

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Johannes Chrysostomus Wolfgang Theophilus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria, on January 27th 1756. The first part of his name was in honour of St. John Chrysostom, whose feast day was January 27th. The name *Theophilus* (Greek for *beloved of God*) was in honour of Mozart's godfather, Joannes Theophilus Pergmayr. *Wolfgang* was in honour of his maternal grandfather, Wolfgang Nikolaus Pertl. For everyday use, the child went by the name *Wolfgang* (or the nickname *Wolfgangerl*). In later years he often added *Theophilus*, but translated it into French (*Amadé*), German (*Gottlieb*), or Latin (*Amadeus*). We now know him best as *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*.

Wolfgang was the seventh and last child of Leopold Mozart and his wife Anna Maria. Only two of Leopold and Anna Maria's children lived past infancy: Wolfgang and his sister Maria Anna Walburga Ignatia (nicknamed Nannerl) who was nearly five years older.

Leopold Mozart was a composer, music teacher, and the author of a *Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing*, which was one of the best books of its time for training of violinists and is still used today. He was also violinist in the court orchestra of the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg, a position he held for 44 years under five successive Prince-Archbishops. Leopold worked his way up from fourth violinist to court composer and Vice-Kapellmeister, a position he reached in 1763 under Count Sigismund Christoph Schrattenbach.

Leopold taught music first to Nannerl and then to Wolfgang and quickly recognized that both were extremely gifted. He determined to promote their talents throughout Europe. When Wolfgang was six, Leopold, the ultimate stage parent, received permission from his boss, Schrattenbach, to take the children on a series of tours of the courts of Europe.

In January 1762 they embarked on a three-week trip to Munich, where the children performed before Maximilian III Joseph, the Elector of Bavaria.

Between September 1762 and January 1763, the family toured Austria. At Schönbrunn Palace in Vienna the children performed before Emperor Francis I and Empress Maria Theresa. Leopold wrote of this occasion: *Their Majesties received us with such extraordinary graciousness that, when I shall tell of it, people will declare that I have made it up. Suffice it to say that Wolferl jumped up on the Empress' lap, put his arms round her neck and kissed her heartily.*

From June 1763 to November 1766 the Mozarts went on a three-year grand tour of Europe. Stops along the way included Munich, Bonn, Cologne, Brussels, Paris, Versailles, London, The Hague, Geneva, and Zürich. They presented concert performances for various European princes and princesses, including, at Versailles, Queen Maria Leszczyńska and Louis XV and, in London, King George III and Queen Sophia Charlotte, to whom Wolfgang dedicated his six *Sonatas for Piano and Violin*, K. 10-15.

A second tour to Vienna took place from September 1767 to January 1769. Again, the Mozarts were received by the Imperial family, Maria Theresa and her son Joseph II, the new emperor.

At each stop, Leopold would try to finagle a concert appearance at the most influential local court, followed by a series of private concerts for lesser nobility. Payment was unpredictable: sometimes cash, sometimes trinkets. But the expenses of travel and the frequent illnesses of the children kept the family's finances in a precarious position. Leopold wrote: *We have swords, laces, mantillas, snuff-boxes, gold cases, sufficient to furnish a shop; but as for money, it is a scarce article, and I am positively poor.*

These trips were the first of many Wolfgang would take throughout his life. In fact, he spent some ten years – close to one third of his life – on the road, during which time he visited more than 200 places and cities throughout Europe. He also was plagued by ill health for most of his life. He caught rheumatic fever during the Austrian tour of 1763. Both children came down with typhoid and smallpox during their travels.

During his childhood prodigy tours, Wolfgang was doing far more than delighting the rich and important with his precocious performances. He was composing. He had begun composing at the age of five and continued to do so throughout the tours. While they were in Paris in 1764, his first four *Sonatas for Piano and Violin* (K. 6 – 9) were published by Leopold. His first symphony was written later the same year.

