



Mozart's Starling

Lyanda Lynn Haupt

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On May 27th, 1784, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart met a flirtatious little starling in a Viennese shop who sang an improvised version of the theme from his Piano Concerto no. 17 in G major. Sensing a kindred spirit in the plucky young bird, Mozart bought him and took him home to be a family pet. For three years, the starling lived with Mozart, influencing his work and serving as his companion, distraction, consolation, and muse.

Two centuries later, starlings are reviled by even the most compassionate conservationists. A nonnative, invasive species, they invade sensitive habitats, outcompete local birds for nest sites and food, and decimate crops. A seasoned birder and naturalist, Lyanda Lynn Haupt is well versed in the difficult and often strained relationships these birds have with other species and the environment. But after rescuing a baby starling of her own, Haupt found herself enchanted by the same intelligence and playful spirit that had so charmed her favorite composer.

In *Mozart's Starling*, Haupt explores the unlikely and remarkable bond between one of history's most cherished composers and one of earth's most common birds. The intertwined stories of Mozart's beloved pet and Haupt's own starling provide an unexpected window into human-animal friendships, music, the secret world of starlings, and the nature of creative inspiration. A blend of natural history, biography, and memoir, *Mozart's Starling* is a tour de force that awakens a surprising new awareness of our place in the world.

Mozart's Starling Details

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From Reader Review Mozart's Starling for online ebook

JQAdams says

Someone I haven't seen or even much corresponded with for years contacted me saying that I'd probably like this book. It is not hard to sell me on Mozartiana, and the specificity of that recommendation also seemed promising.

The book turned out to be another Unexpected Memoir, less about Mozart than about the author's own efforts to keep a starling as a house pet, with some other asides into miscellaneous starling lore (e.g., how starlings' use of song informs linguists' views of language, or the efforts to eradicate European starlings in the Americas as an invasive species), ecological woo-woo, and other bits that were less likely to appeal to me than the Mozart material. Even the Mozart-adjacent chapters were as much memoir as anything else, narrating Haupt's visit to Mozart sites in Vienna and often being something of a greatest-hits version of Mozart -- you're going to get to hear about the *Requiem* when she goes to Mozart's gravestone, for instance. And Haupt wasn't able to resolve the question of when or how Mozart's pet learned to sing a variant of a theme from one of his piano concertos, even though she presents a conjectured/fictionalized account in the introduction. But Haupt does defend Ein musikalischer Spaß (K. 522), which will win anyone an extra star in my ratings even if I don't at all believe most of her extensive theorizing about how it celebrates and responds to starlings' vocalizations.

Melanie says

This is a book to savor. And it has so much to savor!

Carmen, Haupt's clever, charming, sociable starling, is the star of the book. Her behavior is so delightful, and her ability to mimic so precise, that Haupt is not at all surprised that Mozart loved his own pet starling - which may have sung a snippet of his own concerto to him in the store where he bought it. Details of Mozart's life and music, information and observations of usually-reviled starlings, poetry, linguistics, and the nature of music itself are blended with the daily adventure of living with Carmen.

Read slowly, preferably with some Mozart playing in the background, and an amiable avian at your side.

Joseph Adelizzi, Jr. says

I know nothing about music, and my wife hates birds, so Lyanda Lynn Haupt's book **Mozart's Starling** was the perfect book for me to read.

Hmm. Let me start over.

I have had a lifelong curiosity about animal behavior, positive there was so much more there than we were willing to admit, and I have been fascinated by what makes genius, how one individual could so far outpace the rest of humanity and then open our eyes or our ears or our minds in such ways as to give new dimension to our entire species. So Lyanda Lynn Haupt's book **Mozart's Starling** was the perfect book for me to read.

Writing a book which gives us a literal bird's eye view of a musical genius would be fascinating in its own right, but that Haupt goes above and beyond, actually raising a starling of her own, adds so many dimensions to the tale, not to mention a fuller appreciation for Mozart the man and Carmen the Starling. While there are a couple sections which delve into the intricacies of music, music theory, and music appreciation which were sadly wasted on me, there are so many other sections which were insightful, moving and humorous. I also admire Haupt's patience and kind heart, two prerequisites, I'm sure, for raising a starling in your home. *It's not a party until you start passing out the poop shirts!* There's an interesting internal struggle here too for Haupt - the approach-avoidance conflict which comes with becoming intimately involved with an individual of a maligned "invasive" species.

