

# Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

## I INTRODUCTION



### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, an 18th-century Austrian classical composer and one of the most famous musicians of all time, came from a family of musicians that included his father and sister. Mozart wrote masses, oratorios, symphonies, concertos, sonatas, and more, but he is best known for his operas. These include *Don Giovanni* (1787), *Così fan tutte* (All Women Do So, 1790), and *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute, 1791).

CORBIS-BETTMANN

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791), Austrian composer, who is considered one of the most brilliant and versatile composers ever. He worked in all musical genres of his era, wrote inspired works in each genre, and produced an extraordinary number of compositions, especially considering his short life. By the time Mozart died at age 35, he had completed 41 symphonies, 27 piano concertos, 23 string quartets, 17 piano sonatas, 7 major operas, and numerous works for voice and other instruments.

As a child prodigy Mozart toured Europe and became widely regarded as a miracle of nature because of his musical gifts as a performer of piano, harpsichord, and organ and as a composer of instrumental and vocal music. His mature masterpieces begin with the Piano Concerto No. 9 in E-flat Major (*Jeunehomme*, 1777), one of about a dozen outstanding concertos he wrote for piano. Also successful as an opera composer, Mozart wrote three exceptional Italian operas to texts by Italian librettist Lorenzo da Ponte: *Le Nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*, 1786), *Don Giovanni* (1787), and *Così fan tutte* (All Women Do So, 1790). They were followed in 1791 by his supreme German opera, *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*).



### Scene From Don Giovanni

The Glyndebourne Opera staged this production of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in 1993. Mozart deepened this comic opera, written in 1787, with many dark and sinister moments. Although it is a popular favorite today, the complexities of *Don Giovanni* did not win the opera universal acclaim during Mozart's lifetime.

Clive Barda/Performing Arts Library

Mozart's works were catalogued chronologically by Austrian music bibliographer Ludwig von Köchel, who published his catalog in 1862. The numbers he assigned, which are called Köchel numbers and are preceded by the initial K, remain the standard way of referring to works by Mozart. The *Jeunehomme* Concerto, for example, is K. 271.

## II LIFE

Mozart was born in Salzburg. From his father, violinist and composer Leopold Mozart, he received his early musical training. By age six he had become an accomplished performer on the clavier, violin, and organ and was highly skilled in sight-reading and musical improvisation. In 1762 Leopold took his six-year-old son on his first concert tour through the courts of Europe. The young Mozart absorbed the musical styles of the time through travel to Austria's capital, Vienna; the German cities of Munich and Mannheim; Paris, France; London, England; and various centers in Italy. From 1762 to 1766, while he was often touring, he composed several symphonies, a few sacred works, and a number of sonatas for keyboard and violin.

In London in 1764 Mozart met then-popular German composer Johann Christian Bach, son of Johann Sebastian Bach. The eight-year-old Mozart played four-hand piano sonatas with Bach while sitting on the composer's lap. The symphonies of the younger Bach and of Carl Friedrich Abel, another German composer living in London, offered models for Mozart's first symphonies (K. 16 and K. 19), written in 1764 and 1765 when he was eight and nine years old. In 1767, at age 11, Mozart transformed piano sonatas by various composers into his first four piano concertos through the addition of interludes and episodes for orchestra. He intended these works (K. 37, K. 39, K. 40, and K. 41) for his own performance. In 1768 he composed his first *opera buffa* (comic opera), *La finta semplice* (The Simple Pretense), and his first German operetta, *Bastien und Bastienne*. The following year *La finta semplice* was performed at the palace of the Salzburg archbishop, who appointed Mozart his concertmaster.

From 1769 to 1773, Mozart made three extended journeys to Italy with his father, during which he was remarkably productive and wrote not only symphonies and operas but also string quartets and several sacred works. In Milan he was commissioned to write an *opera seria*—that is, a serious opera in Italian on a heroic subject.

The opera, *Mitridati, rè di Ponto* (Mithridates, King of Pontus), was produced in 1770 in Milan under Mozart's direction with success. Also that year the pope made Mozart a knight of the Order of the Golden Spur.

