Arizona Musicfest

2025 Festival Orchestra Notes by Fran Rosenthal

Mozart's *Requiem* | Sunday, March 23, 2025

Samuel Barber, 1910–1981, American, *Toccata Festiva* for Organ and Orchestra, Op. 36

The first work you will hear on Sunday, March 23rd, is Samuel Barber's *Toccata Festiva*. What a celebratory opening for AZMF's 2025 Orchestra Week! The word "celebratory" could actually be enough to describe this work. It was commissioned by Mary Curtis Zimbalist, the founder of the Curtis Institute of Music, for the dedication of a pipe organ she was donating to the Academy of Music, the home of the Philadelphia Orchestra. At the time, it was the largest movable organ in the world. It had over 4,000 pipes, and, more important to this program note, it had 73 stops. Curtis chose Barber, who had graduated from the Institute's first class in 1964, to compose the piece.

The next word after "celebratory" that seems most descriptive of the *Toccata* is "fanfare." And so, I pause to define two terms:

- **"Organ Stops"** are knobs that activate and control the flow of air to the organ pipes. Each stop, in simple terms, produces a different sound or set of sounds. The stops are grouped in sets called "ranks"—for instance, flutes, reeds, strings, and even tympani. If you wish for more information, there is a wealth of material available online that will give you a better understanding of this powerful instrument.
- **"Fanfare"** in music is not much different from its usage in speech. It is a flourish or short piece of music that announces a celebration, event, or person. It is most often introduced and sustained by brass instruments.

Now, to the piece of music at hand. It begins with a bold fanfare played by the orchestra, which is then taken up by the organ. Try to listen for the dotted rhythm the organ plays as the exuberant first section leads to a melodic passage for the strings. The rhythmic figure continues into a short, tuneful dancing passage for the organ's reed pipes. Then, the English horn takes up the figure. What Barber does here is use the orchestra's instruments as organ stops, and vice versa, as the piece proceeds… brilliant! The annotator for the LA Philharmonic referred to the organ as an "über instrument" to describe how Barber uses it. The fanfare returns triumphantly, followed by an amazing cadenza (solo virtuoso passage)

for the organ's pedal keyboard. (Think of Bach's *Organ Toccatas* and his counterpoint on the pedals.) If you are able to see the organist's feet flying on the pedals, you are in for an amazing treat. The final passages are given to the reeds—the solo French horn and clarinet, acting as organ stops, lead to a flamboyant, blazing finish.

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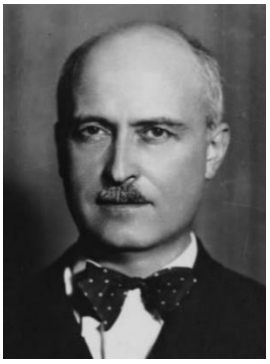
Ibert, Jacques, 1890–1962, French. *Flute Concerto*



Jacques Ibert is not a "household" name among most concert audiences. The composer is best known among listeners for his lush work *Escales* ("Ports of Call"), but his catalog is large and varied across many genres. He composed six symphonies, seven operas, numerous concertos (particularly for woodwinds), and even film music. Ibert once wrote, "I want to be free" and "I only write what I would listen to." Thus, his style is eclectic, drawing from influences like Mozart, Debussy, Stravinsky, and even Wagner.

As a fun introduction to Ibert, listen to his quirky, playful *Suite, Divertissement* before you come to the concert.

Now, to the piece you will hear at our opening concert: the *Concerto for Flute and Orchestra*. This is far from a humorous sketch; rather, it is a brilliant voyage for the solo flute and orchestra. Written in 1932, the work was commissioned by and dedicated to the great French flautist Marcel Moyse. The history of French music is often described as light, humorous, and sweet, and Ibert incorporates these qualities in the *Concerto*. However, he adds dissonant harmonies, dense orchestration (though the orchestra is of reduced size), and an immensely challenging score for the soloist.

The **First Movement** begins with a technically demanding rapid run of notes and intriguing acrobatics. The soloist is heard continually, engaged in a conversation with the woods and brass, as the intensity builds. The **Andante Second Movement** is filled with melody—sometimes melancholy, sometimes truly longing and sad, and at other times almost like a romantic song. In addition to the flute's themes, there is a lyrical violin solo and a floating flute passage commenting above it. The flautist hardly pauses. The **Allegro scherzando** (It. "little joke") is jazzy and playful, with contrasting rhythms and sudden changes of tempo. Be sure to enjoy the timbre of the French horns at the beginning of the movement.

