

Except for the "Coronation" mass, K. 317, the early complete missae solemnes of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart are among the least known, hence, least performed of his choral works. Mozart wrote seven complete missae solemnes, those masses so named because they are believed to have been written for performance on high ceremonial occasions. These include, in order of composition, K. 139, 66, 167, 262, 257, 317, and 337. "Missa solemnis" was the title given specifically to K. 139 and K. 337, K. 262 was titled "missa [longa]," and the others simply "missa." In addition to the unfinished K. 427, also a solemn mass, Mozart composed eight complete missae breves (K. 49, 65, 192, 194, 220, 258, 259, and 275). These shorter masses were for more ordinary occasions and differ from the missae solemnes in length and, in some cases, fullness of orchestration; they are stylistically quite similar. All of the complete masses call for SATB chorus and four soloists, SATB, except K. 167 which does not employ soloists. Typically, the missae solemnes require two oboes, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, two violins, organ, and continuo instruments. Additional trumpets, violas, horns, and bassoons are sometimes called for as well. Some of the earliest missae breves require only strings and organ; some of the later ones use trumpets and timpani also (the use of trombones to double the three lower voices of the chorus is assumed in four of the nine missae breves). None of the missae breves call for oboes, horns or bassoons. All of Mozart's complete masses were written between 1768 and 1779. During these eleven years, Mozart also wrote many symphonies, a few string quartets, numerous sonatas, concertos, serenades, cassations, divertimentos, and several dramatic works including "La finta semplice," "Mitridate," "Lucio Silla," and "La finta giardiniera." The three earliest masses, K. 49, 139, and 66, were composed in Vienna; the rest were completed in Salzburg.

Of all the early masses, only K. 317 has enjoyed the popularity of the later works of either Mozart or Haydn, particularly Mozart's unfinished "Great" c minor mass, K. 427, and Haydn's "Paukenmesse" or

Mozart's Missa Solemnis K. 262 An Overlooked Masterpiece

by Susan C. Welch

"Nelsonmesse." Since it seems that there is often a tendency to continue to program works with which the public is familiar, these more mature works of Mozart and Haydn, along with Mozart's "Coronation" mass, have been repertoire favorites for many years. It is not only the lack of familiarity that has kept Mozart's early missae solemnis from being performed; not all of them are of exceptional quality. All have exceptional moments, however, and many of the masses exhibit finely wrought, memorable melodies, taut, efficient symphonic structure, mature fugal technique, clever unifying devices, and satisfying buildup and release of musical tension—characteristics of the currently more popular, more frequently performed masses of Haydn and Mozart.

The missa solemnis K. 262 is especially noteworthy in this regard.

It is a work that exhibits all the above characteristics in a manner demonstrating considerable intrinsic value.

Musical value is a difficult thing to establish. Value is often ascribed to a piece based on the appearance of beautiful melodies, pleasing harmonies, dynamic or textural contrasts, or other unusual effects. While all of these elements are important, they make up an incomplete picture of a piece in terms of its value. A more comprehensive assessment of value must consider the interplay of expectation and inevitability of musical elements, accomplished through the buildup and release of musical tension. The effectiveness of this interplay, it seems, determines interest, and interest dictates quality or value. Expectation and inevitability relate directly to structural delineations within the music, which

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in turn determines its architecture. Effective, successful musical architecture results when, over the course of a particular piece, or movement, sufficient musical tension is created to produce in the listener an expectation of resolution, and that necessary and appropriate, inevitable but not predictable, resolution occurs. The most important elements affecting musical tension are melody, rhythm, harmony, and phrasing. "Phrasing" in this context refers to the placement and buildup of cadences within large and small sections of a piece or movement. Harmony is, of course, intertwined with phrasing, and the types of cadences along with the buildup of certain harmonies determine the amount of tension produced.

In the most successful pieces or movements, complementary growth and/or release of tension take place on all levels, from the smallest phrase to the largest section. Greater value is ascribed to particular pieces or movements when all levels participate in or enable the listener to grasp the growth or release taking place in the largest section. Here, smaller phrases contribute to the overriding function rather than undermining it with smaller opposing plans of growth or release, or otherwise undue complexity. In other words, the more the small phrases contribute to the design and function of the larger sections, the more the listener is likely to sense the intended growth or release, and the more successful or valuable the music will seem to be.

