

Allegro

Ariel Dorfman

Other Press (Mar 4, 2025)

Softcover \$17.99 (272pp)

978-1-63542-448-5

In Ariel Dorfman's luminous novel *Allegro*, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is drawn into a perturbing medical mystery.

In 1765, nine-year-old Mozart is thrilled to have his first symphony conducted in London by Maestro Johann Christian Bach. After the concert, Jack, a man with a "haunted aura," approaches the prodigy and insists that he needs help restoring his family's reputation. Jack's father was a once-esteemed oculist who performed cataract surgery on the maestro's father, Johann Sebastian Bach. Despite initial "miraculous" results, a subsequent operation resulted in the elder Bach's blindness and death. Jack implores Mozart to tell the maestro that the operation was not malpractice, hoping that Mozart's unspoiled genius will "assuage" Bach's "hardest of hearts." But despite Mozart's intervention, Maestro Bach refuses to change his opinion of the doctor.

Thirteen years later, Mozart is again involved in the quandary of what caused Bach's tragic blindness; the truth may be found in a letter sent by the elder Bach to George Frideric Handel. Now grieving the death of his mother, Mozart struggles to pay gambling debts and maintain his earlier, precocious fame.

The sustained elements of speculative mystery focus on Bach's revelations in the Handel letter and whether Jack's father was a skilled healer or ruinous "charlatan." The entrancing, sumptuous eighteenth-century European backdrop is contrasted with the undertow of political revolution developing in France and the US. As the main narrator, Mozart is an affecting intermediary whose youthful brilliance is later shadowed by financial realities and artistic frustrations. And like an expressive background score, the book's heady passion for music heightens the plot while enlivening the joys and sorrows of each character.

Beyond its compelling intrigue of intertwined creative lives, the historical novel *Allegro* is about how Mozart yearned for divine inspiration while confronting his own vulnerable mortality.

MEG NOLA (March / April 2025)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book to have their book reviewed by a professional reviewer. No fee was paid by the publisher for this review. Foreword Reviews only recommends books that we love. Foreword Magazine, Inc. is disclosing this in accordance with the Federal Trade Commission's 16 CFR, Part 255.