

# MOZART SPEAKS

Views on Music, Musicians, and the World

ROBERT L. MARSHALL



Mozart

DRAWN FROM THE LETTERS  
OF WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART  
AND OTHER EARLY ACCOUNTS

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*Selected and with Commentaries*

ROBERT L. MARSH

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*"Be so good as to reread my letters now and then and to follow my advice."*

WAMozart

Paris, 30 July 1778 (To Aloysia Weber)



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# A Most Necessary Introduction

"I should like to write a book, a short introduction to music, illustrated by examples." Thus wrote Mozart to his father from Vienna on the 28th of December 1782. Although he never got to write that book, Mozart did get to express his views—rather copiously—not only on musical issues but on a colorful variety of other topics as well. His comments are preserved primarily in his letters, also in the first-hand (occasionally, second-hand) reports and recollections of eye witnesses. And they are enough to fill a book.

It seems that Mozart had always felt a desire to share with others his insights and experiences as a musician, and to declare himself on topics ranging from a particular singer's miserable acting, to the practical matter of the proper tempo of a fugue, to the fundamental issue of the nature and limits of musical representation in opera. Some of these remarks may have been made as much for his own benefit as for others. They seem to have helped him clarify his thoughts about essentials. It is significant, for example, that he declared his intention to write a book just three days before completing the first of the string quartets dedicated to Haydn, works which, in Mozart's words, were the "fruit of a long and laborious endeavor."

For most of the previous year, in fact, Mozart had been preoccupied with an even longer and more laborious endeavor: the composition of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*. After almost a full year of gestation, *Die Entführung* finally had its premiere in July 1782. Work on the opera had been accompanied by a series of letters home, in which Mozart described in remarkable detail the rationale behind his approach to several numbers in the evolving opera. Perhaps it was the writing of those letters—that is, the experience of giving expression to his thoughts, in writing, about substantial musical issues (along, of course, with the experience of having written those landmark compositions)—that had precipitated Mozart's desire to "write a book, a short introduction to music." For in the process he had managed to set forth the basic elements of his artistic credo. Such passages in the letters could easily have served as preliminary notes for

Mozart's book. Only the promised musical examples were lacking; but they could be found, of course, in the opera.

To put it a bit fancifully (and, admittedly, rather immodestly), the purpose of the present book is to help Mozart not only to complete but to expand upon his "short introduction." There is every reason to believe, after all, that many passages in the letters and other contemporary documents in fact offer a reasonable clue as to what Mozart would have said in a book on music. Assuming that is so, then it should be a matter of collecting and organizing the pertinent material into topical categories and thereupon, in accordance with Mozart's intentions, illustrate his points with appropriate musical examples: examples drawn from his own works and specified by the composer himself. Even the categories would in effect be dictated by Mozart, since they would necessarily be derived from the topics he had chosen to address.

But the present book has another, even more immodest purpose. There is, after all, really no need, once we have begun, to limit the scope to purely musical matters. In principle, the subject matter of our book need be nothing less than Mozart's mind: that is to say, his opinions, perceptions, intentions, ambitions about a large variety of topics—music chief among them—but only to the extent, of course, that he (or others) took the trouble to write them down. The fact is that Mozart recorded his views on a host of issues, which taken together form the outline of a richly furnished spiritual universe. Among other things, Mozart was inevitably a witness to his time; and it is no surprise that his observations shed invaluable light, for example, on the nature of life, especially a musician's life, in the late eighteenth century. This, too, then, can properly fall within our province. But rather than write another "life of Mozart," the emphasis in this respect will be more on social history than biography in the conventional sense. That is to say, relating the particular events of Mozart's life for their own sake will not be our objective. Certain topics that loom large in the letters—and in most editions of Mozart's letters—will loom small here: for example, the circumstances leading to his break with Salzburg, the murky negotiations surrounding his marriage with Constanze Weber, the infinite complexity of his relationship with his father.

