

3/10/05 DAT 14.850

PROGRAM

CD 14,851

1] from Quattro Pezzi Sacri: STABAT MATER 14:00 GIUSEPPE VERDI (1813-1901)

PAUSE

2] COMMENTS, BOERS

A "Choral Symphony"-Tragedy to Triumph

3] TRAGIC OVERTURE Op. 81 13:53 JOHANNES BRAHMS (1833-1897)

4] NÄNIE Op. 82 13:49 BRAHMS

5] SCHICKSALS LIED Op. 54 16:06 BRAHMS

6] TRIUMPH LIED Op. 55 8:10 BRAHMS
Mvt. 1: Alleluia!

The ghost of Beethoven seemed ever present in the mid to late nineteenth century. Composers wrestled with measuring up to the enduring genius of the *Missa Solemnis*, *Ninth Symphony* and late String Quartets. Brahms himself struggled for nearly a decade to create his first symphony, and never attempted to match the scope of Beethoven's *Ninth "Choral" Symphony*. Yet Brahms proved himself to be a hugely creative symphonist, drawing from historical models and styles, and imbuing them with his rich color and texture. Tonight's concert plays with the idea of what Brahms may have created had he written a choral symphony.

Brahms received an honorary doctorate from Breslau University in 1880, and in honor of the occasion wrote two overtures, the beloved *Academic Festival Overture* and tonight's *Tragic Overture*. The *Tragic* contains a dual musical nature, a sense of contrast between the pain of the human condition in tandem with seeking relief in spiritual and supernatural ideals. This yin yang of ideals continues throughout the entire "symphony." As the first movement in our "symphony" the *Tragic Overture* is one of Brahms' more creative workings of sonata form, the traditional form used by composers for the opening movement of a symphony.

The next work in Brahms *oeuvre*, and our symphonic second movement, is his achingly beautiful Op. 82, *Nänie*, or "Lament." Again the duality of Brahms vision is evident in the structure of the setting of Schiller's poem. Brahms begins and ends the work in a delicate 6/4 time, separated by a central majestic *Andante* in common time. Brahms and Schiller describe not only the distance between humanity trapped in our earthly condition and the ideal life of the gods, but also the lament that pain also invades the heavens. Not only are we separated from our bliss, but the gods must also endure pain as death separated Venus from Adonis, Orpheus from Euridice, and others. Some consider this music among Brahms' most beautiful.

Traditionally a symphonic third movement is a minuet and trio or a scherzo. For tonight's "choral symphony" the *Schicksalslied*, or "Song of Fate," fills that role. Continuing the two-fold vision of heaven and earth, Brahms' Op. 54 is set as an other-worldly *adagio* followed by a fiery *allegro* in 3/4 time, thus fulfilling our need for a two-part minuet and trio movement. A setting of a Hölderlein poem, the text again describes the idyllic life of the god's contrasted against the fearful fate of our life on earth. Brahms surrounds the two-part text with virtually identical musical bookends that perhaps describe a hope of the world from which we came and to which we may return.

The finale of tonight's eclectic choral symphony is the first movement of Brahms' little known *Triumphlied*, Op. 55. During Brahms' career it was considered his most difficult choral work, so difficult in fact that at its premier only the first movement was performed. A *tour de force* employing double chorus, extended orchestra and baritone solo, the work is a nationalistic celebration of the ascendance of the German Empire and of victories in the Franco-Prussian war. The work is an extended Hallelujah Chorus, and in fact draws heavily upon Handel as a model for its structure. The text combines multitudinous Hallelujah's with text from Revelation, describing scenes of deliverance and victory. By the time of World War I, works that promoted German nationalism fell out of favor, and the work has remained virtually unknown until its recent revival.

The opening work on our program is Verdi's *Stabat Mater* from his *Quattro Pezzi Sacri*. Following the composition of his incomparable *Requiem*, Verdi went into semi retirement for nearly 12 years, when at the age of 73 he began a musical rebirth that would produce *Othello* and *Falstaff*. Amidst working on these two treasures, he completed four sacred songs, unrelated, and each a sketch of a unique facet of his compositional style. *Stabat Mater* is an ancient sequence, or religious poem, and describes the anguish of Mary upon the crucifixion of her son. The text is rich with imagery and drama, and, much like his *Requiem*, Verdi sets the text with full operatic expression. From striking open fifths describing the scourging of Christ, to the fiery crucifixion passages, to the sublime ascent into paradise, Verdi uses an expanded orchestral palate ranging from *pppp* to *ffff* creating a dramatic impact in the tradition of his opera.