**Mozart Requiem in D minor, K626**

In July 1791 Mozart received an unexpected visit from an unknown man. The stranger came on behalf of his master, whose identity he would not reveal. The purpose of the visit was to commission Mozart to write a requiem. For some reason, Mozart came to believe that this presaged his own death, and that the work would be his own requiem. Whatever the facts (it seems the unknown patron was a character called Count Franz von Walsegg zu Stuppach!), Mozart's fears were in a sense well-founded, since he died on 5th December of the same year, and the *Requiem* stands as the final memorial to his greatness.

By the time he died, only the tense, solemn *Requiem* and the *Kyrie*, a powerful fugue, were complete. The rest of the work was finished by Süssmayr from Mozart's sketches or, in the case of some movements, simply from the ideas which Mozart had discussed with his pupil. The closing *Lux aeterna* is simply a repeat of the *Requiem* and *Kyrie*, and though this means that the last notes you hear this evening are definitely by Mozart, one cannot escape from the uneasy feeling that this is one song to the tune of another. But between this music's first appearance and its last there is a wealth of material which is among the most exciting, lyrical, tender and frightening in the choral repertoire.

The *Dies irae*, following immediately after the last cry of *Kyrie eleison*, is a terrifying depiction of the Day of judgment, unrelenting in its pace. In the *Tuba mirum* which follows, Mozart introduces the soloists one by one. The mood is gentler than the previous movement: a stately and portentous trombone portrays the Last Trumpet with a sense of doom rather than the frantic clouds-and-glory with which it is usually associated.

In the *Rex tremendae*, the impression of tremendous (that is, scary) majesty is turned aside at the end by the chorus' plaintive cries of *salva me* – save me. The *Recordare* is a gem, with solo lines weaving together to make a seamless musical fabric. It is followed by the *Confutatis*, in which the tenors' and basses' visions of hell contrast with the sopranos' and altos' quiet, pleading prayer.

Until now, all the chorus numbers except the opening *Requiem* have been predominantly assertive and dramatic, in contrast to the more lyrical style of the solo quartets. In the *Lacrymosa* the balance is restored: the arching melody and the aching accompaniment combine to make this the definitive setting of these words tearful but not morbid.

In the *Domine Jesu Christe* the chorus sets aside the lyrical mode in a movement full of energy, which culminates in the irresistible *Quam olim Abrahae*. The mood of introspection returns in the serene *Hostias*, but is blasted away by the tremendous opening bars of the *Sanctus*, leading into the perky, fugal *Hosanna*.

The *Benedictus* has been likened to an operatic quartet, with each of the soloists displaying a different character which miraculously blends in with the other three to produce one of the high points of the work. It is followed by the *Agnus Dei*, alternating between anguished cries of *Agnus Dei* and hesitant pleas of *Dona eis requiem* – the mood and the text summing up the whole work. A mysterious harmonic transformation leads into the repeat of the opening music to the words of the *Lux aeterna*.

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