

# Mozart turns two hundred and fifty

## Part 3: The Italian and German classical styles

Laura Villon  
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*The following is the third of a five-part series of articles. (It contains references to numerous works of music by Mozart. We encourage readers to listen to these pieces, long samples of which are available free of charge on [www.classical.com](http://www.classical.com).*

Between December 1769 and March 1773, Wolfgang and his father spent three years in three trips traveling through Italy, the fount of musical composition.

In Milan, they met one of the great developers of the emerging symphonic form, Giovanni Sammartini (1700-1775).

Among the most important aspects of Mozart's Italian stay was the close relation he developed with Italy's most revered musician, Padre Martini (1706-1784) of Bologna. Bolognese and Venetian composers, among them Corelli, Vivaldi and Tartini, strongly influenced the development of instrumental ensemble music such as the sonata and concerto.

Padre Martini devoted himself to Wolfgang and taught him composition and counterpoint for several months. Under his tutelage and after a difficult entrance examination, the 14-year-old was elected a member of Bologna's Accademia Filarmonica, usually reserved for those over 20 years old.

At Easter, Leopold and Wolfgang attended mass in Rome. After hearing the famous chant *Miserere*, which the Sistine Choir jealously guarded from reproduction and performed only during Easter, Mozart wrote the entire score out from memory.

In Rome, Pope Clement XIV bestowed on Wolfgang the title "Knight of the Golden Spur" with highest rank, a title only given once before in 1588.

Mozart's first *opera seria*, *Mitridate*, appeared in December 1770 in Milan to resounding acclaim. As was the custom at that time, he altered arias according to the strengths and weaknesses of the singers with whom he was working. For the difficult renowned principal singer d'Ettore, the 14-year-old Mozart wrote no less than four sketches of his opening aria.

*Listen: Mitridate K87*

Following on its success—there were 22 performances—he was commissioned to write a "*serenata teatrale*"—*Ascanio in Alba*—for the wedding of the Empress's son in October 1771, and a new opera for the 1773 Carnival season.

The new opera *Lucio Silla* was highly successful and was performed 26 times in Milan. For the lead singer, the castrato Venanzio Rauzzini, Mozart also composed the motet "Exsultate, jubilate".

*Listen: Lucio Silla K135*

Between 1770 and 1773, when he returned to Salzburg, Mozart had written some 50 works, including three operas, an oratorio, numerous

symphonies, arias, as well as music for the Church. He had received great acclaim, acquired an important teacher in Padre Martini, and absorbed the lyrical Italian style of music. However, as with the journeys to Vienna and Paris, in Italy no position was forthcoming for the young man.

Intense Italian lyricism, brought into juxtaposition with the weighty German baroque, would fuse in Mozart's work to become the great German classical tradition. As one historian observes, "Italy gave him much artistically. He learned to write Italian opera, to handle melody and voice with virtuosity, and everything he learned he made his own, transforming and developing it throughout his life—a way that led him towards *Le Nozze di Figaro* and *Don Giovanni*" (Fischer 176).

### Mozart's compositional voice

In December 1771, the music-loving Prince Archbishop Schrattenbach, the Mozart family patron, died. Elected to replace him was an Enlightenment man who, in his reform of the Church service, demanded greatly shortened and simplified pieces of music. In the service of Count Hieronymus Colloredo, Leopold and his son were expected to perform and compose for his court festivities, and not to travel about Europe looking for better positions.

From 1773 to 1776, Wolfgang Mozart composed music for the Salzburg court and city, at an annual clerk's salary of 150 florins. Officially he was a court violinist, not a composer, but during this time he wrote nearly a hundred works in virtually every genre.

But Salzburg was too restricted a place for his genius. He was desperate to find a position where he could develop his dramatic and operatic talents.

The family home, eight rooms on the top floor of the Tanzmeisterhaus, had a vibrant social and musical life. Among the frequent visitors were Michael Haydn, Joseph Haydn's brother (a great composer in his own right) and both colleague and teacher of Wolfgang, several court musicians, and the cultured bourgeois and nobility. An important source of information comes from District Councilor von Schiedenhofen, who kept a detailed diary on the Mozarts' musical life.

In August 1773, a brief unsuccessful trip to Vienna to seek a post at the imperial court had an enduring significance. There Wolfgang was exposed to the new school of Viennese music, including composers of the developing symphonic form, Joseph Haydn, Wagenseil and Karl Ditters von Dittersdorf, and of the naturalistic opera school, Gluck and his pupil Salieri.

In 1771-72 Joseph Haydn had written two innovative series of six-string quartets each. Influenced by the movement towards emotionalism in music, or *Sturm und Drang*, Haydn used intense dramatic expressiveness and reintroduced elements of baroque

counterpoint, including the fugue (Gutman 315).

