

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART was the son of the chapel-master at Salzburg, and was born in that city in 1756. When only three years of age, he was at all times delighted to be present while his sister received her lessons on the harpsichord; and the child would sometimes, for several hours successively, amuse himself by discovering and playing thirds on that instrument, From this early indication of genius, his father was induced to teach him some short airs; and the scholar soon outstripped his hopes. Such indeed was his progress, that at the age of six years he could compose little airs while he was playing, and which his father was always obliged to write down for him upon paper. From that time his whole delight was in harmony; and none of his infant sports gave him any pleasure, unless it was contrived that music should make part of them.

His progress was unremitting; and not in that usual degree which escapes notice, but so as daily to excite new surprise. The following remarkable incident, taken from Schlichtegroll's Necrology, is sufficient proof of this. His father, one day entering the music room in company with a friend, found the boy, with a pen in his hand, busily

employed. "What are you about there?" said his father. "I am writing a concerto for the harpsichord," was the reply. "Indeed! it must doubtless be something very fine: let me see it." "But, Sir, it is not yet finished." The father took up the paper, and at first could discover nothing but a confusion of notes and spots of ink. The boy not knowing how to handle a pen, had continually filled it too full, and dropped it on the paper, which he had wiped with his hand, and then written upon the blots. Old Mozart, on examining the work more nearly, was enraptured with the performance. "See," he said to his friend, "how regular and accurate this is: but it is too difficult to be played." "It is a concerto," exclaimed the boy, "and must be practiced till it can be executed—you shall hear." He then began to play, but it was beyond his powers; he could not make them understand his meaning.

In the year 1762, his father took him and his sister to Munich, where he played a concerto before the Elector, to the astonishment and admiration of the whole court. He gave no less pleasure at Vienna; and the Emperor used frequently to call the Little Sorcerer. It was here that he first began to exhibit that pride of the artist which is indifferent to the praises of the great, when they are known to be ignorant of what they admire; and this character he retained till the day of his death. On one occasion, when the Emperor

was at his side, he asked if Mr. Wagenseil was not in the room. "He," said he "will understand me." Wagenseil coming up to him, Mozart said, "I am going to play one of your concertos; you must turn over the leaves for me."

His father had only taught him the harpsichord: he taught himself to play on the violin. It one day afforded his father an agreeable surprise to hear the boy play the second violin in concert, and acquit himself to perfection. Genius can see no impediments; proud of his success, he soon afterwards undertook to play the principal part, and he executed it with great correctness.

Mozart's first great musical journey was made in the year 1763, accompanied by his father and sister. Although at this time he was only seven years of age he had become so celebrated, that his character spread through almost every part of Europe. He was heard in the chapel of the King of France at Versailles, the court being present; and here his performance on the organ was, if possible, more admired than that on the harpsichord. It was in Paris that the first compositions of this infant Orpheus were engraved and published. There were two sets of sonatas, one of which he dedicated to Madame Victoire, and the other to the Comtesse de Tesse.

From Paris they traveled to London, where they performed two concerts, consisting of symphonies and other compositions of young Mozart.

In one of these concerts, the king being present, a ground-bass was put before him, and he immediately accompanied it with a beautiful melody. Six sonatas for the harpsichord were composed by him and printed in London.

The musical trio then passed over to Holland, again traveled through France; and in 1766, after an absence of three years, they returned home. Here the youthful artist continued twelve months in retirement, and dedicated all his leisure to the study of composition, with the most intricate parts of which he soon became familiar. His chief models were Emanuel Bach, Hasse, and Handel.

In 1768, he returned to Vienna, and, at the request of Joseph the Second, composed "*La Finta Semplice*," a comic opera, which was approved by Metastasio, but not performed. He went back to Salzburg in the following year, and was appointed master of the concert in that city; but, as he had not yet been in Italy, he commenced his journey for that country in the month of December.

Admired as his talents had been in other countries, they produced absolute enthusiasm among the Italians. Scarcely had he given proof of his genius at Milan, before *la scrittura*, for the following Carnival of 1771, was conferred upon him. In the mean time he went to Bologna; and Martini was beyond measure astonished while he listened to the young German, who played, without

the least hesitation an extempore fugue to any given theme. Florence next resounded his praise. He arrived at Rome in Passion Week, and was present in the Papal Chapel at the performance of the *Miserere*. This is known to be the *ne plus ultra* of vocal music; and it is strictly forbidden to give any one a copy of it. Mozart's ambition was powerfully excited; and having listened with the greatest attention to the performance, he went home, wrote the music from memory, returned on the morrow to the Chapel, then corrected his rough draft, and produced a copy which surprised all Rome. The *Miserere* is always composed for a full band of numerous parts, and is extremely difficult of execution. Mozart heard, remembered, and correctly wrote down the whole. He next went to Naples; but, soon afterwards, returned to Rome, where he received the order of the Golden Spur from the Pope. At Bologna he was unanimously elected a member and master of the Philharmonic Academy. As an admission piece, in proof of his qualification, a fugue was required of him for four voices in the church style; and being shut up in a chamber, he wrote it in an hour, and then received his diploma.

He composed the opera *Mithridates* for Milan, which produced him *la scrittura* for the grand opera of the Carnival of 1773, which was his "*Lucio Sull*." At length, after an absence

of fifteen months, he returned once more to Salzburg.

