

## WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

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Is Mozart a great composer?

The fact that I ask that question may cause you to think that I may doubt that he is. Some of you may be incensed that I pose such a question.

But don't be.

However, there are some opinions, not necessarily mine, which have some currency although you may not agree with them. But consider them.

Unlike Haydn or Beethoven, Mozart had no sense of nature or the outdoors. There is no Creation or Seasons or a Pastoral. He was a real townie. Neither is there any great subtlety in his music. His music does, however, have the feel of lace handkerchiefs, powdered wigs and urban society.

If these ideas are true it does not alter the qualities that Mozart had

There are many musicians and music lovers who only talk of the late symphonies or the late piano concertos in terms which imply that these alone are his great works. For a considerable time in comparatively recent decades his early works were seldom played but we are glad to have them available today. Do these so-called great works make a lot of his early works seem poor and weak?

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria on 27 January 1756, the seventh and last child of Leopold and Anna Maria Mozart, nee Pertl. Five of the children died in infancy. He was baptised Johannes Chrysosomus Wolfgang Theophilus. His father, Leopold was both a musician and a composer, kapellmeister to Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg. Leopold was keen on travel, regarded himself as somewhat of a social historian and wrote long letters frequently. One of the most familiar subjects was his state of health. He would give laborious details of all his aches and pains and the medication, dosage and times of day he took such medicines. He was a school master and somewhat stern.

They were not a wealthy family. The father used to refer to the domestic situation as *the Order of Mended Trousers*. He referred to his son as Wolferl.

He was precocious and talented, a child prodigy. But this has to be looked at in the light of the times. In those days and with a musician father there was little else to do whereas a child prodigy of our times would be truly a sensation in view of all the distractions around us.

Mozart was composing by the time he was five but these early piano pieces are facile and I have often wondered what corrections Leopold made to them. What evidence is there that all the notes and combination of them are entirely the child's work? Nonetheless his keyboard skills were clearly obvious since he played before the Elector of Bavaria and the Empress of Austria when he was six years old. Was he regarded as talented or a freak of nature? Leopold thought it was in order for his son to have such exposure whereas some of us would question that. Wolfgang's sister, known as Nannerl, but her names were Maria Anna Walburga Ignatia, was said to be even more gifted as a keyboard player. She lived from 1751 to 1829. She was drawn to the harpsichord and had an amazing natural gift for playing it. It is probably sibling rivalry that caused Mozart to try to better her.

Leopold, being a Catholic, felt that his children's talents were God-given skills and must be displayed. It is more likely to say that Leopold wanted to show his offspring off and, as they were too young to appreciate the adulation, it would be heaped on him. This was also a brother-sister duo but most of the solo pieces were given to Wolfgang as he was 'so sweet.' As far as Leopold was concerned, man was the head of creation and the male must have the dominant and most prestigious roles at all times. Had he not thought like that, Nannerl may have become a star as well. The young Mozart played in Munich and Vienna in 1762. Wolfgang also taught himself to play the violin. In the summer of 1763 the Mozart family set out on an European tour and they lost no opportunity in playing before regal courts. They visited Frankfurt, Cologne, Brussels, Paris and London. They spent two weeks in Louis XV's court at Versailles. In London they were received in April



by George III. Their fame spread across Europe. Young Mozart studied there briefly with Karl Friedrich Abel, a German composer born in Cothen in 1723 who had studied under Hasse in Dresden

Johann Adolph Hasse was born on the outskirts of Hamburg in 1699. He was an amazingly prolific composer composing over a hundred operas. He is often unfairly dismissed as the poor man's Handel but his music is not really Handelian. Rather his music is less contrived and more original. In fact some of it is remarkably striking for the time. His writing for the voice is the most remarkable of all his many qualities and his works need both revival and exposure. His wife was the famous prima donna, Faustina Bordoni. He spent most of his working life in Dresden, Vienna and Venice where he died in 1783.

