says John, who is looking forward to presenting the masterpiece at St Mary's Church, Nantwich, on Saturday, March 8.

"The reason being that with oratorios and other choral society pieces, a lot of the work is done by the soloists. But in this requiem, the choir itself has an awful lot of work to do."

Brahms began work on the German Requiem in 1866 when he was aged 33, and while this type of music is normally associated with death, the composer made it clear that his music was to be a comfort to the living.

"It's one of the challenges of the choral repertoire but the music is absolutely wonderful," says John, aged 60, who took over as conductor of the choir in 2005.

"It's a monumental composition, quite unlike any work which preceded it, but hopefully the audience should hear a beautiful choral sound, as it combines the contrapuntal complexity of Bach with the romanticism of Schumann."

Nantwich Choral Society

A great choral work and two grand pianos...

Nantwich Choral Society is preparing to take on Brahms's phenomenal German Requiem, writes Liz Rowley

The work is written in seven movements and requires both soprano and baritone soloists - on this occasion Janet Ollier and David Butt Philip.

"Janet is based in the North West and has sung with us on many occasions in the past," says John, who lives in Shropshire with his wife Jenny.

"David is a young singer who is completing his final year of the postgraduate opera course at the Royal Academy, in London."

While many performances of the work are delivered with a large orchestral accompaniment, the size of the venue means that John and the choir are relying upon two concert grand pianos, which will be wheeled

into the church for a recital not unfamiliar with the original.

"The first time the requiem was performed in England, it was done so on two pianos with Brahms himself playing one of them," explains John, who is also an accomplished singer and organist.

"The day before the concert, two concert grand pianos are going to be brought to the church, which will be quite unusual to see because you don't often get two pianos side by side."

The performance comes at a very exciting time for the society. Its numbers have risen 25 per cent over the last three years, and the church, nicknamed the Cathedral of South Cheshire, should present the perfect environment in which to hear such great music.

"A convincing performance needs a really good choir, and Nantwich Choral Society is in fine form at present," concludes John.

"We are all really looking forward to our performance."

■ The Nantwich Choral Society will be performing Brahms's German Requiem on Saturday, March 8 at 7.30pm. For tickets, call 01270 762226 or 01270 624209.

And if you'd like to find out more about the society or are interested in becoming a member, contact chairman Anne Barnard on 01270 522664.



Conductor John Naylor hopes the audience will enjoy the "monumental"

THE VERDICT

This is the perfect opportunity to hear one of the most challenging choral works in a wonderful setting.



Janet Ollier

Choral society tuning up for show

NANTWICH Choral Society is tuning up for a performance of *A German Requiem* by Brahms in the town's St Mary's Church on Saturday.

Said to be one of the most challenging pieces in the choral repertoire, it will be performed in English in a new translation by Michael Pilkington and with two piano accompaniments.

The soloists will be Janet Ollier (soprano) who will also feature in *Hear My Prayer* by Mendelssohn, and David Butt Philip (baritone), also singing Brahms songs.

Janet is well known in Cheshire for her many outstanding solo performances and David is a rising star of the London musical scene.

Two concert grand pianos will be moved into the church especially for the occasion and

will be played by pianists Vivian Redfern and Andrew Mildinhal.

The society's musical director John Naylor said: "The Brahms *Requiem* is a monumental composition quite unlike any work which preceded it. It combines the contrapuntal complexity of Bach with the romanticism of Schumann and puts huge demands on the chorus who sing throughout the piece.

"A convincing performance needs a really good choir and Nantwich Choral Society is in fine form at present. We are all looking forward to our performance of this mystical and much loved work."

Tickets for the concert, which starts at 7.30pm, are £12, concessions £10, children £2, and are available on the door or phone 01270 610983.

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THE SENTINEL Monday March 10, 2008 **25**

Review

Nantwich Choral Society

St Mary's Church, Nantwich

BRAHMS'S *German Requiem* is one of the most demanding works in the choral repertoire.

To successfully perform this monumental work singers require musicianship, passion and stamina.

Nantwich Choral Society possesses stamina and musicianship, but lacks the passionate expression necessary for this Romantic tour de force.

The work was performed in English in Brahms's piano version, which he arranged towards the end of his life.

Conductor John Naylor gave clear direction to his singers; the piano accompaniment was played with

assurance and elegance by Vivian Redfern and Andrew Mildinhal.

The concert began with Mendelssohn's *Hear My Prayer*, whose opening recitative was sung dramatically and the more famous *O For The Wings Of A Dove* expressively by soprano Janet Ollier.

Hers is a voice of distinction more suited to the Mendelssohn than to the Brahms whose soprano solo requires a fuller sound. The choir achieved a pleasant blend within each voice part, but where was the passion in *O God Hear My Cry*? The outstanding artist of the evening was baritone David Butt-Philip whose Mendelssohn and Brahms songs were beautifully sung. This young singer has a richly rounded voice supported by a secure technique. His singing in the *Requiem* was full of commitment and intensity.

David Burrowes