

# Wolfgang Amadé Mozart (1756–1791)

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## Mozart's Masses

Since opera was the foremost musical genre of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is hardly surprising that operatic elements should have found their way into the sacred music of the time. This caused the development of the “*stilus ecclesiasticus mixtus*” or mixed church style, which combined traditional contrapuntal choruses with *coloratura* solo arias and ensembles. This development began mainly in Naples, hence the term Neapolitan Mass. The imposing solemn Mass or *Missa solennis* split the text of the Ordinary of the Mass into separate pieces, like the individual numbers in an opera, a practice which contemporary theoreticians such as Johann Joseph Fux and Meinrad Spiess opposed. They were unable however to arrest the development of this genre, with its leanings towards pomp and showiness. On 19 February 1749 Pope Benedict XIV issued an encyclical on church music, which sought to counter these operatic excesses and drew up rigid norms of what was or was not musically permissible in the liturgy of the Mass. Church music which employed instruments must sound neither profane, worldly nor operatic, and the use of trombones, trumpets, fifes (flutes) and horns was forbidden, as was the use of *castrati*.

Because of the restricted authority of the papacy in the eighteenth century, the actual effectiveness of the encyclical was confined to Italy and southern Germany. Even in the time of the young Mozart the cantata-type Mass derived from the Neapolitan School was being fostered, mainly by Johann Adolf Hasse, an opera composer married to a famous prima donna. But the reactionary view expressed in the papal publication could not be quelled, especially as it had the support of the Enlightenment movement, which was gaining more and more ground around the middle of the century. It was the prosaic and pedantic reformer, Emperor Joseph II, who took up the papal regulations for the Austrian dominions. In an imperial rescript of 26 January 1754 he banned timpani and trumpets from the church and sought to restrict the instrumental accompaniment of church music generally. He succeeded only partially, for the love of festive orchestral Masses ran far too deep in Austria, but that is another story. After the death of the Emperor in 1790 his regulations were relaxed or even rescinded.

Mozart's Masses are to be considered according to the “enlightened” spirit of the time. This thinking helps one understand the much criticised restrictive decrees on church music issued by Archbishop Colloredo of Salzburg, which Mozart complained of in his famous letter to Padre Martini. These decrees were not the arbitrary views of a Philistine, but are in accord with the contemporary tendencies of the church, which demanded of liturgical music clarity and simplicity above all else. The *Missa brevis* or short Mass had come to the fore; this was through-composed, renouncing the cantata-like succession of movements. In the late Masses of Haydn this was to develop into the symphonic Mass. Mozart's big C minor Mass, K. 427 was left unfinished because a work of this nature, with a highly virtuoso *coloratura* aria at its climax, could not have been performed in any church in Vienna in the time of Emperor Joseph. The idea of performing a Mass in a concert hall outside its liturgical setting was not conceived until three decades later by Beethoven.

Under the influence of musicians such as Biber, Eberlin, Adlgasser, Leopold Mozart and Michael Haydn, a style of church music had developed in Salzburg which strove towards austerity and concision. This was a “*stile misto*” which endeavoured to combine the “galant” elements of charm with “learned” contrapuntal imitation. As far as orchestral brilliance was concerned, on particularly festive occasions an exception could be made, to include the forbidden timpani and trumpets. Apart

from the *Missa brevis* for ordinary Sundays, the *Missa solemnis* was also fostered, though the operatic or cantata-like succession of divisions within each movement was rejected for a through-composed movement. The young Mozart had to work within this pre-established framework. His Salzburg Masses, apart from those he wrote as a child, were composed as part of his job as the Archbishop's music director and court organist. It is a sign of Mozart's genius that he was able to conform to the set requirements, yet in the end eclipse his predecessors through his creativity, his ability to give the movement thematic unity and his unerring sense of musical logic and proportions.

If we disregard the unfinished C minor Mass and the Requiem, also incomplete, Mozart composed no other Masses during his years in Vienna. That he nevertheless retained an interest in church music is indicated by several performances of the Salzburg Masses, for which he had the parts sent on from Salzburg. Also significant is an application to the Emperor in May 1790 for the post of assistant *Hofkapellmeister* under Salieri, in which Mozart recommended himself above all as a composer of church music.

