Sunday 30 April 2023
Downing Place URC, Cambridge

A German Requiem

Cambridge Philharmonic Chorus
Harry Sever & Tom Primrose piano
Rowan Pierce soprano
James Geidt baritone
Rouzbeh Parsa kamancheh



Saturday 20 May 2023 at 7.30pm
West Road Concert Hall, Cambridge



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Strike of the lift of the lift

Cambridge Philharmonic presents

Improvisations on Iranian folk themes for kamancheh and piano

Rouzbeh Parsa: kamancheh Harry Sever: piano

Interval

Brahms A German Requiem

Cambridge Philharmonic Chorus Harry Sever & Tom Primrose: piano

Rowan Pierce: soprano James Geidt: baritone

Improvisations on Iranian folk themes

Rouzbeh Parsa: kamancheh

Harry Sever: piano

This very special and unique musical performance is presented by kamancheh virtuoso and composer Rouzbeh Parsa, accompanied on piano by Harry Sever.

The kamancheh (or kamānche as it is sometimes known) is a Persian/Iranian bowed stringed instrument related to the bowed rebab, the historical ancestor of the kamancheh, and to the bowed lira of the Byzantine Empire, ancestor of the European violin family. It is played sitting down and held like a cello, although it is about the length of a viola. The end-pin can rest on the knee or thigh while seated in a chair.

Image: Wikipedia

The kamancheh has a long neck including fingerboard which kamancheh makers shape as a

truncated inverse cone for easy bow movement. Traditionally kamanchehs had three silk strings, but modern instruments have four metal strings. Kamanchehs may have highly ornate inlays and elaborately carved ivory tuning pegs. The body has a long upper neck and a lower bowl-shaped resonating chamber made from a gourd or wood, usually covered with a membrane made from the skin of a lamb, goat or sometimes a fish, on which the bridge is set.

The kamancheh sounds deeper than the violin, possibly because Western music tends to love the higher end of the scale, whereas the lower register, the common ground of Middle Eastern compositions, sounds more regal and less frantic.

Interval of 20 minutes

Ein Deutsches Requiem (London version)

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Background

It is most likely that the idea for Ein Deutsches Requiem occurred to Brahms soon after the death of his great hero and mentor Robert Schumann in 1856. Brahms, a sensitive, introverted individual, was profoundly affected by this tragedy and seems to have started work on a D minor symphony that he later abandoned, recycling some of the music in other works. The slow movement of this aborted symphony, which itself seems to have been culled from an 1854 sketch of a sonata for two pianos. eventually became part of the second movement of the Requiem. By 1861, according to the historian Carl Geiringer, Brahms had mapped out four movements of the Requiem. But it was the devastating



blow of his mother's death in February 1865 that impelled him to complete it.

By August 1867 the work had six movements and was, as far as Brahms was then concerned, complete. Its première was arranged for Bremen Cathedral on Good Friday (10 April) 1868. Prior to that, however, the first three movements received a disastrous performance in Vienna in December 1867. As it turned out, this in no way discouraged interest in the work, and the Bremen performance, conducted by Brahms himself in front of a packed cathedral, was a triumph. Indeed, it finally established him as a composer of substance. By 18 February 1869, when the Requiem was performed in the Leipzig Gewandhaus, Brahms had added the lovely soprano solo with choral interpolations that now stands as the fifth movement.

The Leipzig performance was coolly received, but the enthusiasm with which the 1868 Bremen performance had been greeted carried the day. In 1869 the

Requiem was heard in a dozen other German towns as well as being given twice in Basel and Zürich. By 1872 it was receiving its debut performances in Utrecht and St Petersburg. The first public performance in London was not heard until 1873 and appears to have been a sad failure. Yet today the Requiem takes its place as one of the truly great choral masterworks.

As its title suggests, *Ein Deutsches Requiem* (A German Requiem) is not a traditional musical setting based on the Latin Mass for the Dead. Nor is it a Protestant service, even though the sources of its text are drawn from Luther's translation of the Bible and Apocrypha. In one sense, the work is not even Christian, since it makes no reference to the name Jesus Christ whatsoever. What Brahms has produced in this work, as he intended, is a Requiem to console the living. It might well be considered a direct appeal to God for comfort.

