

# PRELUDE

MARCH 2025 • MASTERWORKS #6



HARTFORD  
SYMPHONY  
ORCHESTRA

## Mozart's Requiem – March 14–16, 2025

In July of 1791, an “unknown gray stranger” visited Mozart with a request for a new commission: the composition of a Requiem on behalf of an anonymous patron. Mozart came to believe that the writing of the Requiem was a portend of his own death: “I fear I am writing a Requiem for myself.” In fact, the Requiem was Mozart’s final work, and he did not live to complete it. This edition of *Prelude* explores some of the facts – and fictions – surrounding one of the most famous Requiems the world has ever known.



Mozart's Requiem

“Requiem aeternam don eis, Domine” or “Eternal rest grant them, O Lord.” The Requiem is surely one of the most dramatic liturgical forms and has inspired countless composers, from medieval times to the present.

Not all compositions honoring the dead bear the name “Requiem” and not all composers of Requiems are Roman Catholic. Hector Berlioz, a widely known agnostic, composed the *Grand Messe des Morts* in 1837, and Johannes Brahms, who self-identified as a “humanist and agnostic,” famously composed his German Requiem, which utilized texts not from the traditional Latin Mass but from the German Luther bible. Gabriel Fauré’s *Requiem*, composed in 1887, evoked Fauré’s vision that death was “a happy deliverance and an aspiration towards happiness above.” Benjamin Britten, a conscientious objector during the Second World War, wrote his 1962 *War Requiem* as a tribute to the devastating loss of life in war, mixing parts of the Latin Mass with texts by World War I poet Wilfred Owens. Leonard Bernstein, who was Jewish, drew from the Latin and

A Requiem (a Latin term) is a Roman Catholic Mass offered in honor of the dead. The word is derived from the language of the liturgy, which begins with the words,

Hebrew texts in writing his theatrical 1971 *Mass*, commissioned by Jacqueline Kennedy. The piece reflects strong anti-war themes, and includes a pit orchestra, onstage singer/actors/musicians, as well as an onstage rock band and marching band.

But of all the Requiems in the repertoire, Mozart’s Requiem is the one shrouded in mystery. What we do know is this: in early July of 1791, an “unknown gray stranger” came to Mozart’s apartment in Vienna to commission a funeral Mass, a Requiem. The stranger (who was later identified as Anton Leitgeb, son of the Mayor of Vienna) stated that he represented a patron who wished to be anonymous. History reveals that the “anonymous patron” was Leitgeb’s employer, Count Franz von Walsegg-Stuppach. Today, historical sources believe it is highly probable that Mozart also knew or suspected the identities of both the mysterious messenger and the anonymous patron.

The Count wanted a Requiem to honor his late wife, Anna, who died in her early 20s on February 14, 1791. The Count, already established as somewhat



Mozart and Constanze

of a musical snob, was known to commission music from composers and then claim to have written it himself. Apparently, this was not an uncommon practice among the nobility of

MASTERWORKS  
SPONSORS

ROBERTS  
FOUNDATION  
FOR THE  
ARTS

The Elizabeth M. and Harriette  
M. Landon Foundation

the time. The commission had originally been offered to Mozart's rival composer, Antonio Salieri, who was "too busy" to accept it. But Mozart, who had struggled with financial setbacks in previous years, was just beginning to pay off some of his debts and needed the income. To add to his financial woes, his wife Constanze was eight months pregnant with the couple's second child, Franz Xaver Wolfgang Mozart, who was born on July 26<sup>th</sup> of that year.

In July of 1791, when he accepted the commission, Mozart was deeply absorbed in the writing of not one but TWO operas, *La clemenza di Tito* and *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*), and working against difficult time deadlines. He traveled to Prague in early September for the premiere of the first opera, and the second premiered in Vienna at the end of the same month, with Mozart as conductor. He was simultaneously composing a cantata for the opening of a new Masonic temple on November 18. Despite these pre-existing commitments, Mozart was likely fearful of turning down a paying customer, and thus accepted the commission for the Requiem, which was to be performed on February 14, 1792, the one-year anniversary of Anna's death. Mozart also accepted the terms of the commission: he could not reveal that he was the composer and could never ask the name of the patron who commissioned it.



Mozart working on his Requiem

In September, when he finally began work on the new commission, Mozart was working long hours, was likely sleep-deprived, and was already beginning to exhibit signs of the illness that led to his death. His health was in serious and steady decline and his widow, Constanze, later confirmed that her husband had been seriously unwell since September of that year.

By November 20, Mozart was so desperately ill that he was confined to his bed with unexplained pain, swelling, rash and severe vomiting. Nevertheless, he continued to work on the Requiem obsessively and became overwhelmed with the haunting premonition that he was writing the Requiem for himself. He

gathered his students and a few close friends to sing through the sections of the unfinished work and on December 4, 1791, the day before his death, declared, "Didn't I say before I was writing this Requiem for myself?" Mozart died in the early morning of December 5, 1791. He was just 35 years old, and he died before he could complete the work.



