

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

1756 – 1791

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart is one of the most famous composers of the Classical Era (1750-1800). He was born in Salzburg, Austria. Of the seven children born to Mozart's parents, only he and an older sister, Maria Anna, survived infancy. Maria Anna was known by her family nickname, "Nannerl."

Wolfgang's father, Leopold Mozart, worked as a violinist for the Archbishop of Salzburg. As a court musician, Leopold performed, conducted, and taught violin. He also published a widely used book on violin playing.

Father Leopold instructed his talented children in music. Nannerl became an outstanding performer on the harpsichord. By age four, Wolfgang was playing by ear the music that Nannerl practiced for her harpsichord lessons.

Wolfgang learned to play minuets and marches during his fourth year. He learned easy pieces after practicing for half an hour. Pieces with difficult rhythms had to be practiced for an hour.

Five-year old Wolfgang could sight-read very well. He could improvise songs and keyboard pieces. His father copied into notebooks many of the pieces that Wolfgang composed and played. This example was composed in 1761 by Mozart at age five.



Mozart: Allegro



At age twenty-one, Mozart traveled with his mother to music centers in Munich, Augsburg, and Mannheim in Germany, and Paris, France. He was seeking a position as a court musician.

At the court of Mannheim, he met his future wife, Constanze Weber, and her father had positions as opera singers at the court of Munich. The Weber family realized that, although Mozart was very talented, he had no income or secure court position. Because of this, the family rejected Mozart.

Mozart was in Paris in 1778. He was very poor and his mother died. He was much saddened by the death of his mother in Paris.

In 1779, Mozart returned to the Salzburg court. He worked there as a court organist and composer. The Prince-Bishop of Salzburg, however, was not very satisfied with his work.

Much against his father's wishes, Mozart married Constanze Weber in 1782. She was the sister of Aloysia Weber, Mozart's first love. The newly-married couple lived in poverty most of the time. Only a small income came to them from concerts, commissioned works, and a few pupils. Seven children were born to the Mozarts, but only two sons lived into adulthood.

Leopold Mozart took his talented children on many long journeys to distant cities and royal courts. They performed for royal audiences and aristocratic patrons. The children were praised lavishly by their astonished listeners.

To get to the distant cities where they were to perform, the Mozart family rode in uncomfortable, horse-drawn carriages. The carriages were particularly uncomfortable in bad weather. To make matters worse, the beds and food at many inns where they stayed along the way were of poor quality. To avoid these discomforts, the travelers remained in England for over a year on a journey there in 1764. While they were in England, Wolfgang (who was only eight years old) composed sonatas for harpsichord and violin, as well as his first symphonies for orchestra.

Johann Christian Bach was an important court musician and composer in London at that time. He was the youngest son of Johann Sebastian Bach. After studying music in Italy, Johann Christian settled in England. Wolfgang received valuable lessons in keyboard playing and composing from Johann Christian Bach.

The young Mozart admired the graceful melodies of Johann Christian Bach. He arranged keyboard sonatas by J.C. Bach as concertos for solo keyboard and orchestra.

The example below shows a lyrical theme from Mozart's "Rondo in F Major," section A. Later repetitions of the A section material have the same theme enriched with melodic ornaments.

Mozart: Rondo in F Major

Andante

F:

p
v
I



Mozart and his father made a journey to Italy in 1769. Many honors were conferred upon Wolfgang by church leaders, royalty, and professional musicians there.

At age fourteen, Wolfgang presented a concert of two symphonies he composed in Mantua, Italy. He sight-read a sonata, and then improvised variations upon themes from the sonata. He also improvised other music on themes given to him by members of the orchestra.

In Rome, Wolfgang heard two performances of a famous choral work, Allegri's *Miserere*. Afterwards, he wrote down the music of *Miserere*, entirely from memory.

Mozart's many travels prevented him from attending school. He studied reading and arithmetic as a

child at home. He seemed to absorb foreign languages and advanced music styles on his journeys. He learned the most from the music he heard performed.

At age twenty-one, Mozart traveled with his mother to music centers in Munich, Augsburg, and Mannheim in Germany, and Paris, France. He was seeking a position as a court musician.

