Mozart turns two hundred and fifty

Part 5: The Classical period: Mozart and Haydn

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The following is the conclusion of a five-part series of articles. (It contains references to numerous works of music by Mozart. We encourage readers to listen to these pieces, long samples of which are available free of charge on www.classical.com*. Together with Joseph Haydn and other Viennese musicians, Mozart developed musical forms to a height of perfection—what we now call "Classical."*

From the synthesis of the learned techniques of Baroque counterpoint with the Mannheim expressiveness and sentimental style of Carl Bach, Haydn in the symphony and Mozart in piano works developed instrumental music into an organic whole of contrasting and developed melodic themes.

Mozart, in particular, is known for the sheer lyrical beauty of his melodies. Haydn, who was 24 years older than Mozart, was strongly influenced by Mozart's Italian lyricism.

Classical counterpoint is, according to the historian Gutman's most recent book, "that superb art of ever-shifting precedence in which thematic material moves from one voice part to another, melodic phrases subsiding into accompaniments only to bloom again as melody, the entire organism of voice parts always alive with change and potential" (316).

The symphonic or sonata form originated in the Italian opera overture, with its three movements of fast-slow-fast pace. Haydn, working away in isolation in eastern Hungary, added a fourth movement, a lively dance movement, between the second and last movements. In his life, he wrote 104 known symphonies.

"I could, as head of an orchestra, make experiments, observe what created an impression, and what weakened it, thus improving, adding to, cutting away, and running risks. I was set apart from the world...and so I had to become original," Haydn said of his employment with Prince Esterhazy.

In the symphony, the principal movement begins with a melody, which leads into a second contrasting melody in another key. Both melodies intertwine and undergo development, and finally the original theme is repeated in the original key. Haydn added the emotional expressiveness of *Empfindsamkeit*, shadings of loud and soft, original melodic variations, and unusual shifts of tonal key. His last 12 symphonies, written in the 1790s for a London audience after his release from the Prince's service and influenced by the fugal character of the younger Mozart's last Symphony No. 41, changed the world of music forever.

One of the important influences on both Mozart and Joseph Haydn at this time was a close study of the Baroque masters. Baron van Swieten, a music collector and great patron of Mozart, made his extensive library of the Baroque music of Bach, Handel and others available for Mozart to consult and to copy.

"Every Sunday at noon I go to Baron van Swieten's, where nothing but Handel and Bach is performed," Mozart wrote. Both in Berlin, where he had served as ambassador, and in Vienna, where he headed the Imperial library, this powerful Hapsburg functionary formed an active society of "The Associated," dedicated to the study of Baroque music.

In 1782, under the influence of Haydn's Russian quartets, Mozart began a series of six string quartets, which he published in 1785 and dedicated to his friend Haydn, "Dal Suo Amico" The Mozart scholar Gutman observes of this period that whereas Mozart had hitherto used counterpoint interspersed through his compositions for effect, "now, putting himself into spiritual apprenticeship to Haydn, he strove to acquire a complete command of the polyphonic discipline...to make baroque traditions serve the contemporary idiom of the sonata and thematic transformation" (636).

To make polyphony an element of "both structure and substance" required intense work on Mozart's part. It is a tribute to Constanze's musical ability and taste that she fell in love with Bach's fugues and urged Wolfgang to master them. In 1782, Mozart produced at least two sets of arrangements of Bach's Preludes and Fugues. The incorporation of counterpoint to the dialogue between instruments and melodies contributed to the growing complexity of his music.

During this time, he also wrote Symphony No. 35, "The Haffner," in 1782, for a Mozart family friend who was being ennobled in Salzburg.

In 1783, he wrote "The Linz" Symphony, No. 36, for his enthusiastic patron Count Thun. The newlywed couple stopped at Linz on their trip home from meeting the family in Salzburg. "As I have not a single symphony with me, I am writing a new one at breakneck speed," Mozart wrote his father. He completed the work in just four days.

An engaging story sheds light on Mozart's character. In Salzburg, he discovered that his friend Michael Haydn risked falling out of favor with the Archbishop because he had failed to produce a set of six pieces for violin and viola. Mozart dropped everything and wrote the pieces in Michael Haydn's style, allowing him to pass them off as his own, and saving Haydn's position at court.

Mozart's six piano concertos of 1784, nos.14-18, show a new level of symphonic unity and grandeur. The concertos feature difficult virtuoso sections, but they do not upstage the melodic progression of the music (Britannica 7). Each is individual in character—one stormy, another slow and troubled. Mozart published his works with optional string and wind parts, for use in educated households.

"Vienna is the land of the piano," Mozart boasted. Altogether, he composed 27 piano concerti, 17 of these during the last 10 years of his life. In the spring of 1785, he gave 22 concerts within five weeks, performing his own compositions and sometimes showcasing the talents of his pupils.