## The Salzburg Masses

### **Missa brevis in G, K. 49 (47d)**

In 1768 Leopold Mozart spent the entire year with his two children in Vienna, where Wolfgang completed, among other things, the Singspiel "Bastien und Bastienne". During this second stay in Vienna Mozart wrote his earliest surviving Mass, probably in October and November. This composition has frequently been seen as the work Mozart produced for the inauguration of the orphanage. Even O.E. Deutsch adhered to this theory. But the work seems too modest for such a solemn occasion, since it is scored merely for four-part choir, two violins, viola, bass and organ. Although the work relies a great deal on the Salzburg models, the ability of the 12-year-old composer to handle the problem of the formal unity of the movements with their extensive text is astonishing. In the Gloria he solves this by the motivic relationship of all the melodic lines, a technique which he would develop to a fine art in his later Salzburg Masses.

### **Missa brevis in D minor, K. 65 (61a)**

Unlike K. 49, we have exact information about the completion of this work. The autograph is inscribed "Salzburg, 14 January 1769". It was performed on 5 February in the Salzburg University Church to open the Forty-hour Vigil. The four-part choir alternates with four solo voices, and the instrumentation is confined to two violins, bass, three *colla parte* trombones to reinforce the choir, and organ. Mozart set the Benedictus four times; for soprano solo, for solo quartet, for tenor and bass duet, then finally for soprano and alto duet. For the Credo Mozart chose the forbidden medium of polytextuality, the simultaneous singing of more than one line of the text for the sake of brevity. Nonetheless the openings of the "Cum sancto spiritu" at the end of the Gloria and the "Et vitam venturi" at the end of the Credo are each extended into short fugato sections. In spite of the solemn D minor of the Kyrie and Agnus Dei, the work ends with a nimble "Dona nobis pacem" in triple time, and in the "Et vitam venturi" the fugato theme, broken by crotchet rests, is light and jaunty.

### **Missa solemnis in C, K. 66 "Dominikus-Messe"**

On 15 October 1769 Cajetan Hagenauer, the son of a friend of Leopold Mozart, celebrated his first Mass at St. Peter's in Salzburg, where he had been ordained. For this occasion Wolfgang wrote a solemn Mass for solo voices, choir, two violins, viola, double-bass, two clarini trumpets, timpani and organ. In 1776 he added two oboes, two horns and two more trumpets. Because Cajetan had taken the name Dominikus the work was called the "Dominikus-Messe". In accordance with the solemn nature of the occasion for which it was written, the work was festive in nature, and since it would not be

performed in the Cathedral, Mozart could even revert to the otherwise forbidden cantata form. Thus the Gloria and the Credo are divided into seven sections, and choruses are interspersed with solo arias and solo ensembles in the manner of the Neapolitan Mass. Particularly striking are the G minor “Qui tollis” in the Gloria, and in the Credo the “Et incarnatus” quartet and the grave “Crucifixus” chorus in C minor, with its monumental *a cappella* opening. Both movements end with extended fugal sections. The “Cum sancto spiritu” fugue of the Gloria is particularly festive and energetic. At several points the soloists even have cadenzas. Clearly Mozart was counting on Cajetan’s great love of music when he conceived the work in this form.

### **Missa solennis in C minor, K. 139 (47a) “Waisenhausmesse”**

On 7 December 1768, in the presence of the Empress Maria Theresa and her children, the newly built church of the orphanage on the Rennweg in Vienna was consecrated. According to a Viennese newspaper “all of the music sung by the orphanage choir in the High Mass was written by Wolfgang Mozart, the 12-year-old boy famous for his exceptional talent, son of Leopold Mozart, the *Kapellmeister* of the Prince’s court at Salzburg; it was newly composed for this occasion, and directed by the composer himself to the applause and admiration of all present; he conducted the Mass and the additional motets with the utmost accuracy ...” Which Mass was performed on that occasion? Musicologists have long debated this question. It has been asked whether a 12-year-old could create a large-scale cantata-type Mass for four soloists, choir, two violins, two violas, bass, two oboes, three trombones, four trumpets, timpani and organ. But recent research leaves little room for doubt that it was Mozart’s C minor Mass, K. 139 that was heard on 7 December 1768. The fact that the young Mozart dared to revert to the out-dated form of the Neapolitan cantata-type Mass is due entirely to the exceptional occasion. The certainty with which Mozart mastered the task is astounding, though of course the conventionality of the work should not be overlooked. The Kyrie opens *adagio* in C minor, in the style of the French Overture, then gives way to a fresh and merry *Allegro*. The sombre C minor tonality reappears only twice, in the monumental choral “Qui tollis” in the Gloria and at the opening of the Agnus Dei; the remarkably expressive “Crucifixus” in the Credo is in the key of F minor; for the rest however the festive major tonality rules. The powerful double fugue at the end of the Credo attests to the craftsmanship of the 12-year-old composer. The solos in the Gloria and Credo are rather lyrical than operatic in character, apart from the coloratura soprano setting of the “Quoniam” in the Gloria. Although research has revealed models for this magnificent work, the creative powers of the young Mozart are nonetheless astounding.

