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WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

On December 5, 1791, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, the greatest composer of music of his day (and perhaps of any day) died and was buried in a pauper's grave in Vienna. Had he lived to January 27 of the following year he would have been 36 years old. Only a handful of mourners, some say just two, attended the funeral services. These few were delayed on the way to the cemetery by a violent rainstorm and when they reached the burying place they found that Mozart's body had already been interred in the pauper's field and that no one could tell them the exact place.^{spot}

As appalling as the story of Mozart's funeral is; it is nothing beside the fact that his death was most likely caused by malnutrition and overwork. In a day when the livelihood of an artist was dependent upon the favor and patronage of some noble person, Mozart was never able to obtain the comfortable livings that went to less talented men.

W. A. Mozart died at 35 and yet in this short time he wrote music of such inconceivable beauty, depth, and variety that it is awe inspiring to consider what he might have done had he lived a normal lifetime. At 35 the great works of Bach and Beethoven, for example, were before them. Had Bach died at 35 he might be remembered only as a brilliant organist; Beethoven as a moody intellectual of unknown potential; but Mozart's genius had already flourished.

Mozart wrote more than 600 compositions of every kind - including one for a glass harmonica. In order to do this it was

necessary for him to begin composing early, and this he did, writing minuets at the age of 4. ~~For~~ Mozart was one of the first and greatest of child prodigies.

Mozart was born January 27, 1756, in Saltzburg, Austria. His father was Leopold Mozart, a competent violinist, concert-master of the archbishop's orchestra in Saltzburg, and writer of a treatise on playing the violin that was in use until comparatively recent times. Mozart's mother was fond of music but there is no record of any particular ^{ability} ~~talents~~.

An older sister, Maria Anna, was recognized to have some musical talent, so father Mozart decided to train her in playing the clavier in order to exploit her for the benefit of the family. Mozart was about 2 years old at this time; and it was during Maria Anna's lessons that he first began to show an absorbing interest in music. Discords and ^{low} ~~false~~ notes distressed him, and he began to amuse himself at the keyboard after his sister had finished her lesson. At four Mozart's formal music training began and it was not long until he was picking out tunes and improvising little minuets which his father wrote down in notebooks.

Genius though he was, Mozart throughout his life studied hard at music. He never failed to find delight in reading scores of other musicians and studying the works of Bach, Telemann, Handel, and other predecessors. At the age of four he began to copy out ~~scores of Bach and to play~~ and practice pieces by Bach and others. Leopold Mozart was a good teacher and was apparently truly devoted to his son although determined to make him a public attraction and moneymaker. He never ceased to teach his son all the music he

could though he continually shoved him into the limelight as a prodigy.

When Wolfgang was seven his father decided that the time had come to strike out for the ~~big~~ ^{thing} ~~time~~. He gave up his post with the orchestra, took his wife and two children on a tour of the courts and capitals of Europe that lasted, intermittently, for the next ten years. Maria Anna performed on the piano but Little Wolfgang was the star of the show. Indeed for a time he was the rage of Europe. He played for kings and for the Empress Maria *Teresa*, who deigned to kiss him and to give him a court costume, complete with little sword. In ^{which} addition his portrait was ^{done} ~~Painted~~ by the court painter.

The child Mozart is said to have been of sweet and cooperative disposition, taking everything in his stride so long as he could perform and compose music. Only bad pianos and bad musicianship seriously disturbed him. Nevertheless he was capable of putting people in their places when necessary. In Paris after a performance before the court it is told that La Pompadour refused to meet the prodigy, who drew himself up to his full two and one-half feet and said, "Who is this who refuses to kiss me? The Empress kisses me."

From Paris the Mozart family traveled to London. Their fame had preceeded them and the child was received with acclaim at the court of George III. The concertmaster of the court was Johann Christian Bach, son of the great J. S. Bach. He grew very fond of little Mozart and spent hours every day of their stay playing musical games, teaching him, and composing with him. Mozart's

earliest symphonies were published and played in England and the influence of J. C. Bach is said to be very evident in them, as in much of ^{his} ~~Mozart~~'s later works.

