

Scott Burnham

Late Style in Exile: Beethoven and the *Missa Solemnis*

Massive, difficult, and ever imposing, Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* has often been exiled to its own problematic space, apart from the rest of his later music. As a work both sacred and secular, the *Missa Solemnis* has never been fully at home in either a liturgical setting or a concert setting. And though touted by the composer himself as his greatest work—it is easily his longest in the making—the *Missa Solemnis* has never been received with anything like the pervasive critical enthusiasm eventually bestowed upon the late piano sonatas and the late string quartets.

This talk will engage some of the contradictions and paradoxes perceived in the *Missa Solemnis*, listening out for late-style musical traits as well as for features that have made the work problematic throughout its reception history. Along the way I will explore some telling resemblances to the composer's Ninth Symphony, as well as some intriguing parallels to the Second Part of Goethe's *Faust*, another sprawling late work that has undergone a vexed reception history.

With the help of Edward Said's sense of artistic late style as one of untimely exile, I will attempt to characterize the special place the *Missa Solemnis* holds both in Beethoven's late style and in late style conceived more generally.