

Programme information

Richard Strauss

Tod und Verklärung

&

Johannes Brahms

Ein Deutsches Requiem

Utrechts Studenten Koor & Orkest

2023

Programmainformatie 8^e jaargang, nr. 2

Uitgave van het Utrechts Studenten Koor en Orkest

Auteurs | Donghee Jeong, Jan Huizinga, Lisa Lenderink,
Stijn Bruning, Stijn Janssens, Thijs ter Rele

De Pico (programmainformatiecommissie) bestaat uit:

Abe Wolthuis

Anouk Boon

Donghee Jeong

Esmée Soetekouw

Feline Schiphorst

Jan Huizinga

Justus van Iterson

Lisa Lenderink

Stijn Bruning

Stijn Janssens

Thijs ter Rele

Véronique Schaper

Contents

Glossary	4
Richard Strauss	5
Johannes Brahms	7
An Exegesis on Brahms' Trumpet and Its Theological Implications	12
A very short history of the requiem	14
Tod und Verklärung	17
Which part of <i>Ein deutsches Requiem</i> will make you cry?	24
Possible Absoluteness: What <i>Ein deutsches Requiem</i> Still Asks Us	25

Glossary

Fugue – Specific form of music in which all voices enter with the same melody (imitation), as in a round or canon, and have independent melodic functions (in contrast to music in which one voice has the melody, with the other voices serving as accompaniment only).

Requiem – Normally: the text of the Roman Catholic liturgy for a funerary mass, or music set to that text. *Ein deutsches Requiem* is not a typical requiem: read Lisa's article on page 14 to find out why.

Romanticism – Music and art style of most of the 19th century, in which emotions were generally emphasized over form and technique.

Symphonic poem (or tone poem) – Genre of orchestral music that depicts the contents of a poem, story, scene or painting, using solely instrumental music.

Richard Strauss

by Stijn Bruning

Richard Strauss (1864-1949) was a German composer and conductor. He is mainly famous for his operas and for his symphonic poems (a symphonic poem is a musical adaptation of a story, text, or idea for orchestra only, without singers). Stylistically, Strauss belongs to the Late Romantic period, the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. During this time composers like Strauss, as well as Wagner and Mahler, wrote music with broad emotional scope, with complex harmonies and often demanding very large orchestral forces.



For the most part, Strauss seems to have lived a happy life. He became a successful conductor and composer early on, appearing as a conductor at the prominent Wagner festival in Bayreuth already at age 30. Strauss was happily married to the famous soprano Pauline de Ahna, who inspired many of the prominent soprano roles in his opera and who assisted him with writing vocal parts.

In his twenties and thirties, Strauss composed many successful symphonic poems, like *Don Juan*, *Tod und Verklärung* and *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Later, Strauss turned his attention to writing operas. His first successful

operas were *Salome* and *Elektra*, both of which were short pieces with a certain amount of shock value, written in a cacophonous, modernist style. Many of his later operas, mostly written in a more typical Late Romantic style, also became repertoire pieces, particularly the lighthearted *Der Rosenkavalier*.

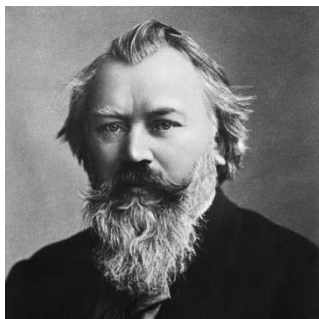
After the rise of the Nazi regime in the 1930s, Strauss condemned the Nazi Party and their ideology in private and insisted on writing an opera on a libretto by the Jewish writer Stefan Zweig. However, his attitude towards the Nazi regime seems to have been somewhat more pragmatic than that of Arturo Toscanini, whose post in Bayreuth he took over after Toscanini resigned in protest against the regime.