Even so, there is no paucity of material. For Mozart's letters, like his music, contain a superabundance of ideas, of "themes": playful or serious, comic or tragic, learned or simple. In this respect the letters are quite Mozartean in style—but not in technique. One of the miracles of Mozart's greatest music is that it mysteriously succeeds, despite its often seemingly wasteful extravagance of themes, in forming a compelling whole. This is rarely true of his correspondence. There the wealth of material can be bewildering. Themes often appear in maddening and confusing juxtaposition; some may be introduced too parenthetically to be fully appreciated at first or even properly noted, or they may be developed insufficiently before

being supplanted by others. In profound contrast to his music, complete and effective exposition is not usually Mozart's paramount concern in his letters. Nor need it be. As a literary genre, letters are more like fantasias than fugues or sonatas. They have the privilege of being open-ended, of returning to earlier themes, if at all, only in a later "work." One of our tasks, then, will be to make sure that we have identified the principal themes, to decide on an appropriate form for them, and, after doing so, to accord them suitable exposition (for example, by means of an epigraph), development, and, often enough, recapitulation. The reader should be alerted at once that the same passage may return, abbreviated or expanded, in more than one context, if it appears that it will gain or contribute new or enriched significance thereby.

The volume that has finally emerged from such considerations consists of fourteen chapters organized into three Parts. The five chapters of Part One, "Self-Portrait with Landscape," are concerned, as the title suggests, with Mozart the man, the historical figure, set, at least in the first four chapters, against an ever-larger background. Chapter 1, "The Musician," narrows the focus to the constituent elements of his genius, beginning with the inborn, natural talent (the ear, the memory, the sensitivity), proceeding to a description of his multiple manifestations as a performer, and finally contemplating the stigmata of the supremely endowed composer: the recognition of the calling, the nature of the gift, the approach to the task. Since much of the material of this chapter relates to Mozart's childhood, it was necessary here, more than elsewhere, to draw on the accounts of contemporaries.

Chapter 2, "The Career," is concerned with the relatively mundane matter of Mozart's day-to-day experiences as a practicing musician. This is inevitably the most purely biographical, or rather, autobiographical, chapter in the volume. Mozart reports here on his plans and ambitions, his daily routines, his awareness of his worldly success. In Chapter 3, "The Profession," however, Mozart is cast less in the role of protagonist than of witness. The emphasis here is on the musical profession per se, as it was practiced in late eighteenth-century Europe. We experience, through Mozart's eyes, the contemporary world of patrons, publishers, and copyists, of concert programs and opera contracts. A full-scale social history of music in Mozart's time addressing such issues has yet to be written. Mozart himself, however, has provided a substantial first draft.

The larger world is the subject, and the title, of Chapter 4—or at least that part of the larger world that was of interest to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. What was his relation to the other arts? What literature did he read? Was he interested in politics? current events? As one of the most widely traveled individuals of his time, finally, what was his opinion of the peoples and places he had got to know: Italians, French, English, Jews,

Germans? Part One concludes by returning to Mozart, not the musical phenomenon this time, but rather the all-too-mortal man: his amusements and pastimes, his human foibles and failings of greater and lesser magnitude, his philosophy of life and death.

The subject of music occupies the center of the volume. Taking our clue from the composer, Part Two begins with "A Short Introduction." Chapter 6 attempts to identify the basic premises of Mozart's aesthetic philosophy—illustrating them with musical examples—before proceeding to describe his method of teaching composition. This has been accomplished by drawing not only on his letters but on some of his surviving lessons as well. Chapter 7, too, deals with basic issues: this time the basics of proper performance, gathering together Mozart's advice on tempo, on expression and interpretation, on ornamentation, ensemble size, keyboard playing (and keyboard instruments), on singing, on playing the violin.

The five remaining chapters of Part Two address the music itself, exploring in turn the realms of opera, church music, and instrumental music. Since Mozart had more to say about opera than any other musical topic, it is the subject of three chapters. Chapter 8 discusses the principal dramatic, national, and stylistic categories of opera; Chapter 9 investigates the multifaceted issue of opera as drama; Chapter 10, finally, provides information on the origins and early reception of individual operas. Mozart's observations on church music in general and on individual compositions are collected in Chapter 11. In Chapter 12, "Instrumental Music," the composer explains the stylistic and performance options available in the concerto, and identifies the prevailing national styles in orchestral music, before turning his attention to certain modish "forms of fashion" and recounting the origins, purposes, and destinies of a number of particular works.

