

A melange of interesting notes and the promise of things to come

Liszt's *Mephisto Waltz* is a hideous, incomprehensible jargon of noise, cacophony and eccentricity, musically valueless... - Boston Gazette, November 20, 1887.

Purely Mozart

Featuring The Requiem K626 and Vespers K339

The Great Hall Newcastle University

Sunday 18 September
2pm

Eloise Roland – Soprano
Rosemary Saunders – Mezzo-Soprano
Paul Morris – Tenor
Joshua Salter – Bass
and

The Christ Church Camerata

Adults \$30 Concession \$25 Students \$15

Tickets at Lathams Music Kotara & Greenhills
Music Solutions Warners Bay
Online: Stickytickets
Or at the door

When Philips released a deluxe edition of the complete works of Mozart, it filled 180 CDs, which will take up about 10 gigabytes on your iPod. It has been calculated that someone copying the music by hand would find it very hard to write the same number of notes in the same time.

He is credited with an astonishing 655 compositions, which averages out to about one very fortnight over his composing career. Beethoven, by comparison, composed 398.

As Emperor Joseph II commented at the premiere of Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*, "Too many notes!"

William Zagorski writes that Mozart's choral masterpieces offer "an unforgettable glimpse into the cosmos, explaining why so many musical annotators have called Mozart the mouthpiece of God."

Purely Mozart is a concert you must not miss!

Missa Solemnis



Recently a group of choristers from Newcastle joined some 800 others from near and far for a weekend performance of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* at the Sydney Opera House. ChorusOz is an annual event hosted by the Sydney Philharmonia Choir, under the direction of Brett Weymark.

What a privilege, to perform this beautiful music in such company and such an environment!

Missa Solemnis is a difficult work for all concerned. "[It imposes] difficulties of heroic dimension upon vocal interpreters," writes Nick Jones. "That Beethoven made such all-but-impossible demands on his singers, keeping them so high in their range for so long or forcing them to shout over full orchestra, has often been ascribed to his deafness..."

Sir Malcolm Sargent calls it "merciless, stretching voices beyond their natural limits and at the same time asking for a supreme fierceness and vigour of attack in regions beyond the normal."

In the 1790s, Beethoven was the darling of Vienna, in demand for concerts, popular on the social scene, publishers competing for his compositions. But by 1801 his deafness was evident, making conversation in company difficult.

"Oh you men who think or say that I am malevolent, stubborn or misanthropic, how greatly do you wrong me," he wrote in 1802. "You

do not know the secret cause which makes me seem that way to you... But think that for 6 years now I have been hopelessly afflicted... finally compelled to face the prospect of a *lasting malady* (whose cure will take years or, perhaps be impossible)... doubly painful to me because I am bound to be misunderstood... I must live almost alone like one who has been banished.

“ [I am] driven almost to despair... I would have ended my life – it was only *my art* that held me back. Ah it seemed to me impossible to leave the world until I had brought forth all that I felt was within me... Thanks... to my art I did not end my life by suicide.

“Oh Providence – grant me at last but one day of *pure joy* – it is so long since real joy echoed in my heart – Oh when – Oh when, Oh Divine One – shall I feel it again in the temple of nature and of mankind – Never? – No – Oh that would be too hard.”

In 1819 he began work on *Missa Solemnis*.

Karl Frederick Zelter, writing to Goethe says “The poor man is reported as being totally deaf... Lately Beethoven went to an eating-house; he sat down to a table and lost himself in thought. After an hour he calls the waiter: ‘What do I owe?’ – ‘The gentleman has not eaten anything yet, what shall I bring?’ ‘Bring anything you please, but let me alone!’”

Anton Schindler, Beethoven’s factotum since 1814, wrote “In the living room, behind a locked door, we heard the master singing parts of the fugue in the *Credo* – singing, howling, stamping... the door opened and Beethoven stood before us with distorted features... He looked as if he had been in mortal combat with the whole host of contrapuntist, his everlasting enemies. His first utterances were confused... Never, it may be said, did so great an artwork as is the *Missa Solemnis* see its creation under more adverse circumstances.”

About this time Beethoven was arrested – “We have arrested somebody who will give us no peace. He keeps on yelling that he is Beethoven; but he’s a ragamuffin...” reported a constable. Beethoven had risen early and gone for a walk and got lost. He was seen looking in the windows of houses, the occupants called the police, he looked like a beggar. “I am Beethoven,” he said, and “Of course, why not?” said the policeman. It was 11 o’clock that night before he was rescued. “That is Beethoven!” said Musical Director Herzog, who had been summoned from his warm bed.

The work was probably completed in 1822. In 1823 a copy was sent to the Archduke Rudolph, for whose installation as Archbishop it was originally composed.

