

## The Spoken Text

### CD 1

#### 1 Leopold Mozart: Sinfonia di caccia

No, there's nothing wrong, either with your equipment *or* your ears (those barking dogs are part of the score); and no, that music isn't by Mozart. By *a* Mozart, yes; but if he hadn't been the father of *the* Mozart, the chances are that most of us would never have heard of him. And though he was a man with a high opinion of himself, that wouldn't have surprised him in the least. He never expected immortality. Leopold Mozart was an intelligent and cultured man, a very respectable composer, a fine violinist, and the author of an influential treatise on playing the violin. For a musician of his time – middle of the eighteenth century – he was exceptionally well educated. Headed originally for the priesthood, he studied logic and jurisprudence at the University of Salzburg in Austria, and it was there that he spent the whole of his professional life as a court and church musician in the service of the Prince-Archbishop. Well I say 'all' of it – in fact there were some years that he spent away from the court, carting his two prodigiously gifted children around Europe, and making a pot of money in the process. His daughter Maria Anna was a child virtuoso on the harpsichord and *fortepiano*, and an excellent singer, and his son Wolfgang was quite simply the most staggering prodigy in the history of music. At the age of three he was picking out pleasing combinations of notes on the harpsichord, and by the time he was four he could already play a number of short pieces from memory – and faultlessly. For a glimpse of his early compositional efforts, we turn to a family friend, the violinist and court trumpeter Johann Andreas Schachtner:

Schachtner: After one of the Thursday services, I went with Mozart's father to their house, where we found little Wolfgang, then four years old, very busy with his pen. Said his father:

Leopold: What are you doing?

Wolfgang: Writing a concerto for the clavier; it will soon be done.

Leopold: Let me see it.

Wolfgang: It's not finished yet.

Leopold: Never mind; let me see it. It must be something very fine.

Schachtner: His father took it from him and showed me a daub of notes, for the most part written over ink blots. (The little fellow dipped his pen every time down to the very bottom of the ink bottle, so that as soon as it reached the paper, down fell a blot; that did not disturb him in the least, he rubbed the palm of his hand over it, wiped it off, and went on with his writing.) We laughed at first at this apparent nonsense, but then his father began to note the theme, the notes, the composition; his contemplation of the page became more earnest, and at last tears of wonder and delight fell from his eyes.

Leopold: Look, Herr Schachtner! How correct, how orderly it is! Only it could never be of any use, for it is so extraordinarily difficult that no one in the world could play it.

Schachtner: Then Wolfgang struck in:

Wolfgang: That's why it's a concerto; it must be practised till it's perfect.

Schachtner: He began to play, but could bring out only enough to show us what he meant by it. He had at that time a firm conviction that playing concertos and working miracles were the same thing.

Which for a four-year-old of course they were. A year later, Mozart had lowered his sights from the miraculous to the practical. Concertos would have to wait. In the meantime, he busied himself with pieces which he could not only play but write out correctly, without benefit of ink-blots.

2

### Minuet in G, K. 1

3

The first, but not by a long chalk the last, of Mozart's minuets in G, written at the imposing age of five. But he didn't confine his repertoire to works by himself. Shortly before his fifth birthday, on January the twenty-fourth, to be precise, we know that he learned a scherzo by Wagenseil – to be still more precise, between 9.00 and 9.30 in the evening: a fine time for a four-year-old to be practising. On the first of September in the same year, he made his debut as a performer at the University of Salzburg (though he

stopped short of enrolling there). By this time his father could hardly contain his excitement. He already had one prodigy in the family. Mozart's sister, Maria Anna, known as Nannerl, was five years older than her brother and by the time she was ten she could outshine most professional keyboard players of three times her age. Talk about a prodigy! Who knows, if she'd been a boy her father might have exploited her as he was about to exploit her brother. Leopold had another word for Wolfgang though, and many others were to follow suit.

Our most gracious Prince does not, like some, see fit to dispatch liars, cheats and mountebanks abroad to throw dust in people's eyes. No, he sends good, upright citizens to proclaim to the world a miracle, ordained by God, in the town of Salzburg. And if ever it is to be my humble obligation to convince the world of this miracle, that time is now, when people mock the very concept and truth of miracles. They must now be convinced of their folly.

If the world didn't hasten to the manger, as it were, then he would take the manger to the world. In the course of the next ten years or so, Mozart undertook a series of lengthy and gruelling tours which would have defeated most adults. But they started gently enough. In January 1762 Leopold, leaving his wife at home, took the two wonder-children to Munich where they played for and presumably astonished the Elector Maximilian III. But, strange to say, since Leopold was an almost compulsive correspondent, there are no letters giving any details of the visit. All we know is that it took three weeks and that it marked the children's first glimpse of life at court. The Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg, it seems, hadn't shown sufficient interest in the marvels on his doorstep to invite them in) – which is odd, not just because Leopold was his employee but because the children were a publicist's dream and potentially the brightest jewels in Salzburg's crown. And this the Prince-Archbishop does seem to have understood. In any case, he gave his blessings to another, longer tour, which kept the whole family away from Salzburg for a little under a third of a year. Despite his tendency to self-importance, it seems that Leopold's services were more easily dispensed-with than he might have liked. But he had his mind on other things. Their destination this time was the Imperial Court at Vienna, where they became – well, certainly the children became – the darlings of the nobility and the aristocracy from

the Emperor on down. But there were stops to be made along the way, in the course of a journey which lasted three weeks, and with every one the fame of the children grew and spread out like the ripples in a pond. They stayed for six days in Passau and nine in Linz, playing for the nobility in each, and, as Leopold noted, they loved every minute of it:

The children are as cheerful as can be imagined, and wherever we go, they act exactly as they do at home. The boy is so friendly and natural with strangers, and particularly the officers, that you would think they had been lifelong friends.

And they were naturally enchanted by him – a fact which paid some unexpected dividends:

We managed to bypass customs altogether, thanks entirely to little Wolfgang, who instantly befriended the officer on duty, showing off his clavier, playing a minuet on his little fiddle, and then inviting the fellow to call on us. The customs officer accepted his kind offer and took down our address for that very purpose. And that's all there was. We were through!

And wherever they went, it was the same:

At noon on Tuesday we reached the town of Ybbs, where two friars, whom we had met on the boat, said Masses – in the course of which our Wolfgang went to the organ and played so brilliantly that the resident Franciscans, who were lunching with guests, abandoned their meal and rushed to the choir loft where they almost expired with astonishment.

4                      Molto allegro in G, K. 72a

The *Molto allegro* in G by the child Mozart.

5    By the time they made their command appearance at the great palace of Schönbrunn, their reputations had preceded them, and they were in every sense royally treated:

Their Majesties treated us so graciously that we might almost have been royalty ourselves. Wolfgang enchanted the whole company, especially when he leapt up onto the lap of the Empress, hugged her round the neck and gave her a great kiss. We were there for most of the afternoon and at one point the Emperor himself invited me to hear the little princess play on her violin. On the 15th the Privy Paymaster, on the express instruction of the Empress herself, arrived at our door to present us with two dresses, one for Wolfgang, the other for Nannerl. As soon as we receive the official command, the children are to appear at court and the Privy Paymaster will fetch them. Today, at half past two, they shall be taken to meet, firstly, the two youngest Archdukes and then at four o'clock the Hungarian Chancellor, Count Paiffy. Yesterday we were entertained by Count Kaunitz, the day before that we were with Countess Kinsky, and later with Count von Ulefeld. And we have still more engagements tomorrow and the day after.

In time to come they would pack a similar number of engagements into a single day. And neither child ever complained of fatigue or a disinclination to do what was expected of them. So much is made – was made at the time – of Mozart's genius that it's easy to lose sight of the child behind it. To those outside his intimate family circle he presented an image that only deepened his appeal, and lived for a long time in the memories of those who experienced it at first hand. The Baron Friedrich Melchior von Grimm, for instance, was captivated like virtually everyone else:

He is one of the most enchanting children one could ever hope to meet: whatever he says, whatever he does, brims over with the greatest vitality and spirit, combined with the innocent charm and sweetness of his tender years. His utterly unforced cheerfulness even rids one of the fear that he may burn out before achieving his full maturity.

But that cheerfulness, of course, was only a part of the whole picture. Despite the enormous fuss that was made over him for almost as long as he could remember, Mozart seems to have craved affection to a degree that suggests a real insecurity – as though he was fearful of being loved for what he did rather than for what he was. Well, that anxiety

was real, and it stayed with him, as we'll see, throughout his life, and brought him much unhappiness. It was something his sister glimpsed, but never really understood, as she recalled him shortly after his death.

He was so extremely fond of me – I, of course fairly doting upon him – that he would repeatedly enquire whether I truly loved him; and when in jest I would occasionally say ‘No’ his little eyes would fill with tears, so sensitive and loving was his heart.

And it wasn't only with his sister. Others told a similar story. Like most children, his early love was greatest, though not perhaps healthiest, within his family.

He loved our parents, especially our father, so much that he composed a little tune which he would sing every night before going to bed, for which purpose our father would stand him on a chair. Father was invariably required to sing the second part, and when this little ritual, which was never overlooked, was finished, Wolfgang would kiss our father very sweetly and go to sleep peaceful and contented. And this went on, every night, except when he was ill and already in bed, until he was in his tenth year.

As it happens, it was in the same year that he shed one of his most abiding childhood fears. As Johann Schachtner recalled:

Until he was almost ten years old, he had an insurmountable horror of the trumpet when it was sounded alone, without other instruments; merely holding a trumpet toward him terrified him as much as if it had been a loaded pistol. His father wished to overcome this childish alarm, and ordered me once, in spite of the boy's pathetic pleading, to blow toward him; but, oh God! how I wish that I had not been induced to do it. Wolfgang no sooner heard the blaring sound than he turned deathly pale, began to collapse, and would certainly have fallen into convulsions, had I not immediately left off.

A charming paternal remedy, but all too characteristic. As neither Mozart nor anyone in Salzburg, nor possibly anyone in Europe at that time could have known, the trumpet, in every society in the world, from the most primitive to the most advanced, was – is still, in many places – a powerfully male, even phallic symbol: penetrating, aggressive,

authoritarian, and designedly intimidating. Not for nothing is the trumpet an almost universally military instrument, designed to rally the troops, and frighten the enemy. In eighteenth-century European music, particularly in the Baroque era, it was also the instrument for celebrating the glory of God.

Could there be any connection between Mozart's fear of the trumpet and a fear of his father? His childhood motto, which he still occasionally invoked in adult life, usually in times of stress, was 'After God, Papa!' And like God, Papa was the one who gave and who withheld. It was one of his principal teaching techniques. And he was Mozart's only teacher: neither of the Mozart children ever went to school, and so were raised without the benefit of friendships with their contemporaries.

Love, fear, and even hatred are often intertwined, and the love and fear of his father was one of the most powerful features of Mozart's personality, and the engine, more than any other, which shaped his worldly life as he grew into manhood. Well, these are big issues which can never be fully resolved, because our lives are too complicated for that; but it's interesting that Mozart overcame his fear of the trumpet in the same year as he abandoned the ritual bedtime song with his father, a ritual probably designed, subconsciously, to ward off any paternal displeasure at the end of the day and give himself the chance of a decent night's sleep. But in the years of these early tours, his fears were as evident to those close to him as his gaiety was to the public. Often he would remember friends left behind in Salzburg, and cry because he feared he might never see them again. And, of course, like all imaginative and sensitive children, he had a rich vein of fantasy:

He created an entire imaginary kingdom in the course of our travels, which he called the Kingdom of Back – I can't remember why. This kingdom and those who dwelt in it were blessed with everything that could make them good and happy children. He himself was the King – and he carried this charming fantasy so far that our servant, who was rather good at drawing, had to make a map of the entire kingdom, with Wolfgang dictating to him the names of all the cities, market towns and villages.

Interesting that this kingdom – clearly an ideal kingdom – consisted entirely of children. Or to put it more pointedly, that it contained no adults. In the long tours which dominated his childhood, mostly to the exclusion of his sister (who, inconveniently for Leopold, was soon all-too-conspicuously growing up), Mozart's days were spent almost exclusively amongst adults; and, as it must often have seemed, solely for the benefit of adults – and of one above all. But he was not a morbid child. And as old Schachtner recalled, his sense of fun was a major part of his personality from infancy to death:

As soon as he began to give himself up to music, his mind was as good as dead to all other concerns, and even his childish games and toys had to be accompanied by music. When we, that is, he and I, carried his toys from one room into another, for instance, the one of us who went empty-handed had always to sing a march and play the fiddle. But before he began to study music he was so keenly alive to any childish fun that contained a spice of mischief, that even his meals would be forgotten for it.

And that spirit of mischief never left him. Many years later it surfaced in his merciless parody of bad composers *A Musical Joke*:

6

A Musical Joke, K. 522

Part of Mozart's *A Musical Joke*, K. 522, written when he was at the height of his powers, in 1787 – the year, as it happens, of his father's death. But that, as they say, is to anticipate.

7

Twenty-five years earlier, in 1762, after a week of playing almost daily for the Imperial Court of Vienna, Mozart fell ill with scarlet fever. By that time, the royal family and other members of the nobility had showered the Mozarts with money, jewellery, and expensive clothing, and Leopold sent back to Salzburg, to be put in the bank, money equivalent to more than two years of his salary there. After a lifetime of scrimping and saving, he and his wife now realised beyond any shadow of a doubt that their children (and Wolfgang in particular, of course) were their ticket to fame and fortune. The scarlet fever was unfortunate – it kept Mozart bedridden, housebound and often in pain for two

weeks. Leopold was concerned, of course, but not entirely for his son. As he couldn't help himself from noting:

This affair has cost me *fifty ducats at least*.

By the end of December, the novelty value of the Mozart enterprise had become somewhat tarnished in Vienna and it was time, in any case, to head for home.