Do you know the meaning of the term "tremolo"? You probably guessed it… "trembling." This effect is produced by rapid repetition of two notes, and you will hear this technique often in the flute score.

Another term to understand is “Cadenza” (It., cadence). It refers to an inserted virtuoso solo passage in a concerto, typically placed toward the end of a movement. It often uses material from the work itself or features improvised passages to showcase the soloist’s skills. In this piece, the *Cadenza* appears in the final movement, and the soloist and orchestra join for a dazzling finish to this highly spirited work.

Since its opening performance in Paris in 1934, with flautist Moyse performing the work he had commissioned, Ibert’s *Flute Concerto* has justly been considered a cornerstone of flute literature.

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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Austrian, 1736 – 1791, *Requiem in D minor*, K. 626, 1791

I am tempted to urge you to simply listen to the *Requiem* and absorb the pure beauty of the work, rather than deconstructing the Mass for these Program Notes. I truly believe that you will immediately respond emotionally to the music, with or without details. **BUT**… there is so much history, mystery, and glorious music to discuss that may make your experience of this magnificent work even more special.

First things first: What is a Requiem Mass?
It is a Mass that asks for repose and peace for the dead. The Mass typically contains six or more major sections, divided into various parts.

Now, onward into the mysterious history of Mozart’s *Requiem*.
The work has been shrouded in mystery since the day a stranger appeared at the Mozarts' door and commissioned him to compose a Requiem Mass in memory of his employer’s wife, who had passed recently. Immediately, questions arise: Who was the messenger’s employer, who offered a large sum for the work? Why did the commission stipulate that Mozart’s name would not be attached to the *Requiem* score? These questions, along with others concerning the genesis of the work, are among the few easy ones to answer factually, despite the vast amount of research done by scholars since Mozart’s death in 1791. The patron was Count Walsegg, who intended to claim the composition as his own work. From here on, more questions emerge: What is fact? What is lore? Did Mozart receive the full payment up front, or was it half, with the other half to be paid upon delivery of the completed work? Constanze, Mozart’s wife, contradicted herself regarding the payment of the much-needed money. It is known that Mozart was extremely ill, and Constanze worried that giving an unfinished work to the patron would mean returning the funds already received.

Thus, the intriguing story of this glorious work unfolds. Many of you are familiar with the mysteries surrounding Mozart's death through the film *Amadeus*. **Fact:** Salieri did not poison Mozart! When I looked up the probable cause of his death, here are just a few possible answers I found: renal failure, streptococcal infection, tuberculosis, scarlet fever, cerebral hemorrhage, and even severe Vitamin D deficiency.

That is more than enough background information. Now, to the glorious music.
Mozart completed the full score for solo voices, choir, and orchestration for the first section of the *Requiem*, the *Introitus*, which includes the somber *Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine* (Lord, give them eternal peace). Listen to the mournful sound produced by the woodwinds at the beginning of the work. Hear the solo soprano and choir continue the sorrowful mood. Do you know what a basset horn is? It is a member of the clarinet family that sounds a lower pitch than clarinets. It has an extended range that allows for chromatic passages. Be sure to listen for this instrument, not only in the opening section but throughout the work. There are no flutes in Mozart's woodwind grouping for the dark beginning of the work.

Have you been moved by the choral singing? Surely, you have responded to the full texture of their combined vocal ranges. Listen to the impassioned homophonic passages. (Homophonic music is a texture where multiple voices or instruments move together harmonically at the same pace, carrying the same music—one voice may carry a line while other voices support it.)

Most Mozart scholars say that the composer left detailed sketches of the score in his own hand for the *Kyrie* (Lord, have mercy) through the *Hostias* (sacrifice). The sketches comprise the vocal score for soloists and chorus, plus the "Basso Continuo." ***Important definition ahead!*** (The term "Basso Continuo" refers to a sort of harmonic shorthand—a "Figured Bass"—indicating the harmonies that should be played above the continuous bass line. The bass line is usually performed by a cello or double bass, and the harmonies are typically played by a harpsichord or organ.)

