

Ave Verum Corpus
W.A. Mozart (1756-1791)

PERFORMANCE NOTES

More than one of the great composers, right at the end of their lives, turned back to a dignified and unassuming simplicity in their final compositions. J.S. Bach, for example, wrote the hauntingly beautiful organ Chorale Prelude “*Wenn wir in höchsten Nöthen sein*” (“When we are in deepest need”) as his last offering, and Brahms, at a similar point in his life, composed, for the same instrument, the Eleven Chorale Preludes.

Mozart, however, turned not to the keyboard but to voices and, disregarding the unfinished *Requiem*, the Motet *Ave Verum Corpus*, scored for strings, organ continuo and four-part chorus, was his last complete work of any kind.

The mood of this small gem is peaceful and contemplative—as befits a piece intended to be used, perhaps, at one of the Corpus Christi services. But its interpretation is by no means as easy as might appear to be the case; it calls for the ability first to *recognise*, then actually to sing, the long, flowing legato phrases; it calls also for the ability to recognise the *apex* or *climax* of each phrase and to move steadily and unrelentingly towards it, and subsequently away from it. As a general rule, there should be a slight *crescendo* in every note of greater length than a half-note (except, of course, for the last notes of phrases). It is also suggested that a slow *crescendo* should be started at bar 30 and continued to the first beat of bar 40. Avoid all accents on the 2nd and 4th beats of the bar.

Tone is particularly important, and (especially in the two upper parts) any suggestion of breathy, cloudy or unclear tone is anachronistic. Production should always be ‘forward,’ and it should be remembered that as much breath is needed when singing softly as when singing loudly. A breath should not be taken after *passum* in bar 12, nor after *latus* in bar 23, nor (in the Soprano part) after *immolatum* in bar 14.

Pronunciation should be as in modern Italian; the ‘r’s’ should be rolled, and particular care should be taken that there is no diphthong at the end of words ending with a vowel (e.g. ‘*Ave,*’ ‘*de,*’ ‘*Virgine,*’ ‘*homine,*’ ‘*sanguine,*’ and ‘*examine.*’) The letter ‘c,’ when it comes immediately before the Latin sounds e and i, is pronounced ch, as in church. Otherwise it is hard, as in card. The letter ‘g,’ when it comes immediately before the letters e and i, is pronounced as in generous. Otherwise it is hard, as in garden.

Precise speed depends to a certain degree on the acoustic of the particular building in which the motet is being performed, but the metronome mark ♩ = 60 may be taken as a rough guide.

Ave Verum Corpus

Motet for Chorus (SATB) & Organ

*Hail, true Body, born of the Virgin Mary,
who truly suffered, sacrificed upon the Cross for man's sake;
from whose piercéed side gushed forth a flood of water and blood.*

*O be for us a foretaste of bliss,
when we ourselves come to face the trial of death.*

Tr. Mary Berry

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791)

Edited by George H. Guest

Adagio

pp

A - ve, — A - ve ve - rum —

pp

Adagio

pp

Organ

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Cor - pus, na - tum de Ma - ri - a Vir - gi - ne, ve - re

mp

6

Cresc.

pas - sum im - mo - la - tum in cru - ce pro

in cru - ce pro

im - mo - la - tum in cru - ce pro

12

Cresc.

ho - mi - ne.

ho - mi - ne.

ho - mi - ne.

17

pp

pp

Cu - jus la - tus — per - fo - ra - tum un - da

pp

pp

22

pp

Poco cresc.

flu - xit et san - gui - ne, es - to no - bis

27

es - to
Poco cresc.

Poco cresc.

prae - gus - ta - tum in mor - tis ex - a - mi -

32

no - bis prae - gus - ta - tum in mor - tis ex - a - mi -

in mor - - - - - tis ex -

mf *mf* *p*

- ne, in mor - - - - - tis ex -

- ne, *mf* *p* ex -

37

mf *p*

Poco rall. A Tempo

- a - mi - ne.

- a - mi - ne.

- a - mi - ne.

Poco rall. A Tempo

42

tr