



# Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart



Suppose you tried to compose a sonata without any music lessons -- or even tried to read a book without having learned to read. Could you do it? Unless you are a genius, you would not know how to begin.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was a musical genius, such a great one that he knew how to compose music before he was taught. When he was three years old, he could play melodies he had heard only once, and create music he had never heard. The first time he sat at a harpsichord, held a violin in his hand, or touched the keys of an organ, he played as though he had had many lessons on the instrument. It was as easy and natural for him to do these things as it is for most children to begin to crawl, or to laugh and cry.

Mozart had the gift of true pitch. That is, he could name the tone of any sound he heard or of any note struck at random on a musical instrument.

Other great musician-composers have had some of these gifts, or a little of them. But none was so richly gifted as Mozart.

In his short lifetime, Mozart composed more music of every different kind than any other composer. Operas, symphonies, solo pieces for many different instruments; church music; chamber music for small groups of string instruments; songs for children, and for famous singers. The list goes on and on.

It is strange and very sad that this great genius was appreciated and applauded only during his childhood. He was a very famous child because of his music. But when he grew up, he could not even make a living with that music.

His childhood began in a story-book world, more than two hundred years ago. He was born in the city of Salzburg, Austria, on January 27, 1756. Standing in the Alps Mountains, Salzburg is a beautiful and historic city. The towers of its fortress and its cathedral rise above the rest of the city and look like a picture in a fairy tale.

Little Wolfgang Mozart seemed like a story-book child, too. He was handsome and cheerful. He had a pretty, older sister, a handsome, talented father, and a beautiful



mother. The whole family had a good time together, and Wolfgang was surrounded by music from the day he was born.

His father was a musician at the court of the archbishop there in Salzburg. He taught music, played the harpsichord and violin, and was named Court Composer when Wolfgang was a baby.

Whenever the father, Leopold Mozart, played at home, or practiced there with other members of the Archbishop's orchestra, the little boy and his sister Marianne listened. They were always quiet and happy as long as there was music.

One December evening, when Wolfgang was three years old, there was excitement at home. It was Papa Mozart's birthday. Wolfgang and Marianne ran back and forth from kitchen to parlor, helping their mother with a surprise celebration for Papa.

Every time Wolfgang went to the parlor, he looked eagerly out the window. At last he shouted at the top of his voice:

"He's coming! Papa's coming! Mama, hurry, hurry! I hear him coming up the steps . . . Oh, he is here! Happy birthday, Papa, happy birthday!"

After the celebration dinner, Leopold Mozart played the music his children begged for. First the violin, then the harpsichord. As he played, he noticed how Wolfgang watched every movement of his fingers and clapped his own little hands with each beat of the music. The child was keeping perfect time and smiling joyfully.

Papa Mozart stopped playing and took the little boy on his knees. "Now, Wolfgang, what makes you smile so? Is it the music? Do you like it so much?"

"Yes, Papa. I like it more than anything. I like to hear it all the time. I do, too, even when you are not playing."

"How can you do that, Child?" the father asked.



"It is easy, Papa. I close my eyes and remember the sound. Some day I will be a musician, too. Teach me to play the harpsichord, Papa? Teach me right now?"

Papa Mozart threw back his head and laughed heartily. "You, Wolfgang? Ach! My little boy! You are far too small. You could not stretch those tiny fingers to play an octave of big white keys. You could not reach up to the keys at all, without putting pillows and big



books on the bench. And what about those little short legs? You could not touch the pedals of the harpsichord. No, Son, you will have to grow a few more inches."

Then he looked at his daughter. "But Marianne, ah, that is different," he said. "Marianne is seven years old now, and I think it is time she learned to play."

Marianne was pleased. "You did promise to teach me, Papa, a long time ago."

So then and there, Marianne had her first lesson on the harpsichord. Papa Mozart showed her how to sit up straight on the bench and how to hold her hands. He helped her strike the keys in the right way, lightly, without pounding. He gave her a little piece to try, a minuet he had written himself.

After an hour Marianne could play the simple music quite well, and her father was pleased. Neither of them noticed that Wolfgang carefully watched and listened.

When Marianne's lesson was over, the little boy climbed up to the bench in front of the harpsichord. Then he played the music he had just heard, and he played it perfectly.

His father and mother looked at him in amazement. Papa Mozart was beaming with excitement.

"Well, little Bubchen! Bravo! This is indeed a happy day! Even though you prove your Papa to be wrong! You show me that you can play the harpsichord, three years old or not! Well, you shall both have lessons in music every day, from now on!"

So the study of music began for the Mozart children. They were taught daily with great care and skill by their gifted father. Often he wrote minuets, which Marianne learned in a few days of practicing. Wolfgang could always play the pieces correctly after hearing them once.

"I did not know such a thing could be!" said Frau Mozart.

"Nor I," agreed her husband. "Never have I seen anything like it. He seems to know everything before he is taught, and to play well without any effort. His memory is fantastic, and his ear is faultless! It is indeed a miracle. He even plays original melodies."

