

At the age of three, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart crawled up to the piano bench and began picking out tunes. At four, he could play minuets and scherzos, and at five, he composed his first pieces. The merry chubby-cheeked boy, born in Salzburg, Austria, in 1756, was a child prodigy.



Wolfgang's father, Leopold, recognized and encouraged his son's genius. A composer and violinist at the Prince-Archbishop's palace in Salzburg, Leopold wrote a treatise on violin playing that is still studied today. But his modest career took a back seat to the full-time job of managing his son. He was to become his son's closest advisor and friend.

Mozart was six in 1762 when his father took him and his older sister, Nannerl, to nearby Munich and Vienna. Leopold hoped to improve family finances by having his brilliant children play for nobility. People marvelled at how well the boy improvised on any theme given to him and played the clavier with a cloth covering his hands. Word soon spread about Mozart, and Leopold began making plans for another tour.

The Grand Tour in 1763 took Mozart away from Salzburg (and his mother) for three and a half years. The family travelled all over Europe, playing for courts in Germany, Paris, Belgium, Holland and finally London, England, where they lived for fifteen months. Here, Mozart met Johann Christian Bach (one of J.S. Bach's sons), whose music influenced Mozart's piano concertos. Nannerl wrote that when Wolfgang and J.C. Bach improvised a sonata together, they sounded like "one person." Mozart composed music during the Grand Tour, writing his first symphony at the age of nine.

Mozart was a fine linguist as well as musician, learning English, German, Italian and French on his travels. His letters home were full of wit and humor. In London, he once broke off from a harpsichord recital to chase after a kitten that had slipped into the room. Wolfgang was also a sensitive boy who needed constant reassurances that he was loved. He contracted some severe illnesses during his travels that may have affected his health in later years.

When Mozart was thirteen, he composed his first opera, *The Fake Simpleton*, for Emperor Joseph II of Vienna. In 1769, he and his father looked for a job in Italy. But although Mozart was knighted by the Pope and elected to the prestigious Academy of Bologna, no one wanted to hire a musician who was still a teenager. Wolfgang spent the rest of his teen years in Salzburg, making occasional excursions within Germany and Austria. During this time he wrote two more operas and the nine-movement "Haffner Serenade."

Mozart set off for Paris in 1778, but got distracted in Mannheim when he met Aloysia Weber, an eighteen-year-old opera singer, with whom he fell in love. When Mozart wrote to Leopold of his plans to take the entire Weber family to Italy so that Aloysia

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (Cont.)

ould make her name as a singer, papa Leopold put his foot down. In letters that were sharply critical, he reminded his son that he had to think of his financial future. He disapproved of the Webers.

Discouraged and love-sick, Mozart arrived in Paris. He was offered the position of organist at the court of Versailles, but turned it down. It may have been that he was still pining after Aloysia. After his mother died in Paris, Mozart returned to Salzburg, visiting the Weber family in Munich on the way back. But Aloysia, who had become a well-known singer thanks in part to Mozart's training of her, was not interested in him.

The new Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg, Hieronymus Colloredo, gave Mozart the part-time position of court organist. Mozart spent 1779 to 1781 in Salzburg, composing such masterpieces such as the Coronation Mass in C Major and the Sinfonia Concertante for violin, viola and orchestra. His opera *Idomeneo, King of Crete* was performed in Munich. Mozart felt trapped in the Archbishop's service, partly because there were no good opera houses in Salzburg. Opera was his first love.

In 1781, Mozart was twenty-five and seeking independence. He wrote angrily to his father that he was badly paid, ordered around like a servant and prevented by the Archbishop from taking better-paying concerts and engagements. On a visit to Vienna with the Archbishop, he refused to carry a parcel back to Salzburg. Bitter words were exchanged, and Mozart left the Archbishop's service.

Mozart had finally finagled his own leavetaking, but his action caused a serious rift in his relationship with Leopold. While upset by his father's disapproval, Mozart insisted he could make his living as a freelance composer and performer in Vienna.

At first he was proved right. Emperor Joseph II of Vienna was an enlightened ruler who encouraged education. The people of Vienna were fun-loving, and music was played night and day in the gardens and concert halls. Mozart began his career by giving piano lessons, concerts in the afternoon and selling compositions. Following the fashion in Turkish entertainment, he wrote his first major opera, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*. In 1782, he married Constanze Weber, Aloysia's younger sister.

The first years in Vienna were highly successful ones for Mozart. After the publication of three piano concertos in 1782, the Mozarts were able to move to better lodgings. They threw wonderful parties and socialized with nobility. In 1784, Wolfgang was in great demand, giving nineteen concerts in the month of March alone. The Mozarts' joy was complete when Constanze had their first child, Raimund, in 1783. (The Mozarts were to have six children, only two of whom survived infancy.)