The reader will recognize music from the film *Amadeus* in this hauntingly beautiful Piano Concerto No. 20 of February 1785, and from the film *Elvira Madigan* in the astonishingly difficult Concerto No. 21, both written in such haste that Mozart did not write out his own cadenzas but improvised them at the performances.

Listen: Piano Concerto No. 20, K466

Listen: Piano Concerto No. 21, K467

Concerto No.22 was completed on December 16, 1785, the same day it

was performed, giving the musicians no time to practice. So great was the haste to put forward new works for the music-mad Viennese, Mozart would sometimes play his own part from memory, only later writing it down. In 1784, he famously played a violin-piano concerto from a blank sheet of paper. He had quickly composed the Sonata (K454) for a visiting violinist in his head the night before, and had only just enough time to scribble down the violin part before the performance.

Leopold Mozart, visiting the family for several months in 1785, testified in letters to the success of his son's concert series, which was attended by the most influential figures in Austria. "When your brother [Wolfgang] left the stage, the Emperor tipped his hat and called out 'Bravo Mozart,' and when he came out to play, there was a great deal of clapping," he wrote to his daughter Nannerl.

Leopold was exhausted by the parade of assistants, copyists, servants, hairdressers and musical guests who frequented the busy household. "Since I have been here, your brother's pianoforte has been taken to the theater or to some house at least a dozen times," he complained.

Mozart's prodigious output included chamber works, piano sonatas, quartets, works for wind instruments, dance music and vocal music.

His most steadfast public was among music-goers of Prague, Czechoslovakia, for whom he wrote his Symphony No. 38 in late 1786, as his opera *Marriage of Figaro* was achieving a huge success there. It is the enthusiastic Prague public whom we must thank for the opera *Don Giovanni,* which they commissioned in 1787 and generously supported.

But *Don Giovanni* was not a resounding success in Vienna—its music was praised but the libretto called "poetic absurdity" by one critic. "A shame it does not eat, too," the critic joked about the Stone Guest come to dinner to take revenge on Don Giovanni, "only then would the fun be complete!" (Gutman 685). The Viennese public was notoriously fickle in taste.

Listen: Don Giovanni, K527

War and financial hardship

The visit of the Grand Duke Paul of Russia in 1781 to Joseph's Viennese Court signaled a rapprochement between Paul's mother, the Empress Catherine the Great of Russia, and the Hapsburg monarchy. The Empress aimed to enlist Joseph in her goal of winning territory away from and weakening the Turkish Ottoman Empire, an alliance that the wily Empress Maria-Theresa had warned her son against.

In the spring of 1787, Catherine the Great made a pilgrimage full of pomp and ceremony (the origin of the term Potemkin Village) down the Dnieper River to the Black Sea to review General Potemkin's new fleet of warships. Joined by Joseph, who moved his best troops into the Balkans, they sought to intimidate the Turks.

To their great surprise, the Turks responded by launching a war against Russia and Austria in August 1787. As the disastrous and bloody war dragged on, thousands of soldiers died from disease as well as battle, and Joseph's already tenuous health declined. Although Austrian forces finally succeeded in capturing Belgrade in October 1789, the senseless war exposed the incompetence of the Hapsburg monarchy and greatly weakened it. Sick with tuberculosis and malaria, Joseph II died in February 1790.

The war with Turkey drained the coffers of the Austrian nobility. Nobles either went to the front to fight or closed up their palaces in the city and headed to their country estates. The increasing tax burden of the war caused food riots in the capital. Taking advantage of the Hapsburg troubles, the Prussian king encouraged rebellion among the Hungarian nobles, and the populations in the Austrian lowlands (now Belgium) and Galicia (now Poland) prepared to revolt.

The heady and lucrative days of 1785 were gone, and Mozart's piano subscription concerts dried up. Furthermore, as Mozart's music grew in depth and complexity, the Viennese public found it perplexing and increasingly difficult to understand.

Depressed by the death of his six-month-old daughter—the couple would lose four of their six children—and troubled by his wife's ill health, Mozart composed comparatively little in 1788 and 1789. He borrowed money from his fellow Mason Puchberg. In April 1789, he traveled to Berlin in search of a position with the court of the Prussian King Frederick William II.

Despite his money problems, during a seven-week period in the summer of 1788, he wrote three magnificent symphonies that stand as the apogee of Classical music. There is no record of a commission, and whether or not they were performed during his lifetime is a matter of dispute. He may have composed them in hopes of a concert tour to London.

The three symphonies—Nos. 39, 40 and 41—are among his best-known works today, and for good reason. Mozart, one historian observed, "was beginning to write pieces that were more difficult, both in conception and in execution. His musical vision was becoming more progressive, decades beyond that of his contemporaries, and he made increased demands upon performers" (Glesner).

Listen: Symphony No. 39, K543

Listen: Symphony No. 40, K544

Symphony No 41, nicknamed the Jupiter Symphony, is his final and most complex symphony. Its finale includes a five-voice fugue, which had such a profound influence on Haydn's London symphonies.

