Mozart Requiem – October 20, 2018

String Symphony No. 3 in E minor Felix Mendelssohn
1809-1847

Between the ages of twelve and fourteen, Felix Mendelssohn composed over a dozen string symphonies, written for the musical *soirees* held every Sunday in his parent's palatial home in Berlin, to which Europe's most famous thinkers, musicians and artists had a standing invitation. These were not his first compositions to be performed in public; they were preceded by a piano trio, a cantata, a violin sonata, four piano sonatas, two operettas and numerous lesser works. Later, Mendelssohn was embarrassed by these youthful efforts, considering them his "apprenticeship," and suppressed them. The string symphonies, therefore, remained undiscovered and unpublished until the 1960s and were first recorded in 1971, 150 years after they were written.

There is no better way of learning a craft than studying – and copying – the works of great masters; even today, the galleries of great European art museums smell of linseed oil as students reproduce the works of old masters. Mendelssohn wrote the string symphonies in this pedagogical tradition. The String Symphony No. 3 is in the three-movement form of the eighteenth-century Italian overture, ancestor of the Classical symphony. At the time, Mendelssohn was also playing piano arrangements of Beethoven's symphonies and working on a piano arrangement of Mozart's Jupiter Symphony.

While Mendelssohn titled this work "Sinfonia," he actually composed it for a string quintet consisting of two violins, viola, cello and bass. Today, these early works are usually called "String Symphonies" and utilize a chamber orchestra.

***Introduction and Allegro*, Op. 47** Edward Elgar
For String Quartet and String Orchestra 1857-1934

Edward Elgar's early career was a constant economic struggle to make ends meet. He played and taught the violin and the bassoon and took on such odd jobs as coach and conductor for the staff of the County Lunatic Asylum at Powick. He also composed a number of choral and orchestral works that had garnered a modicum of success in the provinces. Another source of modest income was the composition of a number of salon pieces. This all changed in 1899, when at age 42, his *Enigma Variations* propelled him from parochial obscurity to worldwide recognition.

Elgar composed *Introduction and Allegro* in 1905 but based it on earlier sketches. He made use of a Welsh melody he had heard in the distance during a 1901 vacation in South Wales, describing the resulting work as "a tribute to that sweet borderland." The impetus for this concerto grosso-like piece came from his friend, critic and editor August Jaeger, with whom he had attended a performance of Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No.3, and who had suggested he compose something for the newly-formed London Symphony Orchestra.

Initially, the work had only limited success but grew in popularity after W.W. II. One commentator suggested that the tremendous improvement in orchestra string players after the war eliminated the necessity to hire a string quartet in order to perform the work.

Despite the fact that the *Introduction and Allegro* is a tightly structured work with regular repeats of entire sections, it gives the impression of being a prelude and fantasy. The theme first heard in the Introduction is subjected to free variation in the Allegro, where its folksong origin only gradually becomes apparent. Elgar maintains a full quarter hour of musical tension by systematically setting up and subsequently thwarting all our expectations of cadence and tonic resolution as he spins out yet another take on the theme. Perhaps its initial lukewarm reception had more to do with British imperial confidence made uncomfortable by artistic ambiguity.

Requiem in D minor, K. 626 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Completed by Robert D. Levin 1756-1791

Probably no single piece of classical music has generated as much speculation, rumor, mythology and – yes – money as Mozart's Requiem. And all of it began with the melancholy fantasies of the composer himself, later enhanced by the reports of his widow Constanze.

The true story of the composition of the Requiem, while not a murder mystery, is still a bizarre one. The first part is well known and accurate: in July 1791 an "unknown messenger" approached Mozart with a commission to write a Requiem Mass for his master, who wished to remain anonymous. Mozart – at the time desperately short of money – accepted the lucrative assignment, working on the Requiem intermittently along with some of his greatest music, including *The Magic Flute*. Overburdened with churning out as many compositions as he could, Mozart sank into despondency and dyspepsia, leading to the nagging thought that he was being poisoned and the premonition that he was composing the Requiem for his own funeral. The fact that Mozart met his untimely death a mere six months after the appearance of the mysterious stranger – the Requiem still unfinished – provided grist for scholars and poets alike, culminating in the Hollywood blockbuster *Amadeus*.

Actually, Mozart composed the Requiem for Herr Franz Count von Walsegg, an amateur musician and composer who was in the habit of commissioning works by established composers and passing them off as his own. When the Count's 20-year-old wife died, he wanted to have two special memorials in her honor: one was a sculpture; the other was the Requiem, which was to be played annually on the anniversary of her death.