### **Missa brevis in G, K. 140 (App. C 1.12)**

The autograph of this Mass, scored for soloists, choir, two violins, bass and organ, has been lost, so that the authenticity of the work, which is stylistically unusual, has been questioned. However, the research of Walter Sern for the New Mozart Edition, based on, among other things, a copy in the archives of Salzburg Cathedral, makes the authorship of Mozart seem probable. The song-like character of the work has earned it the name “Pastoralmesse”. This characterisation is justified by the swaying triple metre in the Kyrie and Gloria, and in the Agnus Dei, where it gives way to the merriment of the closing “Dona nobis pacem”. The bridging sections of the three-part Credo and the closing sections of the Sanctus and Benedictus are strongly marked. The interchange of soloists and choir in the Gloria is motivically unified, while unity is achieved in the bridge sections of the Credo by means of a recurrent violin figure. It is thought that the work was written in 1773.

### **Mass in C, K. 167 “Missa in honorem SSmae Trinitatis”**

This Mass, composed in June 1773 and probably performed in Salzburg Cathedral on the feast of the Trinity in that year, has no solo voices. Because it was a high feast day Mozart supplemented the two violins and bass with two oboes, two clarini trumpets, two trumpets – which in practice were replaced

by trombones – and organ. The work is strikingly instrumental in conception. Extensive preludes and interludes bring the orchestra into the foreground. For long stretches the block chordal texture of the choral parts seems to be embedded in the lively and colourful orchestral part. The closing fugues of the Gloria and Credo and the fugal “Dona nobis pacem” suggests the *Missa solemnis*. Apart from the relatively expansive Credo, the work is quite compact. Mozart appears to have wavered between the concision demanded by the Archbishop and – in the Credo – his desire for instrumental expansion. The *a cappella* episodes of the “Et incarnatus” are delightful. The C major character lends the whole work a festive feeling which is less intimate than in other Masses written by Mozart during this period, which seem more mediocre.

### **Missa brevis in F, K. 192 (186f)**

The autograph is dated 24 June 1774. Scored for soloists, choir, two violins, bass and organ, this work represents, in its formal economy, the perfect example of a compact *Missa brevis* in terms of Colloredo’s requirements. But its imitative counterpoint, thematic unity and subtle instrumentation make this work a miniature masterpiece. At the end of the Gloria and Credo and in the “Hosanna” of the Sanctus and Benedictus, fugal passages provide relief. The most interesting movement is the Credo, in which the flow of the text is repeatedly interrupted by interpolations of “Credo”, on a four-note figure, which is here no more than a thematic parenthesis but which was to reappear in triumphant counterpoint in the last movement of the “Jupiter” Symphony. From a letter written by Mozart’s father, we know that the work was performed in the Hofkapelle in Munich in February 1775, conducted by Leopold. Mozart probably presented the Mass to the Canons of the Holy Cross in Augsburg in October 1777.

### **Missa brevis in D, K. 194 (186h)**

The autograph is dated 8 August 1774. The scoring is identical to that of K. 192 and the two works are related in style. Here too contrapuntal writing provides relief, but this Mass is more lyrical and songlike than its predecessor. The required brevity is achieved by “rapid” choral declamation in the lengthy texts of the Gloria and Credo. The closing “Dona nobis pacem” is an interchange between soloists and choir in the form of a sort of vaudeville. Ironically, the passionate Cecilian Franz Xaver Witt, who despised the church music of Mozart and Haydn, considered this bright, cheerful and somewhat undistinguished Mass the only one of Mozart’s Masses to be liturgically appropriate.

### **Missa brevis in C, K. 220 (196b) ”Spatzenmesse”**

Mozart spent the early months of 1775 in Munich, where his opera “La finta giardiniera” was being performed. There he wrote his *Missa brevis* in C. Though it was performed in the Hofkapelle on 15 February 1775, it was not in fact written for Munich but for Salzburg Cathedral, as is clear from the radically short Gloria and Credo, and from the absence of violas. Scored for soloists, choir, two violins, bass and organ, with trumpets and timpani, the work was probably composed for High Mass on Easter Sunday. The shortness of the work excludes any imitative counterpoint. The choral writing is almost entirely homophonic, and the Gloria and Credo, being polytextual, require almost less time to perform than their plainsong equivalents. The Benedictus quartet is more expansive, and is probably the most beautiful movement of the Mass. At the end, the “Dona nobis pacem” picks up the thematic material of the Kyrie, thus formally rounding off the whole work. The work owes the nick name “Spatzenmesse” (“Sparrow” Mass) to the chirping violin figure which appears in the Sanctus and in the “Hosanna” of the Benedictus. The brevity of the work produces a sense of detachment.

