

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 by Mozart

Written by W.J.Pais

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

~~Quis~~ // ~~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.

[Download MIDI File](#)

[Download Finale Music Score for SABT](#)