

# The Mozart Starter

Exploring the Universe of Mozart's Music

Bruce Cooper Clarke

*Foreword*

*by Christopher Hogwood*

[Author's note: This is the text of a little book that was first published in 1995 by the MEDI-ED PRESS of Bloomington, Illinois. It has been out of print for several years. Because its existence is known, however, and because I continue to receive requests for copies, which I cannot fulfill, I am making the text available here. The text given here is for the most part identical with that of the published book. There have been some modifications and changes.

This also gives me the opportunity to thank Christopher Hogwood once again for generously contributing the Foreword to the little book.]

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## Foreword

*As a hater of crossword puzzles and all that mind-bending word-splitting, I am surprised that there is one anagram that appeals to me: Mozart becomes*

### *MR A TO Z*

*Not only is it neat,--it's true; he worked in every form and style available to him, and invented a few that weren't. No wonder that although this anagram may delight the initiated, it's a deterrent to a new enthusiast. The area is too large, too bewildering, too unmapped – but now*

*“Hats off, gentlemen! A Starter!”*

*If you've found Köchel numbers kaleidoscopic, and Cassations confusing, then start with what you already enjoy and work onwards.*

*This compact companion views the panorama with enthusiasm, and, like a good tourist guide, draws your view from the landmark you know to the gem you had never noticed. And if on the journey you feel like crossing swords over a few topics (I want a word on the Requiem and opera seria), remember that a starter ignites as well as invigorates – from A TO Z.*

*Christopher Hogwood*  
Cambridge, November 1994

## Preface

You, Dear Reader, need music; it is a biological necessity. The fact that you are reading these words shows that you sense this need and are responding to it. Just why human beings have a biological need for music and, indeed, just what music is, are questions for which there are no definitive answers, at least not yet. But the need is there.

Out of this need, men and women since the dawn of time have sought to express themselves in music. Those most gifted have devoted their lives to its composing. Out of the literally thousands of composers over the millennia, a relatively small number have been able to write music so universally compelling that it transcends boundaries, nationalities, and time. Mozart is one of the few.

There is a unique quality to the music Mozart wrote. More so than with almost any other composer, his music can be heard, appreciated, and enjoyed at several levels. We are usually struck at first by its joyousness and lightness of being, the sheer delight of the music-maker in making music. Yet at the same time, we can feel – subliminally – a primal sob, a kind of cosmic catch in the throat, for the beauty and fleetingness of life. And this is done with extraordinary mastery of the art of composing and with impeccable self-control. There is no self-pity in Mozart.

In a brilliant essay on Mozart at the time of the bicentenary of his death, the German historian Michael Stürmer closed with these words:

Being the artist he was, Wolfgang Mozart had discerned the tectonic strains and tensions of his times and creatively set them to music as though dictated from within. And thus it happens, if we choose, that we can hear in his music nothing but the joy and poetic fancy that moved him. But it also happens that we can sense. . . both the smile of his pursuit of happiness and the anguish, as the lamps of his epoch flickered and died one by one and, with them, his own life as well.

Mozart's music captivates the intellect and delights the senses. At least that has been my experience, and I hope it may be yours too. To that end, this little book is dedicated.

*Bruce Cooper Clarke*

## Mozart's Music

In his thirty years or so as an active composer, Wolfgang Amadé Mozart created a vast musical universe. A remarkable amount of it has survived the intervening two centuries. And a remarkable amount of it is of transcendent relevance and interest to us today and a source of great pleasure.

Mozart's music is ubiquitous. As the 20<sup>th</sup> century turns into the 21<sup>st</sup>, no symphony season without it is imaginable; no opera company worthy of the name can afford to ignore him; no would-be virtuoso soloist – whether on the piano, the violin, the clarinet, horn, flute or bassoon – can fail to include a Mozart concerto in his or her repertory.

