NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY
XIAN ZHANG MUSIC DIRECTOR

# NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

BY LAURIE SHULMAN, ©2026

# Mozart's Requiem

## ONE-MINUTE NOTES

**Gabriel Fauré:** Pavane, Op. 50

This little jewel encapsulates all the features that make Fauré so popular on concert programs. Melodious, melancholy without being depressing, and thoroughly French, the Pavane charms from beginning to end.

The title derives from the Italian *pavana*, a 16th-century court dance in quadruple meter, usually slow and processional, and favoring continuous repetition of simple step patterns. Fauré wrote it for the conductor Jules Danbé's newly formed concert orchestra. He later made a version with chorus, seeking a wider market. The original instrumental version is ultimately more successful, benefiting from the inherent restraint and tastefulness of the composer's first inspiration.

**Gustav Mahler:** *Songs of a Wayfarer*

As a young man, Gustav Mahler led a tempestuous love life. He became romantically involved with the singer Johanna Richter in 1884. Ultimately, she jilted him, but he remained enthralled for a while and poured his passion into music. *Songs of a Wayfarer*, dedicated to Richter, is generally considered to be Mahler's first masterpiece. The original score was for voice and piano, but he clearly thought of these songs as orchestral from the beginning. He reused the second and fourth songs in his First Symphony.

The texts are Mahler's own, although they bear the clear imprint of the German folk poetry collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (*The Boy's Magic Horn*). The progression of the four movements is decidedly grim. In the first, the woman is marrying another man; the singer perceives his own grief in nature. In the second song, the beauty of nature fails to touch his injured heart. The memory of her blue eyes begets thoughts of death in the next movement: a burning knife is the metaphor illustrated in this jarring and violent music. Finally Mahler's stricken lover is driven to a funeral march in the closing song.

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart:** Requiem, K. 626

During summer 1791, while Mozart was working on *The Magic Flute*, a mysterious stranger presented himself with an unusual assignment: a Requiem mass, to be composed and delivered as soon as possible. The stranger declined to identify himself or the originator of the commission, and cautioned Mozart not to attempt to learn anything further.

After Mozart's death, the story emerged. Count Walsegg-Stuppach, an Austrian nobleman and music lover,

fancied himself a composer. Lacking real talent, he often commissioned works by well-known composers, copying them to pass off as his own.

In February 1791, Walsegg's wife died. Stricken, Walsegg resolved to secure a Requiem to be performed annually on the anniversary of her death. He sent the messenger to Mozart with the request, instructing his representative to maintain secrecy. During autumn 1791, the emissary called on Mozart repeatedly to check on its progress. Mozart became convinced that a messenger from the netherworld had been sent and that he was composing *his own* Requiem.

At this point, Mozart's health deteriorated. When he died on December 5, the Requiem lay incomplete. His widow could not collect the fee owed to her late husband until the missing parts were completed. She approached several Viennese composers, eventually settling for Mozart's student Franz Xaver Süssmayr, who had worked closely with Mozart during his last months.

So successful was Süssmayr's reconstruction and completion that the Requiem has become one of the most frequently performed choral works in the classical repertoire. Its overall impact is heightened by the relationship of each movement to the next. Mozart's subtle migration between tonal centers and his negotiation between major and minor modes exercise psychological power. But the sound that lingers in our ears is the dark, vigorous fugue of the Kyrie, repeated at the end of the work for the Cum sanctis tuis. Its resolution on stark open fifths, unsweetened by a major third and unmitigated by even a D-minor chord, is a chilling reminder that this is music of death.

## Gabriel Fauré: Pavane, Op. 50

**Gabriel Fauré**
**Born:** May 12, 1845 in Pamiers, Ariège, France
**Died:** November 4, 1924 in Paris, France
**Composed:** 1887
**World Premiere:** November 25, 1888 in Paris
**Duration:** 7 minutes
**Instrumentation:** woodwinds and horns in pairs, and strings

This little jewel encapsulates all the features that make Fauré so popular on concert programs. Melodious, melancholy without being depressing, and thoroughly French, the Pavane charms from beginning to end.