By the time he returned to Salzburg in 1769, the 13-year-old Wolfgang had composed the first 65 pieces in the Köchel catalogue. The Köchel catalogue is the definitive system for identifying Mozart's works; each piece is designated by either "K", for Köchel or "KV", for Köchel-Verzeichnis (German for *Köchel Catalogue*), and followed by a number between 1 and 626. The catalogue was devised by Ludwig Alois Ferdinand von Köchel, an Austrian musicologist, writer, composer, botanist and mineralogist, who published the first edition of the catalogue in 1862.

Mozart's 65 early works included three masses and assorted concertos, sonatas, and symphonies. They also included his first four operatic works:

Die Schuldigkeit des ersten Gebots, part 1 of a 3-part sacred drama; the other two parts were composed by Johann Michael Haydn, brother of the much more famous composer, Franz Joseph Haydn, and Anton Cajetan Adlgasser;

Apollo et Hyacinthus, widely considered his first real opera; this was a commission by the grammar school attached to Salzburg University, with text by Father Rufinus Widl;

Bastien und Bastienne. a one-act Singspiel (a musical drama with spoken dialogue between the musical numbers);

La finta semplice (*The Fake Simpleton*) a 3-act opera with libretto by Marco Coltellini.

Mozart and his father embarked on two trips to Italy in 1771. When they arrived in Rome just before Easter, they attended a liturgical celebration in the Sistine Chapel, where the *Miserere* by Gregorio Allegri was performed. This work was considered so sacred that no one was allowed to have copies of the score. However, after the service Wolfgang transcribed the piece from memory. A few weeks later Mozart received from the Pope the Order of the Golden Spur, an honour similar to a knighthood, conferred by the Pope on people who have contributed to the glory of the Church. Mozart treasured this honour, which had previously been given to the composer Christoph Willibald Gluck (and, oddly enough, to Giacomo Casanova).

After the easy-going Schrattenbach died in 1771, the new Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg, Hieronymus Colloredo, did not give Leopold a much hoped-for promotion to Kapellmeister and took a dim view of Leopold's leaving town to tour with his son. Leopold and Wolfgang did manage another Italian trip in late 1772 and a trip to Vienna in 1773, by which time Wolfgang had been given a position as concertmaster at the Prince Archbishop's court. Both Leopold and Wolfgang were unhappy working for Colloredo and hoped not only to promote Wolfgang's career but to find secure jobs for both of them away from Salzburg. By 1777 Colloredo refused to give Leopold permission to leave town for what would have amounted to a job-hunting trip. Therefore, in September of that year Wolfgang left on his first journey without his father. His mother went with him, and he was under strict instructions from Leopold to find employment or make money. The trip would be fateful in many ways and would cause years of conflict between father and son.

First of all, when Mozart and his mother arrived in Mannheim, Wolfgang met the Weber family, with four daughters, all talented musicians. Three of them, Aloysia, Josepha, and Sophie, would become professional singers. Josepha would be the first Queen of the Night in Mozart's opera *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*). Mozart soon fell in love with Aloysia, for whom he would write a number of arias. The fourth sister, Constanze, would one day become Mozart's wife.

Mozart dawdled in Mannheim, composing and enjoying Aloysia's company as Leopold became increasingly frustrated, pressuring him to make something of himself: *find a steady and good appointment, or, if that should*

fail, go to a place where good money can be made. Early in 1778 Wolfgang hatched plans to travel with Aloysia and her father and a sister to Italy to find her some singing gigs and tried to persuade his father to approve this scheme. But Leopold lay down the law (and showed his skill at inflicting guilt trips) in a furious letter to his son:

I have read your letter of February 4 with amazement and horror... I have not slept all night and I am so weak that I have to write very slowly, word by word ... Your proposal to travel about with Herr Weber and, Nota Bene, 2 of his daughters has almost driven me to insanity ... Off with you to Paris!

In March 1778 Mozart and his mother finally left Mannheim for Paris, where Mozart taught, composed, and saw some of his works performed. However, the elusive secure employment did not materialize.

