

Program notes

Welcome to Chicago Master Singers' 44th annual season! Thank you for coming to these special performances of "Mozart's Mastery." CMS is pleased to perform choral-orchestral masterworks again and is honored to collaborate with soloists Michelle Areyzaga, Kim Leeds, Klaus Georg, and Keven Keys, concertmaster Thomas Yang, and the Metropolis Symphony Orchestra. Of course, none of this would be possible without you, our valued patrons—thank you.

Today's program focuses on the music of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791). It juxtaposes two of the very last pieces he composed, his iconic Requiem and beloved motet *Ave verum corpus*, with his youthful Solemn Vespers. In all of his works, whether an early or mature piece, Mozart demonstrates a sophisticated sense of melodic phrasing and harmonic tension, as well as a keen sense of pacing and storytelling.

Mozart's Requiem is one of the most enduring pieces of classical music. And for good reason! Its long-lasting popularity is due to its multifaceted nature and Mozart's dramatic elevation of the ancient liturgical texts. He appropriately expresses the solemnity of death by featuring the rich timbres of basset horns, brass, and timpani and omitting the lighter sounds of flutes and clarinets. In contrast, some movements demonstrate sincere devotion and even lightheartedness. Musically, Mozart's Requiem undoubtedly deserves its preeminent place within the canon.

One does wonder, however, if the mythology surrounding the Requiem accelerated the work's attainment of this elevated position. It is well known that Mozart composed this work on his own deathbed. He wrote almost everything up to and including the *Hostias* movement; some movements are complete, while others only have choral parts with a figured bass line. Mozart died before completing it, however. His pupil Franz Xaver Süssmayr (1766–1803) finished the work on his behalf. Süssmayr was considered to be merely an average student, and his role in the Requiem is considered controversial today. His contributions are often criticized: Did he have additional sketches by Mozart and dishonestly pass them off as his own work? Or, does he deserve more credit than he receives because he was written out of history by Mozart's widow in an attempt to preserve Mozart's reputation?

Of course, these questions are impossible to answer, and, for better or worse, Mozart and Süssmayr are inextricably linked. In recent decades, scholars have created their own completions of the Requiem based on Mozart's extant sketches; however, Süssmayr's continues to be considered the "standard." Regardless of where the truth lies, Mozart's Requiem transcends controversy and rightly holds its place atop choral-orchestral repertoire.

Mozart composed *Ave verum corpus* in June 1791, while vacationing in Baden. Within its mere 46 measures, this motet for Corpus Christi concisely captures Mozart's mature style and displays the quintessential elements of the late

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Classical era. The famous musicologist Karl Geiringer remarked that “rarely has so much fervor and classical beauty been poured into so tiny a vessel.”

We will conclude our performance with the Solemn Vespers, an early work from Mozart’s time in Salzburg. He composed this work in 1780, a year after his first Vespers setting, *Vesperae solennes de Dominica*, KV 321. The texts for both of Mozart’s Vespers settings come from Psalms 109 [110], 110 [111], 111 [112], 112 [113], 116 [117], and the Magnificat canticle. Each movement concludes with the Gloria Patri doxology. Mozart’s Vespers settings mark the feast days of both “a confessor who was not a bishop” and the feast days of “a confessor who was a bishop.” This flexibility makes the work appropriate for many church services.

In contrast to the other pieces on this program that demonstrate Mozart’s mature style, in this piece, we find an ambitious composer of 24 years of age eager to show off his competence and versatility. The first three movements are quickly identifiable as Mozart with playful articulations, imitative counterpoint, and bright tempi. The “Laudate pueri” movement is Neo-Baroque in its strict-style counterpoint, while the “Laudate Dominum” features the Soprano soloist with a gentile melody fit for an opera house. The final movement is thematically connected to the first, creating a rounded form within the work as a whole.

This piece typifies the Salzburg style. It is concise with overlapping texts and limited orchestration. Most obviously, it does not use violas. The three *colla parte* trombones, which double the upper three choral lines, are also indicative of the Salzburg style. We know that Mozart was quite pleased with this piece because he asked his father to send him a copy in Vienna after he had left Salzburg. Presumably, he wanted to show the piece to prospective patrons.

It is quite fitting to be performing Mozart’s Requiem and Solemn Vespers, both of which have funereal themes, at this time of year, when many commemorate All Saints Day and All Souls Day. I hope our performance is a blessing during these times of remembrance. I hope to see you again soon at an upcoming CMS concert.

John C. Hughes, D.M.A.
Music Director