

LIFE OF MOZART

**BY
LOUIS NOHL**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.

CHAPTER II.

CHAPTER III.

CHAPTER IV.

CHAPTER V.

FOOTNOTES:



WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART.

BIOGRAPHIES OF MUSICIANS.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.

MR. LOUIS NOHL, the author of the present little volume, has merited for himself in Germany a high reputation as a writer of the biographies of musicians, and some of his larger works have appeared in English on the other side of the Atlantic. The present is the first translation into our language of his shorter *Life of Mozart*. It will, we trust, prove acceptable to those who desire to learn the chief events in the life of the great composer, to see how his life influenced his compositions, and how his great works are, in many instances at least, the expression of his own joys and sorrows, the picture of his own soul in tones.

The translator's grateful acknowledgments are due to Mr. A. W. Dohn, of Chicago, who was kind enough to compare the entire translation with the original. His thorough knowledge of music and German, no less than his rare familiarity with the English language, have largely contributed to the fidelity of this translation.

J. J. L.

THE LIFE OF MOZART.

CHAPTER I.

1756-1777.

CHILDHOOD AND EARLY TRAVELS.

Mozart's Parentage—Early Development of his Genius—Character as a Child—Travels at the age of Six—Received by Maria Theresa and Marie Antoinette—Mozart and Goethe—Meeting with Madame de Pompadour—The London Bach's Opinion of Young Mozart—Asked to Write an Opera by Joseph II—Assailed by Envy—Padre Martini—Notes Down the Celebrated Miserere from Ear—The Pope Confers on him the Order of the Golden Spurs—A Member of the Philharmonic Society of Bologna—First Love—Personal Appearance—Troubles with the Archbishop.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART was born in the city of Salzburg, on the 27th of January, 1756. His father, Leopold, was descended from a family of the middle class of the then free imperial city of Augsburg, and had come to Salzburg, the domicile of a prince-bishop and the seat of an excellent university, to study law. But as he had to support himself by teaching music, even while pursuing his legal studies, he was soon compelled to enter entirely into the service of others. He became *valet de chambre* to a canon of the Roman church, Count Thurm; afterwards court-musician and then *capellmeister*^[1] to the archbishop. He had married in 1747 a young girl, educated in a neighboring convent. Himself and wife were considered the

handsomest couple in Salzburg in their day. Of seven children born to them, they lost all but two, Maria Anna, known by the pet-name of Nannerl, and our Wolfgang, most frequently called Wolferl. Anna was about five years older than Wolfgang, and both gave evidence, from the time they were little children, of an extraordinary talent for music.

An old friend of the family tells us how, from the moment young Mozart had begun to give himself to music, he cared neither to see nor hear anything else. Even his childish games and plays did not interest him unless accompanied by music. "Whenever," says our informant, "we carried our toys from one room to another, the one of us who had nothing to carry was always required to play, or sing a march," ... and further: "He [Mozart] grew so extremely attached to me because I kept him company and entered into his childish humors, that he frequently asked me ten times in a day, if I loved him; and when I sometimes said no, only in fun, the tears instantly glistened his eyes, his little heart was so kind and tender."

We learn from the same source that he manifested no pride or awe, yet he never wished to play except before great connoisseurs in music; and to induce him to do so it was sometimes necessary to deceive him as to the musical acquirements of his hearers. He learned every task that his father gave him, and put his soul so entirely into whatever he was doing that he forgot all else for the time being, not excepting even his music. Even as a child, he was full of fire and vivacity, and were it not for the excellent training he received from his father, who was very strict with him, and of a serious turn of mind, he might have become one of the wildest of

youths, so sensitive was he to the allurements of pleasure of every kind, the innocence or danger of which he was not yet able to discover.

When only five years of age he wrote some music in his *Uebungsbuch* or Exercise-book, which is yet to be seen in the Mozarteum^[2] in Salzburg; also some little minuets; and, on one occasion, his father and the friend of the family mentioned above, surprised him engaged on the composition of a concerto so difficult that no one in the world could have played it. His ear was so acute, and his memory for music so good from the time he was a child, that once when playing his little violin, he remembered that the *Buttergeige*, the “butter-violin,” so-called from the extreme smoothness of its tones, was tuned one-eighth of a tone lower than his own. On account of this great acuteness of hearing, he could not, at that age, bear the sound of the trumpet; and when notwithstanding his father once put his endurance of it to the test, he was taken with violent spasms.

