

Introduction

S I M O N P. K E E F E

Friedrich Kerst, assessing the significance of Mozart early in the twentieth century, introduces *Mozart: The Man and the Artist Revealed in His Own Words* in unashamedly hagiographical fashion:

Mozart! What a radiance streams from his name! Bright and pure as the light of the sun, Mozart's music greets us. We pronounce his name and behold! The youthful artist is before us – the merry, light-hearted smile upon his features, which belongs only to true and naïve genius.¹

Packing his prose with overworked generalizations about Mozart and his music – brightness and purity, eternal youthfulness, blissful ignorance aligned with genius – Kerst is one of countless late eighteenth-, nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers to worship at Mozart's shrine. In the last fifty years in particular, Mozart scholars have attempted either directly or indirectly to negate such stereotypes and the laudatory tone that accompanies them. Thanks to pioneering archival work on written and musical sources, and on late eighteenth-century aesthetic and theoretical trends manifest in his music, scholars are now in a better position than ever to evaluate both Mozart's impact on his contemporaries and successors, and his continuing relevance to an ever-changing musical world.

While unadulterated hyperbole about Mozart is a distant memory in scholarly circles, it flourishes as never before outside the academy. The bicentennial celebrations in 1991 outstripped in scope and worldwide participation all preceding and succeeding celebrations of a composer's work; the critical and commercial success of the cinematic version of *Amadeus* (1984) demonstrated the extraordinary public fascination with Mozart and his life story; and predictable millennial polls, aimed at identifying the greatest composers of all time, put Mozart close to the top, even in the company of twentieth-century pop artists who were always likely to garner the popular vote.²

We might dismiss Mozartian hyperbole as media-charged exaggeration, of course, but in so doing would be ignoring a significant implication of the composer's exalted public profile. For Mozart captures the popular imagination in a more pronounced fashion than any other composer of the classical tradition; relentless marketing has turned him into the principal standard-bearer for classical music. In spite of this state of affairs, could it

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be credibly argued that Mozart does *not* deserve his elevated status, that he is *not* a touchstone for musical greatness? Judgements of greatness, as out of fashion in post-modern scholarly discourse as they are in fashion outside academia, seem somehow superfluous where Mozart is concerned. Respected and admired in all quarters, his music defines greatness, rather than being circumscribed by it. In short, his place in the artistic pantheon is as secure as those of Shakespeare, Raphael and Goethe.

Irrespective of the critical validity of Mozart's lofty status, the huge gulf between scholarly understandings of the composer and public perceptions of him needs to be bridged. Like its illustrious predecessor from an earlier era, *The Mozart Companion*,³ *The Cambridge Companion to Mozart* brings new, up-to-date scholarship into a public arena. Intended for students, scholars and music lovers alike, it aims to bridge the gap between scholarly and popular images of the composer by enhancing a reader's appreciation of Mozart and his remarkable output regardless of musical aptitude or prior knowledge of Mozart's music.

Each of the four sections of *The Cambridge Companion to Mozart* aligns with a major area of Mozart research; moreover, the sections together paint a balanced portrait of the composer. Part I, 'Mozart in context', builds a foundation for the study of Mozart's works, focussing on the musical environments that most clearly shaped the composer's development (Salzburg and Vienna), the intersection between Mozart's aesthetic views and those prevalent in the late eighteenth century, and Mozart's compositional methods. Part II, considering the most important genres in which Mozart excelled, likewise paves the way for discussions in Part III of how his works – indeed his career as a whole – have been received in critical, cultural and compositional contexts. Part IV complements contextual discussion in Part I by offering insight into Mozart's career as a performer as well as theoretical and practical perspectives on historically informed performances of his music. Although an entirely comprehensive survey of Mozart's works is a practical impossibility in a single volume of essays, this collection will hopefully provide a simultaneously rounded and focussed picture of the composer and his output.

If a common theme runs through this *Cambridge Companion* – in fact through the Mozartian secondary literature as a whole – it is that Mozart and his music demand repeated scrutiny and interpretation. Each generation of music lovers has found something new and different to admire in the composer, identifying an element or elements in his music that speak directly to the spirit of that time; there is every reason to believe that this pattern will continue for a composer commonly regarded 'as the most universal... in the history of Western music'.⁴ Just as the great twentieth-century landmarks of Mozart scholarship – the collected letters, the *Documentary*

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Biography of Otto Erich Deutsch, the various editions of the Köchel catalogue and the new edition of Mozart's works (*Neue Mozart-Ausgabe*) – immeasurably enhanced (and continue to enhance) our understanding of the composer, so we trust that twenty-first-century monuments (beginning with the forthcoming *Neue Köchel Verzeichnis* under the general editorship of Neal Zaslaw) will do the same. Evaluation and re-evaluation of Mozart's music, and of sources, documents and material pertaining to it, is not only a historical obligation for musicologists and music lovers generally, but a privilege for professionals and amateurs alike; few composers repay systematic examination and re-examination in so unambiguously pleasurable and inspiring a fashion as Mozart.