Once back in Salzburg, Mozart, still some way short of his seventh birthday, almost immediately fell ill again, this time with rheumatic fever. When he was up and about again he sprung a surprise which left his father speechless. Johann Schachtner takes up the story:

There came to the house one day our excellent violinist the late Herr Wenzel, who was a dabbler in composition. He brought six new trios with him, of which he had come to ask our opinion. We played these trios, Mozart's father taking the bass part, Wenzel playing first violin, and I second. Wolfgang then appeared, carrying a little violin which had been given him in Vienna, and begged to be allowed to play second violin; but his father scolded him for so silly a request, since he had never had any instruction on the violin, and his father thought he was not in the least capable of playing. Wolfgang said, 'One need not have learned, in order to play second violin', whereupon his father told him to go away at once, and not interrupt us any further. Wolfgang began to cry bitterly, and slunk away with his little violin. I interceded for him to be allowed to play with me, and at last his father said: 'Alright, play with Herr Schachtner then, but not so as to be heard, or you must leave us at once'. So it was settled, and Wolfgang played with me. I soon realised with astonishment that I was quite superfluous; I put my violin quietly down, and looked at his father, down whose cheeks tears of wonder and delight were running; and so he played all six trios.

This was an unexpected turn, to say the least. Well before reaching his teens, Mozart rivalled his father on the violin and looked set to become, in Leopold's own words, 'one of the finest violinists in all Europe'.

Part of the Cassation in G, composed some years later by the fourteen-year-old Mozart.

9 A mere six months after their return to Salzburg from Vienna, the Mozarts were off again. Not, this time, for four or even six months but for three and a half years – in the course of which they visited all the chief towns and cities of southern Germany and the Rhineland, spent a few weeks in Brussels, the first winter in Paris, almost a year and a half in London, the winter of 1765 to 1766 in Holland, finally making their way back to Salzburg by way of Brussels, Paris, Geneva, Berne and Munich. What a way to grow up! And what a life for a natural homebody like Mama Mozart! And all the time, of course, Leopold was at the helm, and resisting the calendar by lowering Mozart's age by a year for much of the tour, so that he miraculously remained seven for two years running. But so much else was miraculous about him that nobody seemed to notice, or if they did, they didn't care. From the reports of the German Baron Friedrich Melchior von Grimm, a diplomat and much-admired author, long resident in Paris, it seems that Leopold was trying to strike a delicate balance between true art and the tawdry values of a circus freak show. And he observed, revealingly:

The father is a respectable, sensible man of considerable intelligence - and never have I seen a musician who combined his natural talent with such an amazing knack for raking in the money!

But Leopold was just warming up. In England he outdid himself. Not content with courting (and conquering) the King and Queen, the higher nobility and the cream of the aristocracy, he went for the most gullible of the middle class and shamelessly appealed to the rabble of the pubs and taverns. One so-called 'concert' announcement proclaimed that in addition to his astounding keyboard virtuosity:

The boy will also play a concerto on the violin, accompany symphonies on the clavier, completely cover the manual or keyboard of the clavier, and play on the cloth as well as though he had the keyboard under his eyes; he will further most accurately name from a distance any notes that may be sounded for him either singly or in chords, on the clavier, or on every imaginable instrument including bells, glasses and clocks. Lastly, he will improvise out of his head, not only on the pianoforte but also on the organ.

The cloth-over-the-keys stunt became a staple of the side show. But the fact is that any proficient pianist could do it, and a blind pianist would have no trouble at all. Curiously enough, it's not even mentioned in the bizarre and ungrammatical announcement for a concert on 5 June 1764:

Miss Mozart of eleven and Master Mozart of seven Years of Age, Prodigies of Nature; taking the opportunity of representing to the Public the greatest Prodigy that Europe or that Human Nature has to boast of. Every Body will be astonished to hear a Child of such tender Age playing the Harpsichord in such a Perfection—it surmounts all possible Fantastic and Imagination, and it is hard to express which is more astonishing, his Execution upon the Harpsichord, playing at Sight, or his own Composition.

And when, after almost a year and a half, all the proper concert venues had been exhausted, Leopold went for free enterprise, announcing on bills and in the papers that whoever was curious could visit the family at home:

Every Day in the Week from Twelve to Two o'clock, and have an Opportunity of putting the young Mozart's Talents to a more particular Proof, by giving him any thing to play at Sight, or any Music without a Bass, which he will write upon the Spot without recurring to his Harpsichord.

By 8 July 1765 Leopold had discovered a new venue, as evidenced by a notice which appeared in the *Public Advertiser*:

Mr. Mozart, who has been obliged by the Desire of several Ladies and Gentlemen to postpone his Departure from England for a short Time, takes this Opportunity to inform the Public, that he has taken the great Room in the Swan and Harp Tavern in Cornhill, where he will give an opportunity to all the Curious to hear these two young Prodigies perform every Day from Twelve to Three. Admittance 2s. 6d. each person.

More significant than the concerts and the side shows though – incomparably more significant – is the fact that it was in London that Mozart met Johann Christian Bach, youngest and most famous son of Johann Sebastian, and in London that he first really began to compose in earnest. It was there, too, under the influence of J.C. Bach, that he wrote his first symphonies, having now advanced to the age of eight.

10                      Symphony No. 1 in E flat, K. 16 (mvt 1)

The opening movement of the Symphony No. 1 in E flat, by the eight-year-old Mozart.

11      J.C. Bach's musical style had a formative influence on Mozart's own, and it was probably Bach, more than anyone, who fired the young Mozart with his love of Italian opera (J.C. Bach's principal stock-in-trade for many years).

When the Mozarts finally returned to Salzburg after their three-and-a-half-year jaunt they were probably, outside royalty, the most famous family in Europe. And, thanks to Leopold's near-ruthless genius as an impresario, they were almost certainly the richest musicians, though Leopold took considerable pains to conceal the fact. Leopold kept his official position at the court, but after an absence of almost four years it was clear that he was more valuable as a travelling musical ambassador than as a court musician. He – or, more to the point, his children – had made Salzburg a household name all over Europe. But no-one was more keenly aware than Leopold that the children's marketability depended on their youth. After a mere nine months, therefore, the family hit the road again, this time bound for Vienna, where they stayed for the best part of a year.

By the time they got back to Salzburg, in January 1769, Mozart, now pushing thirteen, had put behind him ten symphonies, two operas, eighteen sonatas for piano and violin, three masses, several other religious choral works, and four piano concertos. Well, these last are not strictly speaking his own original compositions, but rather free arrangements and expansions of solo sonatas by various other composers – and they show what a natural feel for the combination of piano and orchestra Mozart seems to have had from the beginning.

[12] Piano Concerto No. 3 in D, K. 40 (finale)

Part of the concerto adapted and expanded by the eleven-year-old Mozart from an original by C.P.E. Bach.

[13] Most of the year 1769 was spent, for a change, at home in Salzburg, where among other things Mozart chalked up a further two masses and another couple of symphonies, bringing the total to twelve. It was in this year also that he wrote the first letter to have come down to us, a brief note to an unidentified girl, also in Salzburg:

Dear Friend,

Pardon me for taking the liberty of writing to you, but as you said you could understand everything in Latin, no matter what I might write down, curiosity has overcome me so I am sending you a few lines of *various* Latin words. When you have read them, please favour me with a reply. But you too must send a proper letter. So: *Cuperem scire de qua causa, a quam plurimis adolescentibus otium usque adeo aestimatur, ut ipsi se nec verbis, nec verberibus, ab hoc sinant abduci.* So there you are!

And in case your Latin's no better than mine, that translates (so I'm told) as 'I should like to know why laziness is so much prized by young men that neither by words or blows will they suffer themselves to be roused from it!' And by the way, the use of two or more languages in a single letter became almost a habit with Mozart, particularly when writing to his sister. Nannerl was now eighteen, no longer marketable as a child prodigy, so when Leopold next set off, this time to Italy, it was with Wolfgang alone. And it's in his

brief letters home during this first Italian trip that we embark on a treasure trove of autobiographical evidence which gives us perhaps the most fully rounded portrait of any composer in history. His first letter to his mother was written shortly after their departure from Salzburg and well before their arrival in Italy:

Dearest Mamma,

My heart is overjoyed with the delights of this trip, because the journey is such fun, and our coachman drives tremendously fast whenever the road allows it. Papa, of course, has already told you about our journey. The reason I am writing to you now is to demonstrate that I know my duty and am, with the deepest respect, your devoted son,

Wolfgang Mozart

This first trip to Italy fulfilled at last a wish that Mozart had nourished ever since meeting J.C. Bach in London. Like Handel before him, it had been in Italy itself that J.C. Bach had learned the craft of writing Italian opera and become one of its most prolific and facile masters. More exciting to Mozart than the two concerts he gave shortly after their arrival in Verona were his two visits to the opera house. But it was in Milan that he met the highly cultured and influential Count Firmian, who secured a commission for Mozart to write an opera for the next winter season in Milan. Father and son then moved on to Bologna and Florence, making important and influential acquaintances in each, and in April they reached Rome, armed with some twenty letters of introduction to the aristocracy and clergy of the city. But before they could offer even one of them, they found themselves, as Leopold relates, only inches away from the highest of them all:

On our arrival, following lunch, we went to St. Peter's, and then to Mass. On the twelfth we were present at the *Functiones*, and when the Pope was serving the poor at table we were within touching distance, as we found ourselves standing beside him at the top of the table. This incident was all the more amazing as we had had to pass through two doors under the scrutiny of two armed guards and make our way through a crowd of many hundreds. Remember that we had as yet no acquaintances in the city at all. But our fine

clothes, and my customary authoritative manner helped us through everywhere. They seemed to have mistaken Wolfgang for some German courtier, some even thought that he was a prince, and I myself was taken for his tutor. And so we made our way to the Cardinals' table. There Wolfgang found himself standing between the chairs of two Cardinals, one of whom, as luck would have it, was Cardinal Pallavicini, to whom we had, and were carrying, a letter of introduction.

Later they would meet the Pope himself, but before that came the most famous incident of the entire journey.

In the Sistine Chapel they heard the famous *Miserere* by the seventeenth century composer Gregorio Allegri – famous not just for its very considerable beauty but for the fact that it was forbidden to remove even a page of this much-prized work from the chapel, on pain of excommunication. This troubled the young Mozart not one whit. When they got back to their lodgings, he sat down and wrote the whole thing out from memory.

[14]

Allegri: *Miserere*

Part of the famous Allegri *Miserere*.

[15]

It was also in Rome that the Pope conferred on Mozart the rarely awarded Order of the Golden Spur, making him officially a knight – the first time the honour had ever been bestowed on a mere fourteen-year-old. Of course Mozart was not a 'mere' fourteen-year-old, but he *was* only fourteen, in fact apart from music he was actually rather a young fourteen, still very much a child. And that disarming combination of maturity and childish innocence emerges clearly in his early correspondence. Most of these early letters are scribbled messages written at the end of letters from Leopold, like this one, from Naples, which leaves no doubt at all that he's enjoying himself:

I too am still alive and as happy as ever, and I simply adore travelling. And to think that I have now been on the Mediterranean! Vesuvius is smoking furiously today - thunder and lightning and all the rest of it. I had a great desire

today to ride on a donkey, since it's the custom in Italy, and so I thought that I too should try it.

But mixed in with these chatty little asides are hints of that keen observation of character which would later help to make him the greatest operatic composer who ever lived:

We are currently travelling with a certain Dominican, who is regarded as a holy man. Personally, I don't believe a word of it, for at breakfast he frequently takes a cup of chocolate and then immediately follows it up with a good glass of strong Spanish wine. I myself have had the privilege of lunching with this saint who on this occasion drank a whole decanter and finished up with a full glass of very strong wine, two big slices of melon, some peaches and pears for dessert, five cups of coffee, a whole plate of cloves and two full dishes of milk and lemon. I suppose he might be following some sort of diet, but I doubt it, for it would be too much; and anyway he eats like this at every meal, and what's more, stokes himself up with several snacks during the afternoon as well.

In between the touring and the sightseeing, the socialising and the concerts, Mozart was fantastically productive, writing in the space of time between his letters more music than he could even keep track of.

Several times now, I've had the pleasure of going alone to a beautiful church, and to some magnificent services there. In the meantime I've composed four Italian symphonies, not to mention arias for my opera, of which I must have composed half a dozen at least, and even a motet.

It wasn't bravado. He didn't have to blind his mother and sister with statistics. Or perhaps he thought he did. It could be that in some secret inner place he was still tormented by the thought that in his case at least love was something that had to be earned through performance and achievement. That was certainly the message he got from his father – and never before had he and his father been thrown together so much, so closely and for so long as on this Italian journey. Fear and hero worship, particularly when the object of each is one's father, are intimately, almost inevitably connected. And

as he stood on the cusp between childhood and adolescence, Mozart, like many children before and since, assumed what he took to be an adult pose by imitating the style and outlook of Papa, who came, remember (Mozart certainly did), just after God. In a postscript to one of his father's letters home, he wrote to his mother, with exactly the same mixture of condescension and self-assured advice that Leopold dispensed on an almost daily basis:

It grieves me to hear that poor Martha has been so ill, and I hope that with God's help she will recover. If she doesn't, however, we must not be unduly distressed, for God's will is always best and He certainly knows best whether it is right for us to be in this world or in the next. She should console herself with the thought that after the rain she may enjoy the sunshine.

Thus did a fourteen-year-old boy instruct his mother in the comfort of the dying. The Martha in question was only five years older than Mozart himself and died before he and Leopold got back to Salzburg.

With the coming of the summer season the steady diet of concerts and privately arranged performances which had been the Mozarts' daily bread diminished and for the most part the rest of 1770 was spent on the composition of the opera for Milan – *Mitridate, Re di Ponto*, based on a famous tragedy by Racine. It had its premiere on the day after Christmas, Mozart himself conducted the first three performances, and from the beginning it was a roaring success.

After the successful launch of his first truly Italian opera (his earlier one had been for Vienna), there were no pressing reasons to stay on in Italy, but Leopold seemed in no great hurry to go home, so they lingered for a few months more, first in Turin, then in Venice. Mozart gave many concerts, all of them sensational, and, slowly, father and son wended their way back to Salzburg, arriving there, after an absence of fifteen months, at the end of March 1771. In their luggage was a contract for a second opera in Milan, *Lucio Silla*, and shortly after their return came another commission, for yet a third opera, *Ascanio in Alba*, this one also for Milan. So, after only five months at home, Mozart and his father set off on their second Italian adventure.