I mention in particular the expansive fugue introduced at the beginning of the *Kyrie*. (A fugue is an extended passage or composition built on a principal phrase that is successively taken up by other voices, woven in before a phrase is completed. Think of the simple child's song, "Frère Jacques.") More impressive is the fact that Mozart's sketches show this section evolving into a double fugue. I also draw attention to the intense *Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath), dramatic in its warning of the Day of Judgment. The music is delivered by the choir and orchestra. Note the emphatic timpani and trumpets. There is no mistaking the panic as the words ring loud and clear above the resounding organ and orchestra. Just

how detailed the sketches for this section and the ones that follow remain a part of the mysterious history, as very few have been found.

Mozart did indeed compose the moving theme for *Tuba Mirum* (Hark, the trumpet), which is scored for a solo trombone, not a trumpet! Do you wish to hazard a guess as to why? One good answer is that the deep, rich timbre of the trombone creates an emotional setting for the text. More importantly, I think, is that Mozart most certainly knew the history of the trombone. The instrument was used in church music to portray God. (NB: It is a fact that often trombonists must perform this theme for auditions.) Three of the soloists join to sing the text: "The wondrous trumpet will gather all before the throne; Judgment will be made…" Then Mozart made another masterful choice: the solo soprano enters and wonders in an entirely different mood, questioning "Who shall intercede for me when the just are in need of mercy?"

Mozart proceeded to sketch the Mass through to the *Hostias*, with the exception of the glorious, heart-wrenching *Lacrimosa dies illa* (On that day of tears). He went back to compose the missing part during the afternoon of December 5, 1791. He finished only eight measures before putting it aside. Mozart died that night.

Now, to the important nagging question: Who finished the Mass after Mozart's death? Constanze asked at least three composers to complete the unfinished work. They struggled to capture the genius of Mozart's style and eventually gave up. One of the finer musicians, Joseph Eybler, worked on the orchestration of the *Kyrie* and parts of other sections, but he also returned the work unfinished. He and/or Constanze then approached Mozart's pupil, Franz Süssmayr. Mozart had shared many of his ideas with Süssmayr and had the younger composer write down whole phrases while he sang them. Why then didn't they ask him to finish the work in the first place? Another unsolved mystery.

By now, you have surmised that Süssmayr went about the task at hand. He filled in the needed orchestration, completed the *Lacrimosa*, composed the undone sections, and adapted music from the beginning of the work to conclude the *Requiem*. The completed score was delivered to the Count as per the original deal with the messenger. The actual completed score was in Süssmayr's handwriting. While noting the deception, it is a fact that Walsegg did indeed plan to claim the *Requiem* as his own work, as he had done with other compositions. It took years for Constanze to get the devious patron to admit his fraud and return her husband's and his pupil's work.

Over the years, many editions of the *Requiem* have been published (several of which are only performed occasionally). Until very recently, Süssmayr's version has been the "go-to" version. In 1991, Robert Levin created a new edition of the *Requiem*. While using

Süssmayr's version, Levin edited and corrected many parts to further express Mozartian style. He worked with a scrap of music found in 1963 and composed a particularly beautiful Amen Fugue for the *Lacrimosa* (probably Mozart's intention). Levin edited Süssmayr's version of the last sections and composed an extension for the *Hosanna Fugue*. Levin said in an interview with Arie Vardi that he "changed as little as possible so that it would not disturb the weight of centuries." It is this score you will hear on Sunday, March 23rd. Levin, a pianist, professor, and composer, brings great skill and deep understanding of Mozart's musical genius to his emendation of the orchestral and vocal scores of the *Requiem*.

In sum, after expounding on so many facts and fictions surrounding the work, the Mass's powerful message remains: there is hope to emerge from the dark, frightening world of the dead and that sinners may find eternal light and forgiveness. *Lux aeterna* and *Cum Sanctis tuis* (May eternal light shine upon them, with your saints forever, O Lord). The *Requiem* is Mozart's personal affirmation of faith.

NB: I am well aware that this has been a prolonged attempt to urge you to hear this work as one of the most valued contributions to all musical literature. I hope it has served its purpose.
It is a much more detailed introduction to the work than I set out to write, yet it is a vast simplification of the glorious music and text settings. This is the advantage of writing online notes, rather than following the strict word count required in a printed Program Book. If you wish to look up more about the order of the *Requiem*, Google awaits your questions.

Finally, I ask you to put aside all the information and be prepared to truly HEAR the sublime work that is Mozart's *Requiem*.

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Arizona Musicfest would like to thank Fran Rosenthal for thorough, entertaining, and thoughtful notes that add depth and perspective to the great music you'll hear during our Festival Orchestra week.