

Book Review

By Marvin L. French

Jane Glover, *MOZART'S WOMEN, His Family, His Friends, His Music*, Harper Collins, 2005

The subtitle is more descriptive of this book than the main title, as Mozart's relationships with his father (not just his mother, sister, and wife), as well as with friends and performers of both sexes, are described in detail.

"Jane Glover's elegant and fascinating book illuminates an aspect of Mozart, and of his work, that has often been touched upon but never with such detail and insight. Her vivid portraits enable us to appreciate how deeply the remarkable women in his life served as both emotional and artistic muses, and how their spirit informs his masterworks. Glover has lived Mozart's music intimately, and her knowledge of it and love for it make her a privileged guide to his endless riches, and to how originally and brilliantly Mozart uses it to create some of the most memorable female characters in all of opera." – Renee Fleming

Glover goes over every one of Mozart's operas, telling how each was conceived, planned, written, cast, and produced. He readily tailored his music to the capabilities of an individual singer when it was either too challenging or not challenging enough. The story and music of each opera are analyzed in detail, providing a greater understanding of how the two are intimately entwined. For me, this was the best part of the book. Henceforth I shall consult it before seeing any Mozart opera.

As an example, take the opera *Idomeneo, re di Creta*, which the court commissioned. The libretto was an old text by Dauchet, originally set to music by Campra in Paris in 1712. Mozart invited Varesco, the court chaplain, to make an Italian version of it, while he too was deeply involved in working out the structure, dramaturgy, and poetry. It was only after meeting his cast and assessing their strength that he began to write the music, tweaking the libretto accordingly. He had the best musicians to work with, so that wasn't a problem. The opera would provide four singers, assigned to him by the court, with splendid roles. These included a great singer who, at age 66, was past his prime. Mozart adjusted his musical conception of the role, writing a simpler version of the central aria "Fuor del mar," transferring the dramatic energy of the other arias to the orchestral accompaniment, thus making it an almost equal partner in the carrying of emotion. He did the same for the castrato assigned to one of the parts, who was "utterly useless," as Mozart put it. To the two singers assigned to the female parts he gave free rein in his music because they delighted him in every respect.

Glover has the highest credentials for telling this story. She is Music Director of Chicago's Music of the Baroque and conducts regularly with the Chicago Opera Theater. She has conducted at all the major symphony and chamber orchestras in Britain, and appears regularly at the BBC Proms. She is also a regular broadcaster, including a television series on Mozart and the radio series *Opera House*.