*Ascanio in Alba* was to be only part of the lavish festivities leading up to the marriage of the Archduke Ferdinand and Princess Beatrice Ricciarda. These were to include, as well, a raft of other theatrical productions, musical and otherwise, horse races, masked balls, a series of huge banquets at the court, and a special mass wedding at which 150 young couples would be publicly united and presented with dowries by the royal pair themselves. The entire city was to be brilliantly illuminated, fountains would flow with wine instead of water, and *Ascanio* was to be the crowning glory of the celebrations. When the great day came, it scored such a resounding hit that it was repeated - by public demand, as they say - two days later. Mozart the composer of Italian opera had arrived.

16

Ascanio in Alba, K. 111 (Act I, Scene 1)

## CD 2

1 The image of Mozart as an 'eternal child' has been a long time dying. And even as I speak, there are very many people who believe it. It was perhaps the standard view of him in the nineteenth century, it receded considerably in the first half of the twentieth, and then got a tremendous boost, first through a popular biography by Wolfgang Hildesheimer, but mostly through the play, then the film *Amadeus*, which was heavily influenced by Hildesheimer. In this case, though, Mozart was presented not only as an eternal child, but as a truly asinine, giggling fool, who apart from his unparalleled musical genius was basically a birdbrain who couldn't think his way out of a paper bag. He wasn't just a fool, he was practically an idiot, and the two are not the same. Mozart's genius wasn't just musical. One of the things that made him perhaps the greatest opera composer who ever lived was a remarkable insight into the complexities of human character, and a sense of what I can only call 'dramatic psychology' which was unerring, and which made him a theatrical as well as a musical genius. He would have made a great film director. His characters are precisely that: characters, not caricatures. And like real characters, they're not static. They develop. And they develop not because of the words they sing but because of the music behind the words. One of the most virtuosic achievements in the whole history of opera is the great Sextet in Act III of *The Marriage*

of *Figaro*, where he not only has six characters singing six different things at the same time but keeps them in character the whole time.

2 'Riconosci in questo amplesso' from 'The Marriage of Figaro', K. 492

3 No birdbrain there. Okay, so where does that image come from? Why the myth of the eternal child? Well, the answers are simple, but the reasons aren't.

The source of the myth is largely the man himself, as revealed in the hundreds of letters – no, let's retake that: in roughly a *dozen* of the hundreds of letters – which he wrote, to his family and others, from the age of thirteen onwards. And they're all connected with his sense of humour, which was pretty-well all-embracing, but which had elements, as we'll see, which were not only childish but positively infantile. Now, before the advent of Sigmund Freud, the so-called 'father of psychoanalysis', in the late nineteenth century, the idea that adults still have a great deal of the child in them may have been widespread but it wasn't generally acknowledged. It was hidden behind the myth of the grown-up – an often guilty secret which you guarded with your life. But Mozart, like quite a number of creative geniuses, not only recognised it in himself, he took no pains to conceal it, not at least within the family or with close friends. In certain respects he seems to have been almost completely uninhibited. But in one particular case he was very inhibited indeed, and the greatest drama of his life was his coming to terms with and at least partially transcending that fact. He was deeply, tragically, cruelly inhibited by his father. Remember that childhood motto: 'After God, Papa'? And it's with Papa, at least as much as with his son, that the myth of the eternal child has its source. The child Mozart had brought Leopold himself a degree of fame, wealth, and parental power beyond his previous imaginings. His role as shepherd to God's miracle came to define his sense of self. He had an ever-deepening need to be needed, and the calendar was against him. The myth of the eternal child became his lifeline. It was an image he fostered with dreadful care. And for a long time, Mozart obliged him. Who would guess from this letter to Nannerl, six years his senior, that the author was not only a genius but already a master composer with the world at his feet?

MILAN, 18 December 1772. I hope this finds you flourishing, my dear sister. When you get this letter, my dear sister, that very evening my opera will have been staged, my dear sister. Think hard of me, my dear sister, and try your utmost to imagine that you, my dear sister, are witnessing it too, my dear sister. That is not easy, I grant you, since it's eleven o'clock already. Otherwise I believe, indubitably, my dear sister, that during the day it is brighter than at Easter. Tomorrow we go to lunch, my dear sister, with Herr von Mayr, and why, do you suppose? Well guess! Why, because he has asked us! Which reminds me. Have you had news yet of what's just happened here? We left Count Firmian's today to go home and when we reached our street,... we opened our front door... and what do you think? Why, we went in. Farewell, my little lung. I kiss you my liver, and remain as ever, my stomach, your unworthy... Oh please, please, my dear sister! Something is biting me. Do come and scratch me!

And as though that weren't bizarre enough (and hardly suggestive of genius), in the actual letter, every other line is written upside down.

Not long after that letter was written, at the end of their third and last visit to Italy, Mozart and his father returned to Salzburg, where Leopold immediately embarked on the next stage in his campaign to find a prestigious position for Wolfgang, this time in Vienna. And in all this, by the way, he had a hidden agenda. It was never his plan that Mozart alone should find a position. He envisaged an arrangement in which he too would be honoured with a post at the same establishment, even though his son would be the chief breadwinner for the whole family, which would continue to thrive and function as a closely knit unit, with Leopold, by Divine right, at its head. And since their return from Italy, the plan, for Leopold and Mozart alike, had taken on a new and unexpected urgency. The Prince-Archbishop who had so generously supported the Mozarts during their long Grand Tour, and since, Sigismund von Schrattenbach, had died, and been replaced by the controversial Hieronymus Colloredo. Controversial? He'd been elected to this position only on the forty-ninth ballot. And his attitude to the Mozarts was very different. Not for him a Vice-Kapellmeister who spent more time away from his post than at it. The Mozarts had already done their job as roving ambassadors of the Salzburg

court – and they'd made the post of the resident Prince-Archbishop a more prestigious one. Now it was time for Salzburg to reap the rewards. And there's no denying that Colloredo kept Mozart well supplied with commissions which produced some of his finest works to date. In the final nine months of 1773 alone, Mozart, still only seventeen, produced – among other things – seven symphonies, six string quartets, a string quintet, four divertimentos, sixteen orchestral dances, a mass, and his first entirely original piano concerto, which he kept in his repertoire for years afterwards.

4 Piano Concerto No. 5 in D, K. 175 (finale)

Part of Mozart's first entirely original piano concerto.

5 In 1773, Salzburg wasn't exactly a musical backwater, but it was a huge come-down from the main cultural centres of Europe in which Mozart had spent most of his professional life. Add to this steadily worsening relationships with Colloredo and his court and it's not hard to see why Mozart was now just as eager as his father to find an official position halfway appropriate to his genius and proven accomplishment. Indeed from 1773 onwards, leaving Salzburg was his principal worldly ambition. So it was in high hopes for all that Leopold and Wolfgang set off in July for Vienna – the capital city not only of Austria but of the Holy Roman Empire, which was by that time distinctly unholy, certainly not Roman, and no longer much of an empire, but the name still carried a lot of clout. Leopold was confident that he'd devised a winning strategy, but adopted an air of cloak-and-dagger secrecy which lent a dramatic, conspiratorial element to the journey that wouldn't have been out of place in one of his son's operas:

There are many things about which it is best not to write. And at all costs we must avoid anything which might cause a stir or trigger suspicion either here or, especially, at Salzburg, or which might give our enemies a chance to put a spoke in our wheel.

As it turned out, father and son returned to Salzburg with nothing to show, Leopold embittered and Wolfgang seething with a mixture of disappointment and resentment which may account for the darkness that shadows much of the symphony he wrote on

their return - by general consent his first indisputable masterpiece, in which his own voice as a composer emerges crystal clear for the first time:

6 Symphony No. 25 in G minor, K. 183 (mvt 1)

Part of the Symphony No. 25 in G minor.

7 Back in Salzburg once again, Mozart lost himself in music, putting his Viennese disappointment behind him as best he could. Writing, whether musical compositions or letters, was a great therapy for Mozart, and accordingly he kept himself busy. He had no time for the self-pity which would all but engulf his father in years to come. He was naturally resilient – and it didn't hurt that he knew his genius was now in full flower. Most of the music he wrote from this time onwards was unmistakably his own, no longer any kind of imitation of older, more experienced composers – and, of course, there was Leopold. For most of 1774 Mozart was homebound but far from idle. The tally for that year includes three more symphonies, two concertos, two masses and several other sacred works, a serenade and a full length opera, *La finta giardiniera*, commissioned for Munich. That occupied him for the last four months of the year, and it was only in late December, when he travelled to Munich to prepare for its performance, that he started writing letters again. And one in particular was immediately seized on by early biographers, because it's the first time he specifically mentions a girl in a romantic or sexual context. As he wrote to his sister:

Please give my best wishes to Roxelana, and ask her to have tea this afternoon with the Sultan. And please give every *kind* of message to Mademoiselle Mitzerl, and assure her of my undying love. Visions of her, clad only in her *négligée*, are ever before my eyes. I must admit that attractive girls abound here, and in faith I have seen many, but none, none so ravishing as she is.

The hunt was on. Who was this beauty, and why do we never hear of her again? Well, the answer is simple. She was the sixty-four-year-old grandmother who had recently

become the Mozarts' new landlady in Salzburg. Mozart's high spirits had obviously returned.

8 Symphony No. 29 in A, K. 201(finale)

Part of the wonderful Symphony No. 29 in A – one of the major highlights of Mozart's teenage career, and one of his own favourites – but not one of Leopold's.

9 When Mozart wanted to offer the symphonies from these two years for publication in Paris four years later, Leopold weighed in with characteristically cautionary advice:

It is best that what dishonours you should be kept from the public. When you grow older and more perceptive, I suspect that you will be relieved that no-one has discovered them. With maturity you will find that one gradually becomes more fastidious.

Not exactly a liberating influence.

For all the lovely and masterly music that seemed to pour out of him, Mozart was biding his time, longing to get away from Salzburg into the bigger world where he belonged, and also, though he may not have been able to admit it to himself yet, longing to get away from his father. He may have been a mind-boggling genius but he was also a late teenager, who, like most late teenagers, needed to spread his wings and learn to fly. And he'd been in the close company of his father for practically every waking hour of his life. He hadn't even been to school, remember. Leopold had effectively been his only teacher. And the whole family, his sister and mother too, had been tip-toeing around 'Papa' for as long as either of the children could remember and what probably seemed like forever to their mother. It's a scenario, I'm sure, familiar to just about every psychoanalyst and psychotherapist in the world. But 'Papa' Mozart, like many domineering fathers, was extraordinarily *un*-self-aware. The time was now not so far off when he would so badly miscalculate the effect of his own words that he would force the (at least temporary) separation of himself and his son. But neither he nor Mozart saw that coming.

In 1777, the now twenty-one-year-old Mozart composed a work whose greatness and originality made everything he'd written earlier look almost like mere preparation. It was a piano concerto, but ironically, and very exceptionally, it wasn't written for himself but for a French pianist whom we know only as Mlle Jeunehomme, and who happened to be passing through Salzburg at the time. And to this day that's all we know about her. How much she had to do with Mozart's inspiration we'll never know, of course. But she must have been some pianist. Where did she come from? Where did she go? Why is there no other trace of her existence? Is she the same as the Madame Jenomé in Paris mentioned (once each) in letters from Wolfgang and Leopold? And what *can* she have slipped into Mozart's wine?

[10] Piano Concerto No. 9 in E flat, K. 271(mvt 2)

Part of the quite amazing Piano Concerto No. 9 in E flat, composed in 1777.

[11] With the opera commission from Munich requiring Mozart's attendance towards the end of the year, Mozart and his father had several times applied to the Archbishop for a leave of absence and permission had each time been denied them. This put Mozart in a difficult position. He had either to renege on his undertaking to Munich, which would have a disastrous effect on his future prospects, or resign from the Archbishop's service. Never yet had he been in a stronger position to find employment elsewhere. He had distinguished himself in virtually every branch of musical art, having now written numerous highly regarded symphonies, concertos, sonatas, serenades, dance suites, divertimentos, trios, quartets, operas, masses, and so on, and was widely regarded as the greatest pianist and harpsichordist of his time; and of course, as we've seen, he was also a skilled and experienced violinist and conductor. The fact that he was also an incomparable genius seemed almost beside the point. So he chose to resign. Once again, a letter was apparently ghost-written for him by his father, duly signed by Mozart, and delivered.

Your Princely Grace, Most Worthy Prince of the Holy Roman Empire,  
Most Gracious Ruler and Lord!

Parents make the most strenuous efforts to enable their children to venture out into the world and become their own breadwinners; this they owe both to themselves and to the greater good of the state. And the more they are blessed with talent by God, the more it is their duty to make use of it and improve their own as well as their parents' lives, to *help* their parents and take *their* progress and future in hand. The Gospel teaches us to take advantage of our talent in this way.

And so on, to the inevitable conclusion. Well, the Archbishop did not need theological instruction from a twenty-one-year-old servant, but in any case he would have spotted at once that the whole style and character of the petition came straight from Leopold, and that Wolfgang's only part in it was his dutiful signature at the bottom. As a psychological mastermind, Leopold was clearly losing his grip. The Archbishop's response to the letter was to fire both of them. And he didn't waste his words:

Father and son are granted permission to seek their fortune elsewhere –  
*according to the Gospel.*

And that was that. Leopold was out of a job for the first time in his life, and Wolfgang had been ignominiously sacked rather than graciously released. There was nothing for it: Leopold had to throw himself on the Archbishop's mercy and plead for reinstatement, on the clear understanding that he would not be allowed to leave Salzburg for any reason (and he was granted it). Mozart on the other hand was free to go and do whatever he liked. What he would have liked is to strike out on his own, of course. He'd now legally come of age and was his own man. But Leopold was having none of it. Mozart, pampered and looked after all his life, was in all practical senses still a babe in arms. Where would he be without his old father to pack for him and look after his clothes and take care of appointments and a hundred other little things? Suppose he were to catch a bad cold without 'Papa' there to take care of him? No, my poor dear boy. If Papa can't accompany you, then your beloved Mama will have to go in his stead. Truth to tell, Leopold was terrified of his son's independence, and still more terrified by the prospect of

his being ensnared by women, duped into marriage, and fathering a family of his own. 'Mama' was no longer young and in any case had always disliked travelling and being away from home. And she was as sensitive to her son's needs as her husband was oblivious of them. No – Mama was coerced into accompanying Mozart, not as a solicitous caretaker but as reluctant chaperone and informer. She was to report back to Leopold on Mozart's every association, especially with women. He even insisted that mother and son must share the same bedroom. But come what may, with Wolfgang's sacking the journey had now taken on the greatest urgency. It was more than ever imperative that he find a stable and lucrative appointment. So mother and son left Salzburg with plenty of time to fit in several promising ports of call along the way.