Black-masked Antonio Salieri

In the play *Amadeus*, playwright Peter Shaffer created a fictional version of the commission and reimagined the strange messenger as a black-masked Antonio Salieri, who kills Mozart to take credit for the work as his own. The deathbed scene from the 1984 movie version of *Amadeus*, directed by Milos Forman, with Tom Hulce as Mozart and F. Murray Abraham as Salieri, is well-known and may be viewed here:

[Mozart and Salieri write 'Requiem in D Minor' \(Full HD\) - Amadeus \(1984\) - YouTube](#)

The trailer for the popular film *Amadeus* may be viewed at the following link and the full film is available on various streaming services: [Amadeus \(1984\) Directed by Milos Forman - YouTube](#)

But what of the unfinished Requiem? Mozart's premature passing now left Constanze with a serious problem. At the time of her husband's death, only the opening Requiem and Kyrie movements were completed, and Mozart had written only eight bars of the Lacrymosa, the last words he set to music. The other movements of the work existed only as sketches, with the outlines of vocal parts and rough drafts of bass lines. Constanze was understandably fearful that the money she desperately needed from the commission would vanish if it became known that

Mozart on his death bed



Mozart's Grave

Mozart died before completing the work. She devised a plan to deliver a finished work and claim that Mozart had completed it before he died. Constanze secretly recruited Mozart's friend and fellow composer Joseph von Eybler, who filled in a portion of Mozart's blueprint, but Eybler returned the score unfinished.

The dying Mozart had given his student, Franz Xaver Süssmayr, instructions on how to complete the work and in his final days, had sung through sections of the Requiem with Constanze and a group of trusted friends. Having nowhere else to turn, Constanze asked Süssmayr to complete the Requiem, using Mozart's notes and instructions as a guide. Süssmayr picked up where Eybler left off and added his own orchestrations to the remaining sections. To make it appear that the piece had been written by one composer, Süssmayr rewrote the entire score in his own hand and falsified the date of completion with the forged inscription "di me (by me), W.A. Mozart. 1791." The manuscript was ultimately delivered to the Count, and he was so pleased with the work that he paid Constanze all that was owed. However, because a portion of the Requiem was played at Mozart's funeral Mass on December 14, 1791 (conducted by

Mozart's friend Michael Haydn, the younger brother of the more famous Franz Josef Haydn), the Count's plans to pass the work off as his own were foiled.

Upon his death, Mozart was buried in a pauper's grave in Vienna's St. Mark's Cemetery, but his celebrity eventually increased, likely fueled by Constanze's account of his death. Writing the Requiem had drained Mozart, she said, because he believed he was writing the Mass for himself. Even more upsetting, Constanze claimed Mozart believed he had been poisoned with a slow-acting toxin. Newspapers picked up the poisoning claim and it spread like wildfire. Who were the poisoners? Over the years, fingers were pointed at the Freemasons, allegedly because Mozart had revealed Masonic secrets in *Die Zauberflöte*, but the exact nature of the secrets was never disclosed or explained. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a German politician and infamous anti-Semite, Hermann Ahlwardt, decided to blame the Jews for having killed Mozart. That theory was picked up by a German neuropsychiatrist named Mathilde Ludendorff (wife of a famous German World War I general), who claimed that Mozart was murdered by a secret Jewish-Jesuit-Freemason cabal. The conspiracies were entirely baseless and ludicrous,

but like all conspiracy theories, persisted in the public's imagination notwithstanding the utter lack of any factual basis.

What parts of the Requiem were written by Mozart and which parts are by Süssmayr? Today, musicologists believe that Mozart had completed roughly two-thirds of the Requiem before his death and had provided clear sketches for the balance of the piece, leaving Süssmayr with the task of orchestrating what Mozart had already written or dictated to his student on his death bed. The work was first performed in public in Vienna on November 13, 1792, some eleven months after Mozart's death.

Beyond the tragedy and mystery of the Requiem, what we know for certain is this: Mozart composed the Requiem with the belief that he was writing it for himself. He poured his heart and soul into the work and, while he did not live to see his *Requiem Mass in D minor* completed, the work stands as a memorial to the composer and a testament to Mozart's genius. His tragic and untimely death robbed him of so much, but also robbed the world of the music he did not live to compose.



Mozart and Salieri

Opening bars of *Lacrimosa* (Unfinished)

## JOIN US!

Please join the HSO on March 14 – 16, 2025, to hear Mozart's *Requiem*, in partnership with The Hartford Chorale, under the direction of Jack Pott, Artistic Director of the Hartford Chorale.