In the last few years of his long life (he died in 1949 at age 85), Strauss' inspiration seems to have been rekindled, prompting him to write several more significant pieces. Notably, these include the moving lament *Metamorphosen* for 23 string players, and the pensive *Four Last Songs* (*Vier Letzte Lieder*) for soprano and orchestra. In the *Vier Letzte Lieder*, Strauss sets four poems that deal with themes of autumn, decay, and death, but his music is mild and nostalgic in character, with a subtle orchestration full of autumnal colors. In *Im Abendrot*, the last of the four songs, on the very last line "ist dies etwa der Tod?" ('is this perhaps death?') Strauss quotes the transfiguration theme from his *Tod und Verklärung*, written some 60 years earlier.

Johannes Brahms

by Stijn Bruning

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) is one of the most important composers of the Romantic period (roughly the nineteenth century). He wrote music in many genres and is well-known for his symphonies, piano and violin concertos, music for piano



solo and, of course, the *Deutsches Requiem*, which he started to compose after the death of his mother in 1865.

Brahms gradually rose to fame as a pianist and composer during his lifetime. He was, however, very self-critical: he reportedly destroyed many of his early works and revised many of his major pieces. Nevertheless, he was able to handle setbacks, and he did not suffer the lack of self-confidence that plagued some other composers, like Tchaikovsky or Bruckner. Brahms had a sense of humor: when he suddenly decided to grow a beard, he pranked his friend George Henschel by pretending to be someone else. When the university of Breslau offered him a honorary doctorate, Brahms was expected to write a solemn and festive piece for the occasion; at the ceremony, Brahms premiered his *Akademische Festouvertüre*, a light-hearted potpourri of student drinking songs.

Brahms was a lifelong close friend of the famous pianist Clara Schumann. He gained the support and encouragement of Clara's husband Robert Schumann, an influential composer and music critic. After Robert's early death, Brahms supported Clara emotionally and had somewhat of a platonic relationship with her. Another good friend of Brahms was the violinist Joseph Joachim, whose violin playing impressed Brahms deeply and influenced much of his music written for violin. Brahms remained a bachelor his entire life, after a failed engagement to Agathe von Siebold in his twenties. Although Brahms grew up Lutheran, he might have been a non-believer, or at least not too concerned about religion.

Brahms belonged to a conservative movement in the German music of his time. While his forward-looking contemporaries Liszt and Wagner were writing innovative symphonic poems and operas, Brahms was more influenced by composers from the time-honored German music tradition, like Schubert, Robert Schumann, Mozart and especially Beethoven. Beethoven loomed so large over Brahms that Brahms hesitated for many years to write his first symphony, feeling pressure to equal the quality of Beethoven's monumental nine symphonies. In 1876, when Brahms was 43 years old, his first symphony premiered at last; it quickly received the nickname "Beethoven's Tenth", and it contained a melody that

unmistakably refers to the famous Ode to Joy theme from Beethoven's ninth symphony.

Apart from Beethoven, Brahms was also interested in music of even earlier times, like the works of J.S. Bach. Unusually for his time, Brahms intensively studied *counterpoint*, the rules that govern music with multiple simultaneous independent melodic voices. The study of counterpoint is often associated with the Renaissance and Baroque eras (1400-1750), culminating in the works of Bach. During the nineteenth century, however, composers tended to focus more on the emotional impact of their works than on academic technicalities such as counterpoint. In contrast, Brahms took counterpoint very seriously, as can also be heard in the fugal endings to the second, third and sixth movements of *Ein Deutsches Requiem* ("die Erlöseten des Herrn", "der Gerechten Seelen" and "Herr, du bist würdig").

An Exegesis on Brahms' Trumpet and Its Theological Implications

by Jan Huizinga and Thijs ter Rele

Ein deutsches Requiem is not a requiem in the traditional sense. A 'normal' requiem is the Catholic funeral mass for the dead set to music. As a result, most requiems have the same standardized Latin text. Brahms, however, was not a Catholic, but a Lutheran, at least nominally, and decided to use a completely different text, collected from an array of Bible verses from many different books. Using this verse collage, he aimed to comfort those who mourn their dead.

To illustrate the way in which Brahms composed the text for his Requiem, we will focus on its sixth part (*Denn wir haben hie...*). This part is a collage of verses from three Bible books, all from the New Testament: two epistles (letters) to early Christian churches, Hebrews and 1 Corinthians respectively, followed by the apocalyptic Book of Revelation, the authorship of which is traditionally assigned to John the Evangelist.

