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Georg Knepler's critical study explores Mozart's life and works from many new perspectives, providing fresh insights into his music and the tempestuous times through which he lived. In what is more than just a biography, Professor Knepler takes a semiotic approach, explaining in readily accessible language the immediacy and universal appeal of Mozart's music. Based on a close reading of the family correspondence and a detailed look at Mozart's entire musical output, the book sheds new light on Mozart's creative psyche, his political leanings, his relation to the thoughts and currents of the Enlightenment, and the underlying basis of his musical expression. This is a book which raises important questions about Mozart the man, Mozart the towering genius, and the universal validity of his creations.

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*For John*

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WOLFGANG AMADÉ MOZART

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*Wolfgang Amadé Mozart. Oil painting by Barbara Krafft, Salzburg, 1819. Though painted three decades after Mozart's death using likenesses supplied by his sister (see MGG, IX, col. 738, no. 13), this painting is held to be one of the most life-like and artistically valuable of all Mozart portraits.*

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*Wolfgang Amadé Mozart*

GEORG KNEPLER

*Translated by*

J. Bradford Robinson



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## Contents

List of illustrations	<i>page</i>	<i>ix</i>
Foreword by David Blake		<i>xi</i>
Preface		<i>xiii</i>
Acknowledgements		<i>xvi</i>
List of abbreviations		<i>xvii</i>
Translator's note		<i>xviii</i>

<i>1</i>	Outline of a remarkable life	<i>1</i>
<i>2</i>	From child prodigy to genius	<i>5</i>
<i>3</i>	'Expressing convictions and thoughts ... in notes'	<i>13</i>
<i>4</i>	Mozart's reading habits	<i>16</i>
<i>5</i>	Making things significant	<i>20</i>
<i>6</i>	The major-minor opposition	<i>24</i>
<i>7</i>	Mozart in the eyes of posterity	<i>28</i>
<i>8</i>	A turning point	<i>35</i>
<i>9</i>	Taking stock of Salzburg	<i>55</i>
<i>10</i>	The move to Vienna	<i>76</i>
<i>11</i>	Other remarkable lives	<i>116</i>
<i>12</i>	'Mozart of the <i>Wohlthätigkeit</i> '	<i>131</i>
<i>13</i>	Convictions and thoughts: a closer look	<i>148</i>
<i>14</i>	A traditionalist?	<i>153</i>
<i>15</i>	The question of imitation	<i>157</i>
<i>16</i>	Zerlina and the three modes of music	<i>165</i>
<i>17</i>	The 'genuine natural forms' of music	<i>180</i>

*Contents*

18	<b>Musical portraits</b>	195
19	<b>How opera was dramatized by the symphony</b>	207
20	<b>How instrumental music was semanticized by vocal music</b>	217
21	<b>Conclusions from endings</b>	247
22	<b>Building blocks and principles of construction</b>	263
23	<b>'A hostile fate – though only in Vienna'</b>	288
24	<b>Mozart in his day and ours</b>	305

Appendix

*Excerpts from*

1.	Melchior Grimm: 'Poème lyrique' [opera]	322
2.	Introduction to the libretto of G. B. Casti's <i>Il re Teodoro in Venezia</i>	329
3.	Beaumarchais: Preface to <i>Le Mariage de Figaro</i>	330
4.	Johann Pezzl: <i>Faustin</i>	336
5.	Joseph Franz Ratschky: Address on Philanthropy	349
6.	Johann Pezzl: Biographical Obituary of Risbeck	351

Select bibliography	354
Index	368



## Illustrations

### *Frontispiece*

Wolfgang Amadé Mozart. Oil painting by Barbara Krafft, Salzburg, 1819.

### *Between pages 174 and 175*

1 The Schottenplatz. Engraving by J. A. Delsenbach after a drawing by Joseph Emanuel Fischer von Erlach (1693-1742) dating from the first half of the eighteenth century.

2 Market spectacle around the year 1785, after an etching by Franz Anton Maulpertsch (1724-96).

3 View of the Graben toward the Kohlmarkt in Vienna. Combination of coloured copper engraving and etching, drawn from life and engraved by Carl Schütz, Vienna, 1781.

4 The 'Golden Ship', a bourgeois building (no. 198) near the Nussdorf Line. Detail from *Vogelschau der Stadt Wien* ('Bird's-eye View of the City of Vienna'), surveyed from 1769 to 1777 and engraved in copper in 1785 by Joseph Daniel von Huber.

5 Bauernfeind Hall (no. 70) in the Lerchenfelder Strasse. Detail from *Vogelschau der Stadt Wien*.

6 View towards the suburbs of Wieden and Wien. Combination of coloured copper engraving and etching by Johann Ziegler, Vienna, 1780.

