Introduction: Mozart’s Requiem in context

In 1791, the last year of his life, Mozart’s compositional reputation was flourishing. His published works were widely disseminated in Vienna and beyond, his operas Die Entführung aus dem Serail, Le nozze di Figaro, Don Giovanni and Così fan tutte were staged around Europe, and his commissions were healthy in number and diverse in orientation, including the singspiel Die Zauberflöte for the Theater auf der Wieden in Vienna, the opera seria La clemenza di Tito for Emperor Leopold II’s coronation in Prague, the Clarinet Concerto in A, K. 622, for the virtuoso Anton Stadler, the motet ‘Ave verum corpus’, K. 618, for Baden, and the cantata Laut verkünde unsre Freude, K. 623, for the Viennese Masonic lodge ‘Zur neugekrönten Hoffnung’.

The basic facts about the commissioning, composition and completion of his final work, the Requiem in D minor, K. 626, have long been known and, on the surface at least, are a far cry from imaginative interpretations and re-interpretations of them.1 It was commissioned anonymously by Franz, Count von Walsegg (1763–1827), an amateur musician and resident of Schloss Stuppach near Gloggnitz in Niederösterreich (Lower Austria), probably in summer 1791, in memory of his wife, who had died on 14 February 1791 aged twenty; Walsegg had earlier commissioned a memorial tomb for her, completed by the time of her internment on 27 March, from the architect Johann Henrici and the sculptor Johann Martin Fischer.2 Walsegg’s lawyer, Dr Johann Sortschan, or his business manager, Franz Anton Leitgeb, was the


probable intermediary between commissioner and composer, promising a payment of 50 or 60 ducats. Busy with his operatic commissions *La clemenza di Tito* and *Die Zauberflöte*, Mozart almost certainly began work on the Requiem only after returning from Prague for the 6 September premiere of *Tito* and after completing *Zauberflöte* for its first performance on 30 September. Work thereafter on the Requiem would have been punctuated by trips to Baden to visit Constanze, by performances of *Die Zauberflöte*, and by the composition of the Masonic cantata K. 623 (entered into Mozart’s thematic catalogue, the *Verzeichnüss aller meiner Werke*, on 15 November). The decision of a Niederösterreich court in favour of Prince Karl Lichnowsky’s financial claim against Mozart also dates from early November 1791. It is uncertain whether Mozart worked on the Requiem after taking to his bed with his final illness on or just after 20 November. At any rate, by 5 December he had completed the Introit in full score, and had written the vocal parts, continuo and sporadic instrumental passages for the Kyrie, the Sequence (the Lacrymosa only to bar 8) and the Offertory. Following Mozart’s death on 5 December, Constanze moved quickly to have the Requiem completed by his Viennese associates, enlisting the services of first Joseph Eybler (1765–1846) and then, once Eybler had given up after orchestrating most of the Sequence, Franz Xaver Süssmayr (1766–1803), who finished the work by the end of February 1792. (A copy was then sent to the King of Prussia and another kept by Constanze.) The score given to Walsegg to fulfil the commission comprised the Introit and Kyrie from Mozart, with

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3 For further information on Walsegg, see Brauneis, ‘Auftrag, Entstehung und Vollendung von Mozarts “Requiem”’. Brauneis speculates that Mozart’s fellow mason Michael Puchberg may have given Walsegg the idea of commissioning a Requiem from Mozart; Puchberg lived in accommodation owned by Walsegg.

4 According to Dexter Edge, Mozart purchased a large quantity of paper-type Tyson 62-V used for the Introit, the Kyrie (except the last page) and the Dies irae, the Tuba mirum, the Rex tremendae and the first page of the Recordare after he arrived back in Vienna on 18 September 1791. See Edge, ‘Mozart’s Viennese Copyists’, Ph.D. thesis, University of Southern California, 2001, p. 437. H. C. Robbins Landon assigns Mozart’s work on the Requiem to the precise period 8 October – 20 November 1791; on account of the awful Viennese weather between mid-October and mid-November 1791, he also confines Mozart’s and Constanze’s putative trip to the Prater (where Mozart supposedly suggested that he was writing the Requiem for himself) to 20 or 21 October. See Landon, *Mozart’s Last Year* (London, 1988), pp. 156, 167.


