Mozart: The Man

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was a child prodigy. He wrote his first minuet when he was only five years old, his first sonata at seven, a full symphony when he was eight, and by the time he was twelve he had already composed two full length operas! When most composers his age were only beginning their formal musical training, Mozart was already being considered a true professional, and maybe even the best composer ever to have lived.

Throughout his preadolescent years, Mozart travelled all around Europe to perform in front of kings, queens, and emperors. Though he was living the life of an adult, Mozart was still a child. Once, for example, after he performed for Empress Maria Teresa, he jumped into her lap, hugged her around the neck and kissed her!

As he grew older, Mozart's performances became more like spectacular shows. The young Mozart would not only play pieces that he composed himself, but would perform "tricks." He would play the piano with a blindfold on and a piece of black cloth over the keys; he would hear a whole mass – a 5-movement, 45 minute piece of music – and recreate the score on paper from memory. Mozart's talent lay in the way that the music simply "came to him." Whereas most composers had to think before writing a single note, Mozart's only difficultly was taking the music from his head and notating it on paper.

Though he lived a life of fame and fortune, however, Mozart was a sad figure. He had a difficult relationship with his father, who, in many ways, forced him into a life of music that Mozart may never have wanted. He depended on Mozart financially throughout his lifetime as well. His sister, with whom he was very close, died at a very young age while Mozart was on tour in Europe. In his adult years, Mozart frequently attended parties late into the evening. He also became a heavy drinker. He wrote *The Magic Flute* at the age of thirty-five, and while it became a huge success, Mozart never saw its true fame as he died at the age of thirty-six.

The story of Mozart's life is at once a fascinating tale of a child prodigy who may have been the most gifted musician ever to have lived, and a tragic story of a man whose genius trapped him in an unhealthy lifestyle. Ultimately, though, despite the many difficulties that he faced, Mozart truly accomplished his life's goal: to make music that would be appreciated forever. 250 years later, his works are certainly still cherished.

Study Questions (for grades 3 – 5)

1. What does "Prodigy" mean? Why is Mozart often considered a "Child Prodigy?

2. Name two "tricks" that Mozart performed. How would you react if someone performed these tricks in front of you today?

3. Why was Mozart's relationship with his father so difficult?

4. Imagine you are Mozart. How do you feel about constantly travelling around the world showing off? Do you like your travels? Do you want to go home?

5. Does Mozart's life seem like one you would like to live?

Study Questions (for grades 6 – 8)

1. What is a "Prodigy?" What skills did Mozart exhibit to lead people to believe he was a "Child Prodigy?" Use at least 2 specific examples.

2. How do you think Mozart felt having to constantly travel around Europe showing off? Do you think this part of his childhood could have led to his troubled adult life?

3. Do you think that Mozart could have created such incredible music had he not lived such a difficult life? Do you think his music somehow validates his tragic life?

4. Do you think Mozart's music is so famous even today partly because of his story? Do you think he would be as universally appreciated as a composer had his life been more normal?

5. How does Mozart's story compare to the lives of celebrities today? Think about their family lives, skills, and personal lifestyles.