

## ***Programme Notes***

### **Jérôme Naulais**

#### ***Etoile Des Profondeurs (1999)***

I. Allegro

II. Ballade

III. Final: Allegro

Jérôme Naulais (b.1951) being born into a family of musicians, naturally began studying music at the young age of 6, first on violin and double bass before subsequently moving on to the trombone. He studied trombone at the Conservatoire de Paris where he won the first prize in trombone in 1971. He had previously served as principal trombone in the Orchestre d'Ile de France and the Orchestre Colonne before moving into composing full-time. He has written and arranged for prominent musicians of a variety of genres including Harry Belafonte and Ensemble Intercontemporain and has added several pieces to the trombone repertoire.

*Etoile Des Profondeurs*, which translates to “Star of the deep” is a three movement work full of tuneful melodies as well as virtuosic technique. The first movement has a basic A-B-A' structure. The movement starts with a 16-measure introduction that puts the performer through technical paces with a series of eighth-note triplet runs that sets up a light, bouncy melody that then recurs throughout the movement. The second movement continues the tunefulness of the first movement by introducing a beautiful flowing melody marked “Ballade” first in the piano and followed by the bass trombone. Following this statement of the melody and following the form of the first movement, Naulais begins to develop the theme of the second movement into a more technical dance. The movement closes off with a restatement of the original theme. The third movement is reminiscent of an Italian tarantella; a fast, fiery dance, containing constant eighth-note scale patterns and frequent interval jumps in the melodic line. A cadenza marks the middle of the movement before returning to the tarantella to the end of the movement.

## **Johannes Brahms**

### *Four Serious Songs (1896), Op. 121*

I. *Denn es gehet dem Menschen* – Andante

II. *Ich wandte mich, und sahe an* – Andante

III. *O Tod, wie bitter bist du* – Grave

IV. *Wenn ich mit Menschen* – Andante con moto et anima

Johannes Brahms, born on May 7th 1833 in Hamburg into a Lutheran family, was a German composer and pianist. Brahms spent much of his professional life in Vienna, being able to develop in this musical mecca of Vienna during the Romantic era and launch an incredible successful career as a composer and pianist.

Brahms composed *Four Serious Songs* in May of 1896, originally for bass and piano. Contextually, these songs were written as a way for Brahms to grapple and reflect his views and thoughts about religion and death and the impact it had on him. They act as an ode to mortality. Each one of the songs correspond with sacred Biblical text. The first two songs draw from Ecclesiastes, the third song draws from Ecclesiasticus from the Apocrypha, and the fourth draws from I Corinthians in the New Testament.

The first of these songs represents the cynicism, bitterness, and stubbornness that he felt throughout his life, ending with the question, “for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?”, implying that Brahms has his own idea of death that comes afterwards. The second song is much darker in overall tone towards this initial cynicism Brahms had felt. Although it does not explicitly state death itself, the text celebrates the dead, and forces the sadness for the unjust suffering of the innocent. Brahms then leaves these dark thoughts behind ending in the key of G major, hinting at hope within the world despite evil lurking. The third song is split into two contrasting understandings of Brahms’ views. The beginning of this movement signifies death as something to dread for the young and strong, starting quite dramatically while using the text of “O tod” as this movement’s motif for death. As the piece progresses, it shifts in mood from depressing to optimistic and welcoming death for the old and weak. Brahms does this through an inversion from E minor to E major and inverting the “O tod” motif, allowing a shift of the entire song cycle’s tone and mood. This hope leads into the fourth and final song, realizing his full view from bitterness of death to wisdom, hope, faith and above all, love in life: “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity”. These songs overall can be interpreted as a portrait into Brahms’ mind and thoughts during this period; though he experienced much despair and tragedy, he eventually let love rescue him from a dark and lonely death.