instrumental additions to the Kyrie in an unknown hand; the Sequence and Offertory in Süßmayr’s hand, incorporating Mozart’s work and Süßmayr’s own orchestration partly based on Eybler’s; and Süßmayr’s Sanctus, Benedictus and Agnus Dei followed by a partial reprise of Mozart’s Introit and Kyrie for the Communio, all again in Süßmayr’s hand. 7 Early performances took place at the Michaelerkirche in Vienna for Mozart’s exequies (10 December 1791), 8 at Ignaz Jahn’s hall in Vienna on 2 January 1793 as a benefit for Constanze and her children organized by Baron van Swieten, in Wiener Neustadt on 14 December 1793 and 14 February 1794 in memory of Walsegg’s wife, at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig on 20 April 1796 under Johann Adam Hiller and at the city’s Thomasschule later the same year, in Kremsmunster in 1796 and Graz in 1798, in Hamburg on 7 November 1799 under Friedrich Gottlieb Schwenke and in Dresden in December 1799. 9 Following a protracted, increasingly ill-tempered series of exchanges between Constanze and Breitkopf & Härtel, set against the backdrop of Breitkopf & Härtel’s desire to publish Mozart’s complete works, the first edition of the Requiem finally appeared in 1800, probably based on performance materials produced for one of the Leipzig performances in 1796. 10

Mozart’s Requiem is a liturgical work, strongly tied to traditions of sacred music; there is no evidence that its composer envisaged a concert performance. In addition to the sections set to music by Mozart and his completers, the liturgical service prescribes intoned texts between the Kyrie and Sequence (Oratio: Fidelium Deus omnium, and Lectio), the Sequence and the Offertory (Evangelium), the Offertory and the Sanctus (Praefatio defunctorum) and the Benedictus and Agnus Dei (Pater noster). 11 Mozart apparently used earlier

7 For a comprehensive list of early Requiem sources (1791–1800), based on unpublished work by Ulrich Leisinger, see Zaslaw (ed.), Der neue Köchel.
works as models in his first two movements: Florian Gassmann’s Requiem in C minor, Handel’s chorus ‘The Ways of Zion Do Mourn’ from the Anthem for the Funeral of Queen Caroline, HWV 264, and Michael Haydn’s Requiem in C minor in the Introit; and Handel’s ‘Dettingen’ Anthem, HWV 265 (later recycled for use in the oratorio *Joseph and his Brethren*), for the fugue subjects in the Kyrie. Mozart got to know Haydn’s Requiem, written to commemorate Prince-Archbishop Schrattenbach’s death (16 December 1771), in Salzburg, and possibly encountered Gassmann’s Requiem either at performances at the Hofkapelle in Vienna in the late 1780s, or at St Stephen’s Cathedral, which owned a set of parts, once he had assumed his duties as unpaid, adjunct Kapellmeister in spring 1791."

"He probably got to know Handel’s works, the parallels with which are too close to allow for coincidental resemblance, through the civil servant and court administrator Baron Gottfried van Swieten, for whom he had previously re-orchestrated four of Handel’s works, *Acis and Galatea*, K. 566 (1788), *Messiah*, K. 572 (1789), *Alexander’s Feast*, K. 591 (1790), and the Ode for St Cecilia’s Day, K. 592 (1790).

Beyond these specific connections, Mozart’s Requiem resonates with earlier requiem settings, many of which he could have encountered in Salzburg or Vienna. He follows Michael Haydn and Johann Baptist Vanhal in the Introit, as well as four requiems by Anton Cajetan Adlgasser and Johann Ernst Eberlin that he may have heard in Salzburg, by setting the antiphon and psalm verse in one continuous movement."

"The association between the Introit’s psalm verse and Gregorian chant goes back to the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries; like Michael Haydn, Mozart incorporates the first phrase of the *tonus peregrinus* (bars 21ff.) from the *Liber usualis*. Ending the Introit on the dominant in preparation for the Kyrie follows requiems by Haydn and the Vienna-based Albrechtsberger and Gassmann; casting the Kyrie as a fugue aligns with those of Georg Reutter (known as Reutter der Junge), Gassmann, Giuseppe Bonno and Leopold Hofmann, all composers based in Vienna."

