

Retracing the Footsteps of a Genius



A Vienna City Walk by Tita Büttner

Follow in the Viennese footsteps of W. A. Mozart, and get a feel for of this exceptional musical genius.

CHRONOLOGY: The numbers in brackets correspond to the order in which the locations discussed figured in Mozart's life. They are an aid to following his biography chronologically.

Start off in the heart of Vienna: on St. Stephen's Square (Stephansplatz station, U1 and U3). Go to the corner with the Aida café and pastry shop, where you'll find yourself at the beginning of Singerstrasse.

The House of the Teutonic Order [2]

(Singerstrasse 7, 1st district, www.deutscher-orden.at)

Enter through the arched gateway. In the front courtyard, next to the door to the small church, is a commemorative plaque indicating that Mozart stayed here from 18 March to 2 May 1781. It was only a few weeks, but this was to be a crucial period for Mozart's future.

The composer was already 25 years old, lived in Salzburg, and was in the service of that city-state's ruler, Prince-Archbishop Count Colloredo. During a Vienna visit by the Archbishop and his retinue, differences between Mozart and Colloredo came to a head, and Mozart resigned his post. Colloredo's chamberlain Count Arco attempted to mediate — efforts which Mozart described in a letter to his father dated 9 June 1781: "What business is it of his if I want my discharge? He should either give his reasons, or let the thing take its course, but chuck louts and lackeys at me, and have thrown out with a kick up the arse."

The said "kick", which has since become legendary, turned out to actually be a kick upstairs — from a secure but subordinate position to the uncertain future of a freelance artist. In that day and age, before the advent of royalty payments and social security systems, this was a courageous step indeed. But "Wolferl", the erstwhile child prodigy, had become a confident young man. Still diminutive (around 1.50 m) and often possessed of childish audacity, he was nonetheless fully conscious of his significance as a towering musical figure. He also attached great importance to a well-groomed appearance and exclusive, expensive clothing.

In the courtyard of the Deutschordenshaus (House of the Teutonic Order), to the right of the gateway by which you entered, you will see a window with an old, wrought-iron grating. Behind it

lies a small, richly decorated 18th century theatre where concerts by the Vienna Mozart Ensemble (in historical costumes) are held. It is also possible to visit the Treasury of the Teutonic Order, where magnificent chalices, Middle-Eastern weapons, priceless tableware and glasses are on display. The second courtyard (where the well-known tea house Haas & Haas serves guests outdoors in summer) opens out once again on to Singerstrasse.

Take a few steps to the left and you will find yourself in the narrow Blutgasse. Don't miss the picturesque courtyards at Number 9 and 3. Time seems to stand still here. At the end of Blutgasse you find the

Mozarthaus Vienna [7]

(Domgasse 5, 1st distr., www.mozarthausvienna.at, daily 10 a.m.-7 p.m.)

When Mozart moved into this luxurious apartment on 29 September 1784, he had already been in Vienna for three years, and had been married to his beloved Constanze for two. He had worked his way up from an unemployed artist to a respected and prosperous pianist, composer and music teacher. He is thought to have spent the happiest and most productive part of his Viennese period in this building — certainly, he never lived anywhere else for nearly as long.

Eight important piano concerti, chamber music works, a horn concerto, the “Masonic Music”, the Goethe song “Das Veilchen”, the cantata “Davide penitente”, the comedy “The Impresario” and the famous opera “The Marriage of Figaro” were composed here. Just how prolific this period was becomes clear when one considers that Mozart also gave numerous concerts, threw wild parties and hosted illustrious colleagues. Among his visitors was his friend and mentor Joseph Haydn, who told Mozart's father Leopold in February 1785, “I say to you before God, and as an honest man, that your son is the greatest composer known to me either in person or by reputation: he has taste, and what's more, the most profound knowledge of composition.”

Johann Nepomuk Hummel lived in the apartment for several months, as Mozart's pupil, an experience which was to have a lasting impact on his career as a musician and composer. The 17-year-old Ludwig van Beethoven, too, travelled from Bonn to take lessons from his great role model (before this could happen, however, Beethoven's mother fell ill and he had to hurry back home).

The original memorial site, Mozart's apartment of 180 square metres on the first floor, is part of the Mozart center on six storeys. The 1,000 square metres of exhibition space will be sufficient for visitors to immerse themselves in the world of Mozart, open themselves to his towering genius and creativity, and get to know the family, friends and foes who surrounded him in late Baroque Vienna.

