

Mozart and the Golden Ratio Reading Comprehension

Name _____

One of the most famous composers in all of Western classical music is Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart – a child prodigy and composer of over 600 works. Born in 1756, Mozart was immersed in the Classical era of music as a child. His father, Leopold Mozart, a composer and violinist, taught him piano, violin, and to compose at a young age. Wolfgang's talents became apparent quickly, as he began to compose his own music at the age of five. Soon he was touring Europe performing for royalty.

Like Haydn's, Mozart's music followed the balanced, symmetrical structures typical of the Classical period. In fact, historians often remark that his music had a divine quality in its proportions, with moments of major musical arrivals in his pieces often occurring at intervals that correspond to the Golden Ratio. The Golden Ratio is a mathematical concept whereby the ratio of two numbers is the same as ratio of their sum to the larger quantity. He was a significant figure in many genres of classical music, composing 18 piano sonatas, 41 symphonies, 22 operas, and much more. In qualitative terms, Mozart's music is thought to be a sophisticated and emotional take on the preexisting Classical forms, expanding on Haydn's early work and incorporating the more contrapuntal (involving multiple, simultaneous contrasting voices) influences of Bach. Another aspect of Mozart's work was that he seemed to compose effortlessly – original manuscripts of his music indicate that he rarely crossed things out.

Despite his incredible ability, Mozart was known to be self-destructive. He often stayed out all night, drank lots of alcohol, and spent all his money. This lack of discipline occasionally translated into his professional life, too. For example, he did not finish writing the overture, or the opening orchestral piece, to his opera *The Marriage of Figaro* until the day of the premiere.

Mozart has been a renowned musician since the 1760s, and his abilities became more developed and nuanced as he matured. Some of his final works, such as his last three symphonies, are considered to be the pinnacle of classical music. Interestingly, these pieces were some of his only works written out of pure artistic inspiration – not motivated by a deadline or a patron's request. Like Haydn, Mozart went on to break from the constraints of patronage (the system under which musicians were employed and responsible to nobility or rich, influential people).

1. **Which question is answered in the opening paragraph?**
 - a. How did Mozart compare to Bach or Haydn?
 - b. Where was Mozart born?
 - c. Who taught Mozart to compose?
 - d. Was Mozart's mother a musical talent?

2. **Why did historians call Mozart's work "divine?"**
 - a. Because it expanded on the work of Haydn
 - b. Because it proved a more sophisticated take on preexisting Classical era forms
 - c. Because the movements of the music in his pieces occurred at intervals that corresponded with the golden ratio.
 - d. Mozart was an effortless composer and rarely crossed things out

3. **Which of the following details supports the idea that Mozart was a prodigy?**
 - a. His incredible talent was evident in his early manuscripts, which show he rarely crossed things out and composed music effortlessly
 - b. He sometimes had to finish his work at the last moment
 - c. The movement in his music occurred at intervals that corresponded with the golden ratio
 - d. He began composing at the age of five

4. **Which of the following could complete the sentence below?**

Despite his incredible ability...

- a. Mozart's last three pieces are considered the pinnacle of classical music.
- b. Mozart was self-destructive with his health and his money.
- c. Mozart composed 18 piano sonatas and 41 symphonies.
- d. Mozart wrote the overture to the *Marriage of Figaro*.

5. **According to the author...**

- a. Mozart reached his musical peak when he got older.
- b. Mozart reached his musical peak when he was a child.
- c. Mozart was a significant figure in one genre of classical music.
- d. Mozart preferred to compose music for the wealthy classes.

6. **Mozart...**

- a. was a famous musician for most of his life.
- b. became famous toward the end of his life.
- c. only became famous after his death.
- d. was a famous for part of his life.

7. Which word in the following sentence means “at the same time?”

In qualitative terms, Mozart’s music is thought to be a sophisticated and emotional take on the preexisting Classical forms, expanding on Haydn’s early work and incorporating the more contrapuntal (involving multiple, simultaneous contrasting voices) influences of Bach.

- a. preexisting
- b. qualitative
- c. simultaneous
- d. sophisticated