Chapter 3

Mozart's Orchestration

Mozart's skill as an orchestrator was recognised relatively soon after his death. One of the elements of the new musical style that emerged in the German speaking countries in the last third of the eighteenth century was the greater importance given to the wind instruments, and while Mozart's use of them was not always appreciated by some commentators,[1] others had just the opposite reaction. Ignaz Ferdinand Arnold (1774–1812) in his *Mozarts Geist* (1802) makes the bold statement that Mozart was 'the unparalleled (and first) master of the art of instrumentation'.[2] Along with another early biographer Franz Xaver Niemetschek (1766–1849), Arnold praises Mozart's economy of means, especially where the winds are concerned: '[Mozart] is unparalleled in his ability to pick apposite moments for wind instruments to make their effect.'[3] Arnold paid special attention, in support of his main thesis of the 'economy' of Mozart's orchestration, to Mozart's accompanimental writing, dedicating a whole chapter to it. For obvious reasons, how Mozart orchestrated his accompaniments is of primary importance to the modern editor-completer of the Requiem, given how little of that task had been accomplished at the time of his death.

Niemetschek and Arnold's observations about Mozart's economy of means is borne out in even a cursory examination of the late scores, especially as concerns the doubling of voices or solo lines. Take, for example, the opening of the tenor solo 'Dieser Gottheit Allmacht ruhet' from *Laut verkünde uns're Freude* K. 623, the last work Mozart entered in his Verzeichnis on November 15th. After a brief six bar introduction which introduces the melody, the tenor enters accompanied only by off-beat string crotchets; the first violins start doubling on the second beat of his third bar (bar 9), sustain though his crotchet rest in bar 10 and have a decorated version of his melody in bar 11: the woodwinds join in doubling his melody (with a characteristic anacrusis to bar 11) as we move towards the half cadence in bar 12. In other words, there is what could be called an 'orchestration crescendo' to the phrase: the soloist starts unsupported, thus featuring him as soloist, gradually instruments join him as the line develops, and when the second group of instruments (winds) join, the first violins begin to ornament the line. Not only is the arc of the melody amplified by the orchestration, each group of instruments is kept distinct. Simple, yet extremely elegant:

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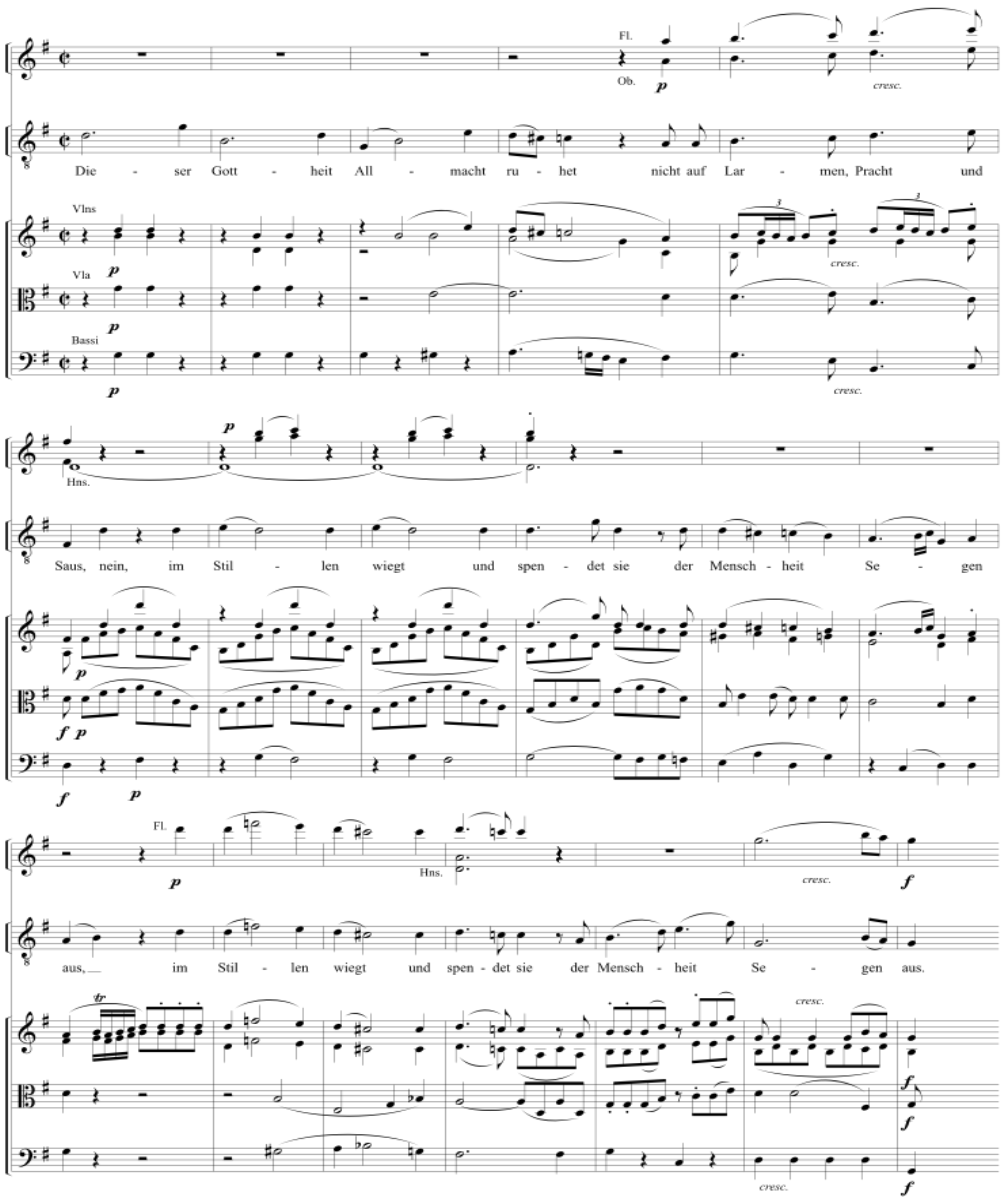
[1] See Zaslaw, p. 453: 'A performance of…*Die Entführung aus dem Serail* in 1787 in Hannover drew forth the comment that "the composer has been too loquacious with the wind instruments." '

[2] See Simon P. Keefe "Die Ochsen am Berge", JAMS Vol 61 (1) p. 15

[3] Keefe, ibid, p 15 (see Keefe's note 53)

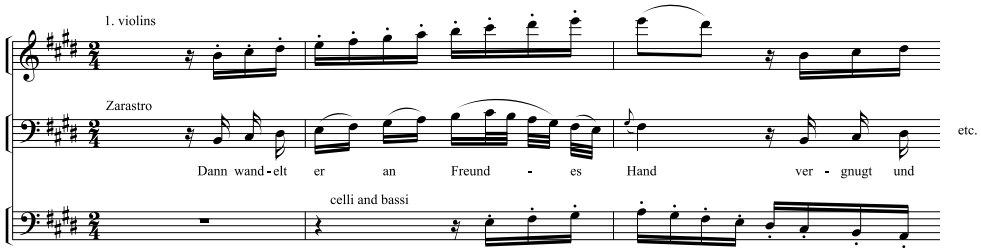


The phrase continues in like manner. What at first could seem like a doubling in the first violins (taking the tenor's D) turns into an independent octave motif; the flute and oboe echo the rhythm of the opening string accompaniment, gently highlighting the change of harmony, while the second violins and violas develop their own arpeggiated idea in thirds; the horns provide a pedal tone. The first violins join in the tenor in bar 15—midway through the phrase, but the winds drop out and the second violin/viola arpeggio melts away. The effect? A four-bar phrase where the music seems to blossom (bars 12 to 15), followed by a contrasting phrase, falling chromatically,

