

Program 3 – Week of April 19, 2020

Misericordias Domini in D minor, K. 222 dates from early 1775, when Mozart was in Munich, overseeing the performance of his opera buffa *La Finta Giardiniera*. The work is scored for SATB chorus, violins, cello/bass and organ continuo (although it should be noted that the Breitkopf & Hartel edition includes violas, paired oboes, and paired horns, apparently added by 1807, but not by Mozart). While in Munich, the Elector Maximilian II Joseph of Bavaria, for whom Mozart had written his opera, expressed a desire to hear some “contrapuntal” music by the composer. What the 19-year-old composer came up with must have surpassed all expectations -- his *Misericordias Domini* offertory is nothing less than a contrapuntal tour de force. Instead of alternating choral forces with soloists, Mozart here opts for alternating eleven times between homophonic choral entries (“*Misericordias Domini*,” often in softer dynamics, befitting the text), and more forceful contrapuntal imitative polyphony (“*Cantabo in aeternam*”). Two other points are worth mentioning; about one minute into the work, Mozart uses a theme in the violins that is identical to Beethoven’s famous “Ode to Joy” theme which will come some 50 years later in the last movement of his Ninth Symphony. The theme starts out identically, but then sequences differently by the second measure -- nevertheless, the similarity is startling, in large measure because of how famous Beethoven’s version would become. It is unlikely that Beethoven would have used a theme buried within such a relatively obscure work; more probable is a generic coincidence. The other moment worth noting comes near the very end of the piece where Mozart has the basses sit on a tonic (and later dominant) pedal (long held note), a most powerful effect and one that almost always signals the end of a piece. Through this device and mostly via the severe counterpoint he maintains throughout the work, Mozart both salutes tradition and confirms his genius -- a teenager handling contrapuntal majesty with total aplomb.

Regina Coeli in C major, K. 108 was written in Salzburg and dated May, 1771. While barely 15 minutes long, Mozart divides the work into four movements and features a rather festive orchestration of paired flutes, paired oboes, paired horns, paired trumpets, timpani, strings, organ plus SATB chorus and soprano soloist. The opening is joyous and exuberant with faster moving bass and upper string lines contrasting with the slower, homophonic choral statements. The homophony is finally interrupted by held whole notes in the sopranos on “alleluia” effectively echoed by tenors, later mirrored by an alto entrance echoed by basses. After that energetic opening, the second movement, marked “tempo moderato” contrasts beautifully through the use of a pastoral atmosphere, emphasized by using paired flutes which typically play in parallel thirds. This bucolic setting accompanies a solo soprano in one of the loveliest moments of the work. The soprano line features sixteenth-note runs and a wonderful sequence as only Mozart seemed to be able to write. Part of the sweetness of the movement is its lilting 3/4 meter, whereas the rest of the piece is in some type of duple meter. After the full chorus comes in, the same solo/chorus pattern is repeated bringing this truly glorious movement to a close. As if the soprano were just warming up, there follows a third movement, and *Adagio* in a minor, which functions as a solo aria for soprano and strings. One of the interesting features of this third movement is how Mozart deftly doubles the soprano line with the first violins for extended periods, producing a marvelous color and “lifting” the vocal line internally in the orchestra. Once again, by way of contrast, the fourth and final movement brings the entire orchestra out in full force with a brisk *Allegro* in 2/4 meter. There are two fairly brief interjections by the solo soprano with some roulades on alleluia foreshadowing the final movement of Mozart’s famous *Exsultate jubilate*, K. 165 to come two years

later. The emphasis here, however, is on effervescent joy, with full throated chorus, brilliant string parts and majestic winds punctuating throughout -- a remarkable work for a 15-year old!

Tantum Ergo ("Therefore so great") is the opening of the last two verses of the famous medieval hymn *Pange Lingua*, written by Thomas Aquinas around 1264 for the Feast of Corpus Christi. The use of these two verses within the Catholic tradition has generally occurred during the veneration and benediction of the Blessed Sacrament. The verses have been set by many composers, including Palestrina, Victoria, Bruckner, and possibly, Mozart. It was long thought that Mozart had composed two settings of this text (K. 142, K. 197). Scholars ultimately cast doubts on both, however, since the attributions were late and not fully supported. The eminent Mozart scholar (and editor of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music*) Stanley Sadie once quipped, "I'd be a shade surprised if K. 197 turned out to be Mozart, rather less so if the attractive K. 142 did." Some have attributed K. 142 to Jan Zach, another 18th century composer, but recent scholarship has cast doubts on that attribution as well. Regardless, K. 142 is a lovely setting of this famous text, lasting around 5 minutes in length. The orchestration is interesting in that it features paired trumpets, strings, organ, soprano soloist and chorus. After a beautiful, lilting orchestral introduction, the soprano enters with a lyrical melody doubled by the violins. and punctuated with choral responses, often in the form of a call/response texture. There is a wonderful, brief excursion to the minor mode, and the whole exudes a charm and beauty that makes the Mozart attribution understandable. The trumpets add a subtle, yet effective color, and the repetition of material for the last verse ("Genitori"), lends to the music a welcome and comforting familiarity. The short work ends with a vigorous and concise "Amen."