### **Mass in C, K. 257 “Credo-Messe”**

In November and December of 1776 Mozart composed three Masses one after another: K. 257, the so-called “Credo-Messe”, K. 258, the “Spaur-Messe”, and K. 259, the “Organ Solo” Mass. K. 257 is not

only the most outstanding of this trilogy, but is also the most substantial of all the Salzburg Masses. Its almost folk-like melodies are closely affiliated to the fashionable music of that year, but here the galant tone of such music is lifted into a sphere of reverence and unequivocal warmth. Mozart seems to have been challenged rather than hampered by the brevity demanded of him, for the wealth of invention within such a confined space is remarkable, as is the orchestration, which is full of contrast, achieving an instrumental independence close to chamber music. The work is richly scored, with two oboes, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and organ, as well as the usual strings, and the instruments are set off against the vocal parts in an extremely colourful and elastic way, with almost symphonic independence. The nick name later acquired by the work of “Credo-Messe” comes from the repeated interpolations of “Credo” which interrupt or combine contrapuntally with the text, in a similar fashion to K. 192. The solemn opening of the Kyrie is followed by an *Allegro*. In the through-composed Gloria Mozart was able to bring out the compelling “Qui tollis” as the climax of the movement, without interrupting the brisk tempo. In the three-part Credo the centrepiece is a passionate “Et incarnatus” for solo quartet; later the listener is moved by the chorus’s cries of “Crucifixus”. In the Sanctus, Mozart once more expounds his four note “Jupiter” figure. The beautiful Benedictus quartet is a jewel of flowing melody interwoven with radiant chamber music. The end of the “Dona nobis pacem” again features luxuriant lyricism in violins and oboes, and the work closes not in the manner of a light-hearted finale, but with a choral entreaty of song-like simplicity.

### **Missa brev is in C, K. 258 “Spaur-Messe”**

The autograph is signed “Salzburg, December 1776”, though possibly by someone other than Mozart himself. The Mass has been associated with the Canon Count Friedrich Franz Joseph von Spaur, though his inauguration as Assistant Bishop of Brixen took place in Salzburg Cathedral on 17 November 1776, thus predating the autograph. The scoring however points to a special occasion, with two trumpets and three *colla parte* trombones, timpani and organ in addition to the usual strings. Although not quite in the same class as its immediate predecessor, this Mass is also distinguished by its independent orchestral writing. A lively Kyrie in triple time achieves its momentum through the constant alternation of choir and soloists. The strictly through-composed Gloria offers a brief fugato before the close, as does the “Hosanna” section of the short Sanctus. In the middle section of the Credo the expressive *adagio* “Et incarnatus” for solo tenor is offset by the almost menacing effect of the “Crucifixus”, where interjections from the basses, supported by trombones, oppose the solo voices. Relief is provided in the closing section by a duet between soprano and alto at the words “Et in spiritum”. The Benedictus is more expansive, alternating solo quartet and choir. Here too Mozart dispenses with the usual *Allegro* finale at the “Dona nobis pacem” in favour of a lyrical, reflective close.

### **Missa brev is in C, K. 259 “Orgelsolo-messe”**

The last of the three Masses written at the end of 1776 was probably written for the Feast of the Holy Innocents on 28 December. This was celebrated in churches generally as the choirboys’ feast day. In Salzburg Cathedral the boys sang soprano and alto. This little Mass represents a prototype of the short Mass demanded by Colloredo, which, as Mozart wrote in his famous letter to Padre Martini, employs nonetheless full orchestra, in this case two trumpets and timpani as well as the usual strings. The organ has a special role in this Mass, apart from the usual one of filling out the sound, being treated as a concertante solo instrument in the Benedictus quartet (which contrary to common practice is marked *Allegro vivace*). This feature gave the Mass its traditional name. The work is radically short. The lyrically flowing Kyrie is followed by a swift through-composed Gloria, which lasts less than two minutes. While the intoning of the Gloria is part of the composition, the three-part Credo opens with the words “Patrem omnipotentem”, as was usual in the Missa brevis. The middle section consists of an

expressive “Et incarnatus” for solo quartet followed by a compact choral “Crucifixus”. The most beautiful movement is unquestionably the Agnus Dei, in which the violin cantilena points forward to the Countess’s aria “Porgi amor” in “Le nozze di Figaro”. The swaying cantabile is heightened by the pizzicato accompaniment which continues through the entire piece. The “Dona nobis pacem” has a very final character. Mozart wrote the Sanctus, with the “Hosanna”, twice, crossing out the first, incomplete version.