of lesser energy and greater focus on the soloist. The violins provide a little link (bar 18) to the last phrase which begins in unison—to portray the words "im Stillen"—doubled by flutes and violins in octaves. Note how the basses drop out for half a bar, further emphasising the text, to re-enter with an imitative entry and increasing the chromaticism. We then prepare for the final cadence of this first section, the strings adding energy with a rising quaver accompaniment as the tenor rises to the highest note. Note how the flute holds its entry until bar 23—in the middle of the phrase—to point the cadence. Again, very simple and economical. The music lives and breathes. The function of each gesture is clear and consistent: the primary focus is the solo vocal line, the instruments provide a flexible, colourful accompaniment that maintains its independence while staying in the secondary role.

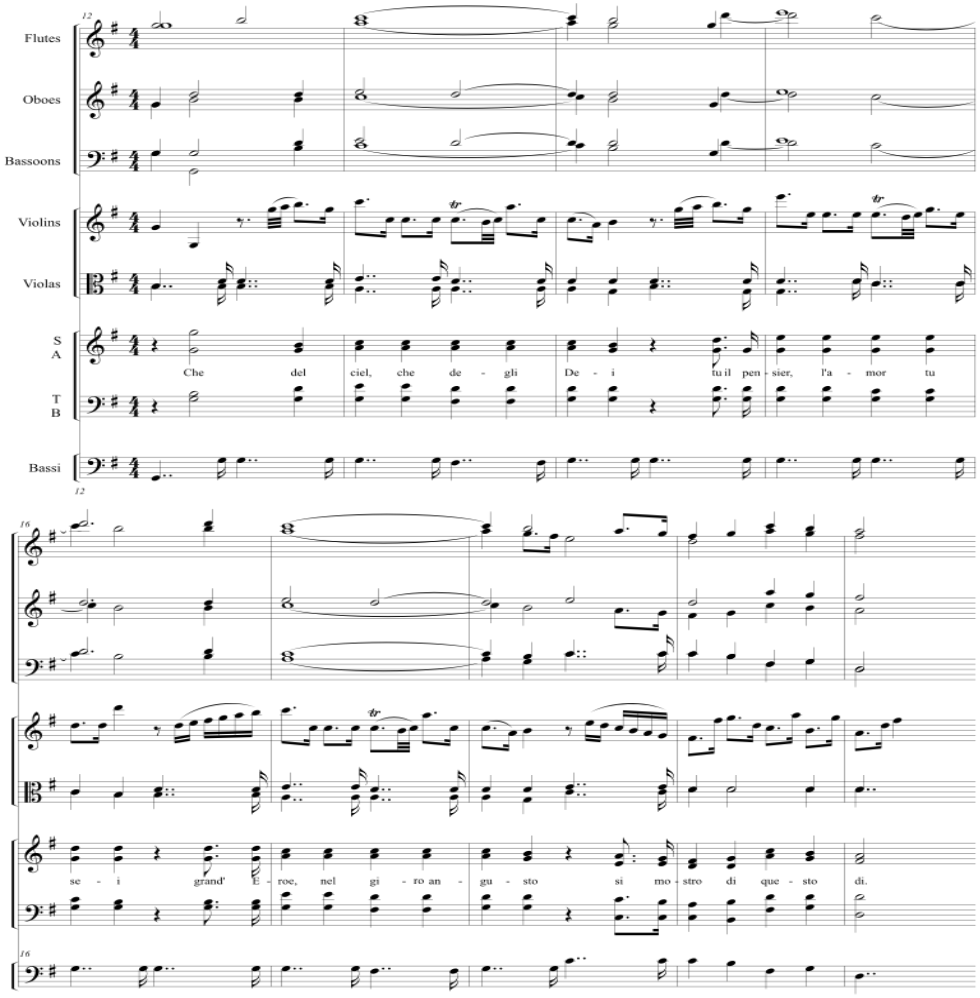
As important as the notes in this texture are the rests. What the instruments don't do contributes as much as what they do: there is no automatic doubling for bar after bar, which just blurs the line and can lead to a monochromatic effect. This passage shows the power of not doing something, and it is a hallmark of Mozart's accompaniment technique. Compare this passage to 'Ihr Bildniss ist bezaubernd schön' or 'Der Hölle Rache' from *Die Zauberflöte* and one will find much the same thing: a high level of consistency of accompanimental characterisation; flexible, developing textures and never generic doubling. In fact, rarely any literal doubling for more than a few bars, and those few instances usually at structurally significant points such as cadences. This is in stark contrast to much of the orchestration of the Requiem.