His readiness and skill in music soon became so great that he was able to play almost everything at sight. His little sister also had made very extraordinary progress in music at a very early age, and the father in 1762, when the children were respectively six and ten years of age, began to travel with them, to show, as he said, these “wonders of God” to the world.

The first place they went to was Munich, then as now the real capital of Southern Germany, and after that to Vienna. Maria Theresa and her consort were very fond of music. They received the children with genuine German cordiality, and little Wolfgang without any more ado, leaped into the lap of the

Empress and kissed her; just as he had told the unfortunate Marie Antoinette, who had helped him from the slippery floor: "You are good and I'll marry you." The youngest son of Maria Theresa, the handsome and amiable grand-duke, Maximilian, was of the same age as young Mozart, and always remained his friend, as he was, subsequently, the patron of Beethoven. The picture of Mozart and his little sister dressed in the clothes of the imperial children hangs on the walls of the Mozarteum; his animated eyes and her budding beauty have an incomparable charm.

He now, in his sixth year, learned to play the violin, and his father neglected nothing to give him, in every way, the best musical instruction. For he was himself an excellent composer, and had written a "violin method" which had a great reputation in its day, and was honored with translation. Mozart's education in music continued even during the journey. Instruction in playing the organ was soon added to instruction in the use of the violin. The next scene of the marvels of the little ones was Southern Germany. This was in the summer of 1763. In Heidelberg, Mozart's little feet flew about on the pedals with such rapidity that the clergyman in charge made a record of it in writing on the organ itself. Goethe heard him in Frankfort, and thus obtained a standard by which to measure all subsequent men of musical genius whom he chanced to meet. In his declining years, Goethe listened to a child similarly gifted, Felix Mendelssohn. In Paris, also, the court was very gracious to the children; but when little Wolfgang, with the ingenuousness of childhood, tried to put his arms about the neck of the painted Madame de Pompadour as he had about that of Maria Theresa, he was met with a rebuff, and, wounded

to the quick, he cried: “Who is that person there that won’t kiss me? The empress kissed me.” He always thought a great deal of Maria Theresa, and his heart, through life, had a nook in it for her, and was ever loyal to the imperial family, as we shall see further on.

The princesses were all the more amiable in consequence, and did not trouble themselves about etiquette. Every one wondered to hear so young a child tell every note the moment he heard it; compose without the aid of a piano, and play accompaniments to songs by ear only. No wonder that he was greeted everywhere with the loudest applause, and that the receipts were so flatteringly large.

The reception extended to them in London in 1764, was still kinder; for the royal couple themselves were German, and Handel had already laid a lasting foundation there for good music; while the French music of the time seemed to our travelers to be exceedingly cold and empty—“a continual and wearisome bawling.” Their stay in England was, on this account, a very long one, and the father made use of the opportunity he found there to give an excellent Italian singer as an instructor to Wolfgang, who soon mastered the Italian style of melody, which was then the prevailing one. It was in London that Mozart wrote his first symphonies.

Their journey back in 1765, led them over Holland, where both children were taken very dangerously ill, and the father’s strength for the difficult task of preserving and educating such a boy as Wolfgang, was put to the severest test. Even during the Lenten season, he was allowed, in Amsterdam, to exhibit “for the glory of God” the wonderful gifts of his son, and he

finally returned in the fall of 1766, after an absence of more than two years, to Salzburg, laden not so much with money as with the fame of his little ones.

The journey taken thus early in life was of great advantage to Mozart himself. He learned to understand men—for his father drew his attention to everything; he even made the boy keep a diary—he got rid of the shyness natural to children, and acquired a knowledge of life. He had listened to the music of the different nations, and thus discovered the manner in which each heart understands that language of the human soul called melody. The refined tone of the higher classes at this time was also of great advantage to his art. The magnificent landscape scenery of his native place had awakened his natural sense of the beautiful; its beautiful situation, its numerous churches and palaces, had further developed that same aesthetic sense; and now the varied impressions received from life and art during these travels, so extensive for one so young, were one of the principal causes why Mozart's music acquired so early that something so directly attractive, so harmoniously beautiful and so universally intelligible, which characterizes it. But this phase of his music was fully developed only by his repeated long sojourns in that land of beauty itself, in which Mozart spent his incipient youth, in Italy.