### **Missa longa in C, K. 262 (246a)**

This Mass occupies an exceptional place within Mozart’s oeuvre of church music, being, at 824 bars long, his longest complete Mass. We have the date of completion from a copy of the work in the Lambach Seminary, inscribed Salzburg, April 1776. Schieder and Paumgartner presumed this Mass to have been written for St. Peter’s, since fugues at the close of the Gloria and Credo were forbidden the cathedral. Schieder however claims that the evidence points to a performance in the Cathedral on 7 April 1776. If this was the case, the work was possibly composed for the inauguration of the canon Count von Spaur on 17 November 1776 (c.f. the *Missa brevis* K. 258). We must therefore conclude that the dates of the completion of the work (perhaps as early as June or July 1775) and of the first performance are uncertain, although there is some basis for the connection with the inauguration of the Bishop. Certainly this was an occasion when Colloredo might have been persuaded to make an exception, since he could hardly have ignored the wishes of Count von Spaur, who was a great music-lover and played viola, to have a grand festive Mass in the Cathedral on his inauguration.

Even the scoring marks the work as exceptional. As well as the usual church trio, two oboes, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones and timpani are employed. The Kyrie and the “Et in spiritum sanctum” of the Credo are preceded by extended orchestral preludes, and the Gloria ends with an extended fugue. Still more expansive is the closing fugue of the Credo, which is over 120 bars long and is full of coloratura. The festive, spirited Kyrie alternates soloists and choir in richly imitative counterpoint. The expressive high point of the three-part Gloria is the grief-stricken “Qui tollis” in G minor. The Credo is constructed in five sections. The fervent “Et incarnatus” quartet begins an *Adagio* which culminates in the choral “Crucifixus” in C minor, which is thematically related to the “Et incarnatus” and thus underlines the theological connection between the birth and death of Christ. The *allegro* tempo is picked up again with the “Et resurrexit”. The fourth section, which begins at “Et in spiritum”, is a lyrically flowing episode in triple time, in which the solo soprano has a dialogue with the choir. A massive fugue closes this extended movement. Mozart set the Sanctus more economically, in the customary manner, with an imitative “Hosanna” section. In the deeply expressive Benedictus the cantabile of the soloists is constantly interrupted by interjections of “Hosanna” from the choir. Imploring cries of “Miserere” highlight the plea for mercy in the solemn Agnus Dei, until the brisk finale tempo takes over with “Dona nobis pacem”. The theme, with its five-fold repeated note and final leap of a fifth back to the tonic, provides an energetic close.

### **Missa brevis in B flat, K. 275 (272b)**

It is thought that this work was completed in 1777. The autograph is lost, but there is a copy in the Austrian National Library, and further copies are to be found in the Archives of Salzburg Cathedral and in Lambach. This mass reverts to the short form. It is scored for soloists, choir, two violins, bass and organ, to which a viola part was later added, perhaps by Mozart himself.

The Kyrie, like the expansive closing “Dona nobis pacem”, alternates choir and soloists in the form of a rondo; in both cases the thematic material has folk characteristics. Apart from the “Dona nobis pacem” only the Benedictus offers an opportunity for vocal expansiveness. This swaying soprano solo, in triple metre, is the crown of the work. The Sanctus and the Gloria are through-

composed and are sung by choir only. The Gloria is held together by the chromatically rising figure with which it opens. The Credo is more strongly articulated through the alternation of soloists and choir, and in this way Mozart highlights the “Et incarnatus” section, set for solo quartet. The choral writing is predominantly homophonic, with only a few short imitative passages.

### **Mass in C, K. 317 “Coronation Mass”**

On 15 January 1779 Mozart returned from his unsuccessful visit to Mannheim and Paris and reluctantly resumed his duties in Salzburg. The second last Salzburg Mass is dated 23 March 1779. Under the name “Coronation” Mass, this work became Mozart’s most popular setting of the Mass. But the claim that it was written for the anniversary of the ceremonial crowning of a miraculous statue in the Wallfahrtskirche (Pilgrim Church) at Maria Plain, near Salzburg, is doubtful, to say the least. For one thing there is a gap of several months between the date of completion and this Marian festival, which takes place in June, and for another thing the large orchestral forces demanded by this work would have presented difficulties in the Wallfahrtskirche. It is therefore more probable that this Mass was written for the Easter celebrations of 1779.