One further illustration from 'In diesen heil'gen Hallen' will reinforce the point: note how, when Sarastro sings, in bar 11, the rising scale to the words 'Dann wandelt er an Freundes Hand' the first violins turn their octave doubling of his line into a wonderfully expressive line of their own by continuing to rise when Sarastro's line begins to fall, reaching the high E at the cadence point: simple, elegant and very expressive. If one were trying to reconstruct this violin part from just the vocal line and basso continuo alone, as the orchestrator of the Requiem often had to, how easy it would be to follow Sarastro note for note:[4]



[4] Note too how the cellos and basses drop out at the beginning of the phrase to allow Sarastro greater prominence low in his range, and enter in imitation at the fourth when they return a bar later.

These have been examples of how Mozart accompanied solo vocal lines. Much of the Requiem is of course concerned with four-part choral writing, but here too there are good models, for a homophonic texture at least. The following is a short, but representative, example from No. 24 of *La Clemenza di Tito*, which premièred in Prague on September 6th, 1791, the chorus 'Che del ciel, che degli Dei' (horns, trumpets and timpani excluded):

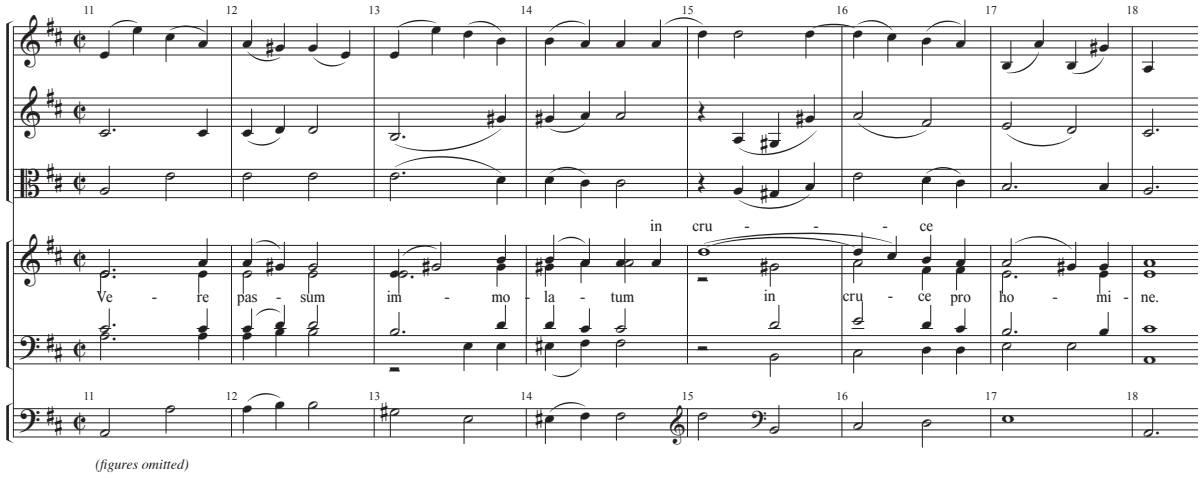


Several features are noticeable here: the independent first violin line, which weaves around the soprano of the chorus but does not double it; note how the bassoons only double the orchestra bass line at the cadence (where they change to unison), up to that point doubling the sopranos an octave lower and the tenor part[5]; how the wind complement is independent of the voices, pointing the harmonic rhythm rather than the rhythm of the text; and finally how Mozart gives the bassi their own rhythm to differentiate them from the choral basses, and how the divisi

[5] Or the oboes an octave lower

violas follow the rhythm of the bassi rather than the chorus. Small details, but each one contributes to the clarity of the texture, and all differing from the blanket doubling of so much of the traditional orchestration of K. 626.