Abel had settled in London around 1759 becoming a musician for Queen Charlotte. He was for a long time associated with Johan Christian Bach with whom Mozart also had lessons at the same time as he did with Abel. J. C. Bach was the youngest son of the great J.S. Bach and was keen on writing symphonies which probably inspired young Mozart to do likewise. In the year of Mozart's visit, Abel, who had also been a pupil of J.S. Bach, and J.C. Bach inaugurated a series of concerts that continued until 1781. J.C. Bach also wrote about 40 keyboard concertos which may well have inspired Mozart to write 27 piano concertos. A tremendous cult grew up around Mozart. He also studied singing with the castrato, Giovanni Manzuoli. He had music published and was writing symphonies. *Symphony no. 1 in E flat* (K.16) appeared in 1764 and *Symphony no. 5 in B flat* (K.22) appeared in 1765.

The Mozarts returned home via Holland and Switzerland shortly before Christmas 1766 they went to Vienna where an opera, *La Finta Semplice* (K.51) by the eleven year old was due for performance. The main cause of contention was the ethics of staging an opera by a prodigy. While some claimed that such a work by a child must be a miracle the fact remains that it is a very poor piece. On the other hand, Hasse wrote, "I have looked at the compositions; they are certainly well done and I have seen nothing in them that smacks of a twelve-year-old boy". There is no evidence that he saw the music of *La Finta Semplice*. Hasse also warned that Leopold must not over indulge his son or spoil his nature with unwarranted praise.

From that time on so-called musical experts put Mozart to the test investigating his work and character as if he were a suspect in a murder enquiry. Leopold would say that his son at the age of eight knew more about music than seasoned professionals in their forties.

The year 1769 saw Mozart at home. Then they engaged in three visits to Italy where Mozart was absolutely adored. The famous incident of his hearing Allegri's *Misere* and going home and writing it out complete from memory but takes some believing. Did he not get a note or time value wrong after hearing it just once? I am sorry to be sceptical but I know how impossible it is for experienced musicians to write out a five minute piece from memory after one hearing and get it completely right.

In Italy, Mozart had lessons from Martini and met Nardini, Jommelli and Sir Charles Burney. Giovanni Martini was a very gifted scholar known as Padre Martini having taken holy orders in 1729. He had a fascination with science and a vast library. J. C. Bach was among his pupils.

Pietro Nardini was born in Leghorn in 1722 and was a renowned violinist and most of his works were written for that instrument and still occasionally played today. He died in Florence in 1793.

Niccolo Jommelli was born in Naples in 1714 and had his first opera produced in 1727. He was kapellmeister to the Duke of Stuggart from 1753 to 1769. He composed about 60 operas but they did not catch on and he is completely forgotten today.

Obviously Sir Charles Burney was an Englishman, born in Shrewsbury in 1726 and well known both for his writings on music and his travels. He was a man with an insatiable appetite for knowledge covering a vast spectrum of subjects. He was also one of those individuals who had to meet famous people for his own aggrandisement. He and Leopold were of the same ilk.

A lesser reason for the travel was for his children to learn new languages which in those days were considered major accomplishments.

In Italy, Mozart produced two operas *Mitridate*, *Re de Ponto* (K.87) produced in Milan in December 1770 and *Lucia Silla* (K.135) which J.C. Bach also set in 1777 as did Anfossi three years earlier in 1774. Mozart was now entrenched in the Italian style.

While in Italy, Mozart symphonies rose to number 25, the first of his two G minor symphonies considered by many to be superior to the later one because of its spontaneity. He also wrote thirteen string quartets during 1770 -73 and his first *String Quintet* (K.174).

One of the hindrances that Mozart faced was that he was short was self-conscious about his appearance which made his character and personality a little bellicose at times.

There is also something disturbing about Mozart. Even into his twenties he was still very adolescent. Some of the letters he wrote, including those to his sister, are nothing short of being vulgar and immature. Lavatory humour for eight-year-olds may be understood but not for someone who is twenty one plus. He dealt on intimate bodily functions and both his parents who talked openly about defecation. He kept a diary of every incident when he heard someone fart.

But Mozart had a filthy mind and was crude in the extreme. In Vienna in 1782 he wrote a series of vocal canons and not only did he write the music he wrote the words. For obvious reasons they are seldom performed or even mentioned and thus an aspect of Mozart's character is concealed.

The canon K213 is called *Lich mir* and Mozart's words are absolute filth. Translated the words are *Lick my asshole, Lick my asshole as I will lick yours.*

Let me quote K 231

Leck mich im Arsch!

