

Programme notes for Vivaldi *Gloria* and Mozart *Mass in C Minor*

Gloria in D Major, RV 589

Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741)

Until the late 19th century, being a musician was a family business little different from being a cobbler or a blacksmith, and Antonio Vivaldi, like Mozart, came from just such a family. He was born in Venice and spent much of his life in that city, beginning his musical studies with his father at a very early age. Father and son toured Venice playing violin duets when he was a child and he began composing early in life; a setting of *Laetatus sum* survives written in 1691, when Vivaldi was 13 years old. His health had always been poor, and the “*strettezza di petto*” (tightness of the chest) from which he suffered was probably asthma. It was decided, therefore, in 1693 that, as his health would probably preclude many occupations, he should study for the priesthood. He was ordained in 1703, aged 25, and became known as the “*il prete rosso*” (the red priest) because of the colour of his hair. Only a year after his ordination he was granted a dispensation from saying mass because of his poor health, and he appears to have performed very few of the duties of a priest throughout the rest of his life.

Venice in the early 18th century was a remarkably forward-looking city-state, and the Doge and councillors made generous provision for the poor, the sick and destitute through four charitable foundations. One of these was the Ospedale della Pietà which ministered to orphaned and abandoned babies. Many of these were the illegitimate offspring of noblemen, so the Ospedale was funded lavishly by many guilty families. During their time there the boys learned a trade up to the age of 15, when they had to leave; the girls were trained in lace-making and laundering, and received a musical education. Those who showed real talent for music could remain at the Ospedale and join its highly-regarded orchestra and choir, receiving further first-rate vocal and instrumental training. In 1744, the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau visited the Venice and wrote, “Every Sunday in the churches of the four scuole, during Vespers, there are motets for a large chorus and orchestra. These are composed and conducted by the leading Italian maestri and performed from behind screened-off galleries by girls, the oldest of whom is not twenty years of age. I can think of nothing so delectable and touching as this music: the wealth of artistry, the exquisite taste of the songs, the beauty of the choices, and the precision of performance . . . what pained me were these cursed screens which let only sounds escape and kept hidden from me the angelic beauties of which the sounds were so worthy.”

In 1703 Vivaldi became “*maestro di violino*” at the Ospedale della Pietà, but despite his obvious qualities, Vivaldi’s relationship with the Board of the Ospedale was distinctly fraught. Each year, the Board had to vote on whether to continue to employ each teacher, and Vivaldi hardly ever gained unanimous approval. In 1709, the vote went 7-6 against his reappointment and he was dismissed. However by 1711, the Board had realised its mistake and he was unanimously reinstated. He was finally appointed “*maestro de’ concerti*” (director of music) in 1716 and assumed full control over the Ospedale’s musical activities. His relationship with the institution remained stormy, however, and was interrupted on a number of occasions, but the Ospedale remained an important part of Vivaldi’s life until his death.

There are few certainties in our knowledge of the history of tonight’s *Gloria*, but it was probably composed around 1715. Surprisingly, given that no men were allowed to perform in the cloistered orphanage, it is written for full choir including tenors and

basses. This is probably the result of Vivaldi's wish that the piece have a wider potential for performance outside the Ospedale. The piece was entirely lost to view from the mid 18th century until the score was rediscovered in the National Library in Turin, along with several other works by Vivaldi, in 1926. The work was transcribed and arranged by Alfredo Casella, who almost single-handedly put Vivaldi's name back onto the musical map, and its first performance since the 18th century took place in Sienna in 1939 during a week-long Vivaldi festival organized by Casella. His edition was published in 1941, and it is this version which we are performing tonight. The work is in 12 sections and the opening "Gloria in excelsis" opens most memorably with its repeated notes and octave leaps in the orchestra. The feeling is grand, but the punctuating trumpets and oboes give it a boundlessly energetic momentum. The following "Et in terra pax" is suitably meditative and makes much greater use of chromatic harmony. The "Laudamus te" duet returns to the more joyful feel of the opening. A more solemn "Gratias agimus" leads into a fine fugal "Propter magnam"; Vivaldi celebrates the glory of God through the glory of finely wrought counterpoint. The first solo aria follows with the "Domine Deus", where the soprano's line suggests that God's glory can also take a gentler turn. The next choral movement, "Domine fili", is dominated by dotted rhythms which contrast with the smoother line of the succeeding alto solo "Domine Deus, agnus Dei", during which the choir pleads for God's mercy in taking away their sins. A chromatically expressive chordal "Qui tollis" prefaces another aria for the alto, "Qui sedes," also of a serious mood, until the final "Quoniam" reintroduces the celebratory optimism of the opening chorus.

Mass in C Minor, K427

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)

Mozart's *Mass in C minor* seems to have been dogged by unhelpful circumstances from the very start. Nothing survives to explain why he commenced upon it at all, but, as there is no evidence of any commission for it, perhaps the most plausible theory is that it was a kind of peace offering to his father, Leopold.

