

Chapter 19

Coda

That Mozart's Requiem survives only as a fragment is not generally obvious to the listener, because the work is performed either in its traditional form—that is, as completed by Süssmayr—or in one of the versions completed by later editors.

Christoph Wolff, *Mozart's Requiem, Historical and Analytical Studies*,
trans. Mary Whittall, p. 85

pla·gia·rize

v: to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own:
use without crediting the source

Merriam Webster Dictionary

forg·er·y n.

The crime of falsely making or copying a document in order to deceive

Merriam Webster Dictionary

hybrid, *n and adj*

2. *transf. and fig.*

a. Anything derived from heterogeneous sources, or composed of different or incongruous elements;

Oxford English Dictionary

To borrow the terminology of the modern television court-room drama, Count Franz von Walsegg could be 'indicted on two counts: first, conspiracy to commit fraud—commissioning the work of another man intending to pass it off as his own—and forgery—copying the work of another man and putting his own name on it.' The defending attorney would almost certainly plead mitigating circumstances, perhaps 'excess grief at the death of his wife', and point out that 'clearly no economic advantage was gained, since the artefact in question was designed only for personal use, to wit, a memorial mass for said deceased spouse'. Indeed, since Mozart was compensated for his work, he suffered neither financial loss nor damage to his reputation, although a zealous prosecutor might make the case that, since it was highly unlikely that such a work of art could have remained a secret for long, had he lived he might have had to sue to establish his authorship of the music.

The team of 'masters' who completed his unfinished masterpiece could be similarly indicted, only with the crimes in reverse, since they intended to pass off their work as that of another man and the forgery was designed to cover up the act of fraud. Süssmayr even went as far

as to sign the score that was handed to Count Walsegg with a forgery of Mozart's signature,¹ adding 'mpa', which stood for 'manu propria' or 'in my own hand' [meaning Mozart's, which clearly it wasn't] and going even further by adding 'di me' or 'by me' [again meaning Mozart, which was at best partly untrue], a notation Mozart himself never used.²

Constanze, as mastermind behind the forgery, could not only have been indicted as a co-conspirator, but must have lived in fear that Walsegg would sue for breach of contract when she not only had other copies made, but sold them for considerable sums of money and arranged performances of the work for her financial benefit. After all, since he had paid for it and set out specific conditions, it was technically his property. Only his fear of exposing the fraud stood between them both and public disgrace. It has all the engrossing elements of an eighteenth century soap opera. No wonder the nineteenth century adored it and added its own layers of intrigue and melodrama.

However, whilst the concept of forgery hasn't changed much in two hundred years, modern views of how a work of art comes into existence in relation to the work of other artists are as anachronistic as the idea of a courtroom drama. The modern concept of plagiarism didn't emerge until the late nineteenth century, partly as a result of the Romantic movement's notion that a work of art was the product of a unique and personal expression, and partly as the result of changes in the publishing industry. Bach thought nothing of transcribing violin works by Vivaldi for the organ without attribution and presenting them as his own compositions; Mozart himself did not see the need to write 'after a work by G. F. Handel' at the top of his score of the *Requiem aeternam* even though it borrows copiously from that composer. Such concepts of intellectual copyright are a fairly modern invention, so in a very real sense Süssmayr cannot be criticised for failing to own up if the movements he claimed as 'ganz neu von mir verfertigt' were based on Mozart sketches, especially if the full realisation of the ideas was his. As all composers did, he was simply assembling a composition from the available musical DNA of the time: to assert that his process was dishonest is to impose a modern concept onto a historical situation.

Nor was the idea of a work of art being created by a team of artists a strange one. It is well known that in the artist studios of the Renaissance masters—often teaching environments—much of the work, such as painting backgrounds, was done by apprentices with the masters themselves sometimes providing only the central figure. In that sense, almost any painting from that period one cares to name could be called a collaboration, or 'hybrid'. For example, many art historians believe that in Verrocchio's Baptism of Christ the young angel holding Jesus' robe was

¹ See H.C. Robbins Landon, *1791: Mozart's Last Year*, Thames and Hudson, 1988, p. 163

² He also added the date '792', the standard abbreviation for 1792, presumably in the hope that Walsegg would believe that Mozart himself would have written down the year in which he expected to finish it on the first page of the score, before he had, even though it was widely known that Mozart had died in 1791.

painted by his young apprentice Leonardo da Vinci: but it is still regarded as Verrocchio's painting.³ Mozart himself had no problem asking Süssmayr to provide the unaccompanied recitatives for *La clemenza di Tito*, though it must be admitted that these made up a very small portion of the work. The care Constanze took to present the Requiem to the world as the work of a single composer was as much the result of her need to receive the second half of the commission fee as the result of moral qualms over whether the work sprang solely from her husband's imagination.

But one can't escape the fact that the score presented to Count Walsegg was a forgery: Süssmayr quite deliberately made his handwriting resemble Mozart's as closely as possible, even going so far as to fake Mozart's signature: his intent was to deceive just as surely as it was Walsegg's to do exactly the same when he copied Süssmayr's score himself and placed his own signature on it. When modern editor-completers attempt to integrate their work into the traditional version as seamlessly as possible they side-step the charge of forgery by appending their name to it proudly and publicly, in stark contrast with the team that Constanze assembled. And there is the conundrum: on the one hand while the document Constanze's team produced is authentic to its time, it is not authentic Mozart, while on the other a modern edition-completion is neither authentic Mozart nor authentic to his time, but in its attempt to get closer to a Mozartian language it pursues the same goals as Constanza's team, but with hindsight, the benefit of as much time as is necessary to complete the task, and a deeper knowledge of Mozart's music resulting from years of study, the ability to listen to almost unlimited performances, the writing of countless scholars, and the luxury of exhaustively researched published scores.