The father proudly began to keep a notebook of Wolfgang's original pieces. He wrote the music down as he watched the boy play it, and soon the book was full.



"The music is good, too," said Papa Mozart. "And the form is always correct. It is as if the boy had studied composition!"

When Wolfgang was about five years old, he was no longer satisfied to let his father write down his music. He wanted to do it himself. So he began to try writing his own manuscripts. Only Marianne knew about this at first, because Wolfgang was not very proud of all the ink blots and smudges he made on the paper.

One day, Marianne looked at him with a puzzled frown on her pretty face.

"Wolfgang, how do you do it? How can you write music when you have not yet learned how to write words?"

"I can do it because I have to do it. It is in here and I have to get it out!"

"In where?" asked Marianne, wonderingly.

"Here," said Wolfgang solemnly, touching his head. "I have to write it down to get it out of my head. To make room for the music that comes along to fill up my head again! Now," he said, "I am going to write out some pieces I have already composed, and I am going to give them to Papa when we have his next birthday celebration. Here is one of them. Shall I play it for you?"

"Oh, yes," said Marianne. "Please do."

As she listened, her eyes grew rounder and bigger. She hugged her little brother and kissed him.

"Wolfgang! It is beautiful. You must play it for Papa when he gets home tonight."

When Leopold Mozart came home, he saw his five-year-old struggling with a pen and sheets of music paper.

"What? Writing!" Papa said. "Let me see." He looked over Wolfgang's shoulder.

"It is a sonata for your birthday, Papa. But it is not quite finished," the little boy said as he wrote. "There! I am sorry there are so many blots. I drop ink, and the pen sticks, too. I don't know why."



His father smiled. "Well, perhaps it is because you have not been using a pen very long. Ah! I see you have written the notes over the blots well enough for a good musician to follow them."

He read Wolfgang's sonata carefully. He was smiling and shaking his head at the same time.

"Bubchen, this is a very beautiful sonata," he said. "And in spite of the ink blots and smudges, it is written out quite correctly. But there is one thing that worries me . . ."

"Oh, Papa," cried Wolfgang, with a long face, "what is it? What is wrong?"

"Nothing is wrong with the music at all," said his father, with a twinkle in his eyes. "But it is much too hard to play, at least for most musicians."

"Oh, is that all!" said little Wolfgang. "Sonatas are always hard to play well, even the simple ones. You know that! They have to be practiced first. But this one is not too hard. I will show you!"

He hurried to the harpsichord to play his music for his father. The little sonata *was* beautiful, singing and happy and full of melody. It is still played often, today.

A good friend of Leopold Mozart's came to practice with him that evening and visit with the family afterward. When the visitor heard Wolfgang play and saw the music he had written, he was amazed.

"I would not believe this if I did not hear it with my own ears and see with my own eyes," he said. "You know, I think that Wolfgang is more than a very nice little boy -- more than a good son and a loving brother. I think he is also the Spirit of Music, and he is playing a joke on all of us. The Spirit of Music is only pretending to be a little boy, so that he can live in this charming and gifted family and have a good time with them!"

It was a happy evening for all of them. So Wolfgang was surprised, later on, at something Marianne said.

The lights were out and they were about to go to sleep when she whispered anxiously, "Wolfgang, Papa is worried."

The little boy thought that was a silly idea. How could it be true? "Worried? But Papa was laughing and happy all evening," he said. "We had such a good time."



"I *know*," Marianne said. "But that does not mean anything. I heard Papa tell Mama that even with his new job as Court Composer, he is very worried about money. It costs money, Wolfgang, to buy shoes and books and medicine and so many things!"

Tender-hearted little Wolfgang was wide awake at once. He sat up in bed and said to Marianne in a loud whisper: "Then we must help."

"Oh, Wolfgang, how could we help? Unless we stopped eating, and wearing shoes."

"Silly! We could not do that. If we stopped eating, we would be sick. And if we stopped wearing shoes, we could not travel, and that would spoil our plan."

"Oh, you say the funniest things! What plan?"

"Our plan to help Papa."

"Oh! Of course. We have a plan, Herr Wolfgang," said Marianne with a giggle. "Let me see now . . . I seem to forget. Just what was our plan, Herr Mozart?"

"Goodness, Fraulein Mozart!" said Wolfgang, in the tone of His Majesty, the Emperor. "My goodness, but you are forgetful, child! Our plan is to travel and give concerts together, like other musicians!"

"Wolfgang!" Marianne was frightened at the very thought of such a thing. "How could we? How do you know Papa would want us to do anything like that? What makes you think the Archbishop would let him leave Salzburg for such a reason? You are much too young to understand all the different problems --"

"I am five-and-one-half years old!" said Wolfgang stoutly. He jumped out of bed and stood on tiptoe to show how tall he had grown.

"And besides, I have studied music all my life, and written it, too! I can play the harpsichord and the violin, and I can sing. You can sing and play the harpsichord. And we can play duets together too, if we practice."

"Duets?" asked Marianne. "What kind of musical instrument is a duet? You see? You don't know."





