

## Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756–1791) was a keyboard virtuoso and composer whose work is considered to be the pinnacle of the Classical era. He was a musical genius, producing exceptional work in every genre available to him, including operas, ballets, symphonies, concertos, and solo instrumental works. Mozart's music was unique in its breadth and clarity, representing both a continuation of tradition and an embrace of innovation. He is widely considered one of the most influential composers in the history of Western music.

Mozart began writing music at the age of five under the instruction of his father Leopold, an accomplished violinist, teacher, and composer. By age seven, he was touring Europe with his sister Nannerl, performing for royalty and nobility on the violin and the harpsichord. His childhood was spent traveling, allowing him to meet influential musicians and familiarize himself with a wide array of musical styles. He became one of the most sought after composers of his day, most notably in the world of opera, where his success was unparalleled. Prior to his untimely death at the age of 35, Mozart composed well over 600 works, among them some of the most enduring pieces of the Classical era.

### Child Prodigy

Mozart was a composer of immense talent, but he also had the good fortune of being the son of a renowned music teacher. Leopold Mozart recognized his son's natural ability at an early age and set out to provide him with the finest musical education available. He personally instructed Mozart and his sister Nannerl in everything from music to mathematics, literature, and dancing. As young Mozart's abilities on the harpsichord and the violin progressed, his father saw an opportunity to secure the family's financial future by taking the boy and his sister on a tour of Europe. Mozart was seven years old when he first left home, and he would travel almost without ceasing for the next 10 years.

Leopold's mission to achieve fame for his children was successful, considering the list of dignitaries that Mozart and his sister visited—including King Louis XV, Holy Roman Empress Maria Theresa, and Pope Clemens XIV. The tour was often a haphazard affair, however, with Leopold booking engagements on the fly and relying on word of mouth for concert promotion. In 1765, the family was temporarily stranded in London, and the children were obliged to perform in a tavern to earn enough money to continue travelling.

Despite his success in his early years as a virtuoso and international celebrity, Mozart was still only a child. Philosopher Daines Barrington met with the eight-year-old composer in 1764 and reported, "Whilst [Mozart] was playing to me, a favourite cat came in, upon which he immediately left his harpsichord, nor could we bring him back for a considerable time." Mozart's early abilities were extraordinary, as was his childhood, but his achievements as a prodigy were only a prelude to a lifetime of exceptional work.

