Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
A Man Through Whom God Sings

by Donald E. Demaray

God reveals himself through the music of Mozart perhaps more than any other composer in the classic tradition. The freshness, playfulness, and sense of having discovered the center of things, lay hold upon human souls at great depth, and set up vibrations that seem to articulate in harmony with the universe. The delicate patterns remind one of the finest Belgian lace; the minuet motifs picture graceful 18th century dancing in royal courts; the transparency of Mozart's work calls to mind the magnificent cut glass creations of his century. In a remarkable way this prolific music maker gathers up the arts of his time and brings the arts of all time to an apex that pierces the sky and lets us see a little bit into heaven.

Early Days

Precocity in both composition and performance cannot find explanation apart from God. Providence opened the door to divinity in the music of Mozart, and the door came ajar at a surprisingly early age. From age four until his death at 35 he composed virtually nonstop on a daily basis. At age three his gifts surfaced and his father began to teach him music. Little minuets came from his creative mind right away. At age six he and his sister, Maria Anna, performed in Munich. He played a few months later for a fascinated court in Vienna, and taught himself violin and organ. At age seven he appeared in Paris where his first works came to publication. In the next year London royalty delighted to his sight-reading, spontaneity, creativity, and general all-round musicianship. Before age 10 he published his first symphony, did six sonatas for violin and harps, and made friends with important people in the musical world. In 1767 he composed an oratorio and the next year his first opera was completed.

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Life Fully Lived

Born in Salzburg, January 27, 1756, he died in Vienna, December 5, 1791. Those intervening years brought to the world some of the most substantive music of all time. No one doubts his genius. Goethe illustrated genius by reference to Mozart who struck him as "the human incarnation of a divine force of creation." The sheer quality of the music witnesses to Goethe's description, but what astounds one is the vast quantity of excellent material. Rarely do strength and range come to the marriage altar and stay married thirty years!

The Köchel listing of the works (updated by Alfred Einstein) numbers 626. He wrote operas, masses, oratorios, cantatas, symphonies, divertimentos, concertos (for piano, string instruments and wind instruments), string quartets and quintets, piano sonatas, piano fantasias, piano and violin sonatas, piano trios and quartets, wind and string quartets and quintets, organ works, and more.

More than one authority believes Wolfgang wrote music as ordinary people write letters. He found both his work and his recreation in composing: "Composing is my one joy and passion." Poor health, poverty, and difficult experiences seemed to have no power to rob him of the joy of creating. Life, fun and grace were never absent from his scores. The listener's taste buds come to stimulation and this creates an appetite for more and more (Mozart acquired his taste from the Italians); the substance of his music stirs the cognitive powers of his listener (Mozart gleaned knowledge from the Germans); the aesthetic nature finds fulfillment in the elegance of his music (Mozart learned beauty and dignity from the French). Haydn once said to Wolfgang's father, Leopold, "I tell you before God, and as an honest man, that your son is the greatest composer I know, either personally or by name; he has taste, and apart from that the greatest science in composition."

Karl Barth

The great theologian expresses his delight in life and beauty in his celebrated essay, "Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart." So taken was he with Mozart that he could say, "I have already been asked whether or not on the basis of my theological thinking I have discovered any other masters in the field of music. I must confess: there is he and nobody else." Barth listened to Mozart on recording first thing each morning, then read the press, and only next moved to work on his *Dogmatik*. The Basel theologian admits that when he gets to heaven

he wishes first to inquire about Mozart, and only then about Augustine, Thomas, Luther, Calvin and Schleiermacher.

Karl Barth helps us by his insightful statement that Mozart had no message, no autobiographical statement, no communication of musical rules. "Mozart does not wish to say anything at all; he just sings and sounds." He does not "intrude a thing upon the hearer, he does not ask decisions or comments of him, he just lets him alone." This quality allows us to see the nature of pure art. When a would-be artist attempts to "say" something, in that moment he robs his work of art. The best praise to God always comes transparent and uncalculated. The very humility, the sense of dependence unwittingly communicated, the total lack of manipulation, all combine to make art. Tolkien's works are an example, for according to his own admission he had no theological statement to project, yet he does just that. Innocence and witness turn out to be Siamese twins. And another grand principle: freedom, freedom in its purest state, comes to those who just pass on what they hear from God, with no attempt to impress, only to express. Mozart's unhampered expression reveals God.

God in Puzzles

Three great puzzles loom into view sooner or later. The first, How could Mozart produce such pure, free music and still remain a child? In a sense, Wolfgang never grew up. Some authorities believe he never matured because of his contradictory life, his impractical ways, his lack of order, his inability to conduct himself in much of a businesslike manner. His mind filled with liberated notations, playful and joyous. His work strikes the human ear with the glad news of relief and lightheartedness, and brings an enormous emancipation, the kind one must feel upon release from kidnappers. Only a child possesses that capacity to free the human spirit. "If only we could allow the child in us to continue to roam!" cries Bill Moyers in his *Smithsonian* article on creativity.

We all have a little child in us; psychiatrists tell us if we develop the adult to the dwarfing of the child, we imprison our native instincts and creative urges. But rare indeed is the one who has allowed the child as much freedom as Mozart. While at a game of billiards he would compose in his head. While sitting at the piano he would improvise with marvelous brilliance. His mind focused intently, absorbed. Life could go rushing by, life could be filled with

contradictory behavior, but the music must go on. All human beings contradict themselves, some more than others. Wise human beings learn to live with contradictions in themselves and in others.

The second puzzle relates to work and play. For Mozart, work was play and play was work. Talk about industry! No man ever invested himself more assiduously; no one ever spent himself more conscientiously. Yet Mozart hardly thought of himself as a workaholic. If he bothered to examine his motives, his emotions, his mind's workings — he was, after all, a human being — these kinds of self-analyses evidently stayed at a minimal, not optimal, level. The result: unfettered expression.

Yes, a lovely lightness characterizes Mozart's music, but not the unsubstantiality which characterizes the ease of modern mood music. Yes, a marvelous unburdening quality enters the music of the Viennese master, but not release from responsibility. "That which is heavy floats and what is light weighs immensely," said an insightful person. Says Karl Barth, commenting on that statement, "Certainly, Mozart's singular quality is connected with this inconsistency — or rather with the fact that this does not constitute an inconsistency for him."

The third puzzle: his enigmatic religious posture. How can a man, baptized in the Roman Catholic faith, one day turn Freemason? How can one who writes score upon score for the Church behave as he did? Does the answer find its roots in his immaturity, his unordered childishness, his preoccupation with music over virtually everything else? We can hardly excuse the man on the one hand, and on the other we dare not react in superficial judgment, for only God knows the depths and genuine motivations of any human heart. Albert Einstein would sign politically unorthodox documents upon request from interested parties, apparently with little awareness of what he did. He had his mind on "more important" things.

Could the answer lie in the sovereignty of God? God can work even through enigmatic characters. Some such figures loom on the horizon more vividly than others. We leave the matter in God's hands.

Who Then Was Mozart?

A composer open by grace to divinity. He heard the music of the spheres, and the compelling forces within him expressed themselves in flutes, organs, pianos, orchestras, quartets and quintets. He seems

not even to have confronted temptations to limit himself to conventional patterns, either of score writing or professional discipline. If he had forced himself into some kind of programming, his creative gift would have foundered like a ship hopelessly moored in a sand bar. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart — liberated, playful, a fun-loving soul — did not capture God. God captured him with the result that we know a little more about the character of eternity.

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