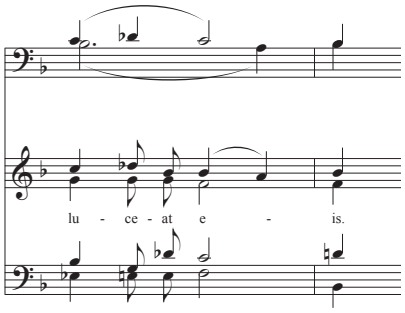
Finally, from the lovely *Ave verum corpus*, K. 618 from July 18th, 1791:



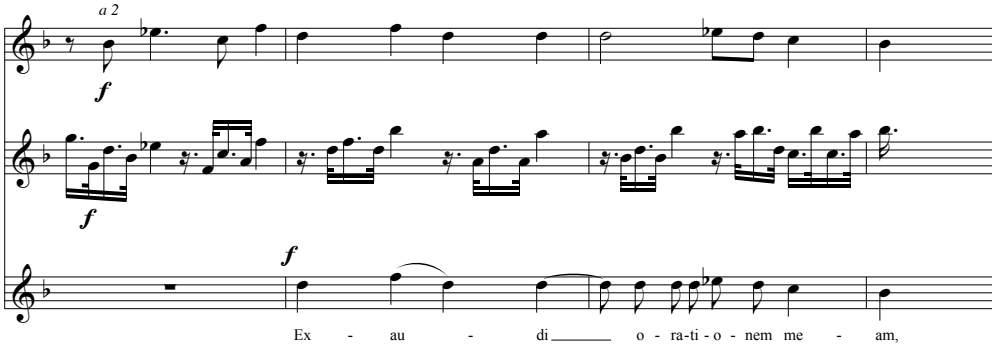
Note again how the first violin weaves its own line around the melody; how the second violin follows first the tenor line then the altos, the violas conversely start with the altos (in a slightly different rhythm) and end with the tenors; how the second violins and violas combine to make an independent countermelody in bar 15; how the second violin follows its own course in bar 17, and finally how the first violin fashions its own completely characteristic figure out of the soprano and tenor parts in bar 17. Never are the choral parts doubled note-for-note by the same instrument for more than two bars: rather, support is provided by independent lines that make sense in their own right.

However instinctive it may have been for Mozart, one can see how the expressivity of his accompaniments and orchestrations is inseparable from the craft, (and how hard to emulate!) While it might be very reasonably be objected that the job of orchestrating is much easier when it is part of the compositional process rather than trying to 'retro-engineer' someone else's work some time afterwards, that was the task facing Süssmayr as he surveyed the *Requiem* torso. Whatever verbal instructions he may or may not have received from the ill and dying Mozart, and whatever he may have been able to glean from performances of *La clemenza di Tito* or *Die Zauberflöte*, it can only have been a horribly daunting prospect.

Let us examine the completed instrumented passages of the Requiem to see whether these observations are borne out in Mozart's use of the wind instruments. The first example is taken from bar 18 of the *Requiem aeternam*: note how the basset horns drop out (there is a bar rest added into their part), thus making their entry in bar 19 more effective. Note also how the bassoon line is independent of the chorus: the first bassoon doubles only the first two notes of the soprano line (an octave lower) then holds the C with the tenors. The second bassoon starts on an expressive major second dissonance with the first bassoon doubling the tenors, but holds a three beat note so it is rhythmically independent: the tenors move off the B flat in the homophonic rhythm of the chorus and the second bassoon "catches" the sopranos B flat (an octave lower) on the second half of the first beat and doubles through the end of the phrase. The bassoons provide support and colour while avoiding literal doubling, thus remaining independent



Another example comes in bar 26 of the same movement, this time in the basset horns. Note how they spin their own independent line out of the first violins dotted semiquaver figure which is used as an introduction to choral sopranos' plainsong melody, which it doubles *a 2*. Notice though, how it does not copy the sopranos quaver rhythm in bar 28 or 31, holding instead a minim: the doubling is not automatic.