The title derives from the Italian *pavana*, a 16th-century court dance in quadruple meter, usually slow and processional, and favoring continuous repetition of simple step patterns. Fauré composed his Pavane in late summer 1887. He had been for an extended visit to Countess Elisabeth Greffulhe's residence in Dieppe, on the Normandy coast, and took up music paper again in nearby Le Vésinet. On 12 September 1887, he wrote to Marguerite Bauguies:

> "The only new thing I have been able to compose during this shuttlecock existence is a Pavane—elegant, assuredly, but not particularly important—for the Danbé Concerts Orchestra."

Jules Danbé was conductor of the Opéra-comique. He had recently formed a concert orchestra.

**Marketing an ancient dance in modern garb**

Fauré was eager to market this modest composition. A few weeks later, Fauré wrote to his Dieppe hostess, Countess Greffulhe, that he had composed the Pavane specifically for her Paris salon. The Countess' cousin, Count Robert de Montesquiou-Fézensac, had become an important literary adviser to Fauré. Montesquiou was a poet, essayist, art critic, and aesthete. He was also very rich.

Apparently seeking to curry favor with the Count and his cousin, Fauré set a Montesquiou poem for optional chorus in the Pavane. He intended to make the piece both danceable and singable, thereby fit for performance in the Countess' elegant Parisian home. The original instrumental version is ultimately more successful, benefiting from the inherent restraint and tastefulness of the composer's first inspiration.

## Gustav Mahler: *Songs of a Wayfarer*

**Gustav Mahler**
**Born:** July 7, 1860 in Kalischt, Bohemia
**Died:** May 18, 1911 in Vienna, Austria
**Composed:** 1883–85; revised 1891–96
**World Premiere:** March 16, 1896 in Berlin
**Duration:** 16 minutes
**Instrumentation:** three flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), two oboes (2nd doubling English horn), three clarinets (3rd doubling bass clarinet), two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, tam tam, glockenspiel, harp, and strings

During the two decades before he met and married Alma Schindler, Gustav Mahler led one of the most tempestuous love lives of any composer in the late 19th century. Because he was so successful as an opera conductor early in his career, biographical details are more readily available for Mahler than they are for many of his contemporaries. He was such a celebrity by the 1890s that people who interacted with him were already retaining memorabilia.

That is the reason we have so much information about Johanna Richter, a singer with whom Mahler became romantically involved in 1884, while he was working in Kassel, Germany. Ultimately, she jilted him, but he remained enthralled for a while and poured his passion into music. In a letter to his friend Fritz Löhr, he wrote:

> "I have written a cycle of songs, six of them so far, all dedicated to her. She does not know them. What can they tell her but what she knows? … The idea of the songs as a whole is that a wayfaring man, who has been stricken by fate, now sets forth into the world, traveling wherever his road may lead him."

Eventually the set of six was pared to four, becoming the cycle we know as *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*, or *Songs of a Wayfarer*. Generally considered to be Mahler's first masterpiece, the cycle is certainly his earliest work to gain a permanent place in the repertoire. The songs deal with the plight of a jilted lover who remains haunted by the maiden who rejected him. Because of that premise, *Songs of a Wayfarer* has been likened to Schubert's *Die*

*Schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise*, as well as to Ralph Vaughan Williams's *Songs of Travel* (which they preceded by more than a decade).

Mahler's original score was for voice and piano, but it is clear that he thought of these songs as orchestral from the beginning. He wrote them in the 1880s, long before he had developed into a symphonist. Significantly, the orchestration dates from sometime in the 1890s—there is some discrepancy among various editions and manuscripts—but almost certainly after Mahler had penned both of his first two symphonies. By then, he had achieved a considerable command of instrumentation technique. Those who know the First Symphony will immediately recognize the second and fourth songs in this cycle, because their music corresponds to the first and third movements of that symphony, respectively. In fact, the entire plan of the First Symphony is closely related to these songs.