In addition to the usual church trio, the orchestra consists of two each of oboes, horns and trumpets, three *colla parte* trombones supporting the choir, timpani and organ. The “Coronation” Mass surpasses its predecessors in terms of its festive vitality, its wealth of contrast, the variety of the musical thoughts it develops within extremely narrow confines, and its arresting lyricism. Behind the apparently straightforward structure, which adheres to the Archbishop’s demand for concision, is hidden an acutely conscious concern for detail. Impressions made on Mozart in Mannheim and Paris did not pass without trace. Thus in the closing “Dona nobis pacem” he picks up the Kyrie, thereby ensuring the musical unity of the work as a whole. Once more the Gloria is constructed in three sections, with the “Qui tollis” as its centrepiece, while the Credo is in rondo form, with the “Et incarnatus” as its centrepiece. The solo quartet and the choir are set off against each other in a variety of ways. The structure of the Sanctus is built on an instrumental ostinato. The Benedictus is also in three parts, with the “Hosanna” repeating the main thoughts as episodes. The soprano solo of the Agnus Dei anticipates the Countess’s aria “Dove sono” in “Le nozze di Figaro”. The completeness of form, the almost folk-like accessibility of the melodies, and the symphonic structure together produce a unity which raises the work, in spite of its brevity, far above the usual *Missa brevis* and points ahead to the great late Masses of Joseph Haydn.

### **Missa solemnis in C, K. 337**

Mozart’s last complete Mass was probably written in March 1780. Although it is usually described as a *Missa solemnis*, it is in fact a *Missa brevis*, albeit with a large, festive orchestra of two oboes, two bassoons, two trumpets, three trombones and organ, as well as the church string trio. This work, Mozart’s farewell to the liturgical Mass setting, is a compact and cohesively structured masterpiece. The orchestra is handled with a freedom and independence which surpasses even the “Coronation” Mass.

The slow, solemn Kyrie is for choir only. The dark modulations and the gripping opening of the short orchestral prelude lay bare an intimate religiosity which would conventionally have been avoided. The Gloria and Credo are compactly built, in obedience to the rules, but what a wealth of detail is unfolded here in the interaction of voices and orchestra, what natural unity is achieved through the interconnection of the thematic material. The “Et incarnatus” for solo soprano with obbligato woodwind and the expressive “Crucifixus”, with its dark opening for unison choir, are exceedingly beautiful. Mozart set the Credo twice, first marking it “Tempo di ciaconna”, then breaking off and beginning all over again. The short Sanctus, with its octave choral interpolations, follows the most revolutionary movement, a Benedictus in the form of a sombre choral fugue in A minor, which

has no counterpart in the Salzburg Masses. The Agnus Dei contains an arioso soprano solo with obbligato wind and organ, a beautiful piece of sacred chamber music, after which the “Dona nobis pacem” closes the Mass in the usual brisk manner of a finale.

In spite of its succinct form, this Mass, with its subtlety of detail and wealth of fantasy, is the finest of the Salzburg Masses. Mozart had good reason to ask his father to send him the score of this work, as well as the scores of K. 275 and K. 317, when he was in Munich in November 1780 for a performance of “Idomeneo”. We do not know whether he performed the Mass there, but we can be certain that he wished to attract the Elector’s notice as a composer of sacred music, with a view to winning a post. His efforts, however, were without success.

## The two Viennese masterworks

### **Missa solemnis in C minor, K. 427 (417a) “Great” Mass**

On 4 January 1783 Mozart wrote from Vienna to his father about “half of a Mass ... which is still lying there hopefully”. This can only have been the C minor Mass, which was begun in the summer of 1782, following a vow Mozart had made when his bride Constanze fell ill. That this vow should have been Mozart’s sole motivation in writing a monumental work, which went far beyond all his other Mass compositions, is extremely unlikely. It is far more likely to have been born of Mozart’s struggle with the work of J.S. Bach, which he discovered that year through Baron van Swieten and which induced in him a creative crisis. When at the end of July 1783 Mozart finally set out on the repeatedly postponed journey to Salzburg to introduce his wife to his father and sister, he apparently brought the completed parts of the Mass with him. And here begins the still unsolved riddle of this work and its first performance.