7 The Theatre in the Freihaus. Detail from a town map by Maximilian von Grimm, 1797.

8 Hanswurst (J. A. Stranitzky) seeking admission to the grand theatre. Engraving from *Lustige Reiss-Beschreibung* (1716).

9 Ignaz von Born. Portrait in oils by Johann Baptist Lampi the Elder (1751-1830), c. 1790.

*List of illustrations*

- 10 *Liberty or Death*. Gouache by Pierre Etienne Lesueur, c. 1790.
- 11 Lorenzo Da Ponte. Engraving by Michele Pekenino after Nathaniel Rogers, c. 1800.
- 12 Giovanni Battista Casti. Contemporary engraving by Antonio Lanzani, c. 1770.
- 13a Page from the autograph score of the Sinfonia (Overture) to *Le nozze di Figaro*.
- 13b From the autograph score of *Figaro*: Figaro's recitative introducing his Cavatina, No. 3.
- 14 Grotto in the bottomlands of the Gilowsky estate in Aigen near Salzburg. Photograph from the second half of the nineteenth century.
- 15 Denis Diderot. Detail from the portrait bust by Jean-Antoine Houdon, 1771.
- 16 Anonymous engraving from the mid-eighteenth century. Comic figures, including Pantalón, Pierrot, Scapin and Harlequin.
- 17 *Die Zauberflöte*. The first scene of Act II, as staged by Walter Felsenstein in 1954 for the Komische Oper, Berlin. Photograph: Jürgen Simon.

## Foreword

Looking back at the Mozart celebrations of 1991, it would be pointless to jeer at the excess and the commercialism; rather, we should be grateful for the many new publications and the performances of lesser-known – and, indeed, unknown – works. Now is perhaps a good time to take stock of the vast Mozart literature and to consider the future of Mozart studies. As work continues on watermarks, minor personalities of the time and obscure byways, as the music of lesser contemporary composers becomes available for study, and since we now have the opportunity to hear recorded performances of everything Mozart wrote, the need for a fresh overview becomes even greater. Biographies, picture books, studies of the operas and symphonies, books on the classical style and compendia proliferate, but there has been no attempt by a scholarly musician to impose his view on the whole extraordinary phenomenon. This is not to imply that we require from any one mind completeness of coverage, either of the historical background, the biography or the works, even if that were feasible.

The value and significance of the achievement of Jahn, Abert and Einstein have never been in doubt, although it is probably true that only the last of these has been at all widely read or consulted by an English readership. New scholarship, far-reaching developments in performance practice, and profound changes in the role and significance of all music in a rapidly developing and confusing (and confused) society, make a unified statement by a scholar of stature necessary and desirable. It is a tall order, one from which Mozart experts understandably shrink.

Georg Knepler's book on Mozart was published in Berlin in 1991. Having known him for over thirty years, it was obvious to me that he was supremely qualified to write the sort of book I have described. In his long life he has distinguished himself as a performer – as opera répétiteur and accompanist (at one stage to Karl Kraus!) – as a pedagogue – at the East Berlin Hochschule and Humboldt University – as a researcher – as chief editor of the journal *Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft* – and as scholar and author in his two-volume

*Foreword*

*Musikgeschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*, the *Geschichte als Weg zum Musikverständnis*, the *Gedanken über Musik* and countless articles and essays on a wide diversity of subjects. Vast knowledge, experience and profound musicality, governed by an intellect of the highest order, are a sure foundation for the achieving of such a task.

A knowledge of the subtitle of the German edition, *Annäherungen* ('approaches'), and a glance at the chapter headings might lead one to expect a collection of rather freely related articles of disparate content. This is emphatically not the case. Knepler's book is constructed in a most intelligent, even cunning, way and possesses a logic and unity worthy of the finest compositions of its subject. These approaches – historical, biographical, analytical – have been organized into a seamless continuity which makes for compulsive reading.

Although to say that within the book there is a thesis might suggest an academic dryness which is quite absent from it, at its heart there is a standpoint about music which is fundamental to Knepler's thinking, and which stems from his Marxist convictions. A clue to this is given by the title of Chapter 20, where the approach is to demonstrate the close thematic relationships between the works which are instrumental and those involving texts and to draw some conclusions. With some daring, Knepler puts interpretations upon such thematic correspondences and apparent self-quotation and invites us to listen to the so-called abstract arguments of sonata, quartet and symphony in a different way. In my opinion, his insights are not only illuminating and convincing, but also frequently inspired.

The other case which Knepler argues with scholarly conviction and some passion is that Mozart was not the anti-intellectual innocent some writers have suggested, even less the buffoon we have seen in the cinema, lacking all interest in ideas, social problems and politics. Rather that, in spite of an extraordinary childhood and a hectically active professional life, he possessed a modest library and read, discussed and reflected.