All of us know some of Mozart's greatest music – the Jupiter symphony, the “Elvira Madigan” piano concerto (or at least its andante second movement), the overtures to *Figaro* and *The Magic Flute*, the rondo *alla Turca* from the A-major piano sonata, and, last but certainly not least, the *Requiem*. But few of us know the farther reaches of Mozart's universe.

In days gone by, that was understandable: concert programmers chose from a relatively narrow range of Mozart's compositions and scheduled the same pieces – *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*, the late G-minor symphony, and the D-minor piano concerto – over and over again. And the recording companies – pre-CD – were seldom much more enterprising.

But now, thanks in part to the spur given by the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mozart's death in 1991, virtually the entire Mozart oeuvre has been recorded. It is there, waiting to be discovered and enjoyed. All we need is a little bit of help from our friends to get started on a voyage through this universe of sound.

This little book is intended to do just that: to help you move beyond what you already know into less familiar – but no less enjoyable and rewarding – realms of Mozart’s music. To that end, I have divided Mozart’s music into ten categories and offer my suggestions on where you might go next in each of them.

In this book, Mozart’s works are identified primarily by the so-called Köchel numbers (Ludwig von Köchel having published the first comprehensive chronological catalog of Mozart’s music in 1862). Over the years, the Köchel numbering system has become a bit chaotic as new research has made more accurate dating of the works possible. But if you are looking for a work and you find that it has two or more numbers, usually one of them will be the number given here.

## The Symphonies

In his lifetime, Mozart did more to develop the symphonic form in the twenty-four years from his first symphony to his last than subsequent composers have done since. For much of this journey of a quarter century, Joseph Haydn was Mozart’s great influence and example; at the end, it was just the reverse.

You probably already know the much-programmed last five symphonies:

C-major, No.36 (*Linz*) K.425; D-major, No.38 (*Prague*) K.504; E-flat, No.39 K.543; G-minor, No.40 K.550; and C-major, No.41 (*Jupiter*) K.551.

In addition to these five, there are some forty-five other symphonies to choose from, tracing Mozart’s development as a symphonist and as a composer from the time he was eight years old to when he was thirty-two.

Five suggestions:

::F-major, No.6 K.43: one of Mozart’s first symphonies, and probably the first to have four movements; lilting first and last movements and a serene second movement with flutes and muted violins; few eleven-year-olds have done better.

::D-minor, K.118: representative of numerous Mozart symphonies derived from overtures to operas and oratorios; in three movements, normally played without a break; his first symphony in the minor, a harbinger of things to come.

::E-flat, No.19 K.132: written five years after K.43, Mozart is older and more ready to experiment and the orchestra is larger (four horns instead of two); a symphony in changing moods with an introspective second movement unlike any written up to the year 1772 when he was sixteen.

::G-minor, No.25 K.183: the so-called “little” G-minor (No.40 K.550 being the “great” G-minor), composed in 1773; perhaps already known to you from the film “Amadeus”; properly performed, a thrilling work, and an important milestone on the way to the concert supremacy of the symphony.

::B-flat, No.33 K.319: written originally in Salzburg in 1779 in three movements, Mozart added a minuet and trio when he performed it after moving to Vienna; in its orchestration and compositional subtlety, another step nearer to the evolution of Mozart’s symphonic conception evident in the last five.

The number of recorded performances of Mozart symphonies runs into the thousands, not all of them equally worthy of your attention. If you would like a comprehensive collection of all the Mozart symphonies, “from A to Z” – from K.16 to K.551, I can unreservedly recommend the 19-CD set with Christopher Hogwood directing the Academy of Ancient Music.

## The Piano Concertos

Whereas the development of the symphonic form was essentially the joint accomplishment of Joseph Haydn and Mozart, the elevation of the piano concerto into “the most highly organized of all purely instrumental forms” (as the English musicologist Arthur Hutchings puts it) is almost entirely the work of Mozart.

