



Mozart's Last Aria

Matt Rees

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Award-winning author Matt Rees takes readers to 18th century Austria, where Mozart's estranged sister Nannerl stumbles into a world of ambition, conspiracy, and immortal music while attempting to uncover the truth about her brother's suspicious death. Did Mozart's life end in murder? Nannerl must brave dire circumstances to find out, running afoul of the secret police, the freemasons, and even the Austrian Emperor himself as she delves into a scandal greater than she had ever imagined. With captivating historical details, compelling characters, and a real-life mystery upon which everything hinges, Rees—the award-winning author of the internationally acclaimed Omar Yussef crime series—writes in the tradition of Irvin Yalom's *When Nietzsche Wept*, Louis Bayard's *The Pale Blue Eye*, and Phillip Sington's *The Einstein Girl* to achieve the very best in historical fiction with *Mozart's Last Aria*.

Mozart's Last Aria Details

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From Reader Review Mozart's Last Aria for online ebook

Sara says

As someone who eagerly eats up practically any Mozart-related book, I was eager to read this mystery about his death narrated by Nannerl, his sister. This book intrigued me in particular because, while most fictional Mozart books paint Nannerl as the "lost sister" whose greatness was overshadowed by her brother (a conception which in my opinion does not need 500 books and movies devoted to it), this book took a new approach and had Nannerl investigating the events of Mozart's death.

The Good: Rees' descriptions are very strong, especially those of Vienna. He evokes the time period well. His writing style ensures the book moves along at a quick pace. I enjoyed his characterizations, particularly of Constanze. I especially appreciated Rees' note at the end about the fact vs. fiction and what had actually happened, although a little bit more historical note and truth would have pleased this Mozart addict. It was also awesome to see some players in Mozart's history brought to life, such as Magdalena Hofdemel (whose story could easily be a book itself!) and von Paradis.

The Bad: Like another reviewer noted, (view spoiler) I also had difficulties imagining Nannerl as some private eye investigator, roaming around Vienna to get the scoop on her brother's death, although there were only a few moments during my reading experience where I felt like that.

Overall: I give this book three stars. It's great to read a Mozart-related fiction novel, but I do wish one would come out that isn't so sensationalist. This one falls low on the scale though, if you compare it against others like Amadeus. The mystery is engaging, but personally I found the truth more interesting. If you want to read another Mozart fiction that is more realistic, try *Marrying Mozart*, or for non-fiction coverage of Mozart's life, try anything by H.C. Robbins Landon. The Maynard Solomon book that is mentioned at the end of Rees' novel is good, but quite overwhelming and analytical for newcomers.

A. S. says

In "Mozart's last aria," Matt Rees takes the real-life historical mystery of Mozart's murder, and uses real-life facts and characters to present a possible solution to the case.

In the early 1790s, Europe is facing some major problems. The French Revolution is going on in France. Prussia and Austria are sworn enemies. And Mozart loses his life in mysterious circumstances, suspecting poisoning. Mozart's story kicks off when his sister, Nannerl, is dying and gives Mozart's son the diary she kept. Upon learning of Mozart's mysterious death, Nannerl leaves her village of Salzburg and travels to Vienna, where her brother Mozart had gained success and gained entry to the highest social circles. Nannerl's aim is simple: find out what happened to her brother.

Except, the world she encounters is a different Vienna than in her youth. The atmosphere is no longer open and laid-back, but secretive and deceptive. As Nannerl meets some of Mozart's friends—piano pupil Magdalena Hofdemel, actor Karl Gieseke, patron Prince Lichnowsky, impresario Emanuel Schikaneder, musician Anton Stadler, and head of imperial library Baron Swieden—she can't help feeling that they know something about her brother's murder. As Nannerl starts questioning them, she enters a dangerous game—as she is attacked on the street, and forced to fear for her safety.

Overall, this is a seductive read. Initially I was concerned that the historical details and multitude of characters might interfere with the writing, but thankfully this was not the case. Right at the beginning of the book, Rees provides the reader with a list of characters and their identities. The writing itself, despite the amount of historical data, is easy to follow. Yet, the mystery itself is anything but simple. Every time you think the killer is unmasked, Rees takes it one step further. I thought it was an interesting, well thought out mystery.

Andi Winterfield says

A brilliantly written, fast paced novel about the mysterious and untimely death of Mozart. I love the novel's focus on Mozart's overlooked older sister, Nannerl. Her character is beautifully written and thoroughly researched. I am absolutely in love with this book.

Tim says

I love Mozart's music and have read a bit about his life. And the book is mystery, so it sounded like fun. It wasn't.

