

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart *Requiem, K. 626*

Mozart's *Requiem* was one of two great choral works that had not been completed by the time of the composer's death. (The other was the great *Mass in C minor*). While this latter work is not well-known and receives comparatively rare performances, the *Requiem* has been a popular favorite for over a hundred years. The overt drama, as well as the general accessibility of the work, no doubt contributes to its popularity. Of course, the play and film *Amadeus* added yet another injection of interest.

It is safe to say that, in any case, the *Requiem* is more surrounded by mysteries than any other major musical work. These mysteries include the commissioning of the music and Mozart's own motivations while absorbed with *La Clemenza di Tito*, and the complicated process by which the music was completed after his death. Mozart's wife, Constanze, employed several persons to complete the work in an order that can only make sense by considerable conjecture about personal relationships. We know that early on, both Franz Freystadtler and Maximilian Stadler worked on the orchestrations of some of the parts. Ultimately, it was one of Mozart's students Franz Xaver Süssmayr (with some help from Joseph Eybler) who completed the task and brought the work to the state we hear it in today. Although it is clear where Mozart's handwriting stops in the various sections of the work, it is not known exactly what verbal instructions he gave to Süssmayr, who was in close contact with Mozart during Mozart's last year (1791). We do know that Süssmayr had completed the work by the end of 1792 and that he himself died in 1803 at nearly the same age as Mozart.

Many have found fault with elements of Süssmayr's work both in technical matters and with a certain sweetness or sentimentality that is present. However, the technical matters are not over-obvious and the "sweetness" is also a trend in *La Clemenza di Tito*, possibly suggesting that Mozart was moving in that direction himself. And, most importantly, there are moments in Süssmayr's work that are both subtle and even transcendent, which leave the listener with a far greater sense of unity in the work than the limited notes in Mozart's own hand would readily suggest. No one, not even Mozart, could have predicted the stunning result.

Allan Birney (2002)

Ludwig van Beethoven
Piano Concerto No. 5, "Emperor," in E-flat Major, Op. 73

It strikes me odd that, unlike others of Beethoven's most popular works, the fifth symphony did not acquire a nickname. The fifth concerto did, and no one knows who applied it or why. Certainly not Beethoven! Nor would he have approved its reference to the Emperor Napoleon whose armies were occupying Vienna the year of the concerto's completions (1809). Some think the name might refer to the Austrian Emperor (who had fled town), since the work was dedicated to the Archduke Rudolph, his younger brother and Beethoven's favorite pupil. But the most likely solution is that someone decided it was the emperor of all concertos.

The score was, perhaps owing to the military situation, not published until 1811. There is a report that it was played later that year in Leipzig to a wildly enthusiastic audience, but the official premiere took place in Vienna on February 12, 1812. The scene was a bash put on by a ladies' charitable organization, which featured living tableaux representing three famous paintings showing scenes from the biblical Book of Esther. The tableaux attracted most of the attention of the high-society crowd, and the concerto was a flop. It has been anything but that ever since.

The "Emperor" is in the usual three movements established in the days of Vivaldi a century earlier. It begins with the orchestra stating the chord of E-flat Major, to establish what tonality we are to be dealing with. Then the piano introduces itself with a long cadenza, punctuated by remarks from the orchestra. Then the pianist steps aside, so to speak, while the orchestra sets forth the two main themes of the opening movement—the first in the violins followed by the clarinets, the second again in the violins but this time followed by the horns. The piano then returns to restate and develop these themes, building up to a climax. At this point in the usual concerto the soloist is expected to improvise a cadenza. But Beethoven wants no such thing: he writes out his own cadenza and orders the pianist to play that and nothing else.

The briefer slow movement is also built on two themes, the first from muted strings, the second from the piano, both later put through a series of variations. At the end, having given hints of what is coming, the pianist launches suddenly into the infectious rondo, which ends in a coda that features the timpani.

David M. Greene (March 1993)