

## About *human requiem*

The word “requiem” carries two meanings: One refers to the “Requiem Mass,” a Latin text that has long been an essential part of Roman Catholic liturgy and has been set to music by Mozart, Berlioz, Verdi, and many other composers. More broadly, “requiem” indicates an elegy or ceremony of mourning. It is in this sense that Brahms used the word in calling one of his greatest works *Ein deutsches Requiem* (“A German Requiem”). This composition provides the music for *human requiem*.

The title for this blend of concert, ritual, and immersive theater comes from Brahms himself. Firmly agnostic throughout his adult life, the composer stated that he intended *Ein deutsches Requiem* to be a “human requiem.” Brahms found his text for this unusual work in German translations of Psalms and other portions of the Bible expressing grief and offering solace. They form an extended prayer not for the dead, as is the purpose of the Latin Requiem Mass, but for those who live on to mourn them.

Though only in his early thirties when he wrote most of *Ein deutsches Requiem*, Brahms had already suffered two significant losses. One, a devastating blow, was the demise of composer Robert Schumann, who had been his mentor and earliest champion. The second was the death of Brahms’s mother, to whom he was particularly close, an event that spurred composition of *Ein deutsches Requiem*. Brahms scored the music for voices and orchestra, but also made a transcription for piano four hands, an arrangement of which will be heard in *human requiem*.

The composition’s seven movements yield a thoughtful symmetry. *Ein deutsches Requiem* begins and concludes with serene benedictions: “Blessed are they that mourn” and “Blessed are the dead.” The second and sixth movements speak of death’s inevitability for all humanity, while the third and sixth focus on individual loss. The work’s centerpiece, the fourth movement, is tranquil in tone, and it echoes the opening and closing movements with its own benediction, its last line beginning “Blessed are they that dwell in thy house.”