

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1759 – 1791)

FAME III (March 2007)

Suggested docent costume: Black suit or jacket, with a lace tie at throat, plus Mozart wig.

Our composer for today is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. He is often called “the most complete musical genius ever” and was considered a musical prodigy. (*What is a prodigy? A child or young person, having extraordinary talent or ability.*) He composed over 600 compositions in his relatively short life. In addition to being a composer, he was a wonderful musician as well.

How many of you play the piano? Could you play well when you were 4 years old? Mozart did.

How many of you write or compose music? Mozart did when he was 5 years old.

How many of you can hear a song once and then sit at the piano and play it perfectly? When Mozart was 8 years old, after hearing Gregorio Allegri’s “Miserere” only once, he played and wrote down the entire score to the religious choir’s version of this music.

The music we are going to listen to is called a “sonata”. Sonatas are written for either a piano solo, or for another instrument such as a violin or cello with a piano accompaniment. Musical pieces have composition just as paintings do. They have different parts that go together to make up a whole piece of music. The basic composition of a sonata is in three parts (also called “movements”):

- The first part has a basic melody that is played rapidly (*allegro*).
- The second part is slower, with a more relaxed feeling (*andante*).
- The third part (*rondo*) is the fastest.

Mozart’s “Sonata in C Major” was one of his finest compositions. Although the piece is very well known today, it was not published in Mozart’s lifetime, and first appeared in print in 1805. It is a piano sonata and this sonata is rather special because the third section is not as quick as the first one. Let’s listen to see if you can tell. (*Play Track 1 from CD*)

If you ever get to hear a sonata played at a symphony, remember that you must wait until all three parts are played before you clap. A lot of people don’t know that, but you’re a FAME expert now and will remember that!

Let’s listen to another of Mozart’s sonatas (*Play Track 2 from CD*). That was “Sonata in A Major”, also known as “Turkish March”. Did you hear the three different parts?

Mozart composed many different types of music, and you would probably recognize many of his musical pieces since they’ve been played in many different forms. The first part of “Sonata in C Major” was even used to represent Granny from the “Tweety and Sylvester” Loony Tunes cartoons.

Raise your hand if you’ve ever heard this music before. (*Play Track 3 from CD*) This is another of Mozart’s very famous pieces called “Eine Kleine Nachtmusik” (or “A Little Night Music”). Now, just for fun, let’s hear a different version of this song to see what you think (*Play Track 4 from CD*). This is from a “Sing Along Symphonies” CD and is called “Please Don’t Play Your Violin at Night”. Mozart enjoyed a good joke, so would probably laugh if he knew about this version of his song!

Mozart's background --

Not much is known of Mozart's very early life. He was born Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in 1756 in Salzburg, Austria to Leopold and Anna Maria Mozart. Salzburg was a great musical city at that time and Wolfgang's father was a musician and official court composer in a royal orchestra. Wolfgang's sister, Maria Anna (whose nickname was Nannerl) was a promising musician and his father spent much time tutoring her. Three-year-old Wolfgang was interested in what his father was teaching, as well, and it was quickly apparent that he was a musical prodigy.

Anything that Wolfgang did, he gave it his all. When he was learning math, he became so interested in the formulas that he covered the room – chairs, tables, walls and even the floor! – with his chalk figures. But music was clearly his life. When he was only five, his father found him covered with ink from head to toe, diligently working on an ink-splotched paper. When his father looked at it, he realized that Wolfgang had correctly composed a very difficult concerto (a composition for one or more instruments) and knew then that his son was a genius.

When Mozart was six, he and Nannerl were taken by their father on a musical tour around Europe to show off their miraculous musical skills. They sang together, played the violin and the clavier (*pronounced "cla-veer"*) – a type of keyboard – but the highlight of their show was tiny Wolfgang playing the clavier with the keys covered by a piece of cloth so he couldn't see his hands. He would play his piece and then begin to improvise (*make up music on the spur of the moment*), much to the delight of his audience. They toured Europe for many years and played in all the major royal courts of Europe, often performing concerts twice a day.

Because of Mozart's unusual childhood, one in which he had been pampered and fawned over, he had trouble dealing with people in a normal and mature manner. When he was 26, he married Constanze, against the wishes of his family, but by all accounts they were very happy together. They had two sons, but neither inherited their father's genius.

Mozart made many enemies because of his odd behavior, and there are many stories about the jealousy of other composers towards Mozart, especially Antonio Salieri, an imperial court composer. The story of their relationship was even made into a play, and then a movie, called "Amadeus". How much of it is true, we'll never know, but we do know that the public, which had once adored him and his music, turned away from him. They said his music was too hard to understand and perhaps he was too eccentric to tolerate any longer.

He died in December 1791 at the young age of 36, leaving his wife and two children in poverty because of his poor money management. He had suffered from poor health throughout his life, and it is believed that he died of a kidney disease or a massive infection. He composed right up until his death, requesting that one of his students finish the composition "Requiem" (a death mass) on which he was working. Perhaps because of the stormy weather, no one attended his funeral. He was buried in an unmarked communal grave in Vienna, which was common for people who died at that time. Today, no one knows exactly where his body lies.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was considered a genius by most people, including the famous composer Joseph Haydn, who said he was "the greatest composer known to me in person or by name; he has taste, and what is more, the greatest knowledge of composition." Mozart's work has endured over two hundred years after his death and is probably more well known than any composer who ever lived.