In sonata form, the growth and release of harmonic tension is more connected to the elements of the form itself rather than to the manipulation of phrases, which can often be seen more clearly in simpler forms. The growth and/or release of musical tension generally occurs within each of the larger structural sections (Exposition, Development, Recapitulation) as a result of the function of that section. Therefore, movements clearly in sonata form, where the structural sections successfully fulfill their expected functions, are often judged to have greater value. This is due not only to complementary, multi-level growth or release functions within sections, but also to the overall plan of the movement in which tension builds into the Development and is released in the Recapitulation.

Successful musical architecture can be seen in various structural formats: from very loosely structured, to clear sonata design, to movements or sections with highly complex, almost over-structured formats.

The Kyrie of K. 262 is in an interesting concerto-sonata structure. A thirteen-measure orchestral introduction serves as Exposition I. Exposition II has two themes. Theme I is a choral fugato on the "Kyrie" text. A transition using diminished chords prepares for Theme II to the "Christe" text which is sung by the solo quartet and accompanied by the second half of Exposition I transposed up a fifth. Tension in Exposition II builds first to the end of Theme I, then through the Transition and Theme II to the end of the Codetta. A Codetta would ordinarily dissipate tension but this one maintains a dominant harmony until its final cadence which begins the Development section. The Development recalls material from Exposition I and the Transition, as well as the fugato from Exposition II. The Recapitulation brings back the first half of Exposition I and the "Christe" from Exposition II, all in the tonic. Interestingly, the Recapitulation is not clearly delineated by any sort of rhythmic pause: the entrance of Exposition I material overlaps the developed fugato. There is a Coda which begins where the Codetta began previously. Tension begins to build at the Development and momentum continues to the end of the movement, perpetuated by the overlap between the end of the Development and the beginning of the Recapitulation. Sections of the Recapitulation end on dominant chords and the Coda, like its corresponding Codetta, propels the momentum by continuing to reiterate the dominant until the end. Generally, in sonata form, the Recapitulation serves to balance the movement by bringing back expository material in the tonic key and to smoothly dissipate the tension created in the Development. Despite the atypical Recapitulation, K. 262's Kyrie is very successful with function clearly related to form and not just to the manipulation of phrases within a simple tonal structure.

The Benedictus of K. 262 is also in sonata form and is performed by the soloists and the chorus. Theme I begins with the tenor soloist singing the "Benedictus" text, followed by the chorus singing "Hosanna." This

alternation of chorus and soloists continues throughout the movement. An extended soprano solo begins Theme II. In the Development, the material from Theme I is seen in imitation among all four soloists although the "Hosanna" by the chorus is new material. The Recapitulation recalls Theme I, this time presented by soprano and tenor soloists in canon; the second Theme returns as well. Tension begins to build with the extended solo of Theme II and continues to the end of the Development section; the phrase patterns support this growth. The

Recapitulation effectively dissipates this tension in a way that maintains interest by using two soloists in canon for the repeat of Theme I. This is the only one of the seven Benedicti after which there is no repeat of any part of the "Hosanna" which ended the Sanctus.

The second movement of the Credo is in two sections setting the "Et Incarnatus" and "Crucifixus" texts in an A-A' format. The first is set for the soloists and the second for the chorus. "A" begins with a two-measure introduction. The soloists pick up a motive from the introduc-

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tion in imitative counterpoint, S-A-T-B. They move to homophony and cadence on V/V in preparation for a repeat of the original melodic material, this time in the dominant with the order of the entries reversed. This succeeds in partially dissipating the tension created in the first statement of the melody. "A" sets the "Crucifixus" text in the minor dominant and puts the original melody in the strings and oboes. The chorus enters in imitative counterpoint with an accompaniment to the original melody. The "Crucifixus" is quite chromatic and begins to build the

tension again to the mid-point of "A" where downward sequential motion further releases the tension built over the entire movement. More important than phrasing, and as important as the harmony, the imitative style of the movement adds voices separately and then brings them together to a point of arrival. In addition, the pairing of solo and choral sections with their melodic intertwining, and the overriding growth and release functions which encompass them both, make for an extremely lovely and successful movement.

Other movements of Mozart masses exhibit the aforementioned structural qualities. The Kyrie of K. 139 has a loosely organized introduction which is only twelve measures in length, but which shows excellent growth and release of musical tension.

