

Requiem, K.626

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The circumstances of Mozart's death and the unfinished condition of his Requiem at the time of his death leave as many questions to be answered as those that can be put to rest with concrete evidence. Any thorough analysis of the work involves collating manuscripts, correspondences, initial biographies, and a detailed reworking of the events and movements of the composer that led up to its commission and composition. The purpose of this paper does not aim toward a full-blown rectification and the setting down once and for all of everything that has been written and consequently found to be true or untrue of the Requiem but, rather toward illustrating the degree of difficulty confronted over two centuries in extracting from a lean and often inconclusive body of source material some knowledge of how the work came about, what state it was in at the time of Mozart's death, and to what extent Mozart's intentions were fulfilled in the unfinished work.

The year preceding Mozart's death on December 5th of 1791 was one of great proliferation for the composer in the midst of shifting financial prospects and trying circumstances. In order to meet the financial demands of a situation involving supporting an ailing, and often pregnant, wife Constanze and, by July, two surviving children, and expenses such as clothing appropriate for appearances at court functions and salons, Mozart did what he knew best – he concentrated on his work. To climb out of a mass of growing debt, the composer sold publishing, manuscript and performance rights to his works - mostly small works. His desire to create large-scale works was in part frustrated by Austria's war with the Turkish Empire which left the aristocratic and bourgeois components of Viennese society with less money to commission large works. The large orchestras of the nobility began to give way to the fashion of chamber music. The receiving of less than grandiose fees for these works (quartets, dances, songs, pieces for mechanical clock, etc.) had to be supplemented by income in the form of loans. Many such appeals to his friends for loans of various amounts can be evidenced in his letters.

Yet, 1791 appeared to be a pivot year for Mozart in the way of income. Compared with a completely disastrous financial situation in 1790, the next year did offer many commissions and led to an improvement in his financial situation. Two large commissions for operas were also presented to the composer to which he responded with *Die Zauberflöte* and *La clemenza di Tito* – composed for the coronation of Leopold II in Prague. It was after composing most of *Die Zauberflöte* and before traveling to Prague for the coronation of the Emperor that Mozart received the commission from an unknown messenger to compose a requiem mass. This was a welcome commission not only because of the payment that would come with its fulfillment, but because Mozart had been trying since May to acquire the post of Kapellmeister at St. Stephen's Cathedral – which he received upon his return from Prague – and new ventures into the realm of composing church music would “enable him to refresh and improve on the knowledge of church style that he had acquired previously in his career.” (Wolff 71)

Mozart began work on the Requiem after his return from Prague in mid-September and continued with it until his death in early December. He did not begin to work on the composition

continuously until *Die Zauberflöte* saw its premiere on October 1st, and his work was furthermore set aside while he composed the Freemason Cantata K.623. This left Mozart a very short amount of time to have completed what portion he did of the Requiem – even taking into account his gift for composing before writing anything down on paper. Moreover, the overworked composer had been ill since his return from the coronation and his condition, with slight periods of relief, was continuing to worsen.

Many myths concerning this unknown messenger had been created in the years following Mozart's death. The identities attributed to the messenger of the commission have included: the ghost of Mozart's father; Antonio Salieri, Kapellmeister to the court in Vienna, and suggested envious arch-enemy of Mozart; Freemasons who conceived of an assassination plot to poison Mozart for revealing secrets of the order in *Die Zauberflöte*; and the Romantic and mysterious face of Death himself. The fact that the messenger was unknown – indeed, Mozart did not even ultimately know with whom he was dealing – and various accounts citing Mozart in his final illness as putting forth rather hysterically that someone had poisoned him, and that the completion of the requiem they had ordered would coincide with his own death, left much room for speculation and imagination. As a result, the messenger became a messenger of death, and Mozart's death a murder, his Requiem his own.

