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“The Continuity Depends on Us”: Mozart’s Requiem K626 in d-minor

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Hello everybody and welcome to this PDC presentation and discussion, where actual and virtual, material and immaterial, affective and cognitive, narrative and scientific manifestations of the unceasingly unfolding and enfolding reality will playfully dance together ... at least I hope so! The music begins with a dream of mine.

A dream about music



“I see and hear myself playing violin sitting as if I was in the orchestra, but I’m alone. I’m looking at myself from the left. The piece is difficult for me, because it is fast, but I’m making it. I feel all my struggle, and see myself assuming awkward and ugly positions while playing; I can detect from outside the tension of my mind pervading all my body. Anyway I’m going on, doggedly heading to the end of the music. I want to succeed, I want to play it through. When I arrive there, not quite with a good sound (being affected by the tension) but without mechanical mistakes, I

exult and scream “YEAH!”. Nonetheless, immediately afterwards I can’t help but feel a sense of subterranean discontent; I’m perfectly aware that while I play with this attitude of anxiety and struggle for purposive control, feeling as if music was a challenger to defeat, I’ll never ever do better than that. My attitude is wrong, I’m separated both from music and the instrument ... my will is separate from my body ... there is no grace in what I’m doing. I wake up all of a sudden.”

When I woke my mood was blue. I had a clear awareness that the issue was not only about playing violin, but also concerned the way I was playing my life in general. “I have to change,” I said to myself, “and I can change.” Surfing the waves of this renewed trust I fell asleep again. My recipe for change was simple: just slow it down. Just calm down. I did slow down every time I studied a new piece on the violin. I did calm down while reading my parts in orchestra. I became slower in leading the conversation during therapy sessions, and so on. The results of this new commitment were not late in arriving. My sound, both on violin and (metaphorically speaking) in my life in general, definitely improved.

So I duly decided to implement this new discipline in one of the most delicate parts of my life: the quantity of work and its organization. I began to be a bit slower in accepting new clients or proposals of seminars and lecturing: “breathing the pauses in between,” I said to myself, “to produce and enjoy a more tasty sound.”

I did not foresee the magnitude of life change due to this small change of attitude. In a few weeks, it produced a leap in my responsibilities and professional presence. I was summoned to better quality undertakings and appointed to new and more visible positions, involving higher responsibilities than before. Meanwhile relevant changes were also occurring in my family life. On the one hand, I felt overwhelmed and puzzled, because I had, despite my starting purpose, almost doubled my hours of work. On the other hand I was surprised to hear the people around me all say the same: “Hey, how radiant you are; you look better, much more relaxed than before. ...” So I had to face an increase of chaos, but I discovered that I could face it fruitfully by giving up my old attitude of *thinking too much* before doing things and after getting them done.

I couldn't help but be reminded of playing Mozart's music. Imagine how difficult playing Mozart can be for an amateur, as I am. At the same time Mozart's music requires, more than other composers', to be played in a relaxed, pleasant and highly focused attitude. And this recalled to me how Mozart's consciousness was often very near to chaos, as many of his letters and life's vicissitudes reveal. Small surprise: the vicinity to chaos is characteristic of creative persons. We have to assume, though, that chaos is not absence of order in itself. It is instead order whose complexity is of an infinite degree. Since we are not able to represent such a complexity, we just say that it's chaotic. So every time we carry out a creative endeavor, we are becoming sensitive to some indefinite call from this chaotic field: we approach it in some way, then we simplify it, taking something away. "Art is a matter of taking away," said Michelangelo Buonarroti. But why are some of these simplifications ugly, stupid and violent, or just trivial, while others are full of charm, beauty and grace?

This is the point where rest – and silence, slowness and emptiness – play a key role.

Eternal Rest



When I was a child I was taught to recite my prayers before falling asleep. They were the most common, traditional prayers of Catholic religion: *Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be, Angel of God, Eternal Rest*. They had a reassuring sound, all but one ... which sounded puzzling and scary to my soul.

Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them

May they rest in peace

Amen

There were many reasons for feeling like this. First, usually I was happy to go to sleep after a day full of play and activities, but the idea that this sleep could last forever and I'd never open up my eyes again – that was simply frightening. Would I never see my mother again? My father? My toys? My dog? Even my brother? Further, now and then I was not at all happy to go to sleep, especially when the adults would remain awake until late at night, chatting, joking and watching TV. “It’s time for bed. You have to get your rest.” Why should I take a rest I didn’t desire nor feel the need for? How angry I'd get in these circumstances! So the idea that a time would inevitably come in which an undesired rest would be the *final* one, and last *forever* – this was just upsetting.

Things became worse when I began to attend church more regularly. I was attracted by the sacred aspects of life, but the atmosphere was anything but fun. I had a feeling that in the best case, if I were to behave, once dead I'd win an everlasting rest... in a place without toys nor playgrounds, behaving as a good boy for eternity. The alternatives were also quite unpleasant. I was not really afraid of being sent to hell, though. Something within me just did not accept the idea that for having skipped a pair of Masses on Sunday, or told some white lies, I could deserve hell. C'mon! But what about Purgatory? For sins like these I could deserve two or three thousand years of not-well-defined punishment. This prospect made the alternative of “eternal rest” absolutely preferable. Anyway I grew up with an acute fear of death and judgment, mine and that of my dears.

