

Honeck: Mozart's Last Concerto and Brahms's Requiem

Sunday, January 25, 2026 · 19:00 · Barbican
Manfred Honeck, conductor · Imogen Cooper, piano · Chen Reiss, soprano · Gerald Finley, bass-baritone · London Symphony Chorus, choir

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	MOZART 1756–1791 <i>Piano Concerto No. 27 in B-flat major, K. 595</i>	30'
2	BRAHMS 1833–1897 <i>A German Requiem, Op. 45</i>	68'
TOTAL MUSIC		98'

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

30 minutes

1756–1791

Piano Concerto No. 27 in B-flat major, K. 595

THE COMPOSER

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart needs little introduction. Born in Salzburg in 1756, he was a prodigy whose talents were cultivated and exhibited across Europe by his father Leopold. By the time he composed this concerto in 1779, the twenty-three-year-old Mozart was restless in provincial Salzburg, dreaming of Vienna and larger stages. Within two years he would make the move that defined his mature career.

Less well known is his sister Maria Anna, called “Nannerl,” five years his senior. She was an equally brilliant pianist as a child, and the siblings toured together as wonders of nature until Nannerl’s touring career ended when she was about seventeen. Following the customs of the time, she stayed at home while Wolfgang continued traveling with their father. The brother and sister remained close, and this concerto was written for the two of them to play.

ABOUT THE WORK

Mozart’s Piano Concerto No. 27 is his last, dated 5 January 1791, the final year of his life, and it carries an unmistakable air of valediction. After the grand, public concertos of his peak Viennese years, this one is intimate, serene and autumnal: gentler in scale, more inward, touched with a gentle melancholy beneath its outward calm. He probably gave the premiere himself in March 1791, in what seems to have

been his last appearance as soloist at a public concert; by December he was dead. Whether or not Mozart consciously sensed the end, listeners have long heard in K. 595 a quality of leave-taking: music of transparent simplicity and quiet poignancy.

That sense of farewell is sealed by the finale, whose main theme Mozart also used, shortly afterwards, for a little song called ‘Sehnsucht nach dem Frühling’ (‘Longing for Spring’), a setting of words yearning for the return of warmth and flowers and birdsong. In a concerto dated in the depths of a Viennese winter, in the last year of Mozart’s life, the longing for spring is unbearably touching. It is the perfect, intimate opening to a concert that turns, after the interval, to Brahms’s great meditation on death and consolation.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the concerto’s gentle, conversational intimacy: Mozart writes for a modest orchestra and treats the piano not as a heroic protagonist but as a first among equals, the music passing tenderly between soloist and ensemble. The first movement is graceful and songful, but listen for the shadows: unexpected chromatic turns and slips into the minor that cloud its serenity with wistfulness.

The slow movement (Larghetto) is one of Mozart’s most sublimely simple, a hymn-like melody of disarming purity, almost childlike in its directness, profoundly moving in its restraint. Then the finale: a lilting 6/8 rondo on the ‘Longing for Spring’ tune, outwardly cheerful and dancing, but with the same vein of gentle melancholy running beneath. Listen for how Imogen Cooper, a celebrated Mozartian, shapes these long, singing lines and brings out the music’s tender, valedictory poetry.

Johannes Brahms

1833–1897

A German Requiem, Op. 45

THE COMPOSER

Johannes Brahms was born on May 7, 1833, in Hamburg, into a family of modest means. His father, a jobbing musician who played horn and double bass in taverns and dance halls, gave him his first lessons; later, the talented boy studied with the distinguished teacher Eduard Marxsen. Stories that the young Brahms played piano in Hamburg’s waterfront bars to help support his family are persistent, but they rest on anecdote, and many modern scholars doubt them.

68 minutes

Brahms's life changed dramatically in 1853 when, at age twenty, he met the violinist Joseph Joachim, who introduced him to Robert and Clara Schumann. Robert, recognizing genius, hailed Brahms in print in his article "Neue Bahnen" (New Paths) as the composer the age had been waiting for. When Robert's mental collapse led to his institutionalization and death, Brahms became devoted to Clara, remaining close to her for the rest of his life, though the exact nature of their relationship remains one of music history's enduring mysteries.