Listen: Symphony No. 41 (Jupiter), K545

Choral Music

Mozart grew up in the musical tradition of the Catholic Church and composed numerous pieces, especially in the ecclesiastical state of Salzburg. When Wolfgang and Constanze married, he promised to write a mass to celebrate the event. Constanze, a talented singer and an enthusiast of church music, sung his unfinished *Mass in C minor* in Salzburg when they journeyed to meet his family in 1783.

Listen: Mass in C minor, K139

Two other works are performed today, including his *Coronation Mass* written in 1779 and his last work, the unfinished *Requiem Mass,* upon which he was working until he died.

Mozart attached great importance to his choral and organ works. In the last year of his life, he served as organist of Vienna's St. Stephen Cathedral, a position he hoped would eventually bring financial security to his family. One of his last works was a hymn for Corpus Christi, *Ave verum corpus* (K618), written in June 1791 for the Baden parish church, where his wife was taking a cure for a medical ailment.

1791: Mozart's last year

By 1791, Viennese musical life was reviving and Mozart began to compose large quantities of music once more, including a piano concerto and two string quartets. Supporters in Hungary and in Amsterdam promised substantial annual stipends for his compositions. He continued in the promising post of assistant to the Kapellmeister of St. Stephen's Cathedral.

In December 1790, when Joseph Haydn was lured to London for a large fee by the impresario Salomon, it was agreed that Mozart would follow as soon as his schedule and his wife's health permitted. The two friends spent the day before Haydn's departure together. When they parted, an emotional Mozart said, "In all probability we are saying our last adieu in this life." Both had in mind that Haydn was an old man of 58 and might not survive the strenuous trip. One year later, Wolfgang lay dead; Haydn would live on for another 18 years.

Instead of traveling to London, Mozart began to work with the actor turned entrepreneur Emanuel Schikaneder, whose popular theater in the Viennese suburbs could seat up to one thousand people. Schikaneder, a fellow member of the Masons, commissioned a Singspiel: *The Magic Flute [die Zauberflöte]*.

While he was working on *The Magic Flute*, Mozart received a last minute commission to write an opera for the coronation of the new

Emperor Leopold II in Prague that summer. Leaving their newborn son, he and Constanze traveled by coach to Prague, taking the student Süssmayr with them. Wolfgang wrote sections of *La Clemenza di Tito [The Clemency of Tito]* along the way. As before, the Prague audiences loved this work, which has recently undergone a revival as one of Mozart's great operatic works.

The Magic Flute opened in Vienna on September 30, 1791. Schikaneder played the role of the Birdman Papageno. The story is a combination of fairy tale and portrayal of the Masonic ideal of the Enlightened Ruler, ruling by Reason and Science and banishing superstition. It was a huge success; middle- and lower-class people nightly packed the theater.

Listen: The Magic Flute, K620

Mozart attended the performances on most nights. On one occasion, he took with him his son Carl, Salieri, and Salieri's mistress, the singer Caterina Cavalieri. To Mozart's delight, Salieri praised the work highly. After Mozart's death, the continued popularity of this work would help Constanze pay off the family debts and put herself on a better financial footing.

Mozart's last entry in his musical catalogue is a "Little Masonic Cantata" (K623), performed November 18 to inaugurate the new hall of his Masonic lodge.

In early summer of 1791, Mozart had received a well-paid and highly secret commission to write a Requiem Mass, to which he now turned his attention. The anonymous patron was the wealthy Count von Walsegg, an amateur musician whose wife had recently died, and who wanted to pass the work off as his own.

After writing two operas and receiving many new commissions for music, the tide was turning once more in Mozart's favor. Though Mozart had already written much brilliant work, it seemed that he was just reaching his musical maturity, with much greater works to come. And in the midst of this hopeful upswing, his life was suddenly cut short.

Mozart had been sick the previous year, but he had hopes of recovering and restoring his family fortunes. In late November 1791, an influenza epidemic swept through Vienna, and Mozart caught it. He continued frantically working on the *Requiem Mass*, which he began to describe as his own. He died, surrounded by his wife and her family, on December 5, 1791, just short of 36 years old.

Listen: Requiem Mass, K626

The cause of his death was listed as Severe Military Fever. The bloating of his body before death led to speculation that he had been poisoned, speculations that continued into the nineteenth century, when Salieri in semi-delirium tried to commit suicide. Recent research has speculated that Mozart succumbed to progressive kidney failure, caused by a series of streptococcal infections in his youth and adulthood. This illness would have been exacerbated by the bloodletting treatments of his doctors.

Of course, the death of such a unique creative force at such a relatively early age leaves behind a sense of intense loss that persists to this day. At the time of his death, Mozart was still growing and maturing as an artist. What else might he have produced if he had lived another 10, 20 or even 50 years? What would have been the impact on music had Mozart made it into the 1830s or 1840s, surviving both Beethoven and Schubert? Of course, that is a question that cannot be answered. But what we can do is listen to, study and absorb the immense body of music Mozart left behind as his undying legacy to humanity.

Concluded

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