Part Three, "On Musicians," forms the finale, with one chapter devoted to Mozart's comments on individual composers—divided into "the good," "the bad," and "the indifferent"—and one chapter on performers—classified this time, with the exception of the singers, not by their abilities but by their medium of tone production. Mozart's opinions of his fellow musicians—whether composers or performers—embrace their moral as well as their musical virtues and vices. These judgments can be abundantly generous or absolutely merciless, highly indignant or simply hilarious.

The vast majority of material in this volume is drawn from Mozart's letters. They are presented here, with permission, in the classic translation of Emily Anderson, *The Letters of Mozart and his Family*, first published in 1938. (Page references to the third edition, published in 1985, appear at the end of each cited passage.) The readability and reliability of Anderson's translation have been confirmed time and again over the course of the past half-century. It is reproduced here with minimal change. The spelling has been rendered according to American practice, and the

punctuation normalized in order to harmonize with the rest of the volume. At times Anderson chose to retain the original language in longer passages written in French or Italian; these have been translated here but printed in italics with the original language identified in brackets. Italics are used here also to identify passages originally written by Mozart in code. (The Mozart family had resorted to a code based on a system of letter substitutions—*a* for *m*, *e* for *l*, *s* for *o*, etc.—in order to evade the curiosity of censors. The passages had already been deciphered, with the resolutions entered into the originals, by Georg Nikolaus Nissen, an early Mozart biographer and the second husband of his widow, Constanze.) Where the translation is problematic, or where it seems desirable as a point of information to have the original German (as in the case of certain technical terms), this is provided (occasionally with a literal or an alternative translation) either in brackets, for single words and brief expressions, or in an endnote, for longer passages. For Mozart's word games, doggerel poems, and scatological writings, Anderson's translations are, reasonably enough, more faithful to the spirit than to the letter of the originals. For the benefit of those able to read the original, therefore, the complete German text of such material is printed in an appendix.

The earliest letter surviving in Mozart's hand is a brief note, undated and addressed to an unknown girl friend. It is thought to have been written no earlier than the year 1769, that is, when Mozart was thirteen years old and already an accomplished, indeed world famous, musician. By 1769, after all, he had already composed some seventy works and spent three-and-a-half years traveling as a Wunderkind on a spectacularly successful grand tour through Northern Europe that had taken him to the leading towns and courts of France, England, Belgium, Holland, and Switzerland. (Mozart's first dated letter was written to his sister Nannerl from Verona on 7 January 1770.) For information, then, not only about what Mozart may have said but even about what he had done and seen during his eventful and formative years as a child prodigy, it is necessary to consult second-hand sources. These include contemporary newspaper announcements and reviews of concert appearances, and especially the numerous and highly informative letters written on these early journeys by Leopold Mozart to his landlord, the Salzburg merchant, Lorenz Hagenauer. Leopold's main objective in writing these extensive and detailed accounts, incidentally, was to create a documentary record for use in his own biography of his son.

Additional reliable information on Mozart's childhood and early career is preserved in the reminiscences of a close friend of the Mozart family, one Johann Andreas Schachtner, trumpeter at the Salzburg Court, and sometime librettist and translator for Mozart. Schachtner recorded his recollections in April 1792 in a letter addressed to Mozart's sister, Nannerl. In the spring of 1792 Nannerl set down her own reminiscences at the request of an historian, Friedrich von Schlichtegroll, who was prepar-

ing an obituary of Mozart. (The obituary was published in 1793.) Further memoirs of Nannerl were published several years later in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* (Leipzig, 22 January 1800). These documents, and numerous others, have been collected in *Mozart: Die Dokumente seines Lebens*, by Otto Erich Deutsch. The volume is published in English under the title *Mozart: A Documentary Biography*, from which the selections printed here have been reproduced. (Page references to the Deutsch *Documentary Biography* are preceded by DDB.)

