

MOZART



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– Kelly M. Rach, National Publicist, Naxos of America



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## Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1/27/1756-12/05/1791)

The youngest child and only surviving son of Leopold Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus was born in Salzburg in 1756, the publication year of his father's influential treatise on violin playing. He showed early precocity both as a keyboard player and violinist and soon turned his hand to composition. His obvious gifts were developed, along with those of his elder sister, under his father's tutelage. Through the indulgence of their then-patron, the Archbishop of Salzburg, the family was able to travel abroad—specifically between 1763 and 1766 to Paris and London. A series of other journeys followed with important operatic commissions in Italy between 1771 and 1773. The following period proved disappointing to both father and son as the young Mozart grew to manhood and was irked by the lack of opportunity and lack of appreciation of his gifts in Salzburg, where a new Archbishop was less sympathetic. A visit to Munich, Mannheim, and Paris in 1777 and 1778 brought no substantial offer of other employment, and by early 1779, Mozart was reinstated in Salzburg, now as court organist. Early in 1781 he had a commissioned opera, *Idomeneo*, staged in Munich for the Elector of Bavaria, but unfortunately the dissatisfaction of his patron, the Archbishop of Vienna, who attended the performance, led to his dismissal from the court. Mozart spent the last 10 years of his life in precarious independence in Vienna, his material situation not improved by a marriage imprudent for one in his circumstances. Initial success with German and then Italian opera and a series of subscription concerts were followed by financial difficulties. In 1791 things seemed to have taken a turn for the better, despite the successor to the Emperor Joseph II, who had died in 1790, lacking interest. In late November, however, Mozart became seriously ill and died in the early hours of December 5th. Mozart's compositions were catalogued in the 19th century by Köchel, and they are now generally distinguished by the K. numbering from this catalogue.



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## Operas

Mozart was essentially an operatic composer, although Salzburg offered him no real opportunity to exercise his talents in this direction. The greater stage works belong to the last decade of his life, starting with *Idomeneo* in Munich in January 1781. He settled in Vienna, where his first success came with the German opera, or Singspiel, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* ('The Abduction from the Seraglio'), a work on a Turkish theme staged at the Burgtheater in 1782. *Le nozze di Figaro* ('The Marriage of Figaro'), an Italian comic opera with a libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte based on the controversial play by Beaumarchais, was staged at the same theatre in 1786, and *Don Giovanni*, with a libretto again by Da Ponte, in Prague in 1787. *Così fan tutte* ('All Women Behave Alike') was staged briefly in Vienna in 1790, its run curtailed by the death of the Emperor. *La clemenza di Tito* ('The Clemency of Titus') was written for the coronation of the new Emperor in Prague in 1791, no such commission having been granted Mozart in Vienna. His last stage work in order of performance was *Die Zauberflöte* ('The Magic Flute'), mounted at the end of September at the Theater auf der Wieden, a magic opera that was running with success at the time of the composer's death.

## Church Music

As he lay dying, Mozart was joined by his friends to sing through parts of a work that he left unfinished. This was his setting of the Requiem Mass, commissioned by an anonymous nobleman who had intended to pass off the work as his own. The Requiem was later completed by Mozart's pupil Süssmayer, to whom it was eventually entrusted, although other possible completions of the work have since been proposed. Mozart composed other church music, primarily for use in Salzburg. Settings of the Mass include the 'Coronation' Mass of 1779, one of a number of liturgical settings of this kind. In addition to settings of litanies and Vespers, Mozart wrote a number of shorter works for church use. These include the well-known *Exsultate, jubilate* written for the castrato Rauzzini in Milan in 1773 and the simple four-part setting of the *Ave verum* written to oblige a priest in Baden in June 1791. Mozart's Church or Epistle Sonatas were written to bridge the liturgical gap between the singing of the Epistle and the singing of the Gospel at Mass. Composed in Salzburg during a period from 1772 until 1780, the sonatas are generally scored for two violins, bass instrument and organ, although three of them, intended for days of greater ceremony, involve a slightly larger ensemble.



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## Vocal and Choral Music

In addition to a smaller number of works for vocal ensemble, Mozart wrote concert arias and scenes, some of them for insertion into operas by others. Songs with piano accompaniment include a setting of Goethe's *Das Veilchen* ('The Violet').

