



WHAT DID MOZART LOOK LIKE?

Mozart was short, probably not much over five feet tall, with fine, blond hair (about which he is said to have been vain), large, protruding eyes, a missing earlobe on one side, a face somewhat pockmarked from a childhood bout with smallpox, and a “Salzburg” nose inherited from his mother.

In the pictures above, you see that only one of them does justice to this most dominant feature. In the unfinished portrait (at right) by Mozart’s brother-in-law, Joseph Lange, which Constanze Mozart regarded as the best likeness of her husband ever made (pictured in more complete form on the cover of this book), he isn’t sad, just looking downward toward the piano that never got painted into the picture.

WAS HE CALLED AMADEUS?

The composer’s baptismal name was Joannes Chrysostomus Wolfgangus Theophilus Mozart: Joannes Chrysostomus, because January 27 was the feast day of St. John Chrysostom; Wolfgangus, to honor his maternal grandfather; and Theophilus, for his godfather. He seems not to have used the saint’s name; occasionally he used Gottlieb, German for Theophilus (“beloved of God”). He almost never called himself Amadeus (Latin for Gottlieb), though it makes an evocative film title.

Which of these possibilities did Mozart prefer? Not Wolfgang

Amadeus Mozart, which is what you see everywhere today. Most of the time, he signed his name Mozart, W. A. Mozart, or Wolfgang Amadè (or Amadé) Mozart:


 A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Wolfgang Amadei Mozart". The signature is written in dark ink on a light background. The word "Mozart" is written in a larger, more prominent hand than "Wolfgang Amadei". There is a small flourish or mark above the final 't' in "Mozart".

MOZART AS CRAFTSMAN

In the eighteenth century, music was viewed as a craft. The Romantic notion of “art” and of the composer as an “artist” awaiting moments of inspiration was just beginning to take hold, but Mozart seemed unaware of it. In fact, he did not regard himself as a genius, but as a master of his craft. A craftsman, whether musician, mason, or carpenter, was expected to command every aspect of that craft. Although few could live up to this ideal, Mozart achieved it through a lifetime of enormous effort to develop his colossal natural gifts. He generally arose around five or six a.m. and wrote for hours every day, composing in every genre: sonatas, symphonies, concertos, operas, church music, small-ensemble music (duets, trios, quartets, etc.), along with shorter vocal works such as canons (some of them with obscene texts), songs, and lots of dance music—his wife, Constanze, said his real gift was as a dancer.

MOZART’S FAMILY

LEOPOLD AND MARIA ANNA MOZART

Leopold Mozart is often depicted as a rigid, domineering man whose attempted railroading of his son’s career left the composer with emotional scars from which he never recovered. Such a portrayal is, of course, a caricature, though you see it quite often.

Born in Augsburg, Germany, in 1719, Leopold was a very bright, ambitious young man with multiple talents in acting, languages, music, and philosophy. Leaving Augsburg to enroll in the University of Salzburg, he evidently intended to become a lawyer or priest. At first, he was a superior student. Two years later, however, he was nearly expelled for poor attendance and neglect of his work—this from a man later known for ramrod self-discipline.

Perhaps the reason for Leopold’s declining interest in academia was that he really wanted to do music. Whether this was the cause or not, he did quit the university before he was thrown out and very quickly found employment as a violinist with a nobleman in Salzburg. Soon he moved upward, garnering a position at the court of the Prince-Archbishop of Salzburg. It must have

already been obvious at the outset, however, that this was no ordinary court musician. His years spent in a university, something quite unheard of for musicians of that day, set him apart. Still, the fact was that musicians were servants. In a nobleman's house they were on a par with the kitchen staff. This low status irked Leopold throughout his life, though he learned to sublimate his anger; it would irk his son to the point of open rebellion.

The elder Mozart was an intellectual not only by education but also by natural bent. He spoke several languages, read widely, owned a microscope and a telescope, kept up with political and scientific ideas—in short, was a man of the Enlightenment. He passed on his voracious appetite for learning to his children, for whom he was the sole teacher.

In 1747 Leopold married Maria Anna Pertl, about whom we know very little—mostly because the women in Great Composers' lives haven't been seen as worthy of study. What has emerged about her so far is that she was born in Salzburg in 1720, where her father, educated as a lawyer at Salzburg's Benedictine University, also sang bass at the Benedictine Abbey of St. Peter's and taught singing at its school. This striking fact tells us that Wolfgang Mozart's musical ancestry may have come more from his maternal than his paternal side—Leopold's father and brothers were bookbinders.²⁵ Maria Anna's father earned most of his income, however, not from music but from administering several small areas near the city, until he was stricken with a disabling illness in 1715. A person unable to work received no pay, which meant that his debts mounted so high that eventually the family's belongings were confiscated. When he died nine years later, his wife and their only surviving child, Maria Anna, subsisted on charity and whatever they could earn by sewing and embroidering (the portrait of Maria Anna, on the next page, shows her holding a piece of lace). But survive they did, which says something about their fortitude and resilience. Then Maria Anna met Leopold Mozart in 1746, and they were married the following year.

Leopold and Maria Anna—said to be “the handsomest couple in Salzburg”²⁶—enjoyed a happy marriage, raising two brilliantly gifted children and sharing an at times salacious sense of humor, which their children picked up as well. (Salzburgers were renowned for their jokes about bodily orifices and functions; you find plenty of these jokes in the family correspondence, from all four Mozarts). Leopold and Maria Anna had seven children, of whom only two lived to adulthood: Maria Anna (nicknamed “Nannerl”), born in 1751, and Wolfgang, born in 1756.

25. Jane Glover, *Mozart's Women* (London: Macmillan, 2005), 11.

26. Deutsch, *Mozart, A Documentary Biography*, 462.