

Chapter 13: The Composer's Voice: Mozart (1756–91)

I. Introduction

- A. Mozart's acclaim began when he was young.
- B. Although he died young, Mozart composed an astonishing number of pieces.
- C. He was born in Salzburg, and his father was very influential in his formative years.
- D. Mozart was a master of all genres, encompassing both vocal and instrumental music.

II. Mozart's early operas

- A. After several early operas (including one to a libretto by Goldoni and a *Singspiel*), Mozart reached his first true success with *Idomeneo* (1780), which was modeled on Gluck's *Iphigenia*.
- B. In 1781, Mozart moved to Vienna. His first opera there was *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*.

III. The "Da Ponte" operas

- A. After *Die Entführung*, Mozart did not compose another opera for four years.
- B. After several years of being thwarted from working with Lorenzo da Ponte, Mozart was able to collaborate with him in 1785. The result was the comedy *The Marriage of Figaro*.
 - 1. Based on the play by Beaumarchais, the basic plot of *Figaro* resembles that of *La serva padrona*, except in this version the servants and nobility are all likeable characters.
 - 2. Mozart associates serious music traditionally given to noble characters with the servants and vice versa.
 - 3. In the second-act finale he expands a duet to a septet over the course of twenty minutes.
- C. The success of *Figaro* prompted more collaborations between Mozart and Da Ponte; the next was *Don Giovanni*.
 - 1. The opera intertwines comedy and tragedy.
- D. The third and finale Da Ponte collaboration was *Così fan tutte* (1790).

IV. Mozart's two last operas

- A. Mozart's last two operas were both performed in September 1791.
 - 1. Of these, *La clemenza di Tito* was the final opera seria of the eighteenth century.
 - 2. The other, *Die Zauberflöte*, was a *Singspiel*.
- B. *Die Zauberflöte* was commissioned by a friend of the composer's, Emanuel Schikaneder, who also wrote the libretto and performed as Papageno in the premiere.
 - 1. This opera mixes folklike elements, colorful and at times outrageous scenes, and mythical characters with Enlightenment ideology.
 - 2. It contains elements of Freemasonry.

V. Instrumental music

- A. Mozart composed symphonies throughout his life, beginning at age eight.
- B. Most of Mozart's symphonies (those before the mid-1780s) were conceived as light pieces—not serious or heavy.

- C. Symphonies 39–41, considered his greatest, were all composed in the summer of 1788.
 - 1. These works were not commissioned. Mozart hoped to make money from them by performances or selling them to a publisher.
 - 2. This intent signals a change in compositional purpose: art for art's sake.
 - 3. As such, these symphonies are more serious.
 - 4. Mozart's approach to the late symphonies prompted nineteenth-century writers to acknowledge a newfound depth in instrumental music.
- VI. The "symphonic" concerto is born
 - A. Mozart contributed as much to the development of the concerto as Haydn did to the symphony, partly due to his capacity as a virtuoso pianist.
 - 1. His first piano concerto is K. 175 (earlier ones are for harpsichord). After this, Mozart focused on violin concertos.
 - a) He combined the ritornello concept of older concertos with thematic contrast.
 - B. Mozart in the marketplace: the piano concertos
 - 1. Mozart's piano concertos were his primary means for performance in Vienna.
 - 2. Their composition dates tell us how economically successful Mozart was at various times in Vienna.
 - C. The Piano Concerto in G Major, K. 453
 - 1. Contemporary commentators noted that Mozart's piano concertos defined the form and demonstrated some of the same elements (intense subjective feeling) as his symphonies and operas.
 - 2. The concerto in G, K. 453, dates from a highly successful year—and the one in which he wrote the most concertos.
 - 3. Mozart defines the form, as seen here.
 - a) Instead of the repeated exposition of the first movement of a symphony, he has in effect two: one for the orchestra and one for the soloist.
 - b) The key scheme must be altered to accommodate the soloist/orchestra interaction.
 - c) He has a cadenza for the soloist before the final ritornello.
 - 4. For Mozart, the act of performing and the act of composing did not differ much.
 - 5. The second movement of this concerto is a slow movement in sonata form, which is unusual.
 - 6. The final movement is a theme and variations (not the typical rondo).
- VII. Domestic genres
 - 1. In addition to the public performance genres discussed above, Mozart also wrote for more intimate settings.
 - 2. Mozart composed a set of six quartets in response to Haydn's Op. 33.
 - 3. While quartets were typically considered pieces for amateur performance, Mozart's demanded a higher level of expertise.
 - 4. His solo piano music was also generally for home use.

5. His so-called violin sonatas are in reality piano sonatas with a violin accompaniment.

VIII. Sacred music and the Requiem

- A. Mozart also composed sacred music; these often include elements of his operatic style.
- B. His two greatest sacred works, the Mass in C Minor and the Requiem, were not completed.

IX. Mozart and the emergence of Romanticism

- A. The term “Romantic” represents many different ideas that do not easily congeal into one definition.
- B. As early as 1782, Rousseau pinpointed the underlying focus of Romanticism: seeking one’s uniqueness.
- C. Romantic artists sought to express themselves authentically.
 1. It was through suffering for one’s art alone that one could provide a truly aesthetic experience, as distinct from an intellectual, ethical, or purely practical one.
 2. E. T. A. Hoffman described the history of music as moving toward emancipation of all that kept music from pure expression. Words dictated direction for music and were one of the things that kept it in “bondage.”
 - a) Mozart expresses the divine and sublime—“into the heart of the spirit realm.”