While at Mannheim, Mozart fell in love with an attractive young singer, Aloysia Weber. Aloysia and her father had positions as opera singers at the court of Munich. The Weber family realized that, although Mozart was very talented, he had no income or secure court position. Because of this, the family rejected Mozart.

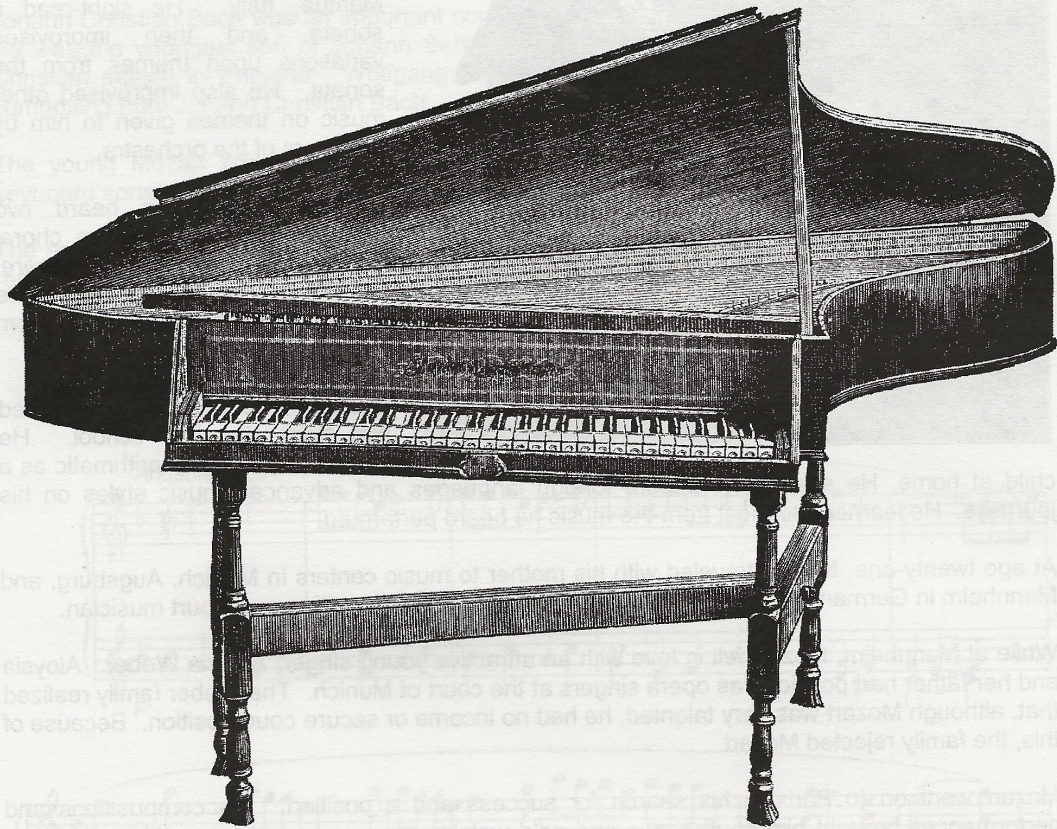
Mozart went on to Paris in his search for success and a position. His compositions and performances brought him snuff boxes and gold watches, but no money or position. He was much saddened by the death of his mother in Paris.

In 1779, Mozart returned to the Salzburg court. He worked there as a court organist and violinist. His patron the Archbishop, had died. The new ruler, Count Hieronymus cared nothing about music so Mozart left provincial Salzburg in 1781 to settle permanently in Vienna.

Much against his father's wishes, Mozart married Constanze Weber in 1782. She was the sister of Aloysia Weber, Mozart's first love. The newly-married couple lived in poverty most of the time. Only a small income came to them from concerts, commissioned works, and a few pupils. Seven children were born to the Mozarts, but only two sons lived into adulthood.

For a time, Mozart produced subscription concerts in Vienna. He composed symphonies, solo concertos, string quartets, and piano works for his concerts. He also performed as a solo pianist. Improvised pieces were often added to the programs.