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12 On Gassmann, see Black, *Mozart and the Practice of Sacred Music*, p. 355.
13 Manfred Hermann Schmid, ‘*Introitus und Communio im Requiem: Zum Formkonzept von Mozart und Süssmayr*’, in Schmid (ed.), *Mozart Studien 7* (Tutzing, 1997), pp. 11–55, at p. 21. Adlgasser (1729–77) and Eberlin (1702–62) were active in Salzburg respectively as court and cathedral organist, and director of court music. A number of the requiem settings mentioned in this paragraph can be securely dated: Georg Reutter (1753); Niccolò Jommelli (1756); François-Joseph Gossec (1760); Johann Adolf Hasse (1763); Michael Haydn (1771); Florian Gassmann (1774); Peter Winter (1790).
Mozart’s setting of the Tuba mirum for four vocal soloists follows Reutter and Haydn among others, and is motivically similar to Adlgasser’s; a first verse for solo bass and obbligato trombone featuring a falling arpeggiated melody comes close to Eberlin’s. Pervasive dotted rhythms in the Rex tremendae bring to mind Baroque manifestations of regal majesty and are similar to settings of the text by Niccolò Jommelli, François-Joseph Gossec, Bonno and Peter Winter; the opening three-fold ‘Rex’ exclamation surfaces in Johann Adolf Hasse’s Requiem. Like the Recordare movements of Johann Joseph Fux, Reutter and Jommelli, Mozart’s is for solo voices, and like Winter’s is in 3/4 with overlapping entries at the beginning. Up to and including verse 15 of the Sequence, Mozart’s and Gassmann’s divisions of the text are the same, the two diverging only from verse 16 to the end: Gassmann sets verses 16–18 for the Confutatis and leaves the nineteenth and last verse (‘Huic ergo parce, Deus’) for his final movement, while Mozart opts for verses 16 and 17 for the Confutatis and verses 18 and 19 for the Lacrymosa. Mozart’s Lacrymosa is a choral movement in the minor mode, in line with south German and Austrian tradition, sharing its 12/8 time signature with the corresponding movement in Hasse’s Requiem. Mozart’s solo quartet setting of ‘sed signifer’ in the Domine Jesu follows Eberlin, Reutter, Adlgasser, Michael Haydn and Winter, and his fugal setting of ‘Quam olim Abrahae’ is consonant with Requiem tradition dating back to the seventeenth century and extending through the nineteenth as well.

The Requiem has always occupied a special place among Mozart’s works. It entered the orbit of almost every major nineteenth-century composer: Beethoven copied out and analysed the Kyrie fugue, angrily denounced Gottfried Weber’s criticisms of the work in the 1820s (‘Oh, you arch ass!’), and alluded to the Recordare in the last of his Gellert songs; Schubert and Rossini drew inspiration from the Requiem in early vocal works, and Berlioz (no great lover of Mozart) in the Grande messe des morts; Liszt improvised memorably on it in Fribourg in 1836, published a transcription of the Confutatis and Lacrymosa, came to consider the work ‘hackneyed’ towards the end of his life on account of such frequent performances, and played it for the Paris-based painter Míláhy Munkácsy early in 1886 as Munkácsy contemplated his picture The Death
of Mozart in a mood of ‘ecstatic reverie’; Wagner’s life-long admiration included an encounter in the mid- to late 1820s that ‘formed the starting point of my enthusiastic absorption in the works of that master [Mozart]’ and contemplations of it late in life as well; Anton Rubinstein, Mahler, Richard Strauss, Stanford and Rimsky-Korsakov all conducted it, Rimsky-Korsakov also quoting extensively from the Introit in the final section of Mozart and Salieri; and Tchaikovsky wrote admiringly of the ‘marvellous, poetic introduction with double fugue at the end’, even though he expressed reservations about other aspects of the work. Described in 1902 as one of Mozart’s works that ‘speaks persuasively to every generation . . . [through which] Mozart’s influence still persists and must be reckoned with as a factor in the complexus of forces which is moulding the music of the new century’, it had similar exposure among twentieth-century composers. Bartók used examples from the Requiem in his teaching; Szymanowski wrote of its ‘divine grief’, the most powerful ‘eruption’ of the ‘grim, powerful call from a world beyond ours’ in Mozart’s late music; Janáček conducted a highly successful performance of it in Brno in the late 1870s and another in memory of Smetana in Prague in 1916; the fifteen-year-old Walton sang a solo part in a performance at Christ Church, Oxford, in December 1917; Britten considered it an important historical precedent for the modern-day composer in writing his own War Requiem (1961–2), subsequently reacting profoundly to conducting Mozart’s work (1971); and Ligeti, composer of another of the last century’s


great requiems (1965), first encountered the Sequence of the Requiem through Mozart, singing it as early as 1943.24