After leaving the Mozarthaus, turn right and pass through the open gateway of Domgasse 2. You are now on St. Stephen's Square, facing the rear side of St. Stephen's Cathedral. On the right-hand, outer corner of the Cathedral is a little chapel with a wrought-iron gate. This is the

Kruzifixkapelle [11]

(Stephansplatz, 1st district, outer right-hand side of St. Stephen's Cathedral)

Look through the wrought-iron gate of the chapel. The commemorative plaque on the wall reads: "In this place, the remains of the immortal W. A. MOZART received their final blessing on 6 December 1791. Wiener Schubertbund 1931". From here, Mozart's coffin was taken to the cemetery in a coach (see St. Marx Cemetery).

St. Stephen's Cathedral [5]

(www.stephansdom.at, www.stephanskirche.at)

On 4 August 1782, this magnificent cathedral was the scene of a small, very modest ceremony — the wedding of Wolfgang Amadé and Constanze. Two of their children were to be christened here, too. When Mozart passed away on 5 December 1791, the cathedral witnessed another unspectacular ceremony when the requiem mass was read for the "compositeur" Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart who, only a few months before, had applied for the well-paid position of Kapellmeister here.

Now take a few steps down Kärntner Strasse — from the "Steffl", the hallowed old cathedral, to the modern Steffl department store at No. 19.

Mozart's deathplace [10]

(Rauhensteingasse 8, 1st district, now the Steffl department store; Mon.–Fri. 9:30 a.m. - 7 p.m., Sat. 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m., closed on Sundays)

From 30 September 1790 until his death on 5 December 1791, Mozart and his family occupied a spacious four-room apartment in a building which stood at this location until 1847. On the department store's seventh floor, from where you can enjoy a breathtaking view across the city's rooftops, you will find the "Sky Café" (www.skybox.at). A small memorial and a bust of Mozart dating back to 1849 remind us of this great artist.

This commercial setting is by no means inappropriate, since few musicians have been as successfully and broadly marketed as has Mozart. In fact, Austrian pop star Falco even conquered the US charts with his 1986 hit "Rock me, Amadeus". Milos Forman's film "Amadeus" was the most successful movie of 1984, winning eight Oscars. And the musical "Mozart" played to full houses at

Theater an der Wien, right down to the last performance. The old 5,000 schilling banknote bears the portrait of the composer, as does today's Austrian 1 euro coin.

The famous Mozartkugeln (Mozart Balls — chocolate on the outside, marzipan on the inside), biographies, novels, etc. bear witness to the timeless appeal of the Mozart name. Even the master's music is said to bring additional benefits when used for therapeutic or esoteric purposes. Even plants are said to grow better, and cows give more milk to the sound of Mozart sonatas.

In the year of his death, Mozart was heavily in debt, but very optimistic nonetheless. His operas were playing to resounding success all over Europe, and this brought him fame, commissions and invitations — but not the steady job he longed for. Mozart worked feverishly to complete lucrative commissions as quickly as possible and so pay off his debts, which had piled up despite his substantial earnings. Constanze's spa cures lasting several weeks at a time, the expensive boarding school attended by his seven-year-old son Carl Thomas, the high rent, the journeys, the fine clothes — and allegedly, gambling debts — all had to be paid for.

Pieces including the operas "La Clemenza di Tito" and "The Magic Flute", the motet "Ave verum corpus", concerti for piano (K 595) and clarinet (K 622), dances and songs such as "Komm lieber Mai und mache", and the Requiem were composed here.

Mozart travelled to Prague with Constanze in late August 1791 for the premiere of "La Clemenza di Tito", which only been commissioned on 14 July. Their son Franz Xaver Wolfgang had been born on 26 July. On 30 September the premiere of "The Magic Flute" took place in Vienna. An overjoyed Mozart wrote to his wife (who was once again at a spa), "Dearest, best wife! I have just come from the opera: it was as packed as it's ever been..." On 18 November, Mozart - a member of a local Freemasons' lodge - conducted his last completed work, the "Little Masonic Cantata" (K 623).

