

Nantwich Choral Society

W. A. MOZART

REQUIEM

VESPERAE SOLENNES DE CONFESSORE



SATURDAY 27th JUNE 1992

The Parish Church of St. Mary, Nantwich
at 7.30 p.m.

NANTWICH CHORAL SOCIETY

NANTWICH SINFONIA

Leader: Andrew Long

Catrin Ley, soprano

Susan Pascoe, contralto

Robin Green, tenor

Philip Ravenscroft, bass

Andrew Mildinhall, organ continuo

conducted by
Stephen Buckman



— PROGRAMME —

VESPERAE SOLENNES DE CONFESSORE, K339

1. Dixit Dominus 2. Confitebor 3. Beatus vir 4. Laudate Pueri
5. Laudate Dominum 6. Magnificat

Almost all of Mozart's church music comes from his early years in Salzburg and was written for use in the Cathedral, where he was employed. The archbishop there put strict limitations on the type of music heard during his services; it must be concise, nothing too fanciful, and above all, the words must not be obscured. Mozart hated working under these strictures but while much of what he wrote is no better than the archbishop deserved, occasionally he produced something that betrays his real quality as a composer.

The task of setting the five psalms and the Magnificat for Vespers was only given to him twice, in 1779 to 1780, and perhaps the opportunity to write something other than a mass (there are 17 of these) fired his imagination more than usual. We do not know for what occasion the second of the two Vespers, K339, was commissioned, but it is suitable for any ordinary saint's day and was probably used repeatedly. Mozart keeps well within the limits set by the archbishop by keeping orchestral and solo passages to a minimum so that the emphasis is on a clear exposition of the text in simple blocks of alternating chorus and solo quartet. There are two exceptions to this pattern of lively dialogue, however, in the fourth and fifth psalms: the dramatic "Laudate Dominum" is a strict and sombre fugue whose main subject could just as easily have come from the pen of Bach or Handel (its characteristically Baroque - sounding fall of a diminished 7th is also to be heard in the "Kyrie" of the Requiem), while in the famous "Laudate Dominum" archiepiscopal restrictions go out of the window as Mozart unfolds a melody of such pure beauty that the archbishop could not but have indulged the composer's little transgression.

INTERVAL

REQUIEM IN D MINOR, K626

(New instrumentation by Franz Beyer)

1. Introitus: Requiem-Kyrie Sequentia 2. Dies irae 3. Tuba mirum
4. Rex tremendae 5. Recordare 6. Confutatis 7. Lacrimosa
Offertorium 8. Domine Jesu 9. Hostias
Sanctus 10. Sanctus Dominus 11. Benedictus
12. Agnes Dei Communio: Lux aeterna

After Mozart left Salzburg for Vienna, he only ever wrote two more masses, the one in the C minor, K427 and the Requiem, K626. Both were left unfinished, but both show us a depth and sincerity of religious feeling almost entirely absent from his Salzburg masses. Mozart's death on December 5th, 1791, left his widow with the problem of finding someone to finish the Requiem, as Count Walsegg zu Stupach who commissioned the work in July of that year wouldn't want only half of what he'd paid for. It was only after she had asked two or three other people that Constanze Mozart turned to the young Franz-Xavier Sussmayr, one of Mozart's pupils and a family friend.

When he saw the manuscript he must have realised what a formidable undertaking it was. Of the whole Requiem Mozart had only completely finished the "Introitus". From the "Kyrie" to the "Hostias" he had only written out the vocal parts with a figured bass line and some fragmentary indications of orchestration. The "Lacrimosa" broke off after the first eight bars and there was nothing at all of the remaining movements. Somebody else had already orchestrated the double fugue of the "Kyrie" and put in some ideas for the first violin part elsewhere. That left Sussmayr with a lot of orchestration to do, the "Lacrimosa" to complete and the rest to invent. Fortunately it looks as though he had access to sketches for the "Sanctus", "Benedictus" and "Agnus Dei" as a lot of the vocal writing in these movements is of a quality that Sussmayr could never have attained. As for the final section (from "Lux aeterna"), Mozart himself probably suggested repeating the music of the "Introitus" from "te decet hymnus", and ending with the fugue of the "Kyrie", as an expedient if not particularly original way to round off the work.

Sussmayr managed to finish the job, and it is thanks to him that the Requiem is now so familiar. He realised, though, that his efforts were "not worthy of the great man" and he has always come in for sharp criticism for his unimaginative and often inept handling of Mozart's final legacy. But it is only in recent years that musicologists have tried, through careful study of the style and techniques of his later works, to complete the Requiem in a more sympathetic way. There have been some very radical solutions, but the most satisfying one so far seems to be the one by Franz Beyer who, while keeping to the substance of the Requiem as Sussmayr left it, has carefully re-orchestrated it "to free the original picture of Mozart's score ... from its overpainting". The result, as we shall hear, is quite illuminating.

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