

***The Unanswered Question***

**Charles Ives (1874–1954)**

Written: 1903

Style: Contemporary American

Duration: Four minutes

Even though he was born in the nineteenth century, Charles Ives experimented with most of the new compositional techniques that became a hallmark of the twentieth century. Igor Stravinsky, one of the greatest of the ‘modern’ composers, claimed that Ives was writing music of the 1960s in the early 1900s! And he used most of those techniques well before his European counterparts. We generally give Arnold Schoenberg the credit for being the first composer to completely abandon a single tonal center for music. Ives abandoned tonality almost a decade sooner. The Europeans got the credit, and Ives got the cold shoulder. We see him as a brilliant, eccentric, and little-understood anomaly of American music. “I’m the only one, with the exception of Mrs. Ives and one or two others perhaps . . . who likes any of my music,” he said. “Why do I like these things? Are my ears on wrong?”

Ives didn’t have to depend on his music for a living; he made a fortune as an insurance executive. He remained coolly aloof from public criticism of his music. Supplying some program notes for one of his more challenging pieces he wrote, “These prefatory essays were written by the composer for those who can’t stand his music—and the music for those who can’t stand his essays; to those who can’t stand either, the whole is respectfully dedicated.”

Ives wrote *The Unanswered Question* while still in his twenties and well before he got into the insurance business. It uses Ives’ “collage” technique where unrelated bits of music are layered over one another. *The Unanswered Question* has three layers of collage. The strings play a very quiet cushion of chords throughout, representing "The Silences of the Druids—Who

Know, See, and Hear Nothing." A lone trumpet intones "The Perennial Question of Existence," while a quartet of woodwinds representing the "Fighting Answerers," scurry about looking for the answer. As the trumpet keeps asking the same question, the woodwinds become more and more frantic with their quest. The trumpet asks once more, but this time the only answer is silence.

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***Symphony No. 8 in B Minor, D. 759, "Unfinished"***

**Franz Schubert (1797–1828)**

Written: 1822

Movements: Two

Style: Romantic

Duration: 25 minutes

All Franz Schubert did was write music, and he did it very well and very quickly. For instance, during 1815, at the age of eighteen, he composed two symphonies, two masses, five operas, a tremendous number of piano and chamber music pieces, and an incredible 146 songs! With all that writing going on it was difficult to keep track of things. Small wonder that forty-three years after it was written, someone discovered Schubert's most famous work, the "Unfinished" Symphony, locked away in a chest belonging to one of his close friends. In that chest were two movements of what Schubert obviously intended to be a complete four-movement symphony.

The first movement begins mysteriously with the cellos and basses playing a single dark line. The rest of the strings join in with a sort of murmuring figure that acts as the accompaniment to an even darker melody played by the woodwinds—the principal theme of this movement. It grows in intensity and ends firmly on a cadence that quickly subsides into a second, more hopeful theme played by the cellos. The violins pick up the theme and repeat it. But not for long! Soon the dark mood returns with a series of foreboding chords. Bits and pieces of the second theme get passed around in the orchestra; then there is a literal repeat of everything that has happened so far. The middle section of the first movement presents motives from both of the main themes in a highly dramatic fashion. As the tension begins to lessen, the recapitulation of the opening sneaks back in. It ends in an even bleaker mood than it began.

The horns and bassoons introduce the second movement while the cellos play the main theme over a “walking” bass line. The atmosphere of this movement is more hopeful than the first, but it is not without its darker moments. A beautiful hushed melody played by the clarinet over syncopated strings starts the second section. Soon the entire orchestra enters and infuses some drama. The tension subsides and brings the movement back to its beginning. The second section gets a restatement too, but with different orchestration. When the walking bass returns, it signals the close of the movement.

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***Mass in C Minor, K. 427 (417a)***  
**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791)**

Written: 1783

Movements: Twelve

Style: Classical

Duration: 60 minutes

Free at last! Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart had finally made the break from the stultifying atmosphere of his hometown Salzburg. Even more importantly, he was free from the suffocating control of his father, Leopold. Now he was in Vienna, the most important musical city in Europe, and actually making a go of it. He was happily married to Constanze Weber, and the couple was expecting their first child.

Not all was well. The father was refusing to let go and demanding that Wolfgang return to Salzburg for a visit. Mozart promised his father that he would come to Salzburg and bring with him a new mass for Salzburg that he was working on (but hadn't yet finished). However, Mozart always came up with excuses for not going. There were unspoken reasons as well. He had never received a proper dismissal from the Archbishop in Salzburg and feared arrest if he ever set foot there again. There was the sensitive issue of his father and sister never really accepting his wife. Then there was the little problem that Mozart had promised to name his child after his father, and then at the last moment chose another godfather and named the boy Raymond! But Mozart told his father that he couldn't come visit because he simply hated Salzburg.

Nevertheless, Mozart and Constanze eventually made it to Salzburg. It was not a happy homecoming; the hoped for reconciliation never really happened. Tragically, while they were there, their son, whom they had left in Vienna with a nurse, died.

Just a few days before they returned to Vienna, the still uncompleted *Mass* received its

premiere in Salzburg. Constanze sang the soprano solos. In order to present a complete work at the premiere, Mozart apparently filled in the uncompleted sections with movements from earlier works. Years later he re-used parts of the *Mass in C Minor* in his cantata  *Davide penitente*, K. 469. But he never completed the *Mass*, a source of great frustration for generations of musicians, audiences and scholars. In the several attempts at somehow constructing or reconstructing the *Mass*, others have themselves substituted movements from other works by Mozart or actually continued composing in his style where his manuscript ends. Tonight's performance uses an edition made in the 1950s by H C. Robbins Landon—who gives us only what Mozart actually wrote. The *Kyrie* and *Gloria* are complete. A significant portion of the *Credo* is missing, however. It ends nearly halfway through the traditional prayer, after “*And was made incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary and was made man.*” The *Agnus Dei* is missing entirely.

The *Mass in C Minor* is unusual for Mozart in that he seems to have started it without any sort of financial incentive. (He wrote a large portion of his music to make money.) In his great modern-day biography of Mozart, Maynard Solomon says that “occasionally . . . Mozart composed a work in a spirit of inquiry, as an affirmation of his beliefs, or as a gift of love or friendship. The several accounts of its origin indicate that the *Mass in C Minor* arose from a fusion of all three of these motivations.” The music of the *Mass* is an unquestionable affirmation of faith. Perhaps it was the failure of the hoped-for reconciliation with his family and the death of his infant son that prevented its completion.

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