2006

Prints and the Courtly World of Mozart

University of Richmond Museums

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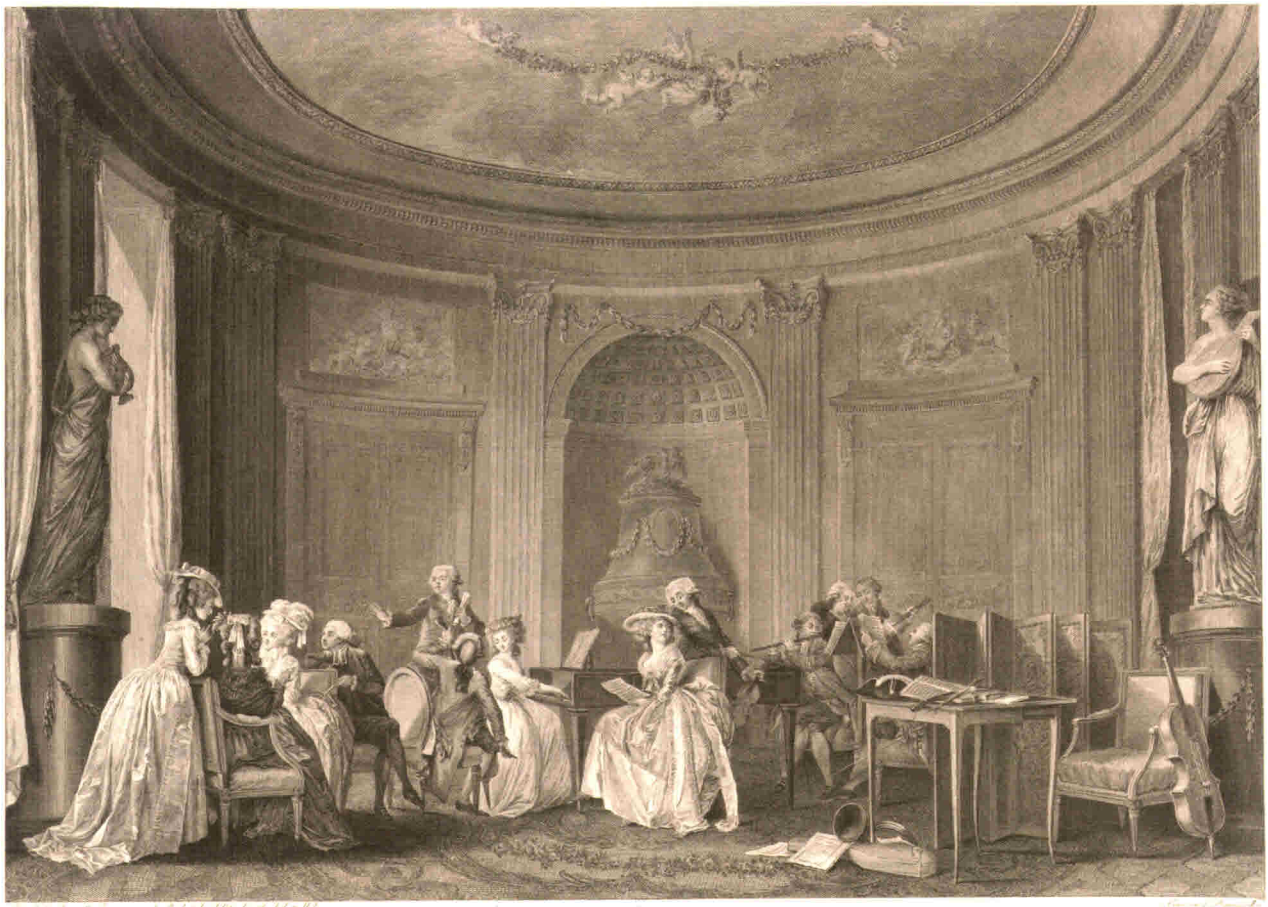
Mozart



L'ASSEMBLÉE AU CONCERT

January 28 to April 29, 2006

Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums

Introduction

In celebration of the 250th anniversary of the birth of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Austrian, 1756-1791), the exhibition explores the courtly world of the composer through prints of the period — from images of concerts and performances, to portraits of the composer, to scenes that capture the costumes and social mores of the day.

