

THE EVOLUTION OF MOZART'S VOCAL STYLE: AN ANALYSIS BASED ON CHURCH MUSIC

Guo Liting

Postgraduate Student,

Sumy State Pedagogical University named after A. S. Makarenko, Ukraine

e-mail: bamssmit@gmail.com, orcid.org/0009-0005-5463-3553

Summary

This article examines the stylistic influences shaping Mozart's sacred music, offering an in-depth analysis of its evolution. It identifies two distinct styles: the Salzburgian and contemporary approaches. The Salzburgian style is defined by brevity, counterpoint, and tonal unity, adhering to traditional liturgical requirements. Meanwhile, the contemporary style reflects the influence of secular music, with larger structures, concertante melodies, and thematic contrasts drawn from symphonic and operatic works. A comparison between Mozart's two Lauretian litanies, *Litaniae Lauretanae* KV 109 and KV 195, illustrates his compositional development. The earlier litany demonstrates simplicity and compactness, while the later piece shows increased complexity, operatic influence, and a more intricate orchestral role. The analysis highlights how Mozart blended sacred music's formal rigor with expressive elements from operatic and instrumental traditions, creating a distinctive style that paved the way for future innovations in liturgical music. By drawing from contrapuntal traditions and integrating operatic expressiveness, Mozart's sacred works reflect his genius in synthesizing diverse influences into a cohesive and innovative musical language.

Key words: Mozart, sacred music, Salzburgian style, contemporary style, contrapuntal traditions, operatic influence, liturgical music.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.23856/6504>

1. Introduction

When discussing Mozart's sacred music, the Requiem often comes to mind, standing as a pinnacle of his spiritual and musical artistry. However, less frequently examined are his masses, motets, and litanies, which constitute a significant portion of his sacred legacy. These compositions are particularly representative of Mozart's church style, showcasing his unique approach to vocal writing and harmonic language.

In exploring the evolution of Mozart's vocal style, it becomes essential to analyze works such as the «*Litaniae Lauretanae*» K. 125 and K. 243. These pieces not only reflect the musical conventions of their time but also highlight the innovative techniques that Mozart employed to enhance vocal expression and convey the spiritual essence of the texts. By focusing on these lesser-known works, we can gain a deeper understanding of how Mozart's sacred music evolved, revealing the intricate interplay between text, melody, and harmony that characterizes his vocal compositions.

Through this analysis, we aim to illuminate the richness of Mozart's sacred oeuvre and its significance within the broader context of his musical development, ultimately shedding light on the profound impact his vocal style has had on the tradition of sacred music.

Only in the last century did musicologists begin to focus on Mozart's church compositions. Significant works include G. Abert (1919–1921), A. Einstein (1947), K. G. Fellerer (1955), H. C. Robbins Landon (1970), and the published collection *Theology and Music: Three Lectures on Mozart* (2006). Additionally, materials on Mozart's sacred works are presented in articles by R. Angermüller.

However, no comprehensive study exists that thoroughly examines individual genres of Mozart's sacred music. Meanwhile, analyzing works from a single genre allows for a deeper understanding of the influences that shaped Mozart's church music style.

The objective of this study is to investigate the evolution of W.A. Mozart's vocal style through the analysis of his lesser-known works, particularly the "Litaniae Lauretanae" K. 125 and K. 243. This research aims to elucidate the distinctive features of his vocal technique and harmonic language, as well as their influence on the formation of the composer's sacred music. Additionally, it seeks to highlight the significance of these compositions within the broader context of Mozart's musical development, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between text and music in his sacred oeuvre.

2. Main part

Analyzing works within a single genre allows us to identify the influences that shaped the composer's church music style, as well as trace the stylistic models and topoi typical of Mozart's Salzburg period. Furthermore, it is widely believed that Mozart's music gained expression and depth during his Vienna period, after he became familiar with the works of Bach and Handel. However, Mozart had mastered the idioms of Baroque music much earlier.

As a result, it can be observed that elements of the Baroque style, such as counterpoint, polyphony, and specific melodic structures, appear in Mozart's earlier sacred works. This suggests that his musical foundations and preferences were shaped by various styles well before his Vienna period.

Almost all of Mozart's church compositions – masses, vespers, offertories, motets, church sonatas, and litanies – were written in Salzburg. Only the Great Mass in C minor, K. 427, the motet «Ave, verum corpus», and the «Requiem belong to his Vienna period. This article presents an analysis of the litanies «Lauretanae» K. 109 in B-flat major and K. 195 in D major, composed during Mozart's Salzburg period. These works followed the typical models of their time, which had been developed by Mozart's predecessors in the Salzburg chapel, such as E. Eberlin, A. Adlgasser, M. Haydn, and Leopold Mozart. Drawing from these traditional models, W. A. Mozart created original compositions marked by his distinctive style. Through the example of the two «Litaniae Lauretanae» (K. 109 in B-flat major and K. 195 in D major) – two compositions in the same genre, written to the same text – it is possible to examine the sources and models underlying Mozart's church music style. Additionally, this analysis highlights the topoi and the expressive means associated with them, which the composer mastered in his sacred music.

