

Confutatis from Mozart's *Requiem*

One of the most renowned and talented composers in history is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. His work has been celebrated for over 200 years, and has paved the way in musical composition. His style and great attention to musical detail are seen in all of his compositions, and they are indeed works of art.

One of his most famous compositions is his twelve-movement piece entitled *Requiem*. During his lifetime, Mozart was only able to complete about half of this piece. After his death, the rest of the selection was left to a different composer, who was able to finish it himself. In this paper, I will discuss Mozart's final movement ever composed: the sixth movement of *Requiem* entitled *Confutatis*.

Before his death, Mozart was only able to complete the vocal parts, the figured organ bass line, and the very prominent violin segments. It is believed that he was on his death-bed as he was writing this, and the lyrics can attest to that. *Confutatis* means "confounded." It explains that when the accused are confounded and are doomed to the flames of Hell, Mozart kneels with a submissive heart and hopes to be called one of the blessed. He is begging to God for mercy in his final hour. These lyrics are extremely compelling, and the composition itself is able to express his feelings well.

Now that the idea behind the creation of this movement has been explained, let's look further into the details of this piece to see how Mozart was able to express his feelings at the time of its creation. This piece in its final state is written for four-part vocals with a near-full orchestral background. For lack of a better recording, the recording I will use is a male duet that incorporates female segments and male segments. There is also not a near-full orchestral

background, but rather an incorporation of all of the main points of the background. To hear how it should sound, I will include a link to Spotify: [here](#).

i V

Soprano
Alto
Tenore
Basso
Violoncello, Basso ed Organo

Tutti
Con - fu - ta - tis ma - le -

Tutti
Con - fu - ta - tis ma - le - di - ctis,

Tutti
f
Org.: tasto solo

i (first inversion)

iv/V (modulation into Em)

di - ctis, flam - mis a - cri - bus ad - di - ctis, flam - mis a - cri - bus ad -

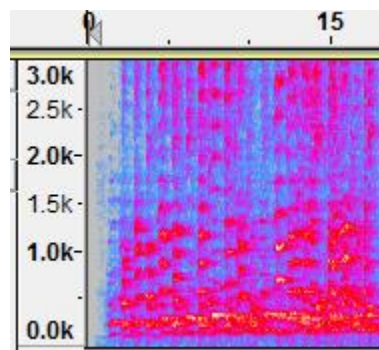
flam - mis a - cri - bus ad - di - ctis, ma - le - di - ctis, flam - mis a - cri - bus ad -

*The first five measures of Mozart's *Confutatis*

Although it is not pictured, Mozart's *Confutatis* was composed in the key signature of A-minor. A minor is the relative minor of C major. That means that although these two keys have different starting pitches, they both have no sharps and no flats. However, there is an

appearance of a G#. This change from G natural to G# gives the half-step pull towards the tonic of the key, which is A. This gives the quality of a certain pull towards other chords in the key and gives it a more dramatic feel.

The chord progressions in this piece are tricky to evaluate. Mozart does something very interesting. He creates what is called a musical sequence in the string section, which is a pattern of notes repeated over and over again with a rise in pitch. You can see this as his starting pitch on the first beat of every measure rises a step in the bass staff. This gives a very intense, climactic feel and gives the piece direction.



The rising patterns of fundamentals suggest sequencing.

**A spectrogram of the first few measures of Confutatis. The sequencing can be seen in the fundamentals of the strings near 200 and 500 Hz.*

To evaluate the chord progressions for this piece requires an understanding of more complex music theory, and I won't go too deep into detail. The piece begins on a minor i chord in A-minor, made up of A, C, and E. It then sequences into a chord containing G#, most likely a version of a Major V chord, giving it that pull to the next chord. The G# will want to travel to tonic, which is A, so the G# signifies that that Major V chord will go to a minor i chord, which it does. It is most likely in the first inversion. This sequencing continues throughout the piece. However, Mozart eventually begins to modulate from key to key. It can be seen that in the fifth measure, there is a D# in the tenor voice. This D# is going to have a pull to the note a half step