Leopold's spirits as he bade them farewell could hardly have been lower, and under the circumstances (depression is a great muddler of perspectives) the first reports from the travellers did nothing to lift them. For a start, the expected roles had been reversed. The son was the caretaker of the mother:

Nothing comes amiss to me. I settled from the first to pay the coachmen and postilions, for I can talk to these fellows better than Mama. At the Stern, in Wasserburg, we are capitally served; I am treated here like a prince. About half an hour ago the porter knocked at the door to take my orders about various things, and I gave them to him with the same grave air that I have in my portrait.

And Mama's first report was not what Leopold was in the mood to hear:

We are leading the most enchanting life – up with the birds, to bed late at night, and visitors coming to see us from dawn till dusk. We live like the offspring of princes (until the hangman comes to fetch us)!

Leopold responded with the first of many increasingly stern reminders that they were travelling on his money, and all for the sake of his son. Reports of merrymaking and conviviality ceased immediately. Anna Maria's later bulletins left no doubt that she and Wolfgang could pinch pennies with the best of them:

I am at home, by myself, as usual, and have to tolerate the dreadful cold. Even if they light a small fire, they never come back to put more coal on, so the fire goes out, and the room is soon as cold as before. And even a little fire like this costs twelve kreuzer. So I have them light one in the morning, when we get up, and another in the evening. During the day I just have to shiver. Even now I can hardly hold my pen, since I am freezing so. Needless to say, we have not been to any balls and only to one play, for the tickets are too expensive. And I seldom venture out of doors since I don't even have an umbrella to protect me from the elements.

Mozart, on the other hand, was having, for the most part, a very good time, despite major disappointments in Munich, where the Elector had praised him to the skies but repeatedly stressed that there was no job going. 'No vacancy, dear boy. No vacancy!' Quite apart from the disappointment, the great composer, and the greatest pianist of the day, was getting tired of being everybody's 'dear boy'. But he liked Munich, and was reluctant to leave it.

The travellers' next port of call was Augsburg, Leopold's birthplace. And though this was a short stopover (little more than a week), and a family visit rather than a scouting operation, Wolfgang gave two concerts, to the usual rapturous reception.

Mozart's fame as a pianist and the major part played in his lifetime and ever since by his incomparable series of piano concertos make it easy to forget that he was also a very remarkable violinist, especially during his teens, when he often appeared as a soloist. After one particularly successful performance in Munich, only days earlier, he made the rather cryptic comment:

I played as though I were the greatest violinist in all Europe.

As he grew into independent manhood, though, he seems to have lost interest in the violin, as a performer. From his early twenties onwards he confined his violin and viola playing to chamber music, made with friends in private, rather than performed in front of audiences. And it's for this reason that all of his five beautiful violin concertos date from

his teenage years, and all of them remain in the repertoire of just about every violinist today. They aren't, perhaps, 'great' works, in that they don't scale the heights and depths of emotion and drama in the way that, say, Beethoven's and Brahms's violin concertos do, but for what they are, they're about as close to perfection as humans are allowed to get.

[12] Violin Concerto No. 3 in G, K. 216 (finale)

Part of the Third Violin Concerto, composed in 1775, when Mozart was nineteen.

[13] It was in Augsburg, for the first time since their childhood, that Wolfgang met his now eighteen-year-old cousin Maria Anna Tekla Mozart, known to the Salzburg Mozarts as 'the *Bäsle*' (the little cousin). And he was clearly smitten:

I must tell you, Papa, that she is beautiful, bright, high-spirited and as charming as can be. And we get on tremendously well, for, like me, she has a great sense of mischief. We both laugh at everyone and generally enjoy ourselves enormously.

It was maybe the first time in his life that he'd actually known a real playmate. And she brought out an aspect of his personality which confounded biographers throughout the nineteenth and most of the twentieth centuries. Part of it was an antic, crazy, off-the-wall sense of humour and an abandonment of all inhibitions which shocked many a Victorian writer into a stunned and embarrassed silence. As he wrote to his cousin from Mannheim, a few weeks later:

O Heaven and hell! A thousand curses! Croatians and demons and witches and hags, the battalions of hell for eternity yell, by all of the elements (water and earth – and fire and air), Europe, America! Asia and Africa! Capucins, Jezwits! Franciscans, Dominicans! Augustinians, Benedictines, Carthusians and Minorites! Brothers of the Sacred Cross! Irregular canons and regular too, all slackards and cowards and sluggards and knaves!! Higgledy-piggledy, asses and fools!!! Buffaloes, oxen, and nitwits and ghouls! What sort of behaviour is this, oh my

dears? Four smart, snappy soldiers and three bandoliers!... Such a package to get, but no portrait as yet! So pray let me have it as quick as you can; and as I desired it – sexy and French!

And then he changes tack, in a fashion typical of his letters to his cousin, but not to anyone else, with the surprising exception of his mother:

Forgive me my miserable scrawl, if you can, but my pen is already worn down to a shred, and I have been shitting, or so I am told, from birth to the present, through the same old hole, which *isn't* yet worn, not the tiniest whit, although I've been using it daily to shit, and each time the muck with my teeth I have bit.

Another of his letters to her is dominated by obsessive repetitions of the words 'muck' and 'lick', and virtually all of them contain sexual and scatological innuendos based on various derivative rhymes. But his infantile fascination with excretion and licking and farting and so on seems to have been something of a family tradition. When his mother, the model of long-suffering gentility, wanted to cheer up her morose and self-pitying husband, she wrote to him, in her first letter after leaving Salzburg, in terms which you mightn't expect.

Keep well, my darling, my dear, my love. Into your mouth your ass you'll shove. I wish you good-night, my darling, but first: shit in your bed, and make it burst.

Not all Mozart's letters to the *Bäse* are off-colour. In some, he seems to have taken leave of his senses altogether:

Why not, I beg of you? I must ask you, dearest dunce, why not?... Why should I not... beg Fraulein Josepha to forgive me for not having sent her the sonata?... Why not?—What?—Why not?—Why shouldn't I send it?—Why should I not?—Why not?—Strange! I don't know why I

shouldn't—so do me this favour.—Why not?—Why should you not do it?—Why not?—Strange! I shall do the same for you, when you want me to. Why not? Why should I not do it, do it with you? Strange! Why not?—I cannot imagine why not! Why not?

To do it, or not to do it: that was the question. Well did they? We don't know. But it seems quite likely. Why else would he bother to reassure her:

Since leaving you I have never taken my trousers off except before going to bed at night.

But whether they 'did' or 'didn't', there's no doubt at all that their feelings for each other went well beyond the physical. On the eve of his departure for Mannheim, Mozart wrote in her album:

If you love that which I love, you will have to love yourself.

Part of Mozart's attraction for her must have been the extraordinary contrast between the zany, earthy, exuberant young man as she came to know him very early on in their brief acquaintance and the genius who mesmerised all of Augsburg in the two concerts which he gave there.

14 Piano Concerto No. 8 in B flat, K. 238 (finale)

Part of the Piano Concerto No. 8 in B flat.

15 When Mozart and his mother reached Mannheim at the end of October, the *Bäse* was still much in his mind. When she asked, in a letter, how he liked it there, he replied:

I like Mannheim as well as I can like any place where you are not.

And later in the same letter:

If you can go on loving me as I love you, then our love will endure for eternity.

But in Mannheim, and probably to his own surprise, Mozart lost his heart to another, even younger than the *Bäsele*.

Aloysia Weber, an apparently quite exceptional soprano and an accomplished pianist, was only sixteen, but the combination of her voice, her talent and her considerable feminine charms were more than Mozart could resist. Indeed he seems to have fallen in love with her entire family. Fridolin Weber, the father, was a former civil servant, now an impoverished musician and musical copyist, with a warm-hearted, rather busy-bodying wife and four children – one of whom, though not Aloysia, was later to become Mozart's wife. All this, to begin with, was kept from Leopold, and his fears must have been at least somewhat allayed by his wife's reassurance that:

Our Wolfgang is kept so busy that he really has no idea whether he's standing on his head or his heels; between his composing and teaching (he gives a great many lessons) he has no time in which to socialise.

A letter from Mozart himself adds detail but gives roughly the same impression:

We can't very well get up much before eight o'clock, since our rooms, which are on the ground floor, get no daylight till eight-thirty. I then get dressed quickly and compose until midday, when I go over to Wendling's and compose a little more until half past one, when we break for lunch. At three, I go off to the Mainz Hotel to give a Dutch officer a lesson in thoroughbass, but I have to be home again by four to instruct the daughter of the house, even though we can never really begin until half past because the lights aren't brought in till then. At six I go to Cannabich's and give Mlle Rosa her lesson, and then generally stay for supper, after which we talk and sometimes make music.

Interestingly, he makes no mention at all of the Webers. Mozart was, certainly, busy, but the fact is that he did have time to socialise and made many friends in Mannheim, very quickly – most of them fellow musicians like Cannabich and Wendling, mentioned there. And there were plenty of those. Mannheim had what may have been the best orchestra in the world at that point, and Cannabich was at their head. He was also one of the most prolific composers in history, and one of the most useful contacts Mozart could have had.

As for Aloysia Weber, there can't be any doubt that Mozart was in love with her, but the differences between the letters he wrote to the *Bäse* and the one surviving letter he wrote to Aloysia could hardly be greater. Who could possibly guess, from this, that the author was madly in love with the recipient?

Dearest Friend!

I do beg your pardon for not sending the variations I have written on the aria you sent me. But I felt it best to answer your father's letter as soon as possible and thus have had no time in which to write them out, but I promise you shall have them with my next letter. I am hoping, as well, that my sonatas will soon be printed so I can send them in the same package as the *Popoli di Tessaglia*, which is already half finished. And if you like it half as much as I do, I shall be more than content. In the meantime, until I know whether you really like it (and I desire no other praise than yours) – I can only say that of all my compositions of this kind, this pleases me the most. I shall also be most gratified if you will give your concentrated attention to my Andromeda scene 'Ah, lo previdi', for I guarantee it will suit you well – and that you will do yourself great credit with it. I must particularly advise you, however, to take special care where the expression marks are concerned, to give careful thought to the meaning and power of the words, to put yourself as seriously as possible into Andromeda's situation and position, to imagine, indeed, that you and she are one and the same. With your beautiful voice, and your excellent manner of producing it, you will undoubtedly become an excellent singer, and that very soon, if you continue to work as I advise.

But madly in love he was – so madly that he was all set to scupper his original plans, forget all about going on to Paris, as urged by Leopold, and to devote himself single-mindedly to the furtherance of Aloysia's career, beginning with a trip to Italy, where he would use his power and influence to help establish her at some prestigious opera house. He had at this time been away from Italy for more than five years, had composed no operas in the interim, had received no Italian commissions, and his power and influence there were non-existent. And as the Webers perfectly well knew, he was currently out of a job, and the whole purpose of his present journey was to secure some suitable position. Well if they were sceptical, as they must have been, imagine what Leopold's reaction was – especially since Mozart also wrote, in the letter containing this bombshell:

I am so deeply attached to this wonderful but unfortunate family that my fondest wish in life is to make them happy. With any luck I may succeed.

The effect of all this on Leopold was just this side of catastrophic, and it resulted in one of the longest and most extraordinary letters ever written by a father to his son – a single paragraph of almost four thousand words, of which these are only some:

I have read your letter with unmitigated horror and astonishment. It has deprived me of a whole night's sleep. This morning I am so much weakened that the best I can do is to write very slowly, word by word. Until the present, God be praised, I have enjoyed the benefits of good health. But now? After this? Let me speak plainly. You know full well our tribulations in Salzburg; you know my wretched income, and all my other troubles; and you know why I agreed to let you go away. But let me repeat it. The aim of your journey was twofold: to win for yourself a good and permanent appointment, or, should you fail in this, to make your way in some big city where large quantities of money may be earned. Both these ends were designed to assist your parents and to help your dear sister. But it appears we are forgotten; now this other family is the most honourable, the most Christian family of your acquaintance, and the daughter is to have the leading role in the tragedy to be enacted between your true and rightful family and her own!

But towering above all this, the purpose of your trip was to build up your own name and reputation in the world. Part of this was achieved in your childhood and boyhood. Today, however, it rests with you alone to raise yourself to a level of eminence such as no musician has ever reached before. It now depends solely on your judgement and your mode of life whether you die as an ordinary musician, utterly forgotten, or as a famous Kapellmeister, whose name and work will be enshrined by posterity – whether, captured by some woman, you die on a bed of straw in an attic full of starving children, or whether, after a Christian life spent in contentment, honour and renown, you leave this world with your family well provided-for and your name respected by all.

As for your current proposal (I can scarcely guide my trembling hand when I contemplate it) – this plan to gad about with Herr Weber, and, be it noted, his two daughters – has almost deprived me of my sanity. How can you have been bewitched into entertaining such a grotesque idea even for an hour?! Quite apart from your own reputation, how could you think to expose your old father to the mockery and ridicule of the Prince and of the whole town which loves you? Yes, to expose *me* to mockery and yourself to contempt, for in answer to repeated appeals, I have already told everyone that you were going to Paris.

You proclaim yourself eager to spare me anxiety yet now overturn onto my head a whole bucketful of worries which are almost the end of me! You know that God in his goodness has given me sound judgement, and that in the most tortuous circumstances I have always, through my foresight, found ways of escape. What, then, has prevented you from seeking my counsel, and from always acting as I desired?

Your desire to help the oppressed comes straight from your father. But your first duty is to consider the well-being of your parents, or else your soul will be condemned to eternal damnation. Remember me now as you saw me last, standing beside the carriage in a state of the utmost wretchedness. Ill as I was, I had been packing for you late into the night, and there I was at the carriage again at six o'clock, seeing to everything for you. Hurt me now, if you can be so cruel! Win fame and make money in Paris – and when you have money to spend, *then* go off to Italy if you must. Your dear sister, incidentally, has wept copiously during

these last two days. And who is accountable for that?! Off with you, then. To Paris. And soon!

