

## Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) 'Great' Mass in C minor (1783)

**In common with his *Requiem*, Mozart's C minor Mass remains unfinished.**

Mozart left Salzburg in 1781 under something of a cloud. He had fallen out with his employer, Archbishop Colloredo, and was in bad odour with his domineering father over his marriage plans. His return in the late summer of 1783, for the first time in the intervening two years, was a last-ditch attempt to patch things up with his father and to make amends by presenting the Mass he had vowed he would write in thanksgiving for his marriage to Constanze Weber. He was bringing his wife to meet her father-in-law for the first time, and had with him the score of a Mass in C minor, albeit only half-finished.

As always, Mozart would be further deflected from his immediate purpose by favours and requests for minor compositions (for example, the Duos for violin and viola K424/5, written at this time at the request of Michael Haydn). As a result, the promised first performance of this masterpiece of an unfinished Mass setting, which eventually took place on 26 October 1783, was without the *Credo*; Mozart had started it, but it had been incomplete when he arrived in Salzburg, and had remained so. There was no *Agnus Dei* at all (nor would there ever be). The *Sanctus* and *Benedictus*, while substantially present, it seems, for the Salzburg performance, have since, in the absence of the original full score, had to undergo considerable reconstruction from surviving wind and timpani parts. Moreover, the section of the *Credo* that Mozart had composed was completed from those of his sketches that survive, with the help of an unreliable and incomplete set of manuscript parts made much later by Pater Matthäus Fischer (1763–1840) of Augsburg. This first performance had had to be held in the Benedictine Abbey of St Peter's on the outskirts of the city beyond Archbishop Colloredo's jurisdiction because of the ban on orchestral accompanied church music within Salzburg itself – it had been arguments over this that had driven Mozart away in the first place – and because of the composer's fear of arrest over the uncontractual manner of his original departure.

The Mass in C minor is Mozart's only setting of the Mass that was not composed to a commission – all his previous Masses had been written for Salzburg, with very firm restrictions as to form and style. His final sacred pieces, the exceptional *Ave verum corpus* and the *Requiem* of 1791, were also both commissioned. Thus, in the C minor Mass alone, Mozart had the freedom to experiment (though without the incentive to finish it for the fee). During his first two years in Vienna, he had encountered the intellectual diplomat and musical impresario Baron Gottfried van Swieten, and, through him, become familiar with the works of Bach (possibly even the B minor Mass via Bach's son Carl Philipp Emanuel) and of Handel (including *Messiah*, which he would eventually edit, revise and perform). Mozart's exposure to these influences is clearly apparent in his C minor Mass, especially in the highly chromatic writing of the *Qui tollis* for double choir, and in the fugal settings of *Cum sancto spiritu* and *Osanna in excelsis* (fugues were deemed to be excessive and had been severely frowned upon in Salzburg under Colloredo).

This setting of the Mass is a veritable synthesis of the Baroque (that is, for Mozart's time, old-fashioned and stylistically backward-looking) and of Mozart's own earlier, fairly conservative Classical church music styles, all reaching out towards the suave sensuality of the more florid operatic manner that he had recently begun to adopt in Vienna. The *Christe eleison* and at least one of the other soprano arias were written for Constanze to sing; above all, the beautiful and affecting *Laudamus te* could just as easily come from *Le nozze di Figaro* or *Don Giovanni*. Also, the lavish and Italianate coloratura and the cadenza passages of the *Et incarnatus est* are reminiscent of an aria, thought to have been a favourite of Constanze's, from her husband's recent opera *Idomeneo* (1780/1), which was completed at around the time Mozart was preparing to leave Salzburg for Vienna.

There can, however, occasionally be heard in this glorious setting of the Mass a more commanding, noble and dignified (proto-Beethovenian?) style that would find expression again, for example, in the *Requiem*, and that Mozart probably felt was altogether more suited to the solemnity of church music.

The complex and original fugal gravity of the finale of the 'Jupiter' Symphony (his last) is another case in point; the mature Mozart was gradually beginning to emerge in this setting of the Mass (only to be cut off and left frustratingly incomplete) and this makes it stylistically so fascinating, very much a transitional work in Mozart's output. As its sobriquet 'Great' Mass indicates, it is also composed on the unusually grand scale of the so-called 'Cantata Mass' – an extended setting, like Haydn's *Missa Cellensis* of 1766 – which, had Mozart completed it, might have approached the length of Schubert's Mass in E major, or even Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*. Certainly, nothing like it would be heard again in sacred music until those two works appeared some forty years later.

Mozart eventually reworked large parts of this 'noble torso' as the basis of a cantata in Italian (to a libretto provided, it is thought, by his new collaborator Lorenzo Da Ponte) that he was called upon to compose 'in the manner of an Oratorio' for a charity performance in Vienna two years later (*Davidde penitente* of 1785). In doing so, he was abandoning the C minor Mass altogether, and would never return to it. His ecclesiastical connections had effectively been severed when he left Salzburg in 1781 and, ever the pragmatist, he now had other demands to meet and fresh fields to conquer. *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni* beckoned.

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## **Editions**

**Numerous attempts have been made to complete Mozart's unfinished Mass in C minor, or at least to produce a satisfactory performing edition; there are currently no fewer than seven different versions of the score in circulation.**

Sir John Eliot Gardiner clearly favoured using his own 1986 (unpublished) revision of the traditional score that had originally been prepared by Alois Schmitt in 1901. There have been several recent attempts at a completion, among them those by Wilby (2004) and Levin (2005); established editions are by HC Robbins Landon (1956, revised 1984) and by Richard Maunder (OUP 1989). Maunder's seems to be the one many interpreters opt for these days, being less interventionist than most, and is the one, I suspect, that Eliot Gardiner might have chosen, had it existed when he made the first of his outstanding recordings, rather than going to the trouble of preparing his own edition. It is the one we are using for tonight's performance.

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<b>I</b>	<b>Kyrie eleison; Christe eleison</b>	<b><i>Lord, have mercy; Christ, have mercy</i></b>
<b>II</b>	<b>Gloria in excelsis Deo</b>	<b><i>Glory be to God on high</i></b>
	Laudamus te	<i>We praise Thee</i>
	Gratias agimus tibi	<i>We give thanks unto Thee</i>
	Domine Deus	<i>O Lord God</i>
	Qui tollis peccata mundi	<i>Thou who takest away the sins of the world</i>
	Quoniam tu solus sanctus	<i>For only Thou art holy</i>
	Jesu Christe	<i>Lord Jesus Christ</i>
	Cum Sancto Spiritu	<i>With the Holy Spirit</i>
<b>III</b>	<b>Credo in unum Deum</b>	<b><i>I believe in one God</i></b>
	Et incarnatus est	<i>And He was made flesh</i>
<b>IV</b>	<b>Sanctus</b>	<b><i>Holy, holy, holy</i></b>
<b>V</b>	<b>Benedictus</b>	<b><i>Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord</i></b>
	Osanna in excelsis	<i>Hosanna in the highest</i>