He was twelve years old and living in Salzburg when he first began experimenting with how to write a piano concerto. By the time he had composed the last, K.595 in Vienna in 1791, he had written twenty-seven altogether. Twelve of the finest -- from K.449 to K.503 and all those with Köchel numbers in between – were composed in Vienna in a span of some three years from 1784 to 1786.

The three piano concertos most frequently programmed tend to be the C-major, No.21 K.467 (with its gravity-defying “Elvira Madigan” second movement) and the two darkly romantic minor-key concertos, D-minor, No.20 K.466 and C-minor, No.24 K.491. If you don’t know them, start here.

You can choose Mozart piano concertos from the shelf with your eyes closed and not go wrong; this even applies to the very earliest ones which are youthful arrangements of other composers’ piano works in concerto form. But six suggestions, nonetheless:

::D-major, No.5 K.175: Mozart’s first piano concerto entirely of his own composition, written in Salzburg when he was seventeen; an ingratiating and altogether joyous work.

::E-flat, No.9 K.271: for American Musicologist Charles Rosen, “perhaps the first unequivocal masterpiece in a classical style”; Mozart, twenty-one years old, in a mellow, experimental mood, with a minor-key second movement and a slow interlude suddenly appearing in the midst of the sprightly last movement.

::F-major, No.19 K.459: Mozart is twenty-eight, making his way in Vienna and being remarkably productive; he is much in demand as a performer and to help meet the demand, he wrote this radiant and graceful concerto.

::A-major, No.23 K.488: one of Mozart’s most personal works with an almost improvisatory feel, full of unexpected touches, and a deeply meditative second movement in the unusual key of F-sharp minor.

::C-major, No.25 K.503: written in December 1786 just before the Prague symphony, this remarkable concerto brought a temporary end to Mozart’s work in this form; it has a first movement of regal splendor, a quirky second movement that I find oddly satisfying and a splendid, constantly shifting last movement.

::B-flat, No.27 K.595: when he finished this concerto in January 1791, Mozart never imagined that it might be his last. But if it had been his explicit aim to write a work bringing his preoccupation with the piano concerto form to a close, he could hardly have done it better than this: an engaging first movement, a second movement pervaded by a feeling of Franciscan serenity, and a lilting last movement that lingers long in your memory.

As with the symphonies, so with the piano concertos: there are many, many recorded versions to choose from. One I can recommend highly to you is the 9-CD set of all the piano concertos from No.5 K.175 to No.27 K.595 with pianist Malcolm Bilson performing on the fortepiano and John Eliot Gardiner leading the English Baroque Soloists.

## Concertos for Strings and Winds

Being the consummate musician he was, Mozart also wrote concertos for instruments other than the piano. This was something that happened at intervals from the time of his first concerto (for the violin in B-flat K.207) in 1773 to the very end of his life (the clarinet concerto in A-major K.622, finished in October 1791). He even wrote concertos for two or more instruments, as we shall see below.

Let me assume that you already know the clarinet concerto, which gained some currency in recent years from its use in the film “Out of Africa,” and the horn concertos which, because of their endless flow of melody, find themselves programmed whenever an even halfway capable horn soloist turns up. In recordings, the four horn concertos often travel together; the K numbers are: 412, 417, 447, and 495.

If these concertos are not in your collection, then this is a good place to start. The clarinet concerto in particular is the greatest of its kind.

As for where to go next, let me suggest:

::The violin concertos. There are five: B-flat, No.1 K.207; D-major No.2 K.211; G-major, No.3 K.216; E-major, No.4 K.218; and A-major, No.5 (*Turkish*), K.219. Start with No.3 K.216 – it is a grand work, every movement a jewel – then you can go in either direction to the others.

::The *sinfonia concertante* for violin and viola in E-flat, K.364. This concerto for two instruments is one of the glories of Western music. In it, Mozart brilliantly solved the problem of the balance between the two solo string instruments and the orchestra. The second movement is one of the most deeply felt he ever wrote.