Then tragedy struck. Mozart's mother died suddenly of typhus in July, devastating both Wolfgang and Leopold. Wolfgang did not rush home immediately to Salzburg as his father wanted, but rather stayed in Paris until September. He dreaded returning to Salzburg to work again for the Prince-Archbishop. He made his way to Mannheim in the hope of finding Aloysia, who had moved to Munich. Leopold was furious and now seemed to blame Wolfgang for his mother's death, writing:

I really don't know what to say anymore – I will either lose my mind or die of exhaustion... Your whole intent is to ruin me so you can build your castles in the air ... I hope that, after your mother had to die in Paris already, you will not also burden your conscience by expediting the death of your father.

Wolfgang tried to find work in Mannheim with no luck, and then traveled to Munich where Aloysia rejected him. Devastated, he finally returned to Salzburg, a city he now hated. He wrote to his father, *I'm looking forward to seeing you but not Salzburg ... I can't stand Salzburg and its inhabitants ... I find their language – their manners quite insufferable.*

He petitioned the Prince-Archbishop for a job and in February 1779 was appointed court organist with responsibilities for composing new works. Over the next year he performed in the cathedral and composed sacred works, symphonies, concertos, serenades and dramatic music. Late in 1780 he was offered a commission for an opera for Munich. He traveled to Munich to work on what now is considered his finest early opera, *Idomeneo, rè di Creta* (K. 366). During this time he kept in touch with his father, discussing many details of the music and stagecraft of the new opera and sending messages through Leopold to the librettist, Gianbattista Varesco, a priest at the court chapel in Salzburg. The opera premiered successfully in January 1781.

The relationship of father and son, at least on a professional level, seemed close, as they discussed the creation of this new work. But some of the hurt remained, despite efforts on both sides to maintain a rapport. When Wolfgang was ill with a cold, Leopold advised him on remedies and offered to take care of him should he become worse, but added a spiteful little dig, *If I had been with your Mother, I would like to believe, she would still be alive.*

Wolfgang was still chafing at working for the autocratic Colloredo, Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg, and he was still anxious to get out of Salzburg. Early in 1787 Colloredo traveled to Vienna to visit his own father and ordered Wolfgang to join him. Colloredo saw musicians as mere servants and treated Mozart with a disdain that the young man finally could no longer tolerate. In May, Wolfgang had had enough and quit. Leopold was appalled, not only because Wolfgang was now without a secure job, but because it meant his son would not return to Salzburg with the Prince-Archbishop.

Indeed, Wolfgang stayed in Vienna, doing freelance work: teaching, publishing his music, performing, composing, and working on whatever commissions came his way. He managed to make a good living, although his poor spending habits meant the money went out as quickly as it came in.

The rift between father and son deepened when in 1782 Mozart announced he was marrying Constanze Weber, Aloysia's sister. Leopold did eventually give his consent to the marriage (his letter agreeing to the marriage arrived just after the wedding), but he was still disappointed in his son's choice.

Over the next nine years, Wolfgang and Constanze had six children, four of whom died in infancy. Only two sons, Carl Thomas (1784 - 1858) and Franz Xavier Wolfgang (1791 - 1844) would survive into adulthood.

Mozart continued to work away in Vienna, composing dozens of new works. His opera *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (*The Abduction from the Seraglio*, K. 384) had premiered in 1782 and was a huge success – in fact this was Mozart's most popular theatrical piece during his lifetime. It is also the piece of which the Emperor Joseph II is reported to have criticized for having *too many notes, my dear Mozart*.

In February 1785, Leopold finally traveled from Salzburg to Vienna to visit Wolfgang and Constanze. This was his first opportunity to witness firsthand the fact that his son was making it as a successful and extremely popular composer, conductor, and pianist. A busy round of concerts allowed Leopold to see how the audiences responded to his son's music. After one such concert, Leopold wrote proudly to Nannerl:

Your brother played a magnificent concerto that he had composed for Mademoiselle Paradis in Paris. I was sitting in the back, only two boxes away from the beautiful Princess of Württemberg, and had the pleasure of hearing the interplay of all the instruments so clearly that tears of joy came into my eyes. When your brother left the stage, the emperor waved his hat to him and shouted Bravo Mozart.