Goethe, Goethe

Gutz von Berlichingen! Zweiter Akt;

Die Szene kennt ihr ja!

Rufen wir nur ganz summarisch

Hier wird Mozart literarisch!

This is sung be females only

K233 is sung by a mixed choir and, again, the words are by Mozart

Leck mir den Arsch fein rein,

Soll das denn Urtext sein?

Soll das denn Mozarts Urtext sein!

Leck mir! O nein, o nein!

Die Bildnis ist so rein

ist so weiss wis ein Schwan!

Lick mir? Das kann nicht sein, nein!

O nein!

Soll das denn wirklich Urtext sein?

Nein, der Mozart war ein feiner Mann!

The text does not speak or servility in the workplace in or society but is absolute filth!

These works are available on CD, Brilliant Classics Mozart Edition with the Chamber Choir of Europe under Nicol Matt.

It takes a filthy mind to write such filth and I wonder why there are recordings of such material sung by a young German choir of schoolgirls!! Britten loved these songs.

It has been suggested that Mozart suffered from Tourette's syndrome which is a neurological disorder.

Physically, it shows itself in involuntary muscular spasms or twitches known as tics. The condition also includes moodiness, bad temper, symptoms similar to manic depression and a fascination with the obscene. Mozart kept dairies of things he saw and heard relating to bodily functions and sexual titillation.

It is also clear that Leopold did not want his son to become involved in a relationship, no more than he did for his daughter. In October 1777, when Mozart was twenty one, he encountered his cousin and was immediately attracted to her. Apparently, and in response to Mozart's obscenities they became lovers within a couple of days. Mozart had now sample the forbidden fruit. Even in lovemaking and his comments, verbal or written, he would talk to his cousin Anna in very vulgar terms. It is really quite revolting.

The idea of Mozart being sweet and the family being gentile is simply not true. I wonder what Nannerl thought of it all.

*La Finta Semplice* was premiered in Munich early in 1775. From 1774 to the middle of 1777 Mozart worked as an assistant Konzertmeister at the Court of the Prince-Archbishop, Hieronymus, Count of Colloredo who had succeeded Sigismund in 1771. During this time Mozart wrote masses, his five violin concertos, of which the *Violin Concerto no. 3 in G* (K.216, 1775) is his first veritable masterpiece. His first mature piano concerto, the *Piano Concerto no. 9 in E flat* (K.271) was written four years earlier but it does not have the breadth of style or inspiration of K. 216

Mozart's fame in Salzburg diminished. In March 1777 Leopold petitioned Colloredo for a leave of absence from the court both for himself and Wolfgang. In other words, they wanted to vary their employment contract.

Colloredo knew that the Mozarts were critical of him and the court and was not immediately disposed to grant any favours. Leopold, pushing his son, had now become an embarrassment. Over exposure can be irritating. The Mozarts wanted to 'move on' saying that there was such limited scope for Wolfgang in Salzburg, whereas the truth is probably that the 'Mozart thing' had been done to death. And, of course, there is that insidious attribute of envy which proceeds to gossip and unkind speech. Leopold was a control freak and anyone who disagreed with him even slightly he regarded as an enemy. Both he and Wolfgang believed the Prince-Archbishop did not trust them

Leopold was not very well. Stress and the disappointment of his son's fall from favour worried him. He was beset with doubts as to whether what he had done for Mozart had proved to be unwise. Therefore, in 1777, Wolfgang went with his mother to both Mannheim and to Munich to see if employment was available. No position was offered to him although during the four months he was in Mannheim he fell in love with Aloysia Weber who possessed an excellent singing voice. His father then sent word that he should go on to Paris where Mozart composed his *Symphony no. 31 in D* (K. 297) referred to as the Paris symphony in order to ingratiate himself with the Parisians.

But here too, Mozart was not offered a post

His mother died in July and Wolfgang deliberately delayed informing anyone of her death and still wrote home to say that she was very ill whereas in fact she was dead. Eventually, his father ordered him home. In Mozart's defence it may have been that he did not know how to break the news to both his father and Nannerl and delayed wondering what to do.

Paris was involved in the scandal between Gluck and Piccinni which, in simple terms, was a matter of jealousy. The people of Paris were not interested in Mozart who spent the next two years in Salzburg.

