

Nantwich Choral Society

Come and Sing



‘A German Requiem’

Johannes Brahms

Catherine Benson – soprano

Christopher Booth-Jones – baritone

Graham Eccles – organ

John Naylor – conductor

St Mary’s Church, Nantwich

Saturday January 11th 2014

We extend a warm welcome to all who have come to join the members of The Nantwich Choral Society for this Come and Sing event.

Our Come and Sing events at the beginning of each new calendar year have begun to establish a truly enjoyable tradition. Last year we had almost 250 singers taking part in a thrilling performance of Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man*. This year many people are returning once again to sing Brahms' great *A German Requiem*. Whether you are a singer, an audience member, a previous participant or whether you are joining us for the first time, you are all equally very welcome.

This is the 41st Season for Nantwich Choral Society. We have grown and flourished from early beginnings as an educational local authority evening class in 1972 into the distinguished choral society that exists today, and 40 years on we celebrate a record membership of 100+ mixed choral voices. Under the inspirational guiding baton of John Naylor, our music director, and our accomplished accompanist Simon Russell, we strive to keep the choral tradition alive by singing great choral music and by performing a varied and expanding repertoire of music, some familiar and some less so. We enjoy a fine choral reputation and excellent receptions of our performances in Nantwich, the wider Cheshire area and in Chester Cathedral.

We perform three major concerts and a Carol Concert each year, as well as arranging an educational Singing Day workshop and a Come and Sing event.

In the spring of 2013 we memorably performed Bach's *St Matthew Passion* on a bitterly cold March Saturday in Chester Cathedral, accompanied by the period instruments of the 18th Century Sinfonia. A much warmer summer evening saw a joyful performance of Puccini's *Messe di Gloria* and in November the 18th Century Sinfonia joined us again for a thrilling performance of Handel's *Israel in Egypt*. Our Family Carol Concert in which we were joined once again by Nantwich Young Voices for a performance of a specially commissioned new work *Kings came riding* was enthusiastically enjoyed by a capacity audience.

Our next concert will be in Nantwich Civic Hall where we will be joined by our associate orchestra The Northern Concordia Orchestra for performances of Coleridge Taylor's *Hiawatha* and Elgar's *Bavarian Dances* and *Enigma variations*. After a performance of contemporary choral music in the summer we will be performing Karl Jenkins' *The Peacemakers* to mark the centenary of the beginning of the 1914-18 World War. The Come and Sing event planned for January 2015 is Rossini's *Petite Messe Solonelle*.

Nantwich Choral Society thanks the Arts Council most sincerely for a most helpful grant in 2013. Without such financial support from many sources, also including The Harding Trust and Barclays Bank, it would not be possible for our choral society to have the opportunity of taking part in, or for our audience to listen to, so many major works in the choral repertoire. We gratefully acknowledge the receipt of all the legacies, sponsorships, grants and donations which help us to maintain and develop our musical standards, especially in these financially straightened times.

Thank you for supporting this event. We hope you have a very enjoyable time with us today.

A German Requiem

Even in his youth Brahms had been preoccupied with the idea of composing a Requiem, but only in 1866 when he was 33 (and still a relatively young man) did he begin serious work on it. It was completed the following year with the exception of the fifth movement. After the false start of a poor performance of three of the movements in Vienna in December 1867, Brahms himself took over as conductor and in its incomplete form *Ein Deutsches Requiem* was first heard in Bremen Cathedral on Good Friday 1868. The final version was performed in 1869 at the Leipzig Gewandhaus and the work was published in the same year.

Brahms may have written the *Requiem* in memory of his mother, who died in 1856; it is equally possible that he had in mind his great friend and mentor, Robert Schumann, whose madness and tragic death profoundly affected him. Schumann's widow Clara, with whom Brahms enjoyed a deep but probably platonic relationship, was of the opinion that the work was in memory of the composer's mother. However, it is probable that the chorus "All flesh is as grass" started life as part of an early sonata for two pianos that eventually became the D minor Piano Concerto, a work which we know was originally intended as a tribute to Schumann and begun in 1854 when Brahms moved to Düsseldorf to look after Clara and her seven children. Whilst the deaths of his mother and his friend influenced him profoundly, Brahms himself gave no indication of whose memorial the *Requiem* might be, if indeed it was any one person's.