Things radically changed when I met the Jesuit Fathers in high school. They not only opened my mind to a more mature vision of the so-called “afterlife” but also taught, mainly by example, to respect and appreciate the visions of different religions, cultures and philosophies. Great help came also from my late therapist Francesco Mina, who had a serene view of these issues. So, gradually and with many up and downs, the oppressive shadow of sadness about the transition from this life to another condition was replaced by a colorful and splended frame of light and fullness of life detectable always and everywhere, even in the worst condition of human existence. And basic concepts like *evil*, *sin* and *justice* took a more serious and mature form.

But with the special persistence that the beliefs of childhood tend to have, be it for different reasons, I didn't stop asking myself:

“While life shows up with great energy, speed and determination in all its manifestations, why do religions, mystic traditions and meditation disciplines insist on slowing one's mind, in trying to get it empty? Why do they insist so much on detachment and in not being totally identified with one's own desires?”

Love, beauty and order



I said above that in creative endeavor we approach chaos. Well, I claim that all life is a creative process. So, if creation is always and everywhere, we are continuously confronted by chaos. The issue is that usually neither communities nor individuals can face chaos directly and remain intact, because this chaos has an enormous power of attraction, so they seriously risk being swept away.

Further, creation needs chaos, but development needs order. To raise a child, to accomplish a task, to make something beautiful, to communicate something meaningful, to make a relationship durable, all needs order. This need of order is so basic and urgent that people easily fall into the idea that chaos, instead of being infinite complexity – something good – is instead a foe to defeat, a condition to discard. The further step is falling into the persuasion that order

needs to be authoritatively imposed from outside or above. But such imposition, be it in education, social organization, a cultural process or the inner world of one's mind, cannot be anything but violent.

So the price of violence will be paid in one way or another, sooner or later. And this price is high. But as the human spirit is resilient and creative in being able to turn negative processes into something positive; and as the price is at times diluted through the span of many generations, we are unaware that we are paying it. Not to mention the tragic fact that, once violence or authoritarianism have become part of the functioning of a system, they cannot be discarded with an act of will or magic. Usually they will be reduced and defused only by a long process of evolution and of self-sacrifice by people who have an unusual capacity for love.

In this process of evolution, one alternative is to learn that order emerges from chaos, and to trigger and foster processes that allow this to occur. A three-decade practice in psychotherapy, particularly systemic family therapy, persuades me that there are many ways to do that. But they all rely, although sometimes paradoxically, on the intent to slow down mind, both individual and collective: to slow down and even stop repetitive and meaningless patterns of conversation, to relent in the search for satisfaction and meaning, to slow down processes of thinking, to learn to control focus, to make friends with silence, with isolation, with darkness... and accept that meaning, order, beauty, friendship and love will emerge from *there*.

There is an incredible stream "out there," at least as fast as light. In trying to face it and resist it, our mind is caught up in the strife of simplifying and slowing it down. But so long as mind acts as a separate Ego running against the stream, mind will forcedly go faster and faster, eventually building images and representations that are slow, heavy and stiff. And the faster one's mind runs, the more one loses touch with the stream and becomes a prisoner of these images, both one's own and those of the collective. Conversely, the more one slows one's mind down, eventually to silence and rest, the more one gets in touch with this incredible stream ... and wins freedom, marvel, surprise. Music and dreams, coming from silence and rest, and there returning, feature as a special bridge between our world of images and the unspeakable, unstoppable stream.

Now, listening to a piece of music that reveals it all in a unique way might help much more than words. This music is Mozart's Requiem k626 in Sergiu Celibidache's rendition.

Mozart's Requiem Mass in D minor k626

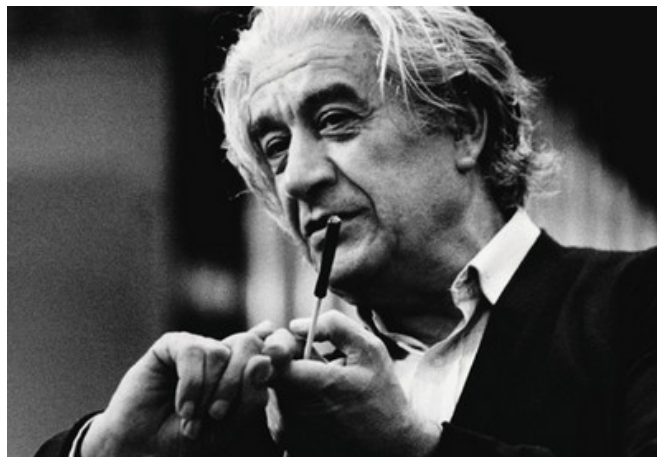


The story of this Requiem's making is controversial, and a number of legends flourished around it. What we know for certain is that Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was 35 when he embarked on the composition, which remained unfinished due to his death that same year – most likely unexpected – on December 5, 1791, his remains buried and dispersed in a mass grave. In order to deliver the work to the Count Franz Von Walsegg who anonymously commissioned it, the Mass was completed by others, mainly Mozart's collaborator Franz Xaver Süssmayr. Years later Mozart's wife Constanze said that Mozart, before dying, was afraid of being poisoned. Nowadays it is more accepted that he died of acute rheumatic fever. A survey of this story with the still open issues can be found at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Requiem_\(Mozart\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Requiem_(Mozart)).