And why to Paris? And why then? Because the Elector in Mannheim, like the Elector in Munich, despite his personal warmth to Mozart when they met, had decided not to take him on. It would have been a crushing blow to Mozart anyway, but he was now more than ever attached to Mannheim, because Mannheim had Aloysia and her family, and Paris had not (which from Leopold's point of view was a plus from the start). The news was given to Mozart, after a concert, not by the Elector himself but by one of his aides:

I left the concert and went straightaway to see Madame Cannabich. The Treasurer, who is a good friend of mine, came with me. On the way I told him what had happened. He became wild beyond your imagining. When we came into the room, he instantly burst out: 'Well, here's another who has been favoured with the usual nice treatment they deal you out at Court.' 'What,' exclaimed Madame, 'so it has come to nothing?' I related the whole sorry tale, and in return they regaled me with accounts of many similar things which have occurred here. When Mademoiselle Rosa (who was in the third room from us, busy with the linen) had finished, she came in and said to me, 'Would you like me to start now?', since it was time for her lesson. 'I am at your service!' said I. 'Do you know,' she said, quite innocently, 'that I mean to be very attentive to-day?' 'I am sure you will,' answered I, 'for I'm afraid that our lessons won't go on for much longer.' 'How so?' says she. 'What do you mean? Why?' She turned to her Mama, who told her. 'What!?' she cried, 'is this really true? Oh I can't believe it.' 'Yes,' I replied, 'quite true, I'm afraid.' She then played my sonata, but looked very grave. And now I could not suppress my tears; in the end they all had tears in their eyes, for she was playing the sonata which is the favourite of the whole family, and whose slow movement is a portrait of Mlle Rosa herself.

### CD 3

[1] Mozart had never wanted to go to Paris in the first place. With his heart and mind now unexpectedly anchored in Mannheim with Aloysia and the Webers, indeed with all the friends he'd made there, the French capital felt to him at times like a glorified (admittedly a very glorified) prison. And for all his devoted affection, having Mama with him didn't make it any easier – for either of them. Mozart wasn't the only one who felt imprisoned:

As for my life here, it is irredeemably unpleasant. From morning till night I am cooped up here alone, I might as well be in jail. Our room is so dark and poorly situated that I don't catch even a glimpse of the sun all day, and the window looks out only onto a little courtyard. Unless it's raining I have no idea what the weather is like. I try to knit a little but the light is so poor and my fingers so cold that even that is a struggle. This room is cold even when the fire is on. As there is no clavier in our room, Wolfgang leaves early to go to work at the home of Monsieur Legros, the director of the *Concert Spirituel*, so I never see him all day long. If this goes on much longer, I may forget entirely how to talk. But I must stop writing now, because my arm and eyes ache too much to continue.

Her husband's response to these lamentations was hardly warmer than the room in which they had been set down, and he made it clear that he would not countenance a return to Salzburg by either his wife or his son. As he continually pointed out, it was he who was footing the bill, and his plans, which he outlined with daunting clarity in a letter to his son, were not for Wolfgang alone.:

If you could get a monthly salary from some prince in Paris, plus doing some work for concert series and the theatre, plus now and then having something engraved 'by subscription', and if your sister and I could give lessons and she

could play at concerts and musical entertainments, then there should certainly be enough for us all to live in comfort.

Again and again, the stress is on the family unit, as though it were some kind of ongoing industry, which it hadn't been since Leopold stopped carting his kids all over Europe. And again and again he stresses his dire financial straits, which he attributes entirely to his altruistic expenditure on his son's career. The guilt is piled on Mozart layer after layer. And the sad fact is that Leopold had made a fortune out of his children and had squirreled much of it away in various places, while continually complaining to others about his poverty. The man was more than solvent. Much more. But if conscience over debt was the only means by which he could retain control of his son, and either force his return to Salzburg or guarantee that an appointment elsewhere would include Leopold and Nannerl as part of the package, then so be it:

You say you would like me to be more light-hearted in my letters. But you know that honour is dearer to me even than life. Consider the whole course of events. Remember that although I hoped you would help me to get out of debt, I have so far only sunk deeper and deeper. You know how high my credit has always been here – but if I lose that, I also lose my honour. And the Archbishop? Is he to have the satisfaction of gloating over our misfortune, and of being able to laugh at us and mock us? Rather than face this I would drop dead immediately.

And away in Paris, which he loathed, Mozart reassured his father:

I pray each day to God to grant me the strength and courage to hold out in this place, and to give me the honour of reflecting His immeasurably *greater* honour and glory; I pray that I am enabled to succeed here and earn large sums of money, so that I shall indeed be able to help you out of your troubles; and that He will allow us to meet again soon, so that we may live happily and contentedly together again. This is now my sole ambition.

Almost more shocking, though, than Leopold's shameless emotional blackmail is the very real possibility that he had spurned (and indeed suppressed) the best offer Mozart had had

yet, and that before he'd even left Salzburg. A vastly wealthy Viennese educator and philanthropist, Joseph Mesmer, had written to Leopold, saying that he was ready to provide Wolfgang with full room and board, in the most comfortable circumstances, for as long as was necessary, until a suitable position could be found for him. Some time later, he followed this up with another letter:

Why did you not send your son directly to Vienna? And why do you hold back even now? As I have already told you, I can undertake to guarantee that all his needs shall be met free of charge, and that along with all your Viennese friends I shall strive tirelessly to secure some prestigious position for him. These things, however, can move slowly, as you well know, but there can be no doubt that Vienna is far the best place for him. Unless he is actually here, however, there is nothing to be done.

To give him credit, Leopold did eventually forward the letter to Mozart in Paris, adding that this gateway was still open to him, but not advising him to go through it.

Mozart made friends in Paris as easily as in other places but in general he felt that the city, its traditions, and its opportunities were incompatible with his own gifts, creative personality, and outlook. Nor did things look promising in terms of the sort of appointment Leopold had in mind. He wasn't idle, though. He had work, in the way of various commissions, and one of these resulted, early on, in a work which has long since become one of the most popular in the repertoire: the Concerto in C for Flute and Harp, of which this is the finale:

## 2 Concerto in C for Flute and Harp, K. 299 (finale)

The last movement of the Concerto for Flute and Harp, one of the first works Mozart wrote in Paris.

3 After the rebuffs in Munich and Mannheim, and in the wake of his recent, turbulent correspondence with Leopold, Mozart's habit of obedience was coming under considerable strain, and his first act of open rebellion was to refuse a highly prestigious and lucrative post which came free in May. He was offered the job of organist at the

palace of Versailles – and turned it down. The list of reasons he gave his father was convincing enough, but incomplete. Nor was it entirely truthful:

As far as Versailles is concerned, after talking it over with good friends who really know the scene here, I have decided to decline the post, which in any case doesn't pay particularly well. And for half of every year I should have to moulder away in a place where there are no opportunities at all for other ways of making one's living and where my talent would hardly count for anything. To enter the service of the King in Versailles, according to the best authorities, is to be as good as forgotten in Paris. Of course I would love to have the honour of a really good appointment, but it must be as a well-paid Kapellmeister, not as a mere organist.

Fair enough. What he doesn't say, of course, is that he disliked Paris anyway, that he came there unwillingly, that along with its other shortcomings it lacked Aloysia, and that he wished he'd stayed in Mannheim, and gone touring with the Webers. When it came to Paris's musical life, on the other hand, he didn't mince his words:

I have written a symphony for the opening of the *Concert Spirituel*. I felt very edgy at the rehearsal, because I have never heard a worse performance. You can't imagine how twice over they scraped and scrambled through it. I was frankly in a terrible state and would have loved to have had it rehearsed again, but I was told there was no more time. So I went to bed with an aching heart and in a very disgruntled and indignant mood. The next morning I made up my mind not to go to the concert at all; but in the evening, since the weather was fine, I had second thoughts and decided to go, after all. But I was determined that if the symphony went as badly as it had during the rehearsal, I would walk straight into the orchestra, snatch the violin away from Lahoussaye, the concert master, and conduct the piece myself!

But he didn't have to. Somehow the whole thing came off very well and the audience loved it. But just imagine an audience behaving like this today!

Just in the middle of the first movement there is a passage which I felt sure would find favour. But little could I have guessed how right I was. The audience were so carried away that there was a tremendous burst of applause, right in the middle of the movement. But since I knew, when I wrote it, the effect it was likely to produce, I had introduced the passage again at the close – when there were shouts of 'Encore! Encore!'

But the audience participation extended to both ends of the dynamic spectrum:

Having observed that all last as well as first *Allegros* begin here with all the instruments playing at once and generally in unison, I began mine with two violins only, *piano* for the first eight bars – immediately followed by a *forte*; the audience, exactly as I expected, said 'hush' at the quiet beginning, and when they heard the *forte*, immediately started to applaud again.

4

#### Symphony No. 31 in D, K. 297 ('Paris') (finale)

I was so happy with the performance that as soon as it was over, I went off to the Palais Royal, where I had a large ice cream, said the Rosary as I had sworn I would, and went home – for as you know, I am always, and shall always be happiest there, or else in the company of some good, upright German who, if he is a bachelor, lives alone like a true Christian, or, if married, loves his wife and brings up his children properly.

5

Mozart was still very much in the business of currying favour with Papa. But by the time Papa reached this part of the letter he was probably past caring – for the moment. All of the Parisian extracts we've just been hearing come from a letter which begins like this:

My dearest, dear Father,

I'm afraid I have very sad and upsetting news to give you. My dear mother is gravely ill. She has been bled, as in the past, and it was very necessary too. She felt better afterwards, but only a few days later she became feverish, along with shivering, headache and diarrhoea. To begin with we used

the usual home remedies, but as she got steadily worse (she could hardly speak and her hearing deteriorated very rapidly, so that I had to shout to make myself understood), Baron Grimm sent us his doctor. But she is feverish and delirious, and very weak. They say there's hope – but it doesn't look that way to me. I have been hovering day and night between hope and fear, but I have resigned myself entirely to the will of God – and I pray that you and my dear sister will do the same.

The truth of it, as Leopold probably guessed, is that she was already dead. The letter, which goes on, at great length, to ramble through all kinds of news and gossip, as though nothing was amiss, was written within a very few hours of her death. Later came the details:

In the final hour of her earthly life, she was unconscious – her life flickered out like a candle. Three days before, she had made her confession, partaken of the Sacrament and received Extreme Unction. Almost from then on, however, she was completely delirious, and at twenty-one minutes past five o'clock she lost all sensation and consciousness. I gripped her hand in mine and spoke to her – but she neither saw nor heard me. All feeling was gone. Thus she lay, now more dead than alive, until she breathed her last five hours later. No one was present but myself, a kind friend of mine, Herr Heina, and the nurse. The memory of this dreadful experience will be with me to the end of my days. You know that I had never seen anyone die. How cruel that the first occasion should have been the death of my own mother. At that moment I wished for nothing but to follow her. Weep. Weep your fill, as I have done, but find consolation in the knowledge that it was the will of Almighty God. Let us, therefore, say a heartfelt Paternoster for her soul and turn our thoughts to other matters, for all things have their proper time.

And now, as before, he turns his own thoughts to other matters and, as I say, goes on to write pages and pages of news and gossip. Mozart's capacity for detachment – and there are many examples of it – can easily give an impression of insensitivity. Years later, he would calmly compose while his wife was in labour with their first child in the next room. Now there's no guarantee at all that a composer's music will match the

circumstances surrounding its composition, but it's hard to think that the slow movement of Mozart's A minor Piano Sonata, written at around the same time, doesn't reflect, particularly in its anguished middle section, the true extent of his own distress.

6

Piano Sonata No. 8 in A minor, K. 310 (slow mvt)

Part of the slow movement of Mozart's A minor Sonata composed around the time of his mother's death.

7

Now imagine. Here is a twenty-one-year old... well, in many ways he was a twenty-one-year-old boy, in a foreign city which he doesn't like, and who has never – not once – been apart from one or other of his parents for more than a few days. He's the only member of his family to have seen his mother dead – to have seen her actually die. And he has to look after all the arrangements. And in this condition, in these circumstances, he begins to be bombarded by letters from his father, whose mind seems bent on one conclusion:

I told you as long ago as May that your mother should be bled, yet it was put off until June the eleventh, and even then she was probably bled too little; and finally, you summoned the doctor far too late, when it was perfectly clear that she was mortally ill. But you had your engagements, you left her alone all day, and since she didn't make a fuss, you treated the matter far too lightly. During all this time her illness grew steadily worse. And where were you?

But this was just the beginning. Leopold now twisted the knife still further, suggesting, by implication, that Mozart had doomed his mother in the very act of being born:

Well, it's all over now. God willed it. The unbreakable chain of Divine Providence saved your mother's life when you were born, at which time we thought that her hour had come. But no. She was fated to sacrifice herself for her son in a different way.

And now the son was to sacrifice himself for his father. Having failed in his mission, thrown away his chances at Versailles, and negligently disposed of his mother, not to

mention dallying with an under-age soprano, it was his clear duty, so Leopold argued, to return to Salzburg. To sugar the pill, he regaled Mozart with a list of the privileges and advantages that would await him there. Mozart was unmoved. Among the many arguments against this plan, quite apart from Aloysia, he cited one with particular and quite uncharacteristic venom:

I must tell you that one of the chief reasons for my hatred of Salzburg is those coarse, slovenly, dissipated court musicians, amongst whom no honest man of good breeding could possibly live!!

Mozart too, it seems, could twist the knife:

Instead of being happy to mix with them, he must feel ashamed of their very company. This is probably why musicians are both unloved and disrespected with us. But ah, if the orchestra were only run on the same lines as in Mannheim! If only you could see the order that prevails there: the unquestioned authority vested in Cannabich; the seriousness and dedication of the musicians. Cannabich, far and away the finest director known to me, is both beloved and feared by his troops, who, like himself, are held in the highest respect by the whole town. And oh how differently they comport themselves! They have good manners! They dress well (and don't go to taverns for the express purpose of getting drunk). Unless the Prince will place his trust in either you or me and grant us full powers, which are essential requirements for any proper conductor, such conditions will never prevail in Salzburg. If I were to undertake such a role in Salzburg, I should have to be granted total authority. The Grand Chamberlain should have no say whatever in musical matters, or on any point *relating* to music. Not everyone in authority can become a Kapellmeister, but a Kapellmeister must become a person of authority. But even if my every point was agreed to, which you will admit is hardly likely, the fact remains that I would rather be anywhere than Salzburg.