Although it is not entirely clear what Brahms' religious views were, the title '*A German Requiem*', (referring to its language) reflects the fact that Brahms selected verses from the Lutheran Bible, one of his greatest influences, rather than employing the customary Latin. He compiled the text himself from both Old and New Testaments and from the Apocrypha to convey a humanist message with a focus on the living rather than the dead. The result has little in common with the conventional Requiem Mass, omitting as it does the horrors of the Last Judgement which are such a striking feature of the *Missa Pro Defunctis*, or any final plea for mercy or prayers for the dead. It also makes only a passing reference in the final movement to Christian redemption through the death of Jesus.

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Brahms was content with the culture of Lutheranism but could not accept its dogma. So concerned was Reinthaler (Music Director at Bremen Cathedral) about the omission of overt Christian references that he took the liberty at the Bremen Cathedral performance of inserting the aria "I know that my Redeemer liveth" from Handel's *Messiah* with a view to satisfying the clergy.

So it is hardly surprising that the title of "Requiem" has at times been called into question. What is clear, is that Brahms was a deeply serious thinker with an intimate knowledge of the Scriptures. He proclaimed that he did not want to write a Requiem for the dead, but one to comfort the living, and it is in this context that the *German Requiem* needs to be considered. As far as the title '*a German requiem*' is concerned, Brahms told his friend Reinthaler that *German* refers primarily to the language rather than the intended audience and that he would have gladly called the work *A Human Requiem*. Years later, Brahms was quite moved when he discovered that Robert Schumann had planned a work of the same name.

Despite its unorthodox text, the work was immediately recognised as a masterpiece and as with all great music, the universal message of its vision transcends the circumstances of its conception.

The similarity of the opening and closing sections unifies the whole work, whilst the funeral-march of the second movement is balanced by the triumphant theme of the resurrection in the sixth. Similarly, the baritone solo in the third movement, “Lord, make me to know that the measure of my days is set”, is paralleled in the fifth by the gentleness of the soprano solo, “Ye now are sorrowful, but yet I will again behold you”. The fourth section, “How lovely are all thy dwellings fair”, therefore stands at the centre of the work, framed as it is by the solemnity of the first three movements and the transition from grief to the certainty of comfort in the last three.

This carefully balanced musical architecture is matched by an equally firm musical structure based on two principal themes which Brahms skilfully uses in a variety of subtle guises throughout the work. The most important of these is really a musical fragment rather than a fully-fledged theme. It occurs at the opening choral entry and consists of the first three notes sung by the sopranos to the words “Blest are they”. Brahms uses this musical cell as the main building block of the whole work, subjecting it to a variety of transformations, including an upside-down version and a back-to-front version, both of which play as significant a role as the original form. The other principal musical idea is a chorale-like melody (played by the violas in the orchestral version) at the very beginning. Its most obvious re-appearance is in the second movement, now in a minor key, as an expansive melody sung by the choir in unison.

What is so unusual about the work is that it combines classical counterpoint with romantic lyricism. There are superb, extended fugues (“And the ransomed of the Lord”, “For the righteous souls are in the hand of God”, and “Lord thou art worthy to gather praise and honour”), poignant romantic passages such as the soprano solo, and lush and inspiring melodies – “How lovely are thy dwellings”. Unlike most major choral works of the period, the voices never divide, staying in four parts throughout.

Brahms prepared an alternative version of the work to be performed by two pianists on two pianos. This version also incorporates the vocal parts, (suggesting that it could also be self-contained) and it is an authentically acceptable substitute accompaniment for choir and soloists in circumstances where a full orchestra is unavailable. The first complete (excepting the yet-unwritten fifth movement) performance of the *Requiem* in London was in July 1871 at the home of Sir Henry Thompson and his wife, the pianist Kate Loder who joined Brahms in playing the two piano accompaniment. It was sung in English.