Mozart's father, indeed, did not remain long in Salzburg. Salzburg was no place for him. And must not the boy always have felt keenly the impulse to display his artistic power before the world? Had not the London Bach, a son of the great Leipzig cantor, Sebastian Bach, whose influence on Mozart we shall hear of further on, said of him that many a *capellmeister*

had died without knowing what this boy knew even now? The marriage of an archduke brought the family, in 1768, to Vienna once more, the first place they lived in after leaving Salzburg. Here the father saw clearly, for the first time, that Italy and Italy alone was the proper training-school for this young genius. The Emperor Joseph had, indeed, confided to him the task of writing an Italian opera—it was the *La Finta Semplice*, “Simulated Simplicity”—and the twelve-year-old boy himself directed a solemn mass at the consecration of a church, a performance which made so deep an impression on his mind, that twenty years after he used to tell of the sublime effect of his church on his mind. A German operetta, *Bastien and Bastienne*, was honored with a private performance. But this first Italian opera was the occasion of Mozart’s experiencing the malicious envy of his fellow-musicians, which, it is said, contributed so much, later, to make his life wretched and to bring it to an early close.

His father writes:

“Thus, indeed, have people to scuffle their way through. If a man has no talent, his condition is unfortunate enough; if he has talent, he is persecuted by envy, and that in proportion to his skill.” Young Mozart’s enemies and enviers had cunning enough to prevent the performance of his work, and the father was now doubly intent on exhibiting his son’s talent where, as the latter himself admitted, he felt that he was best understood, and where he had won the highest fame in his youth.

Italy is the mother country of music and was, besides, at this time, the Eldorado of composers. The Church had nurtured music. With the Church it came into Germany. From Germany it

subsequently returned enriched. It reached its first memorable and classical expression in the Roman Palestrina. After his day, a worldly and even theatrical character invaded the music of the Catholic Church, of which Palestrina is the great ideal. The cause of this change was the introduction of the opera, which was due to the revival of the study of the antique, and especially of Greek tragedy.

The pure style of vocal composition was founded on the Protestant choral, and reached its highest classical expression, in modern times, in the German Sebastian Bach. His contemporary and countryman, Handel, on the other hand, remained, by way of preference, in the region of opera; and, after he had achieved great triumphs in it in foreign countries, he rose to the summit of his greatness, in the spiritual drama, the oratorio. The world at this time loved the theatrical; and its chief seat, so far as the opera was concerned, was the country which had given birth to music. As, in its day, Italy had the greatest composers, it had now, to say the least, the greatest and most celebrated singers, and with a single victory here one entered the lists with all educated Europe. "Then up and go there," the father must have said to himself, when he saw that his son's talent for composition was not recognized in Germany as much as it deserved to be recognized even then, and the superior excellence of his performances denied there when it was admitted everywhere else.

We need not here enter into the details of this journey. The youthful artist continued to work wonders similar to those which we have already related. And on one occasion, in Naples, the boy was even obliged to remove a ring from his finger,

because his wizard-like art was ascribed by the people to his wearing it. We must here confine ourselves to tracing the course of development of this extraordinary genius, and to showing what were the influences that made him such.

At the end of the year 1769, that is, when Mozart was nearly fourteen years of age, we find him and his father journeying through the Tyrol to the land of milder breezes and sweet melodies. Everywhere the same unbounded admiration of his talent. In Vienna, the two—who now traveled unaccompanied by the mother and sister—were obliged to elbow themselves through the crowd to the choir, so great was the concourse of people. In Milan, such was the impression made by our hero, that Wolfgang was asked to compose an opera. In Italy new operas were introduced twice a year; and he was given the first opportunity to display his talent during the season preceding Christmas. The honorarium paid him was, as usual, one hundred ducats and lodging free. He received no more at a later period for his *Don Giovanni*. But such an amount was a large remuneration, at that time, for the young beginner.

In the execution of his task, however, he showed himself by no means a mere beginner. For when, continuing their journey—to which they could give themselves up with all the more composure as the libretto was to be sent after them—they came to Bologna and there called upon the most learned musician of his age, Padre Martini, even he could do nothing but lose himself in wonder at the power of achievement of our young master, who, as Martini said, solved problems and overcame difficulties which gave evidence both of innate genius and of the most comprehensive knowledge. Wolfgang

here became acquainted with the greatest singer of his time, the sopranist, Carlo Broschi, known as Farinelli, and received from him as a last legacy the Italian art of *bel canto*; for, said he, only he who understands the art of song in its highest sense, can, in turn, properly write for song. And yet this vocalist was already in the sixties.