## Orchestral Music

### Symphonies

Mozart wrote his first symphony in London in 1764–5 and his last in Vienna in August 1788. The last three symphonies, Nos. 39, 40, and 41, were all written during the summer of 1788, each with its own highly individual character. No. 39 in E flat major, using clarinets instead of the usual pair of oboes, has a timbre all its own, while No. 40 in G minor, with its ominous and dramatic opening, is now very familiar. The last symphony, nicknamed in later years the 'Jupiter' Symphony, has a fugal last movement, a contrapuntal development of what was becoming standard symphonic practice. All the symphonies, of course, repay listening. Of particular beauty are Symphony No. 29, written in 1774, scored for the then usual pairs of oboes and French horns with strings, the more grandiose 'Paris' Symphony, No. 31, written in 1778 with a French audience in mind, and the 'Haffner', the 'Linz', and the 'Prague', Nos. 35, 36, and 38. The so-called 'Salzburg' symphonies, scored only for strings and in three movements on the Italian model, were probably intended for occasional use during one of Mozart's Italian journeys. They are more generally known in English as Divertimenti, K. 136, 137, and 138. The symphonies are not numbered absolutely in chronological order of composition, but Nos. 35 to 41 were written in Vienna in the 1780s and Nos. 14 to 30 in Salzburg in the 1770s.

### Cassations, Divertimenti, and Serenades

The best-known serenade of all is *Eine kleine Nachtmusik* ('A Little Night-Music'), a charming piece of which four of the five original movements survive. It is scored for solo strings and was written in the summer of 1787, the year of the opera *Don Giovanni* and the death of the composer's father. The *Serenata notturna*, written in 1776 in Salzburg, uses solo and orchestral strings and timpani, while the Divertimento, K. 247, the 'Lodron Night-Music', dating from the same year, also served a social purpose during evening entertainments in Salzburg. Cassations, the word more or less synonymous with divertimento or serenade, again had occasional use—sometimes as street



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serenades, as in the case of Mozart's three surviving works of this title which were designed to mark end-of-year university celebrations. Generally music of this kind consisted of several short movements. Other examples of the form by Mozart include the so-called 'Posthorn' Serenade, K. 320, which uses the posthorn itself during its course, and the 'Haffner' Serenade, designed to celebrate an event in the Haffner family in Salzburg. The Serenade, K. 361, known as the 'Gran Partita', was written during the composer's first years of independence in Vienna and scored for a dozen wind instruments and a double bass.

## **Dance Music**

Mozart wrote a great deal of dance music both in Salzburg and in Vienna. His only court appointment under the Emperor Joseph II was as a composer of court dance music, a position that, in his words, paid him too much for what he did and not enough for what he could have done. The dance music includes German dances, *Ländler* and *contredanses*—popular forms of the time.

## **Concertos**

Mozart wrote some 30 keyboard concertos. The earliest of these are four arrangements of movements by various composers, made in 1767. In 1772 he arranged three sonatas by the youngest son of J.S. Bach, Johann Christian, although these three works are not generally included in the numbering of the concertos. Apart from these arrangements he wrote six keyboard concertos during his years in Salzburg. The more important compositions in this form, designed clearly for the fortepiano (an instrument smaller than the modern pianoforte and with a more delicately incisive tone), were written in Vienna between 1782 and 1791. They were principally for the composer's use in subscription concerts with which he at first won success in the imperial capital. Of the 27 numbered concertos, particular mention may be made of No. 20 in D minor, K. 466 and No. 24 in C minor, K. 491. He completed his last piano concerto—No. 27, K. 595 in B flat major—in January 1791.

Mozart wrote a series of five concertos for solo violin, one in 1773 and four in 1775, at a time when he was concertmaster of the court orchestra in Salzburg. Of the last four, K. 216 in G major, K. 218 in D major, and K. 219 in A major are the best known, together with the splendid *Sinfonia concertante* of 1779 for solo violin and solo viola. The *Concertone* for two solo violins, written in 1774, is less frequently heard.



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Mozart's concertos for solo wind instruments include one for bassoon, two for solo flute, one for solo oboe, and one for clarinet—his final concerto, written in October 1791. He wrote four concertos for French horn, principally for the use of his friend, the horn player Ignaz Leutgeb, and a *Sinfonia concertante* for solo wind instruments, designed for performance by Mannheim friends in Paris. During his stay in France in 1778, he also wrote a fine Concerto for flute and harp, intended for unappreciative aristocratic patrons there.