So sugaring the pill was abandoned. And Leopold returned to form:

I am now in deep trouble. My debts now run to about 700 florins and I have not the slightest notion how I am going to support myself and your sister on my miserable monthly salary... It must be as clear as a cloudless sky to you that the future of your old father and your loving sister now rests entirely in your hands.

Leopold was actually still in his fifties, though you wouldn't guess it from his letters:

I am elderly, and God may call me to Him at any time. But on no account will I die in debt... I will not have it that in order to pay off my creditors our things will be wretchedly sold once I am gone!... It is only with your salary that I can be certain of paying off everything in a few years so that I may be able to die in peace: and that I must and that I will. If, when you come home, you do not lift this weighty burden from my heart, it will crush me utterly. God willing, I would like to live a few years longer, and make good my debts – and then, should you care to do so, you can run your head against the wall. But I am sick and tired of writing these lengthy letters to you. In the last year and more I have practically written myself blind.

Under an onslaught of letters like these, Mozart's resolve to hold his own began to crumble:

Mozart: I'm sorry, but I really cannot write any more now, for my heart overflows with tears. I hope you will write to me soon and comfort me.

Leopold: You say that I ought to comfort you? I say, come and comfort me.

It should come as no surprise by now to learn that Mozart sank into periods of deep depression. His mother's death alone would have seen to that. But that began to seem the least of it:

I often wonder whether my life is even worth going on with. I feel neither hot nor cold – I am numbed, and cannot find much pleasure in anything.

But Leopold was in no mood to take such confessions seriously:

You were obviously feeling disgruntled or irritated at the time. You were clearly writing in a bad humour. I must tell you, I don't like it.

For Leopold, it seemed, the problem was simply solved:

Once you have made your father's happiness your first priority, *then* will he continue to think of your welfare and happiness and to stand by you as a loyal friend.

But the longer Mozart held out, the more Leopold tightened the screws:

I hope, after your mother had to die so inappropriately in Paris, that you will not also have the hastening of your *father's* death upon your conscience.

And a little time later:

If you continue to stay away, I shall die much sooner. You alone can save me from death.

It's some measure of Mozart's reluctance to go home that he stayed on in Paris, however uncongenial, long after his mother's death, and grew so short of money that he pawned his mother's watch. Leopold in the meantime secured for him a position as court organist at Salzburg (the very post he had spurned at Versailles) and Mozart finally gave in. On his leisurely journey home he called in at Mannheim, but the court, and with it the Webers, had decamped to Munich. On his arrival there, Aloysia, who probably never reciprocated his feelings, and was now involved with another man, coldly rebuffed him, and he continued on his way. Not, however, without reopening his correspondence with the *Bäse*, who joined him in Munich and may have accompanied him to Salzburg, where she was probably rebuffed in her turn by Leopold and Nannerl, who now took her father's side in everything. We don't know what happened, but from this point onwards the relationship between Mozart and the *Bäse* was never the same again. Indeed she effectively drops out of the story altogether.

Once reunited in Salzburg, Mozart and his father regained something of their former closeness, and Mozart addressed him and spoke of him in terms of deep affection and respect. In keeping with his new appointment as court organist, he wrote most of his great choral music during this period, most notably, perhaps, the so-called 'Coronation' Mass in C.

8 Mass in C, K. 317 ('Coronation Mass') (Kyrie)

Part of the so-called 'Coronation' Mass, which despite rumours to the contrary didn't acquire its title or its royal association until twelve years after it was written. But that's another story.

9 As a salaried church organist, choirmaster, and instructor of choirboys, Mozart was as outrageously overqualified as J.S. Bach had been in the same sort of job in his day, and his total immersion in composing when he wasn't otherwise occupied must have been both an escape route from the humdrum social life (remember his contempt for the Salzburg musicians) and an almost desperate determination to follow the one true vocation for which he felt he'd been put on this earth. But he was always a man of the theatre, and Salzburg's lack of adequate facilities grated on his nerves. It was a matter of great excitement, then, when he received a commission to write a new opera for Munich. The result was his first undoubted operatic masterpiece, *Idomeneo*, but though it was well received at its opening it proved too advanced for Munich's audiences, and closed after only two performances. More disappointing still, for Mozart, was the lack of interest shown by the Elector, despite having praised the opera to all and sundry after attending one of the rehearsals.

The Archbishop hadn't bothered to come to Munich for his employee's opera but had taken up temporary residence in Vienna, where he now required Mozart's attendance. To the Archbishop's understandable annoyance, Mozart lost no opportunity to promote himself and cultivate useful contacts. Among these was the powerfully influential Countess Thun. As Mozart reported to Leopold:

I've had lunch with her twice already, and hardly a day goes by without my calling on her. She is quite the most charming and lovable lady I have ever had the honour to know, and *she* regards *me* with the very highest favour.

It certainly made a change from lunching at the Archbishop's:

There, we eat, as a rule, around noon, rather too early for me, but what can one do? Our group consists of the two valets, the Archbishop's private messenger, the confectioner, two cooks – and my insignificant self. The two valets have their place at the top of the table but at least I have the great privilege of being seated above the cooks.

Despite attempts by the Archbishop to block him, Mozart became well acquainted with the Viennese musical establishment and gave one or two high-profile concerts, which became the talk of the town. He also discovered, to his delight, that the Webers were now living in Vienna. Aloysia was now married and expecting her first child, but they met again as friends, the rebuff at Munich being thankfully forgotten. Old Fridolin had died, and his widow now lived with Aloysia's three unmarried sisters, one of whom, Constanze, was to become Mozart's wife. This happy reunion, his new acquaintance with members of the aristocracy, and the warmth of his reception by the Viennese public all brought to a head Mozart's long-simmering frustration, to put it mildly, with his situation in Salzburg:

Three times already this Arch-booby has said the most insulting and disrespectful things to my face, which I shall not repeat, as I wish to spare your feelings, and it was only because I always had you, my dear father, before my eyes that I didn't take my revenge right then and there. He called me a knave and a dissolute cad and other insulting names, and told me to take myself off. Then it all came out, as in a single breath, that I was the most dissipated fellow he knew, no man had ever served him so badly, and he threatened to write home and stop my salary if I didn't remove myself forthwith. It was impossible for me to get in a single syllable, for his words blazed away like a fire. He called me a scoundrel, a villain, a rogue and other such delicate bouquets. Finally, I could restrain myself no longer, and I said, 'Your Grace is not

satisfied with me?' 'How dare you threaten me, you miserable, dim-witted little louse?' he replied. 'There is the door, and I tell you I shall have nothing more to do with such scum!' At last I said, 'Nor I with you!' 'Then be off,' says he, 'scram, get out of my sight!' Before I was quite out of the room I retorted 'That's it. This is the end! You shall have it in writing in the morning.'

But it wasn't the end. Not quite. There was another ugly scene, this time with the Archbishop's chamberlain, in which Mozart was literally booted out of the room with a kick on his backside. Technically speaking, however, he hadn't been fired. He'd resigned. On 8 June, 1781 at the age of twenty-five, he felt himself free for the first time in his life. Leopold, however, was predictably appalled, and demanded that Mozart retract his words and beg for reinstatement. After all, Leopold had done it. And successfully. Mozart was incredulous:

You say the only way I can preserve my honour is to go back on my resolve? How can you possibly perpetrate such a suggestion?!... Everyone knows my honour was insulted... Are you seriously proposing that I represent myself as a cowardly worm and the Archbishop a worthy prince?... You say, unbelievably, that as I have never shown you the slightest affection the moment has now come for me to do so. Can this really be you? And then to suggest that I would never think of sacrifice any of my pleasures for the sake of my father? What pleasures do you think have I here? Do you seriously believe that I am revelling in pleasures and amusements... Dearest, most beloved father, I beg of you, do not ask me to recant. Ask of me anything, but not that – anything but that –, the mere thought of it makes me tremble with fury.

Well he didn't recant, of course. Whatever the risks, and he knew them, he was free. Free to be the arbiter of his own fate, or so it seemed to him then. But the challenges facing him were enormous. In leaving the Archbishop and striking out on his own he became the first great composer to abandon servitude in favour of the freelance life. Happily, things went well for him at once. He was busy – playing concerts, composing, teaching – and Vienna's most important music publisher, Artaria, agreed to publish his compositions. But his happiness bordered on rapture when he received a major

commission for a new opera, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, within weeks of his liberation from the servants' kitchen. On Christmas eve, in the presence of the Emperor, he had his famous pianistic duel with the Italian composer-pianist Muzio Clementi. One of the greatest and most influential virtuosos in pianistic history, Clementi led off with his Sonata in B flat, Op. 24 No. 2, whose opening Mozart later pinched for his *Magic Flute* Overture:

[10] Clementi: Piano Sonata in B flat, Op. 24 No. 2 (mvt 1)

So much for Clementi. Mozart then weighed in with an improvisation, and a set of variations:

[11] Variations on 'Ah, vous dirai-je, Maman', K. 265

Well, when Mozart and Clementi finally retired to their respective corners, the Emperor pronounced his verdict – one of the great cop-out lines in musical history:

Clementi has only art; Mozart has art and taste.

[12] As the new year dawned, Mozart, now twenty-six, stood on the brink of the second greatest decision of his life. Even before his resignation, he had moved in with the Webers. The thought of his son ensnared in the home of a widow and her three unmarried daughters alarmed Leopold, who was deeply suspicious of women in general, just as much as Mozart must have known it would. Somehow he'd got wind of rumours that Mozart was even contemplating marriage with one of the daughters, and he wrote to his son in horror. Mozart dismissed the rumours as so much nonsense:

Because I have lodgings in their house, therefore I'm about to marry the daughter. No mention of love. Oh no, the gossipers have skipped that part. No. I just move into the house and marry! For Heaven's sake! If anything,

there has never been a time when I thought less of getting hitched up than I do today! And for what? Money? The last thing I want is a rich wife (in any case the Webers are hardly rich), but even if I could make my fortune by marrying, I should never consider it, for my mind is entirely taken up by very different matters. Has God given me my talent just so I can attach myself to a wife and waste my finest years in idleness? I am only just beginning to live! Mind you, I have nothing against marriage as such, but at this time of my life it would be the greatest folly.

Whether he really felt this, or whether he was simply telling Leopold what he thought he wanted to hear, we'll never know. But five months later, the scene had changed to a degree where it was no longer possible to conceal from Leopold the fact that marriage was now very much on his mind. But his justification of this to his ever-anxious father takes some believing:

Natural urges and desires are as alive in me as in any other man, even more so, perhaps, than in many. But I simply cannot live as most young men of my generation do these days. For a start, I have too much religion; secondly, I have too much love of my neighbour and too deep a sense of honour to seduce an innocent girl; and thirdly, I have too much horror and revulsion, too much dread of diseases and too much concern for my health to fool around with whores. I can swear that I have never had relations of that sort with any woman. Not one. Besides, if such a thing had happened, I would never have kept it from you; to err, after all, is natural enough in a man, and to err once would be mere weakness... But because of my disposition, which as you know inclines more to a peaceful and homely existence than to revelry, I, who from my boyhood have never been used to looking after my own belongings, linen, clothes, and so on, cannot think of anything more necessary to me – than a wife.

Nor, of course, was this just a kind of generalised feeling. It was very specific indeed. For some time now, he'd felt himself strongly drawn to Aloysia's younger sister Constanze, whom he took to be the Cinderella of the family. In Vienna it blossomed into love, and before long Mozart asked her to marry him. But this wasn't a re-tread of his

infatuation with her sister. It was no grand passion. There was no fever of euphoria, none of the bittersweet torments of obsession. It was happy, warm, comfortable, and filled with sympathetic admiration. But again there was that Mozartian detachment. As he reported to Leopold:

She takes on responsibility for the whole household and yet to judge from their attitudes you would think she did nothing right. Oh, my most beloved father, I could fill page after page with descriptions of what I've seen in that house... She is not ugly, though one could hardly say she is beautiful. Her whole beauty is in two little black eyes and a lovely figure. She has no wit, sufficient common sense to fulfill her duties as a wife and mother. Far from being extravagant, she is generally shabbily dressed, for what little her mother has managed to do for her children, she has done for the others, but never Constanze. Moreover, she understands housekeeping and has the kindest heart one could ever imagine. I love her and she loves me with all her soul. Tell me if I could possibly wish myself a better wife.

That last, simple request, and all that it represented, triggered the biggest, indeed the final rift between father and son, from which, despite superficial patch-ups here and there, neither would ever fully recover. After a few bitter exchanges, Leopold, who felt, quite rightly in many ways, that he had been superseded in Mozart's life, froze him out by refusing, month after month, to answer any of his letters. As the date of the wedding grew closer, Mozart repeatedly implored his father to give it his blessing:

My dearest, most beloved father, I beseech you again, I implore you, by all you hold dearest in the world, please to grant us your consent to our marriage... My heart is weary with anxiety and aching with sorrow, and my thoughts are all in a jumble; in circumstances like these, how can I hope to think and work to any worthwhile purpose? Answer me, please. I beg you.

Despite his family distractions, Mozart was very well able to think and work at the highest level – a fact borne out by the triumphant success of *The Abduction from the*

*Seraglio*, which scored the biggest hit of Mozart's career at its opening on 16 July 1782. And now, at last, Leopold broke his silence. But not as Mozart would have liked:

Your letter of the twenty-sixth arrived today. What a cold, uncaring letter, such as I could never have anticipated in reply to the news of my opera's great reception. I thought when I sent you the score that you would hardly be able to open the package in your excitement and eagerness to see your son's work, which, far from merely pleasing, is making such a tremendous sensation in Vienna. But no. You have not had the time!