The seven movements

- 1. Selig sind, die da Leid tragen
- 2. Denn alles Fleisch, es ist wie Gras
- 3. Herr, lehre doch mich Der Gerechten Seelen
- 4. Wie lieblich sind Deine Wohnungen
- 5. Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit
- 6. Denn wir haben hie keine bleibende Statt
- 7. Selig sind die Toten

The **first movement**, based on one of the Beatitudes, is dark and restrained in mood. But the music of the middle section gives hope and a promise that those who sow in tears shall reap in joy.

The **second movement** contrasts the impermanence of humankind and the everlasting nature of God. Brahms uses texts from the Epistles of St Peter and St James and the Book of Isaiah. A slow D minor march, more like a sarabande, together with its repetition, frames a lilting section describing the patience of God. Then the movement suddenly erupts into a joyous effusion, setting the declaration that "the redeemed of the Lord shall come again." The final hope that "joy everlasting shall be upon their heads" is set to some of Brahms's most ravishing music.

The **third movement** is a setting of Psalm 39 for baritone solo echoed by the chorus. It stresses the transience and frailty of humanity and appeals to the Almighty for help, even though to God man is as nothing. Yet once

again Brahms sheds upon this dark picture the light of hope and consolation, and he does it in a magnificent fugue over a sustained D pedal point. In the unfortunate 1867 Vienna performance of the first three movements of the Requiem, this was intended to be the grand finale. Sadly one of the reasons why the performance was such a fiasco was that an overenthusiastic timpanist drowned out all the other musicians!

The **fourth movement** is "How lovely are Thy dwellings", the well-known setting of part of Psalm 84 so often heard as a choral item on its own. The smooth, beautifully lilting opening contrasts with the double fugato section symbolizing the eternal praise of God in heaven. The blend of comforting and restrained laudatory music is compelling.

The **fifth movement** is essentially for a soprano, with the choir commenting quietly on her solo. The text is taken from St John's gospel, from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, and from Apocryphal Book of Ecclesiasticus. The mood of this number is purely consolatory and contains some of Brahms's most beautiful music. It may perhaps be worth noting that the sentiments expressed by the choir – "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you..." – link us directly to one of the emotional sources of the Requiem's composition, the love Brahms always had for his own mother. Since this was the last movement of the work to be composed (in 1868), it is often reckoned to be an afterthought. But such a deeply felt movement that touches the very heart of Brahms's personal feelings for one so dear to him can hardly be an afterthought. Perhaps for the Bremen performance he simply had not yet found the right medium in which to cast that devotion.

The **sixth movement** is Brahms's portrayal of the Day of Judgment, drawing on New Testament sources: Hebrews, Corinthians, and Revelation. The vision is prefaced by yet another reminder of the fleeting nature of human existence, this one embodied in a rather solemn chorus. The baritone soloist announces the sound of the last trumpet, and the chorus is plunged into the Last Judgment. This is no Verdian vision of terror, but again a vision full of hope. The setting of the words "Death, where is thy sting? Grave, where is thy victory?" is almost joyous in part. And just at the point where you think it must end, Brahms unleashes one of his grandest fugues, announced by the altos, emerging triumphantly from a long-held chord of C major: Herr, du bist würdig (Lord, Thou art worthy) — a truly spectacular effect!

For the **final movement** Brahms draws all his material from Revelations. The mood is wholly comforting, using text that is also familiar in more traditional Requiems – "Selig sind die Toten, die in dem Herren sterben" (Blessed are

the dead which die in the Lord). A soaring tune, sung first by the sopranos, later by basses and tenors, drives this glorious movement forward. Eventually, the music subsides, and suddenly we find ourselves back at the beginning, reprising the opening theme, which had earlier been used for a beatitude. The sense of consolation prevails, as the Requiem draws to its hushed and tranquil conclusion.

Programme notes William Gould, Making Music

Tonight's performance is an arrangement created by Brahms with four-handed piano accompaniment instead of orchestra. This version of the Requiem has become known as the 'London Version'.



