

2017-2018 Season
October 14 and 15, 2017
Program Notes

By Dr. Richard E. Rodda



Symphony No. 41 in C major, K. 551, “Jupiter” (1788)
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Mozart’s life was starting to come apart in 1788 — his money, health, family situation and professional status were all on the decline. He was a poor money manager, and the last years of his life saw him sliding progressively deeper into debt. Sources of income dried up. His students had dwindled to just two by summer, and he had to sell his new compositions for a pittance to pay the most immediate bills. He hoped that Vienna would receive *Don Giovanni* as well as had Prague when that opera was premiered there the preceding year, but it was met with haughty indifference when first heard in the Austrian capital in May 1788. He could no longer draw enough subscribers to produce his own concerts, and had to take second billing on the programs of other musicians. His wife, Constanze, was ill from worry and continuous pregnancy, and spent much time away from her husband taking cures at various mineral spas. On June 29th, their fourth child and only daughter, Theresia, age six months, died.

Yet, astonishingly, from these seemingly debilitating circumstances came one of the greatest miracles in the history of music. In the summer of 1788, in the space of only six weeks, Mozart composed the three greatest symphonies of his life: No. 39, in E-flat (K. 543) was finished on June 26th; the G minor (No. 40, K. 550) on July 25th; and the C major, “Jupiter” (No. 41, K. 551) on August 10th.

Three separate motives are introduced successively in the “Jupiter” Symphony’s first dozen measures: a brilliant rushing gesture, a sweetly lyrical thought from the strings, and a marching motive played by the winds. The second theme is a simple melody first sung by the violins over a rocking accompaniment. The closing section of the exposition introduces a jolly little tune Mozart had originally written a few weeks earlier as a *buffa* aria for bass to be interpolated into *Le Gelosie Fortunate* (“*The Fortunate Jealousy*”), an opera by Pasquale Anfossi. Much of the development is devoted to an amazing exploration of the musical possibilities of this simple ditty. The thematic material is heard again in the recapitulation in a richer orchestral and harmonic setting. The ravishing *Andante* is spread across a fully realized sonata form, with a compact but emotionally charged development section. The *Minuet* is a perfect blend of the lighthearted rhythms of popular Viennese dances and Mozart’s deeply

expressive chromatic harmony. The finale has been the focus of many musicological assaults. It is demonstrable that there are as many as five different themes played simultaneously at certain moments, making this one of the most masterful displays of technical accomplishment in the entire orchestral repertory. But the listener need not be subjected to any numbing pedantry to realize that this music is really something special. Mozart was the greatest genius in the history of music, and he never surpassed this movement.

Requiem Mass in D minor, K. 626 (1791) Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

In early July 1791, while he was busy composing *The Magic Flute*, Mozart received a letter testifying to the glories of his music and alerting him that he would be having a visitor with a proposal on the following day. The letter was unsigned. The visitor, “an unknown, grey stranger,” according to Mozart, appeared on schedule and said that he represented the writer of the letter, who wanted to commission a new piece — a Requiem Mass — but added the curious provision that Mozart not try to discover the patron’s identity. Despite the somewhat foreboding mystery surrounding this venture, Mozart was in serious financial straits just then and the money offered was generous, so he accepted the commission and promised to begin as soon as possible. *The Magic Flute* was pressing, however, and he also received another commission at the same time, one too important to ignore, for an opera to celebrate the September coronation in Prague of Emperor Leopold as King of Bohemia — *La Clemenza di Tito*, based on one of Metastasio’s old librettos — that demanded immediate attention.