It is my view that his best works were written about this time

The '*Sinfonia Concertante in E flat for violin, viola and orchestra* (K364) is simply sublime. Here is Mozart at his very best. Even though he uses two string instruments as soloists and they often have the same material the mellowness of the viola is a wonderful foil for the brighter sound of the violin. The orchestral build ups to climax are beautifully judged with soaring cellos having their moments of uplifting music and the horn theme is richly noble and carefully avoided pomposity or baroque styles.

The music is elegant, cheerful and yields that rare supreme joy that music can give.

Of all Mozart's masses perhaps the *Coronation Mass* (K. 317) of 1779 may be his finest. Similarly, the opera *Idomeneo, King of Crete* (K.366) must be one of his finest operas. It was commissioned by the Elector of Bavaria. Here Mozart takes on an heroic sound with a wide range of emotions and some of the best orchestration he ever produced. Without a doubt, it is his best dramatic piece. Later operas have serious flaws. *Idomeneo* was first given in Munich in 1781, in Karlsruhe in 1917, Dresden 1925, Glasgow in 1934, Tanglewood in 1947 and so on. Such was its appeal to fellow composers that Richard Strauss made his own version of it adding some music of his own, such was his desire to be identified with this masterpiece. Wolf-Ferrari also made an edition.

And today there are conductors who perform music not in the way or style intended by the composer but in their own way to 'improve' it or make themselves noted or important. What makes a great conductor is one who realises the composer's intentions. As I have said elsewhere we hear about Karajan's Beethoven. What about Beethoven's Beethoven?

It is curious that the most popular works of a composer are not necessarily his best or favourites. I adore Shostakovich's *Symphony no. 12*. Apart from being somewhat repetitive it is a flawless work although some conductors, such as George Pretre, made a real mess of it. Yet it is not his most popular symphony. Mozart's *Symphony no. 34 in C* (K 338) is a magnificent piece, full of life and vigour and unashamed foot-tapping.

Yet this raises a problem. Mozart has suffered from some ghastly performances over many years. Otto Klemperer conducted Mozart at such a drab and slow pace that it was positively painful and criminal in that it was a great disservice to Mozart. When I first conducted it, I took it at a fast pace and was criticised. Sir Roger Norrington gave a performance a few years ago and at that lively tempo and it was a revelation. He even took the andante as a two in the bar and not as an adagio as most people do. This was exhilarating Mozart, really very special.

During 1779-80, Mozart performed at court and in the cathedral. Prince-Archbishop Colloredo was not popular with Leopold Mozart and there were hostilities and intrigues. Wolfgang rowed with him since he was not given a place of honour but was regarded socially as somewhere between the court valets and the

cooks. Prince-Archbishop refused to let Mozart perform at functions that he was attending and in May 1781 Mozart lost his job or was kicked out of it. Some state that he resigned.

He went to Vienna where he settled and lived for the rest of his life and married Constanze Weber, the younger sister of Aloysia. Leopold was furious referring to her as no better than a slut. He also referred to the widow Weber as a drunk. Aloysia had married Johann Joseph Lange, a Shakespearian actor and professional painter. The Mozart's marriage was born in tension but Mozart assured her that 'he longed for her beautiful ass' and when they were apart he would write quite crude and erotic letters to her. It was with these disgusting thoughts in his mind that Mozart wrote words and set them to music including K213 which is about anal intercourse.

The marriage was 1782, the year of one of Mozart's best symphonies, the *Symphony no. 35 in D* (K. 385) known as the Haffner symphony. Haffner was the name of a Salzburg family for which Mozart had written his *Serenade in D* (K. 250) in 1776. This symphony uses the same material but, given a sprightly and attacking performance, it comes across as a splendid work. *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* (K. 384) was the next opera, which came in for much criticism, may have begun a period of lesser music for Mozart. It was a German Singspiel but Mozart in trying to be original, an essential for all composers, went too far with elaborate arias and prompted the Emperor's famous remark, "Too many notes, my dear Mozart". Nonetheless the work became popular largely because it was different.

Mozart became paranoid about his wife not wanting her to go out alone in case she would meet one of her clients and succumb. These feelings should have prevented his marrying her.