Image: Sheila Burnett

Text

- 1. 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.
- 2. Denn alles Fleisch es ist wie Gras und alle Herrlichkeit des Menschen wie des Grases Blumen.
 Das Gras ist verdorret und die Blume abgefallen. 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. Aber des Herrn Wort bleibet in Ewigkeit.

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.

1. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. They who sow in tears, shall reap in joy. Go forth and cry, bearing precious seed, and come with joy bearing their sheaves.

2. For all flesh is as grass,

and the glory of man like flowers.
The grass withers and the flower falls. Therefore be patient, dear brothers, for the coming of the Lord.
Behold, the husbandman waits for the delicious fruits of the earth and is patient for it, until he receives the morning rain and evening rain.
But the word of the Lord endures for eternity.

The redeemed of the Lord will come again, and come to Zion with a shout; eternal joy shall be upon her head; They shall take joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing must depart.

- 3. 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 Hand breit vor dir. und mein Leben ist wie nichts vor dir. Ach wie aar nichts sind alle Menschen, die doch so sicher leben. Sie gehen daher wie ein Schemen, und machen ihnen viel veraebliche 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
- 4. 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.

Hand und keine Qual rühret sie an.

5. Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit; aber ich will euch wieder sehen und euer Herz soll sich freuen und eure Freude soll niemand von euch nehmen. Sehet mich an: Ich habe eine kleine Zeit Mühe und Arbeit gehabt, und habe großen Trost torment, and now have found great funden. Ich will euch trösten. wie Finen seine Mutter tröstet.

- 3. Lord, teach me That I must have an end, And my life has a purpose, and I must accept this. Behold, my days are as a handbreadth before Thee. and my life is as nothing before Thee. Alas, as nothing are all men, but so sure the living. They are therefore like a shadow, and go about vainly in disquiet; they collect riches, and do not know who will receive them. Now, Lord, how can I console myself? My hope is in Thee. The righteous souls are in God's hand and no torment shall stir them.
- 4. How lovely are thy dwelling places, O Lord of Hosts! My soul requires and yearns for the courts of the Lord: My body and soul rejoice in the living God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they praise you forever.
- 5. You now have sorrow: but I shall see you again and your heart shall rejoice and your joy no one shall take from you. Behold me: I have had for a little time toil and consolation. I will console you, as one is consoled by his mother.

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

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 dein Stachel? Hölle, wo ist dein Sieg? 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.

7. Selig sind die Toten, die in dem Herren sterben, von nun an. Ja, der Geist spricht, daß sie ruhen von ihrer Arbeit; denn ihre Werke folgen ihnen nach. 6. For we have here no continuing city, but we seek the future.
Behold, I show you a mystery:

We shall not all sleep, but we all shall be changed and suddenly, in a moment, at the sound of the last trombone.

For the trombone shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

Then shall be fulfilled
The word that is written:
Death is swallowed up in victory.
O Death, where is thy sting?
O Hell, where is thy victory?
Lord, Thou art worthy to receive all praise, honor, and glory, for Thou hast created all things, and through Thy will they have been and are created.

7. Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord from henceforth. Yea, saith the spirit, that they rest from their labours, and their works shall follow them.

Rowan Pierce (soprano)



Saltburn-by-the-Sea soprano Rowan Pierce was awarded the President's Award by HRH The Prince of Wales at the Royal College of Music in 2017. She won both the Song Prize and First Prize at the inaugural Grange Festival International Singing Competition in 2017, the first Schubert Society Singer Prize in 2014 and the Van Someren-Godfery Prize at the RCM. She was a Britten Pears young artist, a Rising Star of the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and a Harewood Artist at English National Opera.

Rowan has appeared in concert throughout Europe and North and South

America. Recent highlights include performances with Les Arts Florissants, the Rotterdam Philharmonic, the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, Freiburg Baroque, La Nuova Musica, Polyphony, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, Early Opera Company and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. Visits to the US in 2019 included appearances with the OAE at the Lincoln Center in New York, with the Academy of Ancient Music in San Francisco and at the Disney Hall in Los Angeles. She also gave a recital at the Kennedy Center, Washington with Richard Egarr and William Carter in January 2020 and gave a tour in New York with Philharmonia Baroque in the summer of 2021.