Florence was still governed by the Hapsburgs, and hence the best of receptions was given to our travelers there. Of the magnificent works of art in the place, the letters to his mother and sister do not say anything. But we can scarcely suppose that the *Venus Anathusia* and the *Madonna della Sedia* remained unknown to him who was alone destined to give life to Raphael and the antique, even in tones. Mozart's own letters from Rome do not leave us in the dark on this point. He writes to his sister: "Yesterday we were in the Capitol and saw many beautiful things, and there are, indeed, many beautiful things there and elsewhere in Rome"—Laocoon and Ariadne, the Apollo Belvedere and the head of Olympian Jove. And then the many churches, and among them a St. Peter's! But naturally enough, the music remained the most remarkable thing of all to the two musicians; and then there was the Sistine Chapel, in which alone something of the art of the great Romans still lived and ruled. Of Palestrina we hear nothing in this connection, but Wolfgang went so far as to make a copy of Allegri. "You know," the father writes, "that the Miserere sung here is esteemed so highly that the musicians of the chapel are forbidden, under pain of excommunication, to copy any part of it, or to give a part of it to anybody. But we have it. Wolfgang has written it down from ear. However, we do not wish this secret to come into anyone's else possession, lest we should incur the censure

of the Church directly or indirectly.” The Mozarts, indeed, attached some importance to their faith in the Catholic Church. To them it was intrinsic truth. And thus Wolfgang’s youthful soul was forever consecrated, for the reception of the highest feelings of the human breast, by the peculiarly sacred songs sung during this holy week in Rome—feelings which, even in compositions not religious, he, in the course of his life, clothed in sounds so beautiful and enrapturing. In after years, he was wont to tell of the deep impression made on him by these incidents in his religious experience. “How I felt there! how I felt there!” he exclaimed, over and over again, in speaking of them.

We have heard already of Naples. The father had written from Rome that the further they got into Italy the greater was the wonder of the people. The intoxicating beauty of nature mirrored in the Bay of Naples, could not but make a deep impression on the artist, who was himself destined one day to give expression in so magical a manner and in sounds so entrancing, to the charm and intoxication of the serenest joys of life. “Naples is beautiful,” he writes curtly but characteristically to his sister. Yet it may be that the immense solemnity of Rome was more in harmony with Mozart’s German nature. They were there soon again, and this time they had an opportunity to see what can be seen only in Rome—the Pope. Delighted with young Wolfgang’s playing, the Holy Father—it was the great Ganganelli, Clement XIV—granted him a private audience, and conferred on him the order of the Golden Spurs, that same order which afterwards gave us a chevalier Gluck. Mozart did not, at first, make much of this honor, and his father wrote: “You may imagine how I laugh to

hear him called all the time *Signor Cavaliere*." Later, however, they knew when a proper occasion presented itself, how to turn such a distinction to advantage.

The end now aimed at by young Mozart and his father was fame and success. A step towards the attainment of these was Wolfgang's nomination as a member of the celebrated Philharmonic Society of Bologna, which invested him, in Italy, with the title of *Cavaliere Filarmonico*. And when father and son came to Milan again in 1770, he had, so far as his rank as an artist and his position in life were concerned, attained success. At fourteen, he was *Signor Cavaliere*—Chevalier Mozart. The journey itself had done much to bring his artistic views to maturity. His technical ability was very plainly now supplemented by the pure sense of the beautiful, the result of the highest intellectual labor. He had surmounted all difficulties, and especially those purely natural ones by which the rough, lack-lustre north, with its inhospitable climate, only too frequently keeps Germans back in art. From this time forward the divine rays of ideal beauty beam brightly from Mozart's melody, and they never became extinct. In Mozart's art there was now no room for perfection of form. His art could be added to only by adding to the life that was in it; and we shall soon again meet with traces of that personal contact with life which matures man's capabilities and develops them. Let us first look at the earliest decided successes of the composer, successes which, for a long time, bound him to the "land where the citron blooms."

The Italian opera which then ruled supreme everywhere, was far from being such a dramatic performance on the stage as

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