

JOHANN STAMIC

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Johann Vaclav Antonin Stamic was born on 18 June 1717 at Nemecky Brod in Bohemia, a town now in the Vysocina Region of the Czech Republic about 68.35 miles south east from Prague between Prague and Brno.

His father, Antonin Ignac was organist at the Dean's Church and later became a merchant, landowner and councillor. He was his son's first teacher.

Johann entered the Jesuit Gymnasium in Jihlava in 1728. He was at Prague University for the academic year 1734-5 studying philosophy but left to pursue a career in music as a violin virtuoso.

The University was a very strict Jesuit school specialising in theology and medicines. Perhaps its discipline set Johann in good stead since all his music bears the hallmarks of precision as well as quality.

What Stamic did between 1735 and his appointment at the Mannheim Court in 1741 or 1742 is not known. Mannheim is in south west Germany at the confluence of the river Rhine in the province of Baden-Wurttemberg, and is about 268 miles from Prague. We know that he was a first violinist, then, in 1743, the concert master.

His name was Germanised to Johann Wenzel Anton Stamitz. It is thought that his contact with Mannheim was a result of the Bohemia campaign.

A few matters of history and politics may be explained simply here.

Palatine is one of the seven hills of Rome and comes from the word relating to a palace; it is also a soldier of the palace guard of Roman emperors or prince electors of the Holy Roman Emperor since about 1261. Palatine also is used to describe an administrator or feudal lord.

Palatinate was the German area of Pfalz, at one time the seat of power for the Holy Emperor during the High and Middle Ages. Pfalz's Electoral Court was one of the regional princes who elected the Holy Roman Emperor. Bohemia and Moravia were Czech Crown lands and part of the Austrian Empire.

Stamic played in the Mannheim Orchestra at the coronation of Karl Albert, Karl VII (1697-1745), Prince Elector of Bavaria, an ally of the Palatine Elector of the Rhine. In 1720, Emperor Palatine Charles III, also known as Karl III, had moved the Palatine capital from Heidelberg to Mannheim. Stamic played at Mannheim at the marriage of Karl Theodor (1724-1799), Karl VIII, who had succeeded his uncle as Emperor Palatine.

On 1 July 1744 Stamic married Maria Antonia Luneborn and they had five children, two of whom died in infancy. Carl Philip was born in 1745 and was also a composer. He died in 1801. Anton Thadaus Nepomke's dates are uncertain. His birth date ranges from 1750 to 1754 and his death from 1798 to 1809. He was another composer. There was a daughter, Maria Francisco.

As an aside, I should remind you that Charles and Karl are the same name. For example Karl VIII could be written Charles VIII.



It is universally accepted that Stamitz made the Mannheim orchestra the very fine body of musicians it became. It was the pride of Europe. It was also renowned for the 'Mannheim rocket', a reference to its amazing crescendos.

If you admire any of the symphonies of Haydn or Mozart then you owe a debt to Stamitz since Haydn and Mozart were clearly influenced by Stamitz and not only influenced but they greatly admired him.

It was Stamitz who turned the three movement Suite or Sinfonia into a four movement Symphony adding a Minuet and Trio.

In the late summer of 1753, Stamitz began a musical year in Paris at the invitation of the music patron, Alexandre Le Riche de la Poupeliniere (1693-1762), a wealthy man who had a private orchestra which had been led by Rameau (1683-1764) for twenty years. After Stamitz's stay, it was conducted by Francois Joseph Gossec who lived from 1734 to 1829.

Stamitz gave a concert at the Concert Spirituelle on 8 September 1754 which inspired him to publish his Orchestral Trios Op 1. He returned to Mannheim in the autumn of 1755.

He died on 27 March 1757. He was 39.

He composed ten Orchestral Trios, about 60 symphonies, 15 violin concertos, 11 concertos for flute one for oboe, one for clarinet, a sumptuous Viola Concerto, keyboard concertos, at least one Mass and many other works.

Some of his symphonies are choice. The D major Symphony Op 3 no 2 is a marvellous succinct work of all that is the best of music of that time. Some symphonies have titles such as Spring, Pastoral, Melodica Germanica and The Rider. The problem is that if there are no opus numbers there could be, for example, many symphonies in C and how do we identify which is which? The same problem may exist with composers such as Myslivecek, Vanhal and Vanhal.

While I adore most of the Haydn symphonies and some by Mozart, would they have been so admirable had it not been for Stamitz who introduced into music the vitality of outer movements, the sublimity of a slow movement and an engaging Minuet and Trio. It is also evident that Mozart concertos were influenced by Stamitz. If Haydn and Mozart are great composers, so is Stamitz.

There is another important matter to mention. Bohemia itself was, at that time, and in effect, a countrywide conservatory for music and the arts. This is one of many reasons why his name should always be presented as Stamitz and not the Germanised version.

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