"I do," said Wolfgang quickly. "You are the one who doesn't know. I know, because I made up some for us to play. We both play the harpsichord at the same time together. You play the bass notes and I play the treble notes. Marianne, I have written some music for duets! Let's go to the parlor - I'll show it to you."

Marianne was interested now. Quietly she led the way from the dark bedroom. Softly the children tiptoed to the harpsichord in the still-bright parlor. Voices came from the kitchen, but Wolfgang and Marianne thought only of the music.

Wolfgang brought one of his smudgy sheets of paper to his sister. She studied it a moment, then she tried a few chords. The boy joined in with the treble part, which had more than twice as many notes as hers and was much harder to play.

Papa Mozart came hurrying into the parlor to see what was going on. He stood there, spellbound. The music that he heard was unusual and exciting.

By the time the children finished their duet, their mother was listening, too.

"Bravo!" said Papa. "A sonata for four hands instead of two. And a very good one, too."

"It will sound better after we practice it," said Wolfgang. "This is the first time we ever played it. Marianne had lots of ink blots on her part. So did I, but I wrote the notes in the first place, so I knew what they were! We thought a duet would make our concerts more interesting."

"What concerts?" asked Papa and Mama Mozart, making another duet.

Everybody laughed and Wolfgang ran to kiss his father.

"Papa, Marianne told me you are worried about money. I thought if we practice and work very hard, we could play some concerts. Then we could earn a little extra money for you."

Papa and Mama Mozart looked at their children in amazement. Then they looked at each other, thoughtfully. This idea of Wolfgang's was not a bad idea, at all.

The children really were musicians -- Marianne was quite good for a child, and Wolfgang, of course, was a genius! Their ages, their music, their charm -- everything would attract listeners. They would not have stage-fright, as some children might, for they loved to play, and they had already performed for small audiences of the family friends.



Wolfgang had even performed once in a great concert hall, playing with the court orchestra. And how the audience had cheered! The boy was very young, of course, for a concert tour. But musically, he was quite ready. He was born ready for anything in music.

"Yes," said Leopold Mozart to his wife and the eager children. "I think it may work out, this concert idea of yours. I will ask the archbishop for permission to be away from court for a while."

It was not long before he came home from work one day to announce that the permission was granted. "Now we must make arrangements for our tour," he said. "I think we will start in January. And I think we will be invited to play before many important people, in many countries. That is what I think of my wonderful children!"

Marianne and Wolfgang and their father left Salzburg two months from that day. Their tour was a happy, exciting time for all of them. They played in the courts of Austria, Germany, France, England, Belgium and Holland. They played before the Pope in the Vatican, and in many cities of Italy.

Everywhere, their audiences loved them. Wolfgang had more than his share of attention and applause, because he was so young and already such a brilliant performer and composer. But Marianne did not mind. She was proud of her little brother and loved him very much.

When the children played for the Royal Court of Austria, a funny thing happened. Wolfgang ran to the empress to thank her for her kindness and applause. He reached up, put his arms around her neck, and kissed her. Then as he turned to go, he slipped on the marble floor and fell over the long sword he had to wear at court. Down he went on that hard floor, and then he cried like any little boy.

The empress's\* daughter, Marie Antoinette, ran to him quickly. She helped him up and gave him a hug and kiss, "To stop the hurt," she said.

The princess was only a year older than Wolfgang, and he thought that he liked her very much. "Thank you, with all my heart," he said gratefully. "When I grow up I will marry you!"

There were other concert tours in the years of Wolfgang's childhood. Sometimes he played with Marianne, and sometimes he appeared alone. Everywhere he was a great success. Everyone took a special interest in him and his compositions.

\*This would be Maria Theresa, who was the ruling half of the married pair.





All the time, he never stopped composing. He learned to use the pen much better, and not to make blots on his music paper. He wrote songs, sonatas, symphonies. When he was only eleven years old he wrote his first opera. It was produced many times, with great success.

Many honors came to Wolfgang in these happy years. He was made a Cavalier and Knight of the Golden Cross by the Pope. The great Italian city of Bologna elected him a member of its Philharmonic Academy, an honor never before given to anyone so young.

But the fairy-tale childhood came to an end. Mozart's young manhood was filled with disappointments. He wrote and wrote, composing more and more beautiful music, but he received very little appreciation.

Often he was neglected, or treated unfairly and even cruelly. Yet he never became bitter or resentful. His happy, loving nature did not change. The music that filled his life also filled his heart. There was no room left for thoughts of meanness, revenge or bitterness.

His last opera, *The Magic Flute*, was written when Mozart was ill and weak, poor and low in spirit. But it sparkles with wit and gaiety. It is as joyous an opera as you will ever hear.

Mozart's music is proof that the quality of genius cannot be hurt by the world's neglect. And today the world is very fortunate indeed to have the beauty given it by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart.

~Wicker, Irene. Young Music Makers. E.M. Hale and Company, 1961

Music to listen to:

- 2nd Movement from Eine Kleine Nachtmusik
- Andante from Sonata in C Major K 545
- Serenade #13 for Strings from Eine Kleine Nachtmusik
- Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra
- Horn Concerto No. 1

