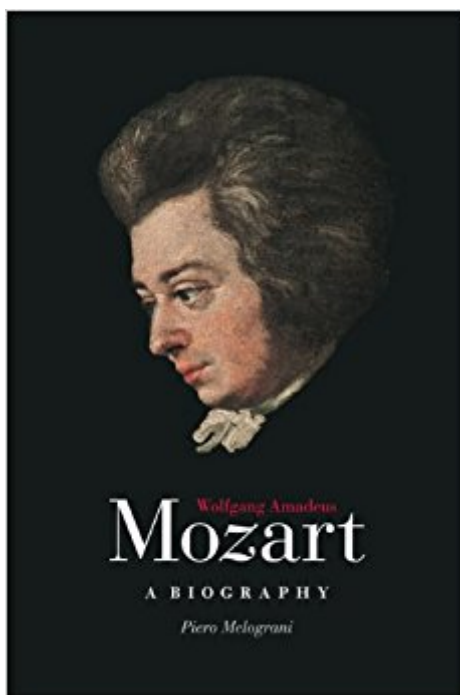


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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: A Biography



Synopsis

Piero Melograni here offers a wholly readable account of Mozart's remarkable life and times. This masterful biography proceeds from the young Mozart's earliest years as a wunderkind "the child prodigy who traveled with his family to perform concerts throughout Europe" to his formative years in Vienna, where he fully absorbed the artistic and intellectual spirit of the Enlightenment, to his deathbed, his unfinished Requiem, and the mystery that still surrounds his burial. Melograni's deft use of Mozart's letters throughout confers authority and vitality to his recounting, and his expertise brings Mozart's eighteenth-century milieu evocatively to life. Written with a gifted historian's flair for narrative and unencumbered by specialized analyses of Mozart's music, Melograni's is the most vivid and enjoyable biography of Mozart available. . . . Italian historian Piero Melograni delivers a charming biography. Expertly grounded by the massive correspondence between Mozart and his highly complex family, Melograni's study benefits from its author's keen understanding of the changing social environments of the late eighteenth century. . . . "Todd B. Sollis, Opera News . . . The idea that Mozart's achievements had nothing to do with self-discipline, hard work, knowledge or intellect is deeply embedded in the popular image of his genius, but Melograni . . . will have none of it, pointing out how hard Mozart worked on his music, even as a child, and suggesting that the "eternal child" view was put about by . . . family members to emphasize Wolfgang's need for and dependence on them. . . . "Sheila Fitzpatrick, London Review of Books

Book Information

Paperback: 316 pages

Publisher: University Of Chicago Press; 1st Edition edition (May 1, 2008)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 9780226519616

ISBN-13: 978-0226519616

ASIN: 0226519619

Product Dimensions: 6 x 1 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars . . . See all reviews (26 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #503,939 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #166 in Books > Arts &

Photography > Music > Biographies > Classical #1808 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music >

Musical Genres > Classical #2664 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Historical > Europe

Customer Reviews

The world has just completed the 250th anniversary of the birth of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart; an anniversary that came overflowing with musical events to commemorate the eminent composer's life. Even so, it has been hard to discover, in one volume, an adequate biography that provides the reader insights about the man as well as his music, until now. This biography by Piero Melograni serves the need very nicely, especially if the reader desires to read only one book about Mozart, or alternatively desires to read an introductory biography that will serve as the starting point to more in-depth Mozart studies. Mozart's melodic output is so vast that any one volume would be insufficient to provide the reader with an analysis of the composer's musical gifts and accomplishments. Nonetheless, this biography places the compositions in the context of Mozart's life and times, and offers some good, brief analysis of a number of those compositions. Also, handy for any listener, Melograni includes a list of the cited works of Mozart by Kochel Number--allowing one the option of reading the biography slowly, and listening to the works as they are discussed. The biography deals very skillfully with Mozart's complex relationship with his family members--most especially the influence of Mozart's father Leopold. We are familiar with the concept of a stage-mother from the world of Broadway and Hollywood--never was there a more unrivaled example of a stage-father than Leopold Mozart. Melograni treats this reality fairly and compellingly as we see Mozart progress from a child prodigy to a young man with musical genius looking for the proper outlets, to a mature composer of greatness, and watch as he goes further and further from Leopold's orbit. Mozart's sometimes cooperative and sometimes competitive relationship with his sister Nannerl is also examined thoroughly. In addition, Melograni shows us Mozart's interrelationship with his contemporaries in the world of music, both performers and composers. Quite aware of the impact of such popular works as the film "Amadeus", the author comments upon and corrects impressions they give. The stories about Mozart are many, and some of the most familiar anecdotes are included in this book, such as the youthful encounter with the Princess Marie Antoinette. This reader, however, would have been pleased to find many more stories that flesh out Mozart's character. Even so, this is a fine life of Mozart, beautifully translated from the Italian by Lydia G. Cochrane. If you find this review helpful you might want to read some of my other reviews, including those on subjects ranging from biography to architecture, as well as religion and fiction.

I agree with the other reviewer in all aspects. No one book can completely encompass Mozart and his works, but this did a very good job of looking at Mozart and his life through an independent and objective prism. It is a dense book in terms of facts and dates and settings, but it reads fast and the

constant references to Kochel numbers is not too distracting. Overall, the narrative is informative and filled with stories that keep the story exactly that - a story of the life of Mozart. After reading this book, I think that the reader would have a wide grasp of Mozart's life, and perhaps even some of the European historical events taking place around him (particularly in reference to Joseph II). The only minor drawback is the lack of analysis of his famous operas (towards the end). Yes, there are rather brief summaries and explanations, but when Soren Kirkegaard (according to Melograni) labels Don Giovanni the "best piece of art ever created", then I think the opera should garner more than 3 short pages devoted to it. Just a thought. But overall, five stars, for sure.

I quite enjoyed this book when looking at it strictly from an informational standpoint and in terms of satisfying my curiosity. I must admit though that the book was somewhat dry. I feel as though this may be an example where an otherwise great book gets "lost in translation". You will learn an awful lot about Mozart, but in my opinion, it may take you a bit longer than expected and you may drift at times, despite the fascinating details held within.

While reading one day, I put on a Mozart CD only to find that I was constantly distracted by the music. Why distracted? Because not only did I like it, but this is certainly not background music. This is music that is meant to be listened to and appreciated. After listening to more works by this musical genius, I looked for and found Piero Melograni's biography on Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Except for some liner notes that I have read on Mozart and of course the movie version of Mozart (which as usual, hollywood gets wrong), I wanted to find a book that had the right balance in terms of both his personal as well as his professional life. Melograni offers such a book. If like me, you are reading your first book on Mozart, this is an excellent introduction to the man and his music. What I found most intriguing about Mozart was his transformation from child prodigy to a mature and musical genius in his adult years. And what was equally impressive was the long hours and days he laboured at writing down his music. As incredible as it may seem, most of the time the music was already written. He just needed to put it down on paper. Unfortunately, records back then are few, as one reviewer pointed out, so to get a real depiction of Mozart is downright impossible. His complex relationships with his father Leopold, his sister Nannerl and his wife Constanze, are echoed in his letters to his family. Unfortunately, many of the letters have been either lost or destroyed. In the end though, it is Mozart's music that matters. Listen to symphonies 25, 29, 35, 39, 40 and 41. Listen to piano concertos 22, 23 and 24. If you are not moved by these works alone, you are not human. Mozart put his volume of music down on paper for all of us to enjoy. And that is what

matters most.

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