Since this book's appearance in Germany, Europe has been politically and ideologically transformed. It is, for me, all the more moving when Knepler transgresses scholarly good conduct, discards the mask of the dispassionate academic and, in his concluding chapter, speaks as a person. The placing of himself as man and musician in an historic context, which, like Mozart's, is one of revolutionary turbulence, makes his rejection of attitudes, some past, many persisting, especially eloquent and emphasizes the wisdom and humanity of his summing up.

*David Blake*  
*Professor of Music*  
*University of York*

## Preface

On countless occasions throughout his life Mozart signed his name ‘Wolfgang Amadé Mozart’. The number of times he wrote ‘Wolfgang Amadeus’ amounts to a grand total of three, and then always in a spirit of tomfoolery, as in the following example: ‘Wolfgang et Amadeus Mozartich, Augspurg den 25 octobrich 1700 Siebenzigich’. Admittedly the question of whether we should choose the French or Latin form of Mozart’s second Christian name is hardly critical. After all, he was baptized under neither of the two, but rather under the Greek form ‘Theophilus’, and every now and then we even encounter the German form ‘Gottlieb’. But the fact that posterity has settled with such unanimity for ‘Amadeus’ is symptomatic of the scant attention paid, then and now, to an extremely rich corpus of source material.

In other words, the way I chose to write Mozart’s name in the title of this book is revealing of my method. My working principle was to investigate the many hundreds of pages of his letters and the many thousands of pages of his scores – all of them, even in their most seemingly insignificant aspects, expressive of an incomparable mind – and to read them as closely as possible for their overt and tacit opinions. Today, fortunately, this approach is no longer a rarity. Researchers and performers alike are increasingly in agreement that what Mozart put down on manuscript or writing paper is still far from completely understood.

But Mozart’s written legacy has had a difficult time making headway. Mountains of interpretations and judgements, many of them distorted by misconceptions nearly two centuries old, as well as myriad performances of his music, translations of his writings and productions of his operas – all now weigh ponderously upon his oeuvre. It is time once again to excavate that oeuvre.

It would be foolish to believe that creative achievements of the magnitude we are dealing with here could be illuminated in their entirety. It is and will always remain inconceivable that this wealth of superb music could proceed from a single brain within the shockingly

*Preface*

short time span of less than three decades, music that seems at times irreconcilable with itself, so various are its shades and hues. After all, we are equally at a loss to explain how Shakespeare, within a single year, was able to create both *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*.

But our inability to account for the genesis of such larger-than-life achievements of the human mind – how could we when even much simpler mental processes remain beyond our grasp! – should not be taken to mean that the products of this mind are themselves inexplicable. Mozart's music is, to be sure, inexhaustible in its plenitude, always summoning forth new explanations, displaying new facets and vistas. We never seem to come to the bottom of it. But these properties are quite different from obscurity, inaccessibility and enigma. Mozart himself sought and offered closeness: he was happy and proud to find people who seemed to love and understand his music. A genius is a human being like the rest of us, only more so. We have no cause to act as though his music were fundamentally unintelligible.

Even so, we will not advance far in our attempt to approach this music if we separate Mozart the composer from Mozart the thinker. This book proceeds on the assumption that Mozart was a keen observer, a critical judge and an accurate reader. He knew how to form his own opinions of events; as a Freemason he tried actively to intervene where he thought help was needed; and he learnt to think in the philosophical categories of the Enlightenment. This Mozart cannot be kept apart from Mozart the composer. We must therefore direct our attention not only to the way he responded musically to events in his surroundings, but also to the way he subordinated his life to his creative impulses, for example in his radical and seemingly irrational move to Vienna in 1781.

An approach of this sort cannot be done justice in a book that concentrates entirely on music. Analyses of individual pieces or groups of works, no matter how fruitful, will not add up to reveal what Mozart's inspiration responded to. Nor will they uncover the processes that link an initial stimulus, the composer's creative and developmental faculties, the writing down of a musical text, its performance by musicians, and its reception by listeners of many different types.

Conversely, there is no way that a book that focuses largely or even exclusively on biography can revitalize our sense of Mozart the musician. True, interdisciplinary methods of research and presentation are indispensable, as the present book hopes to demonstrate. But the essence of music cannot be subsumed in history or cultural history, nor in a general theory of art. To speak about Mozart is to speak about music. Our central task, then, is to probe this music in search of

*Preface*

its intrinsic laws, however entangled they may be with other techniques or modes of behaviour.