By 1822 it was clear that Beethoven’s deafness made it impossible for him to conduct. A dress rehearsal of *Fidelio* became chaotic at the first duet, Beethoven being completely unable to hear the singers. Schindler writes “The impossibility of going ahead with the author of the work was evident. But how, in what manner to inform him of the fact?... to speak the saddening words: ‘It will not do; go away, you unhappy man!’”

Beethoven had worked on his Ninth Symphony at the same time, and parts of the *Missa* (the *Kyrie*, *Credo* and *Agnus Dei*) were performed for the first time at the premier of the symphony.

Beethoven shared the podium with Keppellmeister Umlauf, as was acceptable practice. Umlauf instructed the choir and orchestra to pay no attention to Beethoven’s beating of the time but rather to watch him. At the end of the concert Beethoven continued to study his score, unaware of the extraordinarily enthusiastic and noisy response of the audience, until the soloist Fraulein Unger plucked him by the sleeve. Beethoven turned around and bowed.

Beethoven’s greatest works were composed during this period when he was profoundly deaf. Periods of total silence would alternate with the more usual condition of a constant loud and annoying tinnitus.

I think *Missa Solemnis* is intensely personal, a most moving statement of his hope and his anguish. The plea for mercy in the *Kyrie* is his plea. The *Gloria* is his affirmation of faith, ending as it does in an increasing urgency. I can’t listen to the *Credo* without hearing the composer asserting his own beliefs, repeating them beyond expectation with a long series of *Amens*.

The *Sanctus* breaks with the normal tradition of a solo organ recital with a hauntingly beautiful violin solo, surely an expression of the ‘pure joy’ Beethoven wrote of in 1802, and his awful loneliness.

The *Agnus Dei* begins in the key of B minor, which Beethoven considered to be an especially dark key. This may be a prayer for peace in a time of war, but Beethoven wrote “Bitte um inner und aussern frieden – Prayer for inner and outer peace.” When the choir sings *pacem pacem*, with many repetitions, it is an anguished and angry cry, and the final *donna pacem pacem* seems resigned, and perhaps finally accepting. It is no rousing finale, the audience seems uncertain that the work has ended.

British poet Myra Schneider has captured the loneliness that Beethoven must have felt in her poem *Beethoven’s Ninth*:



The young Beethoven

Beethoven's Ninth

Nothing is sweeter to my ears than the voice of someone I love, soothing words from a stranger, voices of doves in summer trees, the emergence of joy in the last movement of Beethoven's Ninth.

Nothing is more frustrating than failing to follow a fast or subdued talker, than hearing conversation as a loud blur in a room of faces but this is minor. What does a composer suffer if sound diminishes

to nothing and he can only unfold in his head the music he's created? Imagine Beethoven at that first performance of his final symphony, a gesticulating figure standing beside the conductor,

rising, shrinking, stretching forward as if he wanted to be all the instruments, every singer in the choir, and still immersed when the work reached its end, unaware of the applause until the contralto

turned him round to see the audience on their feet, hands clapping, hats being thrown up into the air, mouths uttering what could only be "bravo". Imagine that conjunction of sound and soundlessness.

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Opera tends to stereotype politicians as middle-aged or older, wealthy, emotionally dysfunctional and manipulative. Surely nothing could be further from the truth.

– Christopher Lawrence

Mozart's *Messiah*

In 1789, a performance of Handel's *Messiah* was staged in Vienna. It was an arrangement by Mozart, commissioned by Baron Gottfried van Swieten, and sung in German.

When *Messiah* premiered in Dublin in 1742, there were only 24 singers in the choir. It was originally composed for strings, with the famous trumpet solo, and the customary keyboard. Handel later added oboes and bassoons. Two professional female singers traveled to Dublin, but the male soloists came from the choir.

Most of the changes which have resulted in what we now recognize as *Messiah* would never have been heard by Handel by the time he died in 1759.

The size of the chorus increased, and Mozart's arrangement added harmony instruments - woodwinds and brass - although these were never allowed to obscure the original.

Versions of Mozart's arrangement are readily available - including one by the Royal Symphonic Orchestra with the Huddersfield Choral Society conducted by Sir Charles Mackerras.



The last known portrait of Mozart - an unfinished painting by his brother-in-law Joseph Lange 1782/3.

Music is not a way of switching off. It's not a relaxation method, but rather the opposite - it should be like feeding the fire.

– Pekka Kuusisto

Cacophony is edited by Peter McCloy on behalf of the Newcastle University Choir, who do not necessarily share the views of the editor. To contribute or to communicate, email us at newsletter@newcastleuniversitychoir.com

For more about Newcastle University Choir, go to www.newcastleuniversitychoir.com