It is Brahms’ masterly fusion of robust classical counterpoint and romantic lyricism, heard at its most visionary in *A German Requiem*, which has ensured the work’s enduring reputation as one of the supreme masterpieces of the choral repertoire.

A German Requiem

Blest are they that sorrow bear, for
to them shall be given comfort.
Matthew 5:4

They that sow lamenting shall reap a
joyful harvest.

Who goeth forth with weeping, and
beareth precious seed for sowing,
shall come home rejoicing and bring
his good sheaves with him.
Psalms 126:5-6

II

Behold all flesh is as the grass, and all
the goodliness of man is as the flower
that fadeth. The grass is now
withered and the flower thereof is
fallen. *1 Peter 1:24*

Now therefore be patient, my dear
brethren, unto the coming of the
Lord. See how the husbandman
waiteth for the earth's precious fruit
to ripen, and long he waiteth with
patience, until the coming of morning
rainfall and evening showers.
James 5:7

But yet the Lord's word standeth for
evermore. *1 Peter 1:25*

And the ransomed of the Lord shall

return with singing, unto Zion coming
rejoicing. Unending gladness forever
on their heads shall be. Pleasure and
gladness ever shall possess them, and
grief and sorrow – they shall vanish.
Isaiah 35:10

III

Lord, make me to know that the
measure of my days is set; that my
life hath an ending, and I must go
hence.

Surely, all my days here are but a
span long to thee, and my whole life
is as naught to thee.

Ah, as nothing every man living, he
trusts himself but vainly.

He walketh about as a shadow; he is
disquieted and is greatly troubled in
spirit; his riches – he knoweth not
who shall gather them.

Now Lord, wherein is my comfort?
My hope is in thee. *Psalms 39:4-7*

For the righteous souls are in the
hand of God, and no more pain
touches them now. *Wisdom of
Solomon 3:1*

IV

How lovely are all thy dwellings fair,
O Lord of hosts!

For my soul now is yearning and
longing sore for the blest courts of
the Lord; my heart and flesh cry out

for joy unto the living God.
Psalm 84:1-2

How blest are they that in thy house
are dwelling; they give thee praise
evermore. *Psalm 84:4*

(PAUSE)

V

Ye now are sorrowful, but yet I will
again behold you and then your
hearts shall be joyful, and this your
joyfulness no man taketh from you.
John 16:22

Now behold me: I had but for a little
while labour and trouble to bear, and
yet great comfort now I have found.
Ecclesiasticus 51:27

For I will comfort, like as a mother
giveth comfort. *Isaiah 66:13*

VI

Here on earth have we no continuing
home, rather we seek one to come.
Hebrews 13: 14

Lo, I will show unto you a mystery:
we shall not all slumber, but we shall
all be changed, in a moment, the
twinkling of an eye, at the sounding
of the last trumpet. Then the
trumpet shall be sounded, and the

dead shall all be raised up
Incorruptible, and we shall all be
changed. *1 Corinthians 15:51-52*

Then shall be fulfilled the word that
is written thus: Now death is
swallowed up in victory. Death,
where is thy victory? Hades, where is
thy sting? *1 Corinthians 15:54*

Lord thou art worthy to gather praise
and honour and power, for it is thou
hast all things created, and for thy
will's sake they are and have their
being, and were created.
Revelation 4:11

VII

Blessed are the dead, which in the
Lord are sleeping from henceforth.

Yea, saith the Spirit, they may rest
now from all their labours; their
works shall follow after them.
Revelation 14:13

Catherine Benson – Soprano

Cathy studied at The Guildhall School of Music with Noelle Barker. After two years postgraduate opera study she embarked on a successful freelance career, singing opera, oratorio and recitals. Her operatic work included principal roles at Glyndebourne, Park Lane Opera, Holland Park Opera, English National Opera and The Royal Opera House, Covent Garden. She also performed at Snape Maltings, taking the part of Rowan in *The Little Sweep* by Benjamin Britten and later went on to record the opera for EMI.

