

Stamford Bridge Singers Come and Sing Brahms Requiem The Unitarian Chapel 9th July 2022

It was a great relief to all that after one cancellation and a number of other difficulties, some covid related, some not, the Stamford Bridge Singers could finally perform the Brahms Requiem on Saturday 9th July. The small choir under the leadership of Stuart Nettleship approached this magnificent, huge choral masterpiece of the 19th century with great commitment and energy, aided by a few guest singers, and inspired by the talented soloists Helen Jones, soprano, and Rob Webb, baritone and the truly outstanding accompanists, one piano, four hands, Michael and Ketevan Ward.

The first part of the concert was given over to the soloists to perform memorable works from the 19th century repertoire. Helen Jones showed her versatility in playing two pieces by Clara Schumann, before Michael Ward played three pieces from Clara's husband Robert. Helen Jones was then joined by her husband, Rob, who sang three Robert Schumann songs, before Michael's wife Ketevan dazzled the audience with a quite breath-taking rendition of Franz Liszt's Mephisto Waltz number 1. The theme of married couples underpinned this concert !

The German Requiem by Johannes Brahms was possibly written in memory of his close friend Robert Schumann, and is a mighty work, and to quote one chorus member " a big sing". The seven movements are settings of the bible, but not the normal Latin settings as can be used in a catholic requiem mass, but rather reflected Brahms' personal and deep seated thoughts around death and resurrection. It is a profound and moving work requiring skill and stamina from the small choir, as well as vocal expertise from the soloists and of course thrilling playing by the accompanists. This was a come and sing performance, so not quite the final fully polished performance, but what an experience was created! There were moments of great beauty, from the wonderful opening, " Blessed are they that mourn" to the well-known chorus " How lovely are thy dwellings" and the soprano soloist " ye now have sorrow" with the chorus replying " Thee will I comfort". There were moments of great drama, " But yet the Lord's word standeth for evermore" and the beautiful baritone solo " at the sound of the last trumpet".

This was a wonderful opportunity to sing such a challenging and great work, together with impressive soloists and accompanists. Stuart and the choir should be feeling very proud that they managed to give so many people such an experience.