

Mozart and his Requiem

Mastermind Question 1 – If he Started, Why Didn't he Finish?

Mozart's untimely death was indeed the reason why his *Requiem* had to be completed by someone else, but this does not tell the whole story – after all, his *C minor Mass* is also incomplete (although it is thought possible that it was originally complete, but some parts were subsequently lost) and he wrote that eight years before his death. Mozart spent about fifteen years in the service of the Archbishop of Salzburg, and wrote many small scale masses for the services there - yet we do not have one complete large scale mass. And he wasn't the only composer of his era who had problems with such large scale church music – Haydn's masses came under attack in his lifetime as being of unsuitable character, Beethoven's first *Mass in C* was a public failure, and some music historians have described his oratorio *The Mount of Olives* as merely competent!



So why was it so difficult? Take a look at the conditions Mozart was working under....

In the 18th century the church was fairly hostile towards instrumental music – the use of instruments was actually restricted by order of the Austrian government during the 1780s. Vocal music had always been seen as being more appropriate for religious services, particularly the complete purity of a *Capella* writing in its role of making the words of the service felt. Rarely has the Church at any time encouraged innovation, not just in music. It was opposed to the chromaticism of Renaissance composers as well as the centralised church concept of Renaissance architects. Hence this 'new' instrumental music was not welcome. Unfortunately the classical style was essentially an instrumental one, so was not popular with the church.

Music ideology was a more deep-seated problem. The concept of music for much of recent history has been that of an expressive art whereas the Catholic Church (and to a lesser extent the Protestant church) saw it as having a celebratory function. This argument can be seen clearly in the relatively jolly settings of the Kyrie in the masses of Mozart and others. Kyrie Eleison – Lord have mercy upon us – demands a quiet, pleading context in an expressive art but is rarely granted one.

After 1770 the prevailing style was also rooted firmly in the rhythmic techniques of Italian comic opera, again not a naturally suitable vehicle for Church music. Hence the appearance of almost irreverent coloratura passages in a Mozart mass. Much Mozart's mass music was actually in imitation of High Baroque – as he was a brilliant parodist this served him very well, even if his conviction that fugal entries should most definitely be heard was at odds with Bach's tendency to hide them securely.

The *Requiem* and the *C minor mass* were two of the few works that Mozart actually wrote for his own satisfaction rather than as a means of income. (He wrote the *C minor mass* to celebrate his marriage to Constanza.) As a man of little means he could not afford to do too much that didn't bring in an income.

Too young to die?

One of the headline facts about Mozart is that he died at the age of 35 – or as it is more often put, died very young. But is the latter statement actually correct? At the time of his death in 1791 the world was a very different place, and most major developments in medicine had yet to be made, as had many of the inventions – (fresh) running water, flushing toilets, sewage systems – that contributed to the standard of hygiene that we have come to expect today.

In fact, at the time of Mozart's death the average life expectancy of someone in Western Europe was about 40. As the average life expectancy today is about 80, that makes Mozart the equivalent of being 70 today – not very old indeed, but not 'died very young' in anybody's book!

Even taking into account the very high death rate for children under the age of two in 1790 – 17% of newborns didn't make it to

the age of two in England at that time and 31% didn't reach fifteen – the difference is still large. Anyone arriving at the age of fifteen could expect to live until they were 50. Even using this figure to compare Mozart's age would make him 56 today. Not old – but not very young either...

And not just Mozart – Schubert was born six years after Mozart died, and died at 31. For other well-known composers who had limited composition time, check out how long Mendelssohn, Chopin, Purcell and Gershwin were granted.

Classical musicians were the pop musicians of their day. Our pop world also has an extensive list of short-lived performers who belong to 'The 27 Club' (or 'The Forever 27 Club'), including the most recent headline addition - Amy Winehouse. The difference (in most cases) is that Mozart was led to an early death largely through poverty, whereas the opposite tends to be the modern day killer.

So young and so brilliant!

Another of Mozart's defining legacies is how young he was when he composed so much of his music – or, in absolute terms, all of his music. How could he be so brilliant without the acquisition of skills over a large number of years? Well you may be surprised at how many of the great inventions of the past have been achieved by people who were under 35 at the time.

Discussion point: Mozart or Süssmayr?

Does it matter?

Mozart died before he could complete his Requiem. His pupil Süssmayr, with whom he had discussed it at length, finished the rest for him. That is fact. But who wrote exactly what is less certain and has entertained many a musicologist and music historian since.

There are those who will say that because he didn't write it all and we don't know how much of it he wrote - perhaps less than 50% - then its attribution to him is less than valid and it does not deserve to be as popular as it is. Which begs the question – do audiences go to listen because it is Mozart or because they enjoy this particular Requiem?

After all, it is well documented that Leonardo da Vinci allowed his pupils to 'participate' in the production of many of his major works, yet no one will say that they are lesser works of art (or less valuable) because of this.

So: Mozart or Süssmayr – does it matter?

Below is a list of ten inventors. Nine of them were under 35 when they created their most notable invention. See if you can match them with the correct invention from the list below, and find out how old they were at the time. Who is the odd one out?

Inventor	Age	Invention
John Logie Baird		
Alexander Graham Bell		
Francois-Louis Cailler		
Paul Cornu		
George Crum		
Karl Elsener		
Henri Giffard		
Hanson Gregory		
Arthur Leslie Large		
Alfred Nobel		

Inventions

Television
 Airship
 Swiss Army Knife
 Chips
 Telephone

Helicopter
 Dynamite
 Kettle
 The (hole in the) doughnut
 Chocolate bar