Fortunately, in 1964 Otto Erich Deutsch brought to light the true identity of the mysterious messenger with the discovery of a “precious document, preserved in the town archives of Wiener Neustadt, thirty miles south of Vienna,” and written by a certain Anton Herzog. (Landon¹ 76) Herzog was sometimes second violinist, sometimes viola player in the court quartet of Franz Count von Walsegg of Schloss Stuppach. He recounts how Walsegg would commission works from composers anonymously and then stage private performances of the works, which he would claim to be from his own hand. Upon the death of his wife, Countess Anna von Walsegg, he commissioned a memorial sculpture from sculptor Johann Martin Fischer, and from Mozart, the Requiem.

Concerning Mozart's death, however, no truly conclusive statements can be made. It *can* now be said that the individual that commissioned the Requiem was not Mozart's murderer, but that does not rule out others suspected to have arranged his death. So much had been written after Mozart's death *about* his death and the possibility of murder, that to find any essence of truth (if at all possible) would take a great amount of critical research. William Stafford does a good job in laying out and analyzing the various conspiracy and medical theories that purport to hold a knowledge of the truth in this matter.

The line of conspiracy stories begins with the Niemetschek biography, published in 1798, wherein Constanze relates Mozart's confiding in her that, “someone has given me acqua toffana and has calculated the precise time of my death – for which they have ordered a Requiem, it is for myself I am writing this.” (Stafford 32) Constanze later contradicted this statement, calling it “absurd.” Nonetheless, Salieri was the first named suspect in 1823. References to his alleged confession in poisoning Mozart amount to hearsay and fail in the face of more reliable evidence: an account from one

of Salieri's former pupils of a visit to the hospitalized Salieri in 1823, during which Salieri denies the charge; testimony of Dr. Guldener von Lobes who had been in constant touch with the doctors attending Mozart at the time of his death that claimed not one of the many people who saw him thought once of the possibility of poisoning and that "examination of the corpse did not reveal anything at all unusual."; and a declaration by the nurses that attended Salieri that at no time had he made any kind of confession to murdering Mozart. (Stafford 44) Salieri's defense, it turns out, is much stronger than his condemnation.

The Masons have also been pointed to as conspirators in Mozart's death, some even going as far as claiming that Mozart knowingly participated in his own ritual sacrifice. Others have claimed a Jewish-Christian or Jewish-Roman conspiracy... The arguments that lead in this direction ultimately lead nowhere, as their lack of evidence "proves [for them] the depth and danger of the secret." (Stafford 53) None of the poisoning theories, in fact, stand up well when taking into consideration the state of medicine in Vienna during the time of Mozart's death. Doctors of the day were informed about the symptoms of a poisoned system, knew the effects of specific poisons on the body. Furthermore, the law "prescribed that corpses should be inspected by an independent doctor for foul play." (Stafford 46) Closset, Mozart's doctor, did not think he had been poisoned.

Another angle in determining the cause of death of the composer has been to analyze the various accounts of his actual death as seen by those present, which are at times wholly unreliable, and to derive a medical explanation for cause of death from these analyses. Some have gone so far as to investigate the possibility of a cumulative series of illnesses beginning in childhood that eventually took Mozart over. These investigations rely heavily on a small collection of more or less dependable documents concerning his life illnesses and death, although some of the approaches have been rather inventive. This information consists of an entry for cause of death into the death register by the doctors, the recollections of Constanze and her sister Sophie, the testimony of Dr. Guldner von Lobes mentioned above (which was based upon statements from the doctor Closset had consulted with about symptoms of poisoning), and a few other primary sources. The two leading theories resulting from different techniques in analyzing these sources (taking into account also Mozart's childhood illnesses, documented in letters written by his father, for example, or taking into consideration the exact state and character of medical knowledge of the day) are that Mozart had either died of rheumatic fever or infective endocarditis. (Stafford 56-84)

But one may never know the truth. When Mozart died, misinformation spread too around the circumstances of his burial. It had been put forth that Mozart was most disrespectfully buried in a mass grave with no mourners present and no headstone to mark the grave. This attitude and acceptance of falsities persisted into the 20th century. Research into the event and the civil policies of Vienna in 1791 concerning deaths and burials has revealed that he was buried, like most, '3rd class' (paid for by Baron van Swieten), meaning he was buried in a coffin in a space with up to five other coffins that was

