

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Mozart is seen as one of the greatest classical composers of all time. His music is still treasured and loved today. His talent shone out from a young age and he was considered a child prodigy. He was born in Salzburg, Austria in 1756 and by age 5 he was playing the piano, harpsichord and violin and composing short pieces. At age 6 his father took him to the court in Vienna. It was a difficult and expensive trip but it paid off. Mozart performed for nobles and royalty and was much admired. He went on to travel around Europe including France, England and Italy. He began composing operas and astounded people because he could hear a piece of music once and then write it down from memory.

At the time of Mozart's life, composers needed employment. Mozart was employed at the Salzburg Court but it did not pay well. He wanted to do better. Eventually, in 1777, he left his job in Salzburg to seek his fortune elsewhere. It was not easy, especially as Mozart was a little arrogant and often offended people. He was somewhat playful and had a wicked and immature sense of humour which may have won him friends but not an employer.

In 1778, Mozart went to Paris, again looking for work. It did not go well and left him feeling very unhappy. To make matters worse, his mother died during the trip. Aged 22, he returned to Austria a much more serious and sombre young man. He found happiness however when he met, fell in love with and married Constanze Weber. They had six children although only two survived. Around this time, Mozart befriended another composer called Josef Haydn. He saw Haydn as a mentor and dedicated string quartets to him. Mozart, in turn, inspired another great composer; Beethoven visited him when he was in Vienna, desperate to have lessons from his idol. Although Mozart was impressed by the young Beethoven's talent, the lessons never took place. Beethoven was forced to return home when his mother became ill.

Despite how busy he was and his music being popular, Mozart always struggled for money. When he was paid to write a requiem (a mass written to remember the dead), the



money was too good to say no. However, Mozart's health was deteriorating and he became certain that the requiem was meant for him. He died at age 35 before the piece was finished. Another composer used his notes and the work Mozart had already done, in order to complete it. It is an incredibly moving and powerful piece of music. Haydn said when Mozart died that there would not be anyone with his talent for a hundred years. Some would say it has been much longer than that.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. What is a prodigy?
2. What two words in the first paragraph tell us that people were impressed by the young Mozart?
3. What does 'sombre' mean?
4. What is a mentor?
5. Look up deteriorate in a dictionary. What was Mozart's health when he was writing the Requiem?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

- R** Why did Mozart leave his job in 1777?
- R** What two other composers did Mozart meet?
- I** What mood do you think Mozart's Requiem has?
- S** How did Mozart's success change throughout his life?
- P** Do you think Mozart would have been surprised to know that his music is still popular now? Why or why not?