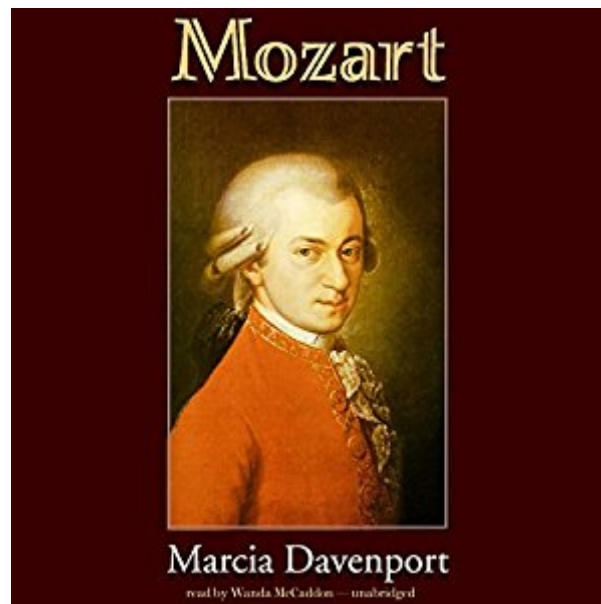


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# Mozart



## Synopsis

Realistic, moving, engrossing, and positively brilliant, this biography recreates Mozart, the man and his music, against the background of the world he lived in. For Marcia Davenport, the research and writing of Mozart was truly a labor of love, during which she retraced every journey he made, saw every dwelling (then extant) in which he had ever lived, every theatre where his works were first performed, and every library and museum where his manuscripts were then to be seen. In this eloquent work of historical reconstruction, Davenport lets her characters tell their own stories. She builds from Mozart's infancy toward the climactic meeting in 1787 of Mozart, Lorenzo Da Ponte, and Casanova in Prague, when Don Giovanni was being written, to Mozart's tragically early death. The result is a biography of such commanding stature that it has remained unassailable since its publication in 1932.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Marcia Davenport's "Mozart" is indeed wonderfully written and truly was a labor of love. She has a gift for drawing the reader into the book; her wit (and, on occasion, biases) can be noted throughout the book. Davenport doesn't get you to know ABOUT Mozart; she gets the reader to KNOW him. The reader will find himself emotionally attached to Mozart. He or she will rejoice when he rejoices and will feel sorrow when the Austrian prodigy felt sorrow (which, sadly, was not uncommon.) I truly enjoyed reading this book.....which is why I'm sorry to say that it is not the best biography. The work is contains many myths and legends that were masqueraded (often by musicologists) as facts in the past. The author makes use of a letter ("Letter to Baron B.") that was proven fraudulent. This

particular letter, concocted by a Friedrich Rochlitz in the early 19th century, was dubbed a forgery even before Davenport's time. (Mozart's first reliable biographer, Otto Jahn, acknowledged this.) This is not to discredit Davenport; she researched all she could. Again, many otherwise reliable musicologists of Davenport's day regarded the above, as well as other myths and legends found in the Davenport biography, as bona fide information. Many other biographers fell victim to this: Alfred Einstein and Maynard Solomon included. It wasn't until the 1980's that further research revealed that many so-called facts about Mozart were nothing more than myth, and that musicologists and biographers alike put a stop to myth-propagation. I recommend the reader study this book alongside a biography written within the last decade or so... or better yet, obtain a copy of "The Mozart Myths: a Critical Reassessment" by William Stafford.

"No biographer, no commentator, critic, or interpreter can ever reveal Wolfgang Mozart entirely. Every attempt to know him truly, to relive his life, is incomplete without his own musical revelations." Although that sentiment could not be more accurate, this biography by Marcia Davenport, simply entitled Mozart, brings us about as close as we can get to knowing and understanding this musical genius solely through a 400-page biographical account. In preparing for the writing of this biography, Davenport retraced every journey Mozart made, saw every dwelling in which he had lived, every theatre in which audiences first heard his works performed, and every library and museum that possessed useful manuscripts. In the foreword, she asserts, "I think I know what he looked like, how he spoke, what he did day by day." Throughout the book, we too get a sense for Mozart the composer and Mozart the man. His great musical works did not emerge from a vacuum; rather, they are the products of a man deeply affected by a unique combination of experiences spanning from his prodigious childhood days of touring throughout Europe to his last days in which he wrote his great Requiem (K. 626), a piece he knew he was composing for his own death. We worry with him through his difficulties with debt and the constant onslaught of disgruntled creditors, and we delight with him when he glows with amorousness for some new love interest. We rejoice with him at the success in Prague of his great operas *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, and we mourn with him as Wolfgang attempts fruitlessly to receive a much-desired court appointment and recognition worthy of his talent.

I own the Dorset Press hardcover version of this book (1987) which features a great and rare pastel of Mozart on the dust jacket. In fact, I got a steal on this edition (in new condition) at the local Goodwill Store for a dollar! This book is for the layperson and not the Mozart scholar. I don't mean to

say that it's not authoritative as the bibliography includes 70 sources. Still, Davenport dispensed with bothersome footnotes and simply focused on telling the story of Mozart. The original of this book was published by Scribners in 1932. I wasn't bothered by this detail in that a 1932 biography of a man who was born in 1756 is probably nearly as good as a 2008 one. As I read, I realized that Marcia Davenport fitted her readers quite effectively for Mozart's shoes, and then she takes us for a nice walk through his life. Here's an illustrative quote from page 259: "In the reaction from his bitter disappointment, Wolfgang expressed himself, for the first time in three years, in a symphony. Into it he poured that intensely serious and vital force which permeated his three subsequent symphonies and culminated in the Olympian Jupiter, his last. After the cruel blow from Leopold [his father], he withdrew into himself, temporarily, but definitely enough to learn how lonely the soul becomes before it comes to create the immortal." Mozart was a fascinating personality... prodigy, genius, procrastinator, disorganized, compassionate playmate, fancy-free, and yet shackled by the stiff German culture of his era, as well as by his burdensome father.

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