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**MUSICA SACROMONTANA**

**JÓZEF ZEIDLER – MISSA EX D**

**Sinfonia Varsovia, The Katowice Singers Ensemble Camerata Silesia**

**Jerzy MAKSYMIOUK** - conductor

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Over the past few years, **Józef ZEIDLER** (1744-1806) has become established as a prominent name in Polish classicism – an epoch which, perhaps, remains the most underestimated by Polish listeners. The last great masters of the Baroque (to mention only Gorczycki), who can be seen as representing the glory of the old Polish Commonwealth in the musical sphere, continue to be household names. Alas, this Polish state succumbed to partitioning foreign powers in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and seemingly eternal centres of Polish culture fell on hard times. Various monasteries and the musical ensembles associated with them continued to keep the fire alive, but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the occupying powers clamped down on Polish monastic life; one of the effects lay in the degradation and dispersal of the monasteries' libraries and archives, which had held valuable manuscripts collected over generations. This resulted in obvious difficulties in assessing and propagating the heritage of individual composers. Józef Zeidler is one of those composers who, for long years, had been forgotten but is now being played ever more often – thanks, in his case, to the indefatigable (positivist) labours of the eponymous society based at Święta Góra in Gostyń. The Oratorian festivals held there since 2006 consistently promote the works of Zeidler, which once graced religious services held at the local basilica. In this way, we can glean some idea as to the importance of Gostyń in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, what with the Oratorian priests lovingly cultivating music in accordance with the testament of St Philip Neri, the founder of their congregation.

By the time he arrived in Gostyń in circa 1775, Józef Zeidler was a fully formed musician enjoying considerable renown. He joined the capella of the Święta Góra monastery and became its in-house composer, almost – in fact – a member of the household. At that time, the Oratorian congregation at Święta Góra was still enjoying its heyday, with musical holdings in excess of 800 works by the leading European masters (Haydn, Mozart) as well as by Polish composers. After the congregation was closed down by the Prussian authorities in 1876, many of the manuscripts cherished at Święta Góra were scattered or lost. Of those still remaining, 16 are by Zeidler. Compositions by Zeidler have also been discovered in Gniezno, Poznań, Grodzisk Wielkopolski, and at Jasna Góra in Częstochowa. The perseverant research of Zeidler Society members has also resulted in identification of several more Zeidler compositions at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Munich; as attested to by the seal on the title page, these manuscripts were once housed at the Cistercian monastery in Obra, and we can only speculate as to whether they arrived in Munich during World War II or at some earlier time subsequent to the Prussian clampdown on monastic life in Poland.

In this way, our topography of Józef Zeidler's life has come to encompass a new locality – Obra, a small town just outside of Wolsztyn (along the road from Poznań to Nowa Sól), picturesquely nestled between three lakes. The local Cistercian monastery, formerly a major cultural centre in its own right, had been founded in 1231 by one Sędziwój, cantor at the cathedral in Gniezno. The first church at the Obra site had stood until the 16th century; the one found there today is younger by a century. The church remained under Cistercian administration until 1835, when the Prussian authorities dissolved the monastery, precipitating the loss of its library holdings – the Zeidler compositions included.

Notable among the Obra trove found in Munich is Józef Zeidler's Mass ex D which, to the extent of our knowledge, has not been preserved in any known Polish collection. Dated to 1769, it is the earliest known Zeidler work; at the time of its writing, the composer would have been approximately 25 years old. One is tempted to speculate whether the young musician did not spend some time at Obra; at any rate, he clearly must have had some dealings with the Cistercians. These are precious bits of information, given the general paucity of hard-and-fast knowledge about Zeidler's life. Naturally enough, the Zeidler Society took a strong interest in this mass, and its modern premiere was held during the Musica Sacromontana festival on 4 October 2015.