## A Salzburg and Germany

From 1775 to 1780 Mozart was based mainly in Salzburg working for the archbishop Hieronymus von Colloredo. Although dissatisfied with the low pay and limited opportunities his employment offered, Mozart composed many works during this period, including his first important piano sonatas (K. 279 to K. 284, 1775). Despite his mother's death in 1778 during a trip they made to Paris, he completed his Symphony No. 31 in D Major (*Paris*, K. 297) and Piano Sonata No. 8 in A Minor (K. 310) during the journey. In 1780 he received a commission from the court at Munich for an opera seria. He fulfilled this commission with *Idomeneo, rè di Creta* (Idomeneo, King of Crete, 1781), the most important opera seria of Mozart's maturity and perhaps the greatest opera seria ever written.

Demeaning treatment from Colloredo, who had little interest in music, led Mozart to ask for dismissal from his service in 1781. This Mozart received, along with a kick in the rear as he departed, delivered by an employee of the archbishop. Mozart then began a career as a freelance musician in Vienna.

While working in Germany in 1777, Mozart fell in love with a singer, Aloysia Weber. His father warned him against marriage in a letter: "... it depends wholly on your own good sense and good conduct, whether you become a commonplace artist whom the world will forget, or a celebrated Capellmeister, of whom posterity will read hereafter in books—whether, infatuated with some pretty face, you one day breathe your last on a straw sack, your wife and children in a state of starvation, or, after a well-spent Christian life, die peacefully in honour and independence, and your family well provided for." Aloysia did not return Mozart's feelings, however. Despite opposition from his father, Mozart married Aloysia's sister, Constanze, in August 1782. Two years later he joined the fraternal order of Freemasonry.

## B Vienna

In the years after his marriage Mozart experienced some notable professional successes. These included an enthusiastic response from Austrian composer Joseph Haydn, the dominant figure in music at the time. Haydn was particularly impressed by a set of six string quartets (K. 387) that Mozart composed in 1785 and dedicated to Haydn, his admired friend and source of inspiration. A series of inspired piano concertos that Mozart composed for his own performance began with No. 14 in E-flat Major (K. 449) in 1784 and culminated in the premiere of No. 24 in C Minor (K. 491) in March 1786. Moreover, *The Marriage of Figaro* was first performed later that year in Vienna, Prague (in what is now the Czech Republic), and other cities to enthusiastic public response. In 1787 the premiere of *Don Giovanni* in Prague received a similar response.

During the last years of his life Mozart was plagued at times by financial difficulties, as revealed in a series of letters he wrote to his fellow Freemason Michael Puchberg, in which he begged for loans. The resounding success of *The Magic Flute*, which had its premiere in late 1791, would have solved these problems, but it came too late for Mozart, who died on December 5, 1791. He spent his last months in feverish activity. In September he completed an opera seria, *La clemenza di Tito* (The Clemency of Titus). On his deathbed, Mozart labored on the Requiem Mass in D Minor (K. 626), while suffering from delusions that he had been poisoned. He died with the Requiem unfinished. The cause of his death is uncertain and has been the subject of much speculation.

## III MUSIC

Mozart's music can be divided into periods of stylistic assimilation and stylistic innovation. From childhood he showed skill at imitating virtually any type of music, including the sacred style of church music and the so-called *galant* (courtly) idiom. The elegant though often superficial galant style dominated much instrumental music of the 1760s and 1770s. Mozart's mastery often demonstrates itself in an ability to expand and deepen the stylistic possibilities of the time. The manner in which he extended the character and form of the concerto, for instance, owes much to his experience in writing operatic arias.

### A Musical Expressiveness



#### Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 9

Austrian composer Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote the Piano Concerto No. 9 in E-flat Major in 1777 at the age of 21. Considered one of Mozart's first masterpieces, it was composed at a time when he was actively exploring and expanding the concerto form. The concerto features one or more solo instruments along with an orchestra. This concerto exhibits both traditional elements and some surprising innovations, as the slides and audio excerpts demonstrate. It is often referred to as the *Jeunehomme* after the last name of a virtuoso French pianist for whom it was presumably written.

© Microsoft Corporation. All Rights Reserved.