At the request of the Elector of Bavaria, he composed the opera of *Idumens [sic]* for the Carnival of 1781. He soon afterwards went again to Vienna, and, from his twenty-fifth year, continued to reside in that capital. His compositions were spread through all Germany, and his fame through the whole civilized world. The Emperor Joseph, who was desirous of improving the German opera, engaged Mozart to compose "*Dia Ent. fahrung [sic] aus die Serail,*" which was first performed in the year 1782. This excited the jealousy of the Italian company at Vienna, who caballed against his fame in every possible manner. Through some interest or other, they had half persuaded the Emperor that Mozart's music was not without its defects. "This piece," said he one day to the author, "is much too fine for our ears, my dear Mozart; and it is prodigiously full of notes." "It is, Sire," he immediately answered, "just as it ought to be."

While Mozart was engaged in the composition of this opera, he married Miss Weber, a performer of distinguished merit; and to this incident it was that the work was indebted for the character of tenderness, and the expression of passionate softness, in which its chief beauties consist. It was received both at Vienna and Prague

with the most rapturous applause: every ear was struck with astonishment at the new traits of harmony, the originality of the airs, and the till then unheard-of effect of wind instruments.

All his celebrity had hitherto, however, produced to Mozart no solid advantages. He enjoyed no place, and had no fixed income, but subsisted on the profits arising from his lessons and from subscription concerts. The *Marriage of Figaro* was then famous: it was transformed into an Italian opera, and the Emperor requested that Mozart would set it to music. He did so, and it was every where received with unbounded applause. Its airs, dances, and songs, enlivened every place for a whole winter. He was next engaged by the manager of the opera at Prague to compose the music to *Don Giovanni*. About this time, which was the commencement of the year 1788, the finances of Mozart, from the extreme uncertainty of his profits, became greatly deranged. In order to retrieve them, he determined to come over to England and reside in London, to which place he had received frequent invitations; but the Emperor being informed of the intention, appointed him composer of the chamber, and Mozart accepted the appointment.

This elegant and interesting musician died in the year 1791, just after he had received the brevet of chapel-master of the Church of St. Stephen, at the early age of thirty-five years. Indefatigable

to his latest moments, he composed his three finest works only a very short time before his death: these were the *Zauber Flöte*, or “Enchanted Flute,” *La Clemenza di Tito*, and a *Requiem*, the latter of which he just lived to finish. The *Zauber Flöte* composed for one of the theatres of the Fauxbourg of Vienna; and never had any dramatic piece such astonishing continuance of success. Its uninterrupted representations were beyond all example; and its airs and songs were repeated though the whole Empire, from the cottage to the palace. *La Clemenza di Tito* was demanded by the States of Bohemia for the coronation of Leopold. Mozart began it in his carriage on his journey to Prague, and it was finished in eighteen days.

The circumstances attending the composition of the *Requiem* are extremely interesting. A short time before Mozart’s death, a stranger came to him and requested that he would compose, as speedily as possible, a *Requiem* for a catholic prince, who, perceiving himself on the verge of the grave, wished for such a piece to be performed before him, in order to soothe his mind and familiarize it to the idea of its approaching dissolution. Mozart undertook the work, and the stranger deposited with him four hundred ducats, though only two hundred were demanded. During the progress of this composition, Mozart felt an unusual agitation of mind, which at length rose to such

a height, that he one day declared to his wife, that he could not possibly persuade himself but that the *Requiem* upon which he was employed, was for his own death. His wife, unable by any persuasion to efface the impression, earnestly requested him to give her the score. This he did; and when he appeared somewhat more tranquillized, and master of himself, she returned it to him to finish, but he soon relapsed into his former despondency. On the day of his death he asked for the *Requiem*, which was brought to his bed. “Was I not right,” said he, “when I declared that it was for myself I was composing this funeral piece?” And the tears bedewed his cheeks: it was his farewell music. After his death we are informed that the stranger came for and received the *Requiem*, and has not been heard of since. The widow, however, preserved the score.

Mozart died loaded with debts; but his wife and children met with ample and honourable protection and support. The debts of Mozart had perhaps not been necessary, but he had too generous a disposition to be an economist.

The figure of this extraordinary man had in it nothing particularly striking. He was of short stature; and, except his eyes, had no indications of peculiar genius. His look, when not seated at his instrument, was that of an absent man; but whenever he was performing, his whole physiognomy was changed: a profound seriousness recalled and fixed

his eyes; and his sentiments and feeling were expressed in every movement of his muscles.

The genius and talents of Mozart were chiefly displayed by the employment of wind instruments; and in this it was that he shewed his greatest powers. His melody is always simple, natural, and energetic, accurately expressing the sentiments and individual situations of his personages. His choruses and all his finales are truly excellent.

The disposition of Mozart was naturally kind, gentle, and frank; and with his friends he had an air at once amiable, gay, and even free from the least tincture of pedantry. His mind was by no means uncultivated; and, by his assiduity, he had acquired very considerable knowledge of several languages. Although he had too much pride to prostitute his musical talents at the request of ignorance, yet he was not the less modest, or insensible to merit wherever it might be found. In a private society, a new piece of Haydn's was performed, and a certain musician, who was never heard to praise any compositions but his own, did not fail to criticise the music. "There now!" he exclaimed to Mozart, "there is a passage that I should not have written." "Nor I neither," was the answer; "and I will tell you why: we should neither of us have been able to conceive it."

As a proof how laborious Mozart was in his profession, it is well known that he composed six

different pieces during the last four months of his life; although he was continually ill, and obliged to undertake two journeys during the time.

Haydn has been heard to declare, respecting Mozart, that in his opinion he was "the most extraordinary, original, and comprehensive musical genius that was ever known in this or any age."