



EMMANUEL MUSIC

2005-2006 Season

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Mozart: *Vesperae Solennes de Confessore*

If you have been living on Mars for the last six months you might have missed the fact that this year we celebrate the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth. Why is this celebration important to us? Any excuse to play Mozart is a good one, but it is a very good thing to occasionally stop and think what these cultural giants mean to us. Mozart's religious music is actually the least important part of his output. His relations to the church were troubled, and unlike Bach he lived in a milieu where the profoundest ideas of the time were not practiced in church. At the same time there are remarkable, profound church works which will never be forgotten.

In the last few months of his life, Mozart was involved in the composition of the *Magic Flute* and *La Clemenza di Tito*. These two very different works were to dominate his last year until embarking upon the unfinished *Requiem*. On June 17 of 1791, his last year, Mozart took a break to compose the profound and heavenly *Ave Verum Corpus* for chorus and strings. This amazing little work is in his most ethereal last manner. Hushed, never going above the softest dynamics, it gives us a picture of an otherworldly peace unlike almost no other work.

While in the service of the unpleasant and autocratic Archbishop Coloredo, Bishop of Salzburg, Mozart bridled at his official duties and wrote some of his most remarkably ho-hum works. His very last Salzburg liturgical work, the *Vespers of the Confessor K. 339*, is, however, a masterpiece and is a foreshadowing of the two great unfinished religious works of his Vienna period, the *Mass in C Minor* and the *Requiem*. The work shows all of the stylistic tendencies of the Austrian Baroque, bright and shining brilliant *Allegros*, and an impressive nod to Austrian liturgical counterpoint as practiced by the early

eighteenth century composer, Fux. Just before the final dazzling Magnificat is an inward and luscious Laudate Dominum for soprano and chorus, a work beautiful enough for a place in any of his operas but somehow breathing an inward spiritual air perfectly appropriate to a church service. After his discovery of Bach and Handel, both of whom were represented in the library of Baron von Swieten in Vienna, Mozart would delve more deeply into the possibilities of liturgical counterpoint, but this wonderful work is an important monument on that particular journey.

The unusual and rarely heard Adagio and Rondo K. 617 comes from the same period as the Ave Verum Corpus. It was written for the Glass Harmonica, an invention of Benjamin Franklin, currently having a vogue in Vienna. It seems to have been written for a blind Glass Harmonica virtuoso. The scoring of the piece, with flute, oboe, viola and cello, again gives off the otherworldly aura that we heard in Ave Verum Corpus. This morning the Glass Harmonica part will be played on the piano.

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