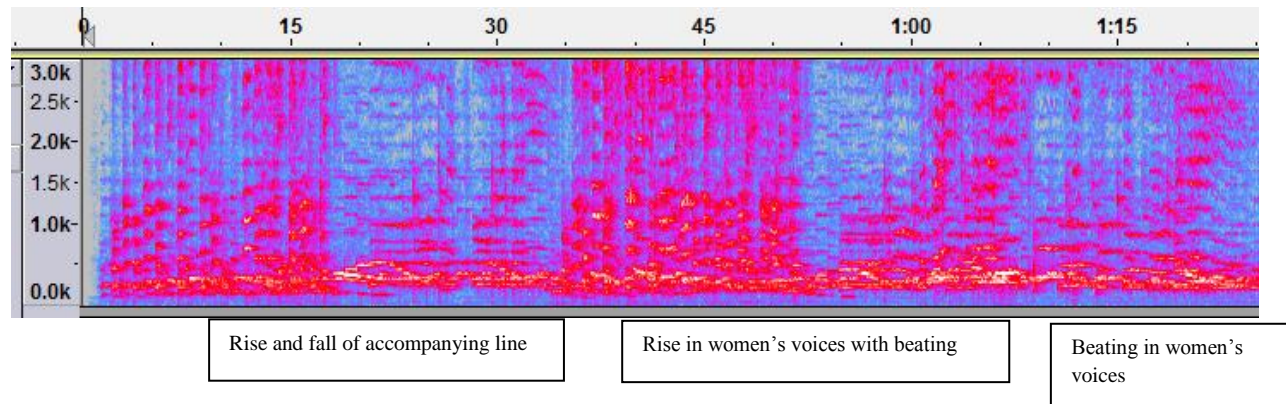
above it, which is E. Now, in the key of A-minor, D# does not exist in the scale. It would be considered a non-harmonic tone. However, sometimes when non-harmonic tones exist, they actually act as leading tones into a new key. In the key of A-minor, D is the root of a minor-iv chord. But because the chord contains a D# instead of a D natural, it has to lead to somewhere new. In this case, it leads to E, which now acts as the new tonic of the key because D# was the leading tone. This is marked in the score as “iv/V.” This means that the minor-iv chord has led to the V chord of A-minor, but has also made the root of the V chord the new tonic. This would mean that the piece is now in E-minor instead of A-minor, due to modulation. Modulation is a shift from one key to another, and is seen in much of Western music. It is a very popular action in music and can further enhance the characteristics of a piece.

It can be seen and heard in the lower voices that there is an echo effect between them. The basses begin, and the tenors repeat their lines with a slight change in note patterns. This echo effect continues until measure seven, when the soprano and alto voices come in. The purpose of the men's voices is to speak of the dooms of Hell and the confounded accused. However, the women's voices hold a different purpose. They sing in a *sotto voce*, or half voice. This gives a very soft, angelic-like quality to the lines that they sing. They are giving a soft cry to the heavens, asking to be called among the blessed. This can be seen in the score at the first measure marked with a *p*, or *piano*.

The image shows a musical score for Mozart's *Confutatis*. It consists of five staves. The top three staves are for the piano accompaniment, starting with a piano (*p*) dynamic and ending with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The bottom two staves are for the vocal parts, marked *Tutti sotto voce*. The lyrics are: "Vo - ca, vo - ca me, vo - ca me cum be-ne - di - ctis."

*The next five measures of Mozart's *Confutatis*.

It can be seen that the accompaniment line is above the vocal lines. This is because in the actual score containing all of the parts essential for this piece, there were so many parts that they were all stacked atop the other according to their entrances. In this case, the violin accompaniment entered the piece before the women did. Therefore, the violin line is above theirs.