And still, the longed-for consent to the marriage was stubbornly withheld. Mozart and Constanze married without it on the fourth day of August 1782. On the following day, a letter from Leopold arrived, making it plain that Mozart need no longer expect any support from his forsaken father. Sadly, Mozart took up his pen and wrote a brief account of what had been the most important day of his life, barring only his birth:

Well, it's over now. I beg your pardon for my all too hasty trust in your fatherly love. In confessing this I give you fresh proof of my love for truth and my hatred of a lie. My darling wife will shortly be asking her dearest, most beloved Papa-in-law for his fatherly blessing and her beloved sister-in-law for the continuance of her most valued friendship. The only people who attended the wedding were her mother and her youngest sister, Herr von Thorwart, as guardian and witness for both of us, Herr von Cetto, district councillor, who gave away the bride, and Gilowsky, who was my best man. When we had been joined together, both my wife and I began to weep. And then all present, even the priest, wept too at seeing how much our hearts were moved.

But of all the wedding presents the couple received, or could have hoped for, none gave them greater joy, or augured better for their future happiness in Vienna, than the continuing, resounding success of *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, of which this is the overture.

13 Overture to 'The Abduction from the Seraglio', K. 384

#### CD 4

1 Despite the lack of Leopold's blessing, the Mozarts began their married life in a state of unalloyed happiness, conviviality, and the justified hope of real prosperity. The great hope, of course, now bolstered by ever increasing support from the aristocracy, plus his rapturous reception by the Viennese public, was that Mozart would be given an appointment by the Emperor. But the months went by and nothing materialised. Mozart began to mutter about moving to Paris (hard to understand, given his failure there before), or even to London. Perhaps to demonstrate that he meant business, he actually began having lessons in English. But the chances are that much of it was a bluff. In any case, he set about laying the foundations of his new Viennese career, independently of private patronage, placing his main hopes on teaching, the sale of his works, and the revenue from public concerts which he himself would set up. On top of this, he would write music to specific commissions, while his greatest ambitions were rooted, as ever, in the opera house. In quality, quantity, and variety, the music that poured from his pen in these early Viennese years is little short of miraculous. None more so than the amazing and quite unprecedented *Serenade for Thirteen Wind Instruments*. Unprecedented in size (no-one had ever written for such a large wind band before), length (its seven large-scale movements add up to almost an hour's worth of music) and in the indescribable genius of its instrumental tone-painting.

2 Serenade for Thirteen Wind Instruments in B flat, K. 361 (mvt 6: Romanze)

Part of the great Serenade for 13 Wind Instruments.

3 The newly married Mozarts led a lively social life, and didn't skimp on entertainment, food, or drink. From the days of his youth, when the food he most fancied was liver

dumplings and sauerkraut, Mozart's tastes in food had undergone considerable sophistication, and visitors to the couple's apartment were likely to be offered such fare as roast pheasant, a variety of rare meats, oysters, glacé fruits, and a range of fine wines, including Moselle and champagne. In January of 1783, to celebrate the new year and Constanze's first pregnancy, the Mozarts held a ball in their own spacious quarters which lasted from six p.m. till seven o' clock the following morning. From the beginning, they lived beyond their means. The continuous, lavish gifts from royalty in Mozart's childhood and early teens had left him with expensive tastes. And whatever their financial circumstances in later life, he had an almost compulsive love of the finest clothing (when Muzio Clementi first saw him, on the occasion of their pianistic 'duel', he mistook him for a senior chamberlain or a court official). But Mozart developed his own special means of acquiring it. Take this note to one of his Viennese patrons, the Baroness Waldstätten:

Dearest Baroness,

...About that beautiful red coat, which attracted me so, please, please let me know where it is to be had and how much it costs. I was so enchanted by its splendour that I failed to register its price. I simply have to have one like it, for it will do perfect justice to certain buttons which I have long coveted. I saw them once, while choosing some for a suit. They were in the button factory in the Kohlmarkt. They are mother-of-pearl with a few white stones round the edge and an exquisite yellow stone in the centre. I like all of my things to be of good quality, genuine, and beautiful. Why is it, I wonder, that people who could never afford it would like to spend a fortune on such articles, and those who can, do not do so?

And the ploy worked, as it usually did. But, also as usual, the lady was paid handsomely (far more than the coat could conceivably have cost) in the one currency which Mozart always had in abundance:

Dearest, Best and Loveliest of All, Gilt, Silvered and Sugared, Most Valued and Honoured Gracious Lady Baroness!

Herewith I have the honour to send your Ladyship, in gratitude for having at once taken so much trouble about the beautiful coat, and for your goodness in finding one just like it, two volumes of plays, a little book of stories – and most particularly, the rondo of which we spoke.

4 Concert Rondo in D for piano and orchestra, K. 382

Part of the Rondo in D, K. 382, which Mozart wrote in Vienna as an alternative finale to an early piano concerto.

5 The piano concerto as a medium was still in its infancy – well, still in its childhood anyway – when Mozart was growing up. It had been largely pioneered by his childhood idol J.C. Bach. But it was Mozart, in a series of twenty-seven concertos, starting with arrangements, as we heard earlier, who in the space of less than fifteen years lifted it into the realms of highest art and took it to a peak that's never been surpassed, and hardly ever equalled. And most of it was done in the mere nine years of his Viennese period – in the subscription concerts, or 'academies', as he called them, which he organised as showcases for his talents as composer, pianist, and conductor. Like Shakespeare's plays, Mozart's piano concertos embrace virtually every shade of human experience, with the one exception, I suppose, of violence and fury. For those you need his operas, and perhaps *Idomeneo* in particular. But unlike Shakespeare's plays, Mozart's concertos represent a kind of ideal world, in which all tensions are ultimately resolved, no matter how dark the journey may sometimes have been. In form, technique, instrumentation, in organic development, characterisation and dramatic interplay, they are unique not only in the level of their inspiration but in their timeless individuality.

Needless to say, the tensions in Mozart's life were not resolved – least of all, perhaps, with his father. But it wasn't for want of trying, on either side. On 17 June 1783 Mozart himself became a father, and he too had a son. They named him Raimund Leopold. At the end of the next month, the parents, rather surprisingly, left their first-born with a wet-nurse and set out to visit grandfather Leopold in Salzburg. It was the first time Mozart had seen his father since they'd parted in Munich two and a half years

earlier, and the first time Constanze had seen him at all. Hopes for a true reconciliation foundered, however, due less to Leopold than to Nannerl, who treated her sister-in-law with undisguised hostility – an attitude which never changed. And while they were there, on 19 August, their ‘darling, fat, bonny little boy’, as Mozart called him, died in Vienna, after only nine weeks of life. It was just the first of a series of such bereavements, which were still common at that time, and it left deep scars.

Mozart, though, as his wife remembered many years after his death, was blessed with an extraordinarily resilient disposition, and on their return to Vienna, the fount of wonderful music continued undiminished. Nor did his sense of humour ever desert him for very long. In the Rondo of his First Horn Concerto, written for his friend Ignaz Leutgeb, he wrote, in several different colours of ink, a kind of nonsensical running commentary between the staves of the score, supposedly describing a sexual encounter corresponding to events in the music itself:

For you, you Ass—Come—quick—get on with it—that's a good lad—  
Courage!—Are you finished yet?—you beast!—oh what a dissonance!—Oh!—  
Woe is me!!—Well done, laddie—oh, pain in the balls!—Oh God, so fast!—  
you make me laugh—help—pause for breath, will you—go on, go on—that's a  
little better—still not done?—oh you frightful swine!—how charming!—dear  
one!—little Ass!—ha, ha, ha—take a breath!—But pray do play at least one  
note, you prick!—Aha! Bravo, bravo, hooray!—You're going to torture me for  
the fourth time, and thank God it's the last—Oh finish now, oh please!—Oh  
Damn it!—also bravura?—Bravo!—oh, a bleating sheep—you're finally  
done?—Oh Thank heavens!—Enough, enough!

Well the music really doesn't sound like any of that at all, but it's delightful nevertheless.

6

Horn Concerto No. 1 in D, K. 412 (Rondo)

Part of Mozart's Horn Concerto No. 1 in D.

7 In the year after their return from Salzburg, Mozart was astonishingly productive, and almost incredibly active as a performer. During Lent alone he gave more than seventeen concerts, many by subscription and attended by the cream of Austro-Hungarian society, and ambassadors from all over Europe. Vienna's publishers vied with each other to bring out his music, pupils flocked to him, and the money was fairly rolling in. In September the Mozarts moved to an expensive apartment in one of Vienna's most fashionable districts, their second son, Carl Thomas, was born – and in December, Mozart joined the Freemasons, a move which was to have lasting significance in the years ahead. But while Mozart's circle of friends was ever widening, and his social life expanding, his father, back in Salzburg, was increasingly isolated. In August, at the age of thirty-three, Nannerl had married (a widower who already had five children from his first marriage) and had moved to a town some six hours' travelling distance away. When Leopold visited Vienna in February, to see his son and meet his second grandson, he was travelling unaccompanied for the first time in decades. It was thus a lonely old man that Mozart, and Constanze, welcomed with open arms on his arrival, and almost at once he was practically swept off his feet trying to keep up with the pace at which they lived. He stayed for three months, during which he had the very great honour of meeting one of Mozart's best and most recent friends, Joseph Haydn, twenty-two years older than Mozart and then widely held to be the world's greatest living composer – this was certainly Mozart's view, but not Haydn's own. For him, as he said to Leopold, whose sense of pride must have been indescribable:

I tell you before God, and as an honest man, that your son is the greatest composer known to me, either personally or by reputation. He has taste, and in addition, the most profound mastery of composition.

Interesting that 'taste' was the first quality mentioned.

Haydn often came to the Mozarts' house to play quartets, with his host, who always preferred to take the viola part, and two other noted composers: Johann Vanhal and the wonderfully named Karl Ditters von Dittersdorf (lucky his first name wasn't

Dieter!). But what had made the deepest impression on Haydn was the set of six string quartets which Mozart had dedicated to him.

8 String Quartet No. 19 in C, K. 465 ('Dissonance') (mvt 1)

Part of the Quartet in C, K. 465: the so-called 'Dissonance' Quartet.

9 'To my dear friend Haydn,' Mozart wrote at the top of his now famous dedication:

To my dear friend Haydn

A father, who had determined on sending his sons out into the great world, felt himself obliged to entrust them into the care and guidance of a man who enjoyed the greatest fame, and who happened also to be his best friend. In similar fashion I send these six sons of mine to *my* most renowned and highly valued friend. They are the result of a long and laborious toil; but many friends have encouraged me to believe that this toil will be in some degree rewarded, and that these children may one day be a source of consolation to me. But from this moment I transfer to you all rights over them. I entreat you, however, to look with indulgence on those defects which may have escaped the too-partial eye of a father, and in spite of these to continue in your generous friendship towards one who so highly appreciates it.

One of the things that's made that dedication famous is Mozart's reference to 'laborious toil' – because the general impression was, and is, that Mozart never had to labour over anything; that compositions simply flowed from his miraculous brain as though he were simply a medium, a vessel, a kind of conduit pipe straight from God (unlike Beethoven, who seemed to wrestle and struggle over almost everything). The more likely truth is that Mozart had not only a phenomenal memory but an extraordinarily organised mind and that he did virtually all of his composing in his head. Writing it out was no more than printing out a document from a computer. The work had already been done. In fact Constanze, many years after his death, recalled how he used to ask her to come in and

chat to him while he was writing out his compositions. Her sister, too, has left an interesting account:

He was always good-natured, but even at his most cheerful he was very thoughtful and reflective, looking you straight in the eye, considering his answer to any question you might ask him, yet he always seemed somehow to be working away, deep in thought, at something quite different. And except when he was in conversation, he rarely stood still. Even washing his hands in the morning, he would walk up and down, tapping one foot against the other, with a very concentrated expression.

The sheer number of great works Mozart produced in the next few years is astonishing enough in itself. But when you think that this was in addition to his very busy life as a teacher and performer, as a husband and father – plus a very active social life – it does indeed seem miraculous. But the character of his music was changing. Much of it was increasingly difficult to play, thereby discouraging the amateur; there was a darkening and intensification of its emotional character; and a prophetic, new daring in its harmonies. Not in all his works, by any means. But the piano concertos, for instance, which had been the staples of his so-called ‘academies’, confronted his hitherto loyal and enthusiastic audiences with a depth of seriousness and an inner turbulence for which they were unprepared and which they found unsettling. The great D minor Concerto, for instance, can safely be described as the first ‘tragic’ concerto ever written – and the Viennese weren’t at all sure they liked this turn of events. They didn’t come to concerts to get all shook up.

[10] Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor, K. 466 (last mvt)

Part of the Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor.

[11] Very different from that, and a huge hit almost from the start, was Mozart’s next opera – *The Marriage of Figaro* – which has been the most consistently popular of all his operas, with the sole possible exception of *Don Giovanni*. And the irony is that it was the most politically explosive thing, at least potentially, that he ever wrote. The play by

Beaumarchais on which it's based was a political satire so dangerous that it had been widely banned, and many of Mozart's supporters thought he was taking a huge risk in tackling it. Fortunately, he had the perfect librettist in the Italian poet Lorenzo da Ponte, who adapted it with extraordinary cleverness, and Mozart's music was quite simply irresistible. It also carried his reputation far beyond Vienna, as Mozart discovered for himself on an all-expenses-paid trip to Prague:

At six o'clock I drove to the so-called Bretfeld ball, where the cream of the beauties of Prague are known to gather. I looked on, with the greatest pleasure, while all these people flew about in unfettered enjoyment to the music of my *Figaro*. For here they talk about nothing but *Figaro*. Nothing is played, sung or whistled but *Figaro*. No opera is drawing like *Figaro*. Nothing, nothing but *Figaro*. I must say, this is certainly a tremendous honour for me!

[12] 'Se vuol ballare' from 'The Marriage of Figaro', K. 492

The cavatina 'Se vuol ballare' from Act I of *The Marriage of Figaro*.

[13] Better still than the success of *Figaro* was the fact that when Mozart left Prague, he had a commission for another opera, *Don Giovanni*, in his pocket. Prague had taken him to its heart in a way that no other city, even Vienna, had ever quite done.