My biggest issue with the writing was the portrayal of emotions. The author would tell us that someone was feeling a particular emotion and my response was often, "Really?". I didn't get it from way events were told. It just seemed out of the blue when the author was say "So-and-so felt rapturous." Just being told it doesn't work for me; I want it to shown. I want to have the picture drawn. The effect was to drive me away from the characters, because I couldn't see how they could be feeling that. What kind of people are these?!?! So I didn't care about anyone in the book.

Another problem was that people kept telling the protagonist, Nannerl, how dangerous her investigation was and that she shouldn't be doing it, and yet they kept giving her information to continue investigating. They'd say one thing and do another. Was annoying.

And I sure must have missed something about the ending. Nannerl and her ally seemed to decide who the culprit was by picking who they wanted to have done it, rather than by evidence. They didn't like what so-and-so was doing so let's say they did it. And I thought the climactic unmasking scene was just ludicrous. Nothing in the villain's personality up to that point had indicated they would react the way they did. The scene was just so unbelievable.

Deidre says

I'm going to be a bit harsh in the review, but I can't really help it.. I was too disappointed. I really wanted to give this more stars than three. Honestly, if I could be more accurate, I'd give it three and a half. But since I can't give it that extra half, I had to round down, and give it three.

Big reason for rounding down: The fluffy writing. Don't get me wrong, I enjoy fluff. I like it in my pillows, on my dog, and under my butt when I'm driving. But I don't enjoy excessive fluffy, sensational language in 230 pages of text. 50 pages, I can do, but four times that many wears on my psyche after a while.

Which means the first fifty pages were actually pretty enjoyable, because the style of writing set the pace well, and lent a sense of urgency to Nannerl's heading to Vienna and the mystery surrounding Mozart's death. The next nearly 200 felt very rushed and overdone, with the author trying to soak up every magical aspect of Mozart's music and saturate the pages with the saccharine goodness, while running through the timeline at supersonic speed, without pausing more than a moment to look around.

Which leads to my next qualm: Undercharacterization. The author was so focused on bringing up all the Masonic connections and underlying politics (which was admittedly pretty interesting), that he completely missed the character-building process. I can't really recall anything special or extraordinary about any of the characters, save that Nannerl and the Baron had way too much sappy chemistry.

Which was, I have to say, the most annoyiny plot addition. Really, the woman proclaims her love for the man after knowing him for all of about three days, and then acts like her heart is completely shattered when he betrays her. I realize that men like to think of women as delicate flowers unable to rein their emotions in, but that particular characterization by the author was rather obnoxious, and totally turned me off to her. I had a lot of trouble finishing the book after that, actually. Luckily, there wasn't much left, or else I wouldn't have bothered.

The rest of the characters were interesting enough, but there were so many random characters who felt very.. Overindulged, for lack of a better word. Like all the players were written in the style of one of Mozart's operas, with everyone in stage make-up and belting out lines so that even the cheap seats can hear. There was a random, unnecessary scene in a crypt, and overdramatic indulgences where Nannerl has apparently boundless intuition. People don't have to even say anything around her; they just look down at the floor a certain way, and she knows exactly what Masonic connection they are. Very over-the-top, and not easily connected to at all.

But besides the obnoxious female character flaws, the book had a lot of good things. Rees obviously knows his music, and brings out the beauty of being a musician, as well as the subtle nuances in Mozart's compositions really well. His passion is infectious, and as an ex-music major myself, I completely understood it. Very personal, and very joyful. I really enjoyed that touch to the story, and the main three stars is for that passion alone. It's beautiful.

However, this book felt so much like a fountain of potential, that never really fully delivered; I just felt so let-down at the end. Perhaps Rees will do another historical fiction with Beethoven, and take more time to allow the story to unfold (without the dramatic female love entanglements), because I could see that being worth reading.

Carol says

Mozart believed that he was poisoned weeks before he died. Upon hearing of his death, his sister Nannerl travels to his home in Vienna. Whatever Freemason directive he tried to promote may have been the cause of his death. ("The Magic Flute" plays a very important role and has a lot of secrets hidden within its score.) Nannerl stops at nothing to find his killer. Enjoying Mozart's music, discussions of 18th Century music performance and descriptions of daily life in Vienna of the time. (Historical mystery.)

Annette says

The early death of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart at the age of 35 is left with many speculations. The official record refers to a rash. But one of the speculations is poisoning, which this story explores.

