



## **Composer Profile: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)**

Born in Salzburg, Johannes Chryostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart is renowned as one of the most gifted musicians in the history of classical music.

Raised as a Catholic, Mozart was the youngest of seven children, five of whom died in infancy. His father, Leopold, was an ambitious composer and violinist, and by the age of 5 years Mozart was already proficient on keyboard and violin.

By the age of 11 years, he had composed his first opera, *Apollo et Hyacinthus*. And a year later the emperor Joseph II commissioned him to write *La finta semplice*.

Mozart worked tirelessly to become not only a great composer, but also a conductor, virtuoso pianist, organist and violinist, with his music embracing opera, symphony, concerto, chamber, choral, instrumental and vocal music.

Though he was considered a genius, and also had a keen sense for languages being fluent in Latin, Italian, French, and German, Mozart was also known to be tactless, vain, arrogant and with an obscene sense of humour.

In 1782 he married Constanze Weber, and together they had six children, but only two survived.

Although Mozart's output was prolific at over 800 works, he and Constanze liked to live luxuriously in their early years together, with an expensive apartment, furniture, servants and their son enrolled at boarding school.

Between 1782 to 1786 Mozart produced some of his best work; the *Haffner* and *Linz* symphonies, five string quartets, nine piano concertos; three concurrently with *The Marriage of Figaro*. And in 1787 his second opera *Don Giovanni* premiered.

However, Mozart didn't tend to save much of his earnings and in his later years, as he stopped appearing frequently in public concerts, and the level of prosperity and ability of aristocracy to support music declined, his income shrank. Within a period of seven years Mozart saw his income shrink by almost 70%.

In the few years before he died, Mozart was highly productive with *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, the Clarinet Quintet in A, *Così fan Tutte*, three piano trios, the Coronation piano concerto, two piano sonatas, three string quartets, and three symphonies (to bring his overall tally of symphonies to 41), which saw his financial situation begin to improve as he paid off some debts.

However, in 1790 Mozart's health began to fail and his output slowed. Although he improved sufficiently during 1791 to compose *The Magic Flute*, the Requiem, and the Clarinet Concerto, he died in December of that year, at the age of 35.

## **Programme Notes: Requiem**

A Requiem is a Roman Catholic mass of the dead; a funeral rite asking God to accept a human soul into heaven.

It combines movements that are part of the daily mass; Kyrie, Sanctus and Agnus Dei, with those that have texts of mourning and remembrance.

The longest of these is the Sequence, written in the 1200's, of God coming down from heaven to judge the world, punishing those who have lived an immoral life with eternal damnation.

In early July 1791 an 'unknown stranger' turned up at Mozart's door saying that he represented someone who wanted a Requiem on the understanding that he would not seek to learn the identity of his patron.

The stranger was Anton Leitgeb, the son of the mayor of Vienna, and the valet of Count Franz von Walsegg-Stuppach,

The count was a sometime composer of sorts himself, but had already acquired the reputation of passing other people's compositions off as his own.

Mozart's setting of liturgical text to music in this new requiem was intended to commemorate the count's young wife, Anna, who died of illness on Valentine's Day that year.

And as part of his game, the count insisted that Mozart was neither to make copies of the score or to reveal his involvement in it. Also, that the first performance was to be reserved for him as the commissioner of the work.

Mozart was not in the best state of mind when he received the anonymous commission. His health was deteriorating; suffering from a succession of debilitating fevers, and convinced of his own imminent death, he believed he had been cursed to write a requiem as his own farewell.

Despite his failing strength at the time, Mozart was deeply consumed with writing two operas: *The Magic Flute* and *La Clemenza di Tito*, both of which were completed and staged.

He was only able to work on the requiem as and when his weakening health allowed.

Mozart's Requiem has five main sections: Introitus, Sequence, Offertorium, Sanctus, Agnus Dei and Communio. The opening Introitus has two parts, Requiem and Kyrie.

At the time of his death, Mozart had finished only the Introitus.

The Kyrie, Sequence and Offertorium were sketched out.

The plaintive *Lacrimosa*, perhaps the saddest but most beautiful moment in the whole work, was Mozart's own work for only the first 8 bars. He died before completing it any further.

The last three movements; Benedictus, Agnus Dei and Communio remained unwritten, and nearly all the orchestration was incomplete.

After Mozart's death, Constanze was in a difficult dilemma.

It seems that at the heart of both the piece and the circumstances, no matter how special a life is, when it ends, everything and everyone else must continue, by imperfectly piecing together what is left.

Payments for the commissioning of the work had already been received and Constanze feared that if the work was handed over incomplete, the patron would want his money back. And, she desperately needed the remaining commission payments that were still yet to be paid.

Constanze decided to have the work completed by someone from Mozart's close circle of students and friends. She asked Franz Beyer, Abbé Maximilian Stadler and an unknown third person. Each of them completed a bit, directly on the manuscript, but then returned it unfinished, for unknown reasons.

She also asked Joseph Eybler, but apart from orchestrating the music following the Kyrie, he passed the task over to Mozart's pupil Franz Xaver Süssmayer, who had assisted Mozart in the final months of his life and to whom Mozart had given detailed instructions about completing it.

Süssmayer collated and revised the work of his predecessors, wrote the entire work out in his own hand; making it virtually impossible to determine who composed what, and so that the work seemed as if all by a single composer. He falsified the date of completion with the strange inscription "di me ("by me") W. A. Mozart /1792."

(It is evident from Süssmayer's handwriting on manuscripts that he completed a number of passages after Mozart's death, but the degree to which he followed Mozart's detailed sketches and drafts remains a point of dispute.

Süssmayer claimed to have written the final three movements on his own, but most scholars disagree. Most of the compositional errors are found in the orchestration; looking at the choral writing on its own, it seems much more in Mozart's own style.

Süssmayer most likely had access to sketches that were later destroyed.)

For a period of time after Mozart's death, Constanze needed to keep it a secret that Süssmayer had anything to do with the composition of the Requiem, in order to give Count Walsegg the impression that Mozart had written the entire work himself.

It was also important for her to promote the work as being wholly Mozart's so that she could receive the maximum revenue from its publication and performance.

It took almost a decade before Constanze was able to persuade Walsegg to acknowledge Mozart as the Requiem's true composer, rather than himself. And it was first published in July 1800.

Although it had to be completed by his contemporaries, the circumstances of the composition, combined with Mozart's genius, make his Requiem no ordinary piece of music.

"Composed on the edge of consciousness, Mozart willed his last creation into life with his final breaths. It has both drama and humanity, grappling with the mystery of death and the journey from uncertainty into hope".