Whilst with Glyndebourne she took part in many famous productions including Stravinsky's *Rake's Progress* designed by David Hockney and several productions directed by Sir Peter Hall including Gluck's *Orfeo* with Dame Janet Baker. She won The Glyndebourne Touring Opera singer's award which enabled her to study the role of Zerlina (*Don Giovanni*) which she then performed with the company.

Family life began to take priority but concert and oratorio work has taken her all over the country and she sings a wide variety of repertoire encompassing opera, operetta, lieder and French Mélodie. She joined Birmingham Conservatoire several years ago and teaches singing both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels and has a particular interest in the field of vocal pedagogy. She is a member of the auditions panel at the Conservatoire and both examines and adjudicates.

Cathy performs regularly in Shropshire with many local choral societies, most recently for Church Stretton and Oswestry. NCS recall with great pleasure her previous performances in their 2010 'Summer Serenade' concert, in Rossini's *Petite Messe Solonelle* and most notably in Vaughan Williams *A Sea Symphony* in 2011.

When not teaching or singing Cathy is an active member of her community, raising money for charities such as Help for Heroes, British Heart Foundation and Acorns Children's Hospice as well as for her local church.

Christopher Booth-Jones – baritone

Born at Castle Cary in Somerset and educated first at Tormore School, Deal and then at Dover College, Chris progressed through a series of jobs. These ranged from working in the City, importing and exporting, sales coordination for a plastics company, factory worker, working for the Evening Argos, swimming pool life guard and then schoolmaster at St Aubyn's Preparatory School teaching Latin, French, English, PE, Games, Shooting and Boxing!

He then qualified as a short hand typist whilst preparing to enter Advertising and Public Relations – and finally 'got it right' thanks to his best friend, who pushed him

into applying and auditioning for the Royal Academy of Music to study singing and acting!

This led to winning various scholarships and finally entry into his chosen profession – work in opera, concert work, theatre, music theatre, films, videos, TV and broadcasting.

Chris has worked for most of the British Opera companies including Phoenix Opera, Welsh National Opera, Glyndebourne Festival and Touring Operas, Opera North, Kent Opera, English Music Theatre, London Musical Theatre Company, the Royal Opera House and English National Opera where he was Principal Baritone for 18 years.

He enjoys a busy concert career, both at home and abroad, and has performed at most of the major music festivals in Britain including – Bath, Chester, Aldeburgh, City of London, Newcastle, and Brighton. He has made many appearances at the South Bank at all three venues – The Festival Hall, The Queen Elizabeth Hall and The Purcell Room.

For many years Chris worked with Sir John Eliot Gardiner as soloist in various concerts and he has been a regular broadcaster for the BBC over the years. His repertoire ranges from Early Music to the 20th century and Music Theatre. Appearances have taken him abroad to the Americas, Russia, Hong Kong and Europe.

NCS recall his memorable performances in 2011 at the première of Andrew Mildinhall's *Requiem Even Such is Time* and Fauré's *Requiem*, and in *Summer Serenade* in 2010. With John Naylor and The Phoenix Singers his performances of Christus in Bach's *St Matthew Passion* and in Brahms' *German Requiem* were especially well received.

After 40 years of performing on stage, concert platform, television, videos and recordings (his most recent being a CD of English Song entitled "Great Things – Twentieth Century English song" 16 composers), Chris is currently working on his next recording and helping others to achieve success in their careers in the performing arts.

Simon Russell – 1st rehearsal accompanist

Simon was born in Liverpool. He studied organ at Birkenhead School with Timothy Lawford and then at Cambridge as Organ Scholar at St. Catharines's College, where he continued studies with Gillian Weir and the late Peter Le Huray.

