

# Notes on the Program

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## Serenade in E-flat major, K.375b

### Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart paints the scene:

At 11 o'clock at night I was serenaded by two clarinets, two horns, and two bassoons playing my own music: I had written it for St. Teresa's Day for Frau von Hickel's sister, or rather the sister-in-law of Herr von Hickel, the court painter, at whose house it was performed for the first time. The six gentlemen who executed it are poor beggars who play together quite nicely all the same, especially the first clarinetist and the two horn players. But my chief reason for writing it was to let Herr von Strack, who goes there every day, hear something of my composition. And so I composed it rather carefully. It was well received, too, and played at three different places on St. Teresa's Night, because when they had finished it in one place they were taken somewhere else and paid to play it again. And so these musicians had the front gate opened for them, and when they had formed up in the yard, they gave me, just as I was about to undress for bed, the most delightful surprise in the world with the opening E-flat chord.

That Mozart documented his life through a barrage of letters to his father and other family members, and that so many of the letters have been preserved, is nothing less than a miracle of history. More than two centuries after they were written, these missives bring to life details of the composer's professional career and his daily doings, year after year, piece after piece. Mozart had moved to Vienna from his native Salzburg not quite

nine months before he penned that note to his father back home, on November 3, 1781. The whole background to this wind serenade is pretty much there in Mozart's own words; we'll simply add a few details.

Joseph Hickel, the court painter to whom Mozart refers, must have kept busy with his brush; in the course of his work at the Viennese court he painted some 3,000 portraits, including one of Joseph Lange, an esteemed actor who in 1780 married Aloysia Weber, whom Mozart had once hoped to wed. (In the meantime, Mozart had married Aloysia's sister Constanze.) Hickel's sister-in-law in a different direction was named Therese. In Catholic Austria, saint's days were celebrated with roughly the vigor that is expended on birthdays; accordingly, St. Teresa's Day — October 15 — would have been a big day in the Hickel household. The date on which Mozart got serenaded was, in fact, October 31, his own saint's day.

Being a newcomer to Vienna and intent

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### In Short

**Born:** January 27, 1756, in Salzburg, Austria

**Died:** December 5, 1791, in Vienna

**Work composed:** October 1781, in Vienna, as a sextet for pairs of clarinets, horns, and bassoons; expanded in July 1782 by the addition of a pair of oboes to create the wind-octet version [K.375b] we hear in this concert

**World premiere:** apparently in the sextet version [known today as K.375a] on October 15, 1781, at the home of the Viennese court painter Joseph Hickel

**Estimated duration:** ca. 31 minutes

on developing contacts that might help his career, Mozart (as he reports) seized on the occasion not because of a special affection for Hickel or his sister-in-law, but rather because he surmised that the festivities could double as an audition for Johann Kilian von Strack (1724–93). Strack entered service in the Austrian court in 1758. Initially he served as valet to Archduke Ferdinand, who was then three years old, but in 1765 he graduated to the adult world of Emperor Joseph II, for whom he arranged chamber-music performances, participating himself as a cellist. He could obviously serve as entry to imperial musical life, and Mozart spotted an opportunity. Although the composer reported

in a later letter that he visited Strack from time to time, it's not clear that Mozart ever scored great success with him. Haydn's early biographer C.F. Pohl maintained that Strack steadfastly prevented the music of both Haydn and Mozart from being included in the Emperor's chamber concerts.

It is hard to imagine how Strack could have failed to be seduced by this piece. Mozart cast it in a five-moment form, not an unusual blueprint for entertainment music (although many such pieces also include a march). The serenade is set up symmetrically: opening and closing *Allegros* frame a pair of minuets and, in the center, a gorgeous *Adagio*.

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## Sources and Inspirations

The celebration of one's saint day is relatively unknown in the United States, but the practice was so common in Europe during Mozart's time that it spurred the composition of his Serenade in E-flat major. A saint day (or name day) celebrates the feast day of the saint for whom a person is named, according to dates on the liturgical calendar that note either the patron's birthday or martyrdom. The significance of naming a child after a patron saint, particularly in the Catholic and Orthodox faiths, was reflected in celebrations that often were more elaborate than those for the individual's actual birthday. Mozart wrote the Serenade to impress a potential sponsor throwing an October 15 party for the feast of St. Teresa of Ávila, patron saint of writers and lacemakers, and also of migraine sufferers (as she wrote of her own extreme headaches).



Mozart's saint day was October 31, recognizing the date St. Wolfgang, bishop of Regensburg died. According to legend, St. Wolfgang (ca. 934–994) persuaded the devil to help him build a church in exchange for the soul of the first living being to cross its threshold. The devil was thwarted when that turned out to be a wolf. St. Wolfgang is the patron saint of carpenters and wood carvers, since he reportedly threw an axe down a mountaintop to determine the location of his church. He is also invoked in prayers to aid internal bleeding, stomach ailments, strokes, and paralysis.

— The Editors

*St. Wolfgang confronting the devil in an altarpiece painting by Michael Pacher for the church of St. Wolfgang in Salzkammergut, Austria, not far from Mozart's birthplace of Salzburg*