

Casefile: Mozart

compiled by T.W. Strouse

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the classical music composer and progenitor of my worldwide investigation, created well over 600 compositions, many of which his ardent devotees consider as close to perfection as humanly possible. The list of his admirers includes some impressive names.

Mozart is sweet sunshine.

- Antonín Dvořák

Mozart is the highest, the culminating point that beauty has attained in the sphere of music.

- Pyotr Ilych Tchaikovsky

When Mozart composed he didn't have aims of genius, he simply was one.

- Sir Roger Norrington

Listening to Mozart, we cannot think of any possible improvement.

- George Szell

Mozart is the greatest composer of all.

- Albert Einstein

Though his admirers deem Mozart's compositions flawless, it is highly unlikely that an artist of his stature was ever completely satisfied with his work. Mozart was a self-described lifelong learner, who famously studied other composers in order to constantly improve his musical knowledge and skills. So I am more than a little intrigued that he would ever describe one of his own symphonies as 'perfect,' much less give it such a title. It's a true mystery!

Now to the facts of Mozart's life:

On January 27, 1756, Mozart is born in **Salzburg, Austria**, and baptized Johannes Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart.

Surrounded by music as a child, Mozart begins playing keyboard at the age of three. By the time he is four, he is performing in public on both piano and violin.

He begins composing at the age of five, producing his first composition, *Andante in C for Keyboard, K. 1a*, in early 1761.

At age six, Mozart begins a three-year tour of Europe, playing music with his sister, Maria Anna, "Nannerl," for the crowned heads of state. Their father, Leopold, a composer and musician in his own right, supervises them.

While on his first European tour, Mozart contracts scarlet fever. Today, we know this illness to be closely related to strep infections. In the 18th century, it was a deadly disease. Nevertheless, Mozart recovers quickly. This is his first brush with death.

By the age of eight, Mozart completes his first symphony - *Symphony in E-flat, No. 1, K. 16*.

By the time he's eleven years old Mozart is composing prolifically. His first piano concerto - *Piano Concerto No. 1 in F, K. 37* - is completed in 1767.

Mozart completes three more piano concertos in 1767, before falling ill with smallpox toward the end of the year. He suffers through the dread disease for two weeks before recovering. This is his second brush with death.

Mozart bounces back from his bout with smallpox to write his first opera at age twelve - *La Finta Semplice, K. 51* (The Pretended Simpleton).

In 1771, 15 year-old Mozart receives lucrative commissions to compose operas in Italy. He and his father travel back and forth between Italy and Salzburg while Mozart composes three symphonies in addition to his operatic assignments.

In 1772, 16 year-old Mozart is becoming downright prolific. While doing more work for his Italian patrons, he composes seven symphonies this year.

In 1773, 17 year-old Mozart composes six symphonies, several divertimentos, quintets and a Concerto for Piano. Additionally

this year, the Austrian empress Maria Theresa receives young Mozart, according him a great honor.

By 1774, Mozart is creating multiple operas, symphonies and concertos annually. His works are being performed in Vienna and Munich.

At this point in my chronology, it bears mentioning that despite his genius as a composer, Mozart endured financial struggles throughout his adult life.

Securing a reliable source of income was as difficult for an artist in the 18th century as it is today. Probably more so, given the stratified nature of European society at the time. Some measure of financial security for composers could be achieved through court appointments; however, such employment was very difficult to obtain. Many composers vied for these positions, which were not always granted on the basis of merit. So, it is somewhat to our benefit that Mozart struggled to make a living. One must conclude that his financial hardships fired his massive creative output.

But so did matters of the heart.

It's January 1778. Mozart is in Mannheim, Germany, where he meets the Fridolin Weber family, and falls in love with the second-eldest daughter, Aloysia. She is an accomplished singer, and he composes arias for her. She sings his compositions.

In March of that year, Mozart has to leave Mannheim and Aloysia for a trip to Paris in the hope of securing employment. He is unsuccessful.