“cleared out” after a number of years to save space according to regulation. That his grave was given no headstone was also because of limited space in the cemetery. And although the corpse probably wasn’t accompanied to the cemetery because it was located four kilometers outside of town (and it was a December night), services were indeed held at St. Stephen’s with a good number of mourners present. In fact, a memorial service was held for Mozart during which his Requiem was performed. There are things that can, after all, be known – through providence or through diligent research. However, to know why Mozart died, for any modern medical examination to be performed, a corpse is needed. In lieu of that, all we have is a collection of documents of various degrees of reliability that must be scrutinized and organized by historians with as creative and acute an objectivism as is possible. What is evident about the Requiem itself is that Mozart was indeed writing it for himself.

When Mozart died, he left an unfinished Requiem. Count Walsegg was given a complete score - what Constanze claimed was Mozart’s finished Requiem. She also had the work published. His Requiem is to have been performed at his memorial service, just days after his burial. The word of the day was that Mozart had indeed completed his Requiem. It was not until Gottfried Weber wrote an article expressing doubt as to the authenticity of the Requiem that the truth of the work’s completion began to emerge – and, even then, not wholly. Two portions of the autograph score (written in Mozart’s hand) surfaced of a sudden and were given to the Imperial Library in Vienna. The first, from Abbé Maximilian Stadler, contained a portion of Sequence from the Dies irae to, but not including, the Lacrymosa; the second, from Joseph Eybler, the two movements of the Offertory, the Domine Jesu and Hostias. Soon after, what was at first thought to be the original and complete autograph score – but was actually the score that Count Walsegg had received, surfaced as well and further confused matters. Then Mozart’s pupil Süssmayr revealed in a letter that he had had a part in the Requiem’s completion and gave a somewhat detailed account of his input in the work. Wolff lists the key points of this document as:

1. that Constanze had first asked ‘several masters’ to complete the work, but these had been unable to undertake it for various reasons, or they were not prepared to put their own work at the side of Mozart’s;
2. that the request was finally made to him because he had often played and sung through the music with Mozart during the last weeks of his life, and Mozart ‘had frequently talked to me about the detailed working of this composition and explained to me the how and the wherefore of his instrumentation’;
3. that ‘of the Requiem [ie. Introit] with Kyrie, Dies irae [ie. Sequence], and Domine Jesu Christe [ie. Offertory], Mozart completed the four vocal parts and the figured bass’...while he ‘indicated only the motivic idea here and there’ in the instrumentation;
4. that he, Süssmayr, had completed the Sequence, while the Sanctus, Benedictus, and Agnus Dei were entirely by himself; and

5. that 'in order to give the work greater uniformity' he had taken the liberty of repeating the Kyrie fugue from the start, with the words 'cum sanctis tuis,' at the end of the work.

(Wolff 16)

The Walsegg score and autograph fragments and Süssmayr's letter together form the totality of the work in its stages from Mozart's death to its delivery to Walsegg, and also the basis from which the controversy surrounding the authenticity of the Requiem can be put to rest.

This, of course, does not mean all questions are answered. It does mean that the events after Mozart's death can be ascertained, and that clarity can be brought to the situation, to a great degree. It has been determined through analysis of handwriting style in the scores and the paper type on which the music was written, as well as interpretation of correspondence in which the Requiem was the subject, that Mozart had only completed work through the first eight bars of the Lacrymosa, and also the Domine Jesu and Hostias of the Offertory. The vocal parts and bass in this portion of the Requiem, as well as the complete instrumentation for the Requiem (Introit – first movement), are Mozart. The rest is the work of four other composers. Walsegg received a full score with Mozart's work constituting the Introit – Requiem and Kyrie. The rest of the Walsegg score is in the hand of Süssmayr. Work in Mozart's hand was also contained in the portions given up by Stadler and Eybler, Dies irae through the beginning of Lacrymosa and the Offertory.