Leopold was also deeply moved after a chamber concert of three of Wolfgang's new string quartets, which Mozart would later dedicate, along with three others, to the great Franz Joseph Haydn, perhaps the most beloved and respected composer in Europe. These six quartets (KV 387 in G major, KV 421 in D minor, KV 428 in E flat major, KV 458 in B flat major, KV 464 in A major, and KV 465 in C major) are still known as the Haydn Quartets.

Haydn himself had been guest of honour at this concert, and afterward he told Leopold, *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. He has taste and, what is more, the most profound knowledge of composition.*

In December 1786, Mozart's great comic opera *Le nozze di Figaro* (*The Marriage of Figaro*) was rapturously received in Prague. This was his first opera with the librettist Lorenzo Da Ponte. The two of them wrote a total of three operas together – a collaboration that gave the world perhaps the finest operas in the repertoire: *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni* (1787), and *Così fan tutte* (*So do they all*, 1790).

In January 1787 Mozart was invited to Prague to conduct *Le nozze di Figaro*. On his arrival Mozart wrote gleefully to his friend Emilian Gottfried von Jacquin, about the welcome the opera was receiving:

I watched with greatest pleasure how everyone was hopping about with sheer delight to the music of my "Figaro," which had been transformed into Contredanses and German dances. Here they talk of nothing but Figaro. Nothing but Figaro is played, trumpeted, sung, whistled. No opera is seen as much as Figaro; again and again it is Figaro. It's all a great honour for me.

As a result of the Prague success of *Le nozze di Figaro*, Mozart received a commission for a new opera, *Don Giovanni*, which would premiere in Prague in October 1787. In the intervening months, Mozart worked on his new opera as well as a number of other compositions. 1787 was an eventful and profoundly stressful year for Mozart in many ways.

During April of that year, a 16-year-old from Bonn named Ludwig van Beethoven came to Mozart for some lessons; after just two weeks Beethoven had to return to Bonn as his mother was ill. He and Mozart never met again.

That same month the Mozarts moved to a less expensive place, and Wolfgang became quite ill with kidney problems.

The year ended with the birth of Mozart and Constanze's fourth child, Theresia Constanzia Adelheid Freiderika Maria Anna, who was to die six months later. 1787 was also the year Mozart's doctor, Sigmund Barisani, a childhood friend, died at the age of 29. Mozart's pet bird also died (the composer wrote a poem about it).

Most traumatic of all, however, was the death of Mozart's father on May 28, 1787. Although Leopold had been ill, his death was sudden, and Mozart had no chance to travel from Vienna to Salzburg to see his father once more.

Mozart's last letter to his father, written April 4, reflects the affection he felt for him, despite the differences they had had over the years.

This very moment I have received a piece of news which greatly distresses me, the more so as I gathered from your last letter that, thank God, you were very well indeed. But now I hear that you are really ill. I need hardly tell you how greatly I am longing to receive some reassuring news from yourself. And I still expect it; although I have now made a habit of being prepared in all affairs of life for the worst. As death, when we come to consider it closely, is the true goal of our existence, I have formed during the last few years such close relations with this best and truest friend of mankind, that his image is not only no longer terrifying to me, but is indeed very soothing and consoling! ... I hope and trust that while I am writing this, you are feeling better. But if, contrary to all expectation, you are not recovering, I implore you. . . not to hide it from me, but to tell me the whole truth or get someone to write it to me, so that as quickly as is humanly possible I may come to your arms. I entreat you by all that is sacred ~ to both of us.

However, Mozart would never see his father again.

For the rest of his life, Mozart's home base was Vienna, although he continued to travel, visiting Prague three times and traveling to Dresden, Leipzig, Potsdam, and Berlin in 1789 in search of the elusive permanent job or at least some lucrative commissions.

Mozart's last few years were a roller-coaster ride of highs and lows. He was buoyed by his enthusiastic welcome in Prague, first when he arrived in January 1787 for performances of *Le nozze di Figaro* and later for the premieres of his operas *Don Giovanni* in October 1787 and *La clemenza di Tito* (*The Clemency of Titus*) in September 1791, just three months before his death. Also in September 1791 *Die Zauberflöte* (*The Magic Flute*) premiered to acclaim in Vienna.