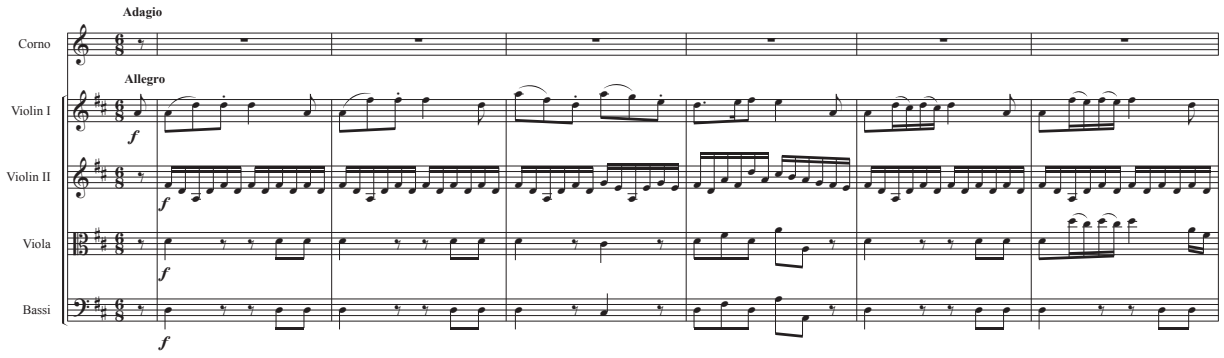


Another important feature of this passage is the use of the bassoons, also *a2*, which double the orchestral basses, not the choral basses (or even the tenors *and* basses), as is so often the case in Süssmayr's orchestration. This use of bassoons seems to be following a much more baroque model and has implications for later movements in the work for which Mozart did not provide wind parts, such as the *Rex tremendae*. It is also consistent with Albrechtsberger's instructions in his *Gründliche Anweisung zur Composition,* published in 1790, where he states: 'Die Fagotte müssen mit dem Violon, wenn sie nichts obligates haben, einhergehen'[6] (The bassoons should follow the orchestral basses, when they do not have an obbligato part). As Cliff Eisen notes, Mozart held Albrechtsberger "in high esteem…and may also have counted among [his] closest friends; he was probably among the few mourners to accompany the composer's remains to the city gates on 6 December 1791." [7] In light of this, and the fact that he succeeded Mozart as assistant music director at St. Stephens, it is surprising how little weight has been given to Albrechtberger's seminal work in considering the orchestration of the Requiem after Mozart died.[8]

The nature of the difficulty of Süssmayr's task, and how he may have gone about undertaking it, is superbly illustrated by Christoph Wolff in the section 'Original and Imitation: Horn Rondo and Requiem' in his book *Mozart's Requiem; Historical and Analytical Studies*:[9]

> A valuable example of an attempt by Süssmayr to write in Mozart's style is provided by a Concerto Rondo in D Major for Horn, which allows us to make direct comparisons that are germane to the study of the Requiem score. The piece was composed by Süssmayr, but he made lavish use of material by Mozart … It is only necessary to look at the second violin, viola and bass parts and compare Süssmayr's rudimentary and mechanically repeated figuration with Mozart's thoroughly flexible and interesting accompaniment. [10]