Concepts of authenticity are complicated and largely culturally derived, and such attitudes change over time. As Maunder has noted: '...it is only through careful study...that one can reconstruct as accurately as possible the framework within which the composer's imagination moved and hence the limits we must set ourselves in trying to bring his music to life.'⁴ In this context, the historical one, one can answer the question posed in the Introduction of this book: 'would a version [of the Requiem] that replaced Süssmayr's work with Eybler's have the same 'authenticity' even though it doesn't have the performance history?' with a resounding 'yes', but it still wouldn't be authentic Mozart. The work of both Süssmayr and Eybler was part of 'the framework within which [Mozart's] imagination moved' and in that sense should be given equal weight. Just as Mozart himself searched many and various sources for his masterpiece, surely the modern audience is justified in doing the same? The fact that Mozart weighed the talents of both Süssmayr and Eybler and rated the latter higher gives both a powerful insight into his

³ There is a story associated with this painting which holds that Leonardo's work was so far superior to his master's that Verrocchio put down his brush and never painted again, but it may well be apocryphal.

⁴ Maunder, p. 197

understanding of the prevailing musical language, and another useful tool with which to evaluate all the contributions to the score. Such a process validates both the historical authenticity of the hybrid forgery that we know as the Mozart Requiem and the process by which any modern version tries to re-shape it, provided the effort is guided by the drive to recreate the framework within which Mozart's imagination moved. As Wolff notes in the quotation at the head of this chapter, the modern listener—unless they have done a good deal of homework—generally does not realise that they are listening to a hybrid work, and if they do, Constanze has long been forgiven for the forgery she foisted on poor Count Walsegg.

The modern listener relates to any work of art as a construct between their own likes, dislikes and understandings and whatever conscious or unconscious historical preconceptions they may or may not have. Sadly, we cannot experience Mozart in the way his contemporaries did: the changing styles of and attitudes towards music have changed our expectations, our entire concept of what a work by Mozart 'is'. In that sense, any performance of a piece of music after the period in which it was conceived must inevitably be different from what its contemporaries would have experienced. Like Planck's constant, which states objects can be altered by the very fact of observing them, any modern performance can't help but contain distortions of the composer's intentions because we are alive now, not when the piece was composed. Maunder gives an excellent example: 'the Viennese fortepiano of c.1785 ... no longer sounds to us, as it did to the composer, like a 'normal' piano. This 'normality' can be translated into our terms by playing the music on the modern piano instead, though only at the price of several other distortions of Mozart's intentions.'⁵ Playing it on a modern reproduction of a fortepiano only introduces a different kind of distortion by injecting the lens of unfamiliarity: it doesn't sound 'normal' to us, so while it might be the sound an eighteenth century composer could well have heard, our experience would not be the same as theirs. In the same way, when modern editor-completers remove Süssmayr's technical errors and adjust his instrumentation in an attempt to recreate a Mozartian 'normality', they remove one layer of distortion but can't help introducing another.

A modern performance of any 'old' piece of music cannot but have layers of distortion. Each generation of performers puts its own mark on a work, which is accepted, rejected, adapted and passed on to and by the next. This must be so if music is to be a living art, not a museum display, frozen in time. The Mozart Requiem is not immune to that distortion in whatever version it is performed. As Simon Keefe has observed: 'modern completions provide a salutary reminder that the performed Requiem can never be about Mozart alone. The completers may want to revise, or marginalize or excise Süssmayr, but his presence looms large - in the score and our

⁵ Maunder, p. 198

expectations about its practical realization and in our historical imagination.’⁶ We cannot hear the work but through the lens of our historical imagination, and ever since the edition of Franz Beyer, in that imagination the ‘presence in the score’ can no longer be limited only to Mozart’s contemporaries.

One of the elements that inform this historical imagination, and one of our most beloved preconceptions about Mozart, is best described using the famous words of Franz Joseph Haydn reported in a letter by Leopold Mozart to his daughter on February 16th, 1785: ‘I say to you before God and as an honest man, your son is the greatest composer known to me in person or by name: he has taste and, what’s more, the greatest knowledge of composition.’⁷ Note that Haydn does not praise Mozart’s *originality*, but his ‘knowledge’ and his ‘taste’, and that of the two, ‘knowledge’—or ‘skill’, depending on the translation⁸—was more highly valued. If some of the criteria by which that skill is evaluated are a lack of technical errors, opacity of scoring and a finely-honed sense of balance and form, then to make adjustments to the traditional version of the Requiem to bring it into a closer correspondence with those criteria is both to be more historically accurate *and* to be true to what our modern concept of what a piece of Mozart ‘is’.

So, what do we understand Mozart’s Requiem to ‘be’? We can’t un-know that it is a hybrid document, a forgery purchased by an unscrupulous nobleman with mixed motives. We can’t help but listen to it through the dual and sometimes contradictory filters of two hundred years of history and modern scholarship, even if we were to limit a performance to only those notes in Mozart’s torso autograph. As Keefe says: ‘The Requiem is, and will always remain, controversial.’⁹

To that other implicit question, ‘What could the Requiem have been if Mozart had lived?’ there is only one responsible answer: ‘We will never know’. That too is part of our relationship with the work, and one of the aspects of the piece that keep us coming back to it again and again.

⁶ Simon P. Keefe, *Mozart’s Requiem: Reception, Work, Completion*, Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 245

⁷ as quoted in *Mozart: A life in Letters*, ed. Cliff Eisen, translated by Stewart Spencer, (Penguin) 2006, # 148

⁸ Leopold Mozart reported Haydn’s word to be ‘Compositionsgewissenshaft’, which has been variously translated as ‘skill’, ‘knowledge’ and even ‘knowledge of compositional science’

⁹ Keefe, *ibid*, p.248