

Mozart the Mystic

March 24, 2006 - Town Hall Seattle

March 25, 2006 - Rialto Theater Tacoma

Hutchinson: Fantasia on Themes of Mozart

Mozart: Requiem

Fantasia on Themes of Mozart

In February 2005, Christophe Chagnard invited me to compose a piece for this 15th season of the Sinfonietta, which coincides with the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth. Knowing the work would be featured on the same program as the *Requiem*, Christophe and I agreed that the musical material should be in some way reminiscent of, or derived from, Mozart's music. As a professor of music theory I teach many of the composer's works, yet culling my material from the master's myriad themes presented a great challenge as his compositions number in the hundreds. At the outset, my desire was not to compose in a strictly Mozartean style, but to reinterpret his melodies and set them in a modern context which encompasses the harmonies and rhythms of jazz, the primary language of my own formative musical experiences.

Fantasia on Themes of Mozart consists of five large sections. The A major piano concerto, K. 488—one of my own best loved of the composer's works—provided the musical material to which I eventually chose to limit myself. I had created an exercise from the piece for my keyboard harmony class in which I looped the notes of the piano's first entrance, which seeded the idea of a minimalist texture for the first section of the *Fantasia*. In the second section, the concerto's opening theme is altered to fit the octatonic scale favored by Stravinsky and Bartók, two giants of the modern repertoire; the sound of this scale powerfully evoked in me the sound and rhythms of the modern era.

In my pre-compositional study of the concerto, I was astounded by the unity I found between the themes of the three movements, particularly those within the first movement. The first four notes of the first theme are also the first four notes of the second theme, simply reordered. And the main four notes of the closing theme of the orchestral exposition are the same four notes of the second theme, transposed down a third. When I discovered this I found the material for the third section of the *Fantasia*: all of the intervals in Mozart's primary theme are played in the introduction by the solo violin, while also arranged as ascending intervals for the lower strings. This arrangement of intervals bore two new extended harmonies common in jazz, each a mirror inversion of the other.

The fourth section starts with a jazz re-harmonization of Mozart's second theme from the first movement. In my analysis of this second theme I was struck by the coincidence that the scale Mozart used is now known among jazz musicians as the "bebop" scale. A contrasting part within this section makes use of a mournful melody from the second movement of K. 488; in my setting I retain two of the melodic lines Mozart had rendered in imitation, but surround them with new harmonies.

After the fourth section culminates in wide-ranging glissandi, *Fantasia on Themes of Mozart* closes quietly, with the primary theme temporally stretched to a glacial pace over a gently rocking ostinato of the theme and its mirror inversion.

Robert Hutchinson

Requiem

So much has been written about Mozart's *Requiem*, from the enlightened to the sensational, that it has become nearly impossible for one theory to prevail over another. And yet, recently discovered letters and sketches have led to irrefutable conclusions. History should, by definition be an accurate science. What belongs to the past is etched in stone, frozen in time. Tales of the past are however, often plagued by sensationalism and an insatiable appetite for tabloid and drama. NO, Salieri did not help Mozart complete the Requiem, nor did he poison him for that matter! The ineluctable facts are as follows; Count Walsegg commissioned the piece anonymously from Mozart with the intention to have it performed as his own composition at a service honoring his departed wife. Mozart began work at once in the last months of 1791. At his side for most of that year was his pupil Sussmayr, then 25 and the most direct witness of Mozart's final days. In November, realizing that the end was near, Mozart instructed his pupil on how to complete the *Requiem* and provided him with sketches as well as verbal guidelines.

Following her husband's tragic passing, Constanze, surprisingly, chose to assign the completion of the Requiem to Joseph Eybler, another of the master's pupils. She later explained in a letter that; "The reason I gave it to Eybler to complete was because I was angry with Sussmayr and Mozart had had a high opinion of Eybler." Eybler began orchestrating from Mozart's sketches dutifully and did rather well at it. Orchestrating is one skill, composing is another. Eybler, unable to find the inspiration to complete the mass, returned the score and sketches to Constanze with his apologies. It is then, as a last resort that Mozart's widow called on Sussmayr's services. He completed the task by the end of 1792, claiming that the "Sanctus", "Benedictus" and "Agnus Dei" were entirely his own creations. Upon observing the quality of Sussmayr's own compositions, it is difficult to believe that no other sources than his own imagination were available to him. I strongly suspect that Sussmayr had more material at his disposal than he confessed and that Mozart had sketched the entire work. The orchestration that he provided and which became the norm, is certainly a worthy effort, but is still filled with technical errors and untypical heaviness. I chose the 1980 Beyer edition, which addresses these issues thoroughly and provides an effective solution to these complex dilemmas by keeping the basic contribution from Sussmayr without the technical flaws.

In the end, Mozart's *Requiem* absolves itself of these debates to reveal one of the most poignant testaments of a man and his at once terrified and serene contemplation of the last judgment.

Christophe Chagnard