K. 412



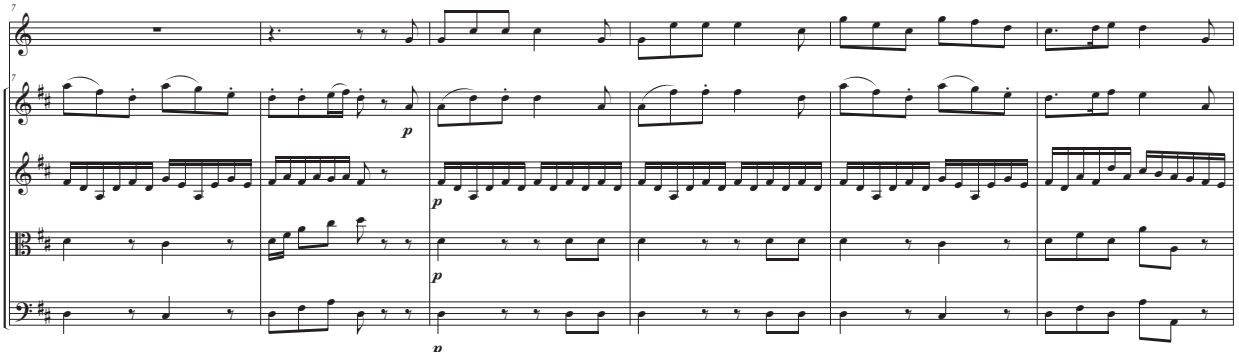
[6] Albrechtsberger, Johann, *Gründliche Anweisung zur Composition,* p.379.

[7] Cambridge Mozart Encyclopedia, p. 6.

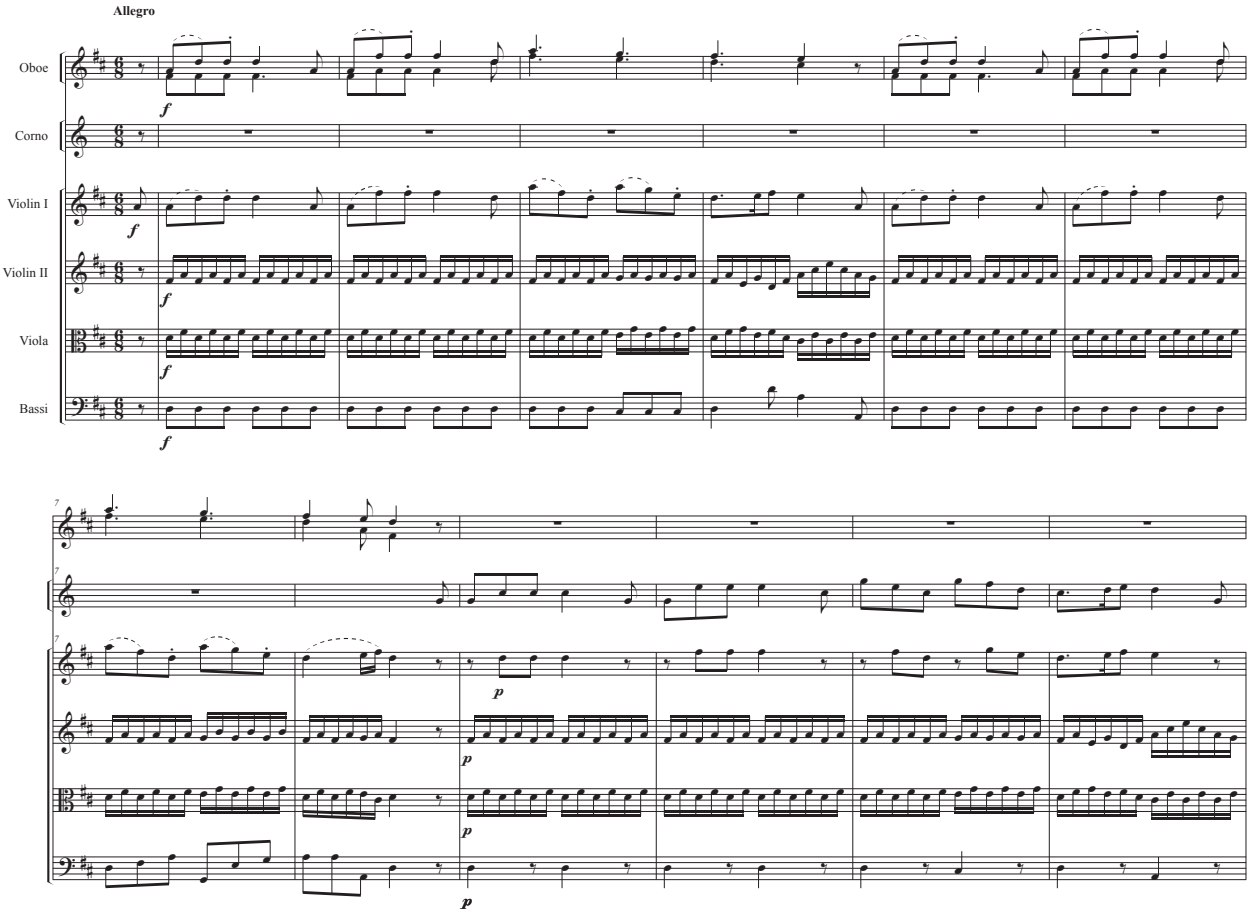
[8] For a discussion of what can be gleaned from Mozart's Handel orchestrations see Chapter 6

