

## More than Notes

Student Study Guide



Painting of young Mozart at the harpsichord, his father behind him playing the violin and his sister singing.

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Words in bold type are defined in the Glossary on page 7.

# MOZART: REQUIEM

## THE BRIEF LIFE OF WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (pronounced MOTE-zart) is one of the most famous composers who ever lived. He was born in Salzburg, Austria, on January 27, 1756. Most six-year-olds play games and learn letters and numbers, but by the age of six Mozart was already on the concert stage, playing the **harpsichord** for an emperor. He and his older sister, who was nicknamed Nannerl (NAN-ner-ul) toured Europe with their father for years, going from court to court to perform for royalty. This unnatural childhood brought fame and notoriety, but their father's dream of great wealth was never realized. Almost all the money they were paid went to travel expenses.

A German newspaper published an article that called Mozart, "The greatest wonder in all Germany...we see a boy of six years sitting at a harpsichord, and hear him playing not at all like a child, and also hear him **improvising** from his head, for whole hours at a time..."

It was in Paris that Mozart's first compositions were published—he was seven at the time. His father wrote home...

*"Our great and mighty Wolfgang seems to know everything at the age of seven that a man acquires at the age of 40."*

Mozart owed his early success to his father, an ambitious man who was a composer himself. Leopold Mozart recognized early on that his children were extremely talented, and he took advantage of that as often as possible, hauling them from palace to palace all over Europe, traveling in horse-drawn carriages over horribly rutted and uncomfortable roads in every kind of weather. Leopold was the music teacher for his two

# TIMELINE

## 1756

- January 27, birth of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
- The population of the Virginia colony reaches 250,000, 40% of whom are slaves
- Mayonnaise is invented by a Frenchman
- The first chocolate factory opens in Germany

## 1762

- Mozart plays for the emperor
- The British capture Martinique, Granada, Havana & Manila
- Ben Franklin invented a mechanical version of the glass harmonica



Ben Franklin and his glass harmonica

children, encouraging young Wolfgang to compose and to play all kinds of instruments. For most of these early concerts, Wolfgang played the harpsichord and his sister Nannerl played the violin and sang, although she could also play several instruments.

As an adult, Mozart reached the heights of musical achievement. The public especially liked three of his ten operas: *Don Giovanni*, *The Magic Flute*, and *The Marriage of Figaro* (they are still very popular). Unfortunately, he lived at a time when most composers could not work independently, but needed a patron, (a person of nobility or wealth), to support them. Mozart wrote hundreds of musical works, but he could not get along with the patrons that were necessary for financial survival. He was fired many times because he said too much or the wrong thing to a patron. Mozart did not work well under any kind of restriction.

Society in 18th century Europe was very different from America in the 21st century. The nobility (wealthy people of royal birth) lived in unimaginable luxury. They had tremendous economic and political power, and some of them had more money than the economies of the country in which they lived.

At their palaces and country estates, royalty often kept private orchestras and theaters, where they employed many professional musicians and artists of the day. (Most other jobs for musicians were in the churches as organists, choir members, orchestra members, composers, and teachers.)



Mozart as a young boy

When Mozart was a child, he toured from noble house to noble house, playing for and entertaining kings, queens, emperors, princes and dukes. He was young, he was cute, and he was extraordinarily talented. He was also very spoiled by all the attention he received. As an adult, he expected to get the same treatment, but the nobility no longer found him "cute." He would get very angry if he felt he was

being insulted, but they had the power, and he did not.

Mozart spent most of his adult life hustling for musical jobs to pay household bills, but he had a mischievous sense of humor. In fact, he loved jokes, especially crass or gross ones! When he was 24, he married a singer named Constanze (con-STAHNT-suh) Weber (VAY-ber). He fell in love with Constanze's sister first, and she rejected

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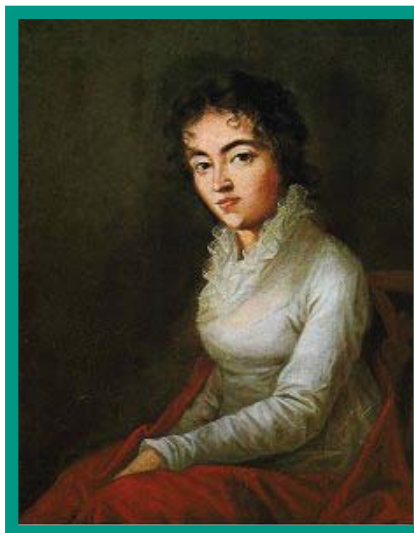
him, but he and Constanze had a happy marriage, and she bore six children. Only two boys, Franz and Carl, lived to adulthood. Neither Franz nor Carl had any children, so there are no direct descendants of Mozart.