### Chamber Music for Strings

Chamber music, it has been said, is not composed to be heard but to be played, for the performers are the audience. And this may be one reason why it is not easy to write good chamber music: each part stands out and the performing audience is critical. Mozart – whose string quartets and quintets reach across his entire composing life – once said he found writing them “hard work.” But it was worth it; the last ten of his more than twenty string quartets are among his greatest works.

If you are already into string quartets and other chamber music, then you probably know substantial parts of the Mozart oeuvre and can skip this section. But if you are not, then some suggestions follow:

::You might start with the three so-called *divertimentos* for string quartet: D-major K.136; B-flat K.137; and F-major K.138. These delightful works, written when Mozart was fifteen or sixteen, are also often performed by small orchestral ensembles instead of just one-on-a-part.

::Mozart’s “hard work” remark applied to the task of writing the six string quartets he dedicated to Joseph Haydn, a project that took over two years to complete. These quartets – G-major, No.14 K.387; D-minor, No.15 K.421; E-flat, No.16 K.428; B-flat, No.17 (*Hunt*) K.458; A-major, No.18 K.464; and C-major, No.19 (*Dissonance*) K.465 – are something of a self-contained galactic system in the Mozart universe; once you learn them, they will be with you forever.

::Mozart wrote six string quintets (with a second viola added to the usual two violins, viola, and cello). A pair with extraordinary beauty and contrast are the two quintets, in C-major K.515 and in G-minor K.516, composed in 1787, not long after the Prague symphony and the majestic C-major piano concerto K.503, mentioned above.

::Finally, let me suggest a remarkable work, composed a year later – a trio for violin, viola and cello in E-flat K.563, which contains six movements and which Mozart chose to call a “divertimento.” A fascinating composition.

## Other Chamber Music

Chamber music, with one person on a part, is written for all kinds of instruments and in many combinations. This sort of music sold well in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and Mozart wrote lots of it to help out his cash flow: pieces for violin and piano, or for piano and two or more instruments, or for combinations of strings and winds.

Five suggestions out of literally dozens to choose from:

::Flute quartet in D-major, No.1 K.285; a youthful work for flute, violin, viola, and cello, written in three movements, with a meltingly lovely Adagio second movement that leads directly into the third.

::Quintet in E-flat K.452 for piano, oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and horn. A product of Mozart’s joy in experimentation, the listing of the instruments alone tells you that this is something unusual; indeed, this was probably the first piano and wind quintet ever written: a challenging musical problem, a marvellous musical solution.

::Sonata in B-flat K.454 for violin and piano, written in Vienna in 1784 for a joint performance with the Italian violin virtuosa, Regina Strinasacchi. It is a complex composition rich in chromaticism, with an unusual Largo introduction to the first movement.

::Piano quartet in G-minor K.478. Not Mozart’s most immediately ingratiating work, it has an austere, autumnal quality, realized most completely perhaps in the beautiful Andante second movement.

::Clarinet quintet in A-major K.581. The chamber music precursor of the clarinet concerto, written for the same soloist some two years before. Broadly conceived in four movements, a lustrous and deeply satisfying work.

## Music for the Piano

As a performer, Mozart was primarily a pianist (although his father thought it a shame that he didn’t apply himself more to the violin). And his Wunderkind reputation was established more by his precociousness as a pianist than as a composer. It is not surprising, then, that Mozart the composer worked all his life for Mozart the pianist (including his older sister, also a formidable piano soloist) and that there are over a hundred works, long and short, in a variety of forms, for solo piano and for two pianos, and even for two persons at one piano.

Some suggestions as to where to start into Mozart's piano literature:

::The so-called "Opus 4" sonatas: C-major K.309, D-major K.311, and A-minor K.310. Written in 1777 and 1778, they show Mozart reaching for new expressive possibilities with the piano sonata form. The A-minor sonata was composed in Paris after his mother died there unexpectedly, a work full of bitterness, resignation, and resolution.

::A second group of sonatas was composed some five years later: C-major K.330, A-major K.331, F-major K.332, and B-flat K.333. Large-scale, often entertaining works, probably written primarily to display the composer's pianistic talents in concert. If you're looking for the *alla Turca* movement, it is number three in K.331.