Before analyzing Mozart's «Litaniae Lauretanae», it is important to consider the relationship between the sacred and the secular in 18th-century Austria.

Austria in the second half of the 18th century was governed by two centers of power: Vienna, the political and secular center, and Salzburg, the spiritual center. During the reign of Maria Theresa, Empress of the Holy Roman Empire (1740–1765), and later as co-regent with Joseph II (1765–1780), significant reforms began in both state structures and the military, as well as in education and the church's infrastructure. According to the decrees of Joseph II, the

number of church holidays was reduced, church decor was regulated (down to the number of altar candles), and this Habsburg policy aimed to reduce state spending on the church and simplify the ceremonial and ritual aspects of church services.

The idea of returning to the «original simplicity» of sacred music was supported by church hierarchy. In 1749, Pope Benedict XIV issued an encyclical calling for the elimination of «Baroque excesses» in the church, a return to unison liturgical singing, a reduction in the use of instrumental music, and a simplification of the language of church music. Archbishop Hieronymus Colloredo of Salzburg, on the occasion of the 1,200th anniversary of the establishment of the archbishopric, published a pastoral letter calling for the simplification of liturgical music.

As a result of these church music reforms, two opposing trends coexisted harmoniously within Austrian sacred music in the second half of the 18th century: on one hand, there was an awareness of the need to distinguish between secular and sacred styles; on the other hand, there was a simplification of church music, driven by both religious and political reforms. Joseph II's reforms and the reformist inclinations of the Salzburg archbishop contributed to the secularization of sacred art. For composers of this period, including Mozart, this meant that musical laws took precedence when composing church music, and there was the possibility of using sacred music elements in secular genres, and vice versa.

The secularization of church art was further facilitated by the musical atmosphere in Austria. Salzburg's musical life was shaped by two key factors: the city served as the residence of the archbishop, and it was home to the renowned Benedictine University. Thus, Salzburg's musical culture developed at the intersection of both sacred and secular traditions.

Many prominent composers served at the court of the Salzburg archbishop in the mid-to-late 18th century, including E. Eberlin, C. Adlgasser, M. Haydn, and Leopold Mozart. The church compositions of these predecessors could have served as models for W. A. Mozart as he mastered various sacred music genres. Mozart began receiving commissions to compose music for the Archbishop of Salzburg in 1766. One of his first commissions was to write the opening part of a collective festive oratorio. In early 1769, Archbishop Schrattenbach appointed Mozart to the position of court concertmaster. During this time, Mozart quickly composed a number of sacred works, including two masses, «Te Deum laudamus» (for choir and orchestra), and an offertory.

Mozart's first Mass in C major was the result of his study of works by Eberlin, Michael Haydn, and Adlgasser. The influence of these composers can be seen in the four-part vocal writing and the structure of the mass, which reflects the sacred music traditions of Salzburg.

With modest organ accompaniment, the development is concise and contrapuntal, transitioning to chordal presentation. Beginning with the tenure of Archbishop Hieronymus Colloredo (1772), the situation regarding commissions changed. Colloredo demanded simplified and compact music, resulting in many of Mozart's sacred compositions being relatively brief, such as the masses («Spatzenmesse» KV 220 or «Coronation Mass» KV 317). In a letter to Padre Martini (September 4, 1776), to which a manuscript of the offertory «Misericordias Domini» (K. 222) was attached, Mozart characterized the «Hieronymo-Salzburg» church style: «...our church music is very different from the Italian, especially because the mass, in its entirety – with Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, with epistle sonata, with offertory or motet, with Sanctus and Agnus Dei – even the most solemn, when served by the prince-archbishop, should last no longer than three-quarters of an hour. It is necessary to practice specifically to write in this manner. Moreover, this must be a mass with a full orchestra, with trumpets, timpani, etc.» (*Becker, 1991: 44-45*).

By 1774, as a result of mastering various styles of sacred music – on one hand, Salzburgian, and on the other, contemporary – Mozart developed his own style, synthesizing

elements of the galant and learned styles. In exploring the evolution of Mozart's sacred music, Einstein identifies the genetic sources of the compositions through which the composer mastered various models of sacred music. He distinguishes Salzburgian, French, Italian, as well as learned, galant, contrapuntal, and concert styles. Furthermore, the scholar points to the models of Mozart's sacred compositions, specifically the concrete works of his predecessors that served as examples for him. For instance, «Litaniae de venerabili altaris sacramento» KV 125 (1772) in B major was composed based on the model of L. Mozart; «Missa brevis» KV 115 in C major (1773) was modeled after Eberlin, M. Haydn, and Adlgasser.