Throughout the Epistle to the Hebrews, its anonymous author is admonishing the Hebrew converts to stand firm in their faith, telling them that the pain and the humiliation they have to endure in this earthly 'city' (*Statt*) is only of a temporary nature. Instead, they should

aim for the city that is to come, the heavenly city, where there will be no pain¹.

In the First Epistle to the Corinthians, its author, Paul the Apostle, talks about who will be the citizens of this future city. He does not break the news gently: corruptible humans of flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God². This is, of course, quite a bummer to the Corinthians, who are corruptible humans of flesh and blood. Luckily, in the following verses, Paul proceeds to tell them a secret (*ein Geheimnis*): we will not all die, but we shall be changed incorruptible (*unverweslich*) as the last trumpet sounds.

The trumpet, or *Posaune* (not really a trumpet) and alternatively 'buisine' in English, is of course the most beautiful instrument God has blessed us with on this Earth, but in addition to that, it is also a very interesting Biblical concept. Trumpets are often associated with heaven, judgement and even the voice of God himself³. In the famous Old Testament story of the Battle of Jericho, the city walls of Jericho collapse as the priests blow their trumpets⁴. Likewise, the earthly city will be brought

¹ Hebrews 11:26, 12:3, 13:13-14

² 1 Corinthians 1:50

³ Exodus 19:16, 20:19

⁴ Joshua 6

down by the sound of the last trumpet, which at the same time will herald the coming of the heavenly city.

We can also find trumpets of judgement in the Book of Revelation, where they are a sign of the coming Apocalypse⁵. The seven trumpets that are described there announce a series of disasters and woes that Earth and its inhabitants have to endure during the end times. You might now ask: "That doesn't sound too comforting, so how is Brahms trying to comfort us by (indirectly) talking about the end of the World?" Well, he does this by skipping over the apocalyptic part of the end times and focusing on its result: the resurrection of the dead and the coming of the New Jerusalem (*when the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with singing*⁶). By brushing over the violence of Revelation, the end of the world sounds like a lovely event, because suddenly death has lost its sting (*Stachel*) and hell its victory (*Sieg*)⁷.

Of course you cannot talk about the end times and not quote the book of Revelation explicitly, which Brahms does in his final fugue. He decides to take the only line from chapter 4 that is not filled with psychedelic

⁵ Revelation 8-11

⁶ Isaiah 35:10, quoted in the second part of the Requiem

⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:55

prophecies, but instead is a simple song of praise: *You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power*⁸.

With part 6 of the German Requiem, Brahms fits into a tradition of composers focusing on the positive side of the Apocalypse. Listen for example to Handel's "The trumpet shall sound" and the Dutch religious song "Eens als de bazuinen klinken" by Tom Naastepad, the most Reformed song ever written by a Catholic priest. There is, however, no composer but Brahms who has written such an aggressive piece, literally shouting death into submission and meanwhile comforting those who are afraid of death.

⁸ Revelation 4:11

A very short history of the requiem genre

by Lisa Lenderink
Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem* is an unusual requiem. It's part of a long tradition of music, but stands out because it deviates from that tradition in significant ways. To understand this, we have to take a crash course in the history of the requiem.

The term 'requiem' derives from the first line of text from the Roman Catholic mass for the dead: '*Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine*' (Lord, give them eternal rest). A requiem mass contains some of the texts that are also used for a normal mass, with some changes. Some more cheerful texts like the *Gloria* are omitted, and others, like *Dies irae*, are added. The form of the requiem mass as we know it today was gradually standardised between the thirteenth and fifteenth century.

Just like other liturgical texts, a requiem could be put to music, but polyphonic music (that is: music with different voices or parts that each have their own melody) was long considered to be improper for such a solemn occasion as a funeral. The earliest known example of a polyphonic requiem, composed by Johannes Ockegem, dates to around 1470. At the time, the traditional Gregorian chants of the Middle Ages were the main source for requiem compositions. Only in the sixteenth

century did the requiem become a standard genre in classical music.