After London the family began a leisurely return trip to Salzburg, returning three years after they first set forth. After such heady experiences Salzburg could not hold Leopold Mozart and he was soon petitioning the archbishop for permission to take another tour. When permission was granted the family set out for Vienna. However, instead of triumph they met a smallpox epidemic. ~~The young~~ Mozart, who was then eleven, was stricken and was blind for several days.

Upon his recovery the family left for Italy where Mozart was to meet and study with the noted Padre Martini, the foremost music teacher of his day, who accepted him as an equal. In Rome a most remarkable event took place. Mozart attended a performance of Allegri's "Miserere" by the papal choir, a contrapuntal work of immense complexity, ^{which was rarely performed.} After listening to the performance, Mozart went to his room and wrote down the entire score from memory. ~~This work was rarely performed and there was only one copy of the score,~~ which was closely guarded, ^{and} copying the ~~score~~ ^{it} was punishable by excommunication. ^{When Mozart} ~~This~~ feat was somehow brought to the Pope's attention. Instead of excommunicating him the Pope made Mozart a companion of the Order of the Golden Spur. This was a rare honor and one which pleased ^{his father} ~~Leopold Mozart~~ very much, although Mozart himself was less impressed and rarely ever used the title which accompanied the award.

During these trips Mozart was always composing -- minuets, sonatas for piano, symphonies, and even operas. Most of these pieces are not on par with the results of his later years and are seldom played; but all of them contain parts of great grace and beauty and give many intimations of the master-works to come.

After this second trip the Mozarts returned once again to Salzburg. Through all their travels the youthful musician had been lionized, admired, and marveled at; but he had never succeeded in attaining a position of importance and security from which to work. Fame and fortune of the kind Leopold Mozart sought always eluded his son and there was nothing for it but to come back to their provincial town.

None of these experiences were wasted on the young Mozart. He was assimilating, consciously or unknowingly, the best music of the greatest composers of the time whom he met. He was learning about instruments and their capabilities, and he was always studying the scores of masters of former times.

Mozart became a virtuoso of note on these tours. He was the foremost pianist of his day, brilliant at improvisation. An early biographer gives some idea of the reason for Mozart's popularity as a piano virtuoso when he says, "If I might have the fulfillment of one wish on earth, it would be to hear Mozart improvise once more on the piano." He was also an accomplished organist and he became a fine violinist. It is said that he picked up the violin one day and played it well without ever having had a lesson. Mozart wrote five violin concertos which musicologists

think were intended for performance by himself. They are truly virtuoso pieces and violinists like Heifitz, Stern, and Menuhin delight in performing them today. [#] After the freedom and variety of his years of traveling, Mozart found being cooped up in a small provincial town unbearable. This was partly because his employer, the archbishop of Saltzburg, was such a thoroughly detestable person that the town went into mourning when his appointment to the office was made known. He finally secured the archbishop's permission to make another tour but the prelate refused a leave of absence for Leopold, who saw to it that Frau Mozart went along to chaperone her son in his place. In Paris Mozart's mother died unexpectedly and Mozart went alone to Mannheim where he heard and became familiar with the most famous orchestra in Europe and also fell in love. ^{The girl} His ~~beloved~~ was Aloysia Weber, a buxom and talented singer. Mozart was soon writing to his father about all sorts of plans to forsake a musical career for a post as a voice teacher of Aloysia. Leopold Mozart wrote his son and very firmly and completely squelched this plan. In fact he commanded his son to return to Saltzburg and such was the fear or respect in which Mozart held his father that he did so.

Mozart was not to see Aloysia again for two years and when he did in 1778 he found that she had almost completely forgotten him. This was quite a blow and was probably one of the reasons that Mozart retreated to Saltzburg in January 1779 and stayed there for the next two years. During this period he was completely unhappy but he was writing the first of the truly great music of his life.

