

EIR Books

An unfinished requiem for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

by David S. Shavin

1791, Mozart's Last Year

by H.C. Robbins Landon
Schirmer/Macmillan, New York, 1988
240 pages, hardbound, \$19.95

Mozart: The Golden Years 1781-1791

by H.C. Robbins Landon
Schirmer/Macmillan, New York, 1989
272 pages, hardbound, \$29.95

In 1986, Robbins Landon—a scholar who has spent a lifetime digging through the minutiae of Vienna's classical period—confronts the ugly reality that the last vestige of a proper memory of Mozart is being destroyed, perverted into the hyena-like eruptions of the "Amadeus" movie's Mozart, Tom Hulce. His revealing, parenthetical comment in his introduction to *1791, Mozart's Last Year*, goes beyond the academic niceties that usually prevail, to expose the irreducible ugliness that sticks in his craw: "In Italy, the young make a speciality of imitating Mozart's laugh from the film." Robbins Landon proceeds to write a total of 512 pages on Mozart, to counter the gross banalities of Hollywood, and to begin to enrich the public's view of the composer.

Unfortunately, with the November publication of *Mozart, The Golden Years*, Robbins Landon has retreated to his own psychological/chemical variation of cultish historiography, which would attempt to account for the mental-creative

powers of Mozart's mind by reference to an attributed cyclothymic disorder. While this may be said to be less jarring than the cultish inanities of Rocky Horror Picture Show star Tom Hulce, such a view of Mozart represents its own sort of academic cultishness. And in the final analysis, such a view can only serve to help murder Mozart a second time.

Fortunately, in between, before the author suffers this relapse, he pulls together a wealth of fascinating material—most of it previously known, but not widely circulated. In particular, much of this material had never been offered to the English-speaking world before. For this, along with the extensive footnoting, the handsome layout of the books, and the several new gems that he makes public in the two books, Robbins Landon does indeed deserve commendations. He may yet find out that he has contributed, in his own way, to the proper resurrection of the memory of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

Mozart's assassination

In *1791*, Robbins Landon collects, compares, dissects, and analyzes many of the various myths and theories of Mozart's death. The reader becomes impressed, possibly overwhelmed, at the wealth of cover stories that were manufactured and retailed over the years. After reviewing this material, one can only be struck by the vital concern over certain strategic secrets that must lie buried in the matter of Mozart's premature demise. And with the extensive footnoting, the author has done the reader the favor of providing a wealth of leads. The book reads as a veritable "Disinformation Digest." And herein lies this book's main value. However, the reader must be aware that the leads provided cannot be read as leads as to who murdered anybody, but only as to who thought it

vital to protect certain state secrets, and to create disinformation.

One example will have to suffice. In the fall of 1823, thirty-two years after Mozart's death, Salieri is ill, and confined in a hospital. Rumors are stoked by the Viennese journalists that Salieri murdered Mozart. In October, Beethoven's pupil Ignaz Moscheles manages to get in to see the isolated Salieri.

The reunion was a sad one. His appearance already shocked me and he spoke only in broken sentences about his imminent death. But at the end he said: "Although this is my last illness, I can assure you on my word of honour that there is no truth in that absurd rumour; you know that I am supposed to have poisoned Mozart. But no, it's malice, pure malice, tell the world, dear Moscheles, old Salieri, who will soon die, has told you."

Within weeks, Salieri is reported to have tried, unsuccessfully, to commit suicide. The limited access to him is almost totally closed off. He is isolated until his death, one-and-a-half years later.

Now, Robbins Landon is careful enough not to swallow the media slanders of Viennese journalism of 1823 in their attacks on Salieri, though he does not probe into the possible origins behind this orchestrated campaign. ("Gossip!" was Beethoven's characterization of this early attempt to turn Mozart's death into a matter of a personal vendetta.) Instead, he seems to accept the Hapsburg family doctrine on the assassination, first articulated publicly by Giuseppe Carpani in 1824. This defense is predicated upon the writing of a Hapsburg doctor, the Court Councillor Eduard Vincent Guldener von Lobes, and is seemingly accepted whole by Robbins Landon. Having accepted this denial of any poisoning of Mozart, Robbins Landon proceeds to review the medical speculations regarding Mozart's death.