According to the latest research, as it is set forth in the foreword to the C minor Mass in the “Neue Mozart-Ausgabe”, that much-cited performance in St. Peter’s, Salzburg, took place not on 25 August, as was earlier supposed, but on 26 October. Mozart would then have had plenty of time to complete the work during the months of his stay in Salzburg. Why did he not do so, particularly since he had no other commissions to fulfill? If, as emerges from a letter of Constanze to the publisher André on 31 May 1800, the C minor Mass really was performed in St. Peter’s, how did Mozart fill out the skeleton? It is unlikely that Constanze was mistaken, since she herself had sung the soprano solo, which was far more demanding than his previous Masses. These questions will probably never be answered conclusively.

Mozart completed the Kyrie and the Gloria, the Credo as far as the words “Et incarnatus”, and the great solo quartet of the Benedictus. In the “Et incarnatus” coloratura aria only the voice part, the three obbligato woodwind parts, the two orchestral ritornellos, and the basso continuo were written out; the filling in of the harmonies by the strings is missing. The Sanctus and Hosanna are in only five parts, although actually conceived for eight-part double chorus, a fact first established by Alois Schmitt at the turn of the century. The close of the Credo and the Agnus Dei are missing completely. Alois Schmitt, H.C. Robbins Landon and, more recently, Franz Beyer have supplied the missing parts for the soprano aria, the Sanctus and the Hosanna, where the differences are of little importance in performance practice. In this completed form the work is usually performed today.

Even in the sombre, monumental Kyrie, with its imitative counterpoint and its choral writing supported by the trombones, it is already clear how far Mozart has moved from his earlier Masses. In the “Christe eleison” the comforting lyricism of the soprano solo is supported by interjections from the choir, before the sombreness of the opening returns with the second “Kyrie”. The brisk *Allegro vivace* of the “Gloria” chorus is followed by the “Laudamus te” aria for soprano, accompanied by strings,



oboes and horns, a jubilant piece of exultant coloratura. Then the monumental five-part chorus “Gratias agimus” bursts in, a homophonic movement of solemn block chords in A minor. The “Domine Deus” duet for two sopranos in D minor, a stirring, imitative piece, is accompanied by strings only. The “Qui tollis” which follows is the expressive climax of the work as it stands. A powerful double chorus in G minor accompanied by jagged, dotted string figures and full wind transforms the request for mercy into a succinct cry of entreaty. Here the influence of Bach and Handel is unmistakable. Even in the Requiem Mozart would write nothing on a larger scale than this. The *Allegro* trio in E minor for two sopranos and tenor, “Quoniam”, is followed by an Adagio choral interjection on “Jesu Christe”, of only six bars. This ends on the dominant seventh of C major, which leads immediately into “Cum sancto spiritu”, an *alla breve* fugue in C major, with a compact theme pressing onward in crotchets, passing gradually into agitated quavers which produce a rich texture of imitative counterpoint. This expansive fugue-finale is a masterpiece of the strict style based on the great Baroque masters. The Credo is through-composed as a strict *allegro maestoso* chorus in five part homophony. The expansive “Et incarnatus” aria which follows is a showpiece of great coloratura sopranos, ending in a virtuoso cadenza in the form of a duet for solo voice and solo flute. It is sometimes regarded as “operatic”, and therefore out of the ordinary, sometimes as naive and pious Christmas music. This piece, with its soloistic flute, oboe and bassoon parts, has great musical charm, although it is stylistically inconsistent with the monumental expressiveness and retrospective style of the work as a whole. The reconstructions begin with the Sanctus for double chorus and the Osanna, but these are largely corroborated by the trombone parts which Mozart himself wrote. The stirringly expressive Benedictus quartet is followed by a condensed repeat of the Osanna double chorus.

Why did Mozart revert to the Neapolitan cantata Mass, which was already out-moded, and was despised in Vienna? Perhaps here too the influences of the music of Bach and Handel were decisive. It is understandable that he did not complete the work later in Vienna and “rescued” part of it for the oratorio “Davide penitente”, since the church music reforms of Emperor Joseph II denied any opportunity for the performance of such a Mass.