But an entirely different, special commission also awaited its composition by Mozart in that fateful year. He was to write a requiem for a mysterious, unknown patron, who had already paid a high advance fee and whose "eerie grey messenger" warned the composer to make haste. Mozart was not completely comfortable with this assignment. Premonitions of his own impending death led him to fear that he might just be composing his own death mass. Today we know that the patron who commissioned the Requiem was Count Walsegg-Stuppach, who had ordered the piece for his deceased spouse Anna and intended to pass it off as his own. In order not to be discovered, he had sent a messenger.

But Mozart was no longer to learn this. His forebodings came true, and the composer fell mortally ill. One of the many legends of Mozart's death talks of a rehearsal of the Requiem that took place at his deathbed: "They were in the first measures of the 'Lacrimosa' when Mozart began weeping

loudly, put the score aside and — eleven hours later, at one o'clock in the morning — passed away.” It was the night between 4 and 5 December 1791. The cause of death was recorded as “severe military fever”, the actual cause has remained uncertain to this day. The Requiem was completed by Mozart’s pupil F. X. Süssmayr. Mozart had made sure ahead of time that he was provided with the necessary instructions and sketches.

Walk on the Kärntner Strasse and take the first turn left. On Himmelpfortgasse 6 you find the

Café Frauenhuber [9]

Once up to 400 guests had place in the Jahn Concert Hall which was located here. Mozart performed here a few times. On March 4, 1791 he gave his last concert in public here.

Walk back to St. Stephen’s Place, then turn left into the Graben. Mozart must have walked along this street many times as he lived here in three locations. The houses do not exist today, but their stories might be interesting:

Graben 29 [6]

Of the once massive complex owned by the publisher J. F. von Trattner, all that remains today is the name of a street, Trattnerhof. On 23 January 1784 the Mozarts, husband and wife, began a short period of residence in one of the many apartments located in these sprawling buildings. It was here that Mozart began his “catalogue of all my works”, which provided the basis for the “Köchelverzeichnis KV”.

Milchgasse / Petersplatz (commemorative plaque) [3]

Mozart lived here beside St. Peter’s Church, at the site of today’s Milchgasse 1, from May to September 1781, immediately after his spectacular departure from the House of the Teutonic Order. With neither money nor his father’s blessing, he had set off to find a place to live. Here, a certain Frau Weber had cheap rooms to let. She was a widow and the mother of four daughters (cousins of the composer Carl Maria von Weber). Mozart knew the family, since he had been in love with one of the daughters, Aloysia, a few years before. She was by then happily married to Joseph Lange, who later on painted the famous unfinished portrait of Mozart. So Mozart turned his attention to Aloysia’s younger sister, Constanze.

The proceeds from the opera “The Abduction from the Serail”, which saw its premiere on 16 July 1782 at the old Burgtheater, finally made it possible for Mozart to finance a wedding. The marriage was a very happy one. In nine-and-a-half years, Mrs. Mozart gave birth to six children— four of whom, however, died in infancy. She managed ten difficult moves, and since Wolfgang never wanted to be without his “little wife”, she accompanied him on numerous arduous journeys.

Serious illnesses made it necessary for Constanze to take long and expensive cures. It is all the more surprising that she died at age 80, outliving Mozart by 51 years. After the sudden death of her husband, numerous benefactors and the sale of her husband's musical legacy not only enabled her to pay off the heavy debts she had been left with but provided her and her two sons with a financially secure future. She went on to author a Mozart biography with her second husband, Georg Nikolaus von Nissen.

Graben 17 [4]

When word got around on Milchgasse about the romance between Constanze and Amadé, Mozart moved a couple houses down, across the Graben, in order to escape his gossipy neighbours. It was here in the former house at number 17 that he completed the Haffner Symphony and "The Abduction from the Serail".

Walk down Graben until you reach Kohlmarkt, turn left on to Kohlmarkt, and go towards the Hofburg. At the end of Kohlmarkt, you will find the Michaelerkirche.

Michaelerkirche [13]

(Michaelerplatz, 1st district, www.michaelerkirche.at)

The 17-year-old Joseph Haydn played the organ in this church in 1749 (he lived next-door in a small attic room), and it was here that the Requiem was played just a few days after Mozart's death, in a requiem service for the composer, thus confirming Mozart's dark premonitions. In the church, just to the right of the entrance, you will find two dark reliefs bearing the text "On 10 December 1791, the office for the dead was held for Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in this church; during this service, parts of his Requiem received their first public performance." Count Walsegg-Stuppach finally performed the work, as completed by F. X. Süssmayr, in December 1793, with the note "composto del conte Walsegg" (composed by Count Walsegg).

