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*Dramatic Publishing*

# Prodigy: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart



By  
Mary Hall Surface

# Prodigy: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

**Commissioned and performed by the California Theatre Center  
and produced at the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts.**

***Drama. By Mary Hall Surface. Cast: 4m., 4w., minimum, or option to add extras.*** Mozart is a famous musical genius, equally infamous for his difficult personality. This play is an edgy piece that provides an insight to Mozart by illustrating the compelling relationships of his life. Complete with a remarkable sound score, it is a daring look at the role Mozart's parents and public played in his developing talent. As a result of its focus, this dramatization may be of particular interest to gifted and talented programs, youth performing arts schools and colleges. *Prodigy* opens as 6-year-old Wolfgang and his 9-year-old sister, Nannerl, perform before the court in Munich where all are dazzled. A grand tour of Europe follows. Leopold Mozart, the father, expresses determination to nurture God's gift of music in his children. But as the prospect of fame and fortune becomes more possible, Leopold succumbs to a fanatical desire to achieve greatness through Wolfgang's genius. Despite their mother's protests to let the children be children, Leopold eventually succeeds in convincing his son that he is defined by his musical genius, to the detriment of their relationship and, ultimately, Wolfgang's life. *Single, evocative set. Incidental music available. Approximate running time: 75 minutes. Code: PG1.*

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Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart



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# **Prodigy: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**

Type of show By

AUTHOR



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*Dedicated to*  
*Finn*  
*Michael*  
*Sean*  
*and Kevin, always*

# PRODIGY

**PRODIGY** (originally entitled *Young Mozart*) was first performed by eight actors, the four courtiers playing the numerous kings, queens, gossips and messengers. The distinction of, for example, "Courtier One" in the script is not intended to designate one actor as Courtier One throughout the piece, but merely to distinguish one courtier from another in that particular sequence. (In the Kennedy Center production I chose to cast the same actor as each of the three kings, the same actress as the queens, and the same actor to play each of the courtier ones and twos. This allowed each court scene to have a haunting sameness to Wolfgang; it also gave the actors a very interesting through-line with which to work, while creating distinctly different characters.)

Children were cast in the roles of Wolfgang and Nannerl Mozart. I highly recommend that in future productions of the piece that the producer accept the challenge of finding children for the roles. The impact of the play rests so heavily on the parent-child relationship that, unless a thoroughly-conceived, highly theatrical production concept is created, using adults for the roles will weaken the impact. For the young audience, the opportunity to identify with one of their own in such circumstances creates vivid exciting theatre.

The play should be considered as a piece of music — each scene following smoothly into the next, with minimal scenic adjustments. The original production dwelled in a set consisting of an ornate double-door up stage, two decorated columns down right and down left, and a painted floor — all marbled in Salzburg-pastel unity. A harpsichord on wheels was the central furniture piece with the occasional chair brought out for certain scenes. The visual emphasis should go to realizing the multi-leveled metaphor of the play, utilizing the puppets and the cut-outs.

**PRODIGY** was conceived for audiences of fourth graders through high school. At the California Theatre Center we discovered that the production was quite moving for adult audiences as well — perhaps even more so.

Mary Hall Surface



# PRODIGY

By Mary Hall Surface

**PRODIGY** was first performed, under the title of *Young Mozart*, by the California Theatre Center on April 8, 1986, under the direction of Sean Michael Dowse.

## CAST

Leopold Mozart ..... Kevin Reese  
Wolfgang Mozart ..... Kevin Davis  
Anna Maria Mozart ..... Tracy Huffman  
Nannerl Mozart ..... Becky Steuben  
Courtiers ..... David Gassner, Brian Lewis  
Pat Sibley, Dorien Wilson

## PRODUCTION

Set Design ..... Michael R. Cook  
Costume Design ..... Colleen Troy  
Michael R. Cook  
Sound Design ..... Jeffra  
Light Design ..... Jon Kranbuhl  
Stage Manager ..... Maureen Chapman  
General Director, California Theatre Center ..... Gayle Cornelison

**PRODIGY** was presented by the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Education Program through its Programs for Children and Youth, October 5-31, 1987, under the direction of Mary Hall Surface.