Nominated for The Time Sky Arts Award for opera in 2020 her operatic roles include Galatea (*Acis & Galatea*), Iris (*Semele*), Dorinda (*Orlando*), Belinda (*Dido and Aeneas*), Elsie (*Yeoman of the Guard*). As a Harewood Artist she has performed Tiny (*Paul Bunyan*), Papagena (*The Magic Flute*) and Barbarina (*The Marriage of Figaro*). Future engagements include various roles in performances of both Purcell's *King Arthur* and *The Fairy Queen* with the Gabrieli Consort, *The Indian Queen* with Opéra de Luxembourg, Opéra de Caen and Antwerp Opera as well as a recital with Philharmonia Baroque in Ryedale Festival. In 2020 she should have made her Covent Garden debut performing Barbarina but this was cancelled due to Covid. Instead she made her debut there in 2023 singing Papagena in Mozart's *Magic Flute*. In 2022 her Glyndebourne Festival debut was Oberto (*Alcina*).

James Geidt (baritone)



Born in Northampton, James Geidt is a recent graduate from the Opera Course at the Royal Academy of Music where he studied with Glenville Hargreaves and Jonathan Papp, having previously completed his Masters with Distinction at the RAM. Prior to this, James was a Choral Scholar in the choir at New College, Oxford.

As a student at the Royal Academy of Music, James was a soloist for the RAM/ Kohn Foundation Bach Cantata Series and was a finalist in the 2019 Richard Lewis/ Jean Shanks award. James won the Joan Chissell Schumann Lieder Competition in 2016.

Operatic roles to date include Gaspar in Donizetti's *Rita* for Opera South, The Sorceress in Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* for the Vache Baroque Festival, Papageno in Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, Le Comte in Massenet's *Chérubin*, Forester in Janáček's *The Cunning Little Vixen*, L'horloge Comtoise and Le Chat in Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges* and Cadmus in Handel's *Semele* all for Royal Academy Opera. In 2021 James joined Garsington Opera as one of their Alvarez Young Artists.

In concert, James has appeared at the Birmingham Symphony Hall, St John's Smith Square, Palau de la Música Catalana, Cadogan Hall and the Three Choirs Festival.

Current and future engagements include Handel's *Messiah* at the Auditorio Nacional de Música, Madrid for Edward Higginbottom, J.S. Bach's *St John Passion* in Hereford Cathedral, Fauré *Requiem* in Exeter Cathedral, Mendelssohn's *Elijah* for the Amersham Music Festival and Vaughan Williams' *Five Mystical Songs* in Gloucester Cathedral.

Harry Sever (piano)



BBC Music Magazine 'Rising Star' conductor Harry Sever studied at Oxford University and trained at the Guildhall School of Music & Royal Academy of Music. A finalist in both the LSO's Donatella Flick and the Athens International Conducting Competitions, recent and upcoming engagements include Cavalleria Rusticana/Aleko/Carmen (Opera North), Die Walküre/Siegfried/The Fairy Queen (Longborough Festival Opera), Siegfried (Sønderjyllands Symfoniorkester/Den Ny Opera), Fantasio (Garsington), La Traviata (Opera Holland Park), concerts with the orchestra of Welsh National

Opera and recordings with the orchestra of Opera North.

He is currently the Ring Cycle Conducting Fellow at Longborough Festival Opera, and Music Director of the Cambridge Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus.

As an assistant conductor and member of music staff, Harry works in the coming season with Scottish Opera (Strauss *Daphne*), the Kammerphilharmonie Potsdam, and Opera North (Strauss *Ariadne auf Naxos*). He has worked with English National Opera, the Royal Danish Opera, Den Jyske Opera, Garsington, Opera Holland Park, the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra at the Grange Festival, and the Britten Sinfonia at Sadler's Wells. His education work has included projects with The Royal Opera House Covent Garden, The Royal Opera Academy, Copenhagen, British Youth Opera, Birmingham Conservatoire and Trinity Laban Conservatoire.

