

"Choral Artists do justice to Brahms"
by Edward Reichel
Deseret News, April 24, 2007

Johannes Brahms' "German Requiem" had its origins in the deaths of two people who were closest to the composer - his mother and Robert Schumann. As such, it is highly personal, and one of Brahms' most touching and heartfelt works.

Unlike the traditional settings of the mass for the dead, there is no wrathful God or fear for Judgment Day in Brahms' Requiem. Instead, it is a work of consolation for the grieving and an entreaty that the departed find eternal rest. Never a religious man, Brahms nevertheless brought deep spirituality to his work. He selected passages from the German translation of the Bible that fit his beliefs. Usually performed in German, there have been several English translations. The best known of these is perhaps Robert Shaw's, which the Mormon Tabernacle Choir performed and recorded shortly after Shaw's death in 1999.

There is another English translation by Lara Hoggard, who spent some 20 years meticulously researching the German text and creating a new translation that more accurately reflects the original and more closely fits the spirit of the work.

The Salt Lake Choral Artists, under their director Brady Allred, gave the Utah premiere of this version last weekend. They were joined by the Salt Lake Symphony and soloists Carol Ann Allred, soprano, and Christopher Holmes, baritone. (Holmes was a replacement for Darrell Babidge, who was scheduled to sing.)

Brady Allred is, without doubt, one of the pre-eminent choral conductors in the country, and he brings the best out of his choral forces - and also the orchestra, as he once again showed Saturday. The Salt Lake Choral Artists and the Salt Lake Symphony may be community organizations, but under Allred's direction, they have a professional sound and quality.

The ensemble sang magnificently. They sounded rich and resonant and responded well to Allred's direction. He coaxed a nuanced performance out of them, one that was dramatic where needed, but also poignant and deeply moving.

The soloists were also wonderful. Holmes proved himself to be a worthy replacement for Babidge, as he brought feeling and profound expression to his two arias ("Lord teach me to know the measure of my days on Earth" and "Lo, I unfold unto you a mystery").

Carol Ann Allred brought tender expressiveness and heartfelt sincerity to her aria, "You now are sorrowful." She captured the poignancy of the words with great sensitivity and feeling.