Selected from the collection of the Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums, artists include Johann Wolfgang Baumgartner (German, 1712-1761), François Boucher (French, 1703-1770), Jean-Honoré Fragonard (French, 1732-1806), and Jean-Antoine Watteau (French, 1684-1721), among others. The prints offer us a glimpse into the eighteenth-century aristocratic society that was Mozart's milieu.

Organized by the University of Richmond Museums, the exhibition was co-curated by Charles Johnson, Professor of Art History, Emeritus, Department of Art and Art History, and Senior Fellow, Jepson School of Leadership Studies, University of Richmond, and Richard Waller, Executive Director, University Museums. The celebration of the 250th anniversary of Mozart's birth is presented in collaboration with the Department of Music and the Modlin Center for the Arts, and the exhibition is made possible in part with the generous support of the University's Cultural Affairs Committee.

Happy Birthday, Wolfgang!

Richard Waller
Executive Director
University of Richmond Museums

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Mozart was born in Salzburg in western Austria, the seat of an archbishopric and a lively provincial center of music, on January 27, 1756. He was an extraordinary child prodigy who wrote his first musical piece when he was five years old. By age six he was giving harpsichord concerts, and by age eight he had toured Europe. Before his ninth birthday, Mozart wrote his first symphony, and his first oratorio at age eleven. A visit to Vienna in 1768 at the age of twelve led him to compose his first opera, an

Left: Adolph Friedrich Kunike (Austrian, 1777-1838), *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart,* [after the 1789 portrait medallion by Leonhard Posch (Austrian, 1750-1831)], circa 1818, lithograph on paper, image 7 5/8 x 4 3/4 inches, sheet 10 x 7 13/16 inches, Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums, Museum purchase, funds from the Louis S. Booth Arts Fund, H2005.06.04

Right: after Johann-Nepomuk de la Croce (Austrian, 1736-1819), *Familie Mozart,* [based on 1780-1781 painting commissioned by Leopold Mozart, now in the Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum, Salzburg], circa 1800, lithograph on paper (printed in Munich), image 9 1/2 x 12 1/2 inches, sheet 12 1/8 x 14 7/8 inches, Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums, Museum purchase, funds from the Louis S. Booth Arts Fund, H2005.06.02

Italian comedy titled *La Finta Semplice (The Pretended Simpleton).* When he was fourteen, he visited Italy and was elected a member of the Accademia Filarmonica of Bologna, although normally the academy did not accept candidates for membership until they were twenty years old. At an early age Mozart had widely performed on the clavier, violin, and organ for an enthusiastic European nobility.

Mozart was also extraordinarily prolific and gifted as a composer during his short life, producing more than 600 works, including approximately forty-nine symphonies, twenty-seven piano concertos, as well as masses, operas (about twenty), and much chamber music. His music demonstrates his unsurpassed gifts for an ease and grace of melody, lending every phrase and cadence the simplicity that was his trademark, a variety of invention, and a perfection of form.

Yet, for all of his great gifts and accomplishments, Mozart was not astute in his practical affairs. He never experienced financial security and was short of funds for most of his life. While he did not lack friends in high places, he lacked commissions, and no one ever offered him a musical post compatible with his talents. He died a pauper on December 5, 1791, and was buried in an unmarked grave.

What perhaps is most amazing about

Mozart is the universality of his music. During the many trips he made in his formative years, the young composer was brought into contact with every kind of music that was being written or heard in contemporary western Europe. While the vicissitudes of his own personal life left no immediate or obvious traces in his work, his repertoire does reflect, in various ways, the situation of the late eighteenth century.

One of the characteristics of the European musical scene at the time was the existence of distinct national styles. Generally, in what are over-simplifications, Italian music aimed at entertainment, German at expression, while French music was influential chiefly in opera.

