

Chapter 9

Rex Tremendae

Once again, in this movement, the shortest in the Requiem, only the *coro* parts, basso continuo¹ and most of the first violin part are in Mozart's hand. The violin part is almost complete: only bars 20 (after the downbeat crotchet G) and 21 are empty. Both Eybler and Süssmayr assumed that bars 20 and 21 should be filled by strings doubling the chorus, though they chose slightly different rhythms. As before, there are four unassigned, empty staves, but their allocation is obvious.

For reasons unknown, perhaps due either to lack of time or his own preferred working methods, Eybler once again completed only the strings for this movement, providing second violin and viola parts and choosing octave doublings for the opening six bars, then—except for an imitative entry for the second violins in bar 12—mostly chains of thirds² through to bar 15, where he returns to an octave doubling. Rather than joining the first violins in bars 16 and 17, Eybler's second violins have a series of triple stops following the choral parts, and it is a shame that their upper voice in bar 16 preempts the rising soprano line of bar 17. To finish the movement, he doubles the firsts and cellos at the unison in bar 17, and uses second violins and violas in quavers to complete the harmony for the last five bars.

Süssmayr's string parts are very similar to Eybler's, so similar that it is probable that he copied much of Eybler's work straight into his own score (although where they differ Eybler's version is generally better conceived): this would have considerably sped up his work while allowing him to feel that the movement was 'his' because of his addition of all the other instruments. In bar two, instead of playing on the beat with the cellos and basses, Süssmayr's violas play off the beat with the violins, which seems inconsistent with their partnering with bassi for most of the movement. Since they had been in octaves up to that point, Süssmayr's first note in the second violins on the second beat of bar 5 (G instead of E flat) must be a miscopying (Eybler had E flat).

In bars 7–9 Süssmayr's seconds violin follow the firsts exactly a third below, their quavers rising by a tenth on the third beats, which unfortunately creates a parallel octave with the bass line each time (the violas have the same relationship with the bassi, also resulting in a parallel octave with the first violins on the first beats):

¹ but figures for only the first two bars

² The second violins a third below the firsts, the violas a third above the bassi

Eybler seems to have been aware of this problem, as he began to do the same but crossed out the leap in bar 7, and writing a crotchet on the lower note instead. He also changed the pattern in the viola. Clearly, these errors are uncharacteristic of Mozart and should not stand; neither should Süssmayr's viola clash with the altos (A against B flat on the second quaver of the second beat) in bar 15.

Mozart wrote a crotchet G on the downbeat of bar 20, which both Eybler and Süssmayr changed to a quaver.³ For this final section, both men basically copied the *coro*, Eybler doubling both voice part and note lengths, Süssmayr doubling but with repeated quaver movement. There would seem to be no good reason why Eybler's violas come in a quaver later than the violins in bar 20, and even less for both men to introduce a passing seventh in the second violins on the last beat of bar 21, when there is no figuring to that effect in Mozart's autograph. Both also missed the implication of Mozart's quaver rests in the last bar, which would seem to imply that the off-beat quaver rest-quaver pattern was already in happening, recalling the open motif of the work. The present edition has it thus:

³ The first violin part is blank from the second beat of bar 20 and all of bar 21

Süssmayr's largest task in this movement was, of course, adding the winds. Owing to the change of tonic in this movement to G minor, the participation of the trumpets and timpani—surely to be expected in a movement depicting the awesome majesty of God—is somewhat limited. Seeing as the only note they have in common with the tonic of this movement is the dominant D, their presence in the opening measures would destabilise the sense of tonic, so they are sensibly held back until bar 6, where the strings drop out, and they add the necessary pomp for the half cadence in the dominant, where the text “Rex tremendae majestatis” is finally proclaimed in full. However, it must be said that Süssmayr's scoring here is not very efficient: he sets the first trumpet and first basset horn on the same note, surely rendering the wind instrument inaudible. Nor does his music for the trumpets and timpani in bar 10 make sense because he doesn't continue to complete the cadence on the downbeat of bar 11: his trumpets and drums play on the first and third beats of bar ten and then simply stop, for no apparent reason. Once again, in bar 15-17 his scoring is ineffective, this time doubling the first trumpet with the second basset horn, but their role, reinforcing the cadence, is better managed rhythmically. Mozart's indication of *piano* in bar 17 shows there is no place for them (or, in all probability trombones) for the rest of the movement.

Somewhat predictably, Süssmayr achieved the rest of his instrumentation by a process of automatically doubling each voice part with the basset horns and bassoons as well as *colla parte* trombones, so that the altos, tenors and basses are, once more, each doubled by two instrumental timbres. The sopranos, admittedly in all probability the most numerous of the four parts, receive support only from the first basset horn. This automatic doubling of the chorus robs the sound of individuality and makes all the movements begin to sound the same, whereas Mozart usually takes great pains to vary the sound of each movement.

