



Mozart's Requiem

This weekend's concerts feature two celebrated works by Mozart, both set in the dark key of D minor. On the first half, Maestro Dinur plays and conducts the iconic Piano Concerto No. 20. After intermission, soloists and chorus join the orchestra for the master's final work, his immortal Requiem.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born 27 January 1756; Salzburg, Austria

Died 5 December 1791; Vienna, Austria

Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K. 466

Composed: 1785

First performance: 11 February 1785; Vienna, Austria

Last MSO performance: October 2006; Andreas Delfs, conductor;
Shai Wosner, piano

Instrumentation: 1 flute; 2 oboes; 2 bassoons; 2 horns; 2 trumpets; timpani;
strings

Approximate duration: 30 minutes

Mozart's K. 466 holds a special place, both in the composer's oeuvre and in the piano concerto repertoire as a whole. His first concerto to be set in a minor key, it was also Beethoven's favorite Mozart concerto, the only one he played in public. (The pair of cadenzas Beethoven wrote for himself continue to be heard even today.)

During the 19th century, the piece was revered – perhaps due to its operatic overtones – along with the big Romantic piano concertos and was practically the only Mozart piano concerto played. As scholar-musician Charles Rosen aptly noted in his epochal book, *The Classical Style*, "The D minor Concerto is almost as much myth as work of art: when listening to it, as to Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, it is difficult at times to say whether we are hearing the work or its reputation, our collective image of it."

Mozart wrote the concerto for a subscription concert held at Vienna's Mehlgrube Casino – so named because its basement was used as a flour warehouse. Never one to be intimidated by deadlines, the composer completed the piece at the last minute. In a letter, written five days after the work's premiere, his father Leopold told Mozart's older sister Maria Anna ("Nannerl," 1751-1829) of how the orchestral parts were still being prepared on the day of its premiere. "Your brother did not even have time to play through [the rondo], as he had to supervise the copying."

The opening Allegro's pulsing, syncopated D-minor chords and rising 16th-note triplets create a tense, yet unsettlingly quiet, mood. Ignoring this music, the piano enters with recitative-like melodic lines that are likewise eschewed by the orchestra. Throughout this restless, recondite movement, the agitated give-and-take of soloist and orchestra moves the music into an operatic sphere. (Think of the ominous D-minor opening of *Don Giovanni*, which would come two years later.)

The gentle B-flat major Romance is an “aria without words” cast in a simple rondo form. Its tempestuous second episode, in the relative key of G minor, provides propulsive energy. (Fans of the 1984 film *Amadeus* – an account of Mozart that is more fancy than fact – will recognize this movement as the music that played during the final credits.) The soloist catapults us into the weighty Allegro assai. It is not the sort of light-hearted rondo we normally count on for the final movement of a Classical-era work. The constant switching from minor to major confounds our tonal expectations but, after all is said and done, Mozart concludes in a sunny D major – yet another characteristic he would employ for *Don Giovanni*.

Recommended recording: Martha Argerich; Claudio Abbado, Orchestra Mozart (Deutsche Grammophon) 🎧

Requiem in D minor, K. 626

Composed: 1791

Last MSO performance: November 2006; Andreas Delfs, conductor; Karina Gauvin, soprano; Phyllis Pancella, mezzo soprano; Pascal Charbonneau, tenor; Charles Temkey, bass; Milwaukee Symphony Chorus

Instrumentation: 2 basset horns; 2 bassoons; 2 trumpets; 3 trombones; timpani; organ; strings

Approximate duration: 48 minutes

The year 1791 was one of the busiest of Mozart's life. It saw, in the first half of the year, the composition, rehearsal, and performance of one opera – *The Magic Flute* – and in the second half of the year, an identical process for his last stage work, *La clemenza di Tito*. In January, he completed and performed the robust Piano Concerto in B-flat major, K. 595. Other notable works that year include the String Quintet in E-flat major, K. 614 and the Clarinet Concerto in A major, K. 622 – in addition to multifarious minuets, contredanses, organ pieces, Ländler, Lieder, concert arias, and Masonic cantatas.

In June, Mozart penned the priceless little gem of a motet “Ave verum corpus,” K. 618, for the Feast of Corpus Christi (17 June 1791). By July, he had finished composing most of *The Magic Flute*. About this time, he received a letter, brought to him by an unknown messenger, that had no signature. The missive contained many flattering remarks and asked if he would be willing to write a requiem mass.

The man requesting such an opus was Count Franz von Walsegg, an enthusiastic amateur musician known for commissioning compositions and then passing them off as his own. The count asked Mozart to write a requiem following the death of his 20-year-old wife. “He was surely slightly demented, living like some caricature of a grand 18th-century *seigneur* in his beautiful and rather remote castle, with its magnificent view towards the austere Semmering mountains, pretending (but only slightly) that he was a great composer *manqué*” (H.C. Robbins Landon).

Mozart began writing the *Requiem*, but was obliged to set it aside to work on *La clemenza di Tito* – a commission scheduled to have its September premiere in Prague, as part of the festivities surrounding the coronation of the Hapsburg emperor Leopold II. Tragically, Mozart became ill and died before he could complete the funeral mass; the first two lines of the Lacrimosa are probably the last notes he penned. Only the Introit and Kyrie were finished. The draft of the remaining sections contained only the vocal parts, a figured bass, and indications as to the orchestration; the last three movements are missing in their entirety. The work was later fleshed out by Mozart's devoted pupil, Franz Süssmayr.

Mozart's specified orchestration of the *Requiem* – and the manner in which the instruments are employed – allows for timbres that evoke, by turns, both gravitas and consolation. Flutes, oboes, and horns are nowhere to be found. Clarinets are eschewed in favor of the darker-toned basset horns. Trumpets, trombones, and timpani lend solemnity and urgency when called for, and the violins are often set in their lower, warmer register.

Over the course of the 19th century, Mozart's setting of the mass for the dead became the most famous. It was sung at the memorial services of Haydn, Beethoven, Weber, Chopin, and other celebrated musicians. Nearer to our own time, Erich Leinsdorf led the Boston Symphony Orchestra in the *Requiem*, in the context of a solemn pontifical mass to honor slain president John F. Kennedy, on 19 January 1964.

More recently, on 11 September 2002, musicians around the world participated in a “Rolling Requiem” to commemorate the first anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Commencing in each time zone at precisely 8:46 am – the moment the first plane struck the World Trade Center’s north tower – Mozart’s consoling masterpiece was first sounded in New Zealand, circled the globe, and ended in American Samoa 24 hours later.

Recommended recording: Barbara Bonney, Anne Sofie von Otter, Hans Peter Blochwitz, Willard White; Sir John Eliot Gardiner, Monteverdi Choir, English Baroque Soloists (Decca) 

Program notes by J. Mark Baker.