

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), always in straitened circumstances, began his final year of 1791 with excellent prospects for a long-overdue spell of financial security. The City Magistrate of Vienna had decided in Mozart's favor for a position as Cathedral *Kapellmeister*, and the composer had just completed his opera *The Magic Flute*, which would prove to be one of his most popular works. The future did indeed look rosy. It was during rehearsals of the opera that Mozart received a commission from a mysterious stranger for a Requiem Mass to be delivered as quickly as possible. Mozart immediately began work on the Requiem, but he was obliged to put it to one side for another commission, the opera *La Clemenza di Tito*, dashed off in an astounding eighteen days.

After *Clemenza's* premiere in Prague, Mozart resumed work on the Requiem and found himself under constant pressure from the stranger who kept inquiring after the work's progress. Mozart was already in the grip of his final illness, and it is difficult to determine his actual state of mind during those last days. His letters, playful and bantering as always, show no signs of morbidity, nor does his personal diary convey any sense that it was written by a man who thought he might be dying. On the other hand, several accounts by those close to Mozart describe him haunted by thoughts of his impending demise and terrified by the notion that the mysterious visitor was an emissary of Death. However trustworthy these melodramatic accounts may be, and whatever Mozart's mental state might have been, the prosaic facts surrounding the dark visitor are well documented.

The gentleman in question was merely the steward of a certain Count Franz von Walsegg, a wealthy dilettante who made a practice of commissioning works by well-known composers, re-copying them out in his own hand, and frequently passing them off as his own. (Mozart's rival, Antonio Salieri, played absolutely no role in the Requiem's genesis or completion, *pace* Peter Schaffer and the film based on his play *Amadeus*.) Mozart did not live to complete his Requiem; he died on December 5, 1791, of kidney failure, probably brought on by excessive blood-letting by the doctor who was treating him.

Constanze, left destitute with two children and desperately in need of the final payment due upon delivery of the finished score, covertly employed Mozart's student, Franz Xaver Süssmayr, to complete the work. Süssmayr was able to imitate Mozart's handwriting to an uncanny degree, and scholars wrangled for a good many years before determining which portions of the work are in Mozart's hand and which are in Süssmayr's. The Requiem received its first public performance two years later, with Count Walsegg himself conducting; however, its true authorship was widely known by then, and the Count was thus foiled in his attempt to claim the work as his own.

Only the first two movements (Requiem and Kyrie) of the full score are wholly in Mozart's hand. Of the remainder, Mozart prepared about half of it in vocal score, which Süssmayr orchestrated. The authorship of the Sanctus, Benedictus, and Agnus Dei poses

a problem, for although they were set down entirely in Süßmayr's hand, we do not know to what degree he may have worked from lost sketches or from ideas which Mozart conveyed orally to him. (The Abbé Maximilian Stadler, a close friend of Mozart, wrote, "Whoever has examined these manuscripts in detail must admit that Mozart is the sole composer and Süßmayr had no more part in it than any man somewhat trained in figured bass. All the essentials come from Mozart.")

However one may judge Constanze's perpetrating a forgery on the Count—and there is a satisfying poetic justice in seeing the deceiver deceived—the fact remains that Süßmayr did an uncommonly fine job in completing the work. It may be a flawed masterpiece, or a torso, but it is a masterpiece for all that.

There is enough mystery and enigma in Mozart's music to preclude any further need to romanticize the man at the expense of the truth. We can only nod in agreement with Robert Craft who finds it incomprehensible that any mere human being could have composed Mozart's music.

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