In the meantime, Aloysia's singing career takes off, and she finds tremendous success in Vienna. When Mozart next sees her, she spurns him.

In fall 1780, Aloysia Weber marries court actor and amateur painter, Joseph Lange.

For the next year or so, Mozart's creative output is somewhat diminished. But then, as 1780 comes to a close, Mozart finishes composing *Idomeneo re di Creta*, K. 366, a dramatic opera that will bring him great success.

It's 1781. With the success of *Idomeneo*, Mozart's creativity is revived. He moves to Vienna, and takes a room with the Weber family, who has moved there from Mannheim. Mozart begins to court Aloysia's younger sister, Constanze.

Thus begins a rich period of creativity for Mozart in which quartets, quintets, concertos, fantasias, sonatas, serenades and symphonies seem to pour forth from his pen.

Mozart marries Constanze Weber in Vienna in 1782. This year also marks the first performance of his comic opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (The Abduction from the Harem), K. 384 at the Burgtheater. It is a sensation. Tellingly, the heroine of the piece is named Konstanze.

For the next few years, Mozart busies himself with every type of composing except opera.

Then, from 1786 to 1791, comes a deluge of musical composition, which includes his most famous operas: *Le nozze di Figaro* (The Marriage of Figaro), K. 492, *Don Giovanni*, K. 527, *Così fan tutte* (Women Are Like That), K. 588, and *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute), K. 620.

1791 was a very productive year for Mozart. He was collecting fees from his published works. His opera *The Magic Flute* was enjoying immense popularity among people from all walks of life, making him something akin to a modern pop star. He was creating several works on commission, including his famously unfinished *Requiem*. After years of struggle, financial success finally seemed within Mozart's grasp.

Then, on November 20, 1791, he took to his bed, seriously ill. His illness apparently wasn't sudden. A good deal of evidence indicates that he endured early signs of sickness in order to meet his professional obligations. Now, he was paying dearly for his diligence.

His physicians, his wife, Constanze, and her younger sister attended Mozart. On December 5, five minutes before 1:00 a.m. he died.

There has been great speculation about the cause of Mozart's unexpected and unfortunate death at the young age of 35. Some have claimed that a rival composer poisoned him. Some have suggested that he was done in by food poisoning. Current research

indicates that it was more likely an old enemy - a strep infection that led to kidney failure. Mozart had cheated death twice before. This time, he wasn't so lucky.

Mozart and Constanze had six children together. Infant mortality was high in the 18th century, and only two of their children survived into adulthood. However, Mozart's other children - his compositions - well over 600 in number will survive forever.

Seek them out. Experience the joy they bring.

Some Mozart highlights to start with:

SYMPHONIES

Symphony No. 35 in D major, "Haffner", K. 385 (1782)
Symphony No. 36 in C major, "Linz", K. 425 (1783)
Symphony No. 38 in D major, "Prague", K. 504 (1786)
Symphony No. 39 in E-flat major, K. 543 (1788)
Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K. 550 (1788)
Symphony No. 41 in C major "Jupiter", K. 551 (1788)

CONCERTOS

Bassoon Concert in B-flat major, K. 191 (1774)
Concerto for Clarinet & Orchestra in A major, K. 622 (1791)
Oboe Concerto in C major, K. 314 (1777-1778)

SERENADES

Serenade No. 6 in D major, "Serenata Notturna", K. 239 (1776)
Serenade No. 13 for String Quartet & Bass in G major,
"Eine kleine Nachtmusik", K. 525 (1787)

OPERAS

Idomeneo, K. 366 (1781)
Die Entführung aus dem Serail, K. 384 (1782)
Le nozze di Figaro, K. 492 (1786)
Don Giovanni, K. 527 (1787)
Così fan tutte, K. 588 (1789)
Die Zauberflöte, K. 620 (1791)

MASSSES

Mass No. 15 in C major, "Coronation", K. 317 (1779)
Requiem Mass in D minor, K. 626 (1791, unfinished)

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