The texts are Mahler's own, although they bear the clear imprint of the German folk poetry known as *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (*The Boy's Magic Horn*). The progression of the four movements is decidedly grim. In the first, the woman is marrying another man; the singer perceives his own grief in nature. In the second song, the beauty of nature fails to touch his injured heart. Memory of her blue eyes begets thoughts of death in the next movement: a burning knife is the metaphor illustrated in this jarring and violent music. Finally, Mahler's stricken lover is driven to a funeral march in the closing song.

While the tunes Mahler uses are relatively simple, his music is highly sophisticated and complex. The scoring is chamber-like, emphasizing the intimacy of the singer's thoughts, despite the large orchestra. Further, each song ends in a different key from the one in which it began. Such a plan, which Deryck Cooke calls "progressive tonality," was quite daring in the 1880s. It is but one way in which Mahler demonstrates in this early cycle so many of the distinctive characteristics that so brilliantly mark his mature compositions.

## Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Requiem, K. 626

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**
**Born:** January 27, 1756 in Salzburg, Austria
**Died:** December 5, 1791 in Vienna, Austria
**Composed:** 1791
**World Premiere:** January 2, 1793 in Vienna
**Duration:** 51 minutes
**Instrumentation:** two bassoons, two basset horns (played by clarinets in most modern performances), two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, organ, soprano, mezzo-soprano, tenor and bass-baritone soloists, mixed chorus, and strings

**A poignant farewell**
In December 1790, Joseph Haydn left Austria for London with the violinist and entrepreneur Johann Peter Salomon. He spent his last day in Vienna with Mozart. When they parted, Mozart embraced his friend and said, "Papa, I fear that this will be our last farewell." Haydn, no longer young at 59, took Mozart's remark to be concern for his welfare on such a long journey to a distant country. As it happened, Mozart's words were prophetic of his own death. Haydn outlived his younger contemporary by 18 years and produced superb

music in his old age. When he died in 1809, the work performed at his funeral was the Mozart Requiem.

**Mysterious commission**

Mozart rarely composed without a specific commission, and the Requiem was no exception. During summer 1791, he was hard at work with Emanuel Schikaneder on *The Magic Flute*. The new opera went into rehearsal in July. At about the same time, a mysterious stranger presented himself to Mozart at his residence, with an unusual assignment: a Requiem mass, to be composed and delivered as soon as possible. The stranger declined to identify himself or the originator of the commission, and cautioned Mozart not to attempt to learn anything further about his employer.

We know these facts from written reports by Mozart's contemporaries, including his widow Constanze and her second husband, Georg Nikolaus Nissen, who was one of Mozart's first biographers. Only after Mozart's death did the full story emerge. Count Walsegg-Stuppach, an Austrian nobleman and music lover, fancied himself a composer. Lacking real talent, he often commissioned works by well-known composers for private performance, copying the works to pass them off as his own.

In February 1791, the Count's wife died. Stricken, Walsegg resolved to secure a Requiem to be performed annually on the anniversary of her death. He sent the messenger to Mozart with the request, instructing his representative to maintain secrecy.

**Distraction: a royal commission for an opera**

Needing money, Mozart accepted the project and set to work, then put the Requiem aside when Emperor Leopold II was to be crowned King of Bohemia. For that occasion, Mozart was asked to compose an *opera seria*. Composing with lightning speed, he completed most of *La clemenza di Tito* in an astonishing 18 days, before travelling to Prague to supervise rehearsals and the premiere. His frenetic pace included ongoing work preparing for *The Magic Flute*'s opening. One starts to understand the extreme degree of nervous exhaustion that compromised his health.

**Mental and physical health problems**

Following his return from Prague in September 1791, Mozart resumed work on the Requiem. The unidentified emissary called on him repeatedly to check on its progress. Unable to determine the origin of the eerie commission and drained from overwork, Mozart became convinced that a messenger from the netherworld had been sent and that he was composing *his own* Requiem.

At this point, Mozart's health deteriorated. Battling dizziness, headaches, swelling, and nausea, he continued to work on the Requiem. With the assistance of a composition student, Franz Xaver Süssmayr (1766–1803), he sketched several movements, orchestrating the first few measures of some, concentrating on the vocal lines, providing only limited instrumental detail in others. At Mozart's death on December 5, the Requiem lay incomplete.