Reading **Mozart's Starling** I felt keenly aware of a resonating synthesis highlighted so nicely by Haupt. Beyond the shared music and affection between Mozart and his Star, beyond the shared vocabulary and affection between Haupt and her Carmen, there is a linkedness of life, of nature, of art, of love made evident first in Haupt's discussion of starling murmurations and then captured so eloquently in her "wild summons" in the closing paragraph of chapter nine. "The gift offered is different for each but all are equal in grandeur."

So whether you are a musical clod who knows no love for birds or a virtuoso who is obsessed with ornithology, have I got a book for you!

Kate Forsyth says

I picked up this lovely little hardback at Powell's Books in Portland, Oregon, which claims to be the biggest bookstore in the world. It certainly seemed so to me! I wandered in it for hours and bought far too many books.

Lyanda Lynn Haupt is a naturalist and author with several books about birds under her belt. *Mozart's Starling* – her fifth – was inspired by a beguiling anecdote about the 18th century composer, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

The story goes that, in 1784, Mozart encountered a playful little starling in a Viennese shop who sang the theme from his Piano Concerto no. 17 in G major. Charmed, he brought the bird home to be his pet. For the next few years, the starling lived with the Mozart family, inspiring and amusing the famous composer.

Apparently, nowadays, starlings are seen as a nuisance. They gather in great squawking flocks, decimate crops, and fight other birds for food and nesting sites. I didn't know this when I bought the book. All I knew is that starlings sometimes fly together in vast swirling clouds of motion that have been given the glorious name, a 'murmuration'. I have always wanted to see a murmuration of starlings (I've watched a few on Youtube and they are just astonishing), and I love Mozart's music, and so I bought the book to discover more.

A combination of natural history, biography and memoir (one of my favourite genres to read), *Mozart's Starling* not only examines the story of Mozart and his pet bird, but also Lyandra Lynn Haupt's own experiment with raising a baby starling. Cheeky, charming and clever, Carmen sings and whistles her way into Lyandra's heart, and, I must say, into mine.

Jen says

Main take-aways from this book for me are 1) starlings are not the devil. Yes invasive, but we can alter our landscapes to discourage their roosting and lessen their numbers in humane ways. 2) Pigeons, despite being introduced to America via settlers as food sources, are not considered invasive. Weird, cuz I see WAAAY more of them than any other bird I feel. 3) Starlings are close to endangered in Europe. Go figure. Maybe we should get endangered species and introduce them into not their natural habitat and they'll thrive? Reverse psychology!

This was a great little book, which deftly wove Mozart, his life, music and starling, the history and current lives of starlings in both America and Europe and the author with her starling Carmen. The author went a bit too philosophical and "we are the world with animals" for me at times, but it wasn't a huge annoyance, just made this a great book rather than a fantastic, re-read book. Which isn't knocking the book at all, just didn't work for me as well as for others maybe. 4 solid stars. I would recommend it if you are a nature or Mozart lover.

My thanks to NetGalley and Little, Brown and Company for an eARC copy of this book to read and review.

Nancy says

"A blend of natural history, biography, and memoir, Mozart's Starling is a tour de force that awakens a surprising new awareness of our place in the world." from the publisher

First I was charmed, then delighted; then I felt educated, and finally, elevated. In beautiful language and uplifting insight, Mozart's Starling is my most unexpected find of the year. I loved every page.

The book is a wonderful blend of subjects. A nature study of the starling and its ability to mimic; a memoir of life with Carmen, the starling; a consideration of the creative life and person of composer Mozart, the beauty of his music and the depth of his personal philosophy; the interrelation of all living things--Haupt takes us on a continually deeper look into the human experience.

Haupt, a naturalist and birder, was inspired to verify the story of Mozart's pet starling which reportedly sang a line of his Piano Concerto no. 17 in G major. There were so many questions. How did the starling learn the music? What was the bird's role in Mozart's personal and creative life?

In America, starlings are held in disdain. What good could be associated with this bird? Haupt questioned.

So Haupt arranged to adopt a baby starling to learn more about the species and their rare ability to mimic. Carmen is a wonderful character and helps us understand why pet birds were so popular in 18th c Europe.