However, it is the questions unasked, and unexamined, that mark the shortcomings of his method. If Mozart was not poisoned, then who was running the nasty operation against Salieri, and why? If the Hapsburgs of 1823 disclaimed the possibility of the poisoning of Mozart, on what grounds should this be accepted? Would not an answer to the question of who was feeding Salieri to the wolves, have a bearing on the question of who knew what was at stake in Mozart's demise? (And, as we shall come to ask, could the question of Mozart's assassin possibly be satisfactorily answered without addressing the question of the suspicious death of his Emperor, Leopold?) These lines of inquiry will not be found in *1791, Mozart's Last Year*.

Interestingly enough, the concluding lines of the above-cited paragraph from Moscheles' diary, Robbins Landon does not find pertinent, and he chooses to omit them from his book. Moscheles concludes:

With regard to the report hinted at by the dying man, it certainly had been circulated, without my ever giving it the slightest belief. Morally speaking he had no doubt by his intrigues poisoned many an hour of Mozart's existence.

What Moscheles states here, both explicitly and implicitly, is certainly, at least, an interesting measure of what Beethoven's networks are prepared to believe, and not believe, regarding Mozart's demise. Salieri may have been used in the poisoning of Mozart's existence, but one should not look to him to find out whose poison ended Mozart's life.

Robbins Landon concluded his material on Mozart in *1791*, by noting: " 'Amadeus,' play and film, has already created another [myth], and it may prove difficult to dissuade the public from the current Shafferian view of the composer as a divinely gifted drunken lout, pursued by a vengeful Salieri." In *Mozart, The Golden Years*, Robbins Landon picks up on this mission. He manages to further undercut the "Mozart-Salieri personality conflict" theory of Mozart's death by providing the reader a much richer sense of Mozart's world—with whom he worked, and for whom he composed. The details should be read and appreciated for themselves, but suffice it here to note the following.

The 'American' faction

Mozart worked with the key republican contact (in Vienna) of Benjamin Franklin's "American" network in Europe, Baron van Swieten. As the author understates the case, "Swieten was very much *en rapport* with the reforming ideas and ideals of Emperor Joseph II." Swieten brought from Frederick's court in Prussia the knowledge and manuscripts of Bach and Handel to his post as Prefect of the Imperial Royal Library in Vienna, where Mozart arrived in 1781. Mozart wrote to his father, "Every Sunday at 12 noon I go to Baron von Suiten [sic]—and there nothing but Handel and Bach is played. . . . I am making a collection of Bach fugues. . . . Also Handel's, and these I don't have." In short, Mozart, the former child prodigy, at the age of 26, was immersed in Bach's fugues, making powerful discoveries in his quest to understand, and to master, his own genius.

Robbins Landon introduces the reader to a fascinating circle of individuals in Vienna's political and cultural life. Baron van Swieten's circles included the ministers, educators, artists, and officials involved in Joseph's nation-building, in particular, in his education reforms. For example, Mozart performed his quartets with Haydn at the home of the Hofrat von Greiner, the Court War Secretary in the Bohemian-Austrian Court Chancellery, and a member of the Imperial Royal Study Society, which organized the school system. He was a leading Freemason, who initiated a tax on alcohol, and helped lead the abolition of statute-labor in Bohemia.

Mozart's lodge was part of the New Crowned Hope lodge—not an uninteresting name, considering that the Aus-

trian Masons were reorganized by Emperor Joseph in the mid-1780s to weed out the agents. Included among Mozart's Masonic brothers, along with his father Leopold and his composer friend Joseph Haydn, were two of Beethoven's later patrons, Prince Lichnowsky and Prince Nicolaus Esterhazy, and the Imperial Royal Chamberlain, Johann the Count.

However, the key event that Robbins Landon—not to mention all the other, less-helpful Mozart scholars—remains strangely silent about, is the event that shook the courts of Europe, the American Revolution. Or, to put it differently, the Western civilization revolution. Simply put, the success of the American Revolution against King George III, brought a key question to the fore: Were men the loyal subjects of royalty, of authority based upon blood lines, or were men made in the image of God, free to hearken to their moral obligation to develop their God-like capacities?

How our purported scholars today expect to properly treat the critical questions of culture and creativity in the Europe of the 1780s (that is, of Mozart's world), and to ignore this living, breathing reality of the birth of the American republic—this is truly mind-boggling. Such a bankrupt methodology could never hope to comprehend why the Founding Fathers, why Lafayette, and why indeed Mozart would put their lives on the line, any more than it could comprehend why today a Chinese student would stand up to the tanks of dictators.

