

Mozart

As a teenager I went through a horror movie phase. I shivered and shook my way through all the classic horror films of the time such as Exorcist, Omen, Dracula (several versions including the classic one starring Christopher Lee who was himself a trained opera singer incidentally) and so on. But I found that the very same terrifying movie became far less so when viewed at home on video in the company of friends, during the day, with the sound switched off. This made me realise rather early on just how vital a role it is that the background music plays in creating the appropriate mood for any kind of situation, be it suspenseful, funny, horrific or romantic. Perhaps because of this generous exposure to films at an early age I have since had a "Soundtrack" for each event or situation occurring in my imagination too. I have had the privilege of studying South Indian Classical Music under some of the best teachers in the country and also I have had the good fortune to listen, to understand (To a certain limit) fall in love with (Without any apparent limit) various kinds of music from all over the world. Artists as diverse as K.L.Saigal, Kishore Kumar, Pandit Ajoy Chakrabarty, Eartha Kitt, Maria Callas, Jacques Brel, Fairuz and M.D.Ramanathan, not to mention my own beloved and revered teachers adorn my pantheon of musical Gods and Goddesses. But whenever I imagine heaven it is unfailingly the music of a young man from Austria who lived and died nearly 180 years before I was born that plays in my head, not to mention heart. Mozart! Always Mozart!

Born at Salzburg on the 27th of Jan 1756 to Leopold Mozart, himself an established violinist and composer during his time, the child Mozart started to show signs of the miracle that he was right from the time he was an infant. Having a father like Leopold was a mixed blessing. He was more than confident about the musical talent and ability of both Wolfgang Amadeus and his daughter Maria Anna Mozart (Affectionately called "Nannerl") and did all he could to groom them to be top class musicians. But this deprived themin particular Mozart..... of a normal childhood, since they were packaged and marketed as two wonderchildren right from the time they were five and ten years old respectively.

Leopold Mozart was a composer in his own right, but became most famous (other than for fathering THE Mozart of course!) for his book on the techniques of playing the violin which is referred to by students of the instrument to this day. He was an excellent teacher and had soon groomed Nannerl and her miraculous Little Brother into excellent violinists and artists on the key board. We get a taste of Mozart's skill on the violin from the five Concertos for the violin that he has left us ... as opposed to a single Violin Concerto each composed by all time greats such as Beethoven, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and others and several lilting Rondos and Adagios. Mozart was originally christened Wolfgangus Theophilus; the latter word meaning

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"Beloved of God" in Greek. He later changed it to the Latin word with the same meaning: *Ama Deus*.

When one listens to the childhood compositions of Mozart one realizes just how much God must have loved him. He was as much loved by the public of the time as he was by God apparently. Father Mozart took the children on several highly acclaimed tours of Europe where they were received equally enthusiastically by the aristocracy and by the man on the street. Once while playing at the palace of Empress Maria Theresa young Mozart fell down and was helped up by Marie Antionette, the future Queen of France. He gave her a kiss on her royal cheek and asked for her hand in marriage. She refused politely and offered him a piece of cake instead.

The tales about Mozart as a child are legendary. Once he wrote a piece for the harpsichord as an eleven year old and submitted it to the Prince. When the court musician played it he found that at one point he got stuck because one would have to have eleven fingers to play it instead of ten! He smiled condescendingly at the child Amadeus and pointed out the mistake. Little Mozart jumped on to the stool and started playing it furiously. And when he reached the controversial note, so to speak, he suddenly dived down and struck the note with his nose, much to the delight and amazement of all the people around. On another occasion the fourteen year old Mozart and his father visited the Sistine Chapel in Rome where the celebrated piece "Miserere" by Gregorio Allegri was being played. The Vatican was so possessive about this piece that performances anywhere else was forbidden. But Mozart returned to his room after the performance and wrote down the whole piece from memory. He tasted some of his biggest successes in Italy during this tour. He was invested as a "Cavalier of The Golden Spur" by the Pope himself. Till then the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg was a pleasant enough, easy going gentleman called Sigismund Schrattenbach who smiled indulgently at Leopold Mozart's long absences, though he was technically the court musician. But disastrously for Mozart, this kindly soul passed on to meet his maker at this time and was replaced by a real monster of a man Hieronymus, Count von Colleredo who was a merciless dictator who didn't think much of absent musicians in general and Leopold Mozart in particular. He completely ignored Leopold's wish to be appointed the Kappellmeister but conceded to appoint Wolfgang Amadeus as the Konzertmeister, where he was paid a pittance, treated like a second class servant and was expected to churn out religious works by the dozen masses of Masses, one could say.

At this point Leopold sent Mozart off to Paris to seek his fortune there. But en route

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at Manneheim, he met and fell in love desperately with a sixteen year old girl called Aloysia Weber, the daughter of the family he was staying with. This was completely counterproductive to Leopold's paternal plans for his prodigious progeny. And he blasted Mozart so strongly in the letter he wrote that Mozart hastily bade a temporary goodbye to the Webers and went off to Paris with his mother. Sadly for him, not only did he find Parisians as unfriendly and unwelcoming as one finds them even to this day, but also his mother fell gravely sick and finally breathed his last there. A totally dismayed Mozart went back to the Webers where Aloysia rejected his pleas of love, making him even more disappointed in the process. Archbishop Colleredo appointed him as the court organist for some time. But the hatred and contempt between the two men was palpable. Finally things reached a head and Mozart was physically kicked out of the palace by one of the guards. He then left for Vienna in search of fame and fortune. He was delighted to find himself in the company of the Weber family once again and he promptly proceeded to fall in love with Constanze Weber, the less glamorous sister of Aloysia Weber. He wrote the soprano part of the incredibly beautiful Great Mass in C Minor to show off her talents to the increasingly disapproving Leopold Mozart. Finally Mozart married Constanze on the fourth of August 1782.

