

SCORE REVIEW

Antonio Salieri, *Requiem with Two Related Motets*, edited by Jane Schatkin Hettrick, Recent Researches in the Music of the Classical Era, 108 (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2017). xxv, 4 plates + 248pp. \$360.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, few composers in the Viennese musical orbit wielded as much prestige and influence as Antonio Salieri (1750–1825). Since 1788 he had served as Hofkapellmeister of the Habsburg court, a promotion attained after achieving international prominence in the field of opera and a successful tenure as court *Kammerkomponist* in the 1770s and 1780s. Though he had begun to retreat from opera by the end of the eighteenth century, ceasing composition in the genre altogether in 1804, he remained consequential. His active leadership of the court's musical activities, most importantly those related to its vast liturgical life, would last through the early 1820s, as would his involvement in Viennese concert life. He was particularly significant as a teacher: by the end of his career he had instructed several emerging composers of note, including Beethoven, Schubert, Hummel and Liszt. Composed in 1804, Salieri's setting of the *Missa pro defunctis*, or Requiem Mass, may be viewed as representing his transition to this final professional period. That he composed it with the clear intention that it be performed as a memorial for himself makes it yet more intriguing. Whatever the case, the work stands as an instructive and often compelling specimen of Requiem composition from the years immediately following Mozart's famous setting, and ahead of the Romantic-era turn towards ever more dramatic and expansive approaches to the genre. With its meticulously edited musical text and thorough scholarly apparatus, this edition by Jane Hettrick, which includes two short motets closely linked to the work, stands as a welcome contribution to early nineteenth-century sacred music studies.

Along with four orchestral settings of the Mass Ordinary, the Requiem is one of a relatively small group of major liturgical works Salieri composed during his lengthy tenure as Hofkapellemeister. Its scale and orchestration correspond to the type of elaborate concerted works performed on the court's highest liturgical occasions. Its score calls for SATB chorus including soloists, and a mostly typical church orchestra of the time: four-part strings, oboes, English horn, bassoon, three trombones, trumpets, timpani and organ. In accordance with traditional late eighteenth-century usage, the trombone parts serve to reinforce the lower three choral voices in many of the *tutti* passages, the role of the strings and oboes encompasses both *tutti* and concerted functions, and the organ is written as a basso continuo part with figures, in support of both vocal and instrumental sonorities. The trumpets and timpani, which elevate the whole work to the status of a 'solemn' composition – one customarily suited to special occasions on which the fullest possible church orchestra could be assembled – are used selectively, mainly for martial or dramatic effect. Salieri's employment of an English horn stands out as a peculiarity. Seldom heard in church music of this era, it adds an appealingly plaintive voice to the orchestration.

The work's formal scope largely follows outlines typical of concerted church music in the Vienna Hofkapelle and its environs during Salieri's time.

Eschewing the division of the texts into several movements, in the manner of a Baroque 'number' mass, it comprises seven movements, each presenting major prayers in their entirety: Introit: Requiem aeternam and Kyrie eleison, Sequence: Dies Irae, Offertory: Domine Jesu Christe, Sanctus, Agnus Dei and Communion: Lux aeterna, and Responsoy: Libera me. The joining of the Introit and Kyrie and the Agnus Dei and Communion, into two single movements reflects a strategy prominently demonstrated by Michael Haydn's Requiem in C Minor (*Missa pro defuncto Archiepiscopo Sigismundo*, MH 155), which was composed in Salzburg in 1771 but familiar to musicians of the Viennese court by this time.¹ The Introit–Kyrie combination is logical, since in traditional liturgical usage the music of the Kyrie follows the Introit without break: many later Requiem composers employ a similar strategy. Less common is the joining of the Agnus Dei and Communion, which is also rooted in historical liturgical practice. Nevertheless, beyond Haydn's Requiem, precedents are found in that of Niccolò Jommelli (1756), which Salieri had conducted in 1788,² and the more recent setting (1803) by Joseph Leopold Eybler. Salieri's inclusion of a setting of the Libera me, which comes from the ritual of the burial service, not the *Missa pro defunctis* itself, represents a compositional liberty uncommon in his time but increasingly prominent in the nineteenth century. Jommelli's Requiem provides a precedent for this element as well.

Though his Requiem mirrors the type of scale and orchestration customarily associated with princely liturgies, Salieri composed it without intending that it be added to the Hofkapelle repertory, which included the works mentioned above as well as numerous settings by other distinguished composers – at least not during his own time as Kapellmeister. Hettrick's introduction, which offers an informative discussion of the practice of funeral music in Vienna during this era, explains that Salieri conceived the work as an act of personal piety. Its first performance was intended not for one of the numerous occasions which called for a Requiem mass at the court or cathedral, but instead for one of the traditional memorial masses that the composer willed to be celebrated for the repose of his own soul after his death and funeral. Thus the work was performed for the first time 21 years after it was composed, in the context of a Requiem mass for Salieri celebrated six weeks after his obsequies (xi). While it did join the repertoire of the Hofkapelle during the nineteenth century, it obtained only a limited record of performance.³

While the Requiem conforms to the general stylistic conventions of late eighteenth-century Austrian orchestral church music, it also follows a set of tendencies and ideals distinctive to Salieri, as demonstrated elsewhere in his orchestral liturgical works. He grounds the Requiem in the mixture of traditional choral textures, instrumental augmentation and concerted elaboration that is foundational to the solemn orchestral church music aesthetic. The way he utilizes and balances these elements may strike the casual observer as ironic, however, since despite his established mastery of theatrical composition, it tends to avoid sustained displays of dramatically oriented vocal or orchestral writing. Primary sources confirm

¹ John Rice, *Empress Marie Therese and Music at the Viennese Court, 1792–1807* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 270.

