



PEMBROKE COMMUNITY CHOIR

www.pembrokecommunitychoir.org

MEDIA RELEASE

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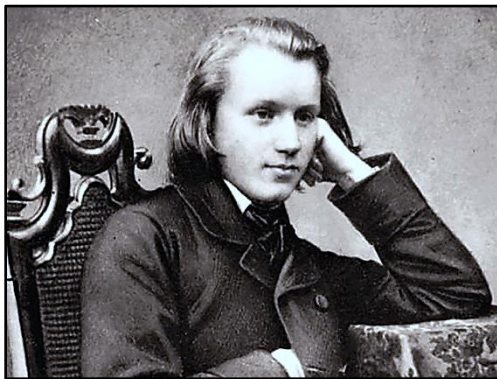
PEMBROKE COMMUNITY CHOIR TO PERFORM BRAHMS' REQUIEM AT SPRING CONCERT

The Pembroke Community Choir will be demonstrating its versatility at an upcoming spring concert on Sunday, April 21st. After a varied series of successful concerts in recent years—the multi-language “Christmas Around the World”, their groovy “Sounds of the Sixties”, and two virtual mini concerts during COVID, the Pembroke Community Choir will mark its 66th year by performing what some consider one of the greatest choral compositions of the 19th century: Johannes Brahms’ *A German Requiem* (sung in English).

Many of us may have unknowingly been introduced to Brahms through his *Lullaby*, sometimes known as the *Cradle Song*. Generations of parents have hummed this gentle, lilting tune while rocking their babies to sleep. Brahms wrote it in German as *Wiegenlied* in 1868, and in modern times it has been recorded by opera singers, American crooners Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra, the Disney studio, and even jazz pianist Dave Brubeck. But Brahms is known for much more than a lullaby, his music having long endured since his first significant compositions in the early 1850s.



Choir Director Gerald LaRonde and A/President Bentley Horne display posters from the Christmas Around the World concert in December 2023.



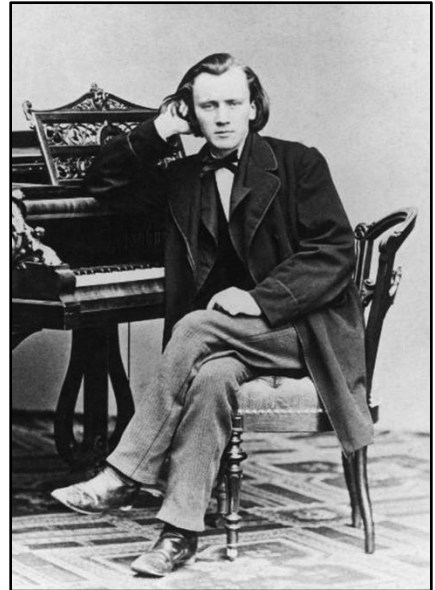
Young Johannes Brahms was already performing and composing when he was a young teenager.

Brahms was born in Hamburg, Germany in 1833 and during his almost 50-year career, was known as a pianist, choir director, conductor, and most famously, a prolific composer of piano works, chamber music, symphonies, concertos, choral music, and more than 200 songs. By age seven, he showed early promise as a pianist and between 14 and 16 years of age, he played at rowdy taverns along the docks of Hamburg, earning a little money to help his family.

At the same time, he was already beginning to perform at recitals and compose his own music. His parents and piano teacher disapproved of his composition efforts, however, wanting him to concentrate solely on piano performance. The musical world greatly benefitted from his disobedience.

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When he was 30, Brahms moved from his birthplace to establish himself in Vienna, the creative hub for serious musicians, and became more deeply immersed in the world of music. He had already enjoyed a 10-year friendship with Robert and Clara Schumann but now he rubbed shoulders with other musicians and composers who were prominent or emerging during the Romantic era—Wagner, Liszt, Mahler, Dvorak. Although he had some rivalries with certain composers and did not receive universal approval from other musicians, critics, or clergy, Brahms’ first years in Vienna were especially productive and successful.