We follow the author to Europe, into Mozart's home, searching for his final resting place. She upends many myths about the composer, such as the pauper's grave. Her portrait of the composer is sensitive and insightful.

This is a beautiful, uplifting book. I heartily recommend it.

Kevin Parsons says

Having just read Bernd Heinrich's wonderful book "One Bird at a Time" which contained a chapter about a Starling who befriended the author (actually flew onto his hand and allowed himself to be taken home) and spent a winter at his house (and which also contained an antidote about Mozart's pet Starling), I was excited when my lovely librarian wife brought home an ARC of this book this weekend from the ALA conference in Atlanta.

It turned out to be a wonderful book about Mozart, Starlings, music, language (both avian and human) and the author's pet Starling named Carmen. Like all good books it was both an enjoyable and entertaining read as well as a thoughtful discussion on a wide variety of topics. The premise is that the author knew of the Mozart story and wished to write about it and felt that it would be beneficial if she could also have a Starling as a pet. If you enjoy birds, music, Mozart or history you will find something to love in this well written book. This book releases in May of 2017 and I highly recommend you get a copy and read it.

I went back and read the short chapter in Heinrich's book and discovered that the experiences that he had with his Starling in some ways matched those of Haupt's. It will make me more appreciative of Starlings when I see them in the wild - since like many of us I typically see these birds as more of a nuisance than your typical songbird. I am also going to get copies of Haupt's other books in the near future. I had heard of several of them before and they were on my radar, but after reading this book I will definitely add them to my reading list.

Todd says

I received my copy of Mozart's Starling through a goodreads giveaway. This review was originally posted on my blog.

In *Mozart's Starling*, Lyanda Lynn Haupt has written a fascinating book that teaches about starlings, a bird often hated in North America. We learn their history and how they were introduced to North America, and we learn about their behaviors, skills, and habits. But this book is also a story about Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, about his life, family, and inspiration, about his music and perhaps one of his muses. And along the way we learn a little about the parts of Austria where Mozart lived. We see his version of Austria through his eyes and then we see the modern day Austria through the author's eyes as she visits various locations associated with Mozart.

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Reading it felt like an extended conversation with the author. She has been a life-long lover of birds, so she knows that starlings are an introduced species to North America, and one that is so widespread and adaptable it can cause problems as only introduced species can. But she also recognizes the beauty of the bird, how its black feathers shimmer in color when the sun lights them up, and the amazing patterns in their murmurations as they flock through the sky.

One day when she was watching a group of starlings out the window she remembered hearing that Mozart had kept a pet starling. And that thought eventually led to this book, an exploration of starlings and a search for the true history of Mozart's pet starling and what part it might have played in his life. And to bring the story to life the author decided to adopt her own starling, Carmen, raising her from a chick and watching her grow, learning what behaviors Mozart might have witnessed, and what might have drawn him to purchase

his starling in a Vienna pet shop. In the end her starling became a loved member of her family, as most pets do. It makes sense then, that Mozart would have become quite attached to his own starling, enough to hold a funeral for and write a musical piece in memory of, his starling when it passed on.

Prior to reading this book I had no idea starlings were capable of mimicry, much like mockingbirds and parrots. In fact, the author says starlings rival parrots in their ability to imitate other birds, musical instruments, and any other sound, even the human voice. She gave many examples of sounds Carmen learned on her own, from the house cat, to a kitchen coffee grinder, to words and phrases spoken in her presence. She described how Carmen would quietly repeat sounds over and over again, seemingly frustrated by any mistakes she made, until she finally got them right, at which point she would loudly and repeatedly sing the sounds, over and over again, perhaps proud of her accomplishment.

Mozart's Starling is an entertaining and charming book, but it is also well researched, containing a sizable bibliography for those interested in learning more. I love non-fiction books that teach and entertain, and this one does a great job of both. Highly recommended!

Sylvia Walker says

This is an enchanting book, about Mozart, music, language, birds, ecology, and philosophy, too, and the wondrous Intelligence all of our intelligences are a part of. The author's starling, Carmen, is a charming bird, loved by the author and her family, as Mozart loved his starling, whose name is not known. Beautifully written.