I claim that, regardless of the material causes and circumstances of his death, the meaning of Mozart's passing away is that he was *taken away*. With the Requiem he approached the infinite universal stream of consciousness to a degree that he had never done before, until it *swept him away*. This destiny, in my opinion, might not be uncommon for artists and other explorers of the depths of human soul. To approach "the gigantic stream" remaining aware and, ultimately, alive,

requires tremendous discipline, focus and self-control. In general the greatest artists have it in the field of their arts, where they show a superlative mastery of techniques and skills, essential for artistic outcomes to retain the height of the original inspiration. But paradoxically, in their lives outside of artistic production, creatives may be undisciplined, dissipative and chaotic, as Mozart was. In their work, creatives do not accept any kind of warnings coming out of common sense; nor did Mozart, when Constanze, seeing what was happening to his health during Requiem's composition, tried to persuade him to give up. Creatives feel compelled to push things to the extreme limit, forgetting the risk of passing it by in what will become their final and unfinished masterwork.

Sergiu Celibidache and his Mozart Requiem's rendition



The Romanian conductor Sergiu Celibidache (1912 – 1996) was a peculiar artist, with an acute sense of a musical performance as something alive, transcendent and unrepeatable. His sensitivity was very close to Zen Buddhism. Seeing both the production and the experience of sound as strictly dependent on all the physical, social and psychological characteristics of the time and environment where the performance would take place, he refrained from making studio recordings, though a number of live recordings have been made available after his death. His intense career led him to work worldwide, devoting much of his energy to teaching, often without requiring a fee.

Some have considered his concerts “life-altering experiences,” including the New York Times critic John Rockwell. And I also, because I was so lucky as to hear him several times conducting the RAI National Orchestra in Turin, Italy, when I was a teen. Although I was totally unaware of the philosophic implications of his work, these concerts left in my soul a durable and effective imprint.

In his performances, the choice of time was precisely derived from the relationship between the peculiarities of the music and those of the circumstances and environment. Celibidache performed Mozart’s Requiem quite slowly. The common expectation might be that this would generate boredom and a sense of decreasing tension in the listener. Actually the outcome, for me and for many others, is absolutely the contrary. When I listen to this music I feel as if brought on the very edge of the indefinable boundary between this life and the afterlife, and I feel that the entire community of humankind is present. I can feel myself approaching a point of no return, beyond which a Reality lies that one cannot perceive pretending to remain alive in the biological body.

A complete performance of the Requiem conducted by Celibidache is linked below. For the purposes of this presentation and discussion, I suggest you listen to at least the first movement, “Requiem Aeternam,” and the “Lacrimosa,” after which Mozart’s presence fades away to be replaced by the work of other composers.



http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_9vuUJcUbkE

If you have time and are curious, you can also watch these two short excerpts of Celibidache's rehearsals of the Requiem:



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yiM0Yr4cXBE>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2wxgBwIYtQ&feature=relmfu>

In the second, you'll see the Conductor teaching the Choir to sing "*et lux perpetua luceat eis*" – "and let perpetual light shine upon them" – gracefully, by controlling the voice and by paying attention to the music in its whole. You'll hear him pronouncing the phrase that I quoted as a part of the title of this presentation: "The continuity depends on us."

The continuity depends on us

Dream and music play the same function, one when we are awake and the other when we are asleep: to be an interface, a liaison, a boundary – intended as Ernest Hartmann (2011) means it – between the infinite speedy world of the light existing beyond any possible representation, and our slow, heavy, and nonetheless precious world of images. We might also refer to music and dreams as "bridges," in a double sense. A bridge links two territories that would otherwise be separated; further, from a bridge one can (carefully) lean out and participate in the life of turbulent waters below while one's identity is kept safe. Not to get lost in a world of disconnection and separation requires that we recognize and experience this continuity. To

achieve this priceless goal we need a strong passion, but at the height of this passion discipline, self-control and self-sacrifice are also required. In making the choices of every day's life, we need to be aware. We need to be able to foster an attitude of detachment.

Now, I'm happy to say that the prayer "*Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine, et lux perpetua luceat eis*" does not frighten me anymore, nor evoke eternally annoying perspectives. It is rather the contrary!

Finally some questions, to start our conversation:

- Do you recognize yourself as having experiences similar to those described in this presentation?
- What would be the differences?
- Do the hypotheses presented make sense to you?
- What kind of feelings does the Mozart's Requiem raise in your mind?
- Related to the subject of this presentation, do you have a dream and comments to share with the other participants?

Thank you!

References

Hartmann, E. (2011). *Boundaries: A new way to look at the world*. CIRCC EverPress.