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Mozart's unfinished Mass in C minor, K. 427 ('Great Mass')

History, Theory, and Practice of its Completion

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I. Introduction

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Mass in C minor, K. 427 (417a), is one of the great unfinished works ('torsoes', 'fragments') in the history of Western classical music. The incomplete state in which the work survives is considerably less known than that of Mozart's Requiem, Bach's *Die Kunst der Fuge*, or Schubert's 'Unvollendete'. But since a few decades the work is receiving more and more attention. From the 1980s onwards, the period in which 'historically informed performance' ('HIP') became highly successful and well-known to large audiences, the Mass was performed more and more. Many new recordings were made, based on various completions, dating from the early twentieth century until very recently.

It was one of these 'historically informed' performances, recorded in 1986, that draw my attention to the work in the early 1990s. It was the recording of John Eliot Gardiner and his Monteverdi Choir and English Baroque Soloists, with the soprano Sylvia McNair. In the early 1990s, Gardiner was a regular guest at the 'Holland Festival', a cultural event taking place every June in Amsterdam. Year after year from 1990 onwards, Gardiner gave 'semi-scenic' performances of Mozart's 'seven great' operas in the Concertgebouw. I was in the audience at many of them and became a great fan. The first of these performances, of the 'opera seria' *Idomeneo*, with Sylvia McNair and Anne Sofie von Otter in the roles of Ilia and Idamante, was a revelation to me. I kept going to these performances and started looking for Gardiner's recordings of other vocal works. Soon I found the C-minor Mass.

This was another major discovery for me. This was the most beautiful mass I ever heard. It seemed to bring together the best and most diverse of eighteenth-century styles, like a true compendium, yet a wonderfully coherent and balanced piece of art. Very soon I found out about its incomplete state: a long *missa solennis* with a Kyrie of seven minutes and a Gloria in seven movements, but with an incomplete Credo that stops after the 'Et incarnatus est', the second of its probably seven planned movements, a Sanctus and Benedictus, but no Agnus Dei. I started reading about it and bought me a score, the Dover reprint of the Alte Mozart Ausgabe, *AMA*, edited by Philipp Spitta and originally published by Breitkopf & Härtel in 1882. It offers the 'fragment', just the notes that Mozart left. And I came face to face with the empty staves in the 'Et incarnatus est', the aria I loved so much, waiting there, as it were, to be finished in the style of the composer. And as a conservatory-trained music theorist and arranger, I could not resist the temptation of trying my hand on it. For years, however, my attempts remained just a hobby.

Then, in the autumn of 2004, I was invited to make a completion of the entire Mass, for a performance in the Mozart year 2006. The invitation came from a colleague at the Conservatory of Amsterdam, where I taught analysis, harmony, and arranging. The colleague was violinist-conductor Johannes Leertouwer, then also concertmaster of the Netherlands Bach Society, with whom I had successfully collaborated in several projects 'Analyse & Uitvoering' ('Analysis & Performance'). He

had been invited to conduct the Mozart concert planned by the Bach Society for the Mozart year 2006. I proposed to perform the C-minor Mass, but in a new version that I would be able to supply. He readily accepted and I took to work. The performance finally was not by the Bach Society. Already earlier, the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century had planned to perform the Mass in 2006, and programming it twice in a year was seen as too risky. Leertouwer then suggested to Frans Brüggen to do my version (in the making). And so it happened in April 2006. Only after the positive reception of the Mass, I dared to accept the next invitation, from both Leertouwer and Brüggen, to prepare a new version of the Requiem. This was performed in October 2006 in two countries simultaneously: in Holland by the Netherlands Bach Society under Johannes Leertouwer and in Poland by the Orchestra of the Eighteenth Century under Frans Brüggen.

Only after the positive reception of these performances, the idea came up, with me and the directors of the Conservatory of Amsterdam, to make my completions the subject of a research project, as a form of ‘practice-based research’, a kind of research in the arts that was making a quick rise in those years. Initially, my research was going to include both the C-minor Mass and the Requiem. I saw the latter as Mozart’s picking up on the genre of church music after an eight-year break. Research results about the one work, could be of importance for the other. Only in 2015, I saw that I had to give up this idea; it simply was too big. And I focused on the C-minor Mass, the earlier work.

During my work on the completion, in 2004 to 2006, I had also studied the existing completions, especially those by Harold Robbins Landon, Helmut Eder, Franz Beyer, and a new one, by Robert Levin. I concluded that these versions all had their problems (and so thought Frans Brüggen), the most important of which were:

- the writing for strings, both in terms of general technique and in terms of Mozart’s individual style of composition and instrumentation;
- the reconstruction of the Sanctus double choir from the few sources there are; a daunting task, all the more since eight-part harmony and counterpoint does not even belong to the normal training of the music-theorist, let alone that of a musicologist or a performer.

It was no surprise that all the existing solutions were different. Moreover, no foreword or critical commentary could, in my opinion, give really convincing answers to the many questions involved.

This made it clear to me what my research project should include: not only a solid musicological (historical) and music-theoretical underpinning of my own version, but also a well-founded argument why there was a need for a new version, based on a thorough analysis and evaluation of all the existing versions.

This is what this dissertation hopes to offer. But there is another aim: by combining musicology, music theory, including arranging, and experience in collaborating with performers (conservatory students and colleagues), and by showing what this collaboration can result in, I hope

to convince readers that, at least in projects like these, the disciplines should be combined and work together. And since music theory is located, in most cases, at conservatories, in close contact with performing practice, and contains both practical skills (ear training, analysis, counterpoint, harmony and, for some, arranging) and academic subdisciplines (history of music theory and, for some, writing about music), it seems to be in an excellent position to bring the various disciplines together. For that reason, this dissertation should also be seen as a plea for collaboration: not just ‘Analysis and Performance’, but ‘History, Theory (including Arranging) and Performance’.