1791 Salzburg, Austria, Nannerl, Mozart's sister, receives a letter informing her of her brother's death and his suspicion of possible poisoning. Upon arrival in Vienna, Nannerl learns about her brother's wish of equality and creation of a secret society of Freemasons to fulfill his wish. As she unravels the mystery, it points to his membership of a Masonic lodge which might have endangered him.

The story starts interesting and has a tone of a novel. However, once the mystery attitude takes over I lost the interest in reading it. It is a personal preference. I do not like the tone of mystery/thrillers. I am all about novels. So depending what genre you like to read, you may like this book.

Olga Kowalska (WielkiBuk) says

Matt Rees wykorzystuje historyczną zagadkę i wykreował nie lada kryminalną opowieść w oświeceniowym duchu, opierając się na jednej z najpopularniejszych legend, dotyczących śmierci kompozytora. Co więcej, zafascynowany jego muzyką, oparł nawet „Ostatni Arię Mozarta” na strukturze inspirowanej przez pasję sonaty a-moll, co sprawia, że cała opowieść przypomina pieczeniowicie spisaną kompozycję, nawiązując charakterem do utworu muzycznego. Tym samym, czytelnik otrzymuje historyczną opowieść przez pryzmat muzyki i polityki, naznaczoną śmiercią oraz sekretami, które sięgają głębiej, niż moglibyśmy przypuszczać. A to wszystko podane lekko, niezobowiązująco, opowiedziane ustami kobiety, o której talencie wiat zapomnia, kiedy tylko zeszła ze sceny. Siostry, w której rysach przez lata jeszcze postrzegano widmo brata – Marii Anny Mozart.

Patricia says

As I started to read the book, I was so excited about winning on Goodreads, I was hoping for a story of intrigue and suspense, but overall, that was not the case. Reading MOZART'S LAST ARIA was like listening to a piece of music whose notes did not venture beyond the lines of the musical staff. E-G-B-D-F over and over again. When the story yearned to go into a high G, the composer dragged it down an octave. When the story started going into a low D, the same thing occurred and I was left feeling flat and disappointed watching the dynamics of this piece fall apart. I was also left uninspired more often than not and at some point hoped that this aria would reach its curtain call.

When this composition ended, I was left wondering what the point of the story was---was it a family love story, a murder mystery, an equality for all story, or a romantic love story? As far as all the politics involved in the story---I got all that and understand why Mozart had to die and who all the players were, and why they all did what they did,--revolution, Masonic link, divine right of kings being questioned by Masonic equality etc, but it wasn't enough for me to feel that this story was fulfilling.

I think the main problem is that the main character Mozart's sister, Nannerl, is played as flat as a child barely learning to play an instrument. Until that child learns how to play each note properly, there is no way they

can bring expression to the music they play. While it is evident that the composer of this story is an avid fan of Mozart, as a reader I never felt myself pulled into caring about Mozart and his death as much as the composer of this work does. Mozart was a composer and a brilliant one at that, but as much as the writer mentioned one piece of his work as another, I never felt Mozart. He was a whole note---a circle with no center. The story surrounds him, but his heart is absent. The ending--Nannerl dying with the necklace given to her by the Baron left me feeling validated in not caring about Mozart's death--at the end she seemed to remember her loss of the Baron more than that of her brother whose death had originally taken her to Vienna. To top that off, the romance centering on the love between Nannerl and the Baron was really really lacking in romance and love--it felt like it was tossed in there for good measure and nothing more. Lack of development of the main characters, lack of development of important parts of the story left me feeling like I had just listened to the lyrics in Yanni's Aria* instead of "The Magic Flute" by Mozart, which is a very important part of this story.

* About Yanni's Aria: The music is loosely based on the French opera from the 19th century called 'Lakme' by Leo Delibes, but Yanni didn't use actual words in the song -- they are vocal expressions or sounds made with singing voices. I'm aware of some the sounds seem like words -- especially French words -- but they aren't... at least, probably not intentionally.

I really like the premise of this story and overall it is a decent read. Unfortunately, it falls flat in two big ways---flat characters and flat story development--too much fluff and not enough stuff. Perhaps a little less Mozart (relating everything to his music and piano playing) would have given this story more depth, more Nannerl, more romance, more love, and in the end, more Mozart as well.

Carey Combe says

I found this tremendously disappointing. I love Matt Rees' other books set in Palestine and this was a whole new departure. I think I may have enjoyed it a lot more had I had an appreciation of Mozart's later music and the philosophy behind it. But as it was, I found the characters wooden, unbelievable and full of clichés, while the story was pretty weak.

