

Thoughts on Mozart's Requiem Manfred Honeck

In today's society, often referred to as fun-society for a good reason, death does not have a real quality anymore. The philosophy of life is geared towards happiness and joy, success and consumption. Death is blacked out – and that I find inhumane. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart had many children, only two of whom survived. At that time death was a constant companion. It stood in front of every door and people lived with it on a very conscious level. One can and probably should view death as something positive because it is an inevitable component of our life that doesn't warrant fear. Mozart writes to his father: "Death is Man's best friend" – a deep and profound statement.

When I thought about Mozart's death, all the traditional requiems of his time came to my mind. I wondered what happened the day after Mozart's death. The Gregorian chorals, the peal of the bells at the Stephansdom, the funeral service – all of that happened. Even though there are no written records of this day concerning Mozart, the common practice of those days in Vienna permits certain assumptions. Gregorian customs, words, music – this area of conflict inspired me to think about Mozart and his relationship with death. Mozart was a deeply religious person and incorporated death into his life. "Death is Man's best friend" is a key sentence of his thinking. And this grasp on death, the intimate relationship can be felt in his requiem.

To me Judaism and Christianity are like brothers. Christianity would be unthinkable without Judaism. These two are the religions that are most closely related. The current revival of understanding between the religious is wonderful and lets us look toward the future with more optimism. But I also incorporated Nelly Sachs into the concept to call to mind the insanity of the twentieth century. Then, death had a completely different meaning – death as a companion became a ghost, a curse on humanity, brought about by humanity itself. One must not view this composition of art as a historical concept. Rather, the intention is to merge notional, emotional and aesthetically interwoven pieces into a new experience of art.

I lost my mother when I was only seven. I didn't really know her but I do remember the funeral. This experience may be at the root of my thinking about death. When, later on, I first heard Mozart's requiem I sensed what Mozart must have felt when he created this music. Mysterious and divine moments are both present in this requiem. One also has to take into account the adventurous circumstances of its creation. Mozart created hundreds of works, chamber music, operas, symphonies – and he died during his first assignment for a requiem and was not able to finish it himself.

To me, God is number one. Music and literature are based on that. This is the value system I live by and I believe that in this context my thinking is very similar to Mozart's. I am very glad that, particularly in our time, the quest for values outside of commerce and consumption is gaining importance. The focus on profits makes people so greedy that they lose their connection with religion, art and nature. Religion, music and poetry are the three most important things in my life, and I do believe in life after death. It would be disastrous for me if there was nothing after death. The responsibility for your own thinking and actions – even beyond death – in my view is a fundamental element when wondering about the purpose of life. I believe in God and I talk about it openly.

*These comments by Manfred Honeck first appeared in 2006 as an interview in liner notes for the CD, **Mozart: Requiem & Death in Music and Words (Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart und der Tod in Musik und Wort)**, featuring the Swedish Radio Orchestra and*

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