

REQUIEM IN d -- WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

The mystique and myths surrounding Mozart's last work have flourished throughout history, and any contemporary research encounters fragments of truth, fables, both arbitrary and factual circumstances, human error, and even deceit. What is most amazing is that with all the convoluted history and mystique the work has been and remains an integral part of the core Western music culture.

What appears to be finally agreed upon is that Mozart received an anonymous commission to compose a requiem from Count Walsegg, a nobleman who frequently commissioned works so that he could affix his own name to them. Work by the composer was interrupted in order to complete *Clemenza di Tito* and *The Magic Flute*. Mozart became ill and depressed after completing *Titus*. His wife Constanze briefly took the score from him but Mozart persevered. Returning to work on it, he became progressively poorer in health and died on December 5, 1791, leaving the requiem unfinished.

From this point on the story becomes less clear. Mozart's wife, Constanze, needed the money from the commission and searched for someone to finish the work. After unsuccessfully seeking out several composers, she finally had to settle on Süssmayr, a young student of Mozart's. What is not known is why she did not ask Süssmayr in the first place; some suggest jealousy. He had worked very closely with Mozart for several years, had written the secco recitatives for *La Clemenza di Tito* and probably helped to orchestrate much of the opera. Süssmayr had been actively working with Mozart on this requiem right up until the composer's death.

It is also clear that Mozart totally completed only the first movement, *Introitus*, and most of the vocal parts through the *Hostias*, although he wrote no more than the first 8 bars of the ever popular *Lacrymosa*. Instrumentally Mozart left just a few sketches after the *Kyrie*.

From here on speculation is rampant. Süssmayr claimed that everything past the first eight bars of the *Lacrymosa* and all the orchestration except the *Introitus* was composed by him. Due to a variety of circumstances handwriting comparisons are not helpful, but there was a clear consensus at that time and also among historians today that Süssmayr did not have the talent to have completed the work. It was also finished within a very short time frame and while Süssmayr was involved in a major production of an opera of his own. Additionally, the composition as submitted to the publisher had many errors, most especially in the orchestration. So what is not conclusively known is how much of the completion is based upon Mozart sketches and fragments and how much is Süssmayr's as he claimed.

Over the years there have been several attempts at new editions and historical performances, including those that omit the *Offertorium*, *Sanctus*, *Benedictus*, and *Agnus Dei*. Others have left the vocal parts essentially intact but have attempted 'corrections' to the orchestration. Corrections certainly could be warranted even if Mozart had completed the score, for it was done in a state of his ill health and without opportunity to hear a performance or make final adjustments. Many conductors from Richard Strauss to Bruno Walter freely made adjustments to the orchestration. We are performing a 2005 edition by Franz Beyer which makes only modest changes to the vocal parts but with an orchestration that is much closer to the style of Mozart than in previous editions. What is truly remarkable is the fact that the work as a whole is one of great sensitivity, intensity, and musical brilliance in spite of its clouded history and the greatly diminished mental and physical health of its creator.