### **Requiem in D minor, K. 626**

In July 1791 Mozart was commissioned to write a Requiem by a representative of Count Franz von Walsegg-Stuppach. Posterity, with the help of the widowed Constanze, was to weave around this incident the well-known legend of the unknown “messenger in grey” and the mysterious patron. In fact Mozart knew it was Walsegg who had commissioned the work, as a memorial to his young wife who had died. According to his contemporaries, Count Walsegg did in fact follow a peculiar practice of commissioning compositions which he would then copy out and pass off as his own at private musical gatherings. So it was thought that in the case of the Requiem too he had asked for the composer’s discretion. Taken up with the composition of “Die Zauberflöte” and “La clemenza di Tito”, Mozart was able to begin work on the Requiem only after some delay; too late, as we now know, for him to be able to complete the work. When he died on 5 December, the Introit and the Kyrie were fully written out. He had written the choral and solo voices with basso continuo from the “Dies irae” of the Sequence up to and including the “Hostias” of the Offertory, but for the rest he had only indicated the scoring. After the eighth bar of the last verse of the “Lacrymosa” section the work is broken off. Of the Offertory movements “Domine Jesu Christe” and “Hostias”, only the vocal parts are in Mozart’s hand. The Sanctus, Benedictus and Agnus Dei, as well as the Communio “Lux aeterna” are completely missing, not even sketches having been left by Mozart, as is often supposed to be the case with the beautiful Benedictus quartet.

Constanze, who did not want to lose the fee, looked around for someone to complete the work. She first commissioned the composer Joseph Eybler. He began the work, then handed it over to

Mozart's pupil, Franz Xaver Süssmayr. Having had contact with Mozart until the end, Süssmayr no doubt knew better than anyone else what the composer had intended. In recent years his version has been much criticised. It is true that the scoring is sometimes awkward, that the Sanctus is weak, and that Mozart may have had a different ending in mind for the "Lacrymosa". But Süssmayr's version of Mozart's opus ultimum has won its place as a pinnacle in the repertoire of great sacred choral music, regardless of recent corrections of details by Franz Beyer and others. It remains as deeply moving as ever.

The dark tonal background is ensured even by the instrumentation. As well as the usual strings, two basset horns, two bassoons, three trombones, two trumpets and timpani are used. The chorus of the Introit, interrupted only by the short soprano solo, "Te decet hymnus", builds up towards the end to a stirring urgency, in the style of a contrapuntal motet passing into insistent semiquaver movement. The fugal Kyrie follows, immediately setting the compact main theme, with the falling seventh typical of the Baroque fugue, against a countersubject in rushing semiquavers. Recent research claims that even in this movement someone other than Mozart has interfered with the scoring. The closing chord without the third has a sombre, archaic quality. With the "Dies irae" the problems begin, especially concerning instrumentation. The dramatic, sweeping "Dies irae" chorus is followed by the solo quartet "Tuba mirum", which opens menacingly in B flat major, as a bass solo, but closes in tranquility. The trombone solo at the opening has been the subject of much argument, because it is regarded as being too long. In the G minor chorus "Rex tremendae", with its falling dotted figures in the strings, its three-fold cry of "Rex", and its taut syncopated dotted figures in the choral parts, the call on the Judge of Mankind is transformed at the close into the beseeching plea of "Salva me". The expansive solo quartet "Recordare", in the comforting key of F major, with its lyrical, sanguine eloquence is perhaps the musical highlight of the work, in terms of the expressive part writing as well as the beauty of the string parts, of which Mozart sketched at least the opening motive, a sequence of descending phrases. The dramatic "Confutatis" chorus in A minor, with its threatening, rumbling string figures that evoke the horrors of Hell, the jagged, dotted cries of the male voices, and the imploring "Voca me" of the female voices, is followed without interruption by the "Lacrymosa", which Mozart broke off after the great climax at "Homo reus". Süssmayr's continuation may be regarded as being too short, but its comforting D major "Amen" is nonetheless convincing. The "Domine Jesu Christe" of the Offertory is like a motet, with a solo quartet inserted. The fugue "Quam olim Abrahae" is again archaic in character; it is repeated after the lyrically reverent "Hostias". The rest is Süssmayr: a concise, conventional Sanctus, with a fugato "Hosanna" section which is too short, a very beautiful Benedictus quartet, and a simple but impressive Agnus Dei. Whether the complete repetition of the music of the second part of the Introit and the fugue of the Kyrie from "Lux aeterna" was what Mozart intended, is open to question. But it successfully rounds off the work as a whole.

Mozart's Requiem, despite all claims to the contrary, is absolutely liturgically oriented; it is a work which, in the face of a personal vision of death and of consciousness of sin, offers the comfort of the hope of the world to come; a work which is not infrequently used at solemn Masses for the dead in Austria and Southern Germany.

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