Mia says

The first half of this book was a solid 4 stars. While the story revolves around Carmen (the writer's pet starling) instead of Mozart's Starling, it was still a fascinatingly written exploration of starling ability and the way they fit into our historical and current social landscape. Haupt contrasts the disdain felt towards starlings today with the more positive attitude towards these birds in Mozart's time. She makes well researched arguments about starling's abilities and the possible influence starlings might have had on Mozart's life, and supports any conclusions or extensions to existing theories with anecdotes and observations gained through living with Carmen. The writing was engaging and fast paced- Haupt makes the research she uses approachable and understandable to readers, even if they don't have an enthusiasm for birds or for classical music.

Unfortunately, the second half of the book dropped in quality for me. I found myself struggling to get through chapters as her writing became less engaging, as Haupt spends more time philosophizing about the inter-connectivity of the universe than talking about anything related to Carmen or Mozart. While her conclusions and suggested theories in the first half were supported by research, the assertions made in the second half pull less on research and more on her own experiences meditating in the woods or visiting various spots that Mozart lived in (and discussing how her expectations were or, more often it seemed, weren't met). There were times where I had to stop and ask myself "what is happening here?," as the second half has a much looser structure than the first half. It seems like the writer got lost in her own book, and had forgotten where she was headed. Entire chapters could have been removed without significantly detracting from the main narrative.

That being said, I still did enjoy this book (especially the first half), and think that the second half would have been less disappointing to me if I hadn't had such high expectations based on the hype this book was getting. The topic is interesting, and I feel like I learned a great deal about both Mozart and starlings.

3 out of 5 stars

Pouting Always says

This was a really unique book, I've never read anything like it. The author raises a starling chick and writes about the experience while also interweaving in the story of Mozart and his starling as well as talking about people's hate for the starling. I really enjoyed the pictures of the starling because animal pictures are always a big hit with me and it was fun reading the experience of raising the chick. Also I didn't know about Mozart and his starling so that was cool. The book also made some good points about the ubiquitous hate against starlings and about conservation and invasive species. I don't see what the big deal is having the starlings here already, they're already here leave them alone. We literally go everywhere and run out the wild life, wouldn't that make us invasive species too? I don't see anyone bitching about how humans should have stayed in Africa. Things happen, if they're prolific here it's because they can survive well I don't see how we have the right to be annoyed about it. Nature isn't static it changes over time why is everyone so hell bent on preserving every animal and plant that can't survive on its own. I agree if it's our fault from like hunting or introducing new predators to the environment but you know still. Anyway the book was nice but I don't think the individual aspects came together as well as they were supposed to. It felt like there were three separate things going on through out the book and they didn't really do anything for each other. It felt a little scattered and I don't think putting in people from history we all know's opinions is a good way to make your point but that's just me.

Lauren says

I'm not sure why I entered this giveaway. I have little interest in Mozart. I have about an equal interest in birds. And yet, that is precisely how I know that Lyanda Lynn Haupt has written a beautiful and masterful piece of nonfiction. Without even an ounce of interest in the subject matter, I fell in love with every word of this book. It's fascinating, it's mindful, it's serene, it's funny, and it's absolutely stunning. I should have finished it in about three days. I, instead, took a week and a half simply because I didn't want to say goodbye to Lyanda, Carmen, or the stories told of Mozart and his legacy.

I've gotten into the habit of donating books or giving them away to friends once I finish them so my house isn't absolute chaos with the amount of books I own. This one, however...I might just hold on to this one. It's so wonderfully comforting and, honestly, possibly the best book I've read all year. I cannot recommend it enough.

Nancy Schoellkopf says

True confession: I'm not a big fan of nonfiction. It's not that I have anything against authors who make valiant efforts to record reality, but every minute I spend reading nonfiction is time that could be spent reading a novel. I love novels.

So when I bought Mozart's Starling, somehow I'd gotten the idea it was a work of historical fiction. I mean, it's about Mozart's pet bird, right? But whoa, happy accident!—because I love love love this book. Part memoir, part nature essay, part travelogue—all feeding brilliant speculation based on solid historical research about the role of a domesticated starling in the life and work of Wolfgang Amadeus: it all adds up to a delightful read.