The manuscript of the Mass ex D is not – as opposed to the other scores – annotated with the name of the copyist. At the same time, the hand is very similar to that seen in the Pastorella preserved at Gniezno. The Rev. W. Zientarski, a Zeidler scholar, believes the Gniezno Pastorella to be an original score written out by Zeidler himself; accordingly, there are grounds to believe that the Mass ex D from Munich has likewise been written by the young composer's own hand. Examination of the score discovers an engaging oddity: one of the letters in the organ line (O) is decorated with a drawing

of a man's head – perhaps a facetious portrait of the composer ?

The Zeidler compositions preserved in the archives of the congregation of St. Philip in Gostyń have been dated to the 1780s and 1790s. In reference to this timeline, the Mass ex D is almost 20 years earlier. We know next to nothing about Zeidler's studies, but this piece provides valuable insights into his musical knowledge and approach at the very outset of his composing career. The Mass ex D is a work of youthful bravado, unfolding in full-bore festive mass fashion, and the sizeable line-up of four solo vocalists, a four-voice choir, two clarions, and two violins plus organ is called upon to perform no mean feat. This is an expansive cantata form whose individual parts fragment into choral segments, solos, and arias, with instrumental intros also playing an important part.

Zeidler's Mass ex D leaves the old Baroque style behind in terms of its melodic lines, textures, and its approach to the liturgical text. It is an unabashed manifestation of the classicist musical idiom, with its hallmarks of symmetry at all levels, simple motifs, and transparent textures all in evidence. The piece is striking on account of its simple melodic concepts, which are often based on the same simple phrases repeated in various configurations. The choral sections are, for the most part, structured in chords, although Zeidler occasionally resorts to polyphony (as in the slightly archaic Kyrie II or in the Amen in the Gloria finale), introducing a long, multi-stranded theme which he then weaves into the chords. A typical Zeidleresque trait is presented in the consistent uniformity of motifs in the consecutive parts of the work; the orchestral introductions which, most usually, preface any given part of the Mass ex D incorporate all the themes which the composer then painstakingly includes later on.

The Mass ex D is structured around a choral core, often supported by bold violins or trumpets. Even at this tender age, Zeidler confidently applies the possibilities opened by the choir. The merry, affirmative choral passages with lively phrasing are effectively juxtaposed with the emotive phrasing of parts such as Qui tollis (in an evocative B minor), Gratias agimus, or the melancholic choral aria of Kyrie I (in D minor). To appreciate the sheer expressive contrast which Zeidler is capable of achieving through adroit interplay of two choirs, we need look no further than the final Agnus Dei, in which the pithy, pensive introduction (with its rhetorical Miserere phrase in descending chromatic half-tones) proceeds to the vivid, energetic narration of Dona nobis pacem.

While the choral parts of Zeidler's mass often have an individual expression, the solo arias and the duets tend to not so much convey subjective emotion as to showcase vocal virtuosity. The soprano passages (Laudamus Te, Benedictus) are particularly demanding – written in a high register, teeming with cavalier coloratura passages and hairpin vocal bends of fragmented, rich and varied rhythm. We can only admire the anonymous singers who, back in the day, took it upon themselves to perform these parts.

This mass by the young Zeidler, while essentially true to the European canon of the great mass form, features certain individual accents in his reading of the liturgical text. His seven-part Gloria is particularly complex, suggesting a deliberate emphasis of the aspect of divine glory. The composer devoted significantly less attention to the theological deliberations of the Credo, and he eschews certain emotional suggestions which would normally receive emphasis in a traditional reading (as in the Et incarnatus). A novel idea is presented in the varying treatments of the Hosanna crowning the Sanctus and the Benedictus. The former is a succinct continuation of the lively Pleni sunt caeli narrative; the latter, meanwhile, passes to a fugue coda with clear allusions to the Gloria (Amen) finale. This is a conscious formal device on Zeidler's part, a striving for cohesiveness of the cantata mass.

All in all, the Mass ex D – monumental, technically dazzling, and bombastic – is a fine display piece in which the young composer flaunts the rich and varied contents of his toolbox. It lacks the individual traits found in Zeidler's more mature compositions – the melancholy, well nigh romantic aura of his Stabat Mater or the gregarious, danceable pulse of those of his Masses in which he drew inspiration from folk pastorals. All this, and more, was yet to come.

Ewa Obniska