Over the next couple of centuries, many famous composers would write a requiem: Mozart's Requiem is probably one of the most famous ones, but other notable examples include those of Verdi, Berlioz, Dvořák and Fauré. For all of these, the Latin mass texts remained the textual basis for the requiem, yet over time, the requiem became less of a religious affair. In composing his *Messa da requiem* for example, Verdi did not intend for it to be performed in church, but in a concert hall. Thus, the requiem became separated from its originally liturgical function.

That is where Brahms comes in. As one of the first composers, he decided to ditch the traditional requiem text altogether. One reason for this was probably that Brahms was a Lutheran and thus might not have cared much for the traditional Catholic liturgy. Instead he opted for a personal selection of verses from the Bible. This means that there is of course a religious dimension to the piece, but it isn't as present as in the traditional text. In his selection, Brahms consciously left out obvious references to Christian dogmas.

Another special feature of *Ein deutsches Requiem* is that it is (obviously) written in German, instead of the traditional Latin. Brahms was not entirely the first person

to come up with the idea of using German Bible verses for funerary music. Already in 1635, Heinrich Schütz had composed his *Musikalische Exequien* for the funeral of count Henry II of Reuss-Gera. The count had personally selected texts from the Bible and Lutheran writings to be used in his funeral service, which Schütz put to music. This piece, rather than Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem*, could thus be considered the first German requiem. This might even have been where Brahms got the idea, because it is likely that Brahms knew the work of Schütz.

Either way, Brahms's version of the Requiem can still be considered revolutionary, because if you look at the texts he has chosen, it's not really a requiem in the traditional definition at all. Whereas a requiem is supposed to be a prayer for the dead, Brahms's *Deutsches Requiem* is more of a prayer for the living, who are left behind. With this purpose in mind, it makes sense that Brahms opted for using his mother tongue and a personalised selection of texts. In the *Deutsches Requiem* we see Brahms's personal view of death and mourning, while the text is still open-ended enough for anyone to relate to it in their own personal way.

Tod und Verklärung

by Stijn Janssens

What does struggling for life on your deathbed, dying and then passing on to the afterlife *feel* like? This is what Richard Strauss attempted to musically depict in his symphonic tone poem *Tod und Verklärung* (“Death and Transfiguration”).

Even though *Tod und Verklärung* does not contain any spoken or sung text, it portrays a specific narrative which, later on, was written down by Alexander Ritter in the form of a poetic scene, after Strauss had finished composing the piece. Strauss and Ritter, two fellow composers, met one another when Ritter played as a violinist in the orchestra where Strauss was the assistant-conductor at the time. Strauss was greatly inspired by Ritter to write poetic and expressive music, leading him to compose *Tod und Verklärung* at the age of 24, between 1888 and 1889.

Strauss renders the story into music by employing several short melodic fragments known as ‘*Leitmotifs*’ or ‘themes’, which each refer to a specific concept or emotion, and appear throughout the piece according to the structure of the narrative.

Because Strauss felt that in order to understand the piece, the audience should know the story that is depicted by the music, he ordered for Ritter’s text to be printed on the

programme leaflets, as well as alongside the printed sheet music. For this reason, I believe it is most appropriate to explain the piece alongside a translation of Ritter's text, together with highlighting the Leitmotifs which Strauss uses to convey the story.

1. *Largo* (The sick man near death)

In the small, wretched room, dimly lit only by a candle stump, the sick man lies upon his bed. — Even now he has been struggling ferociously, despairingly, with death. Now he has sunk, exhausted, into sleep, and the quiet ticking of the clock is all that you hear in the room, whose dreadful silence gives heed to death's approach. Upon the sick man's pale features plays a melancholy smile. At the end of his life, does he dream now of childhood's golden time?

The piece opens calmly with a soft pulsating rhythm, often claimed to depict a heartbeat, though Strauss himself identified it as being the heavy, irregular *breathing* of the sick old man. In either case, it is used throughout the piece to represent the life force pulsing through the man's body as he endures his final struggle with death.