One of Haydn's most striking and influential works was the *Farewell Symphony No. 45*. The last movement slowly faded out as the musicians individually departed the stage, leaving only Haydn and another player to end the piece. The evocative work—a favorite of Prince Esterhazy—was intended to convey to the demanding Prince that it was past time to allow his musicians to return to their families in Vienna.

*Listen: Farewell Symphony No. 45*

Haydn's quartets inspired Mozart to write six of his own, based on a close study of the new techniques. On his return to Salzburg, he wrote several symphonies and a piano concerto. These works are considered the first examples of his own maturing style.

*Listen: Violin Concerto No. 1, KV207, 1775*

With the radiant character of his *Symphony No. 29*, written in 1774, "Mozart had found his own compositional voice," noted music scholar Robert Greenberg. "From this point to the end of his life, his constant refinement of that voice put him increasingly in a musical place occupied by himself alone" (Greenberg Lecture 8).

*Listen: Symphony No. 29, K201, 1774*

Anyone who has seen the film *Amadeus* will instantly recognize the wonderful driving theme from *Symphony No. 25 in G minor*, the "Little G." This music is used to depict Vienna's opening street and later market scenes. Stanley Sadie in the *New Groves Mozart* writes, "The urgent tone of the repeated syncopated notes at the start represents something new, and so do the repeated thrusting phrases that follow. This is music of a new and different temper."

*Listen: Symphony No. 25, K183*

In January 1775, he wrote the comic opera *La Finta Giardiniera* for Munich's Carnival season. His expressive use of the orchestra and the real human emotions developed in the characters made the opera a great success.

Wolfgang requested his release from the service of Count Colloredo. "Granted," the Count replied, and sarcastically gave permission to both father and son to seek their fortunes elsewhere. Thunderstruck at this potential ruin of the family fortunes, Leopold begged to be reinstated.

#### **Disaster—the trip to Paris, 1777-79**

The 21-year-old Mozart set off to find a position, accompanied by his mother. In Munich, the Elector did not offer him a post. "He ought to go off, travel to Italy and make a name for himself," the Elector said of Wolfgang Mozart.

In Mannheim, Wolfgang had his greatest hopes of a position. He made friends with Christian Cannabich, the successor of Stamitz as head of the famous orchestra. He worked with the musicians, taught Cannabich's daughter and others, but still no position was offered him.

Meanwhile, Wolfgang fell head over heels in love with the 16-year-old Aloysia Weber, one of four daughters of a musical family. He tarried in Mannheim, reluctant to leave the musical city of his affections, spending his family's available funds.

While Wolfgang was in Mannheim, the Munich Elector died, leaving Mannheim's Karl Theodore potential ruler of all Bavaria. Karl Theodore and his famous orchestra left for Munich, leaving the city of Mannheim a shell of its former self. The "Crisis of the Bavarian Succession" threatened to provoke a new war between the Hapsburg Emperor Joseph II and the rival Hohenzollern Reich of Frederick the Great of Prussia.

Back in Salzburg his father was frantic at the expense and

impracticality of his son. "Off with you to Paris! And that soon! Find your place among great people. *Aut Caesar aut nihil!* [All or nothing!]"

Mother in tow, with money borrowed from his sister, Wolfgang arrived in Paris in March 1778. The trip was a disaster. Classical music was then, as it remains to this day, a cut-throat business. Wolfgang was no longer the sensational Wunderkind of 15 years ago, but now a potential rival of established musicians.

Wolfgang renewed contact with Baron Grimm, who introduced him to the tenor Joseph Legros, head of Paris's most influential Concert Spirituel. The resulting *Sinfonia Concertante No. 31 in D Major* met with great success from the demanding Paris public.

Mozart wrote to his father, "The last allegro found particular favor, because having observed that all final as well as first movements here begin with all the instruments playing together, I began mine with only two violins, piano, for the first eight bars, followed instantly by a forte. The audience as I expected said 'Hush!' at the beginning, and when they heard the forte, began at once to clap their hands."

*Listen: Sinfonia Concertante No. 31, 1778*

In the midst of this triumph, real tragedy came upon Wolfgang and his family. While his symphony was being premiered, his mother fell ill, and died on July 3, 1778. Mozart wrote home that she was sick, but hesitated for six days before daring to tell his father the awful truth—that his mother lay dead in Paris.

Heartsick and after failing to find a patron, Mozart set out for home. Baron Grimm had advised the young man, "To gain the day in Paris one must be cunning, enterprising, and bold." But Mozart had no heart for the intricate court dance needed to succeed in Paris society. He disliked much of the musical scene there, and he quarreled with the powerful Baron. His German nationalism was aroused. He wanted "to teach the French more and more to know, esteem, and fear the Germans." He returned to his father and sister in Salzburg. From now on he would make his career in the city forever to be associated with his name—Vienna.

*To be continued*

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