

Andrew Clements looks for the authentic Mozart

The Mozart Mood



Brush and ink image of the genius at work

There is still almost a year to go before the exact anniversary of the death of Mozart - on December 5, 1791 - yet the bicentenary celebrations already seem to be in full swing. The autumn's record schedules were dominated by the release of complete Mozart editions, subscription series, opera trilogies and the promise of even more to come, while in concert halls and opera houses across Europe the shape of the new year's programming seems all too easy to predict.

In London, the Barbican looks set to be the first out of the starting stalls with its ambitious 'Mozart 200': a celebration in two parts running from January to March and again from September to December. It is a series of 21 concerts pres-

enting the major works of Mozart's maturity in chronological order.

What starts on January 25 with a concert performance of *Mitridate*, *Re Di Ponto*, the opera *seria* after Racine that Mozart wrote in 1770 at the age of 14, will end on the exact deathday, December 5, with the most exquisite products of his final year, the Clarinet Concerto and Requiem.

It is as good an approach as any to getting to grips with the product of that creative genius, and trying to bring some sense and shape to the perception of a composer who is now more popular and more revered than he has ever been.

Suddenly Mozart has become common cultural property in a quite unprecedented way. The explosion

of interest in the last two decades is the product of an unlikely combination of commercial exploitation, popular myth-making and academic endeavour. The steady expansion of the recording industry over the last 30 years has fuelled its own demand for the ready availability of every note from every one of the great composers.

In Mozart's case it has offered domestic access to a whole body of music in every genre that was previously neglected, so that every facet of his creative genius has steadily become illuminated. And with the desire for more music has come the desire for more biographical immediacy.

Sober academic research has progressively managed to dispel most of the myths sur-

rounding Mozart's life and death. The exact nature of his final illness may remain somewhat uncertain but the persistent suggestion that he was murdered has been firmly squashed, and the connected tales of his sexual liaisons seem equally fanciful.

Yet there is no doubt that the enormous stage-and-screen success of Peter Shaffer's *Amadeus* has played a big part in creating a popular awareness of what an exceptional creature Mozart was, and the extent of his achievement. Its portrait of a philandering, drink-sodden yet magically gifted lout saddled with an inanely stupid wife, the persistent target of insanely jealous attacks from his contemporary Salieri, amounts to little more than a wild caricature.

But the caricature brought the man alive in a way that a more fastidious biographer could never contemplate. Although it may be a long time before the *Amadeus* persona fades, and can be replaced by a more faithful image, however, the music has largely survived such distortions and prospered enormously.

It is easy to forget that for the first 100 years after his death, knowledge of Mozart was strictly circumscribed. The early-19th century had prized *The Magic Flute* and *Don Giovanni*, a handful of the symphonies and piano concertos, but generally considered his music too complicated and arcane for widespread consumption.

The romantic age valued most highly the soft, pliant side of Mozart, the Apollonian purity and elegance. The comprehensive appreciation of his operatic genius for what it was, for its piercing psychological insights and fusion of musical and dramatic structures, is very much a modern one.

The celebrations for the bicentenary of Mozart's birth in 1956 gave its own boost to the burgeoning performances and academic studies that had grown in depth and breadth throughout the century. *Così fan tutte*, which had earned the moral disapproval of no less than Beethoven and Wagner, and *Ido-*

meneo only became regular repertoire pieces in the 1950s. The other *opera seria*, including *La Clemenza Di Tito*, had to wait another 20 years for acceptance.

By then a radical reappraisal of what constituted Mozartian, and indeed Classical style as a whole, was already underway. 'Authenticity' had begun as a performing phenomenon in baroque music. It rapidly annexed the whole of the 18th century, and at present is making great inroads into the heart of the orchestral literature of the 19th. But its impact on what is acceptable as an appropriate sound world has arguably had a more profound influence on our current perceptions of Mozart than on those of any other popular composer.

Hearing, say, the 40th Symphony played by a standard (that is late 19th-century) symphony orchestra with a large, succulent body of strings, boosted, superbright woodwind and swathes of romantic expressiveness now seems as much a lurid caricature as anything in Shaffer's *Amadeus* script.

There remain some formidable opponents to the cult of period performance. Some of them suggest that the desire to reinvent the music of the past is simply a reaction to the inadequacy of the music of the present. It is hard to deny that the infinitely flexible 'authentic' Mozart sound, with gut strings perfectly matched to period woodwind and brass, capable of the most subtle inflections, seems to offer much more than another cosmetic gloss on familiar music.

It's a shame that the concerts in the Barbican Mozart fest seem likely to be relatively unaffected by 'authentic' views of Mozart. They promise performances of a thoroughly earnest elegant kind that has been common currency for the last quarter century. But our current appreciation of Mozart has been indelibly coloured by these new-old textures. Any credible celebration of his genius ought to have recognised that and included it as prerequisite of its planning. ©



Cue Mozart

Popular Music

Overture to *Il Re Pastore*, Violin Concerto No.4 in D, Arias for Ramiro from *La Finta Giardiniera*, Aminta's aria from *Il Re Pastore*, and Violin Concerto No.5 in A. Violin, Nigel Kennedy. Soprano, Amanda Roccroft. Mozart's five violin concertos given the Burton's treatment by 'serious' music's ambassador to the masses. How many of Nigel's Radio One fans will turn up for their dose of transcendental culture? (February 27).

Mozart In Art 1900-1990

Artists inspired by Mozart. Emotive canvases featuring Max Slevogt, Paul Klee, Hannah Hoch and David Hockney. Also features Tomas Rother's *Sound Object Amadeus*, an interactive sculpture produced by blending a Canova tomb, a wigwam, and

a metronome. Exhibition-goers can 'play' the object in a variety of different ways to their hearts' content. (February 14 - April 1). Admission free.

Mozart's Billiards

Not a Radio Three double entendre, but an exhibition to celebrate Mozart's fame as the number one billiard player in Europe. The variety of billiards played in Mozart's time was called carom, a much faster and pocketless version of the game played in smoky Westminster clubs in the 1990s. For aspiring Mozart imitators tuition will be available from star players and a computer will be on hand to recommend all the best shots. (January 25,26,27).

Mozart in Film

Whom The Gods Love (Directed by Basil Dean, 1936) Filmed in Vienna and Salz-

burg with no romantic device left unused. Soundtrack by the London Philharmonic Orchestra, conductor Sir Thomas Beecham. (January 27). *The Life Of Mozart* (Directed by Hans Conrad Fisher, 1967). Imaginatively titled expansive drama documentary encompassing everything decent that we could possibly want to know about Mozart's life all packed into 148 minutes. Seamless soundtrack by the Berlin Philharmonic and the Vienna Symphony. (February 10). *Amadeus* (Milos Forman, 1984). Easily the most famous of the Mozart films, Forman's interpretation is unashamedly extravagant and exhilarating. If Nigel Kennedy had performed the soundtrack they might have had a real blockbuster on their hands. (February 17). *Ian Tucker*