When the dying man recalls his childhood memories, two memory themes are introduced, the first by the flute, and the second by the oboe. The first theme represents the

energetic vitality of youth, and the second embodies the golden innocence of childhood. Later on, these themes will return in many different rhythmic and harmonic variations, as the old man recalls various scenes from his past life.



2. *Allegro molto agitato* (The battle between life and death offers no respite to the man)

But death does not grant his victim sleep and dreams for long. Cruelly he shakes him awake, and the battle begins anew. The will to live and the power of death! What frightful struggling! — Neither is victorious, and yet again there is silence! Battle-weary, sunk back, sleepless, as in a delirium, the sick man now sees his life, successively, scene by scene, pass before his inner eye.

After the dreamy introduction, we are brutally shaken awake by a loud thwack on the kettle drum: the urgent battle against death. We are first introduced to the looming *death* motif in the bass section.



We hear the *breathing* motif once again, this time greatly intensified and agitated. After a violent buildup, we are introduced to the *will to life* theme for the first time.



When after fierce struggle, neither Death nor the man wins, the battlefield fades away, just as quickly as it came. The music falls into a nostalgic slumber.

3. *Meno mosso* (The dying man's life passes before him)

First the morning-red of childhood, shining bright in pure innocence! Then the impudent play of youth— exercising and testing its strength— until he ripens to manhood's struggle, which to life's highest achievements is now kindled with burning passion. — What once appeared glorified to him now takes clearer shape, this alone the lofty impulse that leads him through his life. Cold and mocking, the world sets obstacle after obstacle against his strivings. Each time he believes himself nearer his goal, a "Halt!" thunders against him. "Treat each obstacle as another rung, climbing ever and always higher!" So he presses forward, so climbs higher, never desisting from his sacred striving. What he has always sought with his heart's deepest yearning he seeks still in the grip of death, he seeks— alas! —yet never finds. Whether he grasps it yet more clearly, whether it gradually grows upon him, still he

can never exhaust it, it can never, in his spirit, be fulfilled.
Then the last stroke of death's iron hammer resounds,
breaks the earthly body asunder, covers the eye with death's
night.

We have now entered a euphoric dream state in which the artist recalls his childhood. We hear the *Memory 1* and *Memory 2* themes repeated many times in many different variations, sometimes even overlapping. The horns optimistically embody youthful play in a variation of the *Memory 1* theme, and we quickly hear a coming of age story as the man overcomes his struggles, and emerges victorious. Then the rhythm of the trusty *breathing* theme returns, but this time as a life force full of chromatic Romantic passion as the young man fulfills his dreams and achieves a life full of purpose.



Where the players in the orchestra were pushed to their very limit in the section depicting the struggle against death, this current section is just as technically demanding as the young man in his memory is ambitious. It seems almost as though Strauss wants the players to endure the same deadly struggle and absurd virtuosity as the man of the story. As the music climbs ever higher and

intenser, the man is confronted with many obstacles, but is never slain. This is when, for the first time, the brass introduces the mighty *transfiguration* theme, and the man's life's purpose is revealed.



The artist is driven for the rest of his life to seek to embody this transcendent 'Ideal', though never truly managing to do so. We awaken from the revelatory flash-back and return to the dark room with the dying man. The atmosphere seems calm as the old man lies motionless, until for the last time, the *will to life* theme returns to put up its final battle. But alas, it is quickly defeated, and the man's soul leaves his body, as the whole orchestra climbs into a dazzling chromatic scale up to the heavens.



4. Moderato (The sought-after transfiguration)

But resounding mightily round him from the expanse of heaven is what he sought here, ever yearning: World-redemption, world-transfiguration!

Out of the total silence, a soft pulse emerges, initiated by the tam-tam, a sort of hypnotizing gong. Out of a cloud of

bass harmonies in the wind section, the *transfiguration* theme emerges, first very slowly and stretched out, but becoming increasingly familiar and prevalent, eternally building on top of itself into Elysium. When during his entire mortal life the artist strived to grasp it in vain, he is now finally united with this ultimate Ideal.