## CAST

Leopold Mozart ..... Kevin Reese  
Wolfgang Mozart ..... Joan L. Meyer  
Anna Maria Mozart ..... Christi Engle  
Nannerl Mozart ..... Brande Martin  
Courtiers ..... William Freimuth, Mykal Knight  
Scott Morgan, Patricia Tulli-Hawkridge

## PRODUCTION

Set Design ..... Michael Layton  
Costume Design ..... Catherine Adair  
Lighting Design ..... Daniel MacLean Wagner  
Sound Design ..... Joseph Holt  
Stage Manager ..... James J. Taylor  
Produced by ..... Carole C. Sullivan

# PRODIGY

## PRELUDE

*(Lights up, Wolfgang, age 6, playfully runs on stage carrying his two puppets, as if hiding from his father. Leopold enters and pursues Wolfgang in a playful chase around the harpsichord. With much laughter, Leopold catches his son. The puppets are then placed down lovingly. Wolfgang and Leopold embrace)*

WOLFGANG: Good-night, Poppa.

LEOPOLD: Good-night, son.

WOLFGANG: I love you.

LEOPOLD: And I love you, with all my heart.

*Wolfgang snuggles into his Father's arms to go to sleep. Leopold begins to sing a simple melody, which will become the theme of the second movement of Wolfgang's Symphony No. 4. Finishing the tune, Leopold rocks Wolfgang tenderly and begins to pray.*

LEOPOLD: Heavenly Father, how could I have been blessed with such a son? To guard such beauty in a CHILD? I pray for your guidance, dearest Lord, as I devote my life to my son — so that your great gift of his music can live for all time. Amen.

## 1. ALLEGRO

*A burst of music. Actors, with hand-held carnival masks, assemble on stage in an orchestrated fashion around a harpsichord. Leopold Mozart, his wife, Anna Maria and their children, Wolfgang and Nannerl, age 10, assume their positions of a performance tableau. Wolfgang is seated at the harpsichord, accompanying his sister who is singing. Wolfgang concludes the piece brilliantly to great applause. The children bow, then run to their parents' arms for a hug.*

ELECTORATE: What extraordinary children, Herr Mozart.

ELECTORATE'S WIFE: And how sweet.

LEOPOLD: Thank you, sire.

LEOPOLD: *(To Wolfgang and Nannerl)* That was beautiful, my dears.

ELECTORATE: It is truly remarkable that at such a tender age their musical accomplishments are so great.

LEOPOLD: My children surprise me daily, my Lord.

*(Wolfgang crawls under the harpsichord, to everyone's amusement)*

COURTIER ONE: Tell us, Herr Mozart, I have heard that the boy could distinguish the interval of a third on the harpsichord when he was only three years old.

LEOPOLD: I humbly admit that it is true.

COURTIER ONE: *(To Courtier Two)* You see!

COURTIER TWO: But is it not mere rumor that at the age of four he could memorize a minuet and trio in an hour?

COURTIER ONE: A mere thirty minutes is what I have heard.

LEOPOLD: With awe, I tell you the latter was true. But NOW, my son has little need for the written music after ONCE hearing the piece.

COURTIER TWO: It is a miracle!

LEOPOLD: A gift from God, surely, my lord.

*(Wolfgang curiously explores the room)*

ELECTORATE'S WIFE: How fascinating. *(To Courtier One)* Please, continue.

COURTIER ONE: The little girl, then. Do I understand that she has studied the keyboard instruments as well as having such a delightful little voice?

LEOPOLD: In truth, it was my instruction to Nannerl that first awakened the gift of music in my son. Wolfgang interrupted our lessons when he was only two insisting that he should be taught as well.

COURTIER TWO: Astonishing!

ELECTORATE: And taught him you have, Herr Mozart. Endless hours of instruction, I hear.