A deep disappointment for Mozart was the attitude of the new emperor, Leopold II. The former emperor, Joseph II, had liked Mozart (despite a lack of monetary support and the infamous *too many notes* comment). However, Leopold II ignored the composer completely and did not include him among the musicians invited to his coronation in Frankfurt in 1790. Mozart went to Frankfurt anyway, possibly hoping some concerts or commissions would materialize.

Health problems plagued both Wolfgang and Constanze and added to their financial difficulties. Mozart's income was unpredictable at best, and their debts grew. Mozart continued to work feverishly through 1791, his final year of life, completing not only *Die Zäuberflöte* and *La Clemenza di Tito*, but some 30 other compositions, including sets of minuets and German dances, songs, concertos, even a couple of pieces for glass harmonica. In July he began work on his great *Requiem* (*Mass for the Dead*), KV 626, which was commissioned by an anonymous patron, Count Franz Walsegg-Stuppach, whose wife had recently died. The Count, a musician himself, wanted to pass the work off as his own composition.

In November, 1791, Mozart fell ill, and on December 5, 1791, he died from what was probably complications arising from infection, a chronic kidney ailment, and rheumatic fever, (not, as is suggested in the engrossing, but fictionalized movie *Amadeus*, by poison). He left the *Requiem* unfinished, but discussed its completion with his pupil Süssmayr. After his death Constanze, in order to receive the rest of the commission money, had the work completed by Süssmayr, based on the composer's outlines and instructions.

Mozart was buried in an unmarked grave just outside Vienna.

In his brief life Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart created a dazzling body of work— over 600 compositions, including symphonies, concerti, sonatas, Masses, piano works, chamber music, and some 20 operas, the best known of which – *Idomeneo*, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così fan tutte*, and *Die Zauberflöte* – are among the most popular ever composed.

Mozart's Operas

This list of Mozart's Operas gives the opera name, Köchel number, and date and place of first performance.

Apollo et Hyacinthus, K.38 (May 13, 1767, University of Salzburg) (intermezzo)
Bastien und Bastienne, K.50 (K.46b) (October, 1768, Vienna)
La finta semplice, K.51 (KE 46a) (May 1, 1769, Archbishop's Court, Salzburg)
Mitridate, Rè di Ponto, K.87 (K.74a) (December 26, 1770, Teatro Regio Ducal, Milan)
Ascanio in Alba, K.111 (October 17, 1771, Teatro Regio Ducal, Milan)
Il sogno di Scipione, K.126 (May, 1772, Archiepiscopal Residence, Salzburg)
Lucio Silla, K.135 (December 26, 1772 Teatro Regio Ducal, Milan)
La finta giardiniera, K.196 (January 13, 1775 Redoutensaal, Munich)
Il rè pastore, K.208 (April 23, 1775 Archiepiscopal Residence, Salzburg)
Thamos, König in Ägypten, K.345 (K.336a) (1779, Salzburg) (Choruses and incidental music)
Zaide, K.344 (K.336b) (1779; 27.1.1866, Frankfurt) (incomplete)
Idomeneo, Rè di Creta, K.366 (January 29, 1781 Court Theatre, Munich)
Die Entführung aus dem Serail, K.384 (July 16, 1782 Burgtheater, Vienna)
L'oca del Cairo, K.422 (1784; 4.1860, Frankfurt) (fragment)
Lo sposo deluso, ossia La Rivalità di tre donne per un solo amante, K.430 (K.424a) (1784) (fragment)
Der Schauspieldirektor, K.486 (February 7, 1786 Schönbrunn Palace, Vienna)
Le nozze di Figaro, K.492 (May 1, 1786 Burgtheater, Vienna)
Il dissoluto punito, ossia il Don Giovanni, K.527 (October 29, 1787, Nationaltheater, Prague)
Così fan tutte, ossia La Scuola degli Amanti, K.588 (January 26, 1790, Burgtheater, Vienna)
La Clemenza di Tito, K.621 (September 6, 1791 Nationaltheater, Prague)
Die Zauberflöte, K.620 (September 30, 1791, Theater auf der Wieden, Vienna)

(list from <http://opera.stanford.edu/Mozart/>)