

MasterWorks 2 Concert
Saturday, November 5, 2012

Mass in C Major, K. 317, "Coronation Mass"

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Written: 1779

Movements: five

Style: Classical

Duration: 26 minutes

In 1779 Mozart was in back Salzburg, precisely where he didn't want to be. He had just returned from a sixteen-month sojourn where he was seeking a job that would fit a composer of his talents. The trip took him as far as Paris, but he also visited the influential centers of Munich and Mannheim. It provided some artistic triumphs, but Mozart didn't find the job he so desperately needed. Tragically, Mozart's mother, who was traveling with him, died in Paris. Now he had to return home to Salzburg to accept a paltry appointment from the Archbishop as organist and concertmaster. Having tasted independence, he was back under the suffocating dominance of his father. And he chafed at all of the rules and regulations of his employer. His job description was to "unbegrudgingly and with great diligence, discharge his duties both in the cathedral and at court and in the chapel house, and as occasion presents, to provide the court and church with new compositions of his own creation" One of those new compositions was a Mass for Easter day, 1779.

Writing music – and particularly religious music – on demand had its peculiar problems. Of course, one has to satisfy the tastes of the commissioner while at the same time respecting tradition and one's own integrity. Mozart expressed these particular problems to his Italian teacher Padre Martini:

Our church music is very different from that of Italy, all the more so because a complete mass . . . even the most solemn ones, when the Prince-Archbishop himself presides, may not last more than three quarters of an hour. One needs particular training for this kind of composition; and furthermore it must be a mass with all instruments — trumpets, timpani, etc.

The Archbishop wanted pomp and splendor in his music; he just didn't want it to last very long! Mozart obliged by including the requisite celebratory instruments but omitted the long, drawn-out fugues that were a feature of many choral masses of the day. For the most part, the music is in a homophonic style with everybody singing the same words at the same time, that way he could cover a lot of text in a short amount of time. The exceptions are when the soloists sing.

The whole mass is marked by an upbeat, joyous character – fitting for Easter – starting with the opening prayer, "*Kyrie eleison.*" Only in the *Credo*, at the words "*et incarnatus est,*" (*and became incarnate*) does the mood change dramatically. The solemn mood does not last long as the triumphant feeling begins anew with the text "*et resurrexit*" (*and rose up*). The

Sanctus begins majestically enough, and then at the words “*Osanna in excelsis*” the choir explodes with joy. The solo quartet sings in a lighter, lyrical style for the *Benedictus*, but the choir keeps breaking in with their “*Osannas*.”

The final movement (*Agnus Dei*) begins with a tender aria sung by the soprano that has a strong resemblance to the soprano aria “*Dove sono*” in *The Marriage of Figaro*, written seven years later! The rest of the solo quartet joins in at “*dona nobis pacem*” (*grant us peace*) and the choir bursts in with their final, jubilant utterance on the same words.

Mozart returned to this mass in 1791, when he was present at the coronation festivities in Prague for the new Emperor, Leopold II. He wrote an opera for the occasion, *La clemenza di Tito*, but wrote home asking that the parts for his Mass in C be sent. It is for that reason that this mass is called the *Coronation Mass*.

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Anton Bruckner (1824 - 1896)

Symphony No. 4 in E-flat Major (Romantic)

Written: 1878-80

Movements: Four

Style: Romantic

Duration: 70 minutes

Bruckner! He is my man! That was Richard Wagner’s assessment. The conductor Hans von Bülow had a different idea of Bruckner’s symphonies. He called them the anti-musical ravings of a half-wit. Moreover, when Johannes Brahms, who hated Wagner, saw a score to Bruckner’s *Symphony No. 4* he exclaimed, Look! Here this man composes as though he were a Schubert . . . then he suddenly remembers that he is a Wagnerian, and everything goes to the devil. Even Bruckner wasn’t so sure about this work. At a rehearsal for the first performance of this symphony, a certain passage puzzled Hans Richter, the conductor. He turned around and asked, “What note is this? Any note you please,” Bruckner replied. “Just as you like. He began the symphony in 1874, revised it often and composed a new third movement and new finale in 1878-80, made some more changes for a >last’ autograph score in 1886, and made further revisions for the actual publication in 1889!

Bruckner may not have even been sure what his music was about. He added a program, a short description about the nonmusical content of the work, to this symphony. He described the first movement as “A Citadel in the Middle Ages. Daybreak. Reveille is sounded from the tower. The gates open. Knights on proud chargers leap forth. The magic of nature surrounds them. Then he continues, And in the last movement, I’ve forgotten completely what picture I had in mind.

The many anecdotes surrounding Anton Bruckner’s *Symphony No. 4* suggest what sort of man he was. He was inordinately humble, almost peasant-like in character, and anxious to please. At the end of the dress rehearsal, Bruckner came up to Richter and slipped the conductor a tip. It was a *thaler* – about seventy-five cents! Take it, he said, and drink a mug of

beer to my health.

The *Symphony No. 4* itself follows the traditional plan of a symphony. The four movements come in the predictable order: fast, slow, scherzo and fast. The interior forms also apply. The first movement is in a *sonata-allegro* form with its exposition of two theme groups, one bold and the other lyrical, its development of those themes, and their restatement in a recapitulation. The second movement is a beautiful *romanza*, almost a funeral march- based on three themes. The third movement is a scherzo made up of robust hunting-horn calls. The fourth movement is again in a sonata-allegro form. These simple, classical forms are only the scaffolding for a huge work held together from end to end by motives played by the horn at the very beginning.

Now, having read the above about Bruckner's retreating character, you will be surprised at the massive character of this symphony. Many people compare his symphonies to the great gothic cathedrals of Europe. Yet this symphony also contains a lot of the sort of stillness that reflects the spiritual contemplation of an intensely devout man. Finally, those great, triumphant brassy climaxes – the huge blocks of sound that he elicits from the orchestra – surely must have had their beginnings in Bruckner's background as a church organist, no matter how humble.

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