

COMPACT
disc
DIGITAL AUDIO
PACO 050

BRAHMS

A GERMAN REQUIEM, Op. 45

- 1 Radio Introduction (0:25)
- 2 1. Blessed are they that mourn (9:34)
- 3 2. For all flesh is as the grass (17:03)
- 4 3. Lord, make me to know (10:46)
- 5 4. How lovely is thy dwelling place (5:41)
- 6 5. Ye have sorrow (6:38)
- 7 6. For here have we no continuing place (11:53)
- 8 7. Blessed are the dead (9:55)
- 9 Applause and back-anno (1:51)

Vivian della Chiesa (soprano)

Herbert Janssen (baritone)

The Westminster Choir directed by John Finlay Williamson

NBC Symphony Orchestra

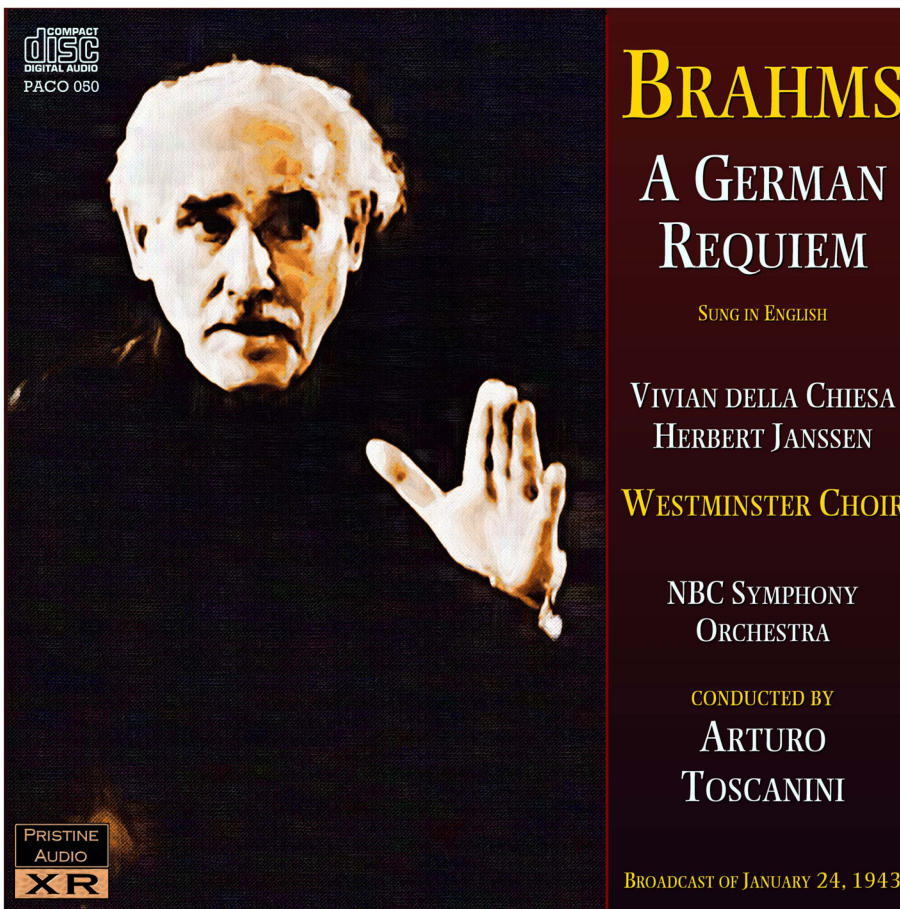
conductor **Arturo Toscanini**

Transfers from the private collection of Christophe Pizzutti
XR remastering by Andrew Rose at Pristine Audio, September 2010
Cover artwork based on a photograph of Toscanini

Total duration: 73:46 ©2010 Pristine Audio.

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BRAHMS

A GERMAN REQUIEM, Op. 45



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It is unfortunate for students of Toscanini this is the only recorded performance of Brahms' *A German Requiem* under his baton, though, as Mortimer H. Frank rightly comments this is not to imply "that it is an inferior account; on the contrary, it is magnificent." A question remains though as to whether this would have been Toscanini's interpretation a decade later, or a decade earlier, prone as he was to the constant revision and reinterpretation of his musical readings.

Certainly this is one of those great performances which runs contrary to the received wisdom that Toscanini was too often inclined to faster tempi – Frank again: "some of his tempos here are considerably slower than the norm. The effect of this approach is to strip away the halo of Victorian sobriety that have hung over many accounts of this score..." He also notes the fact that the performance is given in English, and wonders whether this was done as a result of to wartime anti-German sentiment.

As the sole recording from Toscanini it is no great surprise that this specially-extended broadcast - the last in a six-programme Brahms season for NBC - has been made available on a number of issues over the years, and one might therefore question the need for another. I was strongly influenced in my decision to at least investigate this *Requiem* by the incredibly high quality of the original transfer supplied to me. For a 1943 broadcast it was exceptionally clean, clear and had a wonderfully extended frequency and dynamic range. It would appear that the transcription was a straight and high-quality dub of near-mint originals, with no "interference" whatsoever – even the side joins remained undone. In my experience it has been rare to have such strong source material to work on from this period.

But the fact remains that others may have started with similar sources. Thus I decided that it was worth going a step further than I might otherwise do. Naturally the recording received a full XR remastering; this performed wonders on the already clear sound quality, removing perhaps a decade or two from the perceived age of the recording. Then we come, inevitably, to the sound of NBC's Studio 8H. At the time it had recently been overhauled to try and improve the acoustic, and NBC's engineers were busy trying various microphone set-ups to bring out the best in it. But the recording here was rendered nearly dead by an acoustic as dry as the desert.

This is where convolution reverberation comes in, something I've written extensively about before. By effectively placing the recording in the acoustic of a real hall (as opposed to the artificial sound of a generic digital reverb), it acquired a new and entirely natural life that was totally sympathetic to the recording. Indeed, I suggest that only the listener used to – and conditioned to – the dryness of 8H would even think for a moment that this is not what the audience experienced on the day (as indeed they might have - with only the microphones' accounts to go on it is possible we have little idea as to the actual sound heard by those attending these concerts.)

The result is for me a particularly satisfying achievement, and one which has allowed me to be further absorbed in the music than before, when subject to the constant grating irritant of the original acoustic. In short, I believe this is closer to how this performance would have sounded in a real concert hall than has ever been heard before, and is all the better for it.

NOTES BY ANDREW ROSE - FURTHER NOTES ONLINE AT WWW.PRISTINECLASSICAL.COM