

Venerabilis barba Capucinatorum -

English translation (from Latin) and performance notes by Slantnote Dave Zethmayr

Stated briefly, the whole text consists of the words,

"The venerable beards of the Capuchins. Amen."

However, there is more to be said to guide singers.

From these few mock-solemn words Mozart concocts a lampoon of sacred music style. Treating the sparse text as a verbal ear-worm, he deconstructs it letter by letter and syllable by syllable, making a collage of scraps to be played with as a jumble in the mind. The Capuchins, of course, is the Latin Christian monastic order.

In this selection, a challenge for singers (and audience) is to project (and detect) when the sung word is just the name of a letter. The challenge, as Mozart surely intends, is part of the fun.

The single letters might be sung as pronounced in German. For anglophone audiences not used to European classical tradition the director might well choose local style.

In mm. 98-100, after having sung "ca-pu-ci-" a few times and refraining from completing the word, the syllable "-no-" is added, finalizing a cadence. Only the most strait-laced choir could resist turning "barba capucino-" into "cuppa cappucino" or "Tasse Kapucino" here, (if indeed they would perform this at all, or even breathe properly). Mozart would heartily approve.

Maybe he would likewise approve singing "rum rum rum" (as a competing drink) just afterwards instead of the Latin "room room room"—[a rhyme with "spoon"].

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