Mozart was very much impressed with the pianos built in Vienna by Johann Andreas Stein. The "Viennese action" created by Stein was very light. Stein's pianos produced sounds that were sparkling, clear, and delicate. Early Classical music reflects the clarity and graceful elegance of these early pianos.



An early piano is pictured above. Some early pianos had knee pedals which lifted the dampers off the strings, allowing the strings to keep vibrating. Later pianos were built with foot pedals of the sort found on modern pianos. The ability to sustain sounds and make gradual changes in dynamics was quite different from the Baroque harpsichord, which had short-lasting sounds and could only change dynamics by adding a second manual.

The new piano was most suitable for music with homophonic, rather than contrapuntal texture. A legato or "singing" melody could be played over a softer chordal accompaniment. Cadences (a series of chords that ends a phrase) of lighter weight marked off phrases and small sections of longer compositions.

Mozart wrote a series of variations on a French folk song called "Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman." In America, it is known as "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." Play the theme section below, playing heavier cadences after repeating measures 1-8, and in measures 23-24. The cadence in measures 15-16 is also emphasized with a trill. Try to play legato without the pedal, as if on an early piano.

Mozart: Twelve Variations on "Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman"

Theme:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

C: V I

9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16

I V

17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24

V I

Twelve variations follow the theme section of twenty-four measures. The examples that follow illustrate some of Mozart's variety of rhythm patterns and different accompaniments to the melody.

Mozart: Twelve Variations on "Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman"

Variation V:

C:

Variation VIII:

C:

Variation X:

C:

Which variation has contrapuntal texture with imitation? _____

Which variation is more dramatic in style? _____

Don Giovanni is a stunning tragic opera by Mozart. It is performed frequently to this day. Its plot is based on the traditional tale of the fickle lover, Don Juan, and his eventual ruin.

The following examples are fragments of vocal melodies from *The Magic Flute*. The opera's hero, Tamino, sings of his love for Pamina, the Queen of the Night's beautiful young daughter.

Larghetto

E♭: *p*

Allegro

Mozart: Papageno's Song

Bb: Hm! hm! hm! hm! — hm! hm! hm! hm! — hm! — hm! hm! hm! hm! — hm! hm! hm! — hm! hm! hm! hm! hm!

Allegro

The first staff of music is written on a treble clef with a key signature of one flat (B-flat) and a common time signature (C). It begins with a forte dynamic marking (*f*). The melody starts with a quarter rest, followed by eighth notes G4, A4, Bb4, and C5. This is followed by a half note D5, a quarter note E5, and another half note D5. The next measure contains a quarter note C5, a quarter note Bb4, and a half note A4. The final measure consists of a half note G4 and a half note F4. The entire phrase is covered by a single slur.

On stage, the characters are in costume, and scenery helps the story seem real. The frightening Queen of the Night first appears as thunder rolls and mountains part. Her throne is on high, showing against the starry heavens.

Mozart composed many works for symphony orchestra. The new Classical symphony gained immense popularity at royal courts and in public concerts. A symphony usually has four movements with contrast of key, tempo, form, and style in different movements.

Many of Mozart's forty-nine symphonies are performed in concerts today. He also composed orchestral works similar in style to the Baroque orchestral suite. These works are called "Divertimentos," "Serenades," or "Cassations."

Eine Kleine Nachtmusik (A Little Night Music) is a charming serenade composed for stringed instruments. Its four short movements are organized as symphony movements:

Movement I	Allegro	Sonata form
Movement II	Andante	"Romanze" (theme and variations)
Movement III	Allegretto	Minuet and trio
Movement IV	Allegro	Rondo form

Play the melody line and bass line from of the example below. The phrases are of equal length and similar melodic shape. The trills and quicker rhythms of the second phrase add variety and intensity to the basic melodic shape.

Notice that the bass line also has its own interesting melodic shape. Mozart studied the music of Bach and Handel to learn the technique of creating contrapuntal texture. His later music contains increased richness of texture.

Mozart: Minuet from *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*

Allegretto

f

G:

Listen to a recording of *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*.