

**Missa in C (Coronation Mass) K. 317** It's no secret that Mozart did not get along very well with his boss in Salzburg. The Archbishop Count Colloredo had a somewhat heavy hand in dealing with the young composer, and was adamant about instituting ecclesiastical reforms, also supported by Emperor Joseph: keep the music short and tight. Moreover, Mozart's return to Salzburg in January, 1779, after a long trip to Mannheim, Munich and Paris, was a rather glum affair. His attempts at gaining a position, or at the very least, strong patronage throughout the trip, were only modestly successful; most tragic of all, his mother had died quite suddenly the previous July (1778), while in Paris. Now back in Salzburg in mid-winter, Mozart prepared what was to be his penultimate mass for the Archbishop (Mozart moved to Vienna in 1781) - indeed the next to last complete mass of his life, since the great *c minor mass* (K. 427) and the *Requiem* (K. 626), which came during his Vienna years, were left incomplete (his last complete mass K.337, was written in 1780). Without question, however, the present mass (K. 317), commonly known as the "Coronation" mass, is the outstanding mass of Mozart's "Salzburg" years. While in many ways he adheres to the dictum of the reforms (the whole mass should last no more than three-quarters of an hour), there is a grandness and majesty to the whole which belies its relatively brief length. The construction is mainly homophonic, and the entire mass comes in at just under half-hour in length, but the effect of the whole is more akin to a *missa solemnis* - a grand and powerful experience. The manuscript of the mass is dated March, 1779, and was almost certainly performed on Easter Sunday (April 4) of that year. The appellation "Coronation," not given by Mozart, is a bit more elusive in origin. It was long thought that the nickname was added to the work when it was chosen to be performed (by Salieri !) at the coronation ceremony of Leopold II as King of Bohemia, on September 6, 1791, just months before Mozart's death. The work was also possibly used at the coronation ceremony of Leopold as Holy Roman Emperor, earlier in 1790. Recent scholarship now suggests that these performances are less likely. Regardless, in spite of the tension with his employer, in spite of his rather disappointing trip, and in the face of personal tragedy with the recent death of his mother, Mozart pens a glorious work, one quite possibly chosen many years later for a coronation of an emperor, and one which remains a crown jewel amongst his sacred works to this day. The work opens with a rather solemn but powerful "Kyrie," the chorus in declamation, with the oboes sustaining long tones and the strings providing motion via a dotted-rhythm line. While at first glance this music seems an odd choice for the text ("Lord

have mercy”), perhaps deep anguish could be viewed as the urgent factor expressed in the strong statement. There follows the entrance of soloists and a lighter texture. The heavier, opening material returns to close out the movement. The “Gloria” features, as one might expect, joyful, ebullient music and is tightly knit. The structure is much like a taut sonata-form, with themes being presented, developed, then returning (development at “Qui tollis, and recapitulation at “Quoniam”). Soloists emerge at critical moments throughout the movement, to great effect. The “Credo” movement is the longest (usually clocking in at around 7 minutes). Mozart deftly starts this longer journey with great energy in the violins, creating motion and excitement; when the chorus comes in, it does so on a single reciting tone, serving as a simpler foil to the active strings. A more somber section is introduced by the soloists at “Et incarnatus” which continues throughout the “Crucifixus,” now sung by the chorus. The return of the jubilant opening for “Et resurrexit” gives the movement the feel of a rondo. A powerful “Amen” featuring staggered entrances in the chorus concludes the movement. No sooner have we caught our collective breath when Mozart plunges us into a glorious “Sanctus”; listen for the trills in the lower strings and bassoons - this bass line provides motion which sets the static, but powerful declamations of the chorus, the effect of the whole almost overwhelming, were it not for the fact that its aim and vision is nothing less than setting the text "Holy holy holy". The pace quickens and the trills become even more prominent as we move to the initial “Ossana” which is quite short. As expected, the “Benedictus” features soloists throughout and is more tranquil in nature. When the “Ossana” returns, Mozart interrupts the return by bringing back the “Benedictus” material once again, before continuing with the “Osanna” and completing the movement - definitely an unusual move. The “Agnus Dei” is sublime, and as often is mentioned, somewhat reminiscent of the soprano solo “Dove sono” from Mozart's *Nozze di Figaro* (1786 – so keep in mind the mass came first). Towards the end of the movement, the main theme returns in the soprano, this time with pizzicato upper strings - - a truly magical moment. This leads to the “Dona nobis pacem” where Mozart deftly brings back music from the “Kyrie” thus unifying the work, and providing a satisfying sense of closure to the whole. © Jonathan Saylor