Tom Primrose (piano)



Tom Primrose is a British conductor, accompanist and coach, particularly known for his work in the field of vocal music. He now works principally in opera, and his freelance work takes him all over the world, including the Palais Garnier and the Bastille with Opéra National de Paris, Opéra de Monte-Carlo, Det Kongelige Teater og Kapel in Copenhagen, Polish National Opera, Korea National Opera, and the Mariinsky in St Petersburg. In the UK he has also worked for the Royal Opera House, English National Opera, the Grange Festival, Shadwell Opera, Opera Holland Park, and Opera South. He has assisted and chorusmastered for a host

of conductors including Susanna Mälkki, Richard Egarr, David Parry, Finnigan Downie Dear, Francesco Cilluffo, Yan-Pascal Tortelier, Jean-Luc Tingaud, and most recently assisting Alexander Soddy preparing the music for Deborah Warner's acclaimed production of Peter Grimes at the Palais Garnier. He is on the music staff at Grange Festival Opera where he is currently chorusmaster. He returns to Paris again in September.

He has strong connections with Norfolk where he is Artistic Co-Director of the Southrepps Music Festival, conducts choirs at the University of East Anglia, and acted for a time as Assistant Organist and Director of the Girls' Choir at Norwich Cathedral. Amongst a host of other freelance work, he is also chorusmaster of the Newbury Festival and the Cambridge Philharmonic.

Tom is also an acclaimed piano accompanist, and has performed in many of the UK's principal concert halls and festivals, on BBC television and radio, and has collaborated with leading singers and instrumentalists including Ben Johnson, Ellie Laugharne, Jonathan McGovern, Christina Gansch, Sophie Bevan, Mary Bevan, Susanna Hurrell, Ruby Hughes, Ema Nikolovska, Claire Barnett-Jones, Michael Chance, Jose Maria del Monaco, Katherine Jenkins, Javier Camerena, Corrine Winters, Jonathan Bloxham, Ben Baker, Eloise Fleur Thom and Jennifer Pike, amongst many others.

Rouzbeh Parsa (kamancheh)



Rouzbeh Parsa is a Kamancheh player who graduated from Tehran University of Art and Architecture.

He has attended numerous festivals and has won awards for his exceptional skills as a Kamancheh player.

Two books authored by him have been published and are considered reliable sources for information about this musical instrument.

Cambridge Philharmonic Chorus

Soprano 1

Jane Cook
Amélie Deblauwe
Susan Earnshaw
Clare Hatty
Agnes Heydtmann
Carole MacBrayne
Jan Moore
Penny Mullock
Chessie Nour
Susan Randall
Sheila Rushton
Anne Sales
Pat Sartori
Laura Simmons
Linda Stollwerck Boulton

Soprano 2

Cathy Ashbee
Steffi Campbell Smith
Christine Halstead
Maggie Hook
Wren Khouri
Suzie McCave
Jo Pinfield
Ann Read
Pip Smith
Sheila Stephens
Catharine Warren

Alto 1

Flizabeth Anderson Helen Black Alexandra Bolton Caroline Courtney Elaine Fulton Jean Gulston Elaine Kinsella Jan Littlewood Alice Parr Alison Russell Sarah Upjohn Alison Vinnicombe Helen Wheatley Anne Willitts Margaret Wilson Susan Wilson Joanna Womack

Alto 2

Jane Bower
Margaret Cook
Jane Fenton
Jane Fleming
Stephanie Gray
Hilary Jackson
Emma McCaughan
Lynne McClure
Sue Purseglove
Chris Strachan
Kate Wootton

Tenor 1

Doug Addy Florin Enuta Aviva Grisby Jean Harding Sylvia Hearn Peter Scholten John Williams

Tenor 2

Aidan Baker Jeremy Baumberg Adam Higgins Gunnar Lange Andy Pierce

Bass 1

Chris Fisher
Patrick Hall
Lewis Jones
Paul Lohmann
Andy Mason
Roger McClure
Martin Scutt
Harrison Sherwood

Bass 2

Andrew Black
Richard Birkett
Peter Campbell Smith
Chris Coffin
Max Field
Tom Read
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Chris Brannick &
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otos: Bill Hiskett

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West Road Concert Hall, Cambridge

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> Leoncavallo: Pagliacci Saffron Hall, Saffron Walden

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