The year 1782 also saw the beginning of a set six string quartets dedicated to Haydn two of which have nicknames. The *String Quartet in B flat* (K.458) is known as *The Hunt* and the *String Quartet in C* (K.465), the last of the six dating from 1785, is known as *The Dissonance*. It may have sounded dissonant then but it does not now. Mozart was trying to write modern music but he was not an innovator. Of the six quartets the *String Quartet in E flat* (K. 428) is the pick of the bunch. It has some of the qualities of the *Sinfonia Concertante* also in the same key. This is the smooth mercurial Mozart with the effortless flow of melodic music full of elegance and the 'feel good' factor.

Haydn was full of praise for Mozart saying that he was the greatest composer he knew.

Much is made of key signatures in the music of classical composers. The triumphant D major in Haydn, the alleged profoundly C minor in both Mozart and Beethoven but there is a case of glorious E flat for Mozart.

Wolfgang was now working on what was to become one of best loved operas, *Le Nozze di Figaro* (K.482). This opera brought entertainment to its highest level and I have happy memories of seeing a performance in which the great Edith Mathis played the page boy Cherubino. It is an opera buffa as opposed to an opera seria. It is a comedy and while not all the music in the three acts is of the same high level it is a truly great piece of entertainment. It is one of those works which defies the label of classical music being highbrow.

From 1782 to 1786 Mozart was also largely concerned with piano concertos. The *Piano Concerto no. 13 in C* (K.415) was completed in the winter of 1782-3 and the *Piano Concerto no. 25 in C* (K.503) dates from 1786.

It has often been said that these concertos are gems and that everyone has their favourite. Of particular note is the *Piano Concerto no. 20 in D minor* (K. 466) the first piano concerto in a minor key, in fact, his first concerto in a minor key. The *Piano Concerto no. 24 in C minor* (K.491) is very profound and among his finest concert works whereas its predecessor, the *Piano Concerto no. 23 in A* (K 488), is a very sunny work.

It was during the period of these concertos that Mozart became involved with the Freemasons. His lodge was called Beneficence. He was subjected to the absurd initiation rites which made him an apprentice mason and was quickly promoted to Master mason. He wrote short masonic compositions and the opera *Die Zauberflöte* is steeped in Masonic ritual and it has been said that you cannot understand the opera without some knowledge of this secret society.

But I must return to the piano concertos. In the last year of his life he wrote two final piano concertos. The *Piano Concerto no. 26 in D* (K537), known as the Coronation is the least admired and the first one I played as a teenager. Perhaps because some Mozart does not give the soloist scope to shine may be a reason for this concerto's comparative unpopularity.

*Le Nozze di Figaro* was premiered in Vienna in 1786 and received with great success. But after nine performances it was taken off. The following year it was given in Prague and was an even greater success. Mozart wrote his *Symphony no. 38 in D* (K.504) entitled *The Prague* for his first visit there. The Bohemian

capital were so impressed that they commissioned his next opera *Don Giovanni* (K527) which was written at speed during 1787. This opera is highly regarded in some quarters but it has many weaknesses due to the velocity at which it was composed.

Problems that beset Mozart seem to emerge in this work more so than any before it; he was obviously a proud man and aware of his gifts which did not endear him to everyone. That he paraded himself around Europe was a personal advertisement proclaiming his feelings of importance whereas the people of Salzburg may have thought that he was their property and that Mozart owed his allegiance to them in a sort of exclusive way. He was always in need of money and would ingratiate himself with rich patrons which also annoyed some of the common people who were his friends. And royal courts and nobility are fickle. But most of them were fellow masons. They fuss all over a new star and then when they get fed up they court another talent.

Domestic, social and sexual tensions are seen in *Don Giovanni* and, in some respects, it is a grim work particularly in the light of his other works.

Beethoven disapproved of the work not out of a sense of prejudice but simply on the grounds of the quality of the music.

