

Mozart Birthday Bash
February 11, 2007
Program Notes by Ed Wight

Both Mozart and his father Leopold chafed under the musical limitations imposed by the Archbishop Colloredo of Salzburg. Amadeus was strongly influenced by Enlightenment views of church music, seeking a focus on the text, not on musical display. Colloredo preferred German hymns to choral counterpoint, and tried to limit the performance of any mass to "...no more than 45 minutes" as Mozart wrote in horror to Padre Martini. Thus, Mozart's Salzburg masses tended to be of the short, *Missa Brevis* type, with generally straightforward vocal settings. His greatest choral fugues (in such works as the Requiem and the C Minor Mass) lay ahead in Vienna. However, this **Missa Brevis** from the late 1770s demonstrates that Mozart's musical genius would not be completely stifled by Colloredo's dictates. Listen for the tender soprano solo in the "Benedictus" (punctuated by dramatic choral interjections) and the extraordinary harmonic richness in the introduction to the "Agnus Dei."

Mozart's songs for solo voice and keyboard, such as **Das Veilchen**, remain one of his most underrated genres. In his biography of Mozart, Alfred Einstein - the musicologist, not the theoretical physicist! - wrote that "Mozart placed not the slightest value upon his songs. They were by-products, crumbs from the table..." That view would have surprised both Mozart and his public. Mozart wrote them throughout his life, and they numbered among his most popular works. A greater percentage of them were published during his lifetime than almost any other Mozart genre, a further testimony to their popularity.

"Das Veilchen" (from 1785) proved to be his most popular song, and it was Mozart's only setting of a Goethe text. The non-repetitive, through-composed musical structure mirrors the shifting sentiments of the text, which passes from beauty and hope to inadvertent death. Goethe developed a profound respect for Mozart, writing in 1787 that "All our endeavors to confine ourselves to what is simple and limited were lost when Mozart appeared...The demonic spirit of his genius...conquers all." Goethe may not have been quite so praiseworthy had he known Mozart himself added the last two lines of text, reinforcing the sad fate of the violet.

Aside from songs with keyboard accompaniment, Mozart also wrote independent arias for solo voice and orchestra throughout his career. Though settings for soprano dominate his output, he wrote such pieces for every voice range. Composed in March 1791, "**Per questa**" became his setting in this genre, and it reflects the marvelous, intricate counterpoint of Mozart's late style. His 1791 opera "La Clemenza di Tito" contains several arias for voice and solo instrumental accompaniment. Mozart explores that same texture in "Per questa", written for bass voice, string bass & orchestra. He demonstrates the independence of the double bass immediately, where it completes the latter half of the opening melody before the first entrance of the voice. The string bass later establishes the same partnership with the vocalist. Both the slow and fast sections of this 2-part vocal Rondo provide a virtuoso tour de force for the performers, with demanding technical passages for the double bass and explorations of both high and low range extremes for the singer.

The popularity of "Die Entführung" soared immediately after its July 1782 premiere. It firmly established Mozart's international reputation as a composer outside of Austria - no longer seen as just a child keyboard prodigy. The 1995 New Grove Opera Dictionary states that it received performances in "40 German centers [during] Mozart's lifetime, and was the first opera ever heard in German in Paris." Blonde's aria **Welche, Wonne** was a late addition, but dramatically welcome, after the darkest moments of the opera. Konstanze fears death by Arab captors, but when her servant Blonde hears of the imminent arrival of Belmonte (Konstanze's fiancée) she bursts into this joyous, high-spirited aria.

Mozart became the first composer in Western music history whose operas never had to be revived. They have more or less held the stage since their premieres, especially his two operas in German, "Die Entführung" ("Abduction" from the "Seraglio") and "**Die Zauberflöte**" ("Magic Flute"). The Viennese loved "Magic Flute" - it received 20 performances in the first month (while "Marriage of Figaro" had only nine, and closed). When Mozart tragically died three months after its premier, the librettist Emmanuel Schikaneder oversaw 200 performances in Vienna alone. It spread like wildfire throughout the German lands, and ultimately all of Europe. According to the 1995 New Grove Opera Dictionary, "no major

operatic center was without a production in the 19th century...the popularity of "Die Zauberflote" has never waned."