From this period came the Sinfonia Concertante for Violin and Viola K.364, a passionate work of great feeling.

Up to this time Mozart had been a sponge, soaking in the styles, lessons, and forms of every different composer whom he met or whose scores he studied; absorbing the idiom of the places he visited -- German courts, Italy, France, and England. The genius within him had assimilated all these impressions and ideas, and the music which was to come forth was no longer imitative or reminiscent of other styles or other composers. In the ten years of life left to him Mozart composed music which was wholly his own. In spite of material handicaps, these final years in Vienna, 1781 to 1791, developed and matured ^{the} Mozart, whose works are immortal.

To attempt to describe musical works in spoken or written words is an effort foredoomed to failure because music is a language itself. Despite this knowledge it is tempting to try to convey musical thoughts in this way. One who has come as close as humanly possible to explain Mozart and his music (at least to me) is Bernard Shaw. Shaw was a music critic for six years on London papers before attaining preeminence as a playwright. An article written in 1891 about the Mozart Centenary had this to say: "... he, like Praxiteles, Raphael, Moliere, or Shakespears, was no leader of a new departure or founder of a school. He came at the end of a development, not at the beginning of one; and although there are operas and symphonies, and even pianoforte sonatas and pages of instrumental scoring of his, on which you can put your finger and way, "Here is final perfection in this manner; and nobody whatever

his genius may be, will ever get a step further on these lines", you cannot say, "Here is an entirely new vein of musical art, of which nobody ever dreamt before Mozart." . . . Many Mozart worshippers cannot bear to be told that their hero was not the founder of a dynasty. But in art the highest success is to be the last of your race, not the first. Anybody, almost, can make a beginning; the difficulty is to make an end -- to do what cannot be bettered."

Mozart's first great success came in July of 1781 with the production of his first important opera, "The Abduction from the Seraglio", a German opera based on the popular sing-spiel, or musical comedy. After this success, Mozart decided that he could support a wife. His choice was Constanze Weber, sister of his first love, Aloysia. Throughout his life, Mozart was something of a ladies' man and there are good grounds to think that his marriage to Constanze was largely due to pressure from her family to make an honest woman of her. The match, however, was a good one and Constanze was his faithful companion for the rest of his life.

During the next years Mozart's fame continued to grow and he tried to take some advantage of it. He received fairly good fees from a distinguished list of pupils and he played the piano in most of the illustrious homes of Vienna. However, he saved nothing from these efforts because both he and his wife were notoriously poor managers.

All the while, Mozart was writing symphonies, and by 1785 had written almost 40 of them. One of them, number 35, nicknamed the "Haffner", is the standout of the early symphonies and is almost perfect from beginning to end.

His last symphonies, 39, 40, and 41, are the culmination of the classical symphony. In deference to Beethoven alone it is a moot question whether they have ever been surpassed. These three compositions were written in 1787 during a period of about six weeks. Indeed Mozart seems to have written them almost in a frenzy of inspiration. Most of the early symphonies had been written for some occasion or on commission; but Mozart had no such incentive for these. When they were written Mozart was at an ebb in his fortunes. His health was failing; his finances were disordered; rival composers were preventing his music from being played. Yet despite these trials (or perhaps because of them) the divine urge to compose was on Mozart, and he could not stop until the work was done.

Number 39, the first of this trio, has been called the "locus classicus of euphony". It is a serene work, not light-hearted exactly, but Haydnish in feeling. The second is in G Minor, the key Mozart seemed always to use to express deep feelings. This troubled work is filled with pensiveness and melancholy. The last, number 41, is called "Jupiter" but the name fits only in the sense that the themes are noble and perfect in development. This work is not overwhelming or grandiose; but it is hard to see how any composer could have written a more fitting work as his final ~~piano~~ symphony.

Mozart's more than twenty piano concertos form some of the crowning glories of the piano literature. On them he lavished his genius and musical inventiveness. He so fused and refined its elements that the classical piano concerto may almost be regarded as his invention. Most of his piano concertos were written to be performed by him and the solo piano part in some is quite sketchy since he was accustomed to improvising during the performance.