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century composers’ experiences of the Requiem, while revealing its effect on great musical figures of the past, represent only a tiny fraction of the work’s reception. The sheer variety and amount of reception-related activity – performances, recordings, editions, scholarship, journalistic criticism, fiction, plays, films – attest to the Requiem’s profound impact on Western culture. I dedicate a substantial portion of my book to reception (Chapters 1, 2, 3), redressing a long-standing imbalance in Requiem scholarship whereby narrow consideration of the text of this famously incomplete work (in particular who wrote what, or could conceivably have written what, or should have written what in accordance with Mozart’s perceived intentions) has taken precedence over consideration of context in the widest sense.

Above all, reception draws attention to a fundamental feature of the Requiem’s ontological status, namely that our collective understandings of it derive from our imaginative (and often undifferentiated) engagement with fictional, quasi-fictional and factual circumstances of composition to a degree unrivalled perhaps by any other work in the Western canon. For running in parallel with the aforementioned facts about the Requiem’s genesis are documentary accounts in which divisions between facts and fictions are hazy. As described in Chapter 1, an announcement about the circumstances surrounding the Requiem’s composition was disseminated within weeks of Mozart’s death, in all likelihood relying on information provided by Constanze, claiming inter alia that Mozart finished the work shortly before his death; Constanze then engaged in further deceptions in the account she gave to Franz Niemetschek for his biography (1798), stating that the messenger had collected the unfinished work and that she knew nothing of the commissioner’s identity or of performances that may have taken place. Johann Friedrich Rochlitz adapted and intensified Niemetschek’s story in his two Requiem anecdotes for the Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung (1798), accentuating the otherworldliness of the

messenger and Mozart’s psychological and medical frailty and frenzied composition, in the process moving further in a fictional direction. The collision of music and biography comprising the Requiem legend had by now cast a spell that would entrance the nineteenth and (to a slightly lesser extent) twentieth centuries, irrespective of implicit or explicit scholarly attempts conclusively to separate fact from fiction.

Absolute separation of fact from fiction on all matters of detail is neither possible nor (in my view) hermeneutically desirable where Mozart’s Requiem is concerned. Over 200 years after the composition and completion it is impossible robustly to establish the truth-value of elements of the composite Requiem legend. Although some parts are demonstrably false, others inhabit a grey area between fact and fiction, existing in long-after-the-fact recollections of Mozart’s final days from Constanze’s sister Sophie Haibel – who tells of final instructions to Süssmayr and Mozart’s ‘last movement’ of mouthing ‘drum passages’ – and Benedikt Schack, a friend of Mozart and the first Tamino in Die Zauberflöte, to whom is attributed the account of the rehearsal at Mozart’s bedside hours before his death.25 It is similarly impossible to determine the accuracy of Constanze’s report that Mozart believed he was writing the Requiem for himself. Yet these elements are inextricably woven into our critical consciousness, if not always explicitly as fact then as part of an elaborate, quasi-factual hinterland that insistently reminds us why we believe the Requiem to be so special.

With a plethora of complete Mozart works on which to lavish our critical attention, why do we return time and again to a Requiem he only half finished and worked on for perhaps six or seven weeks? The Requiem project may, or may not, have held special significance for Mozart himself, beyond the fact that its commission came so soon after his appointment as adjunct Kapellmeister to Hofmann at St Stephen’s Cathedral in Vienna,26 but it has always held extraordinary significance for us, for interacting musical, biographical, circumstantial and psychological reasons. How different the