In 1863, Brahms settled in Vienna, which would be his home until his death. A lifelong bachelor, gruff and sometimes tactless but capable of great tenderness, he became the acknowledged master of symphonic and chamber music in the second half of the nineteenth century. His four symphonies, two piano concertos, this violin concerto, and vast quantities of chamber music and songs represent the culmination of the Classical-Romantic tradition. He died of cancer on April 3, 1897, just weeks after attending a performance of his Fourth Symphony.

ABOUT THE WORK

Brahms's A German Requiem is one of the supreme choral works of the nineteenth century, and unlike any requiem before it. It is not a setting of the Latin Mass for the Dead, with its prayers for departed souls and visions of judgement; instead Brahms chose his own texts, in German, from Luther's Bible, and built a work not for the dead but for the living: for the bereaved, the mourning, those left behind. Its message is consolation: 'Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted,' sing the opening words. There is no Day of Wrath, no terror; the work moves instead from grief toward acceptance and peace.

Brahms composed it over several years in the 1860s, and it was almost certainly shaped by personal loss: the death of his beloved mentor Robert Schumann and, above all, of his mother in 1865. The tender fifth movement, for soprano solo ('Ye now have sorrow... but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice'), was added last, in 1868, and is often heard as a song of maternal comfort. The Requiem was the work that made Brahms famous across Europe, and it remains a profound and consoling masterpiece. Tonight it pairs movingly with Mozart's valedictory last concerto.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Listen for the work's overarching journey from grief to comfort, and for the way Brahms frames it: the first and last movements both begin with the word 'Selig' ('Blessed'), and the very opening music returns, transformed, at the close, so the whole work comes full circle in peace.

Key moments to follow: the gentle, dark-hued opening chorus ('Blessed are they that mourn'); the slow, tremendous funeral march of the second movement ('For all flesh is as grass'), which builds to a blazing affirmation of resurrection; the great fugues that crown the third and sixth movements, written with Brahms's matchless contrapuntal mastery; the radiant fourth movement ('How lovely are thy dwellings'); and the two solos: the baritone (here bass-baritone Gerald Finley) meditating on human mortality in the third and sixth movements, and the soprano (Chen Reiss) bringing the work's tenderest consolation in the fifth. Listen, above all, to the chorus, which carries the heart of this deeply humane meditation on loss and comfort.

Tonight's artists

Imogen Cooper *piano*

Mozart's serene, valedictory final concerto asks not for display but for the utmost poise, clarity and tonal beauty: the art of saying much with little. Dame Imogen Cooper, one of the great Mozartians of our time and an artist celebrated for the refinement and inwardness of her playing, is an ideal interpreter, drawing out the gentle melancholy and song-like grace beneath the concerto's calm surface.

Dame Imogen Cooper, born in London in 1949, is one of Britain's most distinguished pianists, revered above all as an interpreter of the Viennese Classical and Romantic repertoire, especially Mozart, Schubert and Schumann. Mentored in her youth by Clifford Curzon and trained in Vienna with Alfred Brendel and others, she has built a long and admired career as a recitalist, concerto soloist and chamber musician, and is also a champion of new music (she premiered works by Thomas Adès). Created a Dame for services to music, she brings to Mozart's last concerto the poise, refinement and depth of a lifetime's devotion to this repertoire.

Chen Reiss *soprano*

The soprano sings only once in Brahms's Requiem, but it is the work's tenderest moment: the fifth-movement 'Ihr habt nun Traurigkeit' ('Ye now have sorrow'), music of maternal comfort floating high and serene above the chorus, widely felt as Brahms's tribute to his late mother. Chen Reiss's pure, warm lyric soprano is perfectly suited to this passage of consolation.

