

Amadeus!

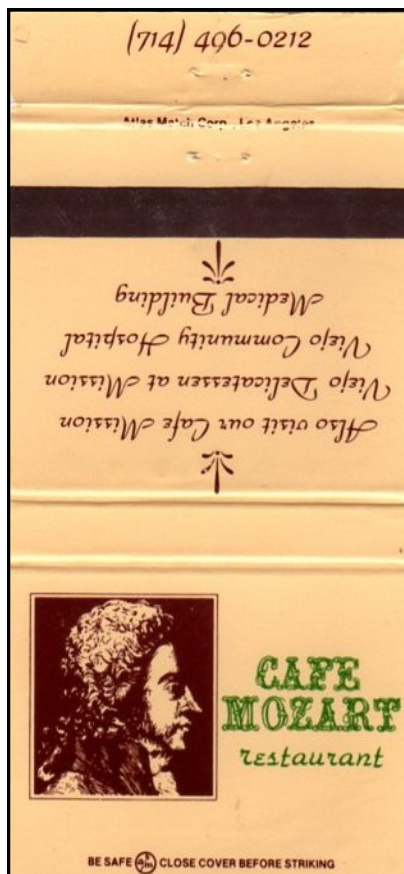
by
Mike Prero



Mozart died on Dec 5, and, because of the music he gave the world, we should take a moment and remember...

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (27 January 1756 – 5 December 1791) was a prolific and influential composer of the Classical era. He showed prodigious ability from his earliest childhood. Already competent on keyboard and violin, he composed from the age of five and performed before European royalty. At 17, he was engaged as a court musician in Salzburg, but grew restless and travelled in search of a better position, always composing abundantly. While visiting Vienna in 1781, he was dismissed from his Salzburg position. He chose to stay in the capital, where he achieved fame but little financial security. During his final years in Vienna, he composed many of his best-known symphonies, concertos, and operas, and portions of the Requiem, which was largely unfinished at the time of his death. The circumstances of his early death have been much mythologized. He was survived by his wife Constanze and two sons.

He composed over 600 works, many acknowledged as pinnacles of symphonic, concertante, chamber, operatic, and choral music. He is among the most enduringly popular of



classical composers, and his influence on subsequent Western art music is profound; Beethoven composed his own early works in the shadow of Mozart, and Joseph Haydn wrote that "posterity will not see such a talent again in 100 years."

Mozart's physical appearance was described by tenor Michael Kelly, in his *Reminiscences*: "a remarkably small man, very thin and pale, with a profusion of fine, fair hair of which he was rather vain". As his early biographer Niemetschek wrote, "there was nothing special about [his] physique. [...] He was small and his countenance, except for his large intense eyes, gave no signs of his genius." His facial complexion was pitted, a reminder of his childhood case of smallpox. He loved elegant clothing. Kelly remembered him at a rehearsal: "[He] was on the stage with his crimson pelisse and gold-laced cocked hat, giving the time of the music to the orchestra." Of his voice his wife later wrote that it "was a tenor, rather soft in speaking and delicate in singing, but when anything excited him, or it became necessary to exert it, it was both powerful and energetic".

Mozart usually worked long and hard, finishing compositions at a tremendous pace as deadlines approached. He often made sketches and drafts; unlike Beethoven's, these are mostly not preserved, as his wife sought to destroy them after his death. He was raised a Catholic and remained a loyal member of the Church throughout his life. He lived at the center of the Viennese musical world, and knew a great number and variety of people: fellow musicians, theatrical performers, fellow Salzburgers, and aristocrats, including some acquaintance with the Emperor Joseph II.

He enjoyed billiards and dancing, and kept pets: a canary, a starling, a dog, and a horse for recreational riding. He had a startling fondness for scatological humor, which is preserved in his surviving letters, notably those written to his cousin around 1777–1778, and in his correspondence with his sister and parents. Mozart also wrote scatological music, a series of canons that he sang with his friends.


Mozart's music, like Haydn's, stands as an archetype of the Classical style. As Mozart matured, he progressively incorporated more features adapted from the Baroque. Mozart would sometimes switch his focus between operas and instrumental music. Mozart's symphonic production covers a 24 year interval, from 1764 to 1788. According to most recent investigations, Mozart wrote not just the 41 symphonies reported in traditional editions, but up to 68 complete works of this type. Perhaps his best-admired work is in opera, the piano concerto and sonata, the symphony, and in the string quartet and string quintet. Mozart also wrote much work for solo piano, other forms of chamber music, masses and other religious music, and numerous dances, divertimentos, and other forms of light entertainment.

Mozart was nursed in his final illness by his wife and her youngest sister. He was mentally occupied with finishing his Requiem, but the evidence that he actually dictated passages to his student Franz Xaver Süssmayr is minimal. Mozart died in his home on 5 December 1791 (aged 35). *"Mozart was interred in a common grave, in accordance with contemporary Viennese custom, at the St. Marx Cemetery outside the city on 7 December. If, as later reports say, no mourners attended, that too is consistent with Viennese burial customs at the time; later Jahn (1856) wrote that Salieri, Süssmayr, van Swieten and two other musicians were present. The tale of a storm and snow is false; the day was calm and mild."* [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfgang_Amadeus_Mozart]

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