



Mozart: A Cultural Biography

By Robert W. Gutman

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This major work, the result of years of careful study and analysis, places Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's life and music in the context of the intellectual, political and artistic currents of eighteenth-century Europe. The result is a fresh interpretation of Mozart's genius, as Robert Gutman shows the great composer in a new light. With an informed and sensitive handling, Mozart emerges as an affectionate and generous man with family and friends, self-deprecating, witty, and winsome but also an austere moralist, incisive and purposeful. The major genres in which Mozart worked-chamber music, liturgical, theater and keyboard compositions, concertos, operas, symphonies, and oratorios-are unfolded to reveal a man of luminous intellect. Mozart is an extraordinary portrait of a man and his times and a brilliant distillation of musical thought.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Readers who think of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) as the shrieking vulgarian depicted in Peter Shaffer's hit play (and movie) *Amadeus* will be astonished by the man they meet in this biography by music historian Robert Gutman: "affectionate and generous ... an austere moralist of vital force, incisiveness, and strength of purpose." Without scanting Mozart's often maladroit handling of his patrons or his earthy way with words ("Let the whole company of patricians lick my ass," he declared in a 1777 letter), Gutman portrays a musical genius who slowly and painfully achieved personal maturity as he emerged from the shadow of his domineering father. The rich cultural life of 18th-century Europe forms a vivid background for Mozart's professional and artistic evolution. And Gutman's descriptions of Mozart's work are models of music writing for the lay reader: they capture the brilliance and beauty of the great composer's art in easily accessible language, as in the analysis of *The Marriage of Figaro*'s place in "a new aesthetic of surging movement ... the vocal and orchestral lines twine, separate, and reunite in confrontation, opposition, and accommodation, an ever-changing, effortless interlacing." The prose delineating Mozart's complex personality is just as full-bodied and perceptive. --Wendy Smith

From Publishers Weekly

Gutman's (Richard Wagner) ambitious biography traces Mozart's (1756-1791) career against the background of the courts in which he worked. The circle of Archbishop Colloredo in provincial Salzburg, the aristocratic households of Europe and England and the salons of Joseph II's culturally diverse Vienna. Gutman shows how Mozart grew from a pampered child prodigy, nearly helpless in practical matters, to a mature, self-sufficient man. Interspersed are discussions of the political and cultural trends of Mozart's day, including the complex dynastic alignments at the end of the Seven Years War, the Enlightenment, the Sturm und Drang movement and the prevailing musical styles. Through these discourses, Gutman shows how aspects of intellectual trends appeared in Mozart's music: for example, the Age of Reason in *The Magic Flute*, Sturm und Drang in some of his symphonies. However, these sections don't always meld smoothly with the biographical narrative. Gutman's analysis of Mozart's personality and his relationship with his father, Leopold, while not groundbreaking, is more successful. Gutman describes Leopold as an "intellectual, ambitious, suave, and frequently cunning" man determined to dominate his son, and depicts how the young Mozart finally freed himself from his controlling parent and embarked on a promising career in Vienna. Gutman counters persistent legends portraying the end of Mozart's short life as a time of poverty and despair and demonstrates that he was then, as always, an exuberant, optimistic man. Illustrations not seen by PW. (Nov.)

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From Library Journal

With this sprawling, meticulously researched work, Gutman (Richard Wagner) enters the already crowded field of Mozart studies. He succeeds admirably in interweaving the chronology of Mozart's life and musical compositions with essays on the social, political, and religious fabrics of the 18th century, offering extended discourses on the Enlightenment, Sturm und Drang, Freemasonry, and other movements that influenced the composer both personally and in his works. Special attention is paid to the tours that Mozart family members undertook to various European locales, the contacts they made there, and the reception of their talents and personalities. Gutman contextualizes rather than analyzes the music; one feels that he has a great deal of respect for the composer's abilities but is not unwilling to be critical. Covering similar territory as Ruth Halliwell's recent *The Mozart Family* (Oxford Univ., 1998) but with more extensive descriptions of the music, this work is directed at an audience of sophisticated lay readers. Highly recommended for all music

collections of significant size, this should set a standard for future Mozart scholars to emulate. A Barry Zaslow, Miami Univ. Libs., Oxford, OH
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Kevin Santiago:

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