## Chamber Music

It was inevitable that Mozart should also show his mastery in music for smaller groups of instruments. With some reluctance he accepted a commission in Mannheim for a series of quartets for flute and string trio, two of which he completed during his stay there in 1777–8. A third flute quartet was completed in Vienna in 1787, preceded by an Oboe Quartet in Munich in 1781, a Quintet the following year for French horn, violin, two violas, and cello, and finally, in 1789, a Clarinet Quintet. The wind part of this last work was for Mozart's friend Anton Stadler, a virtuoso performer on the newly developed clarinet and on the basset-clarinet, an instrument of his own invention with an extended range.

Mozart's work for string instruments includes a group of string quintets, written in Vienna in 1787, and over the course of around 20 years, some 23 string quartets. Particularly interesting are the later quartets, a group of six dedicated to and influenced by Joseph Haydn, and three final quartets, the so-called 'Prussian' Quartets, intended for the cello-playing King of Prussia Friedrich Wilhelm II. *Ein musikalische Spass* ('A Musical Joke'), K. 522, for two horns and solo strings, was written in 1787; the music is a recreation of a work played for and presumably composed by village musicians, including formal solecisms and other deliberate mistakes of structure and harmony.

There are other chamber-music compositions principally written during the last 10 years of Mozart's life in Vienna and involving the use of the piano, an instrument on which Mozart excelled. These later compositions include six completed piano trios, two piano quartets, and a work that Mozart himself considered his best: a Quintet for piano, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and French horn, K. 452.

Mozart added considerably to the repertoire of sonatas for violin and piano, writing his first between the ages of six and eight, and his last in 1788, making up a total of some 30 compositions. On the whole, the later sonatas that were intended for professional players of a high order have more to offer than the sonatas written for pupils or amateurs, although there is fine music, for example, in the set of six sonatas written during the composer's journey to Mannheim and Paris in 1777 and 1778.

## Piano Music

Mozart's sonatas for the fortepiano cover a period from 1766 to 1791 with a significant number of mature sonatas written during the years in Vienna. The sonatas include much fine music, ranging from the slighter C major Sonata for beginners, K. 545 to the superb and more technically challenging B flat Sonata, K. 570. In addition to his sonatas, he wrote a number of sets of variations while his ephemeral improvisations in similar form are inevitably lost to us. The published works include operatic variations as well as a set of variations on the theme *Ah, vous dirai-je, maman*, known in English as *Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star*.

## Organ Music

There is very little organ music by Mozart or by other great composers of the period, although organ improvisation was an art generally practiced then as now. Mozart's organ music includes a few compositions for mechanical organ, one improvisation (transcribed from memory by a priest who heard most of it), and a number of smaller compositions perhaps intended for organ but written in childhood. Mozart's last appointment in Salzburg was as court organist, and there are significant organ parts in some of the church sonatas he wrote during that brief period in 1779 and 1780.



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## Explore these and other key works by Mozart in their entirety:

3 German Dances, K. 605  
Ave verum corpus in D major, K. 618  
Clarinet Concerto in A major, K. 622  
Clarinet Quintet in A major, K. 581  
Concerto for Flute and Harp in C major, K. 299  
Così fan tutte, K. 588  
Die Entführung aus dem Serail  
Die Zauberflöte (The Magic Flute), K. 620  
Divertimento in D major, K. 136, "Salzburg Symphony No. 1"  
Don Giovanni, K. 527  
Flute Concerto No. 1 in G major, K. 313  
Horn Concerto No. 3 in E flat major, K. 447  
Idomeneo, re di Creta  
Le nozze di Figaro, K. 492  
Mass No. 18 in C minor, K. 427, "Great"  
Oboe Quartet in F major, K. 370  
Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K. 466  
Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major, K. 467, "Elvira Madigan"  
Piano Sonata No. 11 in A major, K. 331  
Requiem in D minor, K. 626  
Serenade No. 10 in B flat major, K. 361  
Serenade No. 13 in G major, K. 525, "Eine kleine Nachtmusik"  
String Quartet No. 17 in B flat major, K. 458, "Hunt"  
Symphony No. 25 in G minor, K. 183  
Symphony No. 40 in G minor, K. 550  
Symphony No. 41 in C major, K. 550, "Jupiter"  
Violin Concerto No. 3 in G major, K. 216  
Violin Concerto No. 5 in A major, K. 219, "Turkish"  
Violin Sonata No. 26 in B flat major, K. 378



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