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WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was born in Salzburg, Austria on January 27, 1756. His father, Leopold Mozart, was also a musician, an excellent violinist, court composer, and vice-Kappellmeister to the Archbishop of Salzburg. Mozart revealed his love for music at a very early age and his father instructed him, as well as his precociously talented sister Marianne. From 1762 on, Leopold travelled to various European cities with the children, presenting them in concerts which never failed to impress the nobility. They played in London for the King in 1764, by which year Mozart had already begun composing.

By 1766, Mozart was arranging movements of other composers' music and composing sonatas, serenades, and symphonies. Visiting Vienna in 1768, he was asked by the Emperor to compose and conduct opera. During that visit, he also composed a Mass, trumpet concerto, and two symphonies.

His father continued to intersperse their travels with periods in Salzburg, and took the responsibility for his son's further musical education. He made a point of taking Mozart to Italy to expose him to the Italian operatic style.

By the time he was 21, Mozart was a skilled performer on the pianoforte, violin, and viola, and had come to find Salzburg an intolerable place to live. He set out with his mother for Mannheim, where he composed and gave lessons, and fell in love with Aloysia Weber, one of the daughters of the family with which they were staying. His father was strongly opposed to this alliance, and, at his urging, Mozart reluctantly left for Paris in March of 1778. He remained there until January of 1779; his mother died while they were in Paris.

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Mozart returned to Salzburg, where he was given the position of Konzertmaster and organist to the court and cathedral. He composed several symphonies, concertos, and divertimentos during this period. The Sinfonia Concertante, K. 364, dates from this time in Salzburg.

The opera *Idomeneo*, presented in Munich in January, 1781, established Mozart as a composer for the operatic stage. In March, 1781, he was summoned to Vienna, where he was to remain, with brief travels elsewhere, until his death. He met Haydn there at this time, and the two became good friends, respecting and mutually influencing each other's work.

Mozart was not especially well received by the Viennese aristocracy, and found himself without an appropriate post -- a situation which was to continue unrelieved until his death. His opera *The Abduction from the Seraglio* (*Entfuhring auf dem Serail*) was presented in July of 1782. Less than a month later, he married Constanze Weber, sister of his former love Aloysia, a match which met with strong disapproval from his father. The couple were poor, and neither of them had a good head for managing what little money they had. With no prospect of a fixed appointment, Mozart continued to earn money by composing and giving music lessons. His concerts were very successful, and the Emperor was frequently an enthusiastic member of the audience. Despite this, he was not able to come up with a position at court for the young composer.

Mozart gave subscription concerts, composing a new pianoforte concerto for each one. Despairing of his lack of success, Mozart from time to time considered going to London or Paris, but his father continuously discouraged him from leaving Vienna. Mozart became a member of a Viennese Masonic Lodge in 1784, and his association with the Masons inspired many compositions, most notably his opera *The Magic Flute*.

Mozart continued to compose operas: *The Marriage of Figaro* (*Le Nozze di Figaro*), adapted from a play by Beaumarchais, was first performed in 1786. It was a triumph, but led to no improvement in his financial situation. *Don Giovanni* was presented in 1787 in Prague, where his music was greatly

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appreciated. The Austrian Emperor ordered a new opera from him in 1790; the result was *Così fan tutte*.

By 1790, Mozart's health had declined, and at times he was reduced to asking friends for loans. His previously prolific output -- he had composed his last three symphonies during a six-week period -- had fallen off. In his final year, he experienced one last burst of creative energy, composing a string quintet, his final piano concerto, a clarinet concerto, and the opera *Le Clemenza di Tito*, performed in Prague. His magnificent final opera *The Magic Flute* (*Die Zauberflöte*), had its first performance in September, 1791. Coldly received at first, it gradually became extremely popular.

Mozart was desperately trying to finish his Requiem when he died on December 5, 1791. The official cause was malignant typhus fever, but there has been much historical speculation about the exact cause of his death. Due to his poverty, he was not granted an individual burial place, but was buried in a common pauper's grave.

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Source: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, edited by Stanley Sadie; MacMillan Publishers, Ltd., 1980