After Cambridge he was appointed Assistant Organist at Chester Cathedral but decided after a while to keep music as a hobby and gain fortune from computer keyboards. Having worked for Pilkingtons, ICI and then AstraZeneca, he is now a senior consultant working for the Anglo/Swedish management consultancy company '3gamma'.

He was firstly accompanist and then Musical Director of the Hoylake Choral Society from 1982 until he moved in 2000 to Nantwich where he is Organist at St Mary's Parish Church. He has also accompanied the Nantwich Singers on many occasions and directed them when their normal Musical Director is absent. He is an annual recitalist at Chester Cathedral and is on the 'reserve' organist list covering holiday periods and other absences. He is also in demand as an organ tutor and has many Associated Board and other pupil distinctions and diploma successes to his credit.

Nantwich Choral Society has been delighted to enjoy Simon's playing since September 2010 when he followed Andrew Mildinhall as only the third accompanist in the Society's history.

Graham Eccles - organist

Graham Eccles first studied the organ at Worksop College in Nottinghamshire; during this time he gained his LTCL and ARCO diplomas. He subsequently studied at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester under Ronald Frost and was appointed Boddington Organ Scholar at St. Ann's Church. As well as graduating from the college with an upper division diploma he gained the diploma in professional performance and the Alice Shawcross prize in Church music. He also achieved the ARCM and FRCO diplomas at this time. More recently, he was been awarded the diploma in Choral Directing from the Royal College of Organists, gaining the Brook Memorial Prize.

In 1989 Graham started as Assistant Organist at Chester Cathedral and played a key role in the musical life of the city both in and out of the Cathedral. Some notable recital engagements have taken place in Liverpool Anglican Cathedral, Cantù (Italy), the Cathedral of Sens (France), this being part of the 7ème International Festival d'Orgue and in Memphis, New York and Atlanta, USA and was asked to play at very short notice two concerts in Sardinia in the 8th International Organ Festival. In 2002 he participated in the Keyboard Festival at the Conservatorium of Music in Newcastle, Australia playing and working with the native and some South Korean organ students.

He was Organist and Master of the Choristers at St Asaph Cathedral in North Wales between 1998 and 2003 and recorded the first CD on the rebuilt organ entitled "Organ and Harp from St Asaph", with Eira Lynn Jones playing the harp.

From 2004, Graham became a freelance musician and as well as teaching and performing locally, he is one of the regular organists for the Daily Service on BBC Radio 4. He is a visiting tutor in organ at the University of Wales, Bangor and is Conductor of Colwyn Bay Choral Society as well as St Asaph Choral Society and is in regular demand as an organ accompanist by many other choirs and Choral Societies of the North West. He has played many times with the RLPO and Hallé orchestras. Since November 2009 he has been Director of Music at Bangor Cathedral.

John Naylor – conductor

As conductor, singer and organist, John combines extensive performance experience in world-class choirs with a lifelong passionate interest in choral music and its performance. Following a successful business career he now devotes most of his activities to conducting and choir development. His original training was as a choral scholar at St John's College, Cambridge with the great Dr George Guest after keyboard studies with Conrad Eden at Durham Cathedral where he was a chorister, a music scholarship at Rossall School and singing studies with Wilfrid Brown and Lyndon van der Pump from The Royal College of Music.

He subsequently became a professional member of the Chapel Royal Choir of St Peter ad Vincula at H.M. Tower of London and The Monteverdi Choir and Louis Halsey Singers, appearing at the Proms, the South Bank, the Aldeburgh Festival and in numerous broadcasts and recordings. He has sung in the cathedral choirs of Carlisle, Christ Church Oxford and Chester where until recently he could still be occasionally spotted on the back row!

John has been Director of The Lydian Singers since founding the choir in 1980. They are now one of the leading chamber choirs in the North West and have performed extensively in the North West, Spain, France, Italy and in most of the cathedrals in Great Britain, often returning several times by invitation.

