I will sing with the spirit,
and I will sing with the understanding also.

1 Corinthians 14:15

BACH: MAGNIFICAT: "OMNES GENERATIONES"
BRITTEN: REJOICE IN THE LAMB
BRITTEN: WAR REQUIEM
GESUALDO: MADRIGALS OF BOOKS V & VI
* MOZART: REQUIEM
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

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\[ \text{Music notation} \]
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Figure 1: “Self Portrait” (1791)

I need hardly tell you how greatly I am longing to receive some reassuring news from yourself. And I still expect it; although I have now made a habit of being prepared in all affairs of life for the worst. As death, when we come to consider it closely, is the true goal of our existence, I have formed during the last few years such close relations with this best and truest friend of mankind, that his image is not only no longer terrifying to me, but is indeed very soothing and consoling! And I thank my God for graciously granting me the opportunity (you know what I mean) of learning that death is the key which unlocks the door to our true happiness. I never lie down at night without reflecting that—young as I am—I may not live to see another day.

- Mozart, as he lay dying, in a letter to his father, Leopold (1792)

Pablo Ruiz Picasso (1881-1973)

Figure 2: Self Portrait (1972)

One of the visitors who saw Picasso regularly in these late years was Pierre Daix, and it was to him, during a visit on the last day of June in 1972, that the artist showed something special. Daix had come to work on a book about the cubist years, but Picasso was concerned with focusing on present explorations. “I did a drawing yesterday,” he said as he led Daix into a semi-darkened studio, “and I think maybe I touched on something. It ‘s not like anything I’ve done before.” When Picasso opened the shutters partially and presented the work, it was a riveting, unforgettable self-portrait head in a particular palette of green, blue, and mauve crayon. Make no mistake: the issue here is death. . . .Cross-eyed or dislocated gazes . . . convey a volatile combination of quizzical vulnerability and sheer terror. And yet Picasso talked to Daix about the singular qualities of this image in an easy and impersonal way. . . .When he first showed the drawing, the day after it was made, he in fact made a point of holding it up directly beside his own face “to show that the fear on the portrait’s face was an invention. In a matter of a few months, he died.”

- excerpted from Kirk Varnego’s “Picasso’s Self-Portraits”
Mozart’s Musical Argument with Death

Mozart is the musician’s musician. He spoke the language of music as fluently and effortlessly as anyone who ever lived. Like Josquin, Mozart is the master of the notes. They express what he desires, while other composers do what the notes dictate. And, like Picasso, when confronted with his own mortality, Mozart found symbolic ways to ward off the inevitable. In his unfinished Requiem and his unfinished, far-too-short life (1756-1791), Mozart struggles valiantly with the dragon Death, employing the many ways one might musically proceed to avoid final resolution, because the final cadence signifies that the dance is over, the race is run.

The Introitus and Kyrie of Mozart’s Requiem demonstrate his seemingly effortless mastery of many varied compositional techniques, all of which can be seen to represent, to some degree, his final mortal efforts to avoid resolution. He is the master of deceptive cadences of all kinds. He modulates to the most remote tonal regions without losing sight of his origin or goal. He interrupts ongoing textures and formal procedures (i.e. sequences, suspensions, stretti, fugues, double fugues, etc.) and takes them to unexpected, higher realms of personal expression. Acutely aware of his own impending death, Mozart employs the many techniques in his extensive compositional arsenal to delay the moment of musical resolution.

Abundant examples of his consummate mastery are found in the opening eight-measure introduction:

mm. 1-2 The opening low D singularly establishes the tonality, timbre, and deep profundity of the subject being expressed. But Mozart refuses to rest here. Instead, he immediately sets the piece in motion with a steady eighth note subdivision and a rich harmonic rhythm that changes every quarter note—both techniques unusual for a “Requiem” setting. The imitative motive of the somber bassoons and basset horns interrupts this eighth note motion and its rich harmonic changes. To add to the complexity, this motive is presented in stretto, while the resulting suspensions delay resolution in yet another way.