Aimee says

The story begins with Nannerl, Mozart's sister, receiving a letter telling her Mozart is dead. In the letter written by Mozart's wife Nannerl discovers that Mozart had been afraid that he would die soon from poisoning for the last few months. Nannerl goes to Vienna to pay her last respects and to uncover the mystery of what really happened to her brother.

I had such high hopes for this book, I adore Mozart and enjoy playing his pieces on the piano, but I did not enjoy this story at all. The main problem I had with it was that that it seemed to be based on more fiction than fact and I enjoy historical fiction that is more based on events that really happened with some fiction added to make it more interesting. From the research I did on my own I did not find any evidence to the things that are mentioned in the book.

I also had a problem with Nannerl. Her character was not believable to me as a solver of mysteries. I also found the love interest for her in the book to be totally unnecessary to the story. She was a married woman

with a family at home and was also deeply religious so I had a hard time believing she would throw all of that away for a fling with another man so easily.

The parts of the book that I did really enjoy were the times that Mozart's music was discussed. Rees does a great job of showing the genius of Mozart and the emotions felt by others while listening to his music. This book made me think about all of the beautiful music we lost by Mozart's death at so young an age.

Though I did not enjoy Mozart's Last Aria that much, others that enjoy mysteries or books with conspiracy theories might enjoy it more than I did. Unfortunately, it just was not the book for me.

John says

Although there's a brief frame supposedly narrated by Mozart's youngest son, Franz Xaver, this novel takes the form of a memoir written by Mozart's elder sister, Nannerl.

Having forsaken her own musical ambitions in order to care for her father, Leopold, and having been married off by him to a stuffy Salzburg bureaucrat whom she doesn't love, Nannerl has become estranged these past three years from her wildly talented younger brother, now married and living in Vienna, where the imperial court and the rich potential patrons are. One day she receives a letter from Wolfgang's wife, Constanze, telling her that Wolfgang is dead. Moreover, he believed in his final months that he was being poisoned, so his death may have been murder.

Nannerl travels to Vienna to try to establish what's actually happened. Her investigations eventually uncover a plot -- really, more than one plot -- involving Freemasonry (Mozart was a dedicated Mason), jealousy and imperial politics. Even when she successfully identifies the person responsible for her brother's death, there are further knots of deviousness to unravel.

She also, for the first time in her life, finds herself stirred by passionate love for something other than music. Despite her marriage, despite her religious convictions, she becomes drawn into a relationship with one of the most powerful men in the empire, and even toys with the notion of abandoning her husband and children for him. I found this love story to be a really quite moving counterpoint to the novel's main plot: Nannerl, who tasted the glories of the concert stage before being denied further musical fulfillment by her domineering father, is now given a taste of the other thing he denied her when he arranged her "safe" marriage back in stuffy Salzburg.

Much of the novel is based on historical fact (and there are useful notes at the back to tell us which bits are real and which invented). Mozart really was a Freemason, and his opera *The Magic Flute* really was intended as a two-and-a-half-hour commercial for the ideals of Freemasonry. There was indeed a crackdown on Freemasonry going on at the time, and there's been longstanding speculation that Mozart's death might have been related to this . . . assuming he actually *was* poisoned and wasn't simply being paranoid.

I found this a really quite absorbing read in a low-key way. I grew very fond of Nannerl -- she proves to be a most enjoyable companion -- and also of Constanze, a widow facing disaster because her husband's genius didn't extend to finances. Towards the end there's a charade (devised to coax a confession out of one of the guilty parties) that I'm not sure would have convinced anyone, but everything else was pleasingly restrained and plausible.

Which is not what you might be led to believe by one of the review quotes on the cover: "*The Da Vinci Code*, but this time with Masons and musical manuscripts." Someone at NPR must have been smoking a forbidden substance when they came out with that, because this novel, to its credit, bears no resemblance whatsoever to *The Da Vinci Code*.

Amanda says

Never has the structure of a novel felt more important than in Mozart's Last Aria. Matt Rees takes the essence of Mozart's music to weave a plot that showcases musical genius alongside a desperately paranoid and rather naive young man, who just wanted to introduce equality to all levels of society. Rees starts with a difficult opening - as Nannerl hears about her estranged brother's death and starts to learn that he believed he was being murdered through slow poisoning. The central portion of the book is a more thoughtful and reflective period, where Nannerl discovers more about her brother's place in Viennese society. The final, explosive portion of the novel is the triumphant climax of the music - as Matt Rees calls it: "a crime novel in A minor."

It's been a while since I've read a novel that is as cleverly put together as Mozart's Last Aria. I appreciated the rising tension, the slow build as Nannerl starts to put all the clues together.

