

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born on January 27, 1756 in Salzburg, Austria. He and his older sister, Maria Anna (nicknamed “Nannerl”) were the only surviving children of his parents, Leopold and Anna Maria Mozart. Leopold was a violinist and composer at the court of the prince-bishop of Salzburg. At age four, Wolfgang showed an exceptional ability in music by playing pieces from his sister’s clavier lessons. Leopold began giving him instruction on the keyboard and violin and by age six, Wolfgang was composing and performing.

From 1762 through 1766, Leopold, wanting to promote his son’s rare talent, took Wolfgang and Nannerl on three concert tours across Europe. Everywhere they went, Leopold publicized his son as a scientific phenomenon. One poster in England read, “To all lovers of sciences: The greatest prodigy that Europe or that even Human Nature has to boast of is, without contradiction, the little German boy Wolfgang Mozart.” The precocious Wolfgang would perform musical stunts such as improvising at the keyboard, playing at first sight, difficult pieces he had never seen before, and playing the keyboard with his hands hidden under a cloth so he could not see the keys. His sister would also impress the audience with her skills on the harpsichord.

In 1764 while in London, Wolfgang met the German composer Johann Christian Bach, son of Johann Sebastian Bach. The two of them played four-handed piano sonatas while eight-year-old Mozart sat in his lap. The symphonies of J. C. Bach and Carl Friedrich Abel, another German composer living in London, provided models for Mozart’s first symphonies (K. 16 and K. 19) written when he was eight and nine years old.

When he was 11, Mozart took the piano sonatas of various composers and added their themes or motifs in the orchestra sections of his first four piano concertos. In 1768, he composed his first *opera buffa* (comic opera), *La finta semplice*, and his first German operetta, *Bastien und Bastienne*. In 1769, at the age of 13, Wolfgang received his first appointment as the concertmaster for the Archbishop of Salzburg.

From 1769 to 1773, Mozart now in his teens, made three extended trips to Italy with his father. While in Bologna Mozart was elected to the Academia Filarmonica and in Rome, he was made a Knight of the Golden Spur. It was on this trip that he is believed to have written out the *Miserere* by Allegri after hearing it only once at the Sistine Chapel. He was very productive during this time and continued writing symphonies and operas as well as different works such as string quartets and sacred works.

From 1775 to 1780 Mozart lived and worked as an organist in Salzburg for the archbishop Heironymous von Colloredo. Despite the low pay and limited opportunities this position offered, Mozart composed many important works during this period including his piano sonatas, and his Symphony No. 31 in D major. He also composed a body of works for garden parties, weddings and informal home concerts. Most notable of these were *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* (music of the night) and his five violin concertos.

In September 1777, (age 21) Mozart began a tour with his mother that was to have a life-long impact. In Mannheim, Germany he hoped to secure a position at the elector’s court. Although he was not hired, he did meet and fall in love with a singer, 16-year-old Aloysia Weber. Mozart’s father Leopold expressed his concerns about marriage to this woman 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 honor and independence, and your family well provided for.” Aloysia was not in love with Mozart and so the marriage never took place. Mozart and his mother continued their tour to Paris where he composed *Sinfonia Concertante*. (This work was never performed and is now lost.) In July 1779 Mozart’s mother Anna Maria became sick and died. Mozart returned to Salzburg alone to his position as court organist.

Mozart was unhappy working for the archbishop who had little interest in music. After years of a strained relationship, Mozart requested that he be relieved of his position. His request was granted and upon leaving, he was helped out the door by an employee of the archbishop who gave him a kick in the rear.

Now a “free agent,” as we say today, Mozart worked for no one. Upon hearing that the Weber family moved to Vienna, he relocated so he could be close to the family of his first love. They took him in as a boarder and he made a small income giving piano lessons. Soon, he received a request for an opera from the imperial court. *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, first performed in 1782 was a lasting success. Aloysia Weber had married someone else by this time and so Mozart became interested in her sister Constanze. The two fell in love and were married in 1782. Mozart became a member of the Freemasonry two years later.

In the years following his marriage, Mozart was very productive. Years earlier, Mozart had met Austrian composer, Joseph Haydn, the most popular composer of that time. Haydn was very impressed with the young composer and particularly with his set of six string quartets which Mozart dedicated to his admired friend and source of inspiration. In 1790, after spending a long day together, Haydn then 58, said to Mozart only 34, “This is probably the last time we will say goodbye in this life.” One can only imagine that Haydn was referring to his own death and yet it was Mozart who died less than a year later.

Some of Mozart’s final works also included a series of piano concertos for himself and his pupils, and two operas *The Marriage of Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*.

In the last year of his life, perhaps from stress and constant work, Mozart’s health began to decline. He continued to work feverishly on operas and his Requiem. The Requiem was commissioned by Count Walsegg-Stuppach who intended to pass the work off as his own. In November 1791 Mozart became sick and as his health rapidly deteriorated, he struggled to complete the massive work. As he composed from his bed, he became convinced that he was writing his own Requiem. He completed only a few movements and left sketches for the remainder of the work to be finished by his student Franz Süssmayr. Portions of the Requiem were performed at Mozart’s funeral.

During the last years of his life, Mozart had ongoing financial difficulties. He wrote a series of letters to friend and fellow Freemason, Michael Puchberg, in which he begged for loans. His well-loved opera *The Magic Flute*, could have been the answer to his financial woes as it was a resounding success. Unfortunately, it premiered late in 1791 after Mozart’s death on December 5, 1791. Mozart died a poor man and is buried in an unmarked grave.

When referring to the works of Mozart, one often hears the letter “K” followed by a number. This is called a Köchel listing. In 1862 Austrian music bibliographer Ludwig von Köchel catalogued the entire works of Mozart in the order in which they were

composed. The lower the number, the earlier in Mozart's life the piece was written. (The numbers go as high as the 720's.) Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 5 is K219.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is considered to be one of the greatest composers that ever lived. His music is characterized as being elegant, gracious, and gallant. A musical genius, he performed with natural ease that was unprecedented. His ability to compose was also unlike few before him. He was the J. S. Bach of his day and tales of his speed in writing have become legendary. It has been said that when a beggar approached him on the street, he did not have his wallet and so he took out a sheet of paper, drew the staff, and wrote down a trio and minuet in a few minutes. He gave the piece to the beggar and told him to take the music to a publisher who purchased it on the spot.

While some composers have themes or musical ideas in their heads, Mozart had in his head, the entire symphony, concerto, opera, etc. etc. with all of its layers, colors, and textures simply waiting to be put on paper.

The music of Mozart is in a class all by itself. When musicians embark on a serious course of study, they learn their instrument's repertoire and then they learn "Mozart." The approach taken when performing Mozart is completely different than with any other music. There are styles of performance in the Baroque Period, the Classical Period, the Romantic Period . . . and then there is Mozart. Extremely difficult to perform because of its delicate, exposed nature, his compositions have been described as perfection and are some of the finest and most loved musical treasures throughout the world.