In a well-known comment, [Franz] Joseph Haydn (Austrian, 1732-1809), who was twenty-four years older than Mozart and a close personal friend, told the younger musician's father Leopold of his son's musical genius:

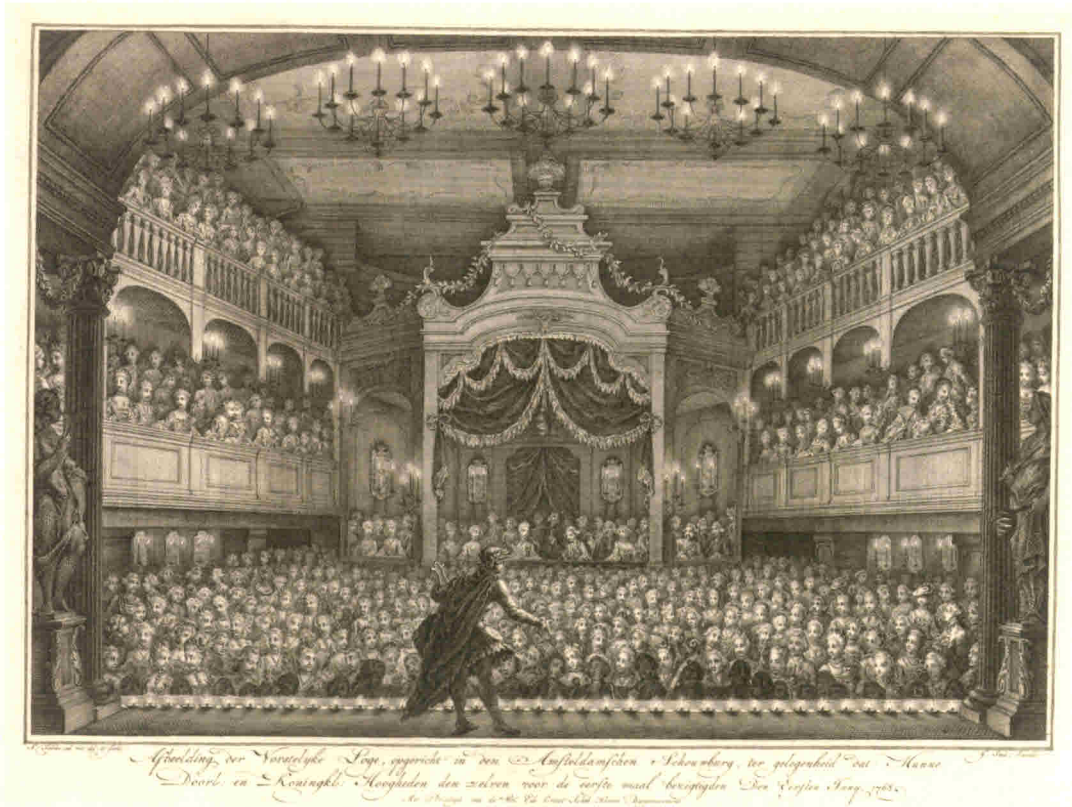
> *Before God and as an honest man . . . your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by reputation. He has the taste and, what is better, the most profound knowledge of composition.*

Haydn's comment defined the two essentials of Mozart's music: *taste,* the instinct for what is appropriate, the awareness of limits, and *knowledge*, the technique to say what one has to say fully, clearly, and persuasively. Broadly speaking, taste was the specialty of the Italians and knowledge that of the Germans. Mozart, an Austrian, combined the two in his own style.

In curious ways, Mozart not only infused various elements of Italian and German music into his work, but also important French philosophies. His four best-known operas — *The Marriage of Figaro, Cosi Fan Tutte, Don Giovanni,* and *The Magic Flute* — are among the finest examples of Classical music. Some of them are moving expressions of ideas associated with the Enlightenment. Mozart was likely not considered a *philosophe,* but it seems that he nevertheless aligned himself with certain of the *philosophes*' ideas.

While it may appear that *The Marriage of Figaro* was written solely to give pleasure, in 1785 it was considered a political bombshell, during a period when public opinion was particularly susceptible to the influence of art. During the 1780s and 1790s, plays, ballets, operas, and paintings were frequently interpreted in a political sense. Mozart was a contemporary of Jacques-Louis David (French, 1748-1825), the great artist of the French Revolution, whose paintings such as *The Oath of the Horatii* of 1784, like Mozart's operas, had the importance of a political manifesto. *The Marriage of Figaro* is only superficially a comical tale of a tug of war between a servant and his master; on a deeper level, it proclaims the dignity of the common man, and dares to criticize the morals and intelligence of the nobility.