Though the opera draws upon diverse sources (farce, fairy tales, myth and magic), the Masonic beliefs of Mozart and Schikaneder unite the disparate elements and narrative absurdities. Sarastro originally appears to be Pamina's kidnapper. But by the **Act I Finale**, the Masonic implications of the activity become clear. Silliness still reigns at the opening, as Papageno's bells sets the menacing slaves to dancing. But Sarastro appears, and the first great choruses of the opera begin. Pamina and Tamino embrace, preparing to embark upon the (masonic) trials to earn their freedom. The act closes with a powerful choral hymn at the heart of 18th-century freemasonry: virtue and justice will make a paradise on earth.

INTERMISSION

Most 18th-century composers based their variation sets on popular tunes, often from opera. Mozart followed this practice, drawing upon operatic arias from Salieri, Sarti, Gretry, and Gluck, among others. So it's no surprise that Mozart turned to another opera composer, Paisiello, and his aria **Tu salve, Domine**. What constitutes the real surprise is how he abandons the typical 18th-century variation structure. The first three variations adhere to the 22-bar structure of the theme. However, as he shifts to the minor mode (another typical feature of the era), he abolishes the predictable thematic boundary. None of the subsequent variations precisely retain that opening structure. The fifth variation dissolves into total sextuplet figuration, as Mozart approaches the through-composed improvisations of Beethoven.

While Mozart's journey to Mannheim and Paris in 1777-78 failed to yield the employment Mozart sought, he wrote some wonderful music in both cities. In Mannheim the surgeon Ferdinand Dejean commissioned a series of flute concertos and quartets. Mozart provided him with at least one work in each genre, as well as a flute transcription of his oboe concerto. He also wrote the **Andante in C Major** for flute and orchestra at this time. Perhaps Mozart intended it as a substitute slow movement for the flute concerto K.313, as the original and surprisingly passionate Adagio slow movement may not have been to Dejean's liking. Mozart sets this charming Andante in sonata form, with graceful and tender themes in every section. In the closing section (the recap) Mozart offers an intensification of the opening material both harmonically and melodically - in wider, octave leaps to dissonant pitches. While Dejean did not receive all the pieces he commissioned, Mozart scholar Stanley Sadie says that the best of these works nonetheless "...lent a measure of immortality to his name."

Mozart scholarship originally thought that he wrote the trio **Dir, Seele des Weltalls** by 1783, before he joined the Viennese Masonic Lodge. It belonged to a cantata of the same name which Mozart left unfinished, and alternates between rich choral homophony and occasional passages of imitation. But then the comprehensive Masonic symbolism began to cast doubt upon this early date. The number three is of paramount importance to Masonry - and Mozart set it for three voices in the key of E-flat Major (three flats). In the 18th century and beyond, Masonic ritual focused on men only, and male choruses appear in all of Mozart's Masonic vocal works. Mozart scholar Paul Nettl says the text refers to the sun worship of the Egyptians, which Mozart drew upon so heavily in "Magic Flute." From the sun "Oh mighty one...from thee comes fertility, warmth and light." Scholarship now focuses on 1785-86 as a more probably date. By then, according to Mozart biographer Maynard Solomon, "through his fame and devotion to the order, Mozart was regarded as one of the outstanding Masons of the time."

Composition lessons in the 18th century focused on one skill above all others: counterpoint. Haydn gave Beethoven lessons in contrapuntal technique, as did Mozart for his English student Thomas Attwood. While Mozart included only the occasional contrapuntal passage in the men's trio above, he subtitles **Caro bel idolo mio** as a "Kanon" referring directly to the centuries-old history of strict counterpoint. Listen as the long opening subject in the soprano line passes to each of the other voices as they enter. Before the final voice concludes its rendition, the sopranos start the process all over again with a theme that dominates the second half of the piece. He wrote this canon in 1788, and it reflects both a career's experience in this technique and his particular genius at veiling the structure behind late-period chromaticism and ancillary imitation.

The 1780 **Vesperae solennes de confessore** constitutes one of Mozart's final sacred works for Salzburg, and it remains one of his most popular. Mozart wrote only two sets of Vespers, the other dating from 1779. They both draw upon the full set of five psalms and a concluding Magnificat, allowing a wider range of styles than was customary in his early masses. He fashions a primarily homophonic choral texture for the opening Dixit, allowing strong local color and surprising accents to reinforce the distant keys. The following Laudate Dominum highlights Mozart's tender and poignant simplicity. In contrast the Magnificat offers the sophisticated choral counterpoint and imitation often so often proscribed from Mozart's Salzburg masses. The powerful fugato passages hint at the Viennese grandeur to come, providing a dramatic close to this year's Mozart bash.