Chen Reiss, born in Israel in 1979, is an acclaimed lyric soprano with a particular affinity for the Viennese Classical repertoire. After early studies in Israel and vocal training in New York, she built her career in Europe, joining the Bavarian State Opera in Munich (where Zubin Mehta became a mentor) and appearing regularly at the Vienna State Opera and with the world's leading orchestras. Admired for the purity, warmth and refinement of her voice, she is ideally suited to the tender consolation of the soprano solo in Brahms's Requiem.

Gerald Finley *bass-baritone*

The baritone soloist in Brahms's Requiem voices humanity's confrontation with mortality: 'Lord, make me to know mine end' in the third movement, and the great sixth-movement vision of the trumpet and the resurrection of the dead. Gerald Finley, one of the leading bass-baritones of our day, brings his noble tone and dramatic gravity to these searching solos.

Gerald Finley, born in Montreal in 1960, is one of the most distinguished bass-baritones of his generation, equally celebrated on the opera stage and the concert platform. He came to Britain to study at King's College, Cambridge and the Royal College of Music, and rose to the world's leading houses. Renowned for the intelligence, warmth and dramatic truth of his singing, he is a great Mozartian (Don Giovanni, Figaro, Count Almaviva) and a noted creator of modern roles, most famously J. Robert Oppenheimer in John Adams's Doctor Atomic. Bluebeard, which asks for vocal nobility and psychological depth in equal measure, suits him ideally. A Grammy Award winner and an Officer of the Order of Canada, Finley is admired wherever great singing meets great acting.

London Symphony Chorus *choir*

Brahms's Requiem is, above all, a work for chorus; it carries the entire emotional and spiritual argument, from the hushed opening beatitude to the tremendous fugues of affirmation. The London Symphony Chorus, the orchestra's own chorus, is at the very heart of this profound meditation on grief and consolation.

The London Symphony Chorus was founded in 1966 as the chorus of the London Symphony Orchestra. Now an independent, self-governing choir, it keeps a close association with the LSO, performing and recording the great choral-orchestral repertoire with the orchestra at the Barbican and elsewhere, and also working with other orchestras.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Johannes Brahms: A Biography**

Jan Swafford, Vintage 1999

Jan Swafford's biography of Brahms, with a full account of how *A German Requiem* grew from Brahms's grief and made his name.

ACCESSIBLE **1791: Mozart's Last Year**

H. C. Robbins Landon, Thames & Hudson 1999

H. C. Robbins Landon's portrait of Mozart's final year, which opened with the completion of the Piano Concerto No. 27 in B-flat, K. 595.

DEEPER **Brahms: A German Requiem**

Michael Musgrave, Cambridge University Press 1996

A Cambridge Music Handbook devoted to *A German Requiem*: its text, composition, structure and early performances.

SOURCES

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3. 27. Klavierkonzert (Mozart), Wikipedia (German). [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/27._Klavierkonzert_\(Mozart\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/27._Klavierkonzert_(Mozart))
4. Piano Concerto No.27 in B-flat major, K.595 (Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus), IMSLP. [https://imslp.org/wiki/Piano_Concerto_No.27_in_B-flat_major,_K.595_\(Mozart,_Wolfgang_Amadeus\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Piano_Concerto_No.27_in_B-flat_major,_K.595_(Mozart,_Wolfgang_Amadeus))
5. A German Requiem (Brahms), Wikipedia. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_German_Requiem_\(Brahms\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_German_Requiem_(Brahms))
6. Ein deutsches Requiem, Wikipedia (German). https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ein_deutsches_Requiem
7. Ein deutsches Requiem, Op.45 (Brahms, Johannes), IMSLP. [https://imslp.org/wiki/Ein_deutsches_Requiem,_Op.45_\(Brahms,_Johannes\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Ein_deutsches_Requiem,_Op.45_(Brahms,_Johannes))
8. Manfred Honeck, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manfred_Honeck
9. Imogen Cooper, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imogen_Cooper
10. Chen Reiss, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chen_Reiss
11. Johannes Brahms: A Biography, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780679745822>
12. 1791: Mozart's Last Year, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780500281079>



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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/lso-2026-01-25-honeck>

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