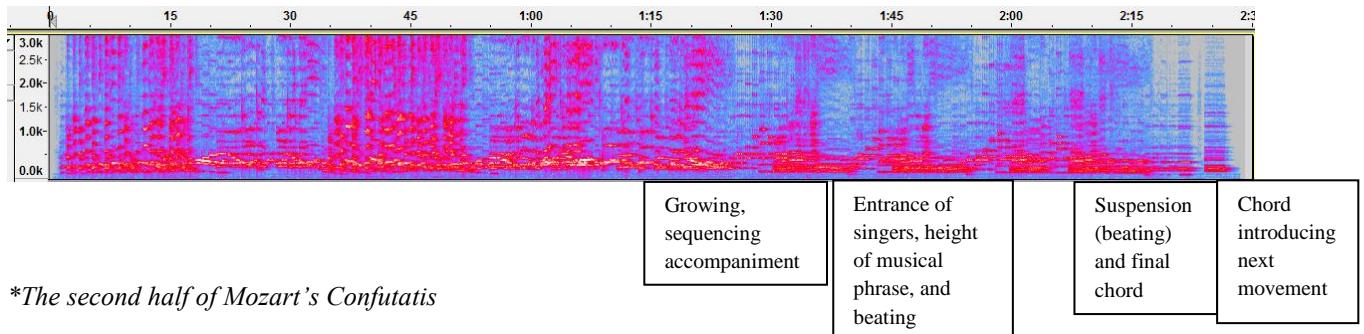


*The first half of Mozart's *Confutatis*

The first segment of this spectrogram was previously given. We will use it to study the repeating patterns in this piece of music. It was discovered earlier that Mozart used sequencing in the accompanying line to the men's voices, which echoed each other. It was then seen in the

score that the women followed the men, singing in what is called half voice, with a very soft, gentle accompanying line. The rise and fall of this line can be seen between 15 and 30 seconds on the spectrogram. It is also very noticeable that this is a much softer section than the previous one. What is next is very interesting. The spectrogram shows that the next section is much louder than the previous one with the women, and that it looks very similar to the very first section. This is because the men enter again into the piece at about 35 seconds, or the end of measure 10, and repeat their first lines, with slight note and rhythm changes here and there. This continues until about 52 seconds, or until measure 17, into the piece when the spectrogram shows that the following section is much quieter again. This is because the men cease singing while the women enter to repeat what was previously sung in their parts. However, this section looks different than the previous one. This is because the women grow in volume and pitch. This growth in both volume and pitch at about 1 minute expresses an increase in the fundamentals of their notes, and includes a wider range of harmonics on the spectrogram.

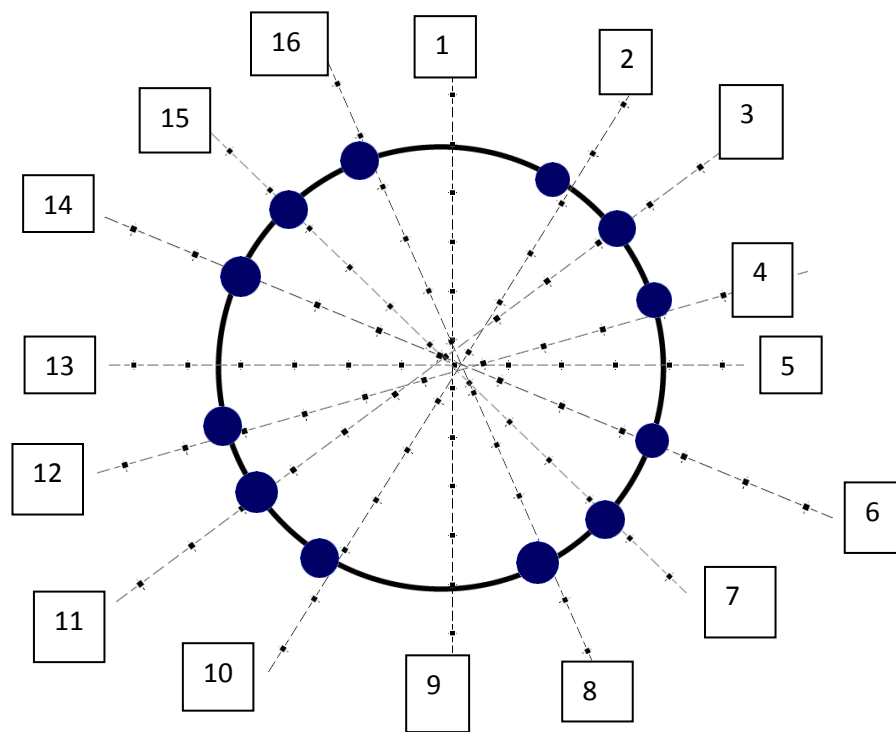
Beating can be seen at about 1:07. The sopranos are holding out a G5 above the staff, while the altos sing a D5, then a C#5, resolving back up to D5. This C#5 creates a tritone interval between the G5 and the C#5. Beating can again be seen at the end of the women's lines, at about 1:22. The sopranos descend to a B4, while the altos ascend from a G#4 to an A4. This is a dissonance of a Major 2nd. The altos then resolve the dissonance by moving down to the previously sung G#4. This musical action is what's known as a *suspension*, which is a release of dissonance by one voice traveling downward by one half-step in the musical scale.



