

March 11, 1997

Friends -

The understanding generally assigned to Brahms' choice of text for his "German" *Requiem* is that, rather than setting the traditional prayers for the safe journey of the souls of the departed to their theologically correct heavenly rest, he chose to be concerned with bringing some degree of comfort to the sorrowing who remain.

I am not sure I ever have "heard" Brahms' *Requiem* — strictly as a member of an audience. At this moment I can recall only performances in which I was a participant — the first, of course, as a singer.

My point is that, however varied and personal its comfort-bearing qualities may be to the listener, there can be no doubt about its exhilarative effects upon those who perform it. Is there any piece in our symphonic choral repertoire which is so enlivening to sing?

Time after time singers and instrumentalists have come to me following a performance, saying, "My (mother, grandmother, aunt, father, uncle, sister, brother...) passed away last month, and this was 'especially meaningful' to me." These comforts do exist, and they undoubtedly vary from person to person in proportion as to how completely a listener or performer is comfortable also with traditional Christian doctrine as to resurrection and an after-life.

My attention at the moment is to those extraordinary "life-fulfilling" joys that singing the Brahms *Requiem* affords its participants apart from doctrinal reinforcement. 'Strange, isn't it, to contemplate the joys (perhaps even "pleasures"?) of singing a Requiem? But, there they are.

Change of subject (Very important for those of you singing the Poulenc "Responses...:") To smooth over its episodic, repetitive, sequential construction, seek a compelling, unwavering inevitability of tempo across composed silences and textual phrasings — however unhurried and meditative that tempo also must be.

Please mark all final consonants — and there are scores of them — to occupy their appropriate metric placement. -And think ahead, no matter how unexpected that next pitch may seem.

To all: 'fine singing last night. Thank you all... and thank you, Norman.

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