Less happy news, though, followed his return to Vienna. Leopold, now long back in Salzburg, had fallen seriously, probably mortally ill. Whatever complicated emotions Mozart may have felt at this turn of events, he wrote a letter to his father which has become perhaps the most famous of his hundreds of letters for its almost priestly simplicity and faith. In fact, though it probably does represent his own beliefs, it's a paraphrase of masonic writings and the thoughts of the philosopher Moses Mendelssohn:

Since death, when we come to contemplate it closely, is the true goal of our earthly life, I have achieved such a close relationship with this truest friend of all humanity that his image, once terrifying to me, has become soothing and

consoling! And I thank God for showing me that death is the *key* to the door of true happiness. I never go to bed at night without reflecting that – young as I am – I may not live to see another day. Yet no-one who knows me could describe me as morbid or melancholy. For this blessing I thank our Creator every day, and profoundly wish that everyone could feel the same.

And that was the last contact between father and son. A month or so later, Leopold was dead. How Mozart took it, we don't know, apart from a rather cold and businesslike letter to his sister. But when his pet starling died a few days later, he gave it a fully fledged funeral and burial in his back garden.

Most of the next year was taken up with the composition of *Don Giovanni*, again to a libretto by da Ponte. But clouds were beginning to gather. Attendance at Mozart's 'academies' dropped to the point where he had to abandon them, *Don Giovanni* had a somewhat troubled birth (mostly because it proved unexpectedly difficult to sing and to stage), and it scored only a moderate success in Vienna. Today it's regarded by many people as the greatest opera ever written.

It's some measure of their diminishing income that the Mozarts were now forced to move, for at least part of the year, to the outskirts of Vienna, where the living was cheaper. On the plus side, Mozart was finally granted an official appointment – as Court Chamber Musician, whose job required little more than the writing of the dances for the annual court balls at the Emperor's palace. But for various reasons, some of them beyond Mozart's control, the family fell rapidly into debt. The political situation worsened, Austria was drawn into the war between Russia and the Ottoman Empire, much of the male aristocracy left Vienna for the front, and imperial subsidies for the arts fell by the wayside. Theatres were closed, opera companies were disbanded, and, through a combination of military action and disease, 170,000 soldiers were immobilised, and more than 33,000 died, all within the space of a year. In 1788, rioting broke out on the streets of Vienna, partly triggered by the shortage of bread, but with strong political undertones as well. These events, combined with his chronic tendency to over-spending, brought Mozart with frightening speed from high-society celebrity to the status of genteel beggary. Nor was his situation improved by the death of a daughter and the unexpected and serious illness of his wife. Of their four children, only one was still living. Mozart's

pathetic, begging letters to a wealthy fellow-Mason, Michael Puchberg, lose none of their searing poignancy even after many readings:

Great God! I would not wish my present circumstances on my worst enemy. And if you, my most valued friend and brother, forsake me now, then we are truly lost, both my unfortunate and blameless self and my poor sick wife and child. I would never presume to write you if I weren't certain that you understand my innocence in the terrible plight that has befallen us. And my God! Here I am coming to you not with thanks alone but with fresh pleas for your help! Instead of repaying what I already owe you, I come begging you for yet more money! If you are my friend, and truly know me, you must recognise the anguish this causes me. But I must mention that in spite of my so terrible condition I elected to give subscription concerts at home so that I might at least meet my present expenses, for I was utterly convinced of your friendly assistance. But even this has failed. Unfortunately Fate is so much against me, though only in Vienna, that even when I want to, I can make no money.

What a curious phrase, 'even when I want to' – as though he often didn't. Puchberg responded to the plea, but only a little time later Mozart's spirits sank even lower:

I have been living in such unutterable misery, that not only have I been unable to go out, for sheer grief, but could not even write. My poor dear wife is quite extraordinarily resigned, awaiting recovery or death with a truly philosophic calm. But *I* cannot hold back my tears.

Yet, astonishingly enough, it was during this period – during this very summer, no less – that he wrote two superb piano trios, one of his best-known sonatas, most of his last piano concerto, and (among still other things) his last three symphonies, the crowning glories of a series which, along with Haydn's, had transformed the symphony as a medium from a lightweight diversion to the highest pinnacle of musical art, dealing in the whole gamut of human emotion – and all this in little more than a decade.

The slow movement of the Symphony No. 40 in G minor: a deeply troubled work of almost unimaginable perfection, regarded by many people as Mozart's greatest symphony, its closest rival perhaps being its immediate successor, the so-called 'Jupiter' Symphony.

[15] With Viennese commissions thin on the ground, Mozart decided to revive his long-abandoned career as a travelling virtuoso, in the hope that as well as bringing in much-needed money it might lead to further commissions. He was only partially successful. The reports in his letters to Constanze were depressingly consistent:

My concerts have succeeded brilliantly in reaping the greatest honour and praise, but have failed utterly where money is concerned.

And so it went. Well, just *where* it went is still something of a puzzle. Certainly Mozart made some money, and just as certainly he didn't use it to pay off his debts. He did pick up one very valuable commission, from the King of Prussia for a group of string quartets, but it was hardly enough to turn the tide, even though it resulted in three masterpieces. Back in Vienna, however, a revival of *The Marriage of Figaro* led to a new operatic commission. The result, *Così fan tutte*, was yet another masterwork, though the supposed immorality of the plot effectively deafened many confirmed Mozartians to the transcendent quality of the music. And this went on long after Mozart's death, affecting even Wagner, who knew a thing or two about immorality himself:

Oh how doubly dear and above all honour is Mozart to me, that it was not possible for him to invent music for *Così* like that of *Figaro*! How shamefully that would have desecrated Music!

One of the most touching and pathetic features of this difficult time is the character of Mozart's letters to his wife, which convey a combination of love, determined optimism, and deep discouragement:

Oh my dearest little wife, I positively ache for news of you. I am thoroughly resolved to earn as much money as possible here and then come back to you with a joy that lies beyond description. And what a marvellous life we shall then lead! I shall continue to strive with such unceasing industry that, come what may, we shall never be condemned again to suffer the desperate straits which afflict us at present. Farewell, then, my love, for now. Give my greetings to the few friends who wish me well. Take care of your health, which is more precious to me than you can ever know, and be ever my Constanze as I shall ever be your MOZART.

And again, later:

A struggle is going on in my heart between my yearning for you and my desire to bring home a lot of money. I've often thought of travelling still further afield, but whenever I do, I'm assailed by thoughts of how bitterly I should regret it if we were to be separated for such an uncertain prospect (and maybe to no purpose whatever). It feels to me already as though I'd left you years ago. Oh my love, if only you were with me I might decide more easily, but I love you too much to bear long periods without you.

Only love me half as much as I love you, and I shall be content. Ever your  
MOZART

PS The page above has been watered by my tears. But, come! I must cheer up—catch!—a swarm of kisses are flying about! Oh, the very devil!—Here is a whole crowd of them! But Ha! Ha-Ha!... I've just caught three!—and (m-m-m), they're delicious!

In spite of the downturn in their fortunes, Mozart returned to Constanze and Vienna full of energy and an almost mischievous, devil-may-care impulse to explore new paths in music, though this hardly seemed a safe proposition. But it paid off brilliantly. Never more so than in *Così fan tutte*, which had its first performance one day before Mozart's thirty-fourth birthday.

[16]

Così fan tutte, K. 588 (Act II, finale)

The closing moments of *Così fan tutte*.

[17]

*Così* was very much a connoisseur's opera, not least in its emphasis on ensembles rather than dazzling solo arias. So the extent of its success was surprising, even to Mozart. It's interesting that even at this low point of his professional life he didn't take the easy route and write mainly 'popular' style works for mass consumption. Whatever his worldly problems, his genius was at its height and he felt an obligation to follow wherever it led him. Even though he was reduced to accepting commissions for freak instruments like mechanical organs and the weird, other worldly 'glass harmonica', he wrote masterpieces for them out of all proportion to their limited (well, to their virtually non-existent) capacity to do them justice.

[18]

Adagio in C for Glass Harmonica, K. 356

The weird sound of the glass harmonica, an instrument more or less invented by Benjamin Franklin.

[19]

With the death of one Emperor and the accession of another in 1790, Mozart's hopes first rose and then plummeted. An important position once again eluded him, and his health began to deteriorate. In the late summer he began to suffer from headaches and generalised pain, making it difficult for him to sleep, and on Constanze's next visit to Baden to take the waters for her own continuing illness, Mozart went with her. In the autumn he undertook another tour, which proved to be as fruitless as the last one, and it's notable that on his way back to Vienna he passed up an opportunity to visit his sister when he passed near her home. Far more noteworthy, though, and more unsettling, is what he passed up when he got back to Vienna. The manager of the King's Theatre in London invited him to come to England for six months and write two operas for a fee of £300 – a colossal sum in those days. And for reasons which nobody fully understands, Mozart turned him down. Turned down the offer of a lifetime. In London he would have reaped honour, fame, and money in equal measure. True, he may have worried about the fact that by that time Haydn would also be there – consolidating his reputation as the

greatest living composer. And there was the problem of Constanze's health, of course. But Mozart makes no mention of this in his letters and the true reason remains a mystery. On the eve of Haydn's departure for London he had dinner with Mozart, who was uncharacteristically emotional and obsessed by the conviction that he would never see Haydn again. Whether Constanze knew anything about all this is another of the things we don't know. It seems unlikely that Mozart concealed it from her, but still more unlikely that *she* would have suppressed it throughout the fifty-two years of life that still remained to her.

Anyway, Haydn was off, and Mozart was soon occupied with what was to be the crowning glory of the new year, his opera *The Magic Flute* – not this time a royal or even an aristocratic commission, but an out-and-out theatrical entertainment aimed very much at the general music-loving public and not at the connoisseur. But this was no case of Mozart 'dumbing down', as the phrase has it. Yes, it achieved new heights of simplicity, but it's the ultimate simplicity of genius. And the work, which is actually a rather strange theatrical hotch-potch in some ways, contains some of the greatest and some of the most dazzlingly virtuosic music he ever wrote.

Hardly had he finished *The Magic Flute* than Mozart set to work on another, very different masterpiece: the beautiful, autumnal Clarinet Concerto in A, which is probably the greatest work ever written for the instrument.

The last great masterwork of 1791 was the Requiem, which, ironically, he didn't live to complete. It was anonymously commissioned by a nobleman, one Count Walsegg, who made a habit of commissioning works from distinguished composers, buying exclusive rights, and then copying them out himself and passing them off as his own. In this case he wanted to commemorate the death of his young wife. But, during the course of its composition, Mozart fell seriously ill and became convinced that he was writing the Requiem for himself. He also developed the paranoid fantasy that he had been poisoned – but, despite a host of theories, books, theatrical pieces, television programmes, and movies, there isn't a shred of evidence to support the claim. Well, whatever the cause, it became clear that Mozart might well not live to complete the Requiem, and he began giving detailed instructions to his pupil Süssmayr as to how it should be finished.

His days were indeed numbered, and the account of his last hours is best left to his sister-in-law, Constanze's youngest sister, Sophie, who was with him:

I had just lit the lamp in our kitchen and made some coffee for my mother. I stared into the brightly burning flame and thought to myself, 'I wonder how dear Mozart is'. And at that very moment, the flame went out, as completely as if it had never been lit. But there was no hint of a draught. All of a sudden the most terrible feeling overcame me. I ran as fast as I could to their house. My sister, who was almost despairing, admitted me, saying: 'Oh dear Sophie, thank God you have come. He was so bad last night that I thought surely he was lost. Do stay with me today, for if he has another attack he will die tonight, I know it. Now go and see him.' Trying to contain myself, I went to his bedside. He looked up at me, saying 'Dear Sophie, how happy I am that you've come. Stay here tonight and see me die.' I tried to control my feelings and persuade him otherwise. But he only replied: 'The taste of death is now on my tongue, and I can already smell the grave. If you don't stay, who will support my dearest Constanze when I am departed?' 'Yes, yes, dear Mozart,' I assured him. Oh God, how I felt! My poor sister beckoned me and entreated me to seek out the priests at St Peter's and implore one of them to come with all speed. I did so, but to begin with they declined and I had great trouble persuading anyone to go to him. I then ran as fast as I could, back to my distracted sister. Süßmayr was now at Mozart's bedside. The score of the Requiem was spread out on the quilt and Mozart was explaining to him how he ought to finish it, when he was gone. Further, he enjoined his wife to keep his death a secret until she had told Albrechtsberger, who would take charge of the services. After a long search, Dr Closset arrived and ordered cold poultices to be placed on Mozart's burning head, which, however, affected him to such an extent that he fainted, and remained unconscious until he died. His last act was an attempt to express with his mouth the drum passages in the Requiem. I shall never forget that sound. Nor can I describe how his devoted wife in utter misery threw herself on her knees and beseeched the Almighty for His aid. She could not tear herself away from Mozart, no matter how much I begged. If it was possible to aggravate her grief, this was done on the following day, when crowds of people walked past

his lifeless body and wept and wailed for him. And do you know, in all my life  
I never once saw Mozart in a temper, still less, angry.

And so said many – though not the Archbishop of Salzburg.

Two days later, Mozart's body was conveyed, unaccompanied, from St. Stephen's Cathedral, where his funeral was held, to St. Mark's cemetery, some three miles distant, where it was deposited, in a linen sack, in a mass grave whose exact location has never been found. A sad end to a journey without parallel in the history of music. But the circumstances of his burial were quite common at the time, and not, as one generally hears, a shameful indictment of society's neglect. The Emperor Joseph II had disliked the unnecessary expense of traditional funerals, and under his reign 'sack burials', as they were known, became the norm. So did the custom of the unaccompanied hearse. And, it must be remembered, Mozart died with huge debts, of which the greatest – significantly – were to the tailor, the apothecary and the decorator. There's hardly a description of Mozart's appearance that doesn't mention his elegant and fashionable clothing.

There's no evidence that he thought much about these things, but it's doubtful that he'd be surprised by the fact that his music has long since taken its place at the very centre of western musical culture – and more than that, in the hearts of music lovers all over the world. It might be appropriate, chronologically, to end our story with the Requiem, but, while Mozart reflected every aspect of human experience, he was also in many ways the most Utopian composer who ever lived. Having embraced reality, his music almost always ends with an affirmation of harmony in every sense. Tensions are released, differences have been resolved. No matter what comes before, he leaves us in an ideal world, where beauty reigns, grace presides. And we feel ourselves to be – the word has been used more in connection with Mozart than with any other composer – in Heaven.