**Widow's work**

Constanze Mozart was unable to collect the fee owed to her late husband until the missing parts were completed. She approached several Viennese composers, eventually settling for Süssmayr, who had worked

closely with Mozart during his last months.

One of Süssmayr's cleverest ploys to conceal the participation of a second composer was to conclude the work with the repetition of the music heard at the beginning. Mozart had used this same type of self-quotation in earlier masses, so the tactic was stylistically consistent—and very convincing. So successful was Süssmayr's reconstruction and completion that the Requiem has become one of the most frequently performed choral works in the classical repertoire. Also because of Süssmayr, the Requiem is a thorny topic in Mozart scholarship, with musicologists and performers debating how much of the music is Mozart's and how much his gifted student's. The Requiem's inherent beauty and remarkable contrapuntal skill assure its following, regardless of questions about authenticity.

**About the music**

Such an embarrassment of riches graces the Requiem that singling out individual movements is gratuitous. The overall impact of the work is heightened by the relationship of each movement to the next. Mozart's subtle migration between tonal centers and his negotiation between major and minor modes exercise psychological power. But the sound that rings in our ears for hours afterward is the dark, vigorous fugue of the Kyrie, repeated at the end of the work for the Cum sanctis tuis. Its resolution on stark open fifths, unsweetened by a major third and unmitigated by even a D-minor chord, is a chilling reminder that this is music of death.

**Mozart, the movies, and misconceptions**

Thanks to Peter Shaffer's award-winning play *Amadeus* (1979) and Milos Forman's remarkable film (1984) based on the play, Mozart's character and music have been absorbed into mainstream culture. Reinforcement came in 1991, with the bicentennial observation of Mozart's death, and in 2006, when festivals worldwide celebrated his 250th birthday.

A singular benefit of these Mozart phenomena has been more widespread familiarity with Mozart's music, which continues in unabated popularity on piano recitals, in concert halls, opera houses, and elsewhere. This ubiquity has spawned a generation of new Mozart lovers, who are discovering the beauty and variety of his works for the first time. But any popularization is something of a double-edged sword. Unfortunately, in hand with this exposure have been a number of misconceptions and factual errors about the circumstances of Mozart's life and death.

Nowhere is this problem more evident or more acute than in the case of the Requiem, K. 626. Shaffer's play and Forman's film adjusted characters and situations for maximum dramatic and cinematic effect. Inevitably this resulted in some distortion of what actually took place. (For example, Antonio Salieri took no part in completing the Requiem, as the movie implies.) Truth is indeed stranger than fiction, and the circumstances surrounding the composition of the Requiem are so remarkable that no embellishment is necessary.

**A word on Mozart's name**

Mozart was born in Salzburg on January 27, 1756 and died in Vienna on December 5, 1791, not quite thirty-six years old. He was baptized with the names Joannes Chrysost[omus] Wolfgangus Theophilus. His parents gave him the names Johann and Chrysostom because he was born on that saint's day. Wolfgang was the first name

of Mozart's maternal grandfather. The name 'Theophilus' (Greek for 'beloved of God') came from the godfather, Joannes Theophilus Pergmayr, a Salzburg businessman and local official. Days after the boy's birth, Leopold referred to his infant son as Gottlieb (the German for Theophilus). 'Amadeus' is the Latinate form.

In letters, the composer signed his name variously as 'Mozart,' 'W.A. Mozart,' 'Wolfg. Amad. Mozart,' 'MZT,' 'Wolf. Amdè Mozart' and, most frequently, 'Wolfgang Amadè Mozart.' As a boy in Italy, he occasionally signed in the Italianate spelling: 'Wolfgango Amadeo.' Despite Peter Shaffer's stage play Amadeus and Miloš Forman's even more popular film, Mozart did not use the name Amadeus.

In recent years, the spelling 'Wolfgang Amadè Mozart' has supplanted the old-fashioned 'Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart' in common usage and printed programs. The glory of his music remains unchanged.