In the masterful *Jeunehomme* Concerto of 1777, the slow middle movement in C minor contains passages suggesting vocal *recitative* (music structured to resemble the tones and rhythms of speech). The movement's heartfelt but dignified tragic aura recalls the operas of an earlier German composer, Christoph Willibald Gluck. The first and third movements of the concerto brilliantly exploit dramatic contrasts between the piano soloist and the orchestra. At the beginning of the first movement, the pianist surprisingly answers the orchestra's opening phrase, although the usual practice called for this section to be given exclusively to the orchestra. The third and final movement of the concerto introduces a lyrical minuet, or dance tune, in the middle of a lively musical form called a rondo. The rondo, in which musical themes recur, is played in a rapid tempo, with virtuosic solo passages, called cadenzas, given to the pianist.

Many of Mozart's most impressive works date from the last decade of his life, 1781 to 1791, which he spent primarily in Vienna. His comic German opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*, 1782), which takes place in a Turkish palace, shows an exceptional range of musical characterization. The "stupid, surly, malicious Osmin," as Mozart described the overseer of the palace's *seraglio* (harem), is depicted in the opera with frenzied music that is intended to sound Turkish; the music's colorful *orchestration* (combination of instruments) includes piccolo, triangle, cymbals, and drum. On the other hand, Constanze, the German woman Osmin holds captive, has an elaborate aria that gives noble expression to her heroic defiance of her captor, no matter what tortures she might suffer. The aria, "Martern aller Arten" ("Tortures of Every Kind"), is introduced by a long passage of 60 measures, featuring solo parts for flute, oboe, violin, and cello that express a range of emotions. By the time of *Idomeneo* and *Die Entführung*, Mozart had found musical equivalents for an entire spectrum of dramatic events and human responses.

## B Instrumental Innovation

Mozart was especially proud of his Quintet for Piano and Winds in E-flat Major (K. 452) from 1784. As far as scholars know, this is the first quintet ever composed for piano and woodwinds (oboe, clarinet, bassoon, and horn). In Mozart's piano concertos from this time, the wind parts become independent, departing from the usual practice of *doubling* (playing the same notes in different octaves) the string instruments (violins, violas, and cellos). The Piano Concerto No. 15 in B-flat Major (K. 450) from 1784 opens with solo woodwinds, and later concertos show a resourceful use of woodwinds for solos as well as for color. Particularly innovative in Mozart's later work is his use of the clarinet, which was not a fixed member of the orchestra at that time. His writing for this instrument culminates in two works written for Austrian clarinet virtuoso Anton Stadler: the Clarinet Quintet in A Major (K. 581, 1789) and Clarinet Concerto in A Major (K. 622, 1791).

## C Chromaticism and Keys

Few composers have written so unforgettably in minor keys using *chromaticism*, in which all of the tones and semitones (half steps, as from F to F-sharp) of the musical scale are employed. Chromaticism means composing with tones that are not part of the established key, as Mozart does, for example, at the beginnings of the String Quartet in C Major (*Dissonance*, K. 465, 1785) and the Piano Concertos No. 20 in D Minor (K. 466, 1785) and No. 24 in C Minor (K. 491, 1786).

Mozart associated the key of D Minor with music that conveys vengeance and fear, as in the music heard at Don Giovanni's confrontation with the stone guest near the end of *Don Giovanni*. Here, Mozart combines chromaticism with majestic contrasts in *sonority* (sound) and an orchestration featuring trombones to evoke a powerful sense of foreboding and terror. Mozart deepens the dramatic evocation of the demonic by foreshadowing this D-minor music at the beginning of the overture to the opera, and throughout the opera he associates references to Don Giovanni's slaying of the Commendatore (whose statue is later the stone guest) with ominous references to the key. Similar associations with this key appear in other works, such as in the D-minor revenge aria of the Queen of the Night in *The Magic Flute*.

Another key closely associated with Mozart is G minor, which he employed to convey agitation and emotional turbulence in his Symphony No. 25 (*Little G Minor*, K. 183, 1773), Symphony No. 40 (K. 550, 1788), a string quintet in this key (K. 516, 1787), and the moving lament "Ach, ich fühl's" ("Ah, I feel it") sung by Pamina in Act II of *The Magic Flute*.

## D Stylistic Resourcefulness

During his Vienna years, Mozart could combine the most popular tuneful charm with the most learned compositional devices, as in the serenade *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* (A Little Night Music, K. 525, 1787). He absorbed the older styles of German composers George Frideric Handel and Johann Sebastian Bach, even arranging some Bach fugues (works based on interwoven melodies) for string instruments. Fugues also appear in the last movement of Piano Concerto No. 19 in F Major (K. 459, 1784) and in the overture to *The Magic Flute*, in which Mozart blends music of a vivacious, humorous character—marked by quick, repeated notes—with rigorous fugal structure.