In exploring Mozart's sacred music, it is crucial to recognize how various stylistic influences shape his unique church style. Abrecht's categorization of these influences into national and local styles – such as Salzburgian, Italian, Bolognese, and Neapolitan – alongside a contemporary style and an instrumental approach, provides a framework for understanding the evolution of Mozart's musical language (*Born, 2005: 54*).

The Salzburgian style, characterized by its learned and contrapuntal qualities, reveals several defining traits. First, the brevity of compositions adheres to Colloredo's preferences, resulting in concise structures (*Becker, 1991: 73*). Second, the liturgical text remains central, guiding the composition's thematic development. Third, typical melodic formulas of sacred music underpin the works, ensuring a sense of cohesion (*Born, 2005: 112*). Fourth, the tonal affinity of melodies contributes to thematic unity throughout the pieces. Fifth, an extensive use of counterpoint reflects the learned tradition within the Salzburgian style. Sixth, the orchestra's accompanying role serves to enhance the vocal lines rather than overshadow them (*Macintyre, 2007: 211*). Finally, the use of coloratura is present but restrained in vocal passages.

Contrasting this, the contemporary style of sacred music, influenced by composers like J. A. Hasse, integrates elements from secular music, embracing a concertante melodic approach and structural organization akin to symphonic cycles (*Heartz, 1992: 189*). Key features of this style include an increased composition scale, where larger works characterized the new style. The subordination of liturgical text to the composer's intent often leads to adaptations for two- or three-part arias, reflecting an operatic influence. Thematic contrast and a modulation plan are introduced in the construction of forms modeled on sonata-symphonic structures (*The Cambridge Mozart Encyclopedia, 2007: 133*), and melodic elements from contemporary operas enrich the sacred compositions. Moreover, operatic themes of sorrow and pathos became prevalent, and the orchestration became more complex, allowing instruments to play independently of vocal lines (*Becker, 1991: 85*).

A striking illustration of the evolution in Mozart's sacred style is found in his two Lauretian litanies: Litaniae Lauretanae KV 109 (1771) and KV 195 (1774). These works represent two distinct phases in his compositional journey. The first litany, KV 109, is characterized by compactness, featuring a clear structure, simple texture, and straightforward tonal development. The melodic lines exhibit a song-like quality, aligning with the classical style (*Macintyre, 2007: 245*). In contrast, the later litany, KV 195, reveals a more expansive scale and intricate compositional techniques, reflecting a maturation in Mozart's style. The vocal parts demonstrate significant operatic influence, with virtuosic cadences and embellishments. The orchestral role is amplified, indicating a shift toward a more complex musical dialogue (*Heartz, 1992: 207*).

Both litanies share a five-part structure that serves as a framework for their thematic exploration. The first part, Kyrie, serves as a dynamic introduction setting the tone for the cycle. The second part, Sancta Maria, acts as an invocation that centers on the Virgin Mary, characterized by lyrical expressiveness. The third part, Salus infirmorum, reflects human suffering,

employing stylistic elements of baroque music (Becker, 1991: 114). The fourth part, Regina Angelorum, provides a solemn conclusion to the main prayer, embodying an ode-like quality. Finally, the Agnus Dei, the fifth part, concludes the cycle with a lyrical finale that echoes operatic arias (Born, 1985: 145).

The internal cohesion of these sections is achieved through a combination of classical sonata form and traditional sacred music techniques. This blend highlights Mozart's ability to traverse stylistic boundaries, integrating contrapuntal and operatic elements seamlessly (Albrecht, 2005: 82).

In **conclusion**, the analysis of Mozart's sacred music indicates that he adeptly synthesized various stylistic influences into a cohesive and distinctive voice. His understanding of church music was informed by the contrapuntal traditions of his predecessors while also embracing the expressive possibilities offered by operatic and instrumental music. Through his innovative compositional techniques and thematic explorations, Mozart's sacred style emerges as a rich tapestry that honors tradition while paving the way for future developments in liturgical music. His ability to draw from established forms and transform them into a unique expression is a testament to his genius, showcasing the evolution of his artistic vision within the context of sacred music.

References

1. Becker, M. (1991). *Mozart: Sein Leben und seine Zeit in Texten und Bildern*. Frankfurt am Main und Leipzig: Insel Verlag.
2. Born, G. (2005). *Mozart Musiksprache. Schlüssel zu Leben und Werk*. München: C. H. Beck.
3. Hertz, D. (1992). *Mozart's Operas*. London: University of California Press.
4. Macintyre, B. C. (2007). *Litany II*. In C. Eisen & S. P. Keefe (Eds.), *The Cambridge Mozart Encyclopedia* (p. 254). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Eisen, C., & Keefe, S. P. (Eds.). (2007). *The Cambridge Mozart Encyclopedia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.