**The second half of Mozart's Confutatis*

The second half of the movement is very different than the first half. After the women finish their second lines, the string accompaniment continues a repeated pattern of sixteenth notes that travel higher and higher in pitch. This starts at about 1:25, or measure 25. These notes have a natural slight crescendo which is a very good example of a musical lead into the entrance of the singers. It can be seen that at every entrance of the singers, the accompanying line increases in pitch (at about 1:30, 1:45, and 2 minutes). This pattern continues until the end of the movement.

To get a better understanding of this sequencing rhythm in this section, starting at about 1:25 in the spectrogram (or measure 25 in the score); let's examine it more closely using a rhythm circle. Much of the accompanying line in this movement is built off of sixteenth notes, and this section is no exception, so the dots on the circle will be closely grouped together.



**Rhythm circle of one measure of the second half of Confutatis*

This shows that at the beginning of every beat in the measure shown in the circle, nothing is being played in the string accompaniment. This is a very distinctive pattern. All of the beats in a measure are the same, and because the pitches are either increasing or decreasing, this circle shows that a musical sequence is definitely occurring. This rhythm pattern of musical sequencing continues until the end of the piece.

The entrances of the singers are led by the basses. The upper three voices enter after the basses have sung for about two beats. It is simple enough to tell where the other voices enter, and where they crescendo and decrescendo. At about 1:30, the basses enter, and shortly after, the other voices follow suit. This is again seen at 1:45 and 2:00. However, at 1:35 and 1:50, there is a very long vertical line in the spectrogram. This is marking the height of the phrase that is being sung. The volume is quite loud here. Almost immediately after, the vertical line disappears and there are a few fundamentals or horizontal lines, with few harmonics. This shows that the passage has quieted much, and this can be seen after every vertical line. There is also noticeable beating at about 1:40 and 1:55. This again is a suspension; however, the beating is

now occurring between the sopranos and the tenors, with a note interval of about 2 half steps, or a Major 2nd.

This musical pattern of the growing sequencing in the accompaniment and the basses leading the rest of the voices continues until the end of the piece. The sopranos have one final suspension at about 2:17, and the accompaniment slowly diminuendos, or gradually dies down in sound until about 2:21 when the final string chord is played. However, this movement and the *Lacrymosa* go very much hand-in-hand in Mozart's *Requiem*. And let's not forget that *Confutatis* is the sixth of twelve movements and does not stand alone as its own piece. This movement must continue and flow easily into the next movement. This is seen through the final chord in the spectrogram, at about 2:34. Although this chord is seen at the end of this movement, it acts as the entrance to the next movement. This is a very dissonant chord, and because of this, beating appears there. The harmonics also appear to be slightly stronger in this chord than in the one prior to it.

Mozart's *Requiem* is one of the most well-known musical compositions in the world, and *Confutatis* is a very good example of much of the musical technique that Mozart used that made him and many other musicians so successful. Using a spectrogram, it is easy to decipher what each part and line is doing, even if the recording used in the spectrogram isn't entirely accurate. Even without the score added, it was easy to tell where beating occurred and what pitches were being sung using a spectrogram.