**Did you borrow this *Prelude*? Get your own free copy! Whether you're a ticket buyer, donor, curious about the music, or know someone who is, just send an email to [dshulansky@hartfordsymphony.org](mailto:dshulansky@hartfordsymphony.org). We'll make sure you receive *Prelude* by email, in advance of each HSO Masterworks concert!**

## Interested in hearing other Requiems by other composers? We have a few suggestions we think you'll enjoy, and we offer the following links and brief stories of the creation of each Requiem:

### [The Requiem by Giuseppe Verdi:](#)

The work was composed to honor the revered Italian poet and novelist Alessandro Manzoni, who died when he fell and hit his head on the steps of a church in Milan. Verdi greatly admired Manzoni and after visiting his grave just four days after the funeral, he proposed composing a Requiem to be performed on the one-year anniversary of Manzoni's death. While Manzoni was a devout Catholic, Verdi was greatly opposed to organized religion and was a confirmed atheist, but the Requiem was the method he chose to honor someone he revered. We hope you enjoy this wonderful recording of Verdi's Requiem conducted by Leonard Bernstein in St. Paul's Cathedral:

[Verdi: Messa da Requiem /Leonard Bernstein/ London Live](#) [ヴェルディ：レクイエム バーンスタイン ロンドンライブ - YouTube](#)

### [The Requiem by Camille Saint-Saëns:](#)

This work was composed in 1878, in memory of the composer's friend and patron, Albert Libon. Just six days after Saint-Saëns completed the work, his two-and-a-half-year-old son André fell to his death from an open window, and just a few weeks later, his six-month old son Jean died in his crib of an unknown illness. Imagine the heartbreak the composer must have felt when he conducted the work later that year. The lush and beautiful melodies of the Requiem, Op 54, by Camille Saint-Saëns, will surely capture your heart:

[Camille SAINT-SAËNS - Requiem Op.54 - Île de France National Orchestra - Jacques Mercier\[COMPLETE\]](#)

### [The Requiem by Johannes Brahms:](#)

By 1861 Brahms completed two movements of what he called a [cantata](#) of mourning, a work begun in memory of his dear friend and colleague Robert Schumann, who died in 1856. When Brahms' mother died in February 1865, he was determined to finish the piece he had started. He completed four additional movements by the summer of 1866. Later revisions ultimately resulted in a total of seven movements. The Requiem by Brahms, conducted by Herbert von Karajan, is one of the most beautiful:

[Requiem Aleman por Herbert von Karajan/ Ein deutsches Requiem Johannes Brahms](#)

### [The Requiem by Gabriel Fauré:](#)

While the motivation of this piece is not clear, it is widely believed that Fauré was moved to compose the piece in memory of his father in 1885, and the death of his mother just two years later. At the time of his mother's death, however, he had already begun work on the piece and explained, "My Requiem wasn't written *for* anything – it was written for pleasure if I may call it that!" Enjoy a performance of the piece by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra and chorus conducted by Robert Shaw:

[Gabriel Faure's Requiem Op. 48 Complete \(Best Recording\)](#)



## WONDERING HOW THE MUSIC OF OUR FEATURED CONCERT WILL SOUND? Try HSO'S LISTENING GUIDE, with links to the pieces you'll hear on our concert stage – and more!

Please enjoy this complete version of the Mozart Requiem:

[Mozart - Requiem in D minor, KV626 | Philippe Herreweghe Orchestre des Champs-Élysées - YouTube](#)

# CASEY'S CLASSICS

Want the best recordings of the pieces you'll experience on the concert program? Coleman Casey, HSO's dear friend, Director Emeritus, and beloved in-house audiophile, offers his recommendations of recording selections featured in our upcoming Masterworks Concert.

There are so many wonderful recordings of the Mozart **Requiem**, but Peter Schreier's reading with the Dresden State Orchestra and Chorus and a starry lineup of soloists has stood the test of time and is generally recognized as a great performance (DECCA).



Stills from Amadeus



## SOURCE MATERIAL

[The Top Ten Greatest Requiem Masses ~ The Imaginative Conservative](#)

[Six of the best Requiems of all time - Classical Music \(classical-music.com\)](#)

[The classical requiem: from Britten to Mozart- Read it on Vialma](#)

[The Story Behind Mozart's Requiem – Mozart Project](#)

[The Unfinished Requiem: Mozart's Last Composition – Mozart Project](#)

[The mystery of Mozart's Requiem - Classical Music \(classical-music.com\)](#)

[Deceit, murder and a masked man – the true story behind Mozart's Requiem - Classic FM](#)

[Mozart's Requiem: the mysteries continue ... | Classical music | The Guardian](#)

[The True Story Of The Mozart Requiem Mass | Barbara O'Brien \(patheos.com\)](#)

[Mozart's Requiem in D Minor: Mysterious and Monumental – The Listeners' Club \(thelistenersclub.com\)](#)

[Requiem in D Minor, K 626 | Summary, Mozart, Analysis, & Facts | Britannica](#)

[The Fall of Mozart: Everything You Wanted to Know About Mozart's Requiem \(appreciateopera.org\)](#)

[Who wrote Mozart's Requiem? \(8notes.com\)](#)