It is this despair that permeates the opera *Così fan tutte* (K.588). The elegance and shine has gone from Mozart who is now into psychological drama. The death of his father in 1787 also plays a part. *Così fan tutte* is a probe into the artificiality of life and sexual infidelity. The next opera *Die Zauberflöte* (K. 620) is weird. The use of allegory and ritualistic elements such as freemasonry is worrying. It is as if this is a political statement rather than an opera just as is the case with the operas of Alan Bush. While we all accept that there is good music in *Die Zauberflöte* it is a very uncomfortable work and out of character with Mozart. To quote the other side of the coin, Alban Berg wrote two magnificent operas, *Wozzeck* and *Lulu* which are dark but they are in character with this latter day genius and his work

In simple terms Mozart was outstanding in the elegant sunny works which he composed but, perhaps, out of his depth with the profound music he tried to write.

In June 1788 he began to compose his last three symphonies which most people highly regard. But I have to ask why. Of the three the *Symphony no. 39 in E flat* (K 543) is unquestionably the best whereas parts of the *Symphony no. 40 in G minor* (K. 550) are trite with rather inane themes that border on the cheap or frivolous. The psychology comes into play again here. Mozart is clearly going through an identity crisis. He is trying to capture the youthful charm of his works of the 1779-80 and then sinks into the despair of his late operas and to crown it all becomes flippant and somewhat insincere in some of the themes of this symphony, particularly the opening one, which are trite, superficial, lacking substance and, as one famous musician said anorexic.

By 1788 Mozart was in serious financial problems. In Berlin, King Friedrich Wilhelm II commissioned six string quartets but only three were written. Emperor Joseph II had commissioned *Così fan tutte*. Mozart had hoped to be appointed kapellmeister for Leopold II but the post was given to Antonio Salieri who was a better all-round musician. Mozart was incensed.

I object to books stating that Salieri was hostile to Mozart. The fact is that it is the other way round. Why Leopold II appointed Salieri over Mozart is a major issue but there is no evidence of sabotage or unfair advantage. The absurd story that has sprung up that Salieri murdered Mozart by poison is just another extension of the efforts to discredit Salieri.

However, there are some who believe that when Salieri probably suffered from a possible form of dementia he may have said that he was responsible for the death of Mozart. But Salieri was old, worn out and his mind was gone when this was apparently said.

It is a great pity that Rimsky-Korsakov put this falsehood into an opera which is based on a play by Pushkin. The hostility was started by Leopold Mozart who took every opportunity to disgrace Salieri. Father Mozart wrote to his daughter in 1785, after hearing Salieri's opera *La fiera di Venezia*, saying that the opera had 'hurt' him and that it was old-fashioned, artificial and lacking all harmony. He called the work stupid.

This aggression of Father Mozart caused many a conflict for Wolfgang. It was like living in a battlefield and life was always something of a contest.

Antonio Salieri is, in my view, a great composer in his own right. He was born in Legnano in 1750 and studied music in Venice with an emphasis on singing. At the age of sixteen he was taken to Vienna and made his debut as a Court conductor in 1770. He taught Beethoven, Liszt and Schubert. He wrote about forty operas and many other works. Some of his symphonies rank higher than those of Mozart, particularly in the realm of originality. As an example I recommend the *Sinfonia Il Giorrio Onomastico*.

Mozart was commissioned to write a requiem from an anonymous patron who apparently was going to pass it off as his own. But this was put on the back burner to enable the completion of his final opera *La Clemenza di Tito* (K. 621) written for the coronation of Leopold II as King of Bohemia which was to take place in Prague in September 1791. This was conducted by Mozart who then wrote his sublime *Clarinet Concerto* (K.622) before working on his *Requiem Mass* (K.626). Four months later on 5 December, he died and a gifted pupil Xaver Sussmayer completed the work maintaining Mozart's style.

In his last year Mozart still worked at full speed. He travelled. He went to the opera several times a week. He still made jokes about defecating and farting. He smoked his pipe, enjoyed his food and played billiards. At the premiere of his last opera *Constanze* and Sussmayer noted how ill and sad he was. He had to take medication.

It seems that Mozart had a recurrence of rheumatic fever but he was clearly in a psychological state. On 20 November he went to bed with painful swellings in his arms and legs, found it hard to move and suffered fits of vomiting. His doctors said that they did the best they could. They bled him several times. Some critics said that they literally bled him to death. In fact the medications given to Mozart made him worse. He died of uraemia.

He was buried in a pauper's grave following a cheap funeral with others who had died around the same time. It was a very stormy and wet day. His grave is not known.

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