Mozart's achievement was not without its assumptions and postulates. A vast panoply of events, experiences and encounters took part in it. To approach it, then, we must constantly start out from new angles and perspectives. Readers of this book are asked to give themselves over to its premisses, which will lead them now into the events of Mozart's life, now into an analysis of a musical problem, now into a glance at general history and the intellectual ambience in which Mozart did his composing. In the end, however, the focus will fall more and more clearly on what, in the final analysis, is the only thing that matters: Mozart's music.

There is one thing which this book cannot offer, and that is completeness. To say more or less inconsequential things about the bulk of Mozart's works, or even about every one of them, is a path I have deliberately rejected. Instead, I have adopted the course of using selected examples to explain what, to my mind, most needs to be said.

There has been no need for footnotes and commentary. All references to sources have been incorporated in the text in the form of keywords and abbreviations that can easily be followed up with the aid of the bibliography. Only one particular kind of reference, and that the most frequent, deserves special mention here: dates in parentheses always refer to the Mozart family correspondence.

## Acknowledgements

It is impossible for me to itemize all the countless suggestions, remarks, criticisms and other acts of assistance I have received over the years. I can only ask my colleagues and friends to believe me when I say that my thanks are not less profound if I list their names in alphabetical order, than if I vainly attempted to describe their assistance or to arrange their names in order of importance for the writing of this book.

None the less, I would like to single out a few persons for special mention. One of the richest and most stimulating minds it has been my good fortune to encounter was responsible for much encouragement in my study of Mozart: Harry Goldschmidt (1910–86). My friends Hanns-Werner Heister and Gerhard Scheit read large sections of my typescript, adding many valuable annotations which I have painstakingly attempted to take into account. Renate Lerche, reader at the publishing house of Henschel, struck a rare and admirable balance of empathy and critical detachment, of meticulousness and conciliation.

In their different ways, these people and the following were involved in giving my book its final form: Philippe A. Autexier, Evelyn Bartlitz, Manfred Bierwisch, David Blake, Kurt Blaukopf, Ursula Bönisch, Miroslav Cerny, Friedrich Dieckmann, Ludwig Finscher, Martin Fontius, Wolfgang Goldhan, Peter Gülke, Florita and Axel Hesse, Hans-Gunter Hoke, Nicholas Jacobs, Jaroslav Jiránek, Christian Kaden, Reiner Kluge, Manfred Kossok, Rita and Günter Lembke, Rosmarie and Konrad Mann, Angela Mingardi, Walter Pass, Luigi Pestalozza, Pierluigi Petrobelli, Inge and Samuel M. Rapoport, Adelbert Schussner, Heinrich Scheel, Katharine Thomson.

*Georg Knepler*  
*Berlin-Grünau, May, 1990*



## Abbreviations and sigla occurring in the text and bibliography

- BA* *Goethe: Berliner Ausgabe in 22 Bänden und einem Supplementband* (Berlin, GDR, 1965–78).
- Briefe* *Mozart: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen, Gesamtausgabe*, ed. International Mozarteum Foundation in Salzburg, compiled and annotated by Wilhelm A. Bauer and Otto Erich Deutsch, I–IV (Kassel, 1962/3); V–VI: *Kommentare*, ed. Joseph Heinz Eibl (Kassel, 1971); VII: *Register*, ed. Joseph Heinz Eibl (Kassel, 1975).
- BzMw* *Beiträge zur Musikwissenschaft* (Berlin, GDR, 1959–93).
- Encyclopédie* *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, ed. Denis Diderot and Jean Baptiste le Rond d’Alembert (Paris, 1751–72) (seventeen volumes of text and eleven of illustrations).
- GDR German Democratic Republic.
- MGG* *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Allgemeine Enzyklopädie der Musik*, ed. Friedrich Blume (Kassel and Basle, 1949–79).
- NMA* *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Neue Ausgabe sämtlicher Werke* (Kassel, 1955–91). The Roman numeral indicates the series, the first Arabic numeral the group of works, and the next one the volume number.

## Translator's note

Quotations from the letters of the Mozart family generally follow the well-known English translation by Emily Anderson (Macmillan: London, Melbourne and Toronto, 2nd edn, 1966. © Executors of the late Miss Emily Anderson, 1966), adapted wherever necessary by the author and translator. Many passages not included in Anderson's edition appear here in English for the first time. The loss of Mozart's idiomatic and often revealing German orthography is, it is hoped, compensated for by a gain in intelligibility for readers who are not thoroughly conversant in German. Wherever applicable, German-language quotations are given in English translations – likewise adapted as necessary – from O. E. Deutsch, *Mozart: A Documentary Biography* (Stanford University Press, Stanford 1965. © 1965, 1966 A. & C. Black Ltd).