

HERITAGE CIRCLE

Frances Hart – The life and times of Mozart as told by his wife

Frances Hart gave an entertaining talk about Mozart which she illustrated by extracts of the composer's music at the October meeting of the Heritage Circle at Rickinghall Village Hall. She adopted the character of his wife during her performance.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in 1756 in Salzburg. His father, Leopold, was a musician for the Prince-Archbishop. Mozart was taught how to play the violin, the viola and the keyboard by his father, but from a young age showed himself to be a prodigy. In 1762, at the age of six, he began to tour with his father's orchestra as the lead musician and played for many of the crowned heads of Europe. The tours were successful but not lucrative as Leopold was given rings, watches or snuff boxes rather than money. The orchestra spent a year in England in 1764 but found the country 'cold.'

The touring ended in 1773 when Mozart was 16. He had established himself as a talented musician and had composed many orchestral works and operas while travelling in a coach across the rough roads of Europe. However, he did not have a patron and had to accept a post as a court musician in Salzburg where he was lowly paid and had a status in the household above the cooks but below the valets. Similarly, Salzburg was also a provincial town which did not offer the opportunities to stage the operas he wanted to write.

Mozart was a fun loving young man who liked to play practical jokes. However, he also tended to make enemies in the world of music as he was not tactful in the critique that he offered on the work of others. Fellow musicians could be jealous and resentful of his youth and apparent arrogance. In 1781, aged 25, Mozart went to Vienna to further his career. He stayed with the Weber family and fell in love with one of the daughters, Constanze, who was six years his junior. She was a talented singer and Mozart wrote several technically difficult pieces for her to perform. They wanted to marry but Mozart's father vehemently opposed the match as he felt that Wolfgang was too young and Constanze was too poor. Eventually, Leopold's objections were overcome and the couple married in 1782. Over the next eight years they had six children but only two of them survived beyond infancy.

Initially, Mozart prospered in Vienna. Unfortunately, during the 1780s his income declined as the Austrian aristocracy commissioned fewer musical works. He was forced to borrow money. However, his fortunes improved when *The Magic Flute* was premiered in 1791 in Vienna. The opera was very popular as it was sung in German, not Italian. In the same year he was commissioned to produce the *Requiem*, his final work as he became ill while writing the score and did not finish it. Mozart died aged 35 in December 1791. The cause may have been food poisoning after a masonic dinner. His funeral was held in St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna but he was interred in an unmarked grave as he was so poor at the time of his death.

Mozart died at the height of his powers but his enduring fame was influenced by his wife. Mozart inspired other musicians and composers in his life time, notably Beethoven, but Constanze had his works published so that they could be performed after his death. He is now recognised as a genius for the innovations that he introduced into a variety of forms of music and study of his compositions is a key element of the education of modern classical musicians.

Constanze remarried some time after Mozart's death and died at the age of 80 in Salzburg.

The next meeting of the Heritage Circle will be at 7.30pm on 22 November when Stuart Bowell will give a talk entitled *History from Old Photographs*. Further information about the Heritage Circle is available on its website, www.heritagecircle.onesuffolk.net.

Gerry Gurhy