Mention must be made of Mozart's accomplishments in the field of chamber music. His string quartets and quintets are marvels of music writing. No other composer has ever understood so well how to write for strings and how to weave the different instruments into a nearly perfect whole. Chief among the chamber works are the six quartets dedicated to Josef Haydn. These were written as an expression of gratitude for Haydn's advice and encouragement. In announcing the dedication Mozart said, "It is from Haydn that I learned to write a quartet".

In spite of what Mozart did in the piano concerto, in the string quartet, and in the last three symphonies, for many (including the writer) his greatest achievements are in the field of opera. When musicians discuss what is the greatest opera ever written the choice soon narrows to three works, "Don Giovanni", "The Marriage of Figaro", and "The Magic Flute", and all three by Mozart. Indeed some people say that another of Mozart's operas, the less often heard "Cosi Fan Tutte" is entitled to first honors.

In some way the full genius of Mozart was released in opera. No other composer has ever had the gift of expressing action, character, and situation in music as Mozart did. With no other does the music seem so appropriate or to get to the heart of the matter so knowingly. Mozart's could almost be called operas for people who don't like opera because of the wealth of singable melodies and memorable scenes.

Mozart was a singer's composer. Most of his vocal works lie in the best part of a singer's range and strain on the voice is lessened; thus it is possible for the singer still to be going strong in the last scenes. This is in direct contrast to the music of Verdi and Wagner, who placed most of their arias in the top of the range. All this is not to imply that Mozart's music is easy to sing. Much that he wrote is very difficult. The tenor aria "Il mio Tesoro" in Don Giovanni is probably the most beautiful song ever written for the tenor voice; yet it was omitted from the premiere performance of the opera because the tenor could not sing it. It requires more breath control, attention to phrasing, and understanding of its meaning than most tenors can bring to it; but the truly great singers delight in it. To have heard John McCormick sing it (as I have on records) is an unforgettable experience.

The most remarkable thing about Mozart's operas is the great amount of beautiful music he wrote for the bass voice. Figaro and Don Giovanni are basses. Mozart's first great operatic character, Osmin, in the "Abduction from the Seraglio", is a bass, and George Bernard Shaw once said that the music of Sarastro, a bass, in the Magic Flute, is the "only music that would not sound out of place in the mouth of God".

I cannot think about Mozart and his music without wondering, "How could he have done it?" Is it sufficient to say that he was a genius at the assembling of sounds in a logical and pleasing way? Can we say that he was only a performer, albeit a virtuoso, who merely assimilated the styles of the others whom he met? Was it only that he was well taught in the fundamentals of music? All of these things are true but they do not give a satisfactory answer. When confronted with Mozart and his music it is difficult not to agree with Socrates when he spoke about music and poetry: "Some divine power is moving you, such as there is in the stone ... called the Magnesian. The magnet attracts iron rings and, not only that, puts the same power into the iron rings, so that they can do the same as the stone does; they attract other rings so that sometimes there is a whole long string of these rings hanging together, and all depend for their power on that one stone. So the Muse not only inspires people herself; but through these inspired ones, others are inspired ... Not by art then they make their poetry but by divine dispensation. Therefore God takes the mind out of those poets and uses them as his servants; because he wishes us to know that not those we hear ... are those who say such precious things, but God himself is the speaker".

Shaw, once again, has the right words for Mozart. "In the ardent regions where all the rest are excited and vehement, Mozart alone is self possessed ... he is economical, practical under the same pressure of inspiration that throws your Titan into convulsions. This is the secret of his unpopularity with Titan fanciers. Give me the artist ... who goes about his work ... as quiet as a common man goes about his ordinary business. Mozart did"

so; and that is why I like him. Even if I did not, I should pretend to; for a taste for his music is a mark of caste among musicians, and should be worn, like a tall hat, by the amateur who wishes to pass for a true Brahmin.

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