

IN DEFENSE OF SÜSSMAYR'S "MOZART'S REQUIEM" (Jeffrey Baxter - January 13, 2009)

Poor Franz Xavier... such a bad rap for trying to do the impossible: be a Mozart. In his completion of Mozart's *Requiem*, Süßmayr has taken some harsh criticism (some of it justified), and even in life he "took it" from both Mozarts – from Wolfgang, who affectionately called him many off-color nicknames that last year of the maestro's life when F.X. was his close musical assistant, and from Mozart's widow Constanze, for whom Süßmayr was not even a "sloppy second," but a third choice to complete the *Requiem*.

As Norman mentioned, no other incomplete work of art has had so many attempts at completion (or at improving and correcting others' completions). In addition to Süßmayr's work, there are no less than five [5] currently published "versions" of Mozart's *Requiem* (by Franz Beyer, Richard Maunder, H.C. Robbins-Landon, Duncan Druce and Robert Levin). Some of these versions attempt to correct Süßmayr's awkward orchestration (Mozart wrote almost all the choral/vocal parts of the score), and some (Maunder and Levin) actually undertake to re-compose, in the style of Mozart, complete sections.

While Süßmayr may not have had the advantage of a comprehensive scholarly knowledge of Mozart's entire output – or even an equal "talent" or level of sophistication – he did possess something no one else had: direct, personal contact with the composer and, later, actual sketches from Mozart himself on how to complete the work. One tiny sketch – one that Süßmayr either lost or chose to ignore – surfaced in the 20th century. It is a sketch for a fugue based on an inversion of the Requiem's 5-note theme on the word, "Amen," to conclude the *Dies irae* sequence. Click here to view (page 60-61): http://nma.redhost24-001.com/DME/nma/nmapub_srch.php?l=2.

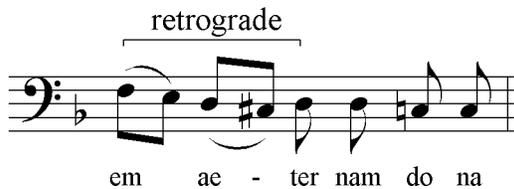
How do we know Süßmayr had these sketches and used them? The proof is in the pudding:

Introit

The only movement fully completed by Mozart. It contains the musical material for the entire *Requiem* he sought to compose. Norman pinpointed the five-note unifying theme last week. It is heard first in m. 1 in the bassoon (the choral basses sing it in their first entrance too):



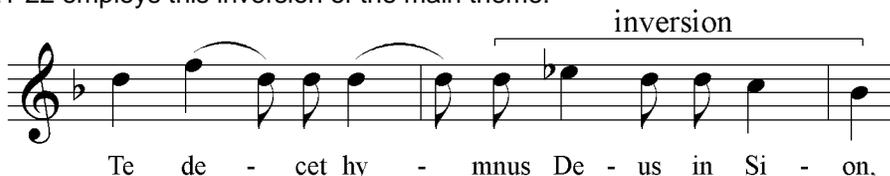
Mozart presents the theme in retrograde (backwards), as in m. 13 in the bass:



In this movement alone Mozart thoroughly works out the theme, not only inverting it (a mirror image of itself), but also presenting it in diminution (compressed or sped up), as in the 1st violins' accompanimental figure at m. 20, or m. 34 in the altos:



Even the tail-end of the pre-existing Gregorian chant melody that Mozart uses for the soprano solo "Te decet hymnus" in ms. 21-22 employs this inversion of the main theme:



-And Süssmayr's clunky little all-too-short "Osanna" fugue that ensues is at the start, however, intervallically identical to Mozart's earlier "Recordare" movement:

Benedictus

While the "Benedictus" of Süssmayr does not contain a use of the Requiem "theme," its opening melody may be found in one of Mozart's exercise books for his piano student Barbara Ployer. –But more true to the time in which it was composed are the trombone and wind chords in ms. 18-20 which, with their mystic numerology of three, sound curiously similar to the chords that summon Sarastro and his cohorts throughout *The Magic Flute*.

Agnus Dei

Aside from the re-use of the opening movement to conclude the work (credited, rightly so, by Süssmayr as Mozart's personal wish), is the overwhelming evidence of original sketch-material found in this movement's first five measures. The "theme," in its original D-minor form, is found in ms. 2-6 in the bass part:

-And a sophisticated dual permutation of the theme is found in the first measure of the Violin 1 part (an inversion and original version of the theme, side by side, decorated this time by an extra G# non-harmonic tone) – something well beyond Süssmayr's capabilities as a composer:

Yes, hindsight may be 20/20 for us, and we may wince when we come upon some of those clunkers of contrapuntal inelegance, improper voice leading and repetitive phrases, but like it or not we are forced to recognize that F.X. was the only one with the primary source material and an intimate rapport with the composer. If he hadn't been the one less wise enough to accept the challenge from Constanze to complete the work, it might have been lost for the ages. It was not, and for that alone we have him to thank.

See you Monday,
-and no clunkers from you!

-Jeff B.
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