This would be nothing, though, without the exploration of Mozart's relationships with those close to him - his wife, his children, the Brothers of his Masonic Lodge, and Nannerl herself. This helps the reader to discover the man behind the music.

I loved the parts of Mozart's Last Aria that dealt with the Masons and how Mozart explored the future of the Masonic Brotherhood through the forms of his operatic pieces, particularly The Magic Flute. The Masons could so easily become an over-used device - all dark cloaks and twirling moustaches, but Rees presents them sympathetically, especially the notion of equality.

The only part of the novel that I wasn't sure about were Nannerl's encounters with the Baron Swieten. It did help to explain why the Baron might have been so willing to lend his aid to Nannerl, but I found it to be a little too sensationalist.

This is an entertaining and swift read through the possibility of Mozart being murdered. The mystery of who might be behind the murder - if, in fact, it is such - will keep the reader guessing to the end, and the character of Nannerl is one to be cherished. But the real treasure of Mozart's Last Aria is the appreciation of the man's music, and allows him to take his place as a true virtuoso.

Michelle says

With nine years of participating in an award-winning wind ensemble under my belt, I have a huge affinity for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his works. I've visited Salzburg several times, toured the house in which he was born, and have watched the movie Amadeus more times than I probably should admit. When offered the chance to review a novel about Mozart's mysterious demise, there was no hesitation on my part; I felt I was meant to read this book. I mention this because my knowledge of and feelings for the maestro definitely influenced my thoughts on the book in a way that most readers probably will not experience. Consider this a

disclaimer of sorts.

Mozart's Last Aria is an intriguing but bland conspiracy theory about Mozart's true cause of death. Told after Mozart's death from his sister's point of view, the reader is led on a goose chase around Vienna as Nannerl attempts to uncover the truth behind certain riddles and mysterious comments her brother made during his last few months on Earth. Unfortunately, its focus on Mozart's Masonic membership made this more reminiscent of current conspiracy theory novels à la Dan Brown. Therein lies the problem.

Mozart's Last Aria hopes to capitalize on Mozart's undeniable genius and the fact that his untimely death prevented even more of his amazing work from being composed and shared with the world. In fact, this exact sentiment is mentioned on almost every page, as one character after another laments on the world's loss after his death. The reader is reminded of this loss incessantly to the point where it becomes slightly nauseating and increasingly numbing. While this loss is meant to increase the reader's sense of urgency to uncover the truth, its constant repetition undermines the suspense.

One cannot read Mozart's Last Aria without noting distinct comparisons to other modern popular suspense novels. It has the Freemasons and "dangerous", life-changing secrets that could change Austria forever, while the reader is left to understand that Mozart was at the heart of this dangerous secret. Unfortunately, the only clue to Mozart's supposedly passionate support of this secret is his music. Mr. Rees attempts to use Mozart's music alone, and not his behavior or own words, to support his theory. It is a weak connection at best, especially because Mozart was a prolific writer, as was his entire family. If he truly supported such sentiments, one would expect more proof in the form of actions or his written words. Music, which is highly subjective, as the only clue is not enough to provide conclusive evidence of Mozart's involvement in these secrets, making this entire storyline very weak.

Mozart's Last Aria is one that definitely must be read with full access to all of his works on hand, as Nannerl goes into great depth of each piece mentioned. Without a deep understanding of music, a reader will easily get bogged down into these very technical passages. Added to that, the flimsy proof behind the big secret and the fact that no one but Nannerl is able to uncover the mystery leaves a reader feeling deeply incredulous over the entire premise. While it does offer a relatively brief alternative to the more depressing Mozart biographies, there is much that is lacking that prevents a reader from being able to become truly immersed in the story. An inability to do this makes this one suspense novel that lacks in suspense.

Kristen says

There's a blurb on the back, surprisingly, from NPR: "*The Da Vinci Code*, but this time with Masons and musical manuscripts." Pretty sure they read a different book than I did.

I wanted very much to like this, honestly. But some of the plot points weren't very believable, the choice of words in conversations (If you were talking about your brother, would you always use his name, or occasionally refer to him as, well, "him"? Particularly in a conversation where his name is mentioned a number of times in a few sentences), and, frankly, outside of learning a few new things about Mozart's music, I don't feel there was any "pulling back the curtain... on powerful secrets." (From the back cover of the paperback version.) In fact, I learned more about Vienna than I did the Masons. Which I don't mind learning about different places, but when the book is touted for a specific aspect, perhaps there should be more information instead of just providing what's generally known as common information. I definitely feel I should've chosen differently for the 100th book of the year.

