MP3 Listen - {audio}mp3/aveverommozart.mp3{/audio}**AVE VERUM CORPUS**
  In April of 1791, Leopold Hofmann, who was *Kapellmeister* at   St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, fell gravely ill. Mozart, who had never   been an avid composer of sacred music, nonetheless saw an opportunity to enhance   his income, and maneuvered to succeed Hofmann. Towards this end, he turned   his attentions again to sacred music, culminating ultimately with his
Requiem
. (As it happens, Hofmann survived Mozart, and died in 1793.)

Mozart set the Eucharistic hymn *Ave   verum corpus* in June 1791. This setting was dedicated to his friend, Anton Stoll, who was chorus master   of the parish church in Baden, and it was first performed in Baden at the Feast   of Corpus Christi.

It is possible that Mozart set this   hymn, mindful of the Imperial ban on elaborate concerted music, or it is possible that he was working with   the limitations of Stoll's choir. One way or another, his setting is   remarkable for its compact simplicity. There are a mere forty-six bars of music, with orchestral writing that serves to provide introduction, transition, and   ending, and double the choral parts. The choral setting is simplicity itself,   with the choir mostly singing the same text at the same time. This direct   approach would suited a reform-minded Austria where textual clarity and brevity were all-important in church music.

Mozart's setting is far from pedestrian   or undistinguished. (It actually isn't even complete; the text below includes the last two verses, which   Mozart omitted from his setting.) There is an unusual modulation from D major   to F major at the text, "whose side was pierced, whence flowed water and blood,", and the simplicity is the sort that Artur Schnabel famously described as too simple for children and too difficult for adults (after   all, simple music like this exposes any lapses of rhythm, intonation, or   ensemble). And the music seems to encompass a universe of feeling in forty-six   short bars.

Chorus SATB;   Strings, Continuo

Ave / verum / Corpus, natum / de / Maria / Virgine:
Hail / true / Body / born / of / Mary / Virgin,

Vere / passum, / immolatum / in / cruce / pro / homine:
truly / suffered / was sacrificed / on / cross / for / mankind

Cujus// latus/ perforatum, / unda / fluxit /
Whose / side / was pierced / / from / whence blood

Esto / nobis / praegustatum / in / mortis / examine.
Be / for us / foretaste / in / of death / testing

O / Jesu / dulcis, / O / Jesu / pie, / O / Jesu / Fili / Mariae,

miserere / mei. / Amen.

Hail, true Body, born of the Virgin Mary,

who has truly suffered, and was sacrificed on the cross for mankind,

whose side was pierced, whence flowed water and blood,

Be for us a foretaste of heaven, during our final trial,

O Jesu sweet, O Jesu merciful, O Jesu Son of Mary,

have mercy on me. Amen.

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