John was appointed Music Director of Nantwich Choral Society in September 2005 for whom he has now conducted highly acclaimed performances of works in the mainstream choral repertoire including Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Bach's *St John Passion* (in Chester Cathedral), and Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610*, Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*, Fauré's *Requiem*, Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man* with Ensemble Vocal Arpège de Mâcon, Mozart's *Requiem* and Bach's *B minor Mass* with the 18th Century Concert Orchestra and in 2009 Haydn's *The Seasons* and *The Dream of Gerontius* in Chester Cathedral with the Northern Concordia Orchestra and in 2010 Handel's *Coronation Anthems* and the *Dettingen Te Deum* with the 18th Century Sinfonia.

John was also conductor of Newport Male Voice Choir from 2004 – 2009 and of The Phoenix Singers of Shrewsbury from 2009 – 2011 with whom he performed works

by Britten, Poulenc, Tavener and Hindemith, first performances of the winning works in The Phoenix International Choral Composition Competition and critically acclaimed performances of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in Shrewsbury Abbey and Brahms' *Requiem* in St Chad's, Shrewsbury.

John's conducting engagements in 2011 included several performances of *Messiah*, the first performance of *Even such is Time*, a new commissioned work by Andrew Mildinhall, three performances of Fauré's *Requiem*, Rossini's *Petite Messe Solonelle*, Haydn's *Creation*, performances of Motets by Poulenc, Britten and Messaien, Blackburn and Liverpool Metropolitan cathedrals with The Lydian Singers, and a memorable performance of Monteverdi's *Vespers of 1610* with the Phoenix Singers and the English Sackbutt and Cornett Ensemble.

2012 included Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony* and *The Lark Ascending* with the Northern Concordia Orchestra, Mozart's *Coronation Mass* and *Vespers* in Macon and Nantwich, *Messiah* with The 18th Century Sinfonia, Coventry Cathedral with The Open University Chapel Choir and with the Lydian Singers and The Lydian Ensemble works by Buxtehude, Monteverdi and Mozart followed by Bangor and Lichfield Cathedrals. In June he conducted the first performance of a new chamber orchestra version of Andrew Mildinhall's *Even Such is Time* with The Lydian Singers at The Lymm Festival.

2013 included Bach's *St Matthew Passion* in Chester Cathedral with The 18th Century Sinfonia, Karl Jenkins' *The Armed Man*, Puccini's *Messe di Gloria* and Handel's *Israel in Egypt* with Nantwich Choral Society, St Alban's, Peterborough and Coventry (Duruflé's *Requiem*) cathedrals with The Lydian Singers and Guildford Cathedral with The Open University Chapel Choir.

Plans for 2014 include Elgar's *Enigma Variations* with The Northern Concordia Orchestra, *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* and Karl Jenkins *The Peacemakers* with NCS, Exeter and Lichfield cathedrals with The Open University Choir, and with The Lydian Singers Liverpool Metropolitan and Lichfield cathedrals and a first performance of another new Andrew Mildinhall work at the summer Lymm Festival.

Nantwich Choral Society

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Music Director: John Naylor

Accompanist: Simon Russell

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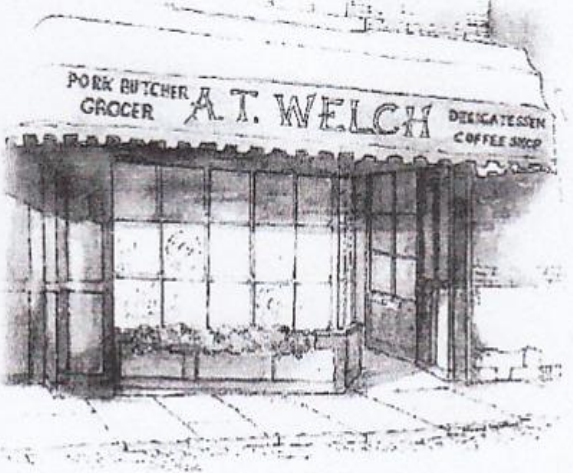
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Elgar: ***From the Bavarian Highlands, Enigma Variations***
Coleridge Taylor: ***Hiawatha's Wedding Feast***

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