[9] Wolff, p 44-51

[10] Wolff, trans. Whittall, *Mozart's Requiem*, p.44-5



K. 514



Apart from the inclusion of two oboes in K. 514, the first thing that immediately hits the eye as one surveys the two scores is the paucity of rests and resulting thicker texture of the Süssmayr score. To start with the bass line, Süssmayr's repeated quavers do seem rather pedestrian compared with Mozart's rhythm, which has a rest at the beginning of the second beat so that the two quavers that follow act as energising anacruses to the next bar: since the violas double the bassi, Mozart's texture is also the more transparent of the two. Note the typical Mozart device of the cadence bars 4 and 8 being the most rhythmically energetic, in contrast to Süssmayr's crotchet on the down beat of bar 4, the longest note in the part up to that point. Notice

too how Mozart's approach to the dominant harmony in bar 4 from below avoids Süssmayr's hidden fifths with the first violins that arise as the result of the upward octave leap of his bass part.

Note too the greater level of what one might call differentiation or characterisation of the accompaniment: Mozart's second violin figure varies at the half bar (more character); when the first violins ornament the main melody in bars 5 and 6 it is the violas that join them in thirds *above* the second violins (bar 6) who therefore stay motivically consistent: the more 'obvious' choice would have been to have the higher instrument (the second violins) duet with the firsts' ornament, thus changing the role of both parts. There is consistency in the Süssmayr too, but of the rather less subtle variety of an unchanging texture, since his second four measures are without the ornamentation and, except for the necessary adjustment of cadence, an exact repeat of the first phrase.

In addition to the ornamentation, Mozart's melody in bar 8 has more variety by replacing the crotchet D with two quavers and his first violins duet again with the violas. The Mozart has variety within the economy and the function of each line is clear, differentiated and consistent. By comparison, with one exception, Süssmayr's is a sort of late eighteenth century 'default setting' orchestration: correct and getting the job done, but looking awfully like the '*mere remplissage*' described by Novello in 1829. His contributions to the Requiem have the same look to them. Ironically, exactly where one might expect a composer of lesser skill to double the melody – at the entry of the soloist – Süssmayr doesn't: he inserts a rest at the beginning of the bar, which is actually a little more interesting than Mozart's exact doubling.

While it would perhaps be unfair to berate Süssmayr for his lack of ability to live up to Mozart on the evidence of a comparison between K.412 and K.514 alone, the technical differences that such a comparison reveals are amply in evidence in his completion of the Requiem. Simply put, compared with Mozart's methods of generating accompaniments and orchestrations, Süssmayr's are overwritten and under-composed: they have almost constant literal doubling and very little differentiation or characterisation. One can almost hear the character of Joseph II in the film *Amadeus* saying: "There are simply too many notes: just cut a few out and it will be perfect."

I suspect that every editor and would-be completer of the *Requiem* since Süssmayr would be very tempted to reply, in exasperation, with Tom Hulce's Mozart: "Which few did you have in mind, your majesty?"