Obviously aware of the tremendous talent he was hiring, von Walsegg paid well, including a down payment, and gave Mozart free rein in the composition of the Requiem. The superstitious and overworked Mozart, in turn, procrastinated. The same composer who could dash off a string quartet in a single sitting, never managed to finish the work and was dictating portions of it to his student, Franz Xavier Süssmayr, even on the day of his death. Mozart's final illness, in fact, had nothing to do with the Requiem; it has now been fairly well established that he died from an acute attack of rheumatic fever months after he had conceived of the poisoning theory. There is also no evidence that he spent six months obsessing over the mysterious commission.

After Mozart's death, Constanze needed the rest of the money from the unfinished commission. It was left to Süssmayr to finish the manuscript, after a number of other composers turned it down. Claiming to be very familiar with Mozart's ideas about the work he finished the missing parts. But since no original manuscript pages of the *Sanctus*,

Benedictus and *Agnus Dei* have been found, there remains a running argument among scholars as to where Mozart ends and Süssmayr begins.

Despite this more pedestrian account of the genesis of the Requiem, the fact that Mozart attached to it such macabre significance clearly affected the emotional intensity of the work. It contains section after section of exquisitely poignant music. Notably absent is any sense of optimism about a better life hereafter. Mozart's unusual orchestration reinforces the grim message of the text. Along with the requisite five string parts, the *Requiem* is scored for two bassett horns (lower pitched clarinets), two bassoons, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani and organ; the absence of flutes, oboes and horns, render the score dark and bottom heavy. We can also credit the composer with setting a standard for subsequent settings of the Requiem Mass, particularly for the spine-chilling *Dies irae*.

As for the completion of the Requiem, Süssmayr provided more than the ending. Mozart had skipped around in his composition of the piece, leaving incomplete, for example, the last four lines of the *Dies irae* text – only eight measures of the *Lacrimosa* are in Mozart's hand. Recent scholarship has suggested, however, that Mozart had probably already composed this movement in his head and proceeded in his haste to the succeeding Offertory (*Domine Deus*); Süssmayr, who was with Mozart at the end, probably knew what the composer had intended for the completion of the *Lacrimosa*, and perhaps for the other unfinished movements as well.

Süssmayr's additions included: the orchestration of the *Kyrie*, completion of the *Dies irae*, and the orchestration of the Offertory, based on Mozart's notes – now lost. Regarding the composition of the *Sanctus*, *Benedictus* and the *Angus Dei* – perhaps based on sketches or conversations – Süssmayr wrote in 1800 in a letter to the first publisher: "(They) were wholly composed by me; but, in order to give the work greater uniformity, I took the liberty of repeating the *Kyrie* fugue at the line *cum sanctis* etc." For the first part of the Communion (*Lux aeterna*), Süssmayr repeated music from the Introit (*Te decet hymnus*) although he does not mention this in his letter. Others have attempted to improve on Süssmayr but have less information than he did on which to base their versions. With all its faults – and there are many – his version is the one most often performed.

The Requiem was finally performed *in memoriam* for the Countess von Walsegg on December 14, 1793 but not before it had been performed in January of the same year as a benefit for Constanze Mozart and her sons – with proper attribution.

Pianist, composer and musicologist Robert D. Levin is one of the recent performer/scholars to have tried his hand at improving upon Süssmayr. He writes: "…the goal was to revise not as much but as little as possible, attempting in the revisions to observe the character, texture, voice leading, continuity and structure of Mozart's music. The traditional version has been retained insofar as it agrees with idiomatic Mozartean practice. The more transparent instrumentation of the new completion was inspired by Mozart's other Church music. The *Lacrimosa* has been slightly altered and now leads into a non-modulating Amen fugue…The second half of the *Sanctus* resolves the curious tonal discrepancies of Suüssmayr's version, and the revised *Hosanna* fugue modeled after that of Mozart's C minor Mass, K. 427, displays the proportions of a Mozatean Church fugue. The second half of the *Benedictus* has been slightly revised and is connected by a new transition to a shortened reprise of the Hosanna fugue in the original key of D major. The structure of the *Agnus Dei* has been retained, but the infelicities of Süssmayr's version have been averted in the second and third

strophes. In the final *Cum sanctis tuis* fugue, the text setting has been altered to correspond to the norms of the era."

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