



The Grand Tour (Mozart from Six to Nine)

Imagine being away from home for three and a half years! Leopold gallantly led his family through the courts of Europe, leaving on June 9, 1763, and returning in November 1766 — Mozart left Salzburg a six-year-old prodigy and returned a nine-year-old composer. This scene includes details of this extraordinary adventure:

- Nicknamed “the little magician,” Mozart could perform and improvise any piece of music set before him. He could play the harpsichord with the keys covered and his hands crossed. He had perfect pitch and could name notes from several rooms away. So astonishing were his abilities that people pinched him to see if he was real!
- Traveling conditions were appalling. Leopold’s letters describe “the pitching motion of heavy wheels, broken axles, the thumping of 16 large hooves” and filthy hotels with “bugs, fleas, rats, clouds of flies, traces of old food, dirty linen.”
- The first important stop was Versailles, *France*. In the enormous 200-room palace of Louis XV, blasts of frigid air blew along the mirrored marble passages, up the stately staircases and along stinking back passages. Wine froze on the tables. People kept themselves warm with furs and lap dogs, which befouled silk gowns and palace corners. In summer, ladies in tight corsets and heavy silk dresses swooned in the heat.
- At the New Year’s Eve feast, young Mozart was honored to stand behind the Queen’s chair and eat off her plate. The family was amazed at the rigid formality of the French court: the three-hour-long dinners and rules that everyone rise, pray, sleep and eat at the same time as Louis XV.
- While in London, eight-year-old Mozart befriended Bach’s youngest son, Johann Christian, then in his twenties. Mozart sat on Bach’s lap and played the organ with him. They remained life-long friends.
- After leaving England, the family was eager to get back to Salzburg. The journey home was often delayed by illness. Leopold describes Nannerl almost dying of typhoid fever in *Holland* (see below). Then Mozart caught the disease and spent nine days barely conscious “without speaking a single word.”

Little Wolfgang has contracted an illness which in four weeks has made him so wretched that he is not only absolutely unrecognizable, but has nothing left but his tender skin and his little bones. For the last five days, he has been carried daily from his bed to a chair. Yesterday and today, however, we led him a few times across the room so that gradually he may [once more] learn to use his feet and stand upright by himself... It began with a fever. Our night vigils were shared, as they were during my daughter’s illness, so that it is owing to the great grace of God that we, especially my wife, have been able to stand all this... Expense must not be considered. The devil take the money, if one only gets off with one’s skin!

Dear Lorenz,
I greatly fear for my daughter... Nannerl is [sick with typhoid and] delirious, talking in her sleep, now in English, now in French and now in German. And as our travels have given her plenty to chatter about, we often had to laugh in spite of all our distress. We divide the time at midday, each of us sleeping about five or six hours.
P.S. My wife and I, Nannerl and our all-powerful Wolfgang send greetings to you, to your whole household and to all of Salzburg.

Dear Lorenz,
Wolfgang is extraordinarily jolly, but a bit of a scamp as well. And Nannerl no longer suffers by comparison with the boy, for she plays so beautifully that everyone is talking about her and admiring her execution.
(Anderson, page 39)