

TONBRIDGE

SOCIETY

Concert Review

Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem*

Chapel of St Augustine, Tonbridge School

30 March 2019

The Tonbridge Philharmonic Society Orchestra and Chorus gave a moving performance of Brahms' *Ein Deutsches Requiem* - their second performance with guest conductor Michael Waldron. They were joined by thirty members of the Evangelische Kantorei from Heusenstamm, supported by the Friendship Circle. The Requiem was sung in the original German and the input from our German friends was particularly appreciated. The programme contained helpful notes on the work, written by L.R. Deacon, together with texts in both German and English to help the audience best appreciate what they were hearing.

This is a demanding work for both choir and orchestra, and Michael Waldron was evidently in full control, bringing out the best in both groups. Sadly this was his last appearance with the Society, and they are all deeply appreciative of the work that he has put in to create such a high standard. The large orchestra was ably led by Susan Skone James.

Following a brief orchestral introduction, the choir set the tone of comfort and solace which is at the heart of this work - this was interspersed with a slight leaning on "Selig sind, die da Leid tragen" (Blest are they that mourn), gently offering shades of tears and grief which were most effective. This was strikingly contrasted by "Denn alles Fleish es ist wie Gras" (For all flesh, it is like grass), with rather muted strings contributing to its chilling tone. Another marked contrast was achieved with a plea to wait for the coming of the Lord, followed by a real sense of exultant jubilation, a reminder of the "everlasting joy" that is to come.

In the first of the two solos for baritone Jonathan McGovern, who had an excellent command of the German language used his warm and very pleasing rounded tone, particularly in the rather pleading chromatic passages. The solo is interspersed by the choir repeating the soloist's words; there was a sense of urgency about this, and the balance just right. We were then treated to the lilting passages of the ever popular and comforting "Wie lieblich sind seine Wohnungen" (How lovely is your dwelling).

Unfortunately the listed soprano soloist, Rhian Lois, was indisposed and the Society

was extremely fortunate to find at the last moment the most wonderful replacement in Elin Pritchard. The audience was clearly spellbound by her beautiful rendition of “Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit” (You are sorrowful now), which had the power and clarity to reach the full and not inconsiderable length of the chapel - it was a moving and memorable experience. There was sensitive playing in the woodwind and in the singers in the accompanying chorus.

Following this comforting aria, the baritone soloist, choir and orchestra gave their all, working up to the climax of “Hölle, wo ist dein Sieg?” (Hell, where is your victory?). In the final movements, which were taken at a good tempo and relate to the opening of the work, there was some expressive orchestral playing, with lovely low strings, and harp played by Anna Wynne. At the conclusion one could have heard a pin drop, no hasty applause intruded to break the spell created by the performers, until it eventually came and clearly expressed the audience’s obvious appreciation. Tonbridge continues in its good fortune in having concerts of this calibre.