

PROGRAM NOTES

Henry Purcell's *Funeral Music for Queen Mary* comprises three movements on texts from the Book of Common Prayer that are used in the Anglican burial service, plus two instrumental pieces, a slow march and proclamatory-sounding canzona. Queen Mary II of England died at the end of 1694, and her funeral took place some months later on March 5, 1695, during which Purcell's music was heard along with pieces by the Renaissance composer Thomas Morley. Both the March and Canzona feature four "flatt trumpets," by which Purcell meant slide trumpets capable of playing in a minor key. The three vocal movements all feature four-part choir accompanied by basso continuo, each somber, contemplative, and elegiac, but also bearing brief moments of expressively clashing dissonances that characterize English polyphony from the Renaissance through Purcell's own time.

Four more vocal solos underscore themes of death and mourning that run throughout this program. Heinrich Schütz's "Fili mi, Absalon" belongs to a large collection of sacred vocal music, the *Symphoniae Sacrae*, Part 1 (he would publish two more parts), which he published in 1629. The bass singer represents the biblical David, whom we hear lamenting his dead son Absalon while repeating his name obsessively. The distinctive cast of this piece comes from its four trombones, and "Fili mi, Absalon" stands in a series of works—including the "Tuba mirum" of Mozart's Requiem—that draw on low brass as a musical emblem of death. Specific keys, usually in the minor mode, can bear the same associations. For the arioso "Figlia mia, non pianger, no" from *Tamerlano*, in which the conquered Sultan Bajazet comforts his daughter, George Friedrich Handel chose the unusual key of F minor not simply to depict their sadness, but to underscore the Sultan's determination to commit suicide and thus the premonition of death that he mentions.

It is Juditha herself who sings "Veni, veni, me sequere fida" in Antonio Vivaldi's *Juditha Triumphans*. The topic, again, is death: she, a widow, commiserates with her servant who is also widowed. The expressive device here is neither the key of the piece nor an emblematic instrument, but the metaphor of the lamenting turtledove, hence the stylized cooing by the obbligato soprano chalumeau (a clarinet predecessor). "Quando spieghi i tuoi tormenti" from Handel's *Orlando* uses another avian metaphor—in this case, the nightingale's amorous warbling—which is heard in both the violin and soprano parts as the shepherdess Dorinda laments her unrequited love for Medoro, an African prince.

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The threads of historical fact and imaginative fiction within the story of Mozart's Requiem are so closely intertwined that we will never completely separate them. But among the undisputed facts of the piece, even the briefest ignite our imagination: initiated by a private commission made in July of 1791, the Requiem is Mozart's final work, one that he left incomplete upon his death on December 5 (the piece was finished by Mozart's colleague, Joseph Eybler, and student, Franz Xaver Süssmayr). Friends rehearsed it with him the day before he died, when he seemed to be recovering from his grave illness, but the Requiem's first public performance just days later on December 10 marked the composer's own exequies. Atop these known facts, imaginative anecdotes about the Requiem began to accumulate almost from the moment of Mozart's death, most centering on the composer's state of mind during his final weeks while working on the piece.

Mozart's widow, Costanze, and two early biographers who relied on her, Franz Xaver Niemetschek and Johann Friedrich Rochlitz, are the earliest sources of a sensationalized account of the Requiem in which Mozart knew neither the source of the commission

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nor the identity of the messenger who bore it, came to be haunted by the project, believing not only that he'd been poisoned, but also that the piece would mark his own passing. According to Niemetschek, Mozart, on his deathbed, had the score of the Requiem brought to him a final time and asked, "Did I not say before that I was writing this Requiem for myself?"

Perhaps he did say so, but there is much in this early account that is concocted. To start, Mozart likely knew the source of the commission, Count Franz von Walsegg, through a mutual friend who lived in Walsegg's Vienna villa. At any rate, there is no evidence that Mozart was haunted by either the commission or its source. Instead, he worked eagerly on the project, as attested by his cheery letters from October and November of 1791. And the consensus on the cause of Mozart's death, both at the moment he died and today, is that he suffered from "severe miliary fever" (hitziges Friesel Fieber)—i.e., a severe rheumatic fever—and not poisoning.

Mozart's enthusiasm for the Requiem project reflected his rekindled interest in sacred music during the last few years of his life. Between 1787 and 1791, Mozart composed fragments for six different Masses, and the Requiem afforded him the opportunity to work, as Costanze would later attest, "[in a] higher pathetic style of church music that had always appealed to his genius." A crucial ingredient of this style lies in the Requiem's wind and brass instrumentation: there are no flutes, oboes, or horns; instead, the orchestra uses basset-horns, bassoons, trumpets, and, in the "Tuba mirum," trombone. The result is a dark, lower-pitched, and even hollowed-sounding wind-and-brass color that we notice from the very opening of the piece.

Within this overall color, Mozart uses four main vocal textures to bring out

variations of mood. Choral homophony—a texture in which the different parts all move together—vividly depicts the force of divine power in the "Dies irae" (Day of wrath) and the "Rex tremendae majestatis" (King of dreadful majesty), whereas the loosely knit counterpoint of the "Requiem aeternam" (Eternal rest) and the "Recordare, Jesu pie" (Remember, merciful Jesus), in their overlapping petitioning lines, invoke a plaintive, supplicating spirit in the music. Cantabile solos—heard, for example in the "Te decet hymnus" (You are praised) passage of the opening movement and in the "Tuba mirum spargens sonum" (The trumpet, scattering a wondrous sound)—are, by contrast, aimed at moments of greater intimacy or of deep persuasion. And fugal textures reminiscent of the Baroque summon up a mood of solemnity and dignity in, for example, the "Kyrie eleison" (Lord have mercy) and the "Osanna in excelsis" (Hosanna in the highest). Beyond Mozart's movement-by-movement text-expressive approaches, there is also larger-scale design at work here. First, those fugal movements just mentioned also mark the conclusion of each of the liturgical sections of the Requiem. Thus, for example, the several movements subsumed under the Sequence conclude with a fugal "Amen," the Offertory with a fugal "Quam olim Abrahae," and the Sanctus with a fugal "Osanna in excelsis." Mozart also reprises the music of the opening Requiem theme for the two times that the text "dona eis requiem" (grant them eternal rest) is repeated after the beginning. Thus, that haunting opening music functions like a refrain across the whole of this extraordinary work.

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