

Vesperae solennes de Dominica K. 321 Mozart composed two complete settings of the Vesper Psalms for Archbishop Colloredo; both include the same full set of five Psalms (110 [109 -Vulgate], 111, 112, 113, 115 and a Magnificat. K. 321., also known as the *Vesperae de Dominica*, was composed in 1779, while the other, perhaps better known setting, entitled *Vesperae de Confesore*, was composed a year later, in 1780. Mozart presumably thought highly of both since, in a letter dated March 12, 1783, he asks his father Leopold to send both settings to Vienna so that he can show them to his friend and patron Baron von Swieten. The *Vesperae de Dominica* is set for orchestra, including two trumpets, timpani, and three trombones (doubling vocal lines), organ, chorus and four soloists. The opening movement is the well-known Psalm “Dixit Dominus” which was so famously set by Handel. Mozart likewise begins the movement in vigorous fashion, with trumpets, timpani and full chorus, with soloists emerging in measure 15. The full texture is significant since the trumpets and timpani will not be used throughout the following four movements. The harmonic moves for the work as a whole are interesting in that only the outer movements are in the home key of C major; Confitebor is in c minor, Beatus Vir B flat major, Laudate Pueri F major and the Laudate Dominum in A major. The strongest contrast can be seen in these latter two movements (#4, 5): The Laudate Pueri Alfred Einstein cleverly suggests, can be imagined sung by “the marble choir boys of Donetello,” opening in a strict a cappella canon, then flowing in a freer fashion as it proceeds. It also ends with a truly remarkable setting of the “Amen.” The Laudate Dominum is a sacred coloratura aria for solo soprano with obbligato organ part. Confitebor starts out with interesting exchanges between the solo soprano and chorus, with ultimately all four soloists joining in. The Beatus Vir displays Mozart's increased restlessness in liturgical music and captures what Einstein calls “passionate solemnity,” with the orchestra and choir seemingly becoming more independent of each other without destroying a vital unity. The concluding Magnificat fuses symphonic majesty and choral ebullience into one glorious whole.

© Jonathan Saylor