An extraordinary decade

For example, Robbins Landon motivates his second book, *Mozart, The Golden Years, 1781-1791*, with a powerful observation: "I thought, then, that such matters would interest the public at large, curious to know some of the background, and indeed foreground, of this extraordinary decade—which brought forth a new masterpiece by Haydn or Mozart twice a month on average [emphasis added]." A stunning observation, properly situated by the author. How are we to understand such an outburst of creativity? However, nowhere in 272 well-documented pages is Benjamin Franklin mentioned. General Lafayette's name is included on a list of 65 names in January 1792, a list that Austrian intelligence agencies considered anti-Hapsburg conspirators. (This same list also includes the names of Schloissnigg and van Swieten.) No other comment appears. In Robbins Landon's account of this extraordinary decade, there is no echo of the shot heard 'round the world.

Even the key visit made by Mozart to Lafayette's family near Paris (made in 1778, when Lafayette is in the United States fighting the British) is omitted by the otherwise exceedingly careful Robbins Landon. While it is the case that Robbins Landon shares this omission with all of the many 20th-century Mozart "experts," his posing of some of the key questions leads the reader to expect more. Certainly, a want for detail cannot, in general, be attributed to the author.

(After all, this is an author who can, and does, detail for the reader how the furniture was laid out in Mozart's apartment!)

Mozart's arrival in Paris in the spring of 1778 coincides with the key decision by the French to join with the Americans in battle against King George. Mozart has been offered the position of court organist at the same time that the French court has entered the war against the British. Baron von Grimm, however, advises the 22-year-old Mozart not to accept this position, and Mozart—at this point, unfortunately, still under the supervision of the Baron—is following his recommendations. Mozart is invited to the estate of the Catholic humanists, the de Noailles—the parents of Lafayette's wife, Adrienne. They are leaders at the French court of the "American" faction. He spends the last ten days of August there, along with Johann Christian Bach (from London!), before he is practically ridden out of town on a rail by an unusually anxious Baron von Grimm. (The Baron buys Mozart's ticket out of town, and pushes him out of Paris, over Mozart's strenuous objections.)

Instead, Robbins Landon characterizes the "failure" of Mozart's trip to Paris according to what is accepted as today's norm. Instead of any mention of the de Noailles, and the strategic realities shaping Paris in 1778, there is a stress upon Mozart's preoccupation with chasing and catching Aloysia Weber. Then he proceeds to underline his argument for Mozart's immaturity by favorably citing Angermüller's rationalization: "The reason for Mozart's failure may be sought principally in his overweening self-confidence. . . . His arrogance can be measured in the sentence, 'I don't care about the Parisians' applause.' "

The Vienna State Archives

The final chapter of *The Golden Years*, "A Freemasons' Conspiracy in 1791?" opens with what is probably the single, new, key piece of intelligence that could have justified the rest of the work.

It has been known that a few blocks away from the room in which Mozart died on Dec. 5, 1791, a messenger handed Baron van Swieten his summary dismissal from all his official positions—including his key position at the head of the education reforms for the Empire. (For those readers who relish their counterpoint, one might note that this is also the day that Alexander Hamilton wrote his *Report on Manufactures*.) However, this eventful day must be seen in the context of a wild faction fight for the future of the Austrian monarchy.

Robbins Landon has contributed new material in providing a lengthy excerpt from an Oct. 14, 1791 spy report to Emperor Leopold II, found in the Vienna State Archives. The report accuses Cabinet Secretary Johann Schloissnigg, of "high treason." It reports that he was overheard declaring that the call-up of 16,000 troops around Vienna can't stave off the coming revolution. "A revolution is necessary, because . . . a ruler who simply enjoys life does not deserve to occupy the throne." The spy stresses to the Emperor, "This

person, this Cromwell, this perpetrator of *high treason* is the private tutor and daily confidant of the Crown Prince of Austria; he is at the head of the Illuminati; he was placed in this position by Baron Swieten . . . what designs and plans might be maturing in this man's mind!"