In the summer of 1780, Mozart had been commissioned by Elector Karl Theodor of Bavaria to write an opera, *Idomeneo*, for his court theatre in Munich. Relationships with both his father (who still tried to dominate every aspect of his son's life, despite his now being 24 years old) and his employer (Hieronymous von Colloredo, Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg) had deteriorated badly. Leopold's only real interest was in securing a safe and secure position for his son, not in allowing him to grow musically and fulfil his potential; Coloredo (spelling?) regarded him as merely a servant to be treated in any way that his master felt appropriate. Unsurprisingly therefore, Mozart was delighted when, in the summer of 1780, he was granted six weeks' leave of absence to visit Munich to supervise the premiere of *Idomeneo*. Having experienced there the pleasure of working with a fine company of musicians and appreciative superiors, he had little stomach for a return to Salzburg. His period of absence lengthened, and when the final performance of the hugely successful first run of *Idomeneo* took place in March 1781, he had been away for about seven months. Archbishop Coloredo, wishing to bask in the reflected new glory of his servant, commanded Mozart to join him in Vienna, but once there, their relationship became increasingly strained and acrimonious. This led in May 1781 to Mozart's dismissal from Coloredo's service. The break with his employer also precipitated a break with his father, whose plans for a secure, lifelong position for his son had now crumbled to dust. Mozart then widened this rift into a chasm by wooing a young soprano named Constanze Weber and marrying her in Vienna in August 1782 without his father's blessing.

A year later, Constanze gave birth to the first of their six children (four of whom died in infancy), and Mozart wished to heal the rift between himself and his father and beloved sister Nannerl. The family made the arduous 200 mile, week-long, journey to Salzburg, but received cold and distant treatment from Leopold and Nannerl. Mozart attempted to please his father by directing a performance of the completed movements of tonight's *Mass in C minor* with Constanze singing the soprano solos. These solos had been specifically written to show off her voice, and Mozart hoped that her performance would impress Leopold sufficiently to make him see that she was a serious and highly talented singer worthy to be his son's wife. Recent research also indicates that the Mass was possibly begun as a promise to Leopold and intended to be a way of becoming reconciled with Colloredo. Unfortunately it did not succeed, and when they left Salzburg the relationship between father and son was still distinctly frosty, and Colloredo had shown no interest in his former employee.

Mozart was unlucky yet again in that by the time of this Salzburg performance of three movements from the Mass in October 1783, the emperor, Josef II, had instigated a series of religious reforms. Josef considered himself to be a child of the Enlightenment, and the Cartesian rationalism of that movement believed that all true knowledge was from the mind, not the emotions, so music was regarded as merely a "decorative" art. The emperor therefore decided to do away with elaborate, concerted musical settings of the mass, demanding short and relatively simple choral music, without aria-like solos or choral fugues, which he regarded as merely (to use a term of Bertolt Brecht's) "culinary". The "rule" was that all of the musical sections of the Mass should not exceed 45 minutes duration in total. These views very much tied in with the views of Colloredo, so it is most unlikely that the elaborate soprano solos and fugal double choruses of the *Mass in C minor* would have pleased him. It would appear that after the parts of the Mass failed to impress either his father or his former employer, and as no-one else seemed to wish to commission it, Mozart simply abandoned the piece.

Tonight's work, therefore, is, like the *Requiem*, an incomplete torso. It is by no means as fragmentary as the *Requiem*, but some important parts of the full mass setting are missing. The "Credo" is unfinished, there is no "Agnus dei" and no full score of the "Sanctus" or "Osanna" survives, so parts of these movements must be reconstructed. A further indication of Mozart's lack of intention to complete the mass can be seen in his re-use of the music of the Kyrie and Gloria in the cantata *Davide penitente*. Surprisingly, the musical style was heavily influenced by the style of the previous generation of baroque composers. In 1781, after Mozart had decided to stay permanently in Vienna, he became friendly with Baron Gottfried van Sweetsen, who was later to provide Haydn with the texts for *The Creation* and *The Seasons*. Van Sweetsen, who had first met Mozart when the composer was only 11 years old, was unusual at the time in having a great interest in the music of the past. Up until the mid 19th century, the general musical public held the opposite view to that of today, wanting above all new works by contemporary composers. Van Sweetsen introduced Mozart to the works of Bach and Handel, and their influence on the *Mass in C minor* is obvious and profound in such movements as the fugue on "Cum sancto spiritu".

The opening "Kyrie" is actually the only movement of this mass written in the key of C minor. It begins with dark solemnity, but this leads to a soaring, lyrical soprano solo for the "Christe", surely designed to allow Constanze to show her ability in legato singing. The "Gloria" begins with a blaze of trumpets and drums to bolster the four-part chorus. The separate movements of the "Gloria" increase their forces numerically, from one to two to three soloists and from four to five to eight-part

choruses. The counterpoint and continuo textures of the soprano duet in “Domine Deus” show how much Mozart had learned from his introduction to the music of Handel. In “Qui tollis”, the dotted rhythms and a repetitive bass line reflect the text’s plea for mercy. “Cum sancto spiritu” is a masterly fugue which is clearly influenced by the music of Bach.

The “Credo”, like the “Gloria,” is in “cantata form”, which means that separate lines of text are treated as independent movements. The “Credo” opens in a similar manner to the “Kyrie”, but this time without trumpets and drums. The lively, largely chordal “Credo in unum Deum” shows a faith without doubts in a direct style of which even Colloredo and Emperor Josef could have approved. The succeeding “Et incarnatus est” is a movement for soprano solo of breathtaking transcendence. The remainder of the “Credo” text was not set.

The manuscript of the eight-part “Sanctus” does not survive, so the movement must be completed editorially, but enough survives for this not to be too speculative an operation. The “Sanctus” is set in a simple, direct style, but the “Osanna” is an extraordinary fugue in which Mozart seems to be saying to the ghosts of Bach and Handel “Anything you can do, I can do better”.

The “Benedictus” weaves the four soloists together contrapuntally and ends with a joyful double chorus “Osanna”.

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