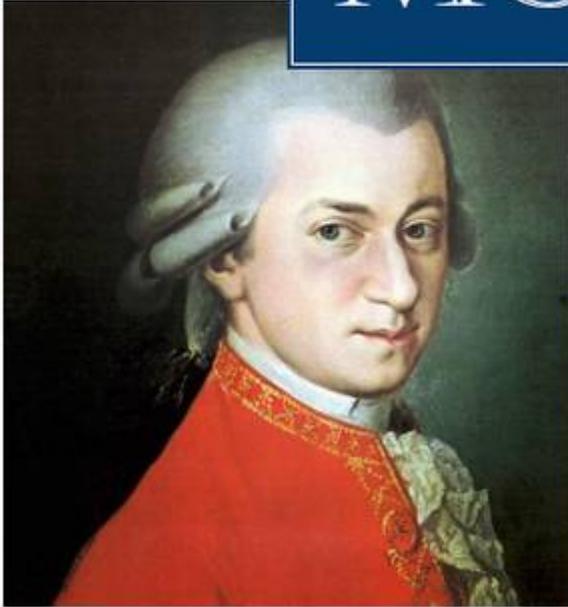


MOZART



*The
Expressive
Voice*

Oxford Girls' Choir Ensemble 1790

Directed by

Richard Vendome and Penelope Martin-Smith

Sunday 7th May • 7.30 PM
HOLYWELL MUSIC ROOM

Tickets: £12 (£8 concessions) available at the door or from Oxford Playhouse
<ticketsoxford@oxfordplayhouse.com> or telephone: 01865 305305

Oxford Youth Choirs is a registered charity (no. 299109)

programme:

Mass in C minor K427 - Kyrie

Kyrie - Christe - Kyrie (solo: Sophie Kent)

Requiem K626 -

Recordare (quartet: Emily Moughton, Rita Oldenbourg, Imogen Carr, Benjamin Thompson)

Lacrymosa

Benedictus (trio: Clemency Stephenson, Elizabeth Nixon, Hugo Tucker, Benjamin Thompson)

Idomeneo K366 –

chorus - Placido è il mar (solo: Penelope Martin-Smith)

Popoli di Tessaglia K316 - Io non chiedo, eterni dei - Recitative and Aria for Soprano (solo: Penelope Martin-Smith)

~ *interval* ~

Alleluia (Exultate jubilate K165) (solo: Amy Webber)

Il Nozze di Figaro K492 -

Voi che sapete (solo: Elena Marcus)

E Susanna non vien - Dove sono (solo: Daisy Venables)

Mass in C minor K427 - Gloria

Gloria in excelsis Deo

Et in terra pax

Laudamus te (solo: Emma Gullifer)

Gratias

Domine Deus (duet: Alik Salter, Sophie Kent)

Qui tollis

Quoniam tu solus (trio: Hermione Thompson, Rosie Dilnot, Hugo Tucker)

Cum Sancto Spiritu

programme notes

This year marks the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth, 1756; he died in 1791 at just 35. Today we celebrate the expressive role of the voice in his music; the forms and idioms of earlier operatic and sacred music are still present, but in Mozart we hear a new emotional narrative which paves the way for Schubert and the Romantic era.

Mass in C minor

Our programme includes sections from his two greatest sacred works, the Mass in C minor and the Requiem, neither of which were completed. The latter, of course, was unfinished because of his death, but the Mass was probably a victim of his resignation from the service of the Archbishop of Salzburg and of his marriage, against his father's wishes, to Constanze Weber in 1782. When the couple returned to Salzburg after the wedding Mozart brought with him the incomplete score of the Mass and vowed to finish it. It remained incomplete, however, lacking the Agnus Dei and most of the Credo, and with the orchestration incomplete. It was first heard on August 25th 1783 in St Peter's Church, Salzburg with Constanze herself taking one of the solo parts. Perhaps the missing sections were left out or sung to other music. The work is a masterful display of Mozart's contrapuntal style, showing an impressive understanding Bach and Handel.