MOTHER: My husband is the children's only teacher in all subjects.

LEOPOLD: God has made me the guardian of a great gift. I cannot allow his song from heaven not to be heard on earth.

ELECTORATE: But what of your position as court composer to the Archbishop of Salzburg, Herr Mozart? Surely the Archbishop does not allow his servants to neglect their duties for the sake of delighting us here in Munich?

LEOPOLD: By the Archbishop's generosity alone was this journey possible. I have been granted leave.

MOTHER: With full pay.

ELECTORATE'S WIFE: So that you might share this miracle with our court during carnival? How charming.

COURTIER TWO: But I must ask, has this "child" actually composed a full concerto for the harpsichord?

LEOPOLD: With delight, I answer yes.

COURTIER ONE: I'm right again!

COURTIER TWO: But I cannot believe the story that the child can name any pitch which is played, while not looking at the keyboard.

WOLFGANG: I can.

LEOPOLD: *(To Wolfgang)* Sire!

WOLFGANG: *(Giving a low bow)* I can, sire.

COURTIER ONE: Let's let him try then.

LEOPOLD: *(To Electorate)* My lord, this exercise is but a game to Wolfgang, and hardly worthy of presentation before your noble court.

WOLFGANG: But it's fun, Poppa!

ELECTORATE'S WIFE: "Fun" . . . how charming!

ELECTORATE: The child is right, Herr Mozart. The carnival season is meant to be filled with games and pleasures of the court.

LEOPOLD: Our only wish is to please, my lord.

ELECTORATE: Then on with it.

*(The courtiers assemble excitedly around the harpsichord. Wolfgang is placed at a suitable distance away)*

COURTIER TWO: I shall play the notes, so that there is no cheating.

WOLFGANG: Pick any you like. I shall know them all.

COURTIER TWO: Shall you indeed? What's this, then? *(Playing a note)*

WOLFGANG: G.

COURTIER TWO: That was a simple one. Here's another. *(Playing a note)*

WOLFGANG: B flat of course.

COURTIER ONE: *(Rushing over, fascinated)* And this one?  
*(Choosing a high pitch)*

WOLFGANG: A. Two octaves above middle C.

COURTIER ONE: How about this? Two at once.  
*(He plays two notes together)*

WOLFGANG: A C and an F. The interval of a fourth, which is a lovely interval. You could use it along with the pitches you have played in a fascinating improvisation.  
*(Wolfgang crosses impulsively to the keyboard)*

COURTIER ONE: Can you indeed?

WOLFGANG: *(Seated at the harpsichord)* Yes. Combine the B flat, the C and the F, and a pretty melody could come on top, suggested by the G. Like this.

*(Mozart combines the notes into an energetic improvisation, which amazes and delights the courtiers)*

COURTIER TWO: Extraordinary. How does he think them up so fast?

ELECTORATE'S WIFE: What a perfectly delightful diversion.

*(Wolfgang concludes the piece. The courtiers applaud enthusiastically)*

COURTIER ONE: Even I am amazed.

WOLFGANG: *(To the Electorate)* 'Twas fun, wasn't it.

*(The courtiers laugh with delight)*

ELECTORATE: Why, yes indeed, young man. And for your "fun" I shall see that your father does not return to Salzburg without an expression of our thanks.

LEOPOLD: I am overwhelmed, my lord.

ELECTORATE: Why, it is our pleasure, Herr Mozart. May our payment serve to further this child's promising future.

LEOPOLD: My only wish is that he continue to blossom and grow under my guidance.

ELECTORATE'S WIFE: What a fortunate little boy to have such a devoted father.

LEOPOLD: He is my greatest joy.

COURTIER ONE: Herr Mozart, surely you do not plan to show him off only here in Munich. Why I should think Vienna is where the child must next perform.

ELECTORATE'S WIFE: Think of the stir he would cause. He would be in great demand as a spectacle at every party.

COURTIER TWO: The rivalry would be fierce to see who gets him first. What "fun!"

ELECTORATE: You realize, Herr Mozart, that before any of the nobility in Vienna can invite you to perform, you must first secure an invitation to perform before the Emperor and Empress.

LEOPOLD: Yes, my lord. I know.

ELECTORATE'S WIFE: That's easy, my dear. Simply write to the Emperor and tell him what a delightful time we've had with these wonder children.

COURTIER TWO: That would no doubt ensure the entrance of the Mozarts into Viennese society.

MOTHER: What a thought!

LEOPOLD: Electorate, your offer is far more generous than we had dared to imagine.

ELECTORATE: Why, it's nothing.

WOLFGANG: No, it's SOMETHING!

*(The court chuckles warmly at Wolfgang's childish outbursts)*

LEOPOLD: *(Amused)* Again, my son corrects me. Such a letter would, to be sure, make it possible to present the great gifts which my children possess to those who most deserve to hear them.

COURTIER ONE: You are bound to make a success of it. Vienna is the musical capital of the world.

LEOPOLD: May I be successful only in the eyes of God.

COURTIER ONE: Right. Well, that too.

ELECTORATE: You shall no doubt conquer Vienna.

ELECTORATE'S WIFE: Then perhaps a grand tour throughout all of Europe. Such talent mustn't be confined.

LEOPOLD: I shall never confine my children, Madam. My sole ambition is to share God's grace with all who might wish to hear.

ELECTORATE: A generous use of such a gift, Herr Mozart.

LEOPOLD: Thank you, my lord.

*(On cue, the Mozart family bows)*

And thank you for granting us this performance before your noble court.

## 2. ANDANTE POCO ALLEGRO

*(Performance tableau breaks. Mozarts now in carriage ride home, triumphant. Laughter is heard rising from all of them as scene begins)*

WOLFGANG: And what about the fellow before supper who asked, *(In a big pompous voice)* “Aren’t you that amazing little man from Salzburg?”

NANNERL: I’m surprised you didn’t say, “No, have you seen him around here somewhere?”

*(All laugh)*

WOLFGANG: Well who else would I be?

LEOPOLD: *(Teasing)* Perhaps he thought you were an elf?

WOLFGANG: Poppa!!

NANNERL: Or a goblin.

LEOPOLD: A little musical goblin who goes about casting charms on everyone.

WOLFGANG: *(Grabbing his Father playfully)* A gobliny wobliney — who plays trickzies on Popzy.

LEOPOLD: *(Laughing)* You’d have to catch me first, my little charmer.

MOTHER: I thought the ballroom was elegant. Did you see all those paintings on the ceiling. They were lovely.



NANNERL: I liked the cherubs on the walls.

WOLFGANG: The little babies with wings flying all over the place?  
They're silly!

NANNERL: They're sweet!

WOLFGANG: (*Wickedly*) They're NAKED!

MOTHER: They're angels, Wolferl. Now hush.

WOLFGANG: (*Mimicking the court*) "I cannot believe that the miracle boy can name every pitch played by every naked angel in the room."

NANNERL: Wolfy?!

WOLFGANG: Naked angels, naked angels!!

LEOPOLD: Wolferl, the nobility may decorate their palaces as they please, no matter how amusing. You mustn't make fun of them.

WOLFGANG: But they're such funny people, Poppa.

LEOPOLD: Truly! But they are also the people who will make it possible for you to be a great musician someday.

MOTHER: They have position in society, darling . . .

WOLFGANG: And money!

LEOPOLD: And you will need some of it. So, you must learn to impress and not offend the people of wealth and position.

WOLFGANG: (*Playfully slipping back into role*) "Excuse me, sire. I DON'T mean to OFFEND you, but did you realize that your angels are naked?"  
(*Mother and Nannerl burst into giggles*)

LEOPOLD: (*Amused*) You are impossible!

WOLFGANG: Maybe I won't even choose to be a great musician when I grow up.

LEOPOLD: Choose?

WOLFGANG: Maybe I shall be a soldier, or a merchant, or a trader and sail to the south seas in search of treasure.

LEOPOLD: Why, son. You have no choice. You have been given a great gift of music. God has chosen for you.

NANNERL: I shall be a great musician when I grow up. That's what you would like, isn't it, Father?

WOLFGANG: Always so good, Sissy. Sissy wissy doesy what Popzy wantzy.

MOTHER: Be nice, Wolfy . . .

NANNERL: I was good tonight, Poppa, wasn't I? The courtiers liked my music, too, didn't they?

LEOPOLD: Of course my dear, you were . . .

WOLFGANG: *(Interrupting, mimicking)* "Astounding! Miraculous! What extraordinary children you have, Herr Mozart."

*(Hugging his father)*

LEOPOLD: Thank you, sire. I'm a lucky man to have such a family . . . silly son and all.

*(All laugh and begin to chatter, overlapping as music begins, builds)*

MOTHER: Leopold, did you notice the Electorate's wife's dress? Lovely, wasn't it? And the little cakes after dinner were scrumptious . . .

NANNERL: *(Overlapping)* This is so exciting, Poppa. Can we do this some more . . .

WOLFGANG: *(Overlapping)* I'll play all night long next time if they want me to, Poppa. It's FUN . . .

*(A crescendo of music segue into gossip sequence)*

### 3. MINUET

*(Four gossips are engaged in a stately minuet, conversing as they change partners, all the while concealing a romantic intrigue among them)*

GOSSIP ONE: Who are these Mozarts anyway? Isn't SHE the daughter of some poorly-paid city official?

GOSSIP TWO: And HE is the son of a book-binder. He should at least have the decency to be descended from a musical family.

GOSSIP ONE: They are all the same, those musicians. Living off the generosity of the rich . . .

GOSSIP TWO: Rather than having a REAL profession. The Mozarts have no REAL position in society.

GOSSIP THREE: *(To Gossip Two)* I heard from a friend of a friend of the Prince-Archbishop Schrattenbach that Leopold Mozart has twice been passed over for the position of Kappelmeister to the Archbishop's court.

GOSSIP TWO: He has been VICE-Kappelmeister for years.

GOSSIP THREE: He'll never be promoted now. He spends all of his time teaching his child prodigy.

GOSSIP TWO: I imagine the real reason is that Leopold Mozart is actually a very mediocre composer. He has no hope of REAL success . . .

GOSSIP THREE: Except for his talented son!

*(They laugh)*

GOSSIP FOUR: *(To Gossip Three)* Have you heard that Leopold Mozart locks his son in a tiny room until he memorizes a new concerto?

GOSSIP THREE: I have heard that he keeps the child there for eight hours . . .

GOSSIP TWO: For TEN . . .

GOSSIP ONE: For TWELVE . . .

GOSSIP THREE: For DAYS at a time!

GOSSIP FOUR: Imagine.

#### 4. IN TEMPO MISURATO

*(Gossips exit, revealing Mozart home. Leopold instructs his children in music. Wolfgang is seated at the harpsichord. Leopold is singing the melody line of the piece which Wolfgang is practicing. Nannerl is standing by the harpsichord, music in hand, waiting for her turn)*

LEOPOLD: *(Singing)* La dee, la la . . . stop. Let's build the phrase more, son. It should peak in the fourth measure.

WOLFGANG: Like this?

*(Wolfgang plays and Leopold sings. They complete the phrase)*

LEOPOLD: Yes. Yes!

WOLFGANG: It's like climbing to the top of a stairway, or a mountain!

LEOPOLD: Tell me why, son.

WOLFGANG: Because you MUST reach the top, and when you do it's so wonderful!

LEOPOLD: Exactly. Oh, my precious child.

*(Nannerl takes a few steps away from the harpsichord)*

Let's go on. See if you can capture the spirit of the next phrase . . .

WOLFGANG: *(Continuing to play)* It's so beautiful . . .

LEOPOLD: Paint a picture . . .

WOLFGANG: Notes sailing across the sky . . .

LEOPOLD: To a sense of stillness.