

WOLFGANG GOES A.W.O.L

Leopold Mozart knew there was going to be trouble when his young son, Wolfgang, ten years old at the time, threw a tantrum just before a performance at Baron Somebody or Other's castle.

Wolfgang jumped up and down and ranted, "I'm NOT going to play that dumb Scarlatti sonata one more time! I'm NOT going to wear this silly silk suit anymore, and I'm NOT going to be chucked under the chin by fat old ladies with bad breath wearing forty kilos of brocade!!"

Patiently, Leopold let the temper run its course, and after informing his son that his behavior was putting his weekly allowance of kronen at risk, the performance went on as planned. That, of course, was not to be the end of the story.

Several days later Wolfgang sat at the harpsichord dutifully practicing his scales and exercises (slipping in a cadenza here and there to break the monotony). A window next to the harpsichord looked down into the Strasse below, and he glanced wistfully at the comings and goings of a busy Salzburg. He particularly liked the fine black carriages pulled by magnificent teams of horses that carried the gentry about their daily business.

Wolfgang was overcome by a great longing. Like all boys his age he was preoccupied with the idea of obtaining his beginning carriage driver's permit so that he too could enjoy the freedom of the streets. If he quietly put aside a few kronen a week from his allowance, he might be able to pay for carriage driving lessons. However, with the impatience of all boys in these matters, he thought, "Why do I need a license? It looks simple enough. One little wiggle of the reins and the horses go, then a tug to the right or left – what could possibly go wrong?"

That afternoon, his father out on business, Wolfgang left the house very quietly through the scullery door. He wrapped his cloak around him against the chill and to conceal his face, although, he reflected, without the silly silk suit, no one was likely to recognize him.

A few blocks away behind the town hall lay the Carriage for Hire stables, the Salzburg equivalent of the Yellow Cab Company. Wolfgang did a brief reconnaissance of the place, noting a large number of vehicles parked idly at that time of day. Five or six drivers, sturdy men in black with jaunty caps, stood in a group at the end of the carriage row, engaged in a spirited hand of Texas Hold 'em. They were totally engrossed.

It was a simple matter for Wolfgang to make his way unseen to the far end of the row where a fine two door model stood ready, its pair of rich brown horses scuffling their hooves on the ground, anxious to be on the road. How BIG the horses were, how enticingly the tall iron clad wheels creaked in anticipation!

Very quietly Wolfgang climbed up into the driver's seat and took hold of the reins. He gave that little clicking sound with his tongue that he had heard a million times, and with a lurch, the horses bounded forward, tossing the boy about on the seat like a rag doll. He grasped an armrest and steadied himself. HOORAY! He was off down the Strasse, the big wheels and hooves clattering a great racket on the cobblestones. What heavenly noise! It was exhilarating, the wind in his face, the bouncing , the SPEED! When he was old enough to own a carriage it would certainly be a two horsepowered convertible like this one!

Suddenly the horses realized they were in the hands of a complete novice, and Wolfgang realized he had made no further plan about where to go. The horses slewed dangerously around a corner aiming for the familiar Town Square.

Unfortunately, the town band had just set up in the center of the Square for a noon concert and the tuba player let out a roaring warm up boom. The horses panicked and bolted headlong into the band, scattering music, musicians and instruments everywhere . There were angry shouts and a few screams. The horses skidded around, the carriage tipped up on one wheel tossing Wolfgang up into the air. His rump landed with a thump on the bass drum, breaking the head and trapping him, like a turtle on its back, with arms and legs flailing.

Any angry crowd was gathering around him, the police were arriving, the horses were thrashing about in a tangle of harnesses and the bandsmen were all swearing in Italian. To his horror, Wolfgang saw approaching through the melee, his father, the Mayor, Baron What's His Name and fat Mrs. Baron What's His Name. Wolfgang willed himself to become smaller, a dog perhaps, even better, an insect so he could fly away. But it was too late.

That evening at home, a penitent Wolfgang stood before his father. "Therefore", concluded Leopold Mozart, after a very long lecture, "Your allowance is suspended for the foreseeable future, and you are required, every day after school for the next month to compose one movement of a string quartet."

"Ah gee Dad, string quartets, do I HAVE to?"

"No arguments, young man, or I could make it krumhorn trios."

"OK Dad OK, string quartets are cool."

In the month that followed, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart penned a set of string quartets (and one krumhorn trio just for spite) which were destined to become known as the “Carriage Quartets”. They were however, lost to history when the bandmaster sued the Mozart family for a host of injuries and insults. The Mozarts, not in happy financial circumstances at the time, gave over the “Carriage Quartets” in settlement, whereupon the bandmaster immediately arranged them for band, rendering them forever musically unintelligible.