::Mozart wrote numerous smaller, separate works for piano – minuets, marches, adagios, and fantasias – works that often have the feel of the master in a meditative mood idly improvising at the piano. Do find his Adagio in B-minor K.540 for one of the best. Another is the Fantasia in C-minor K.475, written and published as an introduction to the C-minor Sonata K.457; when played together, thirty minutes of glorious music.

::And for an example of Mozart composing for two pianos, seek out a performance of his Sonata in D-major K.448, 18<sup>th</sup> century music-making at its best.

## Divertimentos and Serenades – Orchestral and Chamber Music

Here is a wealth of music written in forms called serenades (or, very early, cassations) and divertimentos by Mozart. They are generally broadly conceived works in multiple movements. With few exceptions, they were all written in Salzburg for specific social occasions.

Roughly speaking, the serenades were written for performance out of doors and the divertimentos for indoors as chamber works. They often open and sometimes close with a march. On several occasions, Mozart later drew on a multi-movement serenade to create a four-movement symphony.

Unquestionably, the best known Mozart work in this genre is the one he called *Eine kleine NachtMusik* when he entered it in his catalog of compositions on 10 August 1787 (it ultimately received the Köchel number of 525). There it was listed as having five movements; the original second movement has been lost and only four have come down to us.

These gifts to Salzburg social gatherings contain much music of high spirits and tender sentiment. They are a treasure trove waiting to be discovered.

Here are some places to start:

::Serenade in D-major (*Andretta*) K.185. Mozart was seventeen when he composed this early orchestral serenade in 1773. It contains (as others did as well) what amounts to an abbreviated violin concerto in the second and third movements, giving the first violinist a chance to rise and shine.

::Serenade in D-major (*Haffner*) K.250. While America was declaring its independence in July 1776, Mozart was writing this imposing orchestral serenade, with its march and eight movements, to provide for a marriage celebration in the Haffner family. It begins with an ambitiously symphonic first movement, followed by an internal three-movement violin concerto of great beauty, before returning to its symphonic orientation.

::Serenade in D-major (*Posthorn*) K.320. This is the last of the orchestral serenades composed in Salzburg, in 1779, and for many, the greatest. There is no embedded violin concerto here; rather the “concertino” in the third and fourth movements is given over to pairs of flutes, oboes, and bassoons. The posthorn solo shows up toward the end, in the second minuet.

::Serenade in B-flat (*Gran Partitta*) K.361. Although there is disagreement over exactly when Mozart composed this extraordinary serenade for wind instruments (was it 1781-82 or 1783-84?), everyone agrees it is the *ne plus ultra* in the realm of *Harmoniemusik*, that is, music written for wind instrument ensembles. Mozart combines pairs of oboes, clarinets, basset-horns, and bassoons with two pairs of horns and a double-bass, thirteen instruments in all, for seven diverse, spacious movements.

::Serenade in C-minor K.388. Another of Mozart’s Vienna wind serenades, this one for the more usual combination of pairs of oboes, clarinets, horns, and bassoons. Unusual, however, is the structure in only four movements and, most especially, the minor key, which gives this wind serenade, a category more commonly associated with genial conversation and a convivial glass of wine, an enduring seriousness of tone and purpose. Demanding music to perform well, rewarding music to hear – with or without the wine.

## Music for the Church

Mozart’s substantial body of sacred works is, with notable exceptions, music largely written in and for Salzburg; once he too had declared his independence (from the Church’s employ) and settled in Vienna in 1781, he composed relatively little for liturgical use, although that “little” contains some of his greatest music.

Leaving aside the *Requiem* for the moment, let me assume that you are familiar with the early (1773) motet for soprano and orchestra, *Exsultate, jubilate*, K.165; with the two large, late-Salzburg masses – Missa in C-major K.317 (*Coronation*) and the Missa solemnis in C-major K.337; and with that little jewel of a motet, *Ave verum corpus*; K.618, wrought in June of his last year.