In 1790, when he was 34, Mozart's professional life began to improve. He received a wonderful job offer to work in England the next year, and his opera, *The Magic Flute*, was a huge success. However, by September of 1791, he began to suffer from the illness that would later take his life. He wrote to a friend, "My end has come before I could profit by my talent. And yet life has been so beautiful...but no one can change his fate. No one can count his days...." As Mozart lay dying, his friends and relatives gathered at his bedside, taking notes on what he said and did. Here is one such quote:

*And now I must go just as it had become possible for me to live quietly. Now I must leave my art just as I had freed myself from the slavery of fashion (he means musical fashion—he could compose as he wanted to)...and won the privilege of following my own feelings and composing freely and independently whatever my heart prompted! I must (go) away from my family, from my poor children at the moment when I should have been able better to care for their welfare!*



Mozart (center) with his sister and father, under a portrait of his mother.



Constanze Weber

## 1763

- Mozart (age 7) goes to Paris and plays for King Louis XVI

- Britain rules Florida, Quebec (Canada) and Granada

## 1767

- Mozart writes his first opera (age 11)

- John Quincy Adams, the 6th president of the United States, is born, and so is Andrew Jackson, the 7th president

- Daniel Boone goes through the Cumberland Gap to reach "Kentucke". This is the original name of the territory that became the state of Kentucky. It was pronounced (CANE-TUCK)

## 1770

- Mozart, age 14, is made "Knight of the Golden Spur" by the Pope

- Composer Ludwig von Beethoven is born

- Handel's *Messiah* is performed for the first time

## 1778

- Mozart returns to Paris (age 22)

- In the American Revolution, General Washington defeats the British in New Jersey

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# MOZART'S REQUIEM

For centuries, choral composers have been setting religious words to music, finding new ways to communicate their spiritual message. One text that has been put to music thousands of times is the Roman Catholic mass. This service of prayer, worship, and praise celebrates Eucharist (pronounced U-kuh-rist), which is similar to Communion or the Lord's Supper in Protestant churches.

The standard mass, called the Ordinary, is used for most services, but there are additions or changes for special days or special services (like Easter, a wedding, or a funeral). Originally the mass was chanted by priests, then the chanting developed into solo singing, and finally into choral singing which became more and more complex.

The early Catholic Church was based in Rome during the time of the **Roman Empire**. Latin was the language of the Roman Empire and remained the language of the Church as it spread throughout the world, but as a vernacular language, Latin transformed into Italian, Spanish, and French, as those countries became independent from Rome. So, although Latin is called a "dead" language, most of the masses written by the great European composers are in Latin. After more than 1,000 years, the tradition of saying or singing the mass in Latin changed, and today masses are usually said or sung in the language of the local people. For example, in France they sing in French, in Spain they sing in Spanish, in Korea they sing in Korean, in England they sing in English , etc.

By the time of Mozart, masses were being written as compositions that could be sung in concerts rather than just as part of a church service.

## *What is a* **REQUIEM?**

*A Requiem Mass is a funeral service for the dead. A Requiem mass uses most text of the daily mass, but is greatly expanded. It has sections that alternately praise God and beg Him to receive the soul of the dead person. Some sections of the Requiem Mass describe the horrors to be expected on Judgment Day, but at the end are descriptions of the beauty of heaven and the "Light Everlasting" (Lux aeterna).*



## 1778, *continued*

- La Scala Opera House opens in Milan, Italy

- Congress prohibits the importation of slaves into the U.S.

## 1782

- Mozart marries Constanze Weber

- Spain completes its conquest of Florida, taking it from the British

- The hot air balloon is invented

## 1786

- Mozart composes the popular opera *The Marriage of Figaro*

- Uranium is discovered

- Composer Carl von Weber is born

## 1788

- Mozart composes his last three symphonies, all successful

- The U.S. Constitution is ratified

- The poet Lord Byron is born

## 1791

- Mozart presents his last opera, *The Magic Flute*, a huge success

- Mozart begins his *Requiem*

- Mozart dies on December 5, in Vienna, Austria, age 35

- The Bill of Rights is ratified and Vermont becomes a state

# REQUIEM FOR A GENIUS

In the many years since his death, there has been endless speculation about what killed Mozart at such a young age. The play and movie *Amadeus* is based on the often-repeated rumor that he was murdered—possibly poisoned by his fellow composer, Salieri (SAH-lee-AIR-y). Shortly before his illness, a masked man dressed in dark cape appeared at Mozart's door, requesting that he write a Requiem. Mozart accepted the commission and began to write what would be his final work. After he became ill, Mozart began to believe someone had given him a slow-acting poison, and the Requiem Mass was for himself. He wrote to a friend,

*"My head is confused. The image of that stranger will not part from my eyes. I always see him before me; he asks, he urges me, he impatiently demands work from me. I continue because composing tires me less than rest. Otherwise there is nothing more to fear. I feel it, my condition tells me; my hour has struck! I shall have to die. And so I am finishing my funeral dirge. I must not leave it incomplete."*



When he was too weak to hold the pen, Mozart began **dictating** music, but he was not able to finish the Requiem. Mozart's widow, Constanze, felt the Requiem must be finished or the commissioner might demand his money back, so she convinced composer Franz Sussmayer (a former student) to complete the Requiem using Mozart's instructions. Today, Requiem is one of Mozart's most performed and beloved works.