Given the relatively small orchestra of the Requiem, with no flutes, oboes or horns to use in different combinations, the manner in which the bassoons and basset horns are used is the only way to achieve any timbral differentiation. The *Rex tremendae* is in Mozart's more severe, Baroque-influenced *stile antico*, and the orchestration should reflect that. There is a clue to how to do so, at least as far as the bassoons are concerned, in bars 26–32 of the *Requiem aeternam*, where, like the *Rex tremendae*, the chorus and the strings have different motifs: the bassoons play *a2* in unison with the orchestral bassi, not the chorus.⁴ That model would be a considerable improvement to the *Rex tremendae*, and is used throughout the present edition.

In the *Requiem aeternam* passage the basset horns also play *a2*, doubling the sopranos, showing that in certain circumstances Mozart considered the support of only the alto trombone

⁴ In accordance with Albrechtberger's much cited advice

for the chorus altos to be sufficient.⁵ That passage, however, is admittedly somewhat unique for the basset horns in that, unlike the *Rex Tremendae*, the sopranos are motivically different from the lower three voices, their line continuing the plainsong melody introduced by the soprano soloist in bar 21: Mozart wanted to emphasise the *cantus firmus* by using the basset horns in unison. But in the *Rex tremendae* the situation is different: there is no plainsong melody to bring out, which leads to the question, what role should the basset horns play?

A study of Mozart's orchestration, both in his late works and the Handel orchestrations discussed earlier, suggests that the winds should have their own characteristic and consistent lines rather than giving the same instrument two different roles to play merely for the sake of doubling vocal lines. In his use of winds, their role—especially where they are not to play—is always carefully thought out to fulfill a specific purpose, not just provide generic doubling. See, for example, how the basset horns drop out in bar 18 of the *Requiem aeternam*, leaving only the bassoons to double the vocal lines. This has the triple effect of varying the texture, highlighting each woodwind timbre and making the solo entry of the basset horns in bar 19 much more effective.⁶

If bars 26–32 of the *Requiem aeternam* are to be used as a model for the basset horn scoring of the *Rex tremendae*, the question that follows is: should the second basset horn play in unison with the first? One possible scoring would be for the basset horns to play *a2* throughout the movement. However, this would single out the soprano line for special treatment, which, while appropriate to the context of bars 26–32 of the *Requiem aeternam*, does not exactly fit the situation of the *Rex tremendae*. On the other hand, the choral parts of bars 7–10 of the *Rex tremendae* do contain two contrapuntal motifs—a sustained line to the text 'rex tremendae majestatis' and a detached three-quaver motif to the text 'qui salvandos'—and these two motifs, both used imitatively, are given to the sopranos/altos and tenors/basses respectively. One way to achieve differentiation in timbre and gesture would be for the basset horns to play a smoothed out version of the soprano and alto lines, the different rhythm separating them from the chorus, while creating an independent wind section with the bassoons that is harmonically complete.

There is no need for the sopranos and altos to have support from the basset horns in bar 18 (or tenors and basses from the bassoons in 19). Mozart has carefully cleared out the texture for them to be heard quite clearly: the dynamic drops to *piano*, the organ is marked *tasto solo*, and the unison strings are not only in a different register but completely static: the voices hold center

⁵ Bars 15 and 16 of the *Requiem aeternam* also suggest that Mozart thought the choral sopranos needed no support at all at the top of a homophonic texture and were expected to be of sufficient numbers to balance trombone support of the lower three voices when singing independently of the strings

⁶ Note also what a masterpiece of efficiency the bassoon writing is in bar 18: Mozart manages to suggest doubling three of the voices with just two instruments: the first bassoon takes the first two notes of the soprano and last two of the tenors, the second the opening tenor note and last two of the sopranos

stage. Mozart, the supreme opera composer, captures the moment brilliantly: how small and insignificant the human pleading for salvation seems, portrayed by two voices singing alone, compared to the majesty of God portrayed by the full orchestra.

Only the two-bar introduction remained for Süssmayr's work on the movement to be complete. Here he had a brilliant insight—perhaps modeled on the *Requiem aeternam*—of filling the empty downbeats of bars two with three trombone chords, although it is a shame he writes a G for the alto trombone in the first chord, introducing a seventh not present in Mozart's figuring.⁷ He also wrote quavers rather than the crotchets we see in the *Requiem aeternam*, which robs them of some of their heft. If the opening movement were indeed his model, we would not expect the reinforcement of the winds: in Mozart's *Requiem aeternam* scoring the trombones play unassisted, allowing their 'magic' timbre to be undiluted. The present edition restores the instrumentation as Mozart had it in the opening movement, the trombones playing crotchets unaided by basset horn. Süssmayr also wrote a chord for the winds and trombones on the second beat of the first bar, which foreshadows the entry of the chorus on that beat in bar three, thus robbing the chorus of considerable dramatic impact. Most commentators and modern editions agree that this chord is best omitted, as it is in the present edition.

Score: <https://www.simonwandrews.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/4-Rex-Tremendae-score.pdf>

⁷ The second basset horn has a concert A in this first chord, which does follow Mozart's figuring