Four suggestions out of many to choose from:

::The *Missa solemnis* in C-minor K.139, known as the *Waisenhausmesse* because it was written for the consecration of a new Orphanage Church in Vienna in 1768. The work is such a well-realized accomplishment that, to this day, people have difficulty believing Mozart could have been only twelve years old when he composed it.

::The concert oratorio, *La Betulia liberata*, K.118, was written during one of Mozart's Italian trips when he was fifteen. From the overture came a D-minor symphony, as mentioned above. The strong story-line – featuring a contralto as heroine who saves the besieged city of Betulia by seducing the besieger and cutting off his head (all of this long before Richard Strauss ever thought of *Salomé*) – results in strong music, with the chorus accorded a prominent role.

::The set of vespers, *Vesperae solennes de confessore*, K.339, for soloists, chorus and orchestra, composed as part of his churchly duties in Salzburg in 1780. In setting the psalms, Mozart ranges freely through a variety of musical styles before reaching the *Laudate Dominum* with a soprano solo floating over a soft choral texture (which one writer found “enchancing and poetic” and led him to suspect Mozart of being “completely unconcerned with anything churchly” at the time of its composing).

::And with that, we are landed at the “great” *Missa* in C-minor K.427. This magnificent work was intended for liturgical use in the church and, even though incomplete, had its first performance in St. Peter's in Salzburg in 1783 when Mozart and his bride were visiting there; Constanze sang one of the soprano parts. Because Mozart never got around to finishing it, however, it has tended to become primarily a concert piece. As such, it is an enduring reminder of Mozart's genius, a musical feast, and balm for the troubled soul. (2005 footnote: *The American Mozart scholar and piano virtuoso Robert D. Levin has recently prepared a well-regarded “completion”*)

Now let me mention two Mozart works associated with death and grief and mourning, two compelling works that you should have in your collection.

::The one is the dirge K.477, known as the *Masonic Funeral Music*, a short, indescribably intense elegiac work in C-minor which, in a powerful metaphor of grief assuaged and peace attained, ends on a C-major chord.

::The other you know – the *Requiem*. Because Mozart did not live to finish it and it was brought to liturgical completeness by others in his circle, principally his musical assistant Süssmayr, people have been tinkering with it ever since. There are many different editions available and most of them have been recorded. My personal preference tends to be for those editions that stay reasonably in the vicinity of the Süssmayr completion.

## Music for the Voice -- Concert Arias, Songs, Canons

If we simply add up all the pieces that Mozart wrote for voice (leaving aside the operas), it looks like this: solo songs with piano, more than thirty; vocal ensembles, eight; canons of all kinds, thirty-plus; concert arias and scenes for voice and orchestra – for soprano (over thirty), for alto (one), for tenor (nine), and for bass (eight). Altogether more than one hundred twenty, from his earliest days to his last.

Probably the best known of his songs is *Das Veilchen* K.476. But there are many others to recommend as starting points in learning Mozart's lieder: *Das Lied der Trennung* K.519; *Als Luise die Briefe ihres ungetreuen Liebhabers verbrannte* K.520; *Abendempfindung an Laura* K.523; and *An Chloe* K.524.

That Mozart wrote some fifty independent and concert arias and scenes (that is, an aria with an introductory recitative) is a reflection of the music business at the time. For one thing, it was not uncommon for one composer to write arias at the behest of a singer for inclusion in another composer's opera, and Mozart wrote several of these. For another, concert programs routinely included one or two solo performances by singers in addition to the purely orchestral works, and Mozart was in demand as a composer for these kinds of concert pieces.

Choosing from the broad palette of Mozart's compositions in this form, let me suggest:

::*Vorrei spiegarvi, oh Dio* K.418: Mozart prided himself on his ability to compose arias tailor-made to give full display to the vocal abilities of the recipient. If this demanding and beautiful aria faithfully mirrors the voice of Aloisia Lange, his sister-in-law, for whom it was written to sing in an opera by Anfossi, then she must have been a singer of great range and talent indeed.