Mozart worked on the *Requiem* as time allowed. From mid-August until mid-September, he, Constanze and his pupil Franz Süssmayr, who composed the recitatives for *Tito*, were in Prague for the opera’s premiere. When they returned to Vienna, Mozart was pressed to put the final touches on *The Magic Flute*, which was first staged on September 30th. Mozart’s health had deteriorated alarmingly by October — he complained of swelling limbs, feverishness, pains in his joints and severe headaches. On November 17th, with the *Requiem* far from finished, he took to his bed and was treated by Dr. Thomas Closset, one of Vienna’s best physicians, with the prescribed remedy for what was diagnosed as “miliary fever” (perhaps rheumatic fever or uraemia, though the evidence is inconclusive) — cold compresses and unremitting bleeding. Mozart became obsessed with the *Requiem*, referring to it as his “swan-song,” convinced that he was writing the music for his own funeral: “I cannot remove from my mind the image of the stranger. I see him continually. He begs me, exhorts me, and then commands me to work. I continue, because composition fatigues me less than rest. Moreover, I have nothing more to fear. I know from what I feel that the hour is striking; I am on the point of death; I have finished before I could enjoy my talent.... I thus must finish my funeral song, which I must not leave incomplete.”

Mozart managed to finish only the *Requiem* and *Kyrie* sections of the work, but sketched the voice parts and the bass and gave indications for scoring for the *Dies irae* through the *Hostias*. On December 4th, he scrawled a few measures of the *Lacrymosa*, and then asked three friends who had come to be with him to sing what he had just written. He tried to carry the alto part, but broke into tears as soon as they had begun, and collapsed. A priest was called to administer extreme unction; at midnight Mozart bid his family farewell and turned toward the wall; at five minutes to one on the morning of December 5, 1791, he died. He never knew for whom he had written the *Requiem*.

Constanze, worried that she might lose the commission fee, asked Joseph Eybler, a student of Haydn and a friend of her late husband, to complete the score. He filled in the instrumentation that Mozart had indicated for the middle movements of the piece, but became stuck where the music broke off in the *Lacrymosa*. Franz Süssmayr, to whom Mozart had given detailed instructions about finishing the work, took up the task, revising Eybler's orchestration and supplying music for the last three movements. Süssmayr recopied the score so that the manuscript would show one rather than three hands, and it was collected by the stranger, who paid the remaining commission fee.

The person who commissioned Mozart's *Requiem* was Count Franz von Walsegg, a nobleman of musical aspirations who had the odious habit of anonymously ordering music from established composers and then passing it off as his own. This *Requiem* was to commemorate Walsegg's wife, Anna, who died on February 14, 1791. The "grey stranger" was Walsegg's valet, Anton Leitgeb, the son of the mayor of Vienna. Even after Mozart's death, Walsegg went ahead with a performance of the *Requiem*, which was given at the Neukloster in the suburb of Wiener-Neustadt on December 14, 1793; the title page bore the legend, *Requiem composito del Conte Walsegg*. A few years later, when Constanze was trying to have her late husband's works published, she implored Walsegg to disclose the *Requiem*'s true author. He did, and the score was first issued in 1802 by Breitkopf und Härtel.

Buried away in Otto Erich Deutsch's *Documentary Biography of Mozart* is a fascinating but little-known tidbit of information that may (or may not) have been a factor in Walsegg's commission. One of Mozart's brothers in Freemasonry was Michael Puchberg, who earned many fond footnotes in the composer's biography for his generous financial support to the composer (Mozart euphemistically called these emoluments "loans") during Wolfgang's last years. Puchberg lived and managed a textile firm at Hoher Markt 522. This address, it seems, just happened to be located in the Viennese house of Franz von Walsegg, and it is certainly not impossible that Puchberg encouraged Walsegg, in his curious way, to help Mozart in his time of distress.

It is difficult, and perhaps not even advisable, to dissociate Mozart's *Requiem* from the circumstances of its composition — the work bears the ineradicable stamp of otherworldliness. In its sublimities and its sulfur, it appealed mightily to the Romantic sensibility of the 19th century, and

continues to have a hold on the imagination of listeners matched by that of few other musical compositions. Manifold beauties of varied and moving expression abound throughout the work. The words of Lili Kraus, the Hungarian pianist associated throughout her career with the music of Mozart, apply with special poignancy to the wondrous *Requiem*: “There is no feeling — human or cosmic, no depth, no height the human spirit can reach — that is not contained in his music.”