Paradoxically, Mozart's own account is relatively thin at the latter end of his career, as well. Of the more than 300 letters that survive in Mozart's hand, fully one-fifth were written during the sixteen-month period of Mozart's journey to Munich, Mannheim, and Paris: the period from September 1777 to January 1779. The number of Mozart's letters falls off significantly during Mozart's Vienna period. But this development, upon reflection, is readily understandable. During the last ten years of his life Mozart largely remained at home; as he did not travel extensively, he had little occasion to maintain an extensive correspondence. After all, his colleagues, his friends, and, since 1782, the most significant member of his family, his wife Constanze, were all nearby. It is symptomatic that not a single first-hand letter exists between Mozart and the librettists of his greatest operas: Lorenzo Da Ponte, the librettist of *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan tutte*, and Emanuel Schikaneder, the author of *The Magic Flute*. Mozart had even less occasion to write letters after the death of his father on 28 May 1787. Fewer than seventy letters by Mozart survive from the last four-and-a-half years of his life—a disproportionate number of them (almost one-fourth) consisting of desperate pleas for money addressed to his fellow Mason Michael Puchberg.

Not only for Mozart's childhood, then, but for his later years as well we must augment his own words with the accounts of others. Among the most important of these are the reminiscences of Constanze, as related to the English couple Vincent and Mary Novello and published as *A Mozart Pilgrimage: Being the Travel Diaries of Vincent & Mary Novello in the Year 1829*. The diaries also record the Novellos' interviews with other individuals who knew Mozart, for example, Abbé Maximilian Stadler, a family friend, who helped catalogue Mozart's music. In addition we can consult the early biography of Franz Xaver Niemetschek, *Life of Mozart (Leben des K. K. Kapellmeisters Wolfgang Gottlieb Mozart, Prague, 1798)*. Niemetschek, a Czech professor of philosophy, made Mozart's acquaintance in Prague, presumably in 1787. Ten years later he published a revised and expanded edition under the title *Biography of Mozart (Lebensbeschreibung des K. K. Kapellmeisters Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Prague, 1808)*.

Reasonably credible reports of Mozart's activities and attitudes during the Vienna years are transmitted as well in the following accounts written by individuals who either knew the composer personally, or seem to have known others who did:



Jean-Baptiste-Antoine Suard, "Anecdotes sur Mozart," *Mélanges de Littérature* (Paris, 1804). Unfortunately, Suard's connection to Mozart is obscure.

The reminiscences (1808) of Mozart's brother-in-law, Joseph Lange, the husband of Aloysia, née Weber.

The *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly of the King's Theatre and Theatre Royal Drury Lane* (London, 1826). The Irishman Kelly, who was a tenor in the Vienna Court Theater from 1783 to 1787, sang the roles of Don Curzio and Basilio in the first performance of *Figaro* under Mozart's direction.

The memoirs of Mozart's sister-in-law, Sophie Weber Haibel, as published in Georg Nikolaus Nissen, *Biographie W. A. Mozart's* (Leipzig, 1828).

The *Memoirs of Lorenzo Da Ponte*. Da Ponte published this colorful document in New York in 1829 and 1830.

The memoirs of one Joseph Frank, published in *Deutsches Museum* (Leipzig, 1852). Frank was a prominent Viennese physician who knew Beethoven and Haydn as well as Mozart.

The original intention was to allow the documents assembled here to speak for themselves, with a minimum of editorial explanation. This policy, however, threatened to render the volume of limited use to readers not already rather thoroughly familiar with the facts bearing both on Mozart's life and works and on much of eighteenth-century musical history, as well. Moreover, the minimalist approach was also inherently less than elegant: there was clearly a structural and an aesthetic need to provide a thread of continuity to connect the often brief passages. In the end, the proportion of space allocated to editorial commentary, compared with the original intention, had grown significantly.

With the exception of biographical information, explanatory remarks appear directly before or following the pertinent passage. In order to avoid excessive repetition, biographical material for writers and musicians appears only in conjunction with the alphabetically arranged entries devoted to them variously in Chapter 4 (writers), Chapter 13 (composers), or Chapter 14 (performers). For all other individuals, brief identifications are included in Appendix I, "Biographical Glossary." Page references for biographical entries are printed in italics in the index.

A note about the musical examples. Since musical examples are not only costly but also consume considerable space, both their number and extent necessarily had to be limited. Nonetheless, the very rationale of the present book—to carry out in some fashion an explicit but unfulfilled intention of Mozart's—dictated that a substantial number of examples would be included here. Their main function is to illustrate or clarify