::*Per piet , non ricercate* K.420: written in June 1783 at the same time as K.418 and for inclusion in the same Anfossi opera, but for the tenor Johann Valentin Adamberger (who later decided not to use it, much to Mozart's disgust).

::*Ch'io mi scordi di te?...Non temer, amato bene* K.505: Mozart entered this in his catalog on 27 December 1786, with the words, "Scena con Rond  mit klavier solo. F r Madselle storace und mich," and succeeded thereby in unleashing torrents of purple prose. To this day, persons claim to see – in these words and in this work – confirmation that Nancy Storace, the first Susanna in *Figaro*, and Mozart were lovers. Certainly the work, written for a farewell concert given by Storace, is one of intimacy and passion, and the addition of an obbligato piano part for him to join her and the orchestra is both unusual and enchanting; one of the great Mozart concert arias. (And were they really lovers? Probably not.)

::*Bella mia fiamma...Resta, o cara* K.528: another concert aria for soprano and orchestra, composed for the Bohemian singer Josepha Duschek, a long-time friend of the Mozart family, in Prague in 1787 while Mozart and Constanze were there for the premiere of *Don Giovanni*. A deeply felt evocation of leave-taking, as the singer laments, “*addio, addio, per sempre.*”

## The Operas

Mozart the piano virtuoso and Mozart the composer was also Mozart the man of the theater. He loved to go to the theater, was widely read in dramatic literature, understood dramaturgy, and liked to be around theater people.

More than anything else, he wanted to make it as a composer of opera. Salzburg had no opera theater, so he left; Vienna had several, so he stayed.

Mozart’s first operatic work (*Apollo et Hyacinthus* K.38) was performed in Salzburg when he was eleven years old; the last two – *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute) K.620 and *La clemenza di Tito* (The Clemency of Titus) K.621 – were performed in Vienna and Prague respectively in the last months of his life. In between, he had written some eighteen operatic works (not all of them to completion) and changed forever the world’s perception of the potentialities of opera. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, George Bernard Shaw, in his role as music critic, was writing:

*Mozart’s Don Giovanni has made all musical Europe conscious of the modern orchestra and of the perfect adaptability of music to the subtlest needs of the dramatist. . . .After the finales in Figaro and Don Giovanni, the possibilities of the modern music drama lay bare.*

Assumption: you know the overtures and much of the music to *Le nozze di Figaro* (The Marriage of Figaro) K.492, *Don Giovanni* K.527, and *Die Zauberflöte*, and probably to *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (The Abduction from the Seraglio) K.384 as well. If not, start with these.

It is tempting to write “and then go on to all the others.” But I resist. Instead, let me suggest you go on to:

::*Così fan tutte* K.588, the third (along with *Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*) of the three great operas composed with Lorenzo Da Ponte as his inspired collaborating librettist. For many *Così* is Mozart’s most fascinating operatic achievement, a subtle, penetrating report from the front lines in the battle of the sexes, as modern as tomorrow.

Then you might turn to these three:

::*Lucio Silla* K.135, his seventh operatic work, written for performance in Milan in 1772, shortly before his seventeenth birthday.

::*Idomeneo, rè di Creta* K.366, composed for Munich at the end of 1780, first performed in January 1781, two days after his twenty-fifth birthday.

::*La clemenza di Tito*, Mozart's last opera, commissioned for performance in Prague and taken on while he was in the middle of work on *Die Zauberflöte*.

These operas have this in common: they are all examples of the neoclassical *opera seria* form that even at the time was becoming increasingly outmoded and which Mozart, with his Da Ponte operas, did so much to consign to history. Undaunted by the constraints of the *opera seria* form, Mozart filled each of them with vital, living music.

I recommend *Idomeneo* especially. Its wonders never cease.

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