The next few years spent in Vienna with his new wife were the best for Mozart, personally and professionally. Goethe wrote in his Conversations with Eckerman "I cannot help thinking that the daemons, to tease and fool us, have placed before us single individuals who are so alluring that everyone strives after them, yet so far beyond us that nobody can reach them. Thus they set Raphael before us with whom thought and act were equally perfect thus Mozart as someone unattainable in music, thus Shakespeare in poetry". His father visited him and witnessed the phenomenal success that his son was experiencing in Vienna. A great deal of letters written by various members of the Mozart family survive right from the time Mozart was a child. His letters themselves are as varied in content as his music itself. Having mastered English, French, Italian and Latin apart from his father tongue German, Mozart was a master at writing the most hilarious, yet poignant letters probably written by any musician ever, over history. His humour is mostly scatological though and he has even written absolutely vulgar drinking songs in German for his drinking companions. During this time however Mozart was much too busy to write letters and we get glimpses of his success from letters written by Leopold to his daughter Nannerl describing Mozart's glory with palpable fatherly pride. But things were far from perfect for Mozart. For one, his relationship with Leopold had become more and more strained as Leopold had very definite ideas as to what Mozart should do professionally and he even had ideas on

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musical composition, which Mozart could no longer accept, having become very much his own man by then. The second reason was his health, which had become increasingly bad over the years due to a weak constitution coupled with excessive travelling and exposure to all sorts of food, climate and so on. By this time he had met and become fast friends with Haydn, who even helped him in the art of composing String Quartets. The last time they met, Mozart hinted that they may never meet again: Haydn who was 24 years older than Mozart, was shocked by this statement at the time, but not half as shocked as he would be a few years later when Mozart died. Leopold Mozart was called back to Salzburg by Colloredo and the father and son never saw each other again. When Leopold died a few years later Mozart was saddened as he was genuinely fond of him though they could get along with each other less and less well over the years.

The public, fickle as the public always has been all over the world at any time, found other composer to idolate and Mozart's fortune started to wane. The fact that both he and his wife spent money like water did not help either. Soon he was borrowing money left, right and centre to make ends meet somehow. The other means of making money was, naturally, composing. During the last eight or nine years of his short life, Mozart composed some of his most brilliant masterpieces. He made his mark in Symphonies, Operas, Concertos, Quartets, Quintets and Sonata, maintaining a consistently high level of musicianship that is yet to be equalled by anyone else before or since. He was the first one to make a social statement with his Operas. Firstly he dared to oppose the great Italian lobby (The musical equivalent of the present day Mafia) by composing Operas in German so that the man on the street could understand the lyrics too. Secondly he even challenged the ruling class with operas like the "Marriage of Figaro" which was a runaway success in Prague though not so much in Vienna at the time.

Those days there was a despicable tradition among the aristocrats that the Elector or Prince of each area had the right to deflower newly married women from their jurisdiction on their wedding night. The story of The Marriage of Figaro revolves around this theme and this was one of the initial small but significant steps that finally culminated in the French Revolution. During his last days Mozart continued to drink, play cards, play billiards and make merry with his friends, but thoughts and images of death seemed to haunt him almost perpetually.

These dark thoughts started to reflect in his music too with his sinister opera "Don Giovanni" being one of the finest examples in this genre. At this unfortunate juncture a self important aristocrat commissioned a Requiem (A Mass for the Dead) from Mozart, with the intention of publishing it as his own work. (This is a

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tradition which continues all over the world to this day when not just Requiems, but articles, music, stories, and even whole books are Ghost Written.) For Mozart this was the worst thing that could have happened, in his death obsessed frame of mind. He kept repeating he was writing his own Requiem and finally he breathed his last a few months before his 36th birthday, dictating the music in a frenzy to his disciple Sussmayer, who later completed the work himself. Many a legend has sprung forth about his having been dumped like a sack of potatoes in an unmarked pauper's grave, but that in itself would easily make enough material for another article.

A wonderfully assiduous gentleman called Ludwig Kochel set about tabulating all the available compositions of Mozart chronologically. Thus we find them numbered K or KV, beginning with the tiny little minuets he scribbled in his sister Nannerl's notebook as a child and ending with the magnificent incomplete Requiem.

Mozart widow remarried and her second husband was the first to bring out a complete biography of Mozart, utterly distorted by the romantic imagination of Constanze. But later studies have revealed more and more facts about him and information about his life and his music is being discovered day by day especially since the iron curtain over East Europe was finally raised. It is next to impossible to make a list of his best compositions because they are all so beautiful. Yet for someone totally new to Mozart and western classical music, the following pieces may give an insight into the spectacular world of sound that Mozart occupied.

Eine Kleine Nachtmusik

His symphonies no 25, 40 & 41

The five violin concertos

The Great Mass in C Minor and the Requiem

The Clarinet concerto which is incidentally my all time favourite

The Piano concertoes No 20 to 27

His Operas The Magic Flute; Marriage of Figaro and Don Giovanni

A statement on Mozart will not be complete without mentioning Salzburg's Sweet tribute to its magnificent son, The Mozartkugel, one of the best chocolates in the world with a marzipan centre, surrounded by layers of the most exquisite milk chocolate and dark chocolate.... the closest equivalent to the Glorious Music of Mozart itself and my own first encounter with Mozart when I was a fat and greedy nine year old who was much less musical than Mozart. One might wonder how much more he would or woundn't have composed had he lived a bit longer. But as long as his music is played and enjoyed and loved and cherished, he continues to

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live and it would be a miracle if he ultimately doesn't end up being the single musician from any part of the world with the longest life ever.