Sixty years later, on his own deathbed in 1949, Strauss told his wife that “Death is just as I composed it in *Death and Transfiguration*.” Sadly, he never got the opportunity to come back and tell us whether or not his depiction of life after death was accurate as well. However, I am convinced that if he could, he would have told us that in composing the piece, he had tried his very best at portraying the experience of Transfiguration with the symphonic tools at his disposal. Yet, I believe he would say, as the work itself already foreshadows, no earthly depiction could ever come close to truly capturing the Sublime essence of the Absolute in which his soul presently dwells. Rather, this revelation awaits each of us at the end of our own lives, we must merely wait our turn.

Which part of the Brahms Requiem will make you cry? Find out here!

by Lisa Lenderink

It goes without saying that *Ein deutsches Requiem* has quite some emotional moments. Of course there is nothing wrong with letting your emotions flow every now and then, but in a concert setting, it's good to be prepared for when the moment comes. To give you an indication for when you need to get the tissues ready, I have created a handy flowchart to help you figure out which part of *Ein deutsches Requiem* is most likely to make you cry.

[Click here to find out!](#)

Of course this is all just for fun, but all jokes aside: if you have as many emotions about this piece as I do, I'm always open to discussing our more serious insights :)

Possible Absoluteness: What *Ein deutsches Requiem* Still Asks Us

by Donghee Jeong

“Ein menschliches Requiem?”

“Ein menschliches Requiem.” Johannes Brahms said he would have happily called his *Ein deutsches Requiem* (A German Requiem) ‘Ein menschliches Requiem’, a human requiem. (Steinberg 2005, 70) ‘German’ refers to the language itself, literally meaning a requiem in German. Brahms intended a requiem for everyone, a “universal” requiem, and this is one of his wishes that might be discernible. Sprouting from the tradition of the Catholic Church’s requiem, Brahms’s trial of expanding requiem can be partially considered as an influence from the notable emergence of ‘absolute music’ around the 19th century, which Brahms himself was deeply engaged with.

Absolute music is music that is not explicitly about something. In contrast to ‘program music’ (e.g. J. S. Bach’s *Matthäus-Passion*), absolute music is non-representational. (Horowitz 2005, 5) So to say, music for music’s sake. The idea of absolute music was initiated at the end of the 18th century by early German Romanticist writers and was later coined by Richard Wagner in 1846. According to M. E. Bonds, absolute music is a monolithic concept that minimizes the differences over time. (Bonds 2014, 15) As Daniel Chua states that “absolute music has

no history” because it “can only have a history when it is no longer absolute music”, while he acknowledges that the idea has a history, such as changes in attitudes toward the nature of “pure” music. (Chua 1999, 3) More recently, Sarah Collins describes absolute music as “an idea, an aesthetic concept, a regulative construct, a repertoire, and an aspiration” which participates in broader claims about aesthetic autonomy or the possibility of aesthetic experience, in terms of its capacity to facilitate resistance and political agency. (Collins 2020, 2-5) Absolute music exists in any form having its position in such conceptual, historical, or political relations whilst it aims to be absolute itself. The relationality within absolute music itself questions what it is, what it does, and what we do with it. Is absolute music possible? To what extent can it be experienced? How does the idea of absolute music in *Ein deutsches Requiem* still matter and speak to us?

Is Absolute Music or Something Absolute Possible? – About Absoluteness

Thinking of the idea of absoluteness is prior to considering the idea of absolute music when absolute music is regarded as music that is free from a certain state. Although the idea was already initiated before the 19th century, it is interesting to see how absoluteness is discussed in terms of freedom by G. W. F. Hegel, in *The Phenomenology of Spirit (Phänomenologie des Geistes)* in 1807. For Hegel, freedom is aroused from self-

