

Next week, 27 January, marks the 250th anniversary of the birth of one Johann Chrysostomus Wolfgang Theophilus Mozart, known to the world as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – and to his vivacious wife, Constanze, as Wolfie, at least according to the screen version of Peter Shaffer's play *Amadeus*. Innumerable concerts, programmes, books and articles will mark the occasion and, in Austria, where he lived and died, his skull – apparently removed from his so-called pauper's grave, hidden and lately subject to DNA testing – is the subject of a TV documentary. His earthly remains are of no interest to Dr Jane Glover, the musicologist and conductor who has, in the course of her thirty-year career, majored on Mozart. "My boy," she calls him, agreeing that she feels almost maternal towards him, this child-genius who supposedly never grew up.

But, as Dr Glover gently points out, in his 35 years of life he wrote a quite astonishing amount of music, including 41 symphonies, 27 piano concertos, more than a dozen operas and a prodigious amount of chamber music – some of it with a toddler scampering around at his feet, doubtless demanding his attention. "He was very disciplined – he just wasn't a good businessman," she agrees, "but he could compose amid a roomful of people." He would invite Constanze to

"We spent many happy days discussing the idea, which we were rather cheekily going to call *The Four Sisters*," she recalls. Perhaps her book will now give her a new perspective on the subject.

As she explored Mozart's life and music ever more deeply and this year's anniversary hove into view, so the idea for what became *Mozart's Women* coalesced and what she describes as "my dream book" became a reality. "I marked out six separate months in my diary... Of course opportunities arise that you can't turn down, such as conducting a Prom, which means you lose a week... But I packed a suitcase-full of books on Mozart, including the volumes of letters in both English and German, and flew to Venice", where – just as she had while working on her doctorate on 17th century Venetian opera years earlier – she rented an apartment and lived like a local, shopping every morning at the Rialto before settling down to read. The writing was accomplished at her Camden Town home, where a copy of Joseph Lange's unfinished portrait of Mozart and a Bluthner grand piano dominate her music room-cum-study, as well as on the road. "Often there's a couple of days between performances of an opera, so I'd be in New York and while everyone else shopped I wrote."

It is a fascinating and highly readable account from which Mozart and his family and friends emerge as real people, battling the hardships of 18th century life and the vicissitudes of Fate –

"He wrote no bad music and he knew instinctively how to write for every instrument and every voice"

Settling a score

For too long, Mozart's women were either ridiculed or neglected. But they take a long-overdue bow in Jane Glover's new study. Liz Thomson reports

sit down and chat with him as he wrote – presumably at a furious pace, "though most of his manuscripts are beautiful".

The image so many of us now have of Mozart is that of *Amadeus* the movie (the play, essentially an examination of creativity versus genius, is a different proposition indeed), all Tourette-like gestures and obsessions and hysterical laughter. "Constanze came out of it particularly badly," recalls Glover, of the airhead portrayal that she believes bears scant resemblance to the young wife who got her husband out of debt and who, as a widow, oversaw publication of all his work, thus ensuring that their two children would not have to endure a hand-to-mouth existence. Hence her book, *Mozart's Women*, a look at the women in Wolfgang's life, not least his mother and sister, and how they informed the women he wrote in such dramatic masterpieces as *The Marriage of Figaro*, and how his knowledge of the women who were to sing those roles influenced his composition. For all his vocal writing was, as he put it, "tailor-made".

Glover's fascination with the subject goes back to childhood and her *Oxford Junior Companion to Music*, and she remembers writing a school project on Mozart in which his sister, Nannerl, also a child prodigy with whom he toured Europe playing piano duets, featured prominently. In the 1980s, *Amadeus* made her think not just of Constanze but of the four Weber sisters, of whom young Wolfgang first loved Aloysia, for whom he wrote a good deal of music but who ultimately rejected his advances. "They were amazing women – rather like the Brontës," says Glover, explaining that she and the novelist Elizabeth Jane Howard had worked on a treatment for a television film that they hoped might mark the bicentenary of Mozart's death in 1791.

Wolfgang was the last of seven children of whom only two survived. While he had no formal education, he was brilliantly taught by his cold, ambitious father, a musician whose violin tutor is still used today. He grew up to become the first truly freelance musician, unshackled by patronage but shackled by endless money worries. Yet, despite the *angst* and the tragedy (he and Constanze lost four children), an unstoppable torrent of sublime music poured from his pen and Glover manages to write about it with clarity and simplicity, and without recourse to music examples. "I worried about whether it read like psychobabble or programme notes," she confesses. "I hope I've got it right, but it's very difficult to know."

With the book due out in the States next week and much Mozart in her conducting schedule, Glover won't be leaving her boy alone just yet, indeed not ever, though her repertoire is astonishingly wide and features a good deal of contemporary music by such composers as Judith Weir, James Macmillan and Oliver Knussen. At the other end of the scale, she has prepared new editions of many Baroque masterpieces, and her next such project is Monteverdi's *Il Ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*. But she believes Mozart to be "the greatest musical genius the world has ever known", a sweeping statement but one she is happy to stand by. "He wrote no bad music and he knew instinctively how to write for every instrument and every voice. He stretches people, but nothing he wrote is impossible, which is not the case with Beethoven. Some of the *Missa Solemnis* is unsingable".

Mozart's Women: His Family, His Friends, His Music is published in Pan paperback on 7 April, price £7.99

Jane Glover: mad about the boy
Photo: Ken Howard