Likewise *The Magic Flute* (1791) is only superficially a fairy tale; underneath, it is drenched in the symbols of the Freemasons and it "preaches" — if such lyrical music can be said to preach — the Masonic ideals of truthfulness, endurance, and nobility of the soul. The Freemasons played an important role during the eighteenth century in propagating ideas of the Enlightenment. Mozart, in fact, was an ardent Mason, and believed, with other eighteenth-century Masons, that nobility of character was not a condition of aristocratic



Simon Fokke (Dutch, 1712-1784), *Auditorium of the Amsterdamse Schouwburg, Seen from the Stage, with a View of the Royal Loge for a Performance Held on June 1, 1768*, 1768, etching and engraving on paper, image 12 x 16 1/16 inches, sheet 15 3/4 x 19 3/8 inches, Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums, Museum purchase, funds from the Louis S. Booth Arts Fund, H2005.06.06

birth, but of individual effort. Prince Tamino, the hero of *The Magic Flute,* is accepted by the high priest of the temple, not because he is a prince, but because he is a man.

Mozart's music also has certain characteristics that are quite similar to French Rococo paintings. To some extent, the Rococo was a reaction against the heaviness of Baroque art, and as such, it represented a real gain in sensibility and captured new and more delicate shades of feeling. Jean-Antoine Watteau's masterpiece, the *Pilgrimage to the Isle of Cythera* (1717), for example, has the lightness and sharpness of a Mozart opera. The delicate relationships between these men and women in the painting, who have spent a few hours on the Island of Venus and must now return, reminds one of those rapturous stirrings that precede the departure of the confident lovers in Mozart's opera, *Cosi Fan Tutte* (1790).

As the art historian Kenneth Clark pointed out, nearly all of Watteau's scenes are enacted to the sound of music. The artist achieved the effects of music by translating experience into a different sensuous medium: color. Watteau's color has a shimmering iridescent quality that makes one think of musical analogies. And yet the structure of every detail, for example the hands of his lutanists, is as precise and articulate as a phrase of Mozart. Watteau and Mozart both expressed interest in human beings and in the drama of human relationships. How

often in Watteau's *fête galante* paintings, which exude graceful elegance and delicacy, and in Mozart's beautifully constructed orchestral pieces — concertos or quartets — do we find ourselves participating in a drama or dialogue? And this feeling reaches its natural conclusion in opera, where, as in Watteau's paintings, there is indeed, a delicate understanding of the relations between men and women.

Finally, the legacy of Mozart and Haydn was significant. Their works influenced Beethoven, who came on the scene at a favorable moment in history. He inherited their styles and certain of their musical forms that were well developed, but still capable of further growth. Beethoven, like Napoleon and Goethe, was a child of the tremendous upheaval that had been fermenting all through the eighteenth century and had burst forth in the French Revolution. His musical development, however, is unthinkable without the influence of Haydn and Mozart. Historically, Beethoven's work is built on the achievements of the Classical period, which culminated in the music of Haydn and Mozart.

Mozart's last composition was his *Requiem,* which he never completed. In a curious way, its incompleteness not only symbolizes the tragic brevity of Mozart's life but the fate of the Enlightenment itself, whose bright hopes for mankind were soon brought down by the forces of Revolution and the emerging style of Romanticism.

Charles Johnson
Professor of Art History, Emeritus,
Department of Art and Art History,
and Senior Fellow,
Jepson School of Leadership Studies,
University of Richmond

Nicolaus Valleta (Austrian, active eighteenth century), *Empress Maria Theresa as the Patroness of Music,* circa 1750, etching and engraving on laid paper, image 15 1/2 x 10 7/8 inches, sheet 23 1/4 x 16 3/8 inches, Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums, Museum purchase, funds from the Louis S. Booth Arts Fund, H2005.06.05

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Cover: Nicolas-Barthelemy François Dequevauviller (French, 1745-1807), after Niklas Lafrensen, the younger (Swedish, 1737-1807), *L'Assemblée au Concert,* 1783 (Paris), etching and engraving on laid paper, image 15 1/4 x 18 3/8 inches, sheet 16 1/4 x 19 3/4 inches, Joel and Lila Harnett Print Study Center, University of Richmond Museums, Museum purchase, funds from the Louis S. Booth Arts Fund, H2005.09.01