consciousness. When “Spirit (Geist)” is an “absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousness” that enjoys perfect freedom and independence (Hegel 1952, 110), freedom is the essence of Spirit. As Spirit is “the single mind of all humanity” (Warburton 2011, 129) and the agent of self-consciousness, ‘the experience of what Spirit is’ should be done for self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is progressed by the dialectical method, in which every progress is established through its confrontation and synthesized as a progress of evolution, as Hegel explains that self-consciousness “exists in and for itself when it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged” and “it is faced by another self-consciousness.” (111) By this method, progressing to the ultimate state of freedom is possible through self-consciousness. In other words, ‘an absolute substance’ requires freedom. Within this context, it is thought that the word ‘absolute’ was referred to by Wagner - who considered music as a means of revolution (Bonds 2014, 3) - when the term ‘absolute music’ was coined. However, this term itself asks about the capability of absoluteness as Hegel’s ‘absolute’ was criticized for its ‘nonsense in and of itself’ by Schopenhauer and for its superstitious concept by Nietzsche, later in the century. When we ask if something absolute is possible before asking if absolute music is possible, we even see the absolute is still absolutely in debate, glimpsing how absoluteness is

engaged with the idea of freedom and how the terms are dependent on each other concerning the idea of absolute music – music being free from something, not about anything.

To What Extent Can Absolute Music Be Experienced? – About Aesthetic Experience

Music for music's sake? Art for art's sake with 'purposiveness without purpose', famously stated by Immanuel Kant, is pondered upon. For Kant, since the world is mind-dependent, something beautiful is only comprehensible when we assume it was made by a purposive agent. (Kant 1952, §10) Kant analyzes the conditions of being able to say that something is beautiful; it does not express knowledge, it is subjective, and disinterested – independent from the existence of the object itself, and any cognitive restraints. Disinterestedness is an aesthetic ideal for Kant although it has no purpose. For Kant, comprehending "the beautiful" is crucial because the aesthetic experience provides an experience of freedom in this world of causal determination, creating a "harmony" - the nature of our aesthetic judgment - between our freedom and physicality within the world. (§4) The pleasure derived from the harmony frees us. If there is art for art's sake that "has no purpose" and can be aesthetically experienced towards our freedom, then, to what extent can the musical works influenced by the idea of absolute music - music

for music's sake - be experienced or are they supposed to be experienced, if there is no such thing as music that is absolute?

For this curiosity about the possibility of aesthetic experience, Sarah Collins illustrates that the term 'absolute music' also explores "a range of broader claims about aesthetic autonomy or the possibility of aesthetic experience more generally." (Collins 2020, 5) If music is a self-referential system that can be purely musical, that essential nature of music "comes to limit the scope of what counts as music and what is studied as such, which in turn demarcates the boundaries of a discipline." (3) Collins points that the idea of absolute music has been contentious since it refers to the possibility of an object whose features are irreducible to conditioning contexts and perceptions, similar to religious and political dogma. (8) This leads to such questions "Can music offer a realm of experience that lies somehow separate from instrumental knowledge and prevailing structures of power and organization, enabling something new to come into being which is not simply a replacement system or dogma?" and "Can music offer a type of autonomy (or 'nothing'-ness) that can open up a 'space for a different kind of activity'?" to the political potential of the aesthetic. (8) It is necessary to understand the aspiration towards music's autonomy, while it is impossible to see the aesthetic as "pure" or "absolute." (43) Referring to

Kant's 'reflective judgment' which is gained by viewing an object and abstracting concepts from it, Collins explains the aspiration towards the autonomy of music as a practice of viewing the object free from any idea or purpose. (45) As Timothy Morton says "All art is ecological, (...) even when it's not doing so explicitly" (Morton 2019, 40), music or absolute music, even with the idea of absolute music, is inevitably experienced as an agency itself regardless of how much it initially aims to be "pure" or "absolute", because the possibility of aesthetic experience is already based on the political and autonomous potential.

The Idea of Absolute Music in *Ein deutsches Requiem* to Us – Praxis of Freedom

Although there is no such thing as absolute music or something absolute, the musical works influenced by the idea of absolute music exist in any form as an agency, while we experience them within their 'already-there' aesthetic autonomy. Then, how does the idea of absolute music (and that partially in *Ein deutsches Requiem*) still matter and speak to us? *Ein deutsches Requiem* ends with "Sayeth the spirit, that they rest from their labors, and that their works follow after them. (Ja, der Geist spricht, daß sie ruhen von ihrer Arbeit, denn ihre Werke folgen ihnen nach.)" Could this final line be understood as an individual's wish for the very state of being free from anything? G. W. Leibniz says "individuality involves

infinity, and only someone who is capable of grasping the infinite could know the principle of individuation of a given thing. This arises from the influence – properly understood – that all the things in the universe have on one another.” (Leibniz 1981, 289-290) If we are also involved in infinity to some extent as Individuals or potential Spirits aspiring for freedom, ‘something absolute’ might resemble the ultimate state of freedom the most.