When you exit the Michaelerkirche, you will be standing on Michaelerplatz. To the left of the Michaelertor Gate of the Hofburg, you will find a plaque bearing the words: "Here, until 1888, stood the old Burgtheater, founded by Emperor Josef II in 1776 as a national theatre." This theatre was used not only for spoken drama, but as an opera house and concert hall. It was here that the premieres of Mozart's operas "The Abduction from the Serail", "The Marriage of Figaro" and "Cosi fan tutte" took place.

Now proceed through the Michaelertor and enjoy the walk through the magnificent Hofburg complex. Once arrived at the Ringstrasse, turn left and enter the park to your left through the next gate. You now in the Burggarten, facing the

Mozart memorial

(Burggarten, 1st district)

From spring to autumn, this statue (by Viktor Tilgner, 1896) is surrounded by a small lawn with a treble-clef-shaped flower bed. The steeples of St. Stephen's and the Augustinerkirche, old trees and blooming shrubs provide add to the atmosphere. On the front side of the statue you will find a relief with a scene from "Don Giovanni" (premiered on 29 October 1787 in Prague). Above it are a stone keyboard, masks, instruments and music-making cherubs. The rear side shows "Wolferl", the musical prodigy, at the piano, with sister "Nannerl" and father Leopold Mozart by his side.

In fact, the composer could have styled himself "Wolfgang Amadeus, Ritter von Mozart". On 8 July 1770, Pope Clemens XIV had awarded the much-travelled and famed 14-year-old wunderkind the "Order of the Golden Spur". But Mozart never made use of this title, preferring to be called simply Wolfgang Amadé or Amadeo.

Cross Opernring, and continue along the Ring to Operngasse. Walking away from the centre of town, you will pass the Secession and arrive at Linke Wienzeile. Walk further out along Linke Wienzeile until you arrive at the

Theater an der Wien

(Linke Wienzeile 6 and Millöckergasse 8, 4th district; www.theater-wien.at)

This theatre was only opened after Mozart's death, in 1801. It was once viewed as the most important Vienna stage for operas, operettas, Singspiele, plays and concerts of all kinds.

The theatre's former main entrance can be found on Millöckergasse 8 (a small side-street just before the theatre). There, Mozart's friend Emanuel Schikaneder created a striking monument to himself, the "Papageno Gate". History remembers him not only as the builder and first director of the Theater an der Wien, but also as a librettist and the first Papageno in Mozart's "Magic Flute".

The Theater an der Wien is rededicated to its original use as an opera house since January 2006, following many years as a theatre for musicals.

If you now cross Linke Wienzeile, you will be standing in the middle of the Naschmarkt (next a flea market open only on Saturdays). Take a little walk among the exotically aromatic, colourful "Standln" (Viennese for stands) and look beyond to catch a glimpse of several fine art nouveau façades. At the Kettenbrückengasse underground station take the U4 towards Heiligenstadt. Get out at the Landstrasse / Wien Mitte station and take the Landstrasser Hauptstrasse exit. From

there, take a 74A bus travelling to St. Marx, get out at the Hofmannsthalgasse station, and continue for a short distance along Leberstrasse until you reach the cemetery gates.

St. Marx Cemetery [11]

(Leberstrasse 6–8, 3rd district; map and the list of those buried in the cemetery to the left of the entrance)

This atmospheric, Biedermeier-style cemetery is unique. Burials took place here only between 1784 and 1874. The cemetery became famous for Mozart's legendary "pauper's burial". In fact, Mozart was simply interred according to the Josephine Burial Regulations (decreed by Emperor Joseph II), in a so-called "shaft grave", together with four to five other deceased, without a cross to mark the grave or a graveside service.

The first monument was erected 68 years after Mozart's death, in 1859, where it was thought that Mozart had been buried. In 1891 this monument was moved to the Graves of Honour in the Central Cemetery (Group 32 A, No. 55). The touching monument you see here in St. Marx was made by a cemetery attendant who — in order to fill the empty space — made it from the remains of other monuments. Might it actually stand over Mozart's grave? No one knows. But one thing is sure, without a doubt: the most magnificent monument to the composer was created by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart himself, in the form of his immortal music.