Two other examples of Mozart's stylistic resourcefulness are the three dances in the finale of the first act of *Don Giovanni* and the remarkable final movement of the Symphony No. 41 in C Major (*Jupiter*, K. 551, 1788). In *Don Giovanni*, Mozart combines three dances that embody the different social positions of the characters. The musical confusion creates almost unbearable tension before the peasant girl Zerlina stops the dancing by crying out for help during Don Giovanni's attempt to seduce her. In the last movement of the *Jupiter* Symphony, the climactic last section, or coda, contains a simultaneous presentation of nearly all the *motifs* (short segments of melody or rhythm) and *themes* (repeated melodies) of the movement.

The most celebrated of Mozart's sacred compositions is the unfinished Requiem (K. 626), which combines learned fugue techniques with the vocal features of opera. Masonic elements also are present in the Requiem, as in *The Magic Flute* where they are represented in the music of the wise and benevolent Sarastro. In the Requiem, Masonry is reflected in the use of basset horns, late-18th-century instruments associated with the order, and in the hymnlike solemnity of the music, sometimes reminiscent of the music for Sarastro. Before his death Mozart reportedly discussed the completion of the Requiem with his student Franz Xaver Süssmayr, who may have received specific directions from the composer. Süssmayr's completion remained the version of the Requiem used in most performances until recently. Debate over its merits and shortcomings continues, and several scholars have offered alternative completions of the Requiem.

## IV EVALUATION

Mozart is one of the most universal of composers and one of the greatest geniuses of Western civilization. His output was huge (more than 600 works). Drawing on various national traditions, he brought the classical style to its highest development. This style, which evolved from about 1750 to 1800 when Vienna was the center of European music, is characterized by lively contrasts of themes and by symmetry of forms. In the dramatic genres of opera and concerto, Mozart enjoyed unique success. The richness of musical characterization and the psychological insights of his operatic masterpieces find parallels in much of his purely instrumental music. In the concertos he demonstrates that powerful expressive forces can coexist with serene formal structures.

Although Mozart has been viewed as the quintessential composer of the classical period, early-19th-century critics such as German romantic writer and composer E.T.A. Hoffmann regarded him as an archromantic, much in their own image. (Elements of the supernatural and fantastic figure in *Don Giovanni* and *The Magic Flute*, as they do in romanticism.) Mozart's music also influenced innovative German composers of the romantic period, including Ludwig van Beethoven and Richard Wagner, as well as the 20th-century creator of the twelve-tone chromatic tone system, German composer Arnold Schoenberg. Mozart's influence stems not just from the graceful beauty of his music, but also from its flexible phrasing, startling contrasts, and unstable chromaticism. At the time of their first performance, many of his works were regarded as difficult, with "too many notes," as Austrian emperor Joseph II purportedly said. If Mozart's music embodies something of the elegance and refinement of the privileged aristocratic world before the French Revolution (1789-1799), it also affirms values subversive to that world. He lodged this critique in the depiction of flawed aristocrats in *Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*, and in the glorification in *The Magic Flute* of the ideals of the Freemasons, who were deemed dangerous by Vienna's aristocracy. Many of his finest instrumental works in their beauty and perfection also acknowledge the darker sides of human experience.

Contributed By:

[William Kinderman](#)

Microsoft © Encarta © 2009. © 1993-2008 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (27 January 1756 – 5 December 1791), baptised as Johannes Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart, was a prolific and influential composer of the Classical period. Born in Salzburg, Mozart showed prodigious ability from his earliest childhood. Already competent on keyboard and violin, he composed from the age of five and performed before European royalty. At 17, Mozart was engaged as a musician at the Salzburg court but grew restless and travelled in search of a better Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (baptized as Johannes Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart) (January 27, 1756 – December 5, 1791) was a prolific and celebrated composer of Classical music. His enormous output of more than six hundred compositions includes works that are widely acknowledged as pinnacles of symphonic, chamber, piano, operatic, and choral music. A legendary child prodigy, Mozart is among the most enduringly popular of European composers, and many of his works are part of the standard concert repertoire.