It was common in Mozart's time for people of wealth to buy a composition from a composer and pretend they wrote it themselves. The masked man was a servant for a nobleman who wanted to put his own name on

# GLOSSARY

Mozart's composition. (Similarly, today celebrities hire a "ghost writer" to write a book and pretend the celebrity is the author.) The servant was sent in secret, and he was masked.

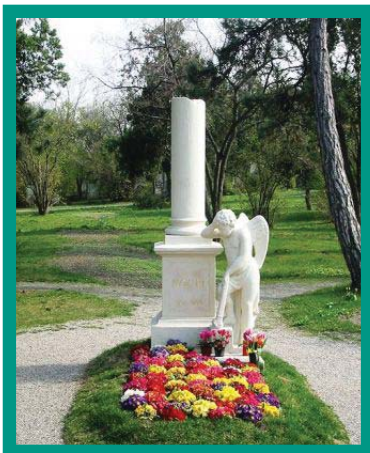
Medical detectives have examined descriptions of Mozart's illness written by witnesses at his bedside, and they have suggested several possible causes. Doctors in Mozart's time could not help him, but his symptoms indicate that the "poison" in his system was from an untreated illness.

During this time period, patients were often "bled" by doctors who believed that the blood itself was tainted, and health would be improved by removing some of it. Not only did bloodletting weaken the patient, but the tools they used were not sterile, and the wounds could become infected. Mozart was bled several times during his final illness.

The accused "murderer," Salieri, was a well-respected and popular composer in his own right, and was known as a kind and good man. Although not as gifted as Mozart, Salieri held an important post as a musician, and his career was much more successful than that of the young genius. It is very unlikely that Salieri wanted Mozart, who was a friend, to die. In fact, some years later Salieri helped Mozart's son get a job as a composer.



Salieri



Mozart's "grave" in Vienna

Although the body of Mozart was buried in Vienna's St. Marx cemetery, the exact location is unknown. If you visit the cemetery today you can see a Mozart monument and a 'gravesite' that have become popular tourist attractions. The Viennese kept excellent public records, which show that Mozart's body was sealed in a wooden coffin and buried in a plot along with 4 or 5 other people, which was the standard kind of burial for people in Vienna at that time. Only the very wealthy had individual graves. At some point, his "mass grave" was dug up and replaced with other bodies. Scientists are currently testing a skull that may be his, checking the DNA against some distant relatives who are alive today. If this is truly his skull, they should be able to figure out how he died.

**Dictating** – telling someone else exactly what you want written down, in this case, music

**Dirge** – a funeral march

**Glass Harmonica** – a musical instrument made of a series of glass bowls of different sizes, attached to a spindle on which the bowls turn, powered by a foot pedal. The rims of the glass bowls are kept wet, and the instrument is played by touching the edges of the rims. The sound is very sweet and eerie. (It is the same idea as rubbing your finger on the rim of a crystal wine glass.) The instrument was very popular in the 18th and 19th century.

**Harpichord** – a keyboard instrument that was very popular before the invention of the piano

**Improvising** – making up and performing music on the spot— instant composing

**Roman Empire** – Rome was first a town, then a city/state in what is now Italy. More than 200 years before the birth of Christ, Rome had grown to be a great power in the European world. It conquered and governed most of Europe, including Spain, France, Germany, Portugal, and England, most of the Middle East, and parts of Northern Africa, including Egypt. The Roman Empire lasted more than 700 years.

**Vernacular** – the language or dialect of a particular country or group

# JUST FOR FUN!

A teenager in Mozart's time was considered an "adult in waiting." The children of privilege were expected to prepare for a career (the boys) or marriage (the girls)—in other words, to live like their parents did. Most girls did not receive formal education, although they learned to read and write, and to do enough arithmetic to run a household. They were expected to sew beautifully and to either play the piano and sing, or to draw and paint. A girl's best hope was to attract a well-to-do husband. There were very few choices for unmarried women, who sometimes became governesses (private teachers) for wealthy families. Most unmarried women lived with relatives all their lives. Teenagers in poor families would have had very little education and as a result would have very few options in life. Most were not able to read or write. They might be working at a menial job by the time they were 12 or 13. Being a servant was considered a good job, because you got to eat regularly and sleep in the relative comfort of the servants' quarters of a fine house. Your hours were very long (and no one counted them or paid overtime), and you might be required to work seven days a week. Women who married were usually expected to give up their jobs and become housewives, even if their husband's income was very small.

The first audience that heard Mozart's Requiem would have been nobility, dressed by servants in ribbons and lace. Their hair might be hidden by a huge wig, or be puffed and curled. Dresses and men's coats and breeches (pants) would be made from satin, silk, taffeta, velvet or brocade. This eighteenth century lady and gentleman are dressed for an evening out:

