

# STRING FAMILY PLAYERS

## *Mozart: The Child Prodigy*

**Art Form:** Music

**Style:** Classical

**Culture:** European

### MEET THE ARTIST:

**The String Family Players** is a dynamic quintet of professional musicians who play music written for the stringed instruments of the orchestra. A string quintet consists of two violins, viola, cello and double bass. The group has performed for hundreds of schools under the auspices of the Music Center, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, Rhodes Foundation, Long Beach Symphony, Coleman Chamber Music Association and Young Audiences of Los Angeles. Dr. David Young - the leader, narrator and double bass player - has received training from Young Audiences in presenting children's concerts, and has considerable experience and training in the teaching of music. The other members of the group are Nancy Roth (violin), Marisa McCleod (violin), Lynn Grants (viola) and Maurice Grants (cello). Examples of the quintet's other performance themes include All Strings Considered, Music at the Home of King Louis XIV, Let's Dance and Rhythm Routes.

### ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE:

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and his music are the inspiration for this show. Students enter the world of young Mozart and hear the music that came from his genius. Led by narrator David Young, the audience journeys to Salzburg, Austria where Mozart was born in 1756. Costumed in clothes worn by musicians of that period, the group will play some of the minuets he wrote when he was 5 and 6 years old. Audiences will also hear variations of "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," showcasing the improvisational methods used by Mozart to dazzle his friends. A party piece, "Eine Kleine Nachtmusik" (A Little Night Music), expresses Mozart's spirit of fun. Students will also hear a competitive duet between a solo violin and a viola. By the end of the performance, students will begin to understand that Mozart's music isn't limited to a historical time and place, but is universal.



### PREPARING FOR THE EXPERIENCE:

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart had the good fortune to be born into the family of a well-known, respected musician and teacher, Leopold Mozart. From an early age, when musicians would practice together at their home, Wolfgang would hold his ears and cry when someone played out of tune. As a toddler he showed persistent interest in his elder sister's lessons on the clavier, the keyboard instrument of that time. By the age of 5, Mozart had written music for the clavier which he played perfectly. He learned to play the violin by watching others, so his father got him a small violin of his own to play when he was 5 years old.

Wolfgang took to music like a bird takes to flying - it was part of his basic intelligence. Soon, his father decided to show his precocious son's talent to the world, taking him to places such as Italy, France and England. These trips gave young Mozart a chance to perform, and also to absorb and learn more about the popular musical styles of Europe. He had the ability to improvise music of his own invention or improvise upon a specific melody. He was famous for tricks, such as playing the clavier with a cloth over the keyboard so he couldn't see the keys. Endowed with a high-spirited temperament, he was full of good humor and loved practical jokes.

A prolific composer, by the time Mozart was twenty-one he had composed over 300 pieces of music! As an adult his output continued, while he mastered every form of music popular at that time. Mozart died from a

serious kidney disease in 1791 at the age of 35. In spite of his early death, he completed over 600 pieces of music which have been loved and played for over 200 years.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What is it about Mozart's music that is different from, as well as similar to, music of today? (Examples of differences include the lack of the drummer's constant back-beat, the different instruments, the many changes in mood in Mozart's music versus the constant drive and mood of present-day rock music. An example of similarity might be the presence of the pulsing bass notes, played by the double bass, driving the rhythm just as the drummer drives rock songs.)
- What surprised you most about Mozart and his music? (e.g., his ability to write good music when he was 4 and 5 years old.)
- Did you notice any differences between the music of Mozart and his contemporary, Salieri?

## FRAMEWORK FOCUS - HISTORY/SOC. STUDIES:

Take a look at the world as it was during the time of Mozart's life, both in Europe and America. There were no planes, trains or automobiles because these vehicles had not yet been invented. Most travel, even from town to town, was very difficult. There were horses and horse-drawn carriages, but most people walked everywhere. When they couldn't travel by land, they traveled by boat. Electricity had not been discovered, so people depended on candles or lamps with wicks for lighting. The late 1700s, when Mozart lived, was also the time when the Declaration of Independence was signed in America, changing England's relationship with her colonies and inspiring revolutions in America and France.

Make a chart and show, in writing or drawing, major events, discoveries, styles and art that existed during the late 1700s. Identify similarities and differences between Europe and America, (e.g. types of travel, inventions, political events, etc.).



- Legend:
- 🌀 Artistic perception
  - ❖ Creative expression
  - ▶ Historical & cultural context
  - ⇒ Aesthetic valuing
  - \* Connections, Relations, Applications

## ACTIVITIES TO ENHANCE THE EXPERIENCE:

- 🌀 Music is often called "organized sound," and rhythm is one of its foundational elements. The music of Mozart's day had a steady beat driven by the bass line. The steady beats are organized in groups called measures. You can feel when these measures come in groups of two, three or four beats. Try listening to a piece by Mozart and count out loud to see which grouping feels right. Is it one, two, one two? Is it one, two, three, one, two, three? Or is it one, two, three, four, one, two, three, four? Try clapping or tapping the strongest beats (called "one") to see which grouping is correct.
- ❖ In an orchestra or band, a conductor helps musicians play together in a cooperative way. He or she stands in front of the group moving their arms in a standardized "beat pattern." To try it, hold a pencil in one hand and "conduct" some music. The strong first beat is a downstroke. The last beat of the measure is always an upstroke. Therefore, measures in two beats would be conducted down-up, down-up. Measures in three would be conducted down-right-up, down-right-up, following the path of a triangle. Measures in four would be conducted down-right-left-up, down-right-left-up.
- ⇒ Music composed by Mozart is called "absolute music" because it is not based on pictures or a story. Rather, it is about the movement and interplay of sounds. Yet we feel a wide range of emotions, such as sadness or joy, when we hear it. Listen to a piece by Mozart, then discuss what you feel. It is important to note that people may respond differently.
- ▶ Stringed instruments evolved in Italy in the late 16th century, and have common Italian names. The root word, "viol," means "stringed instrument." Identify the instruments you heard and saw during the performance and describe their different sound textures, as well as their role within the string quintet.

## SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

- Venezia, Mike. *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Getting to Know the World's Greatest Composers Series*. Children's Press. Chicago, 1995.
- Weil, Lisa. *Wolfperl, The First Six Years in the Life of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*. Holiday House. New York, 1997.