The Benedictus provides another interesting example. In each of its five sections the soprano soloist sings the "Benedictus" text which is followed by a short, homophonic, choral statement of the "Hosanna" text. The harmony builds tension, through the use of dominant and supertonic harmonies, to the end of the fourth section where three tonal centers are heard in close proximity: I-IV-V. Phrasing also contributes to the growth of tension through section four where the choral "Hosanna" is extended. The fifth and final section is an extended solo in the tonic key. In one sense, the return of the tonic in section five helps to dissipate the tension created by having left it. However, the fact that it is more than twice as long as the solo sections that preceded it, that it contains a V/IV-IV

cadence, and that it ends on the V/V all give it a secondary function as a bridge to the "Hosanna" movement which follows and in which dominant becomes tonic. Tension is perpetuated to some extent and complete relaxation is postponed until the "Hosanna."

In K. 66 the "Pleni sunt caeli" portion of the Sanctus displays a simple but very effective buildup of musical tension. It is in two large sections, each in three smaller sections, which differ in the following ways: the first half is in the tonic and the second half moves through the subdominant and the dominant of the dominant; the first half is mostly homophonic and the second is mostly contrapuntal; there is one more measure in each of the three sections of the second half than there were in the first half. Due to these three differences, tension builds to the end of the "Pleni" and is only partly dissipated by the three dominant chords that end the movement. Further dissipation takes place in the "Hosanna" which follows.

The Agnus Dei movements of K. 317 and K. 337 are very similar and equally effective. They are both performed by the soprano soloist and the key to their success is the use of variation technique in their repeating formats: A-B-A'-C-A" and A-B-A'-B' respectively. Tension in both movements builds to the end of each of the two "miserere" sections. In K. 317 the "miserere" sections are harmonically unstable, in K. 337 they are in the dominant. The repeats/variations of "A" serve to dissipate the tension created in both movements. The final "A" of K. 317

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ends on a V7/V and is followed by four measures which continue that harmony and act as a bridge to the "Dona nobis" movement in the key of the dominant. In K. 337, the end of "B" coincides with the beginning of the choral transition to the "Dona." The feeling of resolution is negated and the tension continues to build to the cadence at the end of the transition (dominant to the relative major). Resolution takes place in the instrumental introduction to the "Dona nobis" which is in the relative major key.

The structure of the Benedictus of K. 317 does not conform to any common formal pattern: A-B-A'-C-B'-first half of "Hosanna" from Sanctus-A-second half of "Hosanna" from Sanctus. Musical growth is through "A" to the end of "B" which furthers the growth by reiterating the dominant in short homophonic phrases. The tension is resolved to some extent with the return of "A" material but begins to grow again as this "A" section is extended and becomes more chromatic. A short tag, "C," perpetuates the tension and "B" contains chromatic adjustments which continue the tension to the downbeat of the next section, the first half of the "Hosanna" from the Sanctus. Here the expectation is that there will be a return of "A" material or at least a return of the tonic; neither expectation is fulfilled. The "Hosanna" is abruptly in Allegro assai tempo and continues to reiterate dominant harmony which is not resolved until the return of "A", Allegretto. The tension created to this point is dissipated here in this final "A" section, and the return of the second half of the "Hosanna" from the Sanctus serves as a Coda like it did when it first appeared. At the highest hierarchical level, growth in this movement is perpetuated until the final return of "A". On a smaller level, tension builds to "A" which partly resolves the tension but begins to grow again and continues to grow to the end of the first half of the "Hosanna" section. Harmonic factors have been mentioned, however, phrase patterns corroborate the growth seen by alternating extended contrapuntal sections with short homophonic statements. The "Hosanna" has been incorporated into the Benedictus movement before in K. 139 and K. 262. In this instance, splitting the "Hosanna" used in the Sanctus and

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making it an integral part of the form make for an unusual but very effective movement.

All seven missae solemnes exhibit musical value to a degree worthy of performance. Although consistent quality is not found in all the masses, there are beautiful, interesting, successful passages in every one of them. K. 317, K. 337, and especially K. 262 contain elements of structure and phrase design comparable to other highly acclaimed and frequently performed works of Haydn and Mozart (Full scores, choral scores, and orchestral parts for each of the seven missae solemnes are currently available). While as a group these seven masses do not represent the very best of Mozart, less than the best of Haydn or Mozart should not condemn them to obscurity. The exceptional moments in these works are sufficient reason to perform any one of them, and the overall exceptional quality of K. 262, K. 317, and K. 337 should give them a high standing in the current choral/orchestral performance repertoire.

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