26 In his careful consideration of Mozartian myths, William Stafford swims against the critical tide: ‘In truth, it may be doubted whether . . . [the Requiem] interested him very much. The correspondence of his last months bears testimony to his excitement about Die Zauberflöte but makes no mention of the Requiem.’ See Stafford, The Mozart Myths: A Critical Reassessment (Stanford, CA, 1991), p. 197. On Mozart’s appointment to St Stephen’s and possible activities there in 1791, see Black, ‘Mozart and the Practice of Sacred Music’, pp. 286–301.
posthumous reception of Mozart’s Requiem would have been had the remarks of Mozart’s first biographer, Friedrich Schlichtegroll (1793), come to dominate the critical agenda, rather than the cocktail of Constanze’s, Niemetschek’s and Rochlitz’s accounts. Schlichtegroll correctly reports the Requiem as incomplete at Mozart’s death and uses his single reference to it to reinforce Haydn’s famous assessment ‘before God and as an honest man’ of Mozart’s supremacy over his contemporaries. But he makes nothing of the link between biography and work: “The solemn pathos of the expression, which one finds combined there in the most effective way with the highest degree of art, moved all hearts at the performance organized to benefit the composer’s widow and children [2 January 1793], and earned the admiration of all connoisseurs.”

Schlichtegroll’s supplement to his 1790–3 obituaries, published in 1798, includes a summarized version of Rochlitz’s Requiem anecdotes. For so many critics before and (especially) after, the legend provided information too important to exclude. As scholars today, more critically self-conscious than our predecessors, we should embrace the often murky continuum between fact and fiction where information about the Requiem is concerned, acknowledging the role that information across this continuum has played in cultivating the intense passion we collectively feel, and have always felt, for the work and all that it conveys. The basic facts surrounding the Requiem, as always, provide our scholarly foundations; but facts and fictions together will build our elaborate hermeneutic edifices.

Recognizing the fictional and the quasi-fictional as essential to how Mozart’s Requiem has been processed – and can continue to be processed – affects the organization and content of this book. Chapter 1 looks at the shaping and re-shaping of the Requiem legend, including its role as a focus for nineteenth- and twentieth-century poetry, fiction and drama. Chapter 2 traces critical and scholarly reception, including early nineteenth-century writings that demonstrate uncertainty about the genesis and completion of the work, the mid-nineteenth-century Requiem-Streit when its authenticity was called into question, and the ebb and flow of authorship- and aesthetics-related discussions in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries; I also


address the legend’s impact on serious criticism. Chapter 3 evaluates editions and performances, *inter alia* the mutual reinforcement of work and occasion and the intense connections felt with the Requiem, both partly attributable to engagement with the legend, and narratives conveyed in twentieth- and 21st-century recordings. Chapter 4, on Mozart’s work on the Requiem, draws inspiration from the legend by focusing attention on Mozart’s autograph score, the document in which myths and musical realities collide. Mysteries unresolved by an incomplete score, I argue, complement irresolvable mysteries of the Requiem legend; autograph-inspired musical interpretation and implicit and explicit legend-inspired fiction are kindred spirits.

But the Requiem legend has a basic interpretational limitation as well as stimulating interpretational virtues. The legend is, in effect, Mozart’s alone, but the finished Requiem is not Mozart’s alone. Especially since World War II, Süssmayr has regularly been perceived as a musical cog in Mozart’s wheel; the relative absence of discussion of any of Süssmayr’s works that could cast light on his contributions to the Requiem, for example, illustrates where scholarly energies have and have not been directed in studying the work, where scholarly biases traditionally lie. With a compelling narrative at the interpretative core of the Requiem, Süssmayr gets in the way for many modern-day critics, the putative mediocrity meddling with the genius. Surely pushing out of the limelight, or discrediting, or marginalizing a figure who makes a cameo appearance at a crucial stage in Mozart’s life constitutes palatable collateral damage? Many might like to think this way, in an attempt to understand and appreciate the Requiem as Mozart’s exclusive achievement. If biography and music perform an inspiring double act, then it stands to reason that biographical interpretation will influence musical interpretation. Even if this is a positive state of affairs in many respects, it also helps to explain why Süssmayr’s musical presence has become so unwelcome to many critics. Süssmayr’s completion ensured that Mozart’s fragment saw the light of day as a finished, performable work and has contributed to the Requiem’s critical success (as we shall see). The peaks and troughs in the reception of his work on the Requiem are therefore discussed in Chapter 2. A full re-appraisal of the completion, including Eybler’s contribution, follows in Chapter 5, informed both by Mozart’s contributions to the Requiem and to sacred music and by Süssmayr’s own works. Finally, in Chapter 6, I turn to modern completions of the Requiem, collectively the most important body of twentieth-century editions, which adapt, revise and discard Süssmayr’s contributions in different ways. I explain ideologies that shape the new completions and practical decisions taken by their editors.