![Figure 3](image)

m. 3 By substituting a minor triad for the expected major triad, Mozart deceptively introduces the minor Dominant (v). Dense, rich, poignant harmonies lead to a momentary oasis in C Major (III/v), then pass through a standard progression to a perfect authentic cadence in A minor (v) at the beginning of m. 7. Mozart has already visited some very remote tonal regions—boldly, decisively, and very expressively. He has presented his formidable skills for all to hear.

m. 7 Then, in one measure, by dramatically changing the dynamic, texture, and instrumentation, Mozart modulates back to d minor (i). Attempts to escape resolution are momentarily held at bay.

I. Introitus

Requiem    Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, KV626

Figure 4
m. 8 But only for a moment. One sixteenth note later, before this resolution can establish itself, Mozart grabs the reins and introduces a new syncopated motive in the strings to accompany the four successive entrances of the “Requiem aeternam” subject. This Exposition is also presented in *stretto*—each successive voice enters before the previous one is finished.

![Figure 5](image)

m. 15 The new text, *et lux perpetua luceat eis*, inspires another way of thwarting resolution: namely, modulation. Here, following the d minor tonality of mm. 8-14, the piece modulates to the relative major, F Major (III), to express the brightness of eternal light (*lux perpetua*). The homophonic texture allows the piece to resound resplendently.

mm. 19-20 These transitional measures recall the suspensions and syncopated entrances heard at the opening of the piece and introduce a new *legato* accompaniment motive in Vln I.

m. 21 Mozart again modulates, this time to the submediant key of Bb Major (VI), and we hear the sweet serenity of the soprano solo offer a hymn to God in Zion (*Te decet hymnus*).

m. 26 Yet another modulation—the sixth in 26 measures!—takes us to the subdominant key of g minor (iv), where the more agitated, desperate cry of *Exaudi orationem meam* (“Hear my prayer”) is heightened by the slashing dotted sixteenth- and thirty-second-note motive in the strings.
Mozart opens the final section of the Introitus with another fugal exposition, this time a double fugue (!) combining the “Requiem aeternam” from mm. 8-14, the flowing string melody that accompanied “Te decet hymnus” (now with the text “Dona eis Domine”), and the syncopated string accompaniment found in mm. 8-14. These two subjects and the accompaniment are presented in **stretto**, making them all the more striking and complex.
Mozart returns to the fanfare-like “et lux perpetua luceat eis” in Bb Major (VI), which sounds a little more foreboding with the addition of the timpani and then settles into the last three measures of the Introitus. The piano dynamic heightens one’s expectations and draws attention to the exquisite harmonies above the descending chromatic bass line, while the timpani subdivides the final beats of the Introitus.

Surely Mozart’s deceptions and challenging imitative complexities are over. Surely “the end” has come. The “final” cadence has sounded. But no! The only occurrence that resembles a cadence has arrived—but it is a HALF CADENCE, not to the Tonic key of d minor (i), but a cadence to the Dominant key of A Major (V). It’s not over yet!

**Performance Notes**

The relationship between the end of the Introitus and the beginning of the Kyrie is vital to a convincing performance of the Mozart Requiem; there is great drama here in this final measure of the Introitus, a sense of expectation and anticipation. Be sure to note the fermata, the rhythmic figure in the timpani, the attacca marking at the end of the bar, and the internal structure of the Kyrie subject.

The choir should sustain the final V chord with intensity, (non dim.) or, as my mentor Howard Swan once said in a similar situation, “It should sound the way old champagne feels when it’s still in the bottle.” Control any ritard, with the timpani figure and compare it with the timpani rhythm found at the end of the Kyrie (m. 51).

The attacca marking takes on special significance in this battle between Mozart and Death. Let the cutoff be the breath at the end of the bar, and strike forth vigorously!

And, lastly, note how Mozart again delays the arrival of the tonality of the fugue subject. Most opening fugue subjects move from Tonic to Dominant:
But Mozart begins on the Dominant (V) and ends on the Tonic (i), weakening the sense of solidity or entrapment. As a friend of mine said, “I feel like Mozart’s music resembles a wild rabbit—it can rapidly change direction, and it bolts whenever you get close enough to catch it!”

KYRIE I

mm. 1-15 The opening of the first Exposition features the Bass subject (i) and Alto countersubject (v) combined in *stretto*, as these elements will occur throughout most of this Kyrie. Three more *stretto* pairings—(ST in a minor (v), AB in d minor (i), and TS in a minor (v)—complete this opening Exposition.