Mozart probably met the famous composer Josef Haydn in Vienna in 1781. In 1785, he dedicated six string quartets to him. When Leopold Mozart visited Vienna in 1785, Haydn told him, "Before God and as an honest man, I tell you that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by name."

Mozart began to explore music in a way he had never done before. In 1785, he began work on his most famous opera, *The Marriage of Figaro*, which is notable for its depth of characterization and dramatic feeling. On opening night, every number was

encored. *Figaro* was also produced in Prague, Czechoslovakia, with even greater success. Mozart wrote delightedly that he couldn't go anywhere in Prague without hearing one of the arias sung or played. "Everyone whistles *Figaro*!" he exclaimed.

Figaro is the story of a young valet, Figaro, and his bride-to-be, Susanna, who outwit their master, the Count, who has designs on Susanna. *Figaro* was written in the era of the French Revolution, and the original play was considered controversial because the servants triumphed over the masters. Mozart was drawn to the script by its ideas of liberty and equality. He belonged to the Freemasons, a society that upheld similar ideals.

In May 1787, Mozart received the sad news that his father had died, and, at the same time, he began to run into financial difficulties. The family had always lived luxuriously, partly because Mozart needed to impress the aristocracy for whom he worked. Although he had been made court composer to the Emperor, the position did not pay well. His next opera, *Don Giovanni*, was not well received in Vienna, because it was musically advanced for its time. Despite his financial worries, Mozart wrote the beautiful chamber serenade "A Little Night Music." He wrote his last three symphonies, the E-flat, G minor, and The Jupiter Symphony in C Major, in 1788.

The Turkish war had begun in 1788, and people were less eager to go to concerts and spend money freely. In 1789, Constanze was ill and her visits to the spa to recover her health were costly. Mozart, who was working on another opera, *Così fan tutte*, wrote pleading letters to a fellow Freemason, Michael Puchberg, asking for loans.

In the last year of his life, his actor friend Emanuel Schikaneder approached him to write music for his libretto *The Magic Flute*. The opera was based partly on the secret rituals of Freemasonry. Its fairy-tale-like characters include the amusing Papageno the bird catcher.

One day, a stranger dressed in a black cloak arrived at the Mozart's door, asking Mozart to write a death mass. (Later, the mysterious stranger was identified as a Count Walsegg, who liked to pass off other people's works as his own.) Mozart, depressed and ill, began to believe that he was writing the Requiem for his own death. He remarked to Constanze that he believed he was being poisoned.

Mozart had not completed his famous Requiem when he took to his bed with his last illness. His pupil Sussmayr finished it for him. He died in December 1791, at the age of thirty-five. He was one of the most prolific composers of all time, writing 373 orchestral works, 227 songs and ninety-eight sacred and dramatic pieces. Moreover, his genius was equally at home in chamber music, church music, symphonies, operas and other forms.

More on Mozart's Music

Koechel Listings

Any time you look at a score of Mozart's music, you will notice that it is numbered with a K in front. For example, the serenade "A Little Night Music" is numbered K525. These numbers are known as "Koechel" numbers after Ludwig von Koechel, an Austrian botanist and mineralogist who loved Mozart's music. Koechel catalogued Mozart's music chronologically and by theme

A Vatican Secret

When Mozart visited Rome, Italy, as a teenager, he listened to the Sistine Chapel choir sing Allegri's "Miserere" during Holy Week. This music was supposed to be the private property of the Vatican, and anyone daring to copy it would be excommunicated. After hearing it just once, Mozart wrote down the entire piece from memory. But he was not excommunicated; when the Pope heard of Mozart's genius, he was delighted!

Mozart and the Clarinet

The clarinet was not used much in the orchestra until we reach the time of Mozart. Mozart loved the instrument, and wrote many beautiful pieces for his friend, clarinetist Anton Stadler, including "The Clarinet Quintet" and "The Clarinet Concerto."

Was Mozart Murdered?

There are many theories surrounding the untimely death of Mozart. Some believe he was murdered because he revealed secret rituals of the Freemasons in his opera *The Magic Flute*. Others believe that the husband of one of his pupils killed him or that his fellow composer and rival Antonio Salieri drove him to his death. Plays and movies like *Amadeus* have done much to promote these myths, and Mozart's own statement that he was being poisoned has increased speculation. In fact, it is more likely he died of some sort of rheumatic fever, which he initially contracted during his childhood travels.