Taking into account that the Requiem was unfinished at Mozart's death, and yet delivered to its commissioner, published, and performed, one senses a series of events that deserve to be rescued from their apparent disconnectedness or total lacking. Whether considering the financial hardships of the Mozarts and the fee promised upon delivery of the completed Requiem, or Constanze's desire to fulfill the commission and preserve the reputation of the final great work of her husband, she did ask a total of four composers to finish the work, and never did she let on, even unto her death in 1842, that the work was not completely from Mozart's hand. She first asked Franz Jacob Freystädtler, eldest of Mozart's pupils, who provided instrumentation for the Kyrie. Freystädtler did not continue past the Kyrie. Constanze then asked Eybler, a "friend of Haydn's and protégé of Mozart's," to finish the Requiem. (Landon 161) He, for one reason or another, completed instrumentation for the Dies irae through the beginning of the Lacrymosa. Next, Constanze petitioned Stadler, a longstanding associate of Mozart's, to finish the work. He proceeded to score instruments for the Offertory, completing both the Domine Jesu and the Hostias, and then also discontinued work on the Requiem. Last approached with the proposal of finishing the Requiem was the youngest of Mozart's students, Franz Xaver Süssmayr. Although not a composer of Mozart's caliber in any way, he provided the bulk of work that went into its completion. In addition to copying and revising instrumentation composed by the previous three composers, Süssmayr completed instrumentation for the Lacrymosa and completely composed from

the Sanctus to the end of the work. The score that Walsegg received contained Mozart's vocal setting for the Introit with his instrumentation for the Requiem movement, both Frëystadtler's and Süssmayr's instrumentation for the Kyrie, the rest being copied or composed by Süssmayr.

Again, as in the cause of Mozart's death, the situation is certainly made clearer after much analysis of correspondence and other physical documents. From determining through handwriting and paper type analysis the author of each portion of each movement, a *clearer* picture can be drawn of what of the Requiem is actually Mozart's. Yet the complete answer to the question of Mozart's full intention in composing the Requiem is not attainable in a concrete way. Musical analysis can be performed with what is actually in Mozart's hand (namely the vocal parts for the Introit, Sequence through the beginning of the Lacrymosa, and the Offertory). But to what extent was his intention in instrumentation and, more significantly, in the very composition of the Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus dei and Lux aeterna fulfilled? It is clear that the voice was intended to be of prime importance to the work as the voice is what Mozart concentrated on most. And concerning instrumentation, Mozart "gave only the following indications:

Introit and Kyrie: two basset horns, two bassoons, two trumpets, timpani
Tuba mirum: trombone solo up to bar 18
Recordare: two basset horns."

(Robertson 69)

Although, it is possible that Eybler, who spent a good deal of time caring for Mozart in his dying, gave instrumentation to his portion of the Sequence while in the presence of Mozart, and that Süssmayr may have been very loyal to the ideas expressed to him by Mozart in his final days about the direction in which the work was intended to go, this is only speculation and hoping for the best. In truth, the sketches, drafts and notes that supposedly gave direction to the four composers in their collective completion of the Requiem – are gone. It has also been commented that Süssmayr's counterpoint was not that polished and that he may have been (aside from his handwriting being very similar to Mozart's) the least qualified of the four to complete the work. We can make no conclusive statements about the extent to which Mozart's dying work was realized in the efforts of the four composers. *Mozart's* Requiem, however, was never completed.

As can be seen, it has taken over 200 years to clear away the confusion and myth that arose from an unfinished requiem. The efforts of Constanze to have Mozart's Requiem completed after his death to fulfill a commission from an anonymous and pretending Count Walsegg, and the ensuing spread of misinformation through rumor, the publication of less than objective biographies, and wild conjurings of the imagination, have all contributed to the building of a tradition that has spanned two

centuries, and that has finally begun to extricate itself *from itself*. We are beginning to see the light, but will we ever see it completely? The Requiem that Mozart left with us, that is ours, is partial. The rest is with Mozart, and this is, perhaps, what most effectively binds us to him and makes possible a tradition that is forever in search of what left this world with the composer.

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