A bit of background: I knew starlings were not native to North America, but I didn't realize they'd been labeled invasive pests. Poor European Starlings: they never asked to be brought here (fascinating story Haupt relates about their arrival in New York's Central Park); they can't help it they turned out to be successful breeders, the winners of the natural selection sweepstakes. And what has it earned them but the hatred and disdain of ornithologists, birders and park rangers, none of whom would pass up a chance to wipe out their nests before the eggs can hatch. Poor starlings.

Yet Author Lyanda Lynn Haupt, eco-philosopher, naturalist and professed starling hater, had an epiphany one day while listening to a Mozart symphony on Pandora when she happened to spot what she called “a plague” of starlings out on the lawn. Remembering the story of Mozart's pet, the notion struck her that she must write about the composer's bird. Why, she wondered, would a genius like Mozart want to hang with a despised starling?

She began her research as a good academic does, seeking out books and journals and primary sources. But soon she realized that she needed something more: to fully comprehend Mozart's affinity for his bird, she must have her own pet starling. Thus did Haupt, her husband and daughter welcome the starling chick Carmen into their lives. And so the magic began. Haupt and her family fell in love with Carmen--and so did I.

Mozart's Starling is filled with anecdotes of raising and living with the charming though messy Carmen. Indeed Haupt's experiences with her own domesticated bird informs her reading of Mozart's letters and journal entries mentioning his bird, whom may have been called “Star.” Did Mozart compose with Star on his shoulder, just as Haupt typed this manuscript with Carmen perched on hers? Did Mozart create his anomalous, at times discordant piece, *Ein musikalischer Spass*, as a tribute to and a mimicry of starling song? A few musicologists have ventured the theory, and Carmen's enthusiasm for the “Musical Joke” only strengthens the argument.

Haupt also takes time to offer poetic musings on such subjects as human/animal relations, linguistics, Darwinism, the nature of time. Her observations make for a lovely, contemplative book, highly recommended for birders, musicians, environmentalists and even those of you who'd prefer to hunker down with a novel. This is a good one! Read it!

Bonus! If you're not sure you know what a starling is, check this out! A murmuration of starlings: beautiful and amazing.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eakKf...>

Mark says

"In conservation circles, starlings are easily the most despised birds in all of North America, and with good reason."

"Common, invasive, aggressive, reviled. Starlings don't just lie beneath our notice, the sentiment runs, they are actually undeserving of our notice."

I have been birding nearly two years and I did not realize that starlings held this much disdain. Well, I just received an extensive education on starlings, as the author uses these birds as informative and entertaining bookends: In 1784, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, heard a starling singing a fragment of one his compositions, as he passed a pet store. He purchased the bird and kept it as a close companion for the next three years. When Haupt decided to write about Mozart and "Carmen", his beloved starling, she picked up a baby starling herself, raised it and studied it, while working on this book.

This is an ambitious project, as we get plenty of Mozart history, nuggets about conservation and nature and a complete showcase of the reviled starling.

She is a smart and engaging writer, with a good sense of humor. She has also done her homework. A joy to read.

-A Starling Murmuration

Julie Stielstra says

If you love birds and/or music (especially Mozart), this will likely charm you. If you don't particularly care about either, it may not. As an enthusiastic birdwatcher and bird feeder, I did enjoy Haupt's tale of her hand-caught and raised starling, Carmen. Starlings are smart, personable, funny, vocal and quite delightful one-on-one, rather like the author, I think - Haupt and Carmen are both good company. Haupt is very good at covering acres of biological and ornithological research in a bright, accessible way. She explains vividly the history of the starling's misguided introduction into North America and the ensuing ecological disaster they have become, and while she loves HER starling, she very much wishes there were no others around. Oddly, she does not touch on the fact that the starling population in Europe has crashed to the extent that they are now listed as endangered there, and that they are actually starting to decline here as well (I haven't had a starling at my backyard feeders in several years; I used to host flocks of dozens at a time).

The weakness of the book is that while she starts from the sweet story of Mozart's pet starling (purchased because it allegedly could sing phrases from one of his concerti...which had not been published yet), her attempts to carpenter Mozart and his music together with starlings and their biology and behaviors is a bit rickety. The book meanders, changes focus, skips ahead and back... it might have worked better as two separate long magazine articles: one on starlings, and one focused exclusively on the man-and-his-bird story. Each story is fun and enjoyable; trying to thread them into a coherent whole, less so.