That was the period when he composed his well-known Roma-influenced *Hungarian Dances*, many Viennese waltzes for piano, and his most famous choral work, *A German Requiem*. The deaths of both Brahms’ mother and, years earlier, his close friend Robert Schumann are believed to have been the genesis of this more sombre work. His requiem was well-received by the reportedly 2,500 people in attendance when he conducted it in his home region on Good Friday, 1868. His final version, premiered the following year, received critical acclaim throughout Europe and its success elevated Brahms to the top ranks of German composers. Today, Brahms’ requiem is among the most frequently performed choral works, sung by both professional and regional choirs alike.

The Pembroke Community Choir will sing this beautiful and moving composition in English at their upcoming concert. Under the leadership of choir director Gerald LaRonde, the choristers have taken on the challenging classical piece with much determination since early January, practicing diligently at weekly rehearsals and even from home with helpful video links.



Director LaRonde explains what makes this requiem unique. “Traditionally, a ‘requiem’ was the Roman Catholic liturgy that began with prayers for the dead. In Brahms’ time, a requiem had come to mean any work that took death as its subject.

Brahms based his requiem on the German Bible, choosing passages from Luther’s translation of the New and Old Testaments, and text from Psalms and the Gospels,” he said. Significantly, Brahms’ focused on the living, not the dead, and his piece expresses feelings of grief, mourning, and comfort. Without suggesting judgement or terror, it offers hope and solace from a humanistic viewpoint; ‘Blest are they...’ from the Beatitudes, begins the requiem.

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Mr. LaRonde adds: "Originally scored for full orchestra, Brahms arranged the piece for two pianos; it is from this intimate setting that the chamber orchestra originates." Between 65 and 80 minutes in length, the composition is presented in seven movements, and will feature an eight-piece chamber ensemble consisting of four strings, three woodwinds, and piano.

The 60-voice choir will sing the choruses in multi-part harmony, and the performance will highlight two soloists. Soprano Jessica Green is a former Pembroke resident and choir member currently studying in the Bachelor of Music degree program (Performance) at the University of Ottawa. Baritone Madox Terrell of Ottawa has sung with several Ottawa choirs, primarily the Ottawa Regional Youth Choir, and is currently focusing on composition.

The Pembroke Community Choir last performed this work in 2004 under director Kevin Nieman. Founded in 1958, the choir proudly celebrates its 'senior' status and will be pleased to see friends, family, and supporters in the audience.

There is one performance only on Sunday, April 21st at 7 pm at St. John's Lutheran Church, 357 Miller Street, (corner of Miller and Doran), Pembroke. Tickets are \$15 in advance or \$20 at the door; students 13 and under are free. They may be purchased until Thursday, April 18 from choir members, at the Pembroke Mall's Customer Care Centre, and at Fleurish Floral Designs in Petawawa. For more information, visit the choir's website at www.pembrokecommunitychoir.org.



A poster for the Brahms' Requiem performance. It features a black and white portrait of Johannes Brahms on the right. On the left, there is a musical staff with a treble clef and the letters 'P.C.C.' on it. The title 'BRAHMS' REQUIEM' is prominently displayed in a serif font. Below the title, it says 'Sung in English' and 'with Chamber Orchestra and Soloists'. The soloists are listed as 'Jessica Green – Soprano' and 'Madox Terrell – Baritone'. At the bottom, the conductor 'GERALD LaRONDE – Choral Director' and the accompanist 'DARLENE TerMARSCH – Accompanist' are listed. The performance date and location are 'SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 2024' at 'ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH', '357 MILLER ST. (corner of Miller & Doran Streets)', at '7:00 p.m.'.

BRAHMS' REQUIEM
Sung in English
with Chamber Orchestra and Soloists
Jessica Green – Soprano
Madox Terrell – Baritone
GERALD LaRONDE – Choral Director
DARLENE TerMARSCH – Accompanist
SUNDAY, APRIL 21, 2024
ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
357 MILLER ST. (corner of Miller & Doran Streets)
~ 7:00 p.m. ~



Photos from the choir's Sounds of the Sixties concert in April 2023.