

UNDERSTANDING CLASSICAL MUSIC – Report by Ian Royston

In March we concluded the BBC 'drama documentary' on the "Rise of a Genius – Mozart"

1787: Mozart experienced estrangement from his father and mourned the loss of his pet starling. During this period, amidst ongoing conflict between his homeland and the Ottoman Empire, he composed 'Don Giovanni,' considered his bleakest work to date and reflective of his personal struggles. However, the opera did not provide the intended distraction from the war, and Mozart chose not to cater to popular tastes.

Consequently, his financial situation deteriorated as concert opportunities diminished, although he continued to indulge in an extravagant lifestyle.

1789: With the onset of the French Revolution and the absence of Constanze from his home, Mozart reached a low point both personally and professionally. Seeking renewed success, he revised 'Cosi-fan-Tutte,' a narrative about infidelity that metaphorically paralleled the challenges in his marriage. The opera's remarkable and widely appreciated arias helped stabilize his declining fortunes.

Following Joseph II's support or tolerance of Mozart, Leopold II's ascent to Holy Roman Emperor marked a shift; Mozart was not invited to the coronation. In response, he pawned family valuables to stage a rival performance, presenting the distinguished 40th Symphony.

1791: Mozart accepted a position as kapellmeister in Vienna, reuniting with his wife and son and composing the renowned 'Ave Verum Corpus.' Although initially settled, domestic harmony was short-lived. He joined a Bohemian commune and shifted focus from Italian Opera to works in the German language, culminating in *Die Zauberflöte*. This opera encapsulated Mozart's philosophies, life experiences, and fascination with Masonic symbolism.

The Magic Flute achieved significant success, motivating Mozart to undertake additional commissions. The increasing workload led to exhaustion and illness. Tragically, Mozart received a mysterious request for a requiem, which ultimately served as the mass for his own funeral. He passed away at the age of 35.

Part two took a bizarre turn where we looked at Josep Castanyer Alonso's reinterpretation of "I'm a Barbie Girl" in the style of six different composers, amusing but a little shallow. Thus, the second video where Matthew Cawood reacts to the first video in a highly instructive analysis of each composers' style and a much deeper understanding of what makes them characteristic through looking at some classical musical tropes of piano music.

The next meeting is at 10:00 on Friday 24 April and the following on Friday 22nd May, both at Startforth Community Centre.