² David Black, 'Mozart and the Practice of Sacred Music, 1781–91', (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2007), 346.

³ Richard Steuerer, *Das Repertoire der Wiener Hofmusikkapelle im neunzehnten Jahrhundert* (Tutzing: Hans Schneider, 1998), 101.

that Salieri viewed such restraint as essential to an authentic church music style.⁴ Most conspicuous in this respect is the fact that the work lacks true solo parts, employing SATB soloists mainly to diversify the four-voice sonority. The solo voices feature most prominently in the Benedictus, a typical site for solo and vocal ensemble writing in orchestral masses, as a quartet whose statements are punctuated by full choral passages.

Although subsequent decades would see a significant increase in the dramatic intensity of Mass and Requiem compositions, this kind of restrained choral style is hardly unusual during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries. Like many contemporary church music composers, Salieri frequently anchors this style with regular turns to sparsely accompanied passages of choral homophony that recall the traditional a cappella style. Composers sometimes offset a lack of florid solo vocal writing with more extensive displays of virtuosic polyphonic choral textures – the type of music still regarded in the nineteenth century as ‘true’ or ‘strict’ church music – but this is not the case with Salieri. His many unison and homophonic choral passages do frequently give way to polyphonic inflection or elaboration, but the simpler textures predominate. Eloquent fugatos occur at conventional locations such as ‘Quam olim Abrahae’ (Offertory), ‘Hosanna in excelsis’ (Sanctus, Benedictus) and ‘Cum sanctis tuis’ (Agnus Dei–Communion); however these are of limited scope when compared to the more substantial fugal passages in the contemporary Requiem settings of Haydn, Mozart, and Eybler.

Salieri’s stylistic approach produces inconsistent results. His inclination toward homophonic and unison choral textures, along with his tendency to sustain the full four-voice choral sonority across long stretches of movements, yields some degree of monotony. It is most prevalent in his setting of the *Dies irae*, the longest and most dramatic text of the Requiem. Since in liturgical context the movement accompanies no ritual action, it affords more creative freedom than other movements, but demands music that is compelling and cohesive without becoming prolix in character. In his *Dies irae*, Salieri presents a stirring main theme based on a funeral march topic, effective instrumental gestures to represent trembling at ‘Quantus tremor’ and imposing regality at ‘Rex tremendae’, and many further examples of convincingly affective music. However, his work is undermined by instances in which poignant phrases receive only perfunctory musical declamation, as well as repetitions of phrases without sufficient variety in texture and style to sustain them. Salieri navigates the shorter texts more successfully. In the Offertory, for example, his mixture of declamatory homophonic and contrapuntal choral textures and martial instrumental style generates a cohesive and forceful movement. At many further points in the Requiem, his subdued use of voices and delicate orchestration is remarkably effective; they achieve elegant and stately effects in Introit–Kyrie, for example.

While Salieri’s Requiem may not seriously rival the better-known settings of the early nineteenth-century Viennese repertoire, it is a thoughtful and engaging essay in the genre. Moreover, it offers an important window on the artistic principles and cultural-biographical background of a major, pivotal composer of the era. Hettrick’s edition is laudable for presenting a carefully assembled score of the highest critical quality, but even more so for providing a thorough and wide-ranging introduction that significantly aids our understanding of these issues, as well as performance practice contexts. Its appendices and critical

⁴ Jane Hettrick, ‘Salieri’s Mass in B-flat (1809)’, *Studien zur Musikwissenschaft* 39 (1988): 156.

commentary shed yet greater light on particular contextual concerns and editorial matters. For example, the two motets included as Appendices 3 and 4, *Spiritus meus attenuabitur* and *Audite vocem magnam dicentem*, are pieces composed by Salieri in later years but connected in some way to his funeral and thus possibly to early performances of the Requiem. Meanwhile, Appendix 1 provides the specific Kyrie chant and prayers of absolution that would follow the Libera me in eighteenth-century Viennese liturgical practice; these differ slightly from the texts as standardized in the later Solesmes liturgical books. Such elements reflect Hettrick's long and intensive archival research and deep knowledge of the composer and his environment. The edition is thus comprehensive in scope, and an excellent addition to the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century musical and scholarly literature.

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doi: 10.1017/S1479409819000351
First published online 29 October 2019