KYRIE II

mm. 16-33 Six other subject/countersubject entries—SB in F Major (III), TS in g minor, BA in c minor (iv/iv), ST in Bb Major (VI), BT in Bb Major (VI), and AB in f minor (i/V/VI)—lead us to the rising chromatic “Christe” sequences and a deceptive cadence that finds us in the key of Db Major (VI/i/III)! A major triad built on the Leading Tone! Outrageous
excursions in a piece that belongs in d minor! Like Dorothy, “I’ve a feeling that we’re a long way from Kansas.” The wizard of notes is again the master of deception.

CHRISTE I

mm. 34-38 In five(!) brief measures, Mozart ingeniously dovetails a series of stretto entries based on the rising chromatic “tail” of the “Christe” countersubject.

KYRIE III

mm. 39-44 This leads us back to the original subject in the Bass—now syncopated for greater moment and sense of arrival and followed by the lofty countersubject in the Soprano. A similar, almost-hidden, syncopated entry in the Alto is answered by the Bass in mm. 43-44.

CHRISTE II

mm. 45-52 Three more stretto entries of the “Christe” countersubject and the development of a closing motive bring us to the extraordinary final four measures of the Kyrie. A strong, predictable, harmonic progression is heard in m. 49:

\[ V6 \quad V7 \quad VI \quad iv7 \quad V \quad 4-\#3 \quad [i] \]

But it resolves deceptively to vii7/V. Performers should also note that the chromatic, rising half-step has been featured prominently throughout the piece and that the deception here is strengthened by the downward half-step of A-G#. Balance the Bass and lower instruments to assure that this change of direction can be clearly heard.

Five other elements deserve our attention in these final four measures: the fermata in m. 50, the change in tempo from Allegro to Adagio, the subdivision in the timpani part, the final chord, and the fermata over the double bar.

The fermata over the quarter rest in m. 50 is not merely a breath; it’s an opportunity to gather an extra amount of courage to confront the eternal question one last time. Sustain the intensity through the breath.

Following the fermata, Mozart returns to the Adagio tempo of the Introitus, employing a standard progression that is even more predictable than the one in m. 49:

\[ vii7 \quad V \quad i6 \quad i64 \quad V \quad i? \]

Predictable and irreversible, that is, except for the last chord in m. 52. Having exhausted his compositional arsenal of ways to avoid resolution, Mozart’s apprehension of this final chord may have been similar to the feeling Picasso expressed in the self-portrait displayed at the beginning of this essay.

The final chord is the most striking, unexpected, imaginative moment thus far. This one, final time, Mozart refuses to let anything finish; it’s still not over. For Mozart there is no
third in the final chord. He seems to say there is no answer; there is no simple major or
minor method of resolving the question. The question is still “open,” just as the chord is
“open.” A good performance will balance the final chord so that the A natural will not
be overpowered by all the D’s; we should be able to experience the hollow emptiness of
the open fifth.

Compare the timpani part in the final measure of the Introitus with the rhythms in mm.
49 and 51 of the Kyrie and in mm. 2 and 4 of the Dies Irae. Feature these differences in
your performance.

The fermata over the double bar is an invitation to the conductor to maintain the
intensity and connection between the three opening movements of the Requiem. Mozart
exchanges his contrapuntal pen for his operatic quill, hurtling us headlong into the Dies
Irae, the Day of Wrath and Final Judgment.
Mozart: Requiem
"Kyrie"

Kyrie I

Kyrie II

d  a  d  a  F  g  c
i  v  i  v  III  iv  iv/iv

Christe I

Kyrie III

Christe II

(Coda)

Closing Kyrie

B_b  B_b  f  [D^4]  f  c  g  d  A  d  d  B_b  B_b  d  s  F  A_e  g  e  g^7  d  ?
VI  VI  i/V/VI  VI/4/III  i/III  iv/v/IV  iv  V  i  (VI)  VI  ii  III  V  V  IV  V  ii/V  V  ?  V  i  ?

Summary:  

K I  K II  C I  K III  C II  C CK

d  F  f  [A]  d  (A)  (g^7)  d  ?
i  III  i/III  V  i  (V)  (vim7/V)  i  ?

Figure 13
Bibliography