Therefore, asking about absoluteness would be asking about infinity or vice versa. Absoluteness and infinity, both spatiotemporally ultimate and boundlessly expanding or contracting, are something that human beings are always trying to be close and to figure out and aspiring to resemble but never being able to enough, yet – because of the ultimate nature of our fate, our finity. We are never infinite, therefore, never absolute - even in the realm of music, what we do. Everything we do with the idea of absoluteness is just like us. We aspire to be absolute, further, infinite at some point, but we can never, be free from this relationality and eventually fate itself. Absolute music resembles us. Actually, music itself resembles our life, as Daniel Barenboim describes the resemblance of life-ness and the nature of sound, in the conversation with Edward Said, “the nature of sound being ephemeral, once it is over, it is finished. (...) it is the sort of equivalent to the life of a human being or of a

plant: that it starts from nothing and ends in nothing...”
(Barenboim and Said 2004, 29)

The influence of the idea of ‘absolute music’ in *Ein deutsches Requiem* still matters and speaks to us by making us ask if we are free and free from what – free from anything that restrains us. As long as we question - as long as we are conscious of ourselves questioning about the state of ourselves, we are moving forward to the state of freedom. Hence, as Brahms talked about his requiem as ‘Ein menschliches Requiem’ - everyone’s requiem for *alle Menschen, alles Fleisch*, we witness some possible absoluteness from the requiem. Possible absoluteness includes, first, freedom from the musical tradition of requiem pursuing universality and expandability as much as it can, and second, wishes towards freedom from the human fate through the form of requiem (which is already trying to be free from the tradition) that bridges bodies in between freedom and the reality, also as an ode to all the forms of subliminal transformation such as birth, growth, and death where the intrinsic human fate resides. Within the possible absoluteness, we experience what is possible to us now, what possibility we have, and what we move forward - as much as possible within reality. This possible absoluteness – absolute music - is something that resembles us as it is a way of self-consciousness, a practice, moreover, a praxis (rather than a concept)

towards the state of freedom - freedom from what is possible and freedom out of what is possible.

The idea of absolute music questions us about freedom asking how much it is possible and how aesthetic experience engages with us being able to be closer to absoluteness. Robert Frost's poem *The Secret Sits* consists of only two lines, "We dance round in a ring and suppose, / But the Secret sits in the middle and knows.", I would like to think *the Secret* here is absoluteness, or infinity, more specifically, our fate that we never can be close enough to absoluteness or infinity. Then, we dance around this fate – being around the absoluteness, or beyond, above, before, already, trying to be close as much as we can. If Brahms intended this requiem as a requiem also for the people who are alive, while we are alive, the Secret would be available to be glimpsed by ourselves dancing through the possible absoluteness, and that will free us as much as possible when something is absolute enough 'in the act of doing art.'

References

Barenboim, Daniel and Edward W. Said. *Parallels and Paradoxes: Explorations in Music and Society*. ed. Ara Guzelimian. New York: Vintage Books, 2004.

Bonds, Mark Evan. *Absolute Music: The History of an Idea*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Chua, Daniel K. L.. *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Collins, Sarah, 'Absolute Music'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Western Music and Philosophy*, edited by Tomás McAuley et al., 630-651. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021

Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Miller. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.

New Dictionary of the History of Ideas. ed. M. C. Horowitz. Detroit: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2005.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by J. C. Meredith. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.

Leibniz, G. W. *New Essays on Human Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Morton, Timothy. *Being Ecological*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2019.

Steinberg, Michael. *Choral Masterworks: A Listener's Guide*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Warburton, Nigel. *A Little History of Philosophy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.