Requiem

The strange circumstances of the Requiem's commission have ensured a continuing fascination with this last composition. In 1808 Franz Xaver Niemetschek wrote in his biography of Mozart:

Shortly before the Coronation of the Emperor Leopold, and before Mozart received the commission to go to Prague, an unsigned letter was handed to him by an unknown messenger which, with many flattering remarks, contained the question whether Mozart would like to undertake the composition of a Requiem, for what price, and how soon he would be able to deliver it.

Mozart, who was accustomed to take no step without consulting his wife, related to her this strange commission, and at the same time mentioned his desire to try his hand at this type of work too, the more so as the elevated and exalted style of church music was always close to his genius. She advised him to accept the commission. He therefore wrote to the unknown gentleman to say that he would write the Requiem for a certain sum....

On his return (from Prague) he at once took up the Requiem, and worked at it with much effort and keen interest: but his illness visibly increased its hold on him and made him dark and melancholy.... Mozart began to talk of death, and maintained that he was writing the Requiem for himself.... 'I am only too conscious,' he continued, 'my end will not be long in coming: for sure, someone has poisoned me!'

On the day of his death he had the score brought to his bed. 'Did I not say that I was writing this Requiem for myself?' Immediately after his death the messenger announced himself, asked for the work, unfinished as it was, and received it.

Popoli di Tessaglia

This virtuosic piece is one of several concert arias written for Mozart's renowned sister-in-law Aloysia Weber. She was his first choice as a wife out of the Weber sisters but her family refused to allow the match. He was later permitted to marry her sister Constanze. He remained a close

friend of Aloysia and wrote many arias for her exceptionally high voice. These included the role of the Queen of the Night in 'Der Zauberflöte'. Twice we hear a 'G in alt' (4 ledger lines above the treble staff!) towards the end of the aria - the highest note written for the voice by Mozart and most other composers.

The text is taken from Act 1 Scene 2 of Gluck's opera 'Alceste'. Alcestis, an exemplary wife and mother, has pledged to the gods to die in place of her husband King Admetus. She is addressing the people of Thessaly in a lamentation of her fate, although she believes that her sacrifice will better serve the King's subjects and children than his own death. The first section is a lengthy and dramatic recitative followed by a gentle aria praying for pity. The finale is a fiery Allegro Assai in which Alcestis declares that no one who has not experienced maternal love or a wife's devotion can comprehend her dejection and sorrow.

Idomeneo

In 1780, at the age of 24, Mozart was requested by the Elector of Bavaria to compose an 'opera seria' for the Hoftheater (now the Cuvilliés Theater) on the theme of Idomeneo, King of Crete, set after the Trojan Wars. This was to combine Italian ideals of music and singing with the French tradition of the tragédie lyrique with its emphasis on chorus, ballet and spectacle. Mozart's model was Antoine Danchet's *Idomenée*, with André Campra (Paris, 1712). In the ideological 'war' of the later 18th century between traditional opera and the supporters of Gluck's the 'reform opera', Mozart here steers a middle course, though after its initial success in Munich, Idomeneo was heard only once more during Mozart's lifetime. In the chorus 'Placido è il mar' (Act 2, scene 5) Elettra, daughter of King Agamemnon of Argos, prepares to leave Crete, but before the ship can sail a violent storm breaks out.

Le Nozze di Figaro

Mozart began work on his 'opera buffa' *The Marriage of Figaro* in 1785, having been asked Emperor Joseph to write an opera for Vienna. The librettist Da Ponte based his text on Beaumarchais' famous comedy, 'Le Mariage de Figaro,' which had proved very popular in Paris. The opera was first heard on May 1st 1786. The plot is a succession of embarrassing and humorous situations, propelled forwards by a torrent of sparkling repartee. Confusing on paper, the story is easy enough to follow on stage, with the help of Mozart's finest melodic writing, as we hear in Cherubino's *Voi che sapete* and the Countess's aria *Dove sono*.

Exultate, jubilate

This motet, composed in Milan in January of 1773, was not written for a woman but for the famous castrato Venanzio Raunzini, who also sang the title role in Mozart's opera seria 'Lucio Silla.' Its expressive but virtuosic idiom is again typical of contemporary Italian operatic style, as we hear in the final *Alleluia*.