Schloisnigg is fired. Swieten's faction no longer has input into the Crown Prince of Austria. Within eight weeks, Mozart is dead, and Swieten is fired. Before this dark winter gives way to spring, the man who received the spy report, the Emperor himself, is dead. His death also comes under a cloud of suspicion. The Archduke Franz, no longer under Swieten-associated tutelage, becomes the new Emperor. The "American" program of Emperor Joseph, and to some extent, his brother Emperor Leopold, lies mortally wounded. Lafayette is soon to be locked up in one of Franz's dank prisons. France is consumed in the Terror, as Europe is horrified. In a single morning, three generations of de Noailles women are guillotined.

Evidently, after Robbins Landon wrote his earlier book on the Mozart assassination theories, some of the files of the Vienna State Archives—such as Emperor Leopold's spy report—have been made available for his examination and use. The Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv in Vienna, under the direction of Dr. Clemens Höslinger, has decided to make available for general circulation portions of their documents, regarding this critical 1790-92 period in the Hapsburg Empire. This uncharacteristic development in and of itself would have provided a much more interesting story than the one the author chose to relate. Instead, the reader is treated to Robbins Landon's preoccupation with the manic-depressive personality analysis of "modern medical opinion."

Manic-depressive genius

Mozart, we are told, suffered the "the insidious onset . . . of a chronic mood disturbance, which persisted until his death, and which was associated with pathological mood swings of hypomania and depression." According to what Robbins Landon terms "the authoritative new study on the subject, superseding all previous studies, great and small," the work of "the distinguished Australian physician, Dr. Peter J. Davies," in the case of Mozart, "the diagnostic criteria for cyclothymic disorder (. . . related to manic-depressive personality) are fulfilled."

Without entangling ourselves in the matter of the accuracy of the good doctor's *post mortem*, one might ask, what purpose does Robbins Landon intend in steering his discussion in this direction?

He invites the reader to consider a series of Mozart's works, composed in the minor key: the *C minor Piano Concerto* (K. 491), the penultimate scene from *Don Giovanni* (K. 527), the *Adagio and Fugue* (K. 526), and the *Symphony #40 in G minor* (K. 550). The reader should accept his invitation. Do you hear the "desperate disruptions . . . the violent inner tension"? Can you sympathize with the suffer-

ing Mozart and "the therapy of composing these baleful pieces"?

Perhaps you too may suffer from the same "deep-seated imbalance in Mozart's personality" that in Robbins Landon's opinion, "provides . . . the only satisfactory explanation for this series of violent depressive works in the minor key." Let us hope so. You see, quoting the good Doctor Davies, "Artists with cyclothymic disorder are capable of amazing productivity during their hypomanic periods, when there is inflated self-esteem, excessive energy, sharpened creative thinking and decreased need for sleep." It seems that the symptoms of "cyclothymic disorder" are identical with the symptoms of, for example, the leaders of the American Revolution during that period.

So, how does it happen that the same author who raises the issue of "a new masterpiece by Haydn or Mozart twice a month on average" for a decade, concludes with a summary opinion on the mysterious workings of chemical imbalances? It helps to deny Mozart his humanity, and to assume that the joy and concentration of his composing, have no important connection to the burning question of his decade: whether man's creativity is some sort of curious biological excretion, or rather a God-given, divine quality of man, making him free to hearken to his moral obligation to develop his God-like capacities? How anyone could listen to the works of Mozart, even the "depressive" productions cited by Robbins Landon, and not hear the joy of rigorous mental concentration, the coherence of beauty and truth—such a person might indeed wish that he were suffering from some sort of chemical imbalance.

The memory of Mozart

Nobody ever said that summoning up the strength of character, and the concentration, to solve important problems, was as placid as the thought processes of several recent Presidents. However, to reduce the creative mentation processes behind the above-cited works of Mozart to such "personality" analysis of "modern medical opinion," says more about the proponents of such theories than anything Mozart wrote or did.

On the subject of the American Revolution, of the freedom of man to act lawfully, of the struggle and joy of creative mentation, unfortunately Robbins Landon does not stand alone in exhibiting what we could fairly call manic-depressive behavior. However, such behavior cannot, and will not, revive the proper memory of, nor provide the proper peace of mind to, the living spirit of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Rather, let his listeners broaden their lives, and their selves, until his music's power and grace carry them beyond momentary states of perceived happiness and despair, to where joy and concentration are united—where